

PHOTOS ALLAN WHITING; BENETEAU

SENSE OF DIRECTION

Beneteau's new Sense 43 and 50 yachts are headed Down Under. **ALLAN WHITING** journeyed to the south of France to get the jump on the dashing new designs...



THE SENSE HULLS ARE STATE-OF-THE-ART DESIGNS, WITH CONSPICUOUS AFT CHINES THAT TAPER OFF MID-HULL INTO QUITE FINE BOW SECTIONS

Over a quiet beer on the waterfront of the Isle des Emebies (near Toulon in southern France), I quizzed Beneteau's yachting development manager, Bruno Belmont, about the origin of the Sense design.

"When we were redesigning the Oceanis range five years ago, in conjunction with Jean Berret and Olivier Racoupeau, we pursued the idea of a parallel, yet clean-screen design, with only a few set criteria," said Belmont.

"The parallel yacht design had to be capable of around-the-world cruising, with sea-kindly manners; be ideal for coastal cruising and for just sitting onboard. (The average cruising boat spends 80 to 90 per cent of its life in a berth or at a mooring, or anchored).

"But the most radical departure from the existing Oceanis design

was to be owner-oriented use, with no chartering or only high-end chartering considerations in mind.

"In addition, the proximity relationship between the cockpit and the sea and the cockpit and the saloon was to be as close as possible: similar to the ergonomics of a powerboat," he said.

Belmont explained that this concept had arisen in part from discussions with yacht, multihull and powerboat owners. By abandoning the option of aft cabins or garages under the cockpit, the Sense would have a lower cockpit floor, close to water level and only a short companionway away from the saloon.

RAISON D'ÊTRE

The Sense 43 and 50 are a totally new concept for Beneteau: high-performance hulls and rigs enclose interiors that are

unashamedly designed to owner's specifications, with none of the usual charter-vocation compromises built into most cruising yachts.

In addition, the shallow step-down from cockpit to saloon is indeed reminiscent of powerboat ergonomics; an impression heightened by a high proportion of glazing in the saloon. There's none of that down-below living feeling.

The Sense hulls are state-of-the-art designs, with conspicuous aft chines that taper off mid-hull into quite fine bow sections. Bulb keels have clean forward edges, to avoid catching weed or mooring lines and there's a shoal-draft option. Rudders are relatively shallow.

In most European marinas, boats are berthed stern-to, so a great deal of attention has been paid to making boarding as easy as possible. A teak-faced swimplatform is recessed into

[HIGHS]

- › Owner-oriented interior layout
- › Good performance
- › Cockpit space
- › Easy sail handling

[LOWS]

- › Mainsail stowage when dodger is fitted

Out on the Med' aboard the red-hulled Sense 43 (above). The 43's forepeak cabin features a vee-berth (top right), and a galley (middle right) and saloon (right) mimicking the 50 in layout, but reversed.

each transom, only a short step from the cockpit sole thereby granting easy access.

Two upholstered steering benches, behind the twin leather-clad wheels, swing-up on gas struts when not in use, allowing unobstructed access





BOTH SENSES HAVE SIMILAR RIGGING LAYOUTS, WITH TWIN FURLERS UP FRONT OF THE TEST BOATS, FOR STANDARD OVERLAPPING HEADSAIL AND OPTIONAL GENNAKER



aboard. A nice finishing touch is a powered 'fence' that rises from the aft edge of the cockpit, preventing littlies (or a bottle of champagne) from sliding over the stern of the boat.

The twin steering stations face binnacles with drinkholders, individual chartplotters and speed gauges, while engine instruments and controls are at the starboard helm. Between the wheels are an icebox and a walkthrough section, leading to the main cockpit, which is similar in layout on the 43 and 50. Both have U-shaped seating around a table on the starboard side and a straight bench to port. The table lowers, converting the seating area to a sunbed.

In the 43, the wide cockpit is broken by a tubular handrail and foot-brace structure. In the 50's even wider cockpit there's also plastic folding panels that create a narrow table top, with an oddments bin or additional icebox that converts into a folding bench topped with cushions. The starboard seat lifts to reveal a short companionway and crew bunk, adjacent to the optional washer/dryer that's accessed internally.

WALL OF GLASS

Both boats' glass companionway doors are set into sloping saloon walls that differ from conventional FRP construction: up to coaming height is FRP moulding, but above the



The Sense 43, like its bigger sibling, has twin helm stations (top) facing binnacles (top right). Helm seats (middle right) fold-up on gas struts for unfettered access to the stern. Tilt-able chart table seat (above left) compensates for boat heel. The 43's single bathroom (above right) with separate shower stall.

Facts & figures

PERFORMANCE NOTES

The Med' turned on its usual all-or-nothing weather and our test-sail wind strengths varied from four to 28kts. The Senses were beautiful to sail in breezes up to around 15kts with gennakers hoisted, but above that we shortened gear.

PRICE AS TESTED

Approximately **\$435,000** as tested, fully loaded

OPTIONS FITTED

Twin furlers, gennaker, powered halyard/sheet winch, deluxe galley, Bose speakers, 2000W inverter, and more

PRICED FROM

\$337,000

GENERAL

MATERIAL: FRP hull and balsa resin composite deck

TYPE: Monohull

LENGTH OVERALL: 13.2m

HULL LENGTH: 12.8m

BEAM: 4.28m

DRAFT: 2m; 1.65m (optional)

WEIGHT: 10,070kg

BALLAST: 2920kg

LAYOUT



BENETEAU SENSE 43

CAPACITIES

BERTHS: 2 doubles (+ dinette and cockpit berths)

FUEL: 440lt

WATER: 675lt

HOLDING TANK: 80lt

SAILS

MAINSAIL: 45.2m²

HEADSAIL: 41.3m²

SPINNAKER: 106m²

ENGINE

MAKE/MODEL: Yanmar diesel

TYPE: Reverser saildrive

RATED HP: 54

PROP: Three-blade fixed

SUPPLIED BY

Beneteau France

Websites: www.beneteau.com.au;

www.beneteau.com.au/Dealerships

tradeboat says...

The stylish Sense 43 is a two-cabin cruising yacht with a huge cockpit and very easy swimming and cabin access. It's an ideal craft for daysailing and entertaining, but, at only two-thirds the weight of the Sense 50, could make a competitive club-racing boat as well.

waistline the walls are glass. The effect is similar to that of a powerboat saloon entry. In the case of the Sense 43, the door folds and concertinas to open, with the roof glass sliding into a void in the cabin top. In the Sense 50, the sliding top is the same, but the glass roller door power-glides downwards to open, disappearing into a horizontal slot beneath the cockpit floor, above the engine bay.

Three, very gently-sloped companionway steps lead to both saloons, which are of similar-size. Large coach-house glass areas, roof hatches and square hull ports complement the light from the aft window sections. Each galley takes up one saloon wall, with a U-shaped dinette opposite. A central island bench houses a fold-down seat in front of a dining table and the bench can also house a power-raised flatscreen TV.

Saloon equipment levels are high, with lift-top fridge-freezer (a front-opener as well in the Sense 50 galley), gimballed stove-oven, double sink, ample bench space and a chart table-electrical nerve centre with chartplotter and additional bench and cupboard space. A nice touch is a tilt-able chart table seat, to compensate for boat heel.

Both boats have bathrooms with separate shower and head recesses with individual access doors. In the case of the 43, there is one bathroom, located adjacent to the amidships double cabin and aft of the forward double cabin. The Sense 50 has two bathrooms: one for the forward cabin and one for the amidships cabin, doubling as a dayhead.

The amidships doubles are almost identical in both boats, but the forward cabin in the 50 has an island bed, while the 43 has a conventional vee-berth double.

The extra LOA in the Sense 50 allows for a second head and an office cabin that can optionally be set-up with two single bunks, one above the other. The test boat had an office arrangement that was very functional.

Below decks the Sense 50 has it all over the 43 for travelling couples, offering individual bathroom privacy and an office/



BENETEAU

Underway in steady breezes, the Sense 50 (top) felt dry and secure. Both boats' glass companionway doors are set into a sloping aft saloon bulkhead (right). Foredeck crew will appreciate the broad sidedecks (below right).

bunk cabin. The 43 would suit a family, where bathroom sharing mightn't be such an issue.

OUT ON THE MED'

Both Senses have similar rigging layouts, with twin furlers up front of both test boats, for standard overlapping headsail and optional gennaker. The forward section of each coach house has a moulded recess for a self-tacking jib track: the 43 was set-up for a self-tacker, but the 50 had no track fitted.

The Sense 50 was fitted with a tang just aft of the chain locker, to take an inner forestay for a staysail or storm jib and the 43 is designed to accept the same fitting.

Sheet and halyard control is down to two forward coaming winches — portside powered on the 43 test boat and both





Optional twin-furler setup (left) on the Sense 50, were common to both tests models, as are standard engine instruments and controls on the starboard helm (above). On test day, the 50 was fitted with an overlapping headsail (right). With helm seats folded up, its just a step to the transom's recessed swim platform (below left).



powered on the 50. There are twin sheet running blocks beside these winches, allowing jib sheets to be put onto the forward winches or led aft to the more powerful sheet/spinnaker pair. Lidded rope-tidy bins aft of the forward winches ensure there are no tails in the cockpit.

Mainsail control is done by a forward winch, with a mainsheet that runs from the boom, through two fixed blocks on the cabin arch, back to the boom and mast, then aft under the deck. The boom is set well above arch height, so it offers minimal threat to landlubbers in a gybe.

The test boats had battened mainsails and one-line slab reefing, but in-mast furling is available. Beneteau isn't keen on vertically battened furling mainsails because of wear

[DOCK & GO]

› Berthing a large yacht with a small crew on hand can be stressful at best and dangerous at worst. A bowthruster can be of great assistance, but swings only the front end of the boat: enter Dock & Go.

ZF's Dock & Go system was fitted to the test 50 and is an option on both Senses and an increasing number of Oceanis yachts.

The system combines a saildrive that can pivot through 360 degrees and a bowthruster, with computer control via a simple joystick. When the Dock & Go system is activated the helm is locked and boat direction is achieved by moving the joystick in the direction the helmsperson desires. Engine power is applied by twisting the joystick knob.

During Beneteau's sea trials at the island of Les Embiez, I had the opportunity to check out the new Dock & Go system on the Sense 50 and on a GT Flyer 38. It worked better and less noisily on the Sense than on the powerboat, because the yacht pod has full rotation capability, allowing the engine to work in forward gear all the time it's docking. In the powerboat, the twin units' transmissions need to switch from forward to reverse during manoeuvres.

Our first evaluation was done in calm conditions and the big Sense 50 slid sideways neatly into a tight portside berth that had only one-metre fore and aft clearance. Then we took it out into the bay during a 28-knot blast and aimed it sideways, across the wind, at a concrete fuel wharf. It obviously took more fiddling with the joystick, to combine engine and thruster power in the correct proportions to keep the boat aligned with the threatening dock, but the boat nestled gently alongside the tyre fenders without drama and held position while we rigged mooring lines. Brilliant!



MOST SENSES WILL BE BOUGHT BY THE PURE CRUISING FRATERNITY, BUT THE BOATS PERFORM WELL ENOUGH TO HANDLE CLUB RACING



issues with the batten pockets, so there's some performance sacrifice with the furling main option.

The Senses were fitted with spray dodgers on folding frames clipped to their arches. Removal was pretty quick, which is just as well because folding the sail into its boom bag was much easier with the dodger off, or at least with the forward clear section unzipped and dropped onto the deck. A fixed FRP/polycarbonate dodger, with louvered steps a la Leopard Catamarans would look quite good on a Sense, I reckon, and would make sail bagging much easier.

Beneteau has given much attention to engine installation and that, in combination with a saildrive rather than a shaft, keeps vibration and noise to an absolute minimum. At WOT of 3150rpm the Senses managed 8.4kts and at 1500rpm, 4.7kts, with only 66dBA on our noise meter in the saloon.

In strong breezes both boats felt dry and secure, but crew comfort was compromised somewhat by the sheer size of the cockpits. Flat seats and large walking areas are great for lounging, but don't offer much resistance to slip-sliding away when the boat's heeled over. However, with a tuck in the main and self-tacker sheeted home there's not much need for crew on deck anyway! The helmsperson is better catered for, with bum and foot wedges and drop-down foot braces fitted to the coamings.

Most Senses will be bought by the pure cruising fraternity, but the boats perform well enough to handle club racing. Jib sheeting angles are wide, but a barber hauler is easy enough to rig up and there's ample winching power to cope with an asymmetric or spinnaker.

Either way, with luxurious double cabins and spacious bathrooms; powerful sailing rigs that can be optioned for more performance or easier handling; and ample entertaining and lounging space, above and below decks, these are exciting new designs bound to enliven the staid yachting market. ⚓

Facts & figures

PERFORMANCE NOTES

In 25kts, with a partly furling headsail and a single reef in the main the Sense 50 romped along at 9.4kts hard on the wind and would have been better balanced with a staysail instead of a reefed gennaker. Off the breeze, boat speed climbed above 10kts and the boat felt reassuringly stable.

PRICE AS TESTED

\$715,000 as tested fully loaded

OPTIONS FITTED

Twin furlers, gennaker, deluxe galley, extractor hood, 2000W inverter, powered companionway door, powered saloon blinds, teak decks, genset, air con, Dock & Go system, electronics, electric winches, code zero, and more

PRICED FROM

\$473,000

GENERAL

MATERIAL: FRP hull and balsa resin composite deck
TYPE: Monohull
LENGTH OVERALL: 15.27m
HULL LENGTH: 14.98m
BEAM: 4.86m
DRAFT: 2.10m (1.75m optional)
WEIGHT: 15,295kg
BALLAST: 3965kg

LAYOUT

Layout options on the Sense 50, include a two-cabin variant (above right) or three-cabin version (right), and shoal draft (below right).



BENETEAU SENSE 50

CAPACITIES

BERTHS: 2 doubles (+ office bunk or twin bunks, dinette and cockpit berths)
FUEL: 830lt
WATER: 730lt
HOLDING TANK: 80lt

SAILS

MAINSAIL: 64m²
HEADSAIL: 63m²
SPINNAKER: 165m²

ENGINE

MAKE/MODEL: Yanmar diesel
TYPE: Reverser saildrive
RATED HP: 75
PROP: Three-blade fixed

SUPPLIED BY

Beneteau France
 Websites: www.beneteau.com.au;
www.beneteau.com.au/Dealerships

tradeboat says

The stylish Sense 50 is a three- or two-cabin yacht with all the luxury fittings you'd expect in such a classy-looking, cutting-edge French cruiser. It's an ideal craft for daysailing and entertaining, but can just as easily be equipped for an around-the-world voyage.



Hanging out at anchor, you can find your own zone on the big Sense 50 (top). Internally, the 50 has a U-shaped dinette (above left) with extra seating courtesy of a fold-down settee (inset) in the galley island bench. There's a portside office (above), as per test boat, in lieu of the twin-bunk cabin. The forepeak cabin gets an island double bed (left).