

Comparison of the Hunter 27E Edge and the MacGregor 26M

I'm guessing that I'm probably one of a very small number of people who have ever owned both a MacGregor 26M and the Hunter Edge. That's mostly because the Edge has only been out a few years. Having owned both boats for at least a year each I think that I can speak to the issue of what the differences are between these two boats.

My experiences with the MacGregor were an unmitigated disaster from day one. See the section on it at XXXX for a fairly brief overview of the problems I had and my experiences getting them corrected. I should note though that the problems I had were a combination of poor work by both MacGregor and by their dealer. I wish I could say that MacGregor helped me resolve these problems, but the truth is they didn't. When the dealer wouldn't honor either his specific warranty or the general MacGregor one I contacted MacGregor itself on several occasions to get some assistance in making the dealer comply but basically they blew me off. I've never even gotten so much as an apology from them for all the hassles I went through and only got even a part of the damages I suffered back by suing the dealer and publicly embarrassing him on the internet.

With regard to their marketing, MacGregor tries to make you believe that the Hunter, being a more expensive boat, isn't worth the extra \$ and you shouldn't think that you get what you pay for with the Edge. When you're done reading this I think you'll realize that the Edge is a much higher quality product and, in my opinion, worth the extra money. If you're still not convinced then poke around the web and you'll find a lot of pages put up by MacGregor owners who have spent enormous amounts of time adding things which are standard on other boats (like the Edge), or which they needed just to make the boat useable and/or liveable. See the apples to apples pricing comparison at XXXX for a better comparison of the cost differences between the two boats at the time I was looking to buy.

In some respects I was unfortunate when it came to the timing of my looking to buy a bigger boat. I got delivery of my 26M (several months after ordering it) just weeks before Hunter first announced the Edge to their dealer network. When shopping for a boat I had strongly considered the Hunter products which were available at the time (which didn't include the Edge). I liked the Hunter 25, 27 and 30 and seriously considered them. The 30 was ultimately out of my price range and had too much in the way of ongoing annual costs. The 27 was too wide to trailer and too heavy with the inboard diesel. The 25 was a little too small. I was moving up from a 19ft West Wight Potter (too bad they don't make a larger version, it's a good little boat) and liked having a trailerable boat but really wanted the extra space, especially in the cockpit.

I also never cared much for the traditional sailboat off-center mounted outboard design. I always found it made the boat tougher to maneuver at low speed. The Power Sailer concept's center mounted engine and the higher speed attainable by it appealed to me.

After seeing the marketing video, looking at the brochure, and being suckered in by the MacGregor dealer's high pressure sales pitch I was led to believe the 26M could be set up in roughly the same amount of time as our 19ft Potter. Many of the 26M's other features also looked good on paper. What looked good on paper didn't work out that way in real life. More on that later. So when the Edge was announced I went and took a good look at it. When I was looking at it the sales people were friendly and low key. No high pressure sales guy hovering about giving me the hard sell, but I'd literally just gotten the 26M and wasn't ready to dump it yet.

I soon realized though that trying to use the 26M the way I had used my West Wight Potter 19ft (i.e. trailering it every time I used it, getting it rigged and in the water, then recovering after use and securing the rigging to trailer) was both much more time consuming and a big hassle. My wife and I had been trailering the Potter for 6 years. We were very well rehearsed and knew all the little tricks to make it go faster. I've compared my best time with the 26M to others online and those who launch at the same ramp as we do and have been told that my times were excellent. So the extra hassle clearly wasn't a short coming on my part, it's something inherent to the 26M. Eventually we decided the only practical way to use it was to get a mooring, which meant having to shell out \$ for that as well as to have the boat's bottom painted.

Related to launching and recovery, I found that low speed maneuvering, even in a moderate wind and with the ballast tank full and the daggerboard and both rudders down, was very tough. In order to get it into the dock I had to either loiter off the dock and let the wind push the boat down onto it or back stern in while being ready to jump off fast and grab it to keep it from smashing into the dock too hard.

I got another surprise when I got the 26M on the mooring. Because of the low weight and large freeboard it swings 60 degrees side to side in the wind and jerks hard on the line when it swings wide. I've seen this happen on other 26Ms they swing much more than the other boats out in the mooring field.

So what were my experiences sailing the 26M? I found that in light wind the boat barely moves and the rotating mast doesn't rotate. In heavier wind the 26M doesn't come about well. This is especially true turning to starboard mostly due to the poorly designed ("designed" is a kind phrase it's really kludged) engine

linkage which doesn't allow the boat to turn hard to starboard. Maybe 20 degrees at most, whereas it turns 45 degrees to port. This also makes docking tougher.

With guests on the boat the placement of the traveler meant that someone inevitably spent a bit of time dodging the main sheet or moving so they weren't sitting on it. Same with the furler lines. Even with the traveler pulled fully over to windward, and the sail no more than 30 degrees over, the mainsheet was dragging and chafing against the lifelines which are uncoated and therefore fray the sheet.

In my opinion the MacFurler is a poor quality product. I still use it on my Hunter Edge because it's paid for but hope someday to replace it. This furler doesn't spool in well because the drum is only sized to take a fairly light weight line and, being flexible, it sags a bit in the center which makes it a little tough to first get it started. The line isn't perpendicular to the drum where it leads off it so if you furl the genoa out fully the line doesn't roll onto the spool properly and you have to go forward to unbind it.

When raising the main halyard I found routinely got hung up on the bolts through the mast that hold the mounting point for the stays and the loop for the mast raising system. So even with lines led aft it is often necessary to go up on deck and free the halyard when gets fouled, making having lines led aft sort of pointless.

With all these issues of the 26M in mind I first boarded an Edge in late July 2008 at dealership near where I live. It was fresh from the factory right after they started production. In October 2008 I went for a test cruise and got to handle the boat. I saw it again at a winter boat show early in 2009 and spent a bit of time on board it in the convention hall.

I began to think maybe I should sell the 26M and get the Hunter. Still, the 26M was paid for and I'd put a lot of work into it to repair all the defects it arrived with (that's much too long a story to go into here). At the start of the 2009 sailing season it was in good shape and ready to sail. I decided that maybe my experiences of sailing it in 2008 were colored by the circumstances of its delivery, so I thought I'd give it another chance. After sailing the 26M several more times I went to look at the Edge once more. After seeing it again and spending 2 hours looking it over I decided it was time to move on and buy the Hunter Edge.

The tough part was to convince my wife to let me do this. Fortunately for me the 26M's cheap design and construction did that work for me. One weekend in June 2009 my wife and I went out sailing. I been out a few days before and inadvertently had left the keel down. I asked my wife to go drop it and she

noticed it was gone. Someone from our marina who likes to dive offered to look under our mooring area for it and found it. The keel on the 26M is hollow and is held onto the boat by passing 2 lines through holes in it and knotting them off. Because these holes weren't properly finished and had rough edges it chafed through the line. Unfortunately the keel somehow got damaged and it cost us a bit of \$ to replace it. This was the last straw for my wife....

One of the things that factored into our decision to get the Edge was the realization (born of experience) that it isn't practical to trailer either the 26M or the Hunter Edge every time we wanted to use it as we had done with the Potter. That meant that I would want a mooring whichever boat we got. Having had the Edge 2 years now we trailer it home from the marina to over winter in our driveway. This saves yard storage fees and makes it easier to do maintenance work in the fall and spring.

We also anticipate taking it on a couple of trips each year since driving and launching to sail someplace else far away is faster than sailing there but have been waiting to do so until we were more familiar with it. Trailering the Edge isn't so much of a hassle that it would preclude our pulling it and heading off to one of the many inland lakes or coastal launches in the region where we live. However having realized that I can't use this boat the same way as I did my Potter 19 my feeling was that I should get the boat that is the most comfortable for me, my family and my friends to use. For us that is the Hunter.

I should also note that every thing about the purchase transaction for the Hunter Edge was a night and day difference from dealing with the MacGregor dealer we originally met at the Boston In Water Boat Show. I've only had a few minor problems in the time I've owned it and both the Hunter dealer and Hunter's own customer service at the factory have been very responsive and helpful. So I feel like even if I have a problem they have my back.

At this point I'd like to turn to addressing some of the claims MacGregor makes in its supposed "apples to apples" comparison. As someone who has owned and sailed both boats I think I'm in a position to comment on these.

Trailer – MacGregor tries to knock the fact that the Hunter needs a double axle trailer. In fact I think it's the other way around. MacGregor should be using a double axle and doesn't. I'll tell you why. The MacGregor trailer uses a 5 lug nut axle. A couple of different local Marine dealers I spoke with and who have been in business for decades have told me that a 5 lug nut single axle is only rated for 3700lbs. The 26M is listed as weighing 2550 empty without an engine. Add in the 1150lbs of water ballast and around 240lbs (50HP) to 320lbs (75HP) for the engine plus the weight of fuel (50lbs for 6gal), water (40lbs for 5 gal), and other gear and you're easily over 4000lbs when pulling out on the ramp. So it would

appear that a 5 lug nut single axle trailer is undersized for the loads MacGregor is placing on it, especially if you're trailering it often in which case you're likely pulling it out with ballast water in it a lot.

As far as I can see the drawbacks to Hunter's use of a two axle trailer are that it is a bit heavier and it adds to the price. As far as the weight, despite MacGregor's marketing brochure and video which show a 4 door sedan towing the boat, you'll really need a vehicle that can tow 5000lbs to tow it. In fact the marketing materials and statements from MacGregor about their trailer are misleading. If you look at the photos and video you'll see two things. The first is that the boat in the photos and video never has a motor on it while the ones shown in the water always do. The second is that the vehicle in the photos and video is a 1993 or 1994 Ford Crown Victoria. I actually got help from my local PD in identifying it, but you can tell this from the distinctive wheels. Before asking the PD to help confirm this I checked pictures of every model of Ford Crown Victoria and it only these model years have the same kind of wheels.

If you check the towing guides available from several sources such as Trailer Life Magazine (http://www.trailerlife.com/towratings/tr_index.cfm) and Trailerboats.com (the two largest and most respected compilations of vehicle tow ratings available) you'll see that these are the only 2 models of that car that they rate to tow 5000lbs. They don't list any other 4 door sedan with that towing capacity. So in order to make the claim that the 26M, which was introduced in 2003, can be towed by a 4 door sedan MacGregor had to go out and find an 8-10 year old used car to tow it with in the photos and video!

Finally consider the differences between a single and double axle trailer when it comes to things like tongue weight and load stability. A single axle trailer is basically a see saw. The location of the weight over the axle is critical. If you move the weight too far forward or backward you can change the tongue weight significantly. So you need to be careful about how you stow your gear in a boat you'll be towing on a single axle trailer. With a double axle trailer the position of the weight inside the boat is less critical. Because it has 2 axles there is no pivot point and the weight is distributed more evenly over the axles meaning that you have to shift a lot of weight either very far forward or backward before you would significantly change the tongue weight.

After considering this, ask yourself that given the fact that you know you need to tow something heavy, isn't it better to spend a little more \$ and get a trailer that is better suited to the job?

Ballast, Weight, Keel and Freeboard – MacGregor makes a big deal about their permanent ballast and the boat's weight with or without ballast. They don't mention that on a sailboat it isn't how much weight or whether it is "permanent" or

water ballast that matters. What matters most is how the weight is positioned in the boat and the ratio between the weight and the freeboard (i.e. surface area above the water line) which is the most critical.

A boat which weighs less and has a high profile above the water line gets pushed around a lot by the wind as I found out when I saw how the 26M rides on the mooring. What prevents a boat from getting pushed around is how heavy it is, the drag induced by the keel, and how the boat's weight is distributed. The amount of drag a keel has is a function of its shape and overall size.

Even with a full ballast tank, the MacGregor 26M gets pushed around easily in moderate winds when maneuvering at low speeds. It can also be tough to steer at higher speeds under power during windy conditions. That is because it has a very high profile above the water for the wind to push against, less weight, and the daggerboard doesn't have much surface area to keep the boat from getting pushed sideways. This makes docking or mooring the 26M a real challenge a lot of the time. At times it seems like you're sailing an empty soda bottle with the top screwed on. So while the MacGregor doesn't handle as badly at low speeds in light winds as it does in moderate to stronger winds, sailing when there isn't any wind just so you can get your boat in and out of the dock isn't very much fun.

In my experience the Hunter 27E handles much better in these situations. It takes over 400lbs more ballast water and weighs more empty. This latter consideration is what renders the statement in their comparison that "permanent ballast gives better overall stability" meaningless in the context of comparing the two boats. What difference does it make that the 26M has 300lbs of permanent ballast when the boat weighs less overall and has greater freeboard? The answer is it doesn't.

The Hunter also has a crank down keel which weighs 170lbs and has a larger surface area. The larger keel creates more drag, and the weight of it is lower in the water which gives more stability to it than the MacGregor has.

Lastly the 27E is a little wider and sits a little lower in the water than the 26M. This allows the boat to have a good sized cockpit and cabin while not making the profile above the waterline too high. The MacGregor is narrower, has less interior space, and a higher profile out of the water. This means the Hunter has less freeboard and more weight, and that makes it harder for the wind to push it around.

Rudders – MacGregor tries to make an issue of the rudders as well. They claim that their dual rudder system is designed to keep greater rudder surface in the water compared to a boat with a mid-ships rudder. If you look at their designs prior to introducing the power sailer concept it would seem that the dual rudder

design emerged as a way for them to not have to shorten the cabin or lengthen the boat in order to mount an outboard engine on it. If the 26M didn't have the dual rudders then you wouldn't be able to put the center mount engine on it at all.

Furthermore if you do the geometry you'd realize a boat with a single rudder would have to be heeling pretty far over, like at 45 degree angle, before this would occur. I don't know about you, but if I'm heeling at that kind of an angle I'm less worried about whether my rudder is in the water than I am about grabbing the sheets on the main and the genoa to let out the sails and regain control of the boat.

Also ask yourself what it is you think you're going to do with the boat as it may not really be a consideration for you. At least as it stands now a trailerable power sailer isn't designed to be a racing boat. Flexibility of use is the main design criteria. So even if MacGregor's claim about the rudders actually meant something, who cares? If you want a racing boat then buy a racing boat. But if you're buying a trailerable cruiser then it doesn't matter that much.

MacGregor's comparison makes a statement that "it seems to us odd" that the keel kicks up on the Hunter but not it's rudder. This implies that MacGregor's rudders will kick up if you hit something and that this is a feature. I'm not sure whether whoever wrote this has actually sailed the 26M or not. In order to sail the 26M you have to use their jury rigged rope system to pull the rudders down into place. If you don't cleat off the rope to hold the rudder down the force of the water going past it will cause it to kick up when you're motoring or sailing the boat and you lose steerage. So if the boat is being used as designed the rudders will be tied in the down position and if you hit something they won't kick up.

Furthermore the opposite is true of the MacGregor, i.e. it's rudder's kick up but it's daggerboard doesn't. If this is such a big consideration then why did MacGregor abandon the kick up keel that the 26X had? On the 26X both the keel and rudder kicked up. This comment, hypocritical as it is, just comes off as empty marketing hype that can potentially confuse a prospective buyer.

Hunter made a different choice. They chose to center mount the engine and devised a means to have a full rudder amidships via a rotating turntable design. The down side of this is that it does shorten the interior length a little, but it isn't significant and the Edge is longer to start with so although I haven't actually measured it I think the net interior length is about the same. The plus side of this is that the rudder on the Hunter weighs more and since it is located in the center also helps increase the stability of the boat. But there is something else. When the engine is run in reverse, during docking maneuvers for example, the prop wash from the engine flows past the rudder because both the rudder and engine

are center mounted. This means that the prop wash from the engine exerts force on the rudder.

With any boat having only an engine mounted on the rear of it (as opposed to one with bow thrusters) the ability to turn the boat is a function of how much force can be exerted on the rudder. It is the force of the water flowing past the rudder and pushing on it that creates the turning moment. At power there is a lot of water flowing past the rudder due to its speed, so there is a lot of force exerted on it. But at low speed less water flows past the rudder and most or all of the turning force there is comes from the prop itself pushing or pulling the boat in the direction it is facing.

Think of it this way. It's sort of like the little red wagon with the long handle you had as a kid. If you wanted to turn or maneuver it you pulled or pushed the handle and only the end of the wagon where the handle attached went where you led it while the rest of the wagon pivoted around the center of its weight which could make it tough to turn. But if you pulled the wagon while also pushing on one side of it then you could get it to turn better.

At least when in reverse the prop wash from the Hunter's engine pushing on the rudder acts in a similar manner and creates a greater turning moment. But on the MacGregor the rudders are mounted outside of the engine so the prop wash never pushes against the rudder. The only force on the rudder is from the water flowing past it. At low speed there is very little water flowing past the rudders and very little force is exerted on them. Also, the MacGregor's configuration, with the rudders at the back outside corners of the boat, instead of in the center and further forward (like it is on the Hunter) changes how the boat pivots by moving the pivot point further aft. I think that it is this bit of physics is that makes it tougher to steer the MacGregor at low speeds.

Mast Raising System – The MacGregor has a 30 ft mast that stands 35 ft above the waterline. The Hunter's mast height is 33ft above the water line. So both of these masts are pretty heavy.

When I owned my 19ft trailerable I found one of the toughest parts of using it was raising the mast before launching, and it had a shorter mast than either of these boats. I got my 19 footer used and it didn't come with a gin pole so the first couple of years I lifted the mast up into place. Later on I devised my own gin pole that was permanently mounted on the mast but swung down out of the way when sailing. In order to use this I made up a double block and tackle system and added a deck block to run the line back to the cockpit. In addition to gaining mechanical advantage from the block and tackle this allowed me to use the winch to get a little extra pulling force. Being in the cockpit meant I could guide the mast up out of its trailering cradle, or down into it, when raising or lowering

the mast. It made this job a lot easier. The only trick was making sure the mast didn't lean to either port or starboard when raising or lowering it since (as I found out the hard way) that can bend the sides of the deck plate.

The MacGregor's mast raising system is essentially a gin pole but it uses a crank winch and single pulley over which the line that pulls directly on the mast runs. Hunter uses a block and tackle system.

In their comparison MacGregor states that the Edge's block and tackle system is "more complex" and that the "effort required to pull on the Hunter's rope is more than needed to turn the MacGregor winch." This displays ignorance of the physics of how a block and tackle system works and it makes me wonder whether whoever wrote this has actually been within 100 feet of the Hunter. Ironically MacGregor uses a block and tackle arrangement on both its main sheet and its boom vang. So they should know that a block and tackle works as a force multiplier or they wouldn't use them. Yet in their marketing materials comparing the two boats it seems that they make the confusing claim that it takes more force not less.

For those who may not be familiar with a block and tackle, the way it acts as a force multiplier is that each loop in it serves to divide the overall amount of force needed to lift a given weight. So a block and tackle with a single loop (often referred to as a gun tackle) makes lifting a 100lb weight use the same force as lifting a 50lb weight. Boat winches work in a similar manner in that each loop you make around one allows you to exert more force. When you put a double loop around a boat winch and pull you're able to put out more force than with a single loop.

In MacGregor's winch system there is no block and tackle and the line reels in around the winch so that the winch's cranking force is that of a single loop. The mechanical advantage conferred comes from the ratio between the winch's diameter and the length of the winch handle itself. How much total weight the winch drum itself can lift is a function of its diameter and the force applied tangent to the drum. The Dutch used this principle by creating cranes with what are essentially winches composed of very large drums inside of which men stood and walked as if they were on a treadmill. These cranes were used to lift heavy crates and barrels out of the holds of the ships of the Dutch East India Company. This doesn't tell you how a winch with a crank arm like that on the MacGregor's mast raising system works though, just that winches confer mechanical advantage in a different manner than a block and tackle.

For a winch of a certain diameter with a winch handle attached to it, like the one MacGregor uses, the effective force multiplier is determined by the ratio of the distance from the center of the winch to its outer edge as compared to the

distance from the center of the winch to the end of the handle. A 4 inch diameter winch with an 8 inch long handle has a force multiplier of 2, which allows you to lift a 100lb weight using only 50lbs of force.

The winch handle on MacGregor's mast raising system is roughly twice the length of the diameter of the winch's drum. This means that in order to lift the MacGregor's mast you must create a rotational force on the winch handle of one half the weight of the mast. This is pretty much the exact same ratio of force you need to apply on the Hunter's block and tackle in order to lift its mast. So doing the math it would appear that MacGregor's claim that you need to exert more effort to raise the mast on the Edge with the mast raising system Hunter provides than you do on the 26M with MacGregor's optional mast raising system is wrong.

As to whether MacGregor's mast raising system is safer, it is true that their winch has a brake on it. But, as MacGregor knows from it's main sheet and boom vang configuration, a cleat can be used on a block and tackle to easily provide a means by which the line can be pulled in one direction without risk of slipping back if you let go. This is exactly what Hunter does because the main sheet block and tackle (which has a cam cleat on it) does double duty by getting used with the mast raising system. So there is a way to hold off the Hunter's mast when raising it. Also because the MacGregor uses stay wires instead of a rigid stay support system like the Hunter the mast still sways side to side when you're raising it and someone needs to be there to steady it.

Finally consider the fact that MacGregor's mast raising system is optional and costs over \$120. That means unless you shell out the extra \$ you're probably lifting the mast into place anyway in which case Hunter's mast raising system, which is included in the price, is going to be a safer way to raise the mast.

Engine Steering Linkage – MacGregor claims that it's steering system can easily be disconnected from the engine when sailing. If by easy you mean lifting the captain's chair then reaching down into the engine well all the way to the water line to unscrew a nut without falling off the back of the boat, then yes it is easy. And, of course if you even want this linkage in the first place it will cost you \$55. One of MacGregor's dealers (who were much more helpful than the one that sold me my 26M) makes their own custom steering linkage that costs well over \$100 but is much easier to connect and disconnect than the factory system, although you still have to reach down into the engine well to do so.

When I first got the 26M I was routinely disconnecting the engine while sailing. After some experimenting I found that not disconnecting the linkage made steering harder if the engine trim was in the up position. There were two reasons for that. First, because the boat doesn't come about well (especially to starboard) I found it was useful to be able to kick the motor on. Second is that because, as

MacGregor admits in their own comparison to the Hunter, the way the linkage is designed is such that when the engine is up its weight is transferred down onto the steering system. In my opinion this is actually a result of the poor design of the linkage. The more expensive after market linkage still has this problem as well but it's not quite as pronounced as on the factory part.

However, I also found after a bit of trial and error that the boat didn't handle any worse with the engine in the water. In fact I think it actually handles better with the engine in the water since the engine housing actually acts like a center mounted rudder and in my opinion improved the steering!

In sailing the Hunter I personally didn't think that the engine remaining linked to the steering was problematic. This is probably because instead of some jury rigged part with stainless steel L brackets bolted together Hunter's design allows for the use of the Evinrude steering cable linkage which the engine is actually designed to be used with. With this linkage there is no change in the behavior of the steering whether the engine is up or down because the weight of the engine isn't pressing down on the steering linkage when it is raised.

Mainsheet Traveler – MacGregor's statement that it is "absolutely necessary" to have a traveler to "control the mainsail" seems to me to be overblown. They state that "nearly all racers and cruisers" have these. By the way, what is the 26M a racer or a cruiser? I don't know, but I've seen a wide variety of cruising boats around the places I sail and there are as many boats I've seen that don't have travelers as do. So I don't think having one is "absolutely necessary."

My 19 footer didn't have a traveler and it sailed just fine. It had a nifty little system with a block on the starboard transom, another on the boom by the clew, and a rotating cam cleat on the transom just to port of the tiller. This allowed the mainsheet to be rigged up so it was held above the tiller and the helmsman could sit on either side and control it.

Of course on the boats I've seen that do have travelers they are always positioned up on the deck over the cabin, not down on the seats right in front of the cabin entrance. In my opinion this has to be the dumbest place you could put this, but it's the only place you can put it on the 26M because there isn't any space for it otherwise. The most obvious drawback of this is that traveler's placement blocks entry and exit from the cabin unless it's hauled over all the way. Less obvious at first is that it means someone inevitably spends a bit of time dodging the main sheet when the captain pulls on it. Also it means the mainsheet chafes against the lifelines sometimes. Even with the traveler pulled fully over to windward, and the boom no more than 30 degrees out from the center line, the mainsheet was dragging and chafing on them causing it to fray. Line is expensive and this fraying will make you need to replace your mainsheet more frequently.

Worse yet is that because the traveler is located on the bench in front of the cabin entry you are always having to lean forward from the captain's chair and reach around the pedestal to grab the mainsheet. This is partly because the block and tackle system MacGregor uses to connect the main sheet to the traveler has a cam cleat on it which sits just above the bench and faces downward. This means to pull the line from the cleat to let it out you have to pull it towards you and down. To cleat it again you have to pull it towards you and up. I still haven't found a good way to keep the mainsheet within reach without it getting fouled in the wheel, the throttle or caught up in a guest's legs.

Contrary to their claim, the MacGregor's mainsheet is most definitely positioned in a way that will interfere with the crew. Given how narrow the cockpit is in the MacGregor unless the crew is all up on the forward deck the position of the traveler pretty much ensures that in order for the captain to reach the mainsheet he's got to reach across them and pull the line across them.

The Hunter doesn't have this problem with the mainsheet being in someone's face or chafing on the lifelines. That's because Hunter was sensible and realized that a traveler isn't really that essential. By mounting the mainsheet on top of the a large, well mounted U shaped pole just forward of the pedestal the sheet is in easy reach of the captain to let it out or pull it in when maneuvering instead of having to grope around for it.

MacGregor claims that Hunter's mainsheet will interfere with those seated to leeward, but this is no more so than if the MacGregor's traveler is hauled over and the line from it to the captain's seat has to run across people's laps. Of course this isn't really as much of an issue as MacGregor tries to make it out to be. Being mounted over the pedestal places the mainsheet up higher, pretty much at a height that will be just over most people's heads when they are seated. Unlike on the MacGregor though, where the cockpit is so narrow you can't move around in it easily with more than 3 people on board, the Hunter's cockpit is wider and more spacious and the captain's seat doesn't block off the rear of the boat. In a pinch someone can always duck behind the captain's chair and move from one side of the cockpit to the other. You can't do that in the MacGregor without crawling across the captain's lap.

Jib Fairlead Tracks - These are located up on the deck over the cabin. I've found it's a pain to go up there to adjust them. I got a furler and led my halyard aft so I wouldn't have to go up on deck. So why would I constantly be going up on deck to move these "forward for reaching and running"? Oh right, it's because the MacGregor is a racer. Except when they claim it's a cruiser. Of course since the cars are somewhat cheaply built they have a tendency to pop out on their own so I found myself having to go up and put them back in. I pretty much never find myself worrying about adjusting them under way.

Rotating mast – MacGregor claims this provides “striking” performance and can add a knot or more to the speed of the boat. I’ve sailed the 26M in a variety of wind conditions, with the main only or with the 150% genoa let out. I’ve never been able to get it to go over 5.5mph with or without the engine in the water. Even sailing downwind in 12-15 mph winds with the main and the genoa configured wing on wing I’ve never gotten over 5.5mph. On my stubby little 19 footer which is a design that is definitely not known for its speed, I was able to get top speeds of 6.5mph and it’s mast didn’t rotate. If the rotating mast gets “a knot or more” of extra speed I can only imagine what a dog this boat would be without it, since it’s pretty much a dog with it. Of course I use it as cruiser so that doesn’t really bother me, but if I had bought into their marketing hype and thought this was a racer I’d be sorely disappointed.

Berths – MacGregor tries to ding Hunter on the fact that the aft berth being positioned across the center line is somehow problematic. I don’t put much stock in this. I’ve been on lots of large boats at boat shows where the aft berths are quite positioned like this. It really matters more how the boat rides on the mooring than the geometry of the berth. As mentioned earlier, the MacGregor is lighter and has high freeboard which causes it to swing a lot on a mooring. It’s hull is fully rounded so it also rolls more than the Hunter. The Hunter has a little less freeboard, more weight and chines towards the transom all of which allow it to ride better on a mooring.

Also I don’t think there is much difference in being able to get into the rear berths. In the 26M you have to either remove the dinette seat back, or slide the galley forward. Either way you have to climb in through a relatively small opening into a berth without much headspace. This really is no different on the Hunter where you enter via a space between the cabin stairs and the storage area for the cooler.

In fact on the MacGregor the storage area for the cooler is actually a cut out from the aft berth cushion on the starboard side behind the dinette. So if you have a cooler sitting in there you either have to move the cooler in order to get into the aft berth or move the sliding galley. And because the cutout takes up space in the aft berth you’d have to move the cooler to use it. On the Hunter you can just enter/exit the aft berth without having to rearrange the cabin’s contents and layout.

Galley – When I first saw the sliding galley I thought it was a neat idea. After owning a boat with it I think it’s a kludge. It’s also incredibly flimsy, having been built of the thinnest possible material such that the sides flex if you put much weight on them. The sink is molded into it and it doesn’t even have a real drain, just a puny little hole that clogs easily. The way they installed the drain hose is just plain dumb. Unless you lift the hose up it won’t drain because in order to

allow the galley to slide they made it out of a big loop of hose thereby causing parts of it to be above the level of the sink drain. Also, because the hose drops into the bottom of the bilge below the through hull outlet water collects in it and gets brackish and smelly. The only shelves on the 26M's galley are two small ones on the outside which have no cover. There are no shelves inside and because of the moving galley design their solution for having potable water is use of a jerry jug which takes up most of the room in the galley. That leaves you having to choose between storing things in it or having drinking water.

The Hunter doesn't need a sliding galley because it is laid out more intelligently. It's fixed galley has a fixed drain line that drains properly. The standard potable water system is also a jerry jug but you have some options on where to store it. Hunter also offers a well designed optional system with a fixed storage tank. See the next section for more.

Interior Size & Height including trunk location – In my opinion there is no comparison here. MacGregor claims their cabin has 6ft of headroom. That's only true when you're standing right under the sliding cabin hatch, which is a space about 2ft by 4ft. As you go forward the floor rises where it goes over the ballast tank and the header drops down greatly reducing the cabin height. Also as you move to the sides of the boat the floor steps up under the table and the header slopes down. So where the head is you have to crouch, it just isn't possible to stand in it. You also can't stand up at the dinette seats, you have to slide into them. The center aisle is only barely wide enough for two people to pass by turning sideways. It's as if you're on an airplane trying to scooch by someone and we all know how much fun that is. At least on the plane you can stand up in the bathroom. All of this makes moving fore to aft cumbersome. Also there are no opening windows in the cabin which makes it stuffy unless you open the forward hatch, something you don't want to do if you have a foresail on since it can get caught on the hatch cover. This is especially bad because there is no ventilation at all in the head.

MacGregor's dinette table can only seat 4 people, and only then if they're small, skinny or scrunched in real tight. In order to get into the forward dinette seat you have to shimmy in between the trunk and the table. The MacGregor table has to be unbolted to be removed, and if you take it out you don't really gain much useable space, you just have a big gap between the dinette benches. While there are cabin seat back cushions the only place they mount securely is the rear dinette bench which has a snap. The other seat cushions are held up by means of a piece of PVC tubing sewn into a strap on them which you then jam up into the gap between the header and the hull, where of course they don't stay. Then again neither does the wiring that's up there.

The storage compartments are completely unfinished and have no sides or bottoms. On mine sharp fiberglass pieces stick out. I can't tell you how many

times I've cut my hands or gotten painful fiberglass splinters reaching into or working in them. They are awkward shapes and sizes, lack flat bottoms, and it is difficult to store in, and retrieve things from, them. The covers over them are flimsy marine board which easily pops out of the molded recesses when you sit atop them.

MacGregor touts the presence of carpeting as being standard, but I've always thought carpeting in areas which can easily get wet is a bad idea. It tends to hold moisture and stains and get mildewed so that sooner or later you'll just end up tearing it out anyway.

Also there is no place to securely store a cooler. On its older models MacGregor had a compartment sized to hold a cooler. They foolishly got rid of this. Instead they made a removable cutout cushion in the aft starboard berth with the idea being that you lift the cushion up and put the cooler in the cutout. This means that the cooler is on the opposite side of the boat from the galley, behind the backrest of the aft dinette seat, and doesn't have a hold down or anything to keep it from tipping over. I tried really, really hard to find a cooler which would fit into the compartment under either the forward or the rear dinette seats. I took measurements and bought, then subsequently returned, 4-5 different coolers that seemed like they would fit but which were all just a tiny bit too big. I almost decided to use some Great Stuff insulation foam and build one into a compartment under the dinette, but when I decided I was going to sell the thing I gave up on that idea.

In contrast, Hunter uses the trunk intelligently as a way to support the dinette. The U shaped dinette is somewhat like a booth at a diner and there is enough room between it and the seats so people can slide in around it. Six people, possibly more, can fit at it no problem. The table folds down easily when not in use to be out of the way, but the center section remains allowing people to sit around it with drinks even with it folded down. In the MacGregor there is a wall separating the dinette from the head which blocks off the light and makes the cabin feel close and cramped. MacGregor actually put a mirror on it to create the impression that there is more light and space, but that's just a visual effect. In the Hunter the positioning of the dinette doesn't require putting a wall in so the cabin is very open and spacious with lots of daylight coming into it.

The cabin in the Hunter height doesn't really start to drop down until you get all the way forward as the cabin floor is flat not stepped. Two people can easily stand side by side in the cabin at the foot of the hatch steps, and moving fore to aft is easy. In addition to the dining table there is a good sized food prep surface with rails to keep things from falling off and a storage cabinet underneath it. Unlike the 26M, the Hunter has a place to securely mount a cooler right next to the galley. It also has a chart table on the port side forward of the head and next to the bench. This has a good sized cabinet with a shelf in it underneath.

There is lots of conveniently sized storage space with room to store things. All of the storage areas are finished with no razor sharp fiberglass to cut you or give you splinters. The head is also a full height compartment that you can stand up in with a screened window that opens to ventilate it. Another screen window is opposite this on the starboard side over the food prep area. Accordion window shades are an option that isn't even available for the MacGregor.

In my opinion the Hunter's cabin has it hands down over the MacGregor's for comfort and space. That alone is worth a great part of the price differential.

Cabin access – While the sliding hatch on the MacGregor is OK, there is nothing inherently superior about it, and nothing wrong with Hunter's hatch. Unless you're Gimli the Dwarf Hunter's hatch doesn't block your forward view. It's also not true that "almost all sailboats have sliding cabin access hatches". I've looked around the marina and harbor where I moor and there is plenty of variety in the size and design of cabin hatches with many boats having similar designs to that of the Hunter.

It's ironic though that MacGregor mentions Hunter's hatch as having a "small rubber gasket" when they have no gasket at all. The gap between the sliding hatch cover and the hatch panel on my 26M was so big that water would get in during any rainstorm on a windy day. As a result I ended up adding a gasket onto it at the bottom and changing the hatch hasps to hold the hatch panel up, thereby reducing the gap and keeping rain out.

MacGregor also uses only a single hasp on the hatch located on the side not the center. The hasp is mounted backwards so that when it is closed the mounting screws are exposed and any thief with a screw driver can break in. That's typical of MacGregor's workmanship in which they often use a cheaply made part that doesn't really fit well or work as it's supposed to. I replaced these hasps with nicer more secure ones.

Additionally, because the bench wraps around in front of the cabin entry hatch the cabin entry point on the MacGregor is very high off the cabin floor. As a result MacGregor has to have a ladder with several rungs. It's harder to get into and out of the MacGregor cabin and easy to slip on the ladder especially when the boat has a wake on or rolling seas. I've skinned my knees a couple of times going up and down it.

The Hunter's cockpit is not as far above the cabin floor as the MacGregor's is because there is no bench to climb over. The Hunter has a step which is cleverly designed to sit atop the ballast tank and serve as an inspection port. The step

has a hinged top with an anti slip coating as it makes it easier to get into and out of the Hunter's cabin with less chance of slipping.

Cockpit – MacGregor claims “the cockpit is large and comfortable.” I should have been suspicious of the fact that in every single picture of the boat in their marketing brochure they never show more than 3 people in the cockpit. In the one photo with 3 people two of them are kids. Of course a cockpit will look large when either no one is in it, or when you use people of smaller stature in your photos. The fact is that the cockpit on the 26M is actually fairly cramped.

The Hunter's cockpit is bigger. Two people can easily stand side by side in front of the pedestal at the cabin entry. Even though the pedestal is larger there is actually more room between it and the Hunter's benches than there is between MacGregor's pedestal and its benches. The distance between the Hunter pedestal and bench is almost as wide as the distance between the benches on the MacGregor and the engine throttle is well out of the way of any guest sitting on the cockpit bench.

The MacGregor cockpit is shorter and the seats wrap around in the corners because of the bench in front of the cabin entry. This wasn't the case with the 26X and in my opinion this design change was a big mistake. On both the older 26X and the current 26M the side benches support the captains chair at the rear of the cockpit. The seats in the MacGregor take up a much larger portion of the cockpit area than those in the Hunter but actually provide less useable seating space because the way the benches wrap around reduces the sitting space available. You just can't sit on the bench in front of the cabin entry due to the traveler and you can't sit in the rear corners of the cockpit.

Also, the height of the boom over the cockpit is lower on the MacGregor than it is on the Hunter. On the Hunter you can stand upright in the cockpit and the boom will clear your head unless you're very tall. In the MacGregor only the shortest of people (5ft or shorter) can stand upright under the boom.

As a result the Hunter can seat more people more comfortably, and they can move around the cockpit and into and out of the cabin more easily. With the optional stern rail seats there is even more room as well as a place to put your drinks that doesn't take up the middle of the cockpit.

On the MacGregor the incredibly overpriced optional folding cockpit table, which costs \$245 and is made of a stainless steel tube and a piece of plastic (which is the same size and material as a \$12 cutting board sold at Target) takes up whatever little bit of room there is between the pedestal and the traveler. That means you can either have a place to set your drinks or a tiny bit of room to move around but not both. You don't have to make that choice with the Hunter.

I personally found the captain's seat on the MacGregor **very** uncomfortable. Even though I got the optional cockpit cushions that didn't include a cushion for the captain's seat, which apparently doesn't exist. Instead I sometimes use one of the smaller cabin cushions, but this raises me up higher so that my head hits the bimini which has to be positioned low enough for the boom to ride over it. The optional cockpit cushions on the Hunter include a cushion for the captain.

The captain's seat in the MacGregor is lower, so you frequently have to stand up to get a better view forward. Again this is problematic with the bimini up. The pedestal slopes away (i.e. forward) from the captain's seat while the captain's seat slopes slightly to the rear. This means that the distance between the captain and the wheel is larger at their chest/shoulder height than it is on the floor thereby requiring the captain to lean forward to grasp the wheel. This is tough on the lower back.

Hunter's pedestal and captain's chair are both straight, not sloped. The distance between them makes it easier for the captain to hold the wheel without having to lean forward. The greater height of the Hunter captain's seat with its semi-standing position is also better on the back (well for me at least) and makes it easier to see forward. With the optional stern rail seats there is another position which the captain can easily pop up into to get a better view forward on either the port or starboard.

Other Stuff

This comparison is might no means comprehensive. There are quite a lot of other things I've experienced that lead me to believe the Hunter is a much better boat overall. To keep this from getting any longer I won't go into most of them now. Look for more at a later point in time. I do however want to talk briefly about the warranty.

My personal experience was that MacGregor did not stand behind their warranty. I asked the dealer what the warranty was before I bought the boat. At that point the dealer was legally obligated to give me a copy of the warranty, which is buried in the middle of the owner's manual so that you won't see it until after you've already bought the boat. Instead the dealer who sold me my 26M gave me incorrect information that led me to believe the warranty was all inclusive and of a different duration than it actually was. I also found that there were terms in MacGregor's warranty which were illegal in the state I live in, a point which they were legally obligated to disclose and didn't. In my opinion MacGregor's warranty isn't worth the paper it's printed on.

In contrast when I asked Hunter if I could see their warranty I was sent a scan of it right away. They answered several questions I had about the warranty promptly and the dealer I bought my boat from also made sure I got a copy of it prior to signing anything. Unlike with the MacGregor, so far I haven't had any cause to need the warranty but I feel more comfortable having been able to view it before making my purchase that Hunter has nothing to hide and stands behind their product.

Summary

MacGregor's comparison continually tries to make the 26M out as some kind of finely tuned performance sailboat that has all the features of a large cruiser. But if you wanted a performance sailboat then why in god's name would you buy a MacGregor? Or if you wanted a large comfortable cruiser, why would you buy a MacGregor?

People buy MacGregor's because they don't want to spend a lot of money, not because it is some kind of performance sailboat. MacGregor's pricing reflects this in that they set the base price of the boat low but for a configuration which is almost totally stripped down. This gives you the impression that you can get a MacGregor for not very much money. While that's true if you buy it bare you get what you pay for.

It seems to me that MacGregor's principal goal is to make the boat as affordable as possible for a boat it's size. Think of it as the Pinto of sailboats. It's basic and it's cheap and just about everything you might really want to have on it is extra and in the end this runs the price up significantly over their base price.

It is true that the price for a MacGregor configured comparable to the Hunter's base configuration is less but when you take into account the things which are standard on the Hunter that are options on the MacGregor it's not as much as MacGregor makes it out to be. On top of that if you take into account the things I've shown here, in my opinion the quality, fit and finish of the Hunter is significantly better that it justifies the extra cost. Think of the Hunter as more of a Honda or Toyota. The quality the fittings, the better finish work, the extra room and better designed layout are, in my opinion all worth it.

If I had had the opportunity to choose between the Hunter Edge and the MacGregor at the time I first set out to upgrade from my 19 footer I feel that I would never have gotten the 26M. I think that claim is justified given that in selling my 26M I'll be losing money, which makes the cost difference for me personally pricier than for someone who has the choice I didn't. Even at that so far I think the Hunter is worth the difference.

