

FIRST CLASS

ALLAN WHITING
sails to the south
of France to take
part in Beneteau's
exciting First 30
launch...

Now before you all start thinking: "Oh yeah, he's had a great trip to the Med', so we can hardly expect an objective report," let's get a few things straight. International air travel may be glamorous if you're heading off with the child bride to a posh resort, but working trips aren't like that — change planes in Changi Airport, Singapore (two hours cooling your heels); change planes at Charles de Gaulle (don't even get a glimpse of Paris and then wait

four hours); find a cash machine at Marseille Airport to pay the cabby around 220 bucks to get to a distant wharf, so you can stand in the rain waiting for the ferry and then tramp your bag through puddles to a pub that's perched on a hillside. Around 36 hours of travel with little sleep.

The upside happens next day, when you start to sample eight brand-new power and sail boats, but there's always the thought in the back of your mind that there's the same lengthy commute back Down Under at the end of the week. Right, so



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much for the whinging.

The beauty of a week-long event is the chance of weather changes and so it proved. We had several days of light air, one with around 15 to 20kts and one where it blew the oysters off the rocks. The sea state was different from what we're used to in most of Oz, because the bluff cliffs that fringe the Med' in southern France combine with an onshore wind and shallow bottom to set up a sharp chop, even in light airs. It's a bit like Port Phillip Bay, which is enjoyed only by masochistic Victorians. However, the varying conditions provided a great opportunity to check out the new First 30 in widely differing situations.

FIRST 30 RATIONALE

This latest First is unlike anything Beneteau has done before — new designer, new rig concept and a new method of pre-release fine tuning.

The First 30 designer is Juan Kouyoumdjain — Juan K for short — who's best known for designing BMW Oracle Racing's America's Cup monohulls and the two most recent winners of the around-the-world Volvo Ocean Race. This heritage is evident in the drawings of the First 30.

The hull is a 'dart' in plan view, with wide, flat stern sections, twin rudders and a 1.9m-draft keel with torpedo-shaped bulb.

The hull shape is similar to that employed by Elan Yachts in the 2009 Rob Humphreys' designed 310 and the 2010-model 350 that display well-known Humphreys' design hallmarks and hints from his Volvo 60 raceboat experience. However, that's where the Beneteau First 30 concept departs from the Elan approach.

The First 30's deck-stepped mast is straight, steeply aft-raked and positioned well back on the hull, leaving space for large, non-overlapping headsails. The square-topped main is set

on a long boom that overhangs the stern, leaving no room for a backstay. That arrangement would normally require running backstays, but the First 30 doesn't use runners, relying instead on a variation of the B&R rig that was developed by Lars Bergstrom and Sven Ridder in the 1960s for use on shorthanded around-the-world yachts. The B&R rig is distinguished by the absence of a fixed backstay or running backstays, allowing unlimited mainsail roach and easy gybing. The standard sailplan includes a square-topped mainsail and a 105 per cent headsail.

In the B&R rig, the shrouds and the forestay are disposed at 120-degree intervals, triangulating the mast support. Hunter Yachts universally adopted the B&R rig in 1993. Beneteau's First 30 is similar, but the spreaders are swept back only 25 degrees, not 30 degrees. Assisting the shroud disposition is mainsheet tension, via a multi-block tackle, mounted on a transom beam.

Sail control lines emerge from the mast and run through turning blocks at the mast base, via double-deck organisers to cabin-top clutches. All lines are easily

We got the chance to sail the First 30 with a symmetrical spinnaker and an asymmetric (above), the result was both kites had the yacht planing sweetly. As a twilight racer, the First 30 (below) should prove successful, with the potential to mix it at a higher level. Sail controls emerge from the mast (right) and run through turning blocks at the base.



HIGHS

- › Great performance
- › Cockpit space
- › Value for money
- › Good cruising appointments

LOWS

- › Add-on cockpit brace bars
- › Lack of bilge depth



A fine bow, means the forepeak cabin (right) is restricted in size and best for the kids or height-challenged crew. L-shaped galley (above) includes two-burn gas stove, and lift-up fridge adjacent the sink.



reached, should re-reeving be necessary.

A backstay-less rig relies on a wide shroud base for its swept-back-spreader layout, so the First 30's caps and lowers anchor to beam-width chainplates, not the narrow-set ones we're used to seeing. Normally, this wide-shroud layout would interfere with headsail dimensions, but that's where the aft-positioned mast comes into play. The genoa tracks are set well inboard, but there's ample J length to allow large headsails whose leeches won't foul the shrouds.

Stability is enhanced by a T-keel with large bulb and twin rudders are fitted in recognition of the broad stern sections.

Below decks, the First 30 is well laid out for cruising, but promises easy sail stowage for

racing. The aft-set mast means the compression post is at the aft end of the dining table, rather than forward of it.

Pre-production boats spent considerable tune-up time in the

A FAST, EASILY-HANDLED CLUB RACER, WITH A CRUISING-ORIENTED CABIN LAYOUT AND ACCOMMODATION FOR FOUR TO SIX PEOPLE — ALL AT AN ATTRACTIVE PRICE

Med', under the skilled hands and eyes of Michel Desjoyeaux, three times winner of the Solitaire du Figaro, twice winner of the Vendée Globe and winner of the English singlehanded transatlantic race and the Route du Rhum.

30 PACKAGE

Although Beneteau emphasises the performance side of the First 30, the company is well aware of the need for today's yachts to be dual-purpose boats. The cockpit is huge, thanks to fat stern sections, so there's ample crew-room when racing and when anchored off a beach.

The transom beam carrying the mainsheet traveller is somewhat restricting when it comes to water games, but there's no backstay bridle to dodge around. There's also a long boarding ladder fitted and the cockpit seats are broad for comfortable lounging. Cockpit coamings end well forward, making a broad, flat seating area aft.

A moulded lip at the companionway is supplemented by a flip-down Perspex storm board and a short stairway leads to an airy, light interior. Narrow bow

sections reserve the vee-berth for the vertically challenged, very close friends or kids, but the aft cabin has a huge double bed in a wide portside cabin with limited headroom. The starboard quarter hosts a giant sail bin.

An L-shaped galley, L-shaped chart table nook with simple drop-down seat, and the head/shower flank the companionway, and a four-place dinette area tapers towards the forward bulkhead. Keen racers may remove the drop sides of the table/dinette in the interests of easier sail-bag handling.

Standard fare is a gimbaled two-burner LPG stove and a lift-up fridge, but the rest of the Australian-equipment list was still under consideration.

Lifting the cabin-sole access panels rings a surprise, because there's almost no bilge depth. Any water will slosh back and forth, with the potential to wet the woodwork. To that end the

main bilge pump is fitted with a long "wandering" suction hose with a strainer on its end, so that the pump pickup point can be varied quickly.

WHIFF OF WIND

Our first test sail was in light winds that stirred from an original 5kts up to 12kts and in these conditions the First 30 was most impressive. Beneteau's polar diagram suggests the First 30 is a light-air flyer and that's exactly what we found. It pointed easily in the low-30-degree-true region with speeds of 4kts up to nearly 6kts.

Aiding this pointing ability was a barber hauler arrangement that made up for the wishy sheeting angle imposed by the breadth of the coach house.

With the bow down four or five degrees and barber hauler eased the boat put on an instant half-knot. In heavier air on a subsequent sailing day the First 30 consistently



Below decks (top), the First 30 is well laid out for cruising and even manages to squeeze in a chart table (above) with seat.



The cockpit (above) is huge, thanks to fat stern sections. No need for a binnacle with coaming ends housing electronic displays (top). Transom beam carries the traveller (left).

managed 6kts-plus at very tight pointing angles.

White-sail reaching was also impressive, with the First 30 hitting up to 8kts through a 60-degree wind angle and that's good news for twilight sailors.

We had the chance to check out the First 30 with symmetrical spinnaker and an asymmetric, and both kites had the boat lifting its skirts and planing sweetly on those broad aft sections.

The kites are 9/10 profile, with halyards emerging safely above the forestay terminal, leaving ample space for snuffers.

Downwind in 20-knot puffs we were conscious of the eased-out mainsheet and no backstay or runners, but the boat seemed unstressed. Broad reaching with the symmetric kite in 15kts saw the speedo reading a tic over 9kts.

We suspect this will be the best way to sail the First 30 downwind, reaching at around 130 to 150 degrees and chucking in rapid end-for-end gybes rather than running square, where the considerable wetted area and drag of two rudders might see it disadvantaged in comparison with a skinnier boat. Alternatively, an asymmetric might be the ticket.

Crew work was easy enough, although the fine bow favours ballet-slipper feet rather than

giant plates of meat. The symmetrical kite works on a double-ended pole, without the complication of lazy braces and sheets. Sheeted to the cabin-top winches, the kites proved easy to trim seated, thanks to a wide cockpit that gives the sheet-hand a great view of the kite luffs.

The helm was light and precise, as we expected, and the best steering position was at the end of each coaming. We found that moving aft, in line with the tiller's forward end, meant sitting on the flat aft seats that give no support when the boat heels.

Early photos of the trial First 30s have plain seating in this aft section of the cockpit, but the test boat was fitted with movable foot-rails against which the aft-sitting crewmember can brace. We've sailed with these foot bars before and strongly suggest they be dressed with netting — if you've had a leg slip inside one of these foot brace bars during a knockdown, you'll know why.

Trimming the square-topped main proved different from powering a conventional shape, in that dropping the traveller in puffs wasn't the optimum set; we got better boat speed if we left the traveller where it was and eased the sheet temporarily. ⚓

Facts & figures

PERFORMANCE

Beneteau has raised the bar for high-performance 30-footers, with the introduction of the First 30, but has not done so at the expense of twilight-style racing and cruising potential. The non-backstay rig opens the door for larger sail plans and, with the traveller car slid to one side, opens up the stern area for berthing and bathing.

PRICE AS TESTED

\$195,000 (estimate)

OPTIONS FITTED

Spinnaker gear, and racing sails including spinnaker and asymmetric spinnaker

PRICED FROM

\$180,000 (provisional)

GENERAL

MATERIAL: FRP hull and balsa resin composite deck

TYPE: Keelboat

LENGTH OVERALL: 9.85m

HULL LENGTH: 9.52m

BEAM: 3.21m

DRAFT: 1.9m; 1.5m (optional)

WEIGHT: 3750kg

BALLAST: 1090kg

LAYOUT



BENETEAU FIRST 30

CAPACITIES

BERTHS: 2 doubles (+ 2 settee berths)

FUEL: 30lt

WATER: 160lt

SAILS

MAINSAIL: 34.11m²

HEADSAIL: 28.80m²

SPINNAKER: 87m²

ENGINE

MAKE/MODEL: Yanmar 3YM20SD diesel

TYPE: Reverser saildrive

RATED HP: 20

PROP: Two-blade folding

SUPPLIED BY

Ensign Ship Brokers

Shop 16 Mariners Cove

60 Seaworld Dr

Main Beach, QLD 4217

Phone: (07) 5532 1122

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tradeboat SAYS...

The much anticipated First 30 offers impressive performance and ease of handling in a package that has good cruising appointments. It should make a successful twilight racer and weekend pleasureboat, but has the potential to mix it at a higher level with much more expensive IRC boats.



Extensive soundproofing lines the enginebox (above) for the 20hp Yanmar diesel.

FAST FACTS

► A fast, easily-handled club racer, with a cruising-oriented cabin layout and accommodation for four to six people — all at an attractive price. State-of-the-art hull, T-keel and chined topsides make it a virtual mini-Volvo 60.