

## Bénéteau First 40.7



Since the launch of Bruce Farr's design in 1999, nearly 700 First 40.7s have been built. Their prevalence at regattas shows how much the design has caught the imagination as a performance boat at a good price. Nowadays there's another reason for its success – with so many boats on the water, owners get frequent opportunities to race head to head.

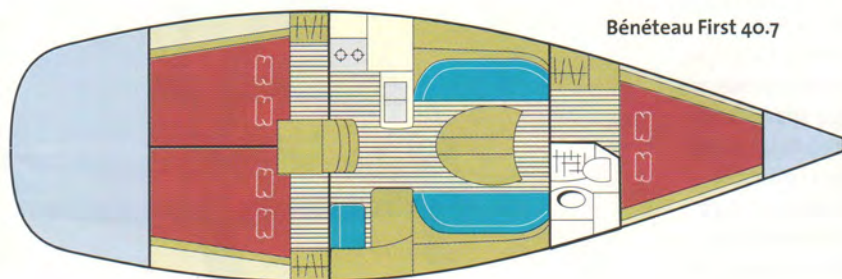
To assess her appeal, we went for a spin on Southampton Water. In around 16 knots of wind, gusting to 23 knots, the boat was well powered up under full main and No 3 headsail. We could have used some more weight on the rail than our crew of five, but in moderate spells, the boat balanced

well, notching up around 6.5 knots close-hauled, tacking through 80° and adding half a knot on bearing away.

One reason for the 40.7's success is its versatility as a cruiser-racer. Cockpit lockers can be removed for racing, providing either a huge area for crew to work forward of the traveller, or ample space for fenders and lines. Bénéteau have also eschewed an open racing transom in favour of quarter lockers bridged by a curved seat – making ideal liferaft stowage in between.

The traveller is just forward of the helm and an above-deck mainsheet system leads to the aft winches. Sitting out is easy, whether on the high or low side, and the chunky steering pyramid ►►

**The Bénéteau would have benefited from more weight on the rail**



**Lines are well laid out, with a long traveller forward of the wheel and plenty of winches**



**There's more timber on the 40.7 than the X-41 and curved edges to saloon table, nav table and galley create a softer look**



provides an excellent bracing position. The helm itself is positive and there's plenty of grunt in the big wheel to handle the yacht as she powers up – even though we were slightly overpowered in the gusts, the rudder never lost grip. Kevlar steering cables avoid stretch and keep the helm free of slack. She isn't quite as stiff as the X-41, but aluminium spars and Dyform rigging still give a balanced response to varying wind conditions.

The six-winch cockpit layout works well for crewed and short-handed sailing. Lines are led aft to the coachroof and there is plenty of space for the mainsail trimmer forward of the helm – the only tricky control for the crew to access is the hydraulic backstay.

Under power the boat showed excellent and positive handling characteristics, tracking well astern,

turning in 1.25 boatlengths and cruising at about seven knots, with an extra knot in reserve when necessary.

### Modern touches

Like X-Yachts, Bénéteau go for two straight saloon settees, a triangular berth forward and identical twin aft cabins. But there's more timber on the 40.7 than the X-41 and curved edges on the saloon table, nav station and galley create a softer look, offset by modern touches such as the matt aluminium grabrails, which also house roller shades – a clever bit of design that avoids curtains on race day.

The forward cabin offers the usual below-berth stowage, although the small deckhatch means spinnaker drops into the cabin are tricky. The heads to starboard has adequate headroom to shower in comfort.

Stowage throughout is adequate rather than generous – a hanging locker in each cabin and good high-level lockers in the saloon above the settees – and although space below the settees is dedicated to tankage, there are handy spaces behind the seat backs. Essential wine stowage is in the centre of the table and the galley has plenty of space above the

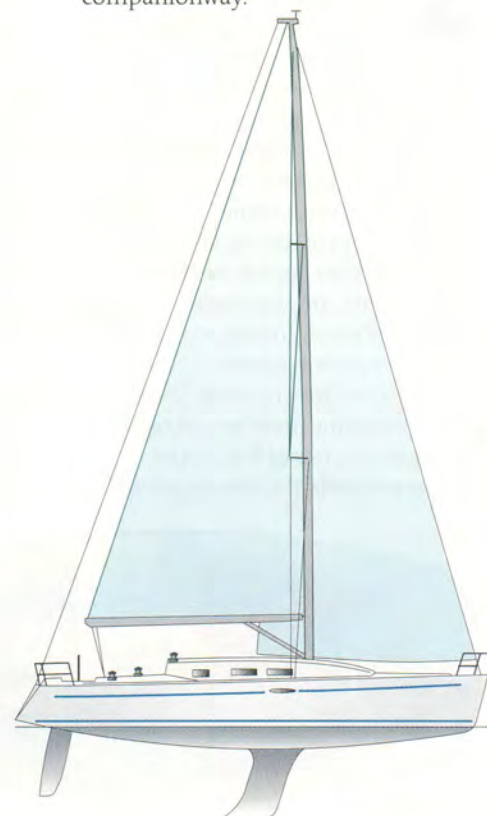


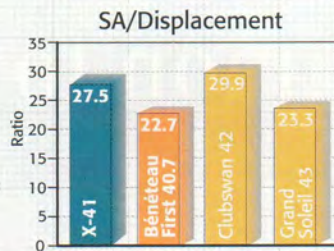
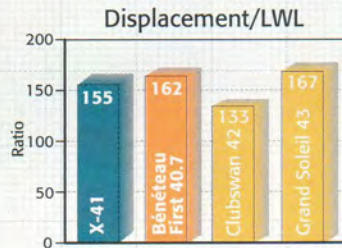
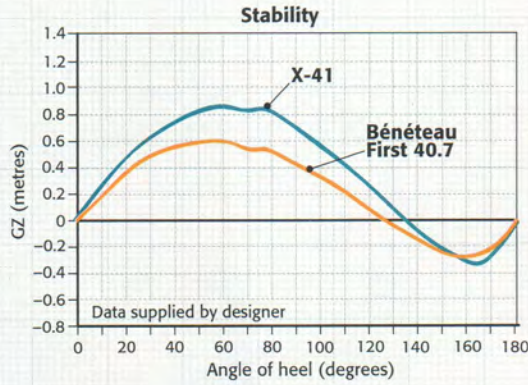
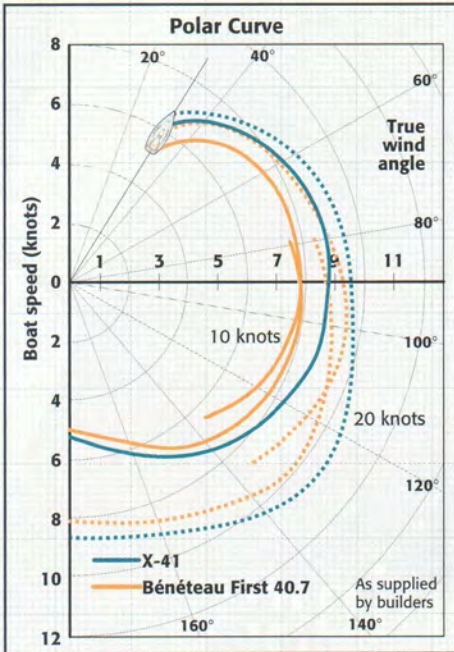
stove, below the sink and in an adjacent cutlery drawer.

The nav station is well set up for racing, with a big, forward-facing chart table and enough space for most gadget addicts. The pedestal provides a drawer and a locker for stowage plus a handy set of cubby holes behind the navigator's seat.

The large double berths aft are simple, with stowage beneath the berths and in hanging lockers. Engine access is through hatches either side of the engine and via the companionway.

**The Bénéteau's wider beam allows slightly more space below. Note the grabrails housing the blinds**





The X-41's design statistics mark her racing ambitions, with generous polars and high stability, combined with plenty of sail area

## Comparable boats

	X-41		BÉNÉTEAU FIRST 40.7		CLUB SWAN 42		GRAND SOLEIL 43	
LOA	12.35m	40ft 6in	12.17m	39ft 11in	12.98m	42ft 7in	13.25m	43ft 6in
LWL	10.69m	35ft 1in	10.62m	34ft 10in	11.30m	37ft 1in	11.40m	37ft 5in
BEAM (MAX)	3.64m	11ft 11in	3.78m	12ft 5in	3.94m	12ft 11in	3.96m	13ft 0in
DRAUGHT	2.50m	8ft 2in	2.40m	7ft 10in	2.69m	8ft 10in	2.30m	7ft 7in
DISP (LIGHTSHIP)	6,800kg	14,991lb	6,970kg	15,336lb	6,885kg	15,179lb	8,900kg	19,621lb
BALLAST	2,730kg	6,019lb	2,764kg	6,094lb	3,196kg	7,046lb	2,850kg	6,283lb
SAIL AREA (100% FORETRIANGLE)	97.17m <sup>2</sup>	1,046ft <sup>2</sup>	81.42m <sup>2</sup>	876ft <sup>2</sup>	106.48m <sup>2</sup>	1,146ft <sup>2</sup>	98.37m <sup>2</sup>	1,059ft <sup>2</sup>
BERTHS	8		6		6		6	
ENGINE	Volvo saildrive		Yanmar saildrive		Volvo saildrive		Volvo saildrive	
POWER	30kW	40hp	30kW	40hp	30kW	40hp	40kW	55hp
WATER	18olt	40gal	272lt	60gal	32olt	70gal	40olt	88gal
FUEL	9olt	20gal	138lt	30gal	14olt	31gal	23olt	51gal
SAIL AREA: DISP	27.5		22.7		29.9		23.3	
DISP: LWL	155		162		133		167	
PRICE (EX VAT)	£150,850		£92,132		£276,939		£164,428	



Left: Harken's Quattro winches allow fast spinnaker control. Right: the Bénéteau's spacious cockpit layout

## Conclusion

The Bénéteau First 40.7 has proved a winning formula on the racecourse and there is little else on the market that offers similar performance and precision at this price. For this reason, the yacht has become a favourite with charter agents – the owner of our test boat, Robert Blackwell, bought her to start a skippered charter business ([www.firstyachting.co.uk](http://www.firstyachting.co.uk)). Handicap racing with such a large number of sisterships means plenty of competition, but owners aren't bound by class rules that prevent modifications to the yacht.

But for sheer adrenalin, the X-41 takes the honours. She's fast and fun, and rewards careful trim and handling with clear returns of speed. The big rig, deep draught and high sail area/displacement creates a stiff, responsive yacht that can put a smile on your face and some results on the board.

Price aside, the crux of the matter is where each yacht sits on the racer-cruiser continuum. Both aspire to be all-rounders, but the X-41 lies more at the racing end. Dimensions are more extreme and the spartan interior, although comfortable, focuses on function. The 40.7 offers a little more comfort and space below thanks to a wider beam and is likely to be less of a handful when cruising short-handed.

My guess is that X-41s will spend most of their time in racing mode. That said, just as many a sports car driver has never been near a track, several owners of the 40 or 50 boats already pre-sold admitted to Jeppesen that they never plan to race at all.

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