

## Beneteau First 45

Distinctive styling and plenty of power make this a fast cruiser or a racer that'll pamper the crew A boat review from our February 2009 issue

By MARK PILLSBURY JANUARY 17, 2009

A couple of seasons ago, Beneteau fired a shot straight into the heart of the racer/cruiser market with its sleek and powerful-looking First 50. This year, the French builder let off a second volley with the First 45, which made its U.S. debut at the Strictly Sail Pacific show in Oakland, California. Like its big sister, the 45's bow is sharp, its shoulders broad, and a slight chine graces its quarters, all of which suggest a hull designed to heel to a point and then accelerate with every puff.

Designed by Philippe Briand Yacht Design, the First 45 is intended for the cruiser who relishes performance and the racer who wants both trophies and comfort. On deck, the boat's all business, from its foldaway anchor roller to its open transom. Hatches mount flush so there'll be no snags, all sail-control lines are under the coachroof and out of sight, the cockpit has plenty of room for trimmers to trim, and a no-nonsense traveler spans the cockpit just forward of the twin wheels.

Step below, though, and there are comforts enough to call the 45 "home." Light oak and stained Alpi wood contrast nicely with dark-leather upholstery in the saloon and cabins. Forward, an owner's stateroom includes head and shower and room to dress for dinner. Aft, there are two double cabins, both with soft-sided hanging lockers whose design was borrowed from the 50.

On the day of our test sail, San Francisco Bay's prevailing weather-sunshine, blue skies and breeze in the mid 20s-had taken a holiday. Instead, clouds clung to the hills behind the marina in Point Richmond, and on the water, the wind hovered around 10 or 11 knots.

Following the trend these days to make big boats friendlier for small crews, the First 45 in cruising mode benefits from a large and powerful full-batten main and a non-overlapping jib set on a roller furler (which hadn't yet been installed on the boat we sailed). With Harken 60 primary winches mounted within easy reach of either wheel, a singlehander or a lone on-watch crew can easily tack and trim the headsail and power the main up or down by playing with the nearby traveler lines. Better yet, the split mainsheet is led, German-style, forward to the mast end of the boom, down to turning blocks on the deck, then to winches at either wheel. Halyards and other sail-control lines lead to the winches on the cabin top. In race mode, the long and wide cockpit has plenty of room for a crowd, and the First 45 is set up with the necessary genoa tracks and spin gear to keep everyone busy.

The demo sails on our test boat (First Series boats are sold sans canvas, since racing owners are bound to have a preferred sailmaker) included a main that was cut quite flat, and both the main and jib were bent on for the first time as the boat left the marina. Still, the boat turned in a respectable 6 knots over the ground in our light-air conditions and tacked through just under 100 degrees. Cracked off to a reach, we gained a knot or better. Later in the afternoon, closer to the Golden Gate Bridge, the breeze built into the high teens, and the boat settled in, then surged ahead with the puffs. As a side note, given the well-thought-out placement of nearly every piece of sailing apparatus, I found myself scratching my head over the location of the chart plotter, which the builder has located at about ankle level behind the portside wheel. It was difficult to read, and I could only imagine the position one would have to assume to punch in waypoints.

When under way, the motion below was steady, and I found handholds in all the right places as I moved about. I can also report that there were no squeaks or groans to be heard.

Not that there should've been. The hull is solid glass, laid up with biaxial and unidirectional glass with an inner structural liner that's affixed both with adhesive and glasswork. Bulkheads are bonded 360 degrees to the hull and deck. The deck itself is an infused fiberglass-and-balsa sandwich, with solid-glass areas where hardware is mounted. The through-deck mast steps on the liner, which also carries loads from the chainplates and keel. The hull/deck joint relies on both mechanical fasteners and polyurethane adhesive.

There are two keels available on the 45, a "shallow," 7-foot-10-inch cast-iron bulb and fin and a deep, 9-foot lead foil. The boat we sailed carried the shallow keel. There's also an option for a carbon-fiber rig. The balanced rudder, riding on self-aligning swivel bearings and connected to the wheels with chain and cable, is responsive to the lightest touch. Sailing closehauled, we tracked well without a finger on the wheel and could easily fine-tune our direction with just a tug on the traveler. Under power, pushed along at hull speed by a 54-horsepower Yanmar, the rudder had us doing doughnuts in the boat's own length.

Below, the First 45's galley, to starboard of the companionway, is well laid out. The test boat had a four-burner propane stove and oven; centerline sinks, one of which can double as a dish-drying rack or cooler; and, of course, refrigeration.

To port, a head with a shower doubles as a wet locker for those coming off watch. Forward, the ample nav station faces outboard; it has a built-in space for the laptop, and there's plenty of room to add display screens. A pair of bolt-down chairs amidships augment the saloon table and the L-shaped settee to port. The settee to starboard, if fitted out with a lee cloth, would make a handy sea berth.

Pleasant as the interior is, though, I wanted to be on deck and looking forward over the low-profile cabin house, where I could hear the whoosh of water flowing past and where I wouldn't miss even a minute of the fun this boat serves up.

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Mark Pillsbury is CW's senior editor.

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## Specs

LOA 46' 2" (14.07 m.)  
LWL 38' 7" (11.76 m.)  
Beam 13' 9" (4.19 m.)  
Draft 7' 10" (2.39 m.)  
Sail Area (100%) 1,002 sq. ft. (93.1 sq. m.)  
Ballast 8,543 lb. (3,875 kg.)  
Displacement 22,369 lb. (10.600 kg.)  
Ballast/D .38  
D/L 182  
SA/D 19.6  
Water 140 gal. (530 l.)  
Fuel 53 gal. (201 l.)  
Mast Height 68' 1" (20.75 m.)  
Engine 54-h.p. Yanmar  
Designer Briand Yacht Design  
Price \$450,000  
Beneteau  
(843) 629-5300

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