X-treme 25

Code Zeros aren't just for the big boys, **Neal Pawson** tests a new Sportsboat with its very own turbo-boost button...

The X-treme 25 is the first vessel from G-force Yachts to be marketed in the UK, although they were previously involved in the development of the Reichel Pugh 37 'Windsong', which has since developed into the X-treme 37 in their growing range.

Walking down the pontoon and seeing the X-treme 25 for the first time it seems a lot more slender than you'd think from the promotional photos. This, combined with the fixed bowsprit, gives it something of a resemblance to a canting-keel maxi such as Alfa Romeo or Wild Oats – she is certainly far more svelte than the current crop of Open-style designs and sits with poise on the dock.

Design and build

The X-treme 25 has a very fine entry to cut the water, which quickly transforms into flat U-shaped sections that provide plenty of lift forward off the wind. Continuing aft the hull keeps a narrow waterline but the topsides flare out keeping the wet stuff where it belongs and making the most of the crew weight whilst staying just inside the European trailing limit. Chines on the turn of the bilge start to develop two-thirds of the way back to give plenty of form stability for power reaching and a clean release for the water off the wind.

The glass, foam sandwich hulls are resin-infused under vacuum in epoxy that ▶

Specification

Builder:	G-force Yachts
Design:	Lutra Design Group
LOA:	7.83m
Beam:	2.52m
Draught:	2m
Displacement:	850kg
Sail Area:	Mainsail 22.65sq m
	Jib 15.04sq m
	Code Zero 36.9sq m
	Spinnaker 66.1sq m
Crew weight:	400kg
Price:	£xx

ABOVE LEFT The deep fin and rudder grip well as you heat up under kite.

ABOVE RIGHT The keel is lifted with the use of a chain hoist.

BELOW LEFT There's not much down below apart from structures and sail storage.

BELOW RIGHT The deck layout with aft maintrack, centre mainsheet with fine tune, traveller and backstay all led forward, and recessed underdeck twinning lines.

ensures that all the boats come out with very similar weights. Five bulkheads run transversely through the boat with a longitudinal running the length of the keel line. This egg box structure makes it stiff and robust, although does make the interior limited to basic gear and sail stowage in front of the mast. G-force Yachts have a CE mark build quality control system in place.

The bulb is optimised for maximum righting moment, minimum drag with an ovoid section running through to a beaver tail. The keel fin is very high aspect and puts the lead very deep for this size of boat. It is milled from T6 aircraft grade aluminum, with the shavings recycled. This gives the foil the correct section without fear of shrinkage causing unfairness. The foil is etched and sealed in primer and epoxy painted – Dutch orange – and oven baked for surface hardness. There is a sacrificial plate should you hit the bottom at speed.

In a departure from their competitors with lifting keels the X-treme 25 doesn't have a transom-hung rudder but a removable through-hull system. This works by having large diameter bearings that allow the carbon rudder blade (again finished in Dutch orange) to lift like a daggerboard through the middle. The balance angle on the rudder is adjustable through the tiller head position allowing the helm loading to be tuned to taste. Apparently the helm was a bit heavy on delivery so the UK team had shifted the head aft to increase the balance area.

The X-treme 25 sits low on the trailer and can be towed by a big family car. Although it is set up for independent trailer launching off a slipway it does seem to miss a single point hoist system, now common on this size of boat. The mast step is on the cockpit sole with a pin through the heel providing a pivot and the aft end of the coachroof is one long mast gate that helps control the spar, giving some reassuring guidance to allow the mast to be easily set by two people. The keel is lifted using a simple chain hoist with a steel frame that slots into the hull fore and aft of the keel fin and is braced by lashing to the spinnaker turning blocks either side. The chain hoist gives a controlled lift and a strategically placed plastic tub to catch the chain. The keel head is locked in the down position by four large Allen key bolts and is covered by a central foot chock. The mast can just be squeezed up on the trailer by pulling the keel head to one side.

Rig and layout

The X-treme 25 has aluminum spars all round with a twin swept-back spreader mast, with twin shrouds from the top spreader supporting both the masthead and the forestay. The boat sports a gnav and uses an extra set of lower shrouds to stabilise the bottom section of the mast.

The mainsail has a conservative roach that doesn't cause any trouble catching on the backstay and a reef point in it, although the decision would have to be made early with no tack hook or reefing line. The sails on the boat were from North Sails South Africa. As well as the 10 per cent headsail there is also an 80 per cent headsail for those really windy days, although again the choice would most likely be made before leaving the dock.

The symmetrical kite hoists to the masthead and is projected with an overlong pole the same length as the boom, along which it is stowed when not in use. The Code Zero tacks to the end of the bowsprit and uses the same sheets and halyard as the spinnaker. This does require some thought to the course ahead and anticipation to avoid costly changes between the two.

In the cockpit the gnav keeps the forward part clear whilst the main track placed behind the rudder head opens up the center of the cockpit. Twin self-tailing

Lewmar 16s are mounted on the back of the coachroof with the halyard clutches and control lines behind the mast does focus the action a bit at the front of the cockpit. A bag system has yet to be devised but there is plenty of space in the area under the aft end of the coachroof that drains straight into the cockpit. This will allow the simple and safe launch and recovery of the spinnaker. The hatch is in front of the mast which prevents access being blocked by spinnakers and halyards but does make it a bit more difficult when stowing the outboard.

The foredeck rapidly narrows as you head towards the forestay but luckily actions whilst sailing are limited to gathering and restraining the hanked-on headsail, hoisting or lowering the A0 from the hatch and gybing the pole. The fixed sprit is purely used for the A0 with the luff load being transferred through a bobstay to the hull and a tack line coming back to a clutch on the coachroof.

The deck flares out to the shrouds where there is plenty of space for the bowman to hike between the shroud and front stanchion and provides a clear straightforward route round the mast when tacking. As an alternative to granny bars or normal height stanchions the X-treme 25 has half-height stainless stanchions with 8mm Spectra guardrail. This allows the crew to hike with legs outboard with relative comfort, rather than the chest height rails on a J/24 or 707 or having them hanging slack like the Melges 24. These mini stanchions have screw in spigots that are designed to break before damage occurs to the deck.

The deck equipment is all Ronstan and features their new Orbit range of blocks. Headsail turning blocks are free floating allowing a range of lead angles options, including pulling through a cam cleat on the side deck or either of the two winches at the front of the cockpit. Essential twinning lines for the symmetrical kite sheets are led under the deck directly from the edge to a recessed cam cleat in the cockpit, whilst the sheets themselves are led forward and through ratchet blocks allowing the trimmer to easily face forward take both through the gybe.

The mainsheet comes forward from the end of the boom and down to the centre of the cockpit to be easily controlled by the helm or dedicated trimmer with a choice of 2:1 coarse or an easy 8:1 fine tune for upwind tweaking. The traveller moves super smoothly and is also easy to hand with a cam cleat on the cockpit side with the backstay alongside.

On the water

We were delivered away from the dock by an electric outboard, an option for the environmentally-conscious that apparently provides four hours running time at half speed. It is all self-contained and no heavier than an equivalent two-stroke. The UK team from G-force Yachts were open about their initial skepticism but did say they were getting more comfortable relying on it.

The short tiller extension underlines the narrow width of the boat which has the boat slipping along in the light, accelerating with the slightest puff with the bow cutting easily into any chop. Like many Sportsboats the X-treme 25 benefits from sliding the crew weight forward in the boat upwind. In relatively flat water of our test the Tacktick display was showing 5.6-5.7 knots boatspeed in around 8-10 knots of wind with three crew sticking their legs over the side.

The helm was light, the side decks comfortable and the traveller and mainsheet easily adjusted. The backstay, however, was a bit stiffer when trying to use it to depower, I'm not sure whether this is due to the stiffness of the mast section or could be eased by splitting the upper triple block and shortening up the cascade

line. With the mainsheet coming from a fixed position in the centre of the cockpit if you let it slip through your fingers it doesn't land out of reach in the leeward scuppers. On the test we were trialing 2:1 jib sheets, but as the breeze built we still found ourselves resorting to the winch to tame the headsail (the sail is three square metres bigger than a Melges 24). This might be avoidable with well rehearsed settings and tacking technique but gives the option of allowing smaller members of the crew to fill the trimmer's role.

Whilst my relatively short legs seemed to fit well with the standard chocks the space wouldn't suit everyone and with this ▶

ABOVE The top of the bearing with adjustable rudder balance.

TOP LEFT The rudder blades are 1.7m carbon.

BELOW LEFT The efficient bulb at the bottom of a long fin gives lots of stability.

BELOW The Code Zero is a great extra for round-the -cans racing.

The X-treme 25 is much more slender than many recent Open-style Sportsboats.

in mind the boat is supplied with two additional foot chocks to place where you like on the cockpit sole. The cockpit is a short distance to cover in a tack, and when helming you naturally find yourself tacking round behind the tiller, leaving space in front for the rest of the crew. It is a boat that will reward good crew co-ordination in roll tacks as she reacts immediately to transverse movement of weight with the form stability being low but in the gusts the extremely high ballast ratio soon comes into play and the boat soon stiffens up.

Downwind with a masthead kite many small Sportsboat sailors will have to re-adjust to having a pole to trim. It does however ensure everyone has more responsibilities in maximising the performance offwind and gybes need a lot more co-ordination to pull off successfully. The 66sq m kite provides plenty of power and the 'U' section hull arrests any tendency for any extreme bow-down antics. Heading up to press the boat under its spinnaker you soon notice the extra righting moment from the deep bulb. The narrow hull and 1.7m deep rudder under the hull combine to keep it immersed, ensuring you maintain grip on the water and making it hard to spin the boat out. A sharp little gust managed to catch us out but a quick collapse of the spinnaker and we were straight on our feet and accelerating again.

Hoisting the Code Zero is nice and simple, but requires practice to get the continuous furling line to roll cleanly. Too hasty on the sheet and you will end up with it wrapped round the tack of the sail requiring a trip to the end of the pole to recover it! Although they call it a Code Zero it is really a jib top as you struggle to get sufficient luff tension to make it a truly effective upwind sail. It is however a great turbo-boost for that 'dead spot' at angles above the range of the spinnaker, ideal for racing round the cans where Sportsboats can struggle. It saw us reaching along at 7.2 knots but I did manage to get to the point where I had to physically push the tiller to make it head up! I think when the boat is well heeled the chine tends to behave like a skeg, accentuating the neutral helm.

Verdict

With some established one-design fleets starting to get a bit long in the tooth it is understandable that people are starting to look around for something new and fresh. With the sail options on the X-treme 25 making it a competitive performer round the cans this flexibility could help the X-treme 25 generate the momentum required to establish a one-design fleet. Twenty have already been sold and fleets are developing in China, Italy and Holland with an online owner forum already encouraging global interaction and cooperation - from setting speed challenges to swapping tuning tips – the building blocks are there.

The X-treme 25 is a quality product that is well finished and sports some different solutions as well as being both fun and challenging to sail. With the Code Zero complementing a symmetrical spinnaker it certainly seems tailor-made for Cowes Week! ■

Answer Back

From ???

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COMPARISONS

Melges 24

LOA:	7.82m
Beam:	2.5m
Draught:	1.52m
Displacement:	809kg
Sail Area:	Upwind 33sq m
	Downwind 77sq m
Guide Price:	£?

The grand-daddy of Sportsboats introduced 16 years ago, carbon rig, asymmetric spinnakers, over 800 boats worldwide. Limited class racing in the UK these days means a life on the road.

SB3

LOA:	6.2m
Beam:	2.15m
Draught:	1.5m
Displacement:	635kg
Ballast:	330kg
Sail Area:	Upwind 27.3sq m
	Downwind 64sq m
Guide Price:	£17,590

Introduced in 2004 and currently the UK's strongest Sportsboat class, growing in Europe and the US. Smaller in size with fewer crew it has low side bars to prevent hiking in an effort to marginalise the athletic requirement.