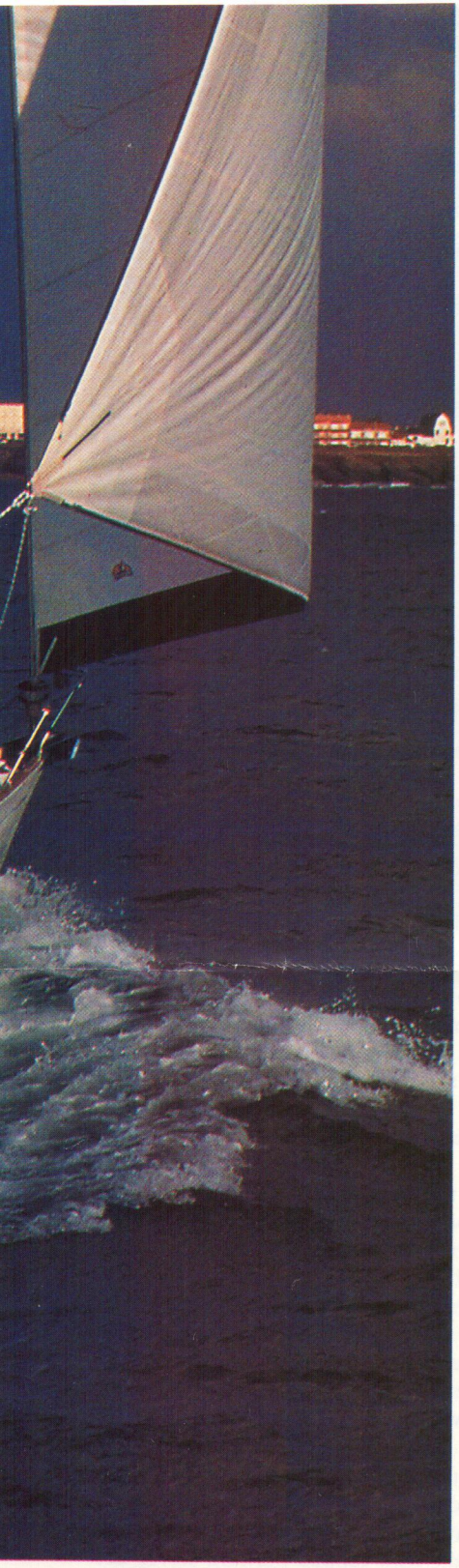


The term 'production boat' seems ill-fitting when one looks at the larger yachts in the Beneteau portfolio. The Beneteau 50 is an example of how big-boat details can make a mass-produced hull just that little bit special. Words by Peter Bentley. Photos by Bugsy Gedlek

Beneteau 50



PETER BENTLEY

Better known as a producer of small and medium sized production yachts, Beneteau, with their new 50 footer (15.24m), have demonstrated that they are also masters of their trade when building altogether bigger boats. Firmly establishing the company's return to traditional styling, the new 50 combines a Bruce Farr-designed hull with a tried and tested layout that has more than proved itself over many thousands of sea miles.

As might be expected, Farr has produced a set of well balanced lines that make for relaxed directional control and an easy motion. Upwind she drives easily with a big overlapping genoa providing ample motive power. Offwind, reaching performance is excellent though to go even deeper, the addition of an asymmetric cruising spinnaker would offer a welcome boost to performance.

Though small, the wheels provide excellent feel and any fears one may have about steering such a big boat with such small wheels are immediately dispelled when one discovers how exceptionally free running and well geared the Whitlock steering is. Pushed hard, the steering loads up progressively, though there seems little risk that control will ever be lost; this is a boat that will give ample warning before things get out of hand. Upwind she moves along with a steadiness of speed that can only come from moderately high displacement and the sureness of control that only a





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Above: The bathing platform and a multitude of deck hatches are evidence that the 50 has been designed for warm cruising as well as performance sailing. Right: A neat little elliptical teak-laid step on the coachroof is useful for entering the cockpit. Far right: The twin wheels give the Beneteau a big-boat feel





Beneteau 50

Top: The spacious open-plan heart of the boat has been given a rich nautical flavour through the use of solid, bold design incorporating cherry-trimmed mahogany. Above: A central island between the galley and seating area serves as a useful brace when cooking on a starboard tack and provides a convenient 'hiding place' for the microwave

generous rudder can provide.

Sail handling is simplicity itself, with a furling jib and fully battened main. The main hoists simply between lazy jacks, using a single electric winch. At the end of the day's sailing this one winch sees service to power the genoa furling line. In between times, the same winch also serves various control lines, not least importantly, the mainsheet. Forward of the hatch, a substantial extruded bar carries the mainsheet traveller. Though serving well to keep the crew out of harm's way such a forward location can lead to inefficiency when the sail has to be trimmed.

Somewhat cluttered to the eye, the deck layout is in fact highly functional, proving safe and efficient to work. Forward, an electric windlass hauls the anchor into a substantial bow fitting. All around the deck, the teak capped bulwark serves better than any aluminium toe-rail to keep errant feet and their owner from slipping oceanwards. Substantial grab rails around the fore hatch and a pair of 'granny bars' at the mast make working the boat forward, simple and secure. Not, one suspects, that there will be much work to do forward. All controls, bar the jib halyard, are run aft to a couple of banks of clutches on the aft end of the cabin top. To port, the electrically powered winch works hard both in hoisting the main and a multitude of other trimming tasks. Though a Lewmar 40 is supplied as standard, the optional 44



is not available without good reason; the smaller winch is barely up to the job. To starboard, much the same comments apply to the manual winch used for less arduous trimming tasks. As if to compensate for the small secondary winches, the primary units, located at the aft end of the main cockpit, just forward of the helmsman, are generously sized 66's.

At first sight, the helmsman's positions, for there are two, appear unusually far aft and rather cramped. Longer acquaintance proves this to be a false view and the deck layout here, as with the rest of the boat, is actually cleverly designed to fit comfortably around the crew. Twin wheels allow the provision of a walk-through cockpit with easy access to the stern platform and bathing ladder, while their aft position maximises the amount of space available for what is essentially a non-working cockpit with a convivial table and seats further forward. By mounting the primary winches just forward of the helmsman it becomes perfectly possible to sail the boat single-handed, though trips forward will be required to trim the main.

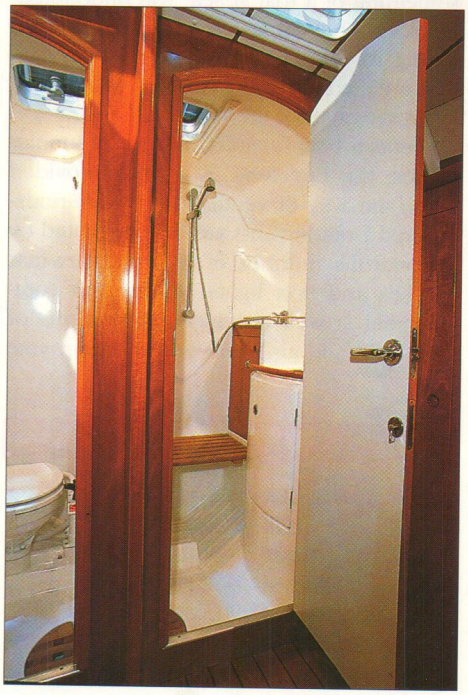
Under power, the Volvo engine is supremely efficient, though it must be said, sound and vibration levels do rise sharply if it is pushed hard. With the controls located to starboard, good judgement is needed when making a port-side approach.

Below decks, two different interiors are offered and we were lucky enough to be able to inspect both. Aft of the main bulkhead both options are essentially identical; forward, there is a choice. The charter version offers a pair of rather more compact mirror image doubles, separated by a longitudinal bulkhead. Both cabins feature a small but efficient combined heads and shower compartment each needless to say fitted with pressurised hot and cold running water. Forward, there is a choice of a cavernous sail locker, accessed from the deck or, for those intending to cruise with paid hands, this space can be supplied fitted with crew accommodation.

In place of the two double cabins forward, the 'owners version' features a well appointed double cabin with virtually full-sized double berth to port and a small sofa and vanity unit to starboard. Rather than a combined heads and shower unit, the owner is treated to two separate compartments each entered from the cabin or via an interconnecting doorway.

Aft, the mirror-image layout of the two forward cabins is reflected in two identical doubles. Again separated by a longitudinal bulkhead, these both feature en-suite shower and heads compartments in the same way as those forward. Though smaller than the other pair, the aft cabins offer substantial double bunks and enough stowage space for all but the most protracted cruising.

Between the two sleeping areas lies the



Top: In the owner's version, the big double bed is hidden around the corner from the entrance door, allowing it to be left open at night for ventilation, whilst retaining some privacy from the saloon. Above: Two doors lead into the owner's bathroom where there is a toilet, shower and twin basins

heart of the boat. A substantial open-plan galley and saloon should prove both practical and pleasant. A central island serves both as part of the seating arrangement and a vital and functional part of the galley. Provided as standard with a Force 10 gimballed cooker, a microwave is one of the few options available in what is already a well specified package. Both a substantial freezer and separate refrigerator are included in the basic specification. Twin stainless sinks, a tasteful grey work top and stout high fiddles should make the cook's job an easy one. Stowage space in and around the galley is more than adequate and as one might expect from a builder of such experience, the standard of detailing is high. Offered in a choice of wild cherry or teak, the standard of finish is well up to the level one would expect to find on this size of boat.

Aft of the galley a small navigation area offers all essential amenities. Electrical power distribution is provided via a superbly presented swing-out electrical panel with all of the associated circuitry laid out behind. A neatly dished seat provides comfort at all angles of heel and there are plenty of small compartments for stowing the essentials of ship's life. Opposite a table and wrap-around seating provides ample dining space. The lack of a fiddle at the table edge, while perhaps something of a trial at sea, will undoubtedly prove a benefit at rest with unobstructed dining for eight. Aft, opposite the navigation area, a substantial hanging locker provides stowage for the wet weather gear.

As befits a boat intended for use in sunnier climes, the Beneteau 50 is well provided for in the way of ventilation. Four seriously-sized Dorade vents are supplemented by a generous number of opening Lewmar hatches and port lights. While each compartment is well provided for in terms of both light and air, there seems little rhyme or reason to the layout and from both above and below decks the relationship between the various openings seems a little uncoordinated. There is also slight inconsistency in the hatch coverings; while some boast excellent proprietary Sky Shade blinds, others make do with simple strips of cloth attached with press-studs; some simply have no covering at all.

Beneteau have clearly worked hard to utilise their hard won skills as production boat builders on a size of yacht that would more usually be built on a semi-custom basis. By producing a very straightforward boat devoid of unnecessary complication, building it on a strict production basis and restricting available options to those accomplished without structural modification, Beneteau have produced an exceptionally cost effective package. The structure follows a tried and tested Beneteau route, using a number of moulded assemblies to provide structural reinforcement to an initially simple hull shell; the resulting complex assembly should prove stiff and strong, without incurring the cost and complication associated with laminating individual frames, floors and stringers in situ. A comprehensive understanding of their market place and the confidence to tool-up for relatively high volume production ensures that individual unit prices are kept low. The immense buying power of an organisation such as Beneteau should not be neglected either; one can be sure that the major equipment manufacturers all supply at their very best prices. When taken together, all these factors ensure the Beneteau 50 represents exceptional value and very enjoyable sailing. ❑

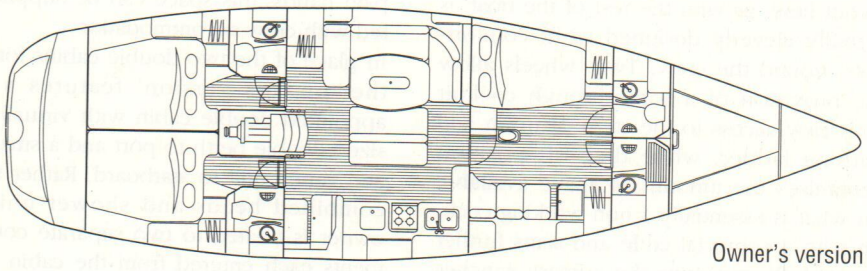


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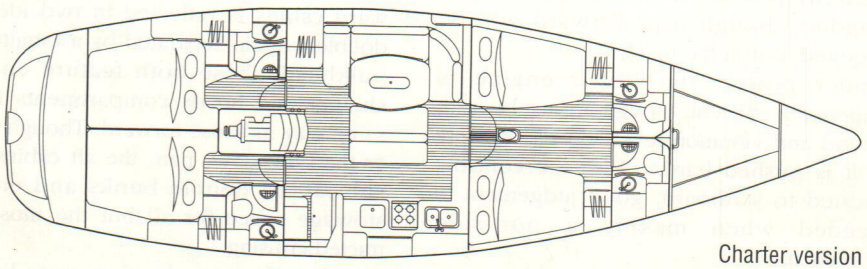
Left: The twin wheels allow good forward visibility and direct access into the cockpit from the bathing platform and transom door, and with the primary winches mounted just forward of the helmsman, the yacht could effectively be sailed single-handed

BENETEAU 50

LOA	15.48m (50ft 9in)
LWL	13.85m (45ft 5in)
Beam	4.48m (14ft 9in)
Draught	1.80m (5ft 11in)
Displacement	15 tonnes
Ballast keel	4 tonnes
Sail area	126m² (4449 sq ft)
Naval architecture	Bruce Farr
Interior design	Armel Briand
Price	FF1,681,177 ex tax
Builder	Chantiers Beneteau SA ZI des Mares, BP 66 85270 St-Hilaire-de-Riez France Tel: +33 51 55 53 82 Fax: +33 51 55 89 10



Owner's version



Charter version