

First 45 Review

By **Toby Heppell** - September 12, 2012

The First 45 has created plenty of buzz on the racing circuit, but Beneteau are pushing this glamorous new yacht as a true cruiser-racer. Andi Robertson tried her out on a light winds sea trials....

Images courtesy of www.beneteau.com

On the circuit of international boat shows this winter the new Beneteau First 45 has been one of the must-see exhibits. The level of interest has been very encouraging even given a market which is generally considered to be flat.

The 45's immediate predecessor, the Farrdesigned 44.7, was successful on the racecourse but sales of the boat never reached the volume hoped for by Beneteau.

The 44.7 won Class 1 at last year's IRC nationals, was part of the winning Rolex Commodores' Cup team in 2006, won her class in the Newport Bermuda race, was second in the BMW Round Ireland Race, won Class D in the 2007 Rolex Sydney Hobart and has just won the Maktoum Sailing Trophy in Dubai. But from a practical point of view the 44.7 lacked stowage and some of the finer points for cruising to make it a true dualpurpose boat.

Meanwhile the smaller First 34.7 is a refined IRC racer-cruiser, best suited to good helms and crews able to get the most out of a relatively narrow groove.

So when it comes to the gleaming First 45, all this substantiates Beneteau's desire to market their new boat as very much a cruising boat which will race competitively under IRC. They are seeking to maximise the market rather than simply accepting that there will be a worldwide market of maybe fewer than 100 seriously IRC campaigned boats. The boat's pitch is as a fast, comfortable cruiser-racer.

Design and build

We asked to test Gery Trentesaux's 'Lady Courier', which is fully tricked out and in the early stages

of her Commodores' Cup campaign, but were told to head to Monaco for the press launch. All very glam, but the boat had the short keel, alloy rig and a roller-furler headsail. That's how much Beneteau want this to be seen as a cruiser-racer. Meanwhile up at La Trinité Gery Trentesaux has been doing a great job with his new First 45 at the Spring Championship weekend series. Over the first three races 'Lady Courier' on a provisional handicap won two races and been second once, in an IRC class of 23-30 boats.

'Lady Courier' is, say Beneteau, a standard boat with no exotic core. They take a little more care in the build process and add a carbon rudder. In total the all-up hull weight is about 10,300kgs compared with the 10,500kgs for the standard boat which they have taken in added weight on the keel. They have a Hall Spars carbon mast and boom and the interior is reported to be standard.

The first First 45 has also reached the UK via Ancasta Hamble and will be campaigned by John Dean, who had the Swan 46 'Lowly Worm'. It will do the Commodores' Cup — seeking a place in one of the English teams — as well as Cowes and probably Cork Week. It has the same configuration as 'Lady Courier' with the carbon rig and carbon rudder.

So far winds have been less than 12 knots for the La Trinite Spring Challenge but Gery reports that the new boat is quick in the light, especially upwind. If it has a weakness so far he believes it might be a little sticky downwind in moderate breezes so he may increase spinnaker area to get a bit more power, but these are very much first impressions.

Rig and layout

The new First 45 is very much a statement boat in the way that the early '90s' Farr/Pininfarina First 45 was. While the Briand hull shape is very much a modern performance design it is the simply styled light oak interior which is bold and beautiful. Feedback even from conservative potential customers is positive.

too on deck and in the cockpit there has been a substantial emphasis on styling and ergonomics. Hence while the halyards and lines are led aft recessed in their deck channels, there is no covering. The reasoning is that the multicoloured lines visually lengthen the coachroof. That this also reduces weight and means the eye can follow the line to what it is operating is a practical bonus.

So too the recessed deckline windows and the signature overhang to the coachroof edge, the moulded longitudinal handhold, the four hatches in the coachroof forward and aft of the mast

conspire to form a very distinctive look. There will be no mistaking the new 45 — unlike the way that the 44.7 looked like a scaled-down 47.7.

The raceboat version comes with a 9/10ths three spreader Hall Spars carbon rig setting a 61sq m main and 104 per cent jib at 54sq m, compared with the standard 55sq m main and 60sq m 135 per cent genoa as we had on our test boat. Even with lead prices rocketing sevenfold since the start of the year the deep lead fin is a necessity for serious racing, drawing 2.74m as against the torpedo-bulbed iron version at 2.4m. The cruiser version provides a substantial bow roller, while the racer version takes the forestay 5cm forward.

The hull shape is relatively modest, balancing good form stability against a slender waterline beam, there is quite a fine entry with a rounded forefoot which sits just clear of the water at the dockside but sinks neatly when the boat is trimmed up.

There is a very subtle chine aft, quite deep and running forward about one third, while the stern sections are quite flat with a quite noticeable overhang which should be relatively easy to lift and reduce wetted surface in light winds. It appears to carry less beam and power aft than the beachball-style 47.7 and 40.7. With the pleasingly rounded coachroof it is in all respects a more pleasing looking boat than the slab-sided earlier models.

The cockpit ergonomics are good. The key is simplicity and lack of clutter. The twin 900mm diameter wheels are set on angled pedestals minimising their footprint on the cockpit floor. There is ample space behind them and good footholds. The space for the mainsheet hand is rather squeezed and lacks a solid footbrace, but that said the Harken mainsheet traveller system is excellent. From the Harken big boat range it crosscleats so that you have a full fall to pull from the opposite side, giving maximum purchase.

The boom is extra long to ensure the mainsheet falls in line to the track. And even at that our mainsail clew was still a few cms shy of the black band on the boom. The A-style mainsheet system runs along the sidedeck as opposed to being hidden and shares the 44.2 STA with the spinnaker. Primaries are a pair of 53.2 STAs. Working areas are generally good, even with the boat buzzing with Europe's boat testing press corps, there was usually safe elbow swinging room to work.

There are lockers deep to cockpit floor level port and starboard, with a large liferaft locker under the helm's feet which is on a gas strut. The steering mechanism is a chain and cable system and seemed to transmit a positive feel.

On the water

The weather overhead was perfect but the gentle breeze remained singularly underwhelming. Over the two periods we sailed the boat we could never muster more than 5 knots TWS and our second session saw the zephyr disappear completely.

What we did learn was that the new boat moves along very sweetly in the light breeze. It built momentum easily and left a tiny wake. Upwind we could make 5.2 knots in about 7-8kts apparent when the helm felt light and positive, tacking through just over 80 degrees. That is with the 135 per cent headsail and smaller main. The boat just felt calmly efficient in the conditions, very ready to answer the smaller helm movements even when overrunning the breeze.

Certainly in the conditions and test configuration we did not feel the boat to be especially close-winded, rather ease a few mms on the sheet and build speed to gain height.

With the spinnaker up the First 45 came alive and we could push 6 knots in the 'puffs' with the pole on the forestay, but sagging downwind there was very little we could really learn with heavy sheets and a mixed crew. Certainly there was no obvious sticky feeling and the boat did seem happy to run deep with the breeze, maintaining good feel over the rudder.

Down below

The interior is excellent, with good levels of natural light and ventilation. You really would be happy to cruise the boat extensively in comfort, and owners will and should. Here's a boat that you might well take a notion to spend next Spring racing in that fleet in La Trinité and then cruise Brittany, or happily spend time delivering to and from Cork Week or Scottish Series, or down to the Canaries for the ARC and the Caribbean circuit.

The main saloon is light, airy and spacious. That includes good floor area for handling sails below. The table is offset to port with a wraparound settee which has good, flat angled back supports. There are two small stools opposite which are unobtrusive but comfortable enough to sit on, and a long settee also to starboard.

The outboard-facing nav station feels more like a small office space and has plenty of stowage and good instrument mounting and electrics access. This is very much more than a simple nav

area and will add appeal to those who occasionally work on board.

The galley, too, is excellent. Not being an expert on these matters I am a little suspect of having the cooker butted adjacent to the aft semibulkhead, but I stand corrected. There is a full 100 litres front-opening fridge and a deep 80 litres ice-box. There is a good, deep drawer for saucepan stowage which has an integral second drawer above it for flat plates. You quickly get the picture that this is a boat which will accommodate big meals for six or eight people.

The two symmetrical aft cabins have ample natural light and stowage, whereas the forward cabin is really a bit special with a large centreline double and lots of space, although the understated styling and chrome handles is an acquired taste. I liked the stowage under the bunk either side for bags, although shock cord retainer would be good.

First 45 Review: Verdict

Overall the new First 45 does seem to deliver in every department. We can't yet be conclusive about her particular strengths on the water, suffice to say that so far she seems quick and easily handled in light breezes. It's a competitive area of the market but one suspects that once Beneteau really get the 45 out onto the racetracks of the world this will be a credit to the marque, for a cruising boat.

[Print Subscription](#)

[Digital Subscription](#)

[Buy single issues](#)

Toby Heppell

Toby Heppell received his first boat for his fifth birthday – a bright red Optimist dinghy. He quickly became hooked on racing and remains just as passionate to this day. He remembers the thrill of seeing his name appear in the

Clubs and Classes pages of Y&Y as a youth and has been a reader of the magazine for as long as he can remember. He is deputy editor of Yachts & Yachting.



Yachts & Yachting is the leading performance sailing magazine, covering every aspect of the racing scene, from dinghies to keelboats. Our insightful features and stunning photography bring you the inside track on the world's most exciting regattas together with advice and inspiration from the very best sailors, coaches and industry experts.

News &
Events
Sailing
Techniques
Equipment
Event
Spotlight
Awards
Magazine



CONTACTS

ADVERTISING

Mark Harrington

MARKETING

Sophie Mazrekaj

EDITORIAL

Georgie Corlett-Pitt

MEDIA PACK

CLICK TO
DOWNLOAD



THE
CHELSEA
MAGAZINE
COMPANY
LTD

© 2018 Chelsea Magazine Company | Terms & Conditions | Privacy Policy | Cookie Policy