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BOAT TEST

Oceanis Yacht 54
Latest Beneteau launch



BEST NEW BOATS FOR 2021

It has been another bumper year for the boatbuilding industry. *Sam Jefferson* casts his eye over the latest launches in the last calendar year



DUFOUR 530

The latest addition to the Dufour range lays out a slightly new vision for the marque going forward. In the past, the company has generally offered a Grand Large and Performance range in each size bracket but with the 530 this has been discontinued. Instead, you now have one boat with three distinctly different deck layouts. These will be the 'Easy', 'Ocean' and 'Performance'. Ok, I realise that has actually offered three options instead of two but, nevertheless, the three options make perfect sense. Aside from that, this is your classic Felci designed Dufour, with acres of space and a good turn of speed.

• dufouryachtsuk.com



HALLBERG RASSY 50

Hallberg Rassy continues the revamp of its range with a new centre cockpit 50-footer that sticks to the template drawn up by the Hallberg Rassy 57. As such, this is a German Frers design with a lot of beam aft, compared with the older generation of Hallbergs. To compensate, there are twin rudders and twin wheels. In common with the 57, this is a modern-looking boat that still manages to remain harmonious. Down below, there is a huge stateroom aft and a generous double forward. The rig is powerful and hints at pleasing performance.

• hallberg-rassy.com



CONTEST 55 CS

Dutch boatbuilder Contest Yachts has a strong reputation for building top notch cruising yachts that are a cut above your standard production yacht. Recently they seemed to have been moving into a different sphere altogether with the launch of their 67CS followed by the whopping 85. The good news is that they have moved back down a size bracket with their all-new 55. This Judel/Vrolijk design is definitely a fast cruiser and potential clients can customise the boat to meet their needs. To this end, there is the option of a carbon or aluminium mast plus multiple different layout options.

• contestyachts.com



BENETEAU OCEANIS 40.1

Beneteau's latest addition to their Oceanis cruising range follows on the heels of the 50.1 and 46.1 and features the same revolutionary hull shape as her older sisters. To this end, this Marc Lombard design features a chine that is carried all the way forward to the bow and a distinctive 'step' outwards. This provides very clear 'champagne glass' hull sections forward. The main aim of this is to give the yacht a lot of extra volume forward while not increasing wetted surface area in light airs. Down below, there is a very light and modern living area. The 40.1 is available with two, three or four cabins. Note that Beneteau has also launched the Oceanis Yacht 54 (pictured opposite); a full review is on p48.

• beneteau.com

Oceanis apart?

Beneteau has taken the hull of its sporty First 53 and repackaged it to create the luxurious Oceanis Yacht 54. *Sam Jefferson* evaluates whether the metamorphosis has been a success



Make no mistake, Beneteau are no mugs. There is a reason that they have been the biggest manufacturer of yachts over the past three decades and more, and that's because they are shrewd enough to look at the bottom line and understand exactly what is required to turn a profit in the notoriously choppy waters of the boatbuilding trade. This is perhaps why I raised an eyebrow when they launched the somewhat flamboyant Beneteau First 53 last year; a boat that was all style, flair and panache. In all honesty it was a boat that seemed designed more as a glorious 'screw you' to Solaris Yachts and other manufacturers in that niche than a serious money maker. Yet, I might have known that Beneteau had a further trick up its sleeve and this was confirmed when it launched the Beneteau Oceanis Yacht 54. Another new yacht? I thought. Well, not exactly. True, the deck is entirely new, but the hull looked strangely familiar and that is because it comes directly from the Beneteau First 53. Yes, this is the more grown up version of the boat. The new deck mould means it is at least halfway to being a new boat and there are other refinements, demonstrating that this is a yacht with pretensions of being much more of a serious cruising yacht.

More on that as we go along, but let's start with what is the same – the hull: the lines have been penned by Italian designer Roberto Biscontini, who devoted many years of his career to working on America's Cup yachts such as Il Moro di Venezia. He won a design competition and the First 53 was born, and that in turn has provided the hull for the Oceanis Yacht 54. Doubtless this was part of Biscontini's design brief in the first place. The lines are, in their own way, fairly conservative. This is a yacht that boasts prodigious beam (16'5") carried almost all the way aft; there is no chine and this slippery aft section is combined with moderately fine bow sections and modest freeboard.

She comes with an iron tipped T-shaped keel with a draft of 2.5m as standard, with a shallow (1.95m)



PHOTOS: BENETEAU YACHTS

version available. The boat weighs in at 16,600kg, which makes her 1,100kg heavier than the First 53. The mast stepped rig is big but has been significantly reduced compared to her sportier sister. Perhaps the need to convert the hull of the 53 into a slightly more conservative 54 explains why the styling is not as aggressive as some of her direct competitors; there is a plumb bow rather than the dreadnought bow favoured by some manufacturers in this category.

ABOVE
The Oceanis Yacht may be a touch less sporty than the First 53 but still has a fine turn of speed

As previously mentioned, it is the deck and coachroof on this yacht that are totally new and that is reflected in the profile of the boat. The new coachroof is a touch higher and more angular than on the 53, while the addition of an arch over the cockpit - which is the fixing point for the mainsheet - gives the boat a distinct air of being a fast cruiser as opposed to having serious pretensions of being sporty.

Nevertheless, it's a stylish yacht which looks good on the water.

On deck

Step aboard and you are definitely in a more enclosed space than on the 53. The layout is markedly different and, although there is a lot of room, there is also a feeling of security.

The helming stations are set slightly further inboard compared to the 53 and there are seats for the helmsman with lockers underneath. The yacht I tested had a fixed bimini and sprayhood which made the boat feel very safe and enclosed without making the boat look terrible, which I thought was a fine achievement.

The cockpit is laid out so that aft by the wheels is the 'working' area of the boat, with all sail controls led through channels in the coamings to two pairs of beefy Harken winches - electric, of course. Meanwhile, further forward is the lounging zone featuring a comfortable seating area and twin cockpit tables. This lounging area is further extended thanks to two large cushions set into the coachroof - very comfortable they are too.

There is a lot of space aft of the wheels and, in addition to providing a pleasant space to pad about and possibly sunbathe, beneath lies the dinghy garage; an important feature - there's also decent access to the rudder quadrants.

There are acres of teak on show, although if you want the foredeck and side decks teak, this is an added



option that you'll probably take to be honest. The side decks are wide and everything is flush. There's not much to say because it's extremely minimalist. Up forward there is the now obligatory fixed bowsprit with integrated roller, and there is also a capacious lazarette which can be converted into pretty reasonably proportioned crew quarters.

Perhaps the most interesting feature is the three-level deck which features a series of three steps ascending upwards as you move toward the bow. The result is a boat

ABOVE
The decks are uncluttered but note the unusual steps in the deck which give it three separate levels

BELOW
A roomy, enclosed cockpit thanks to masses of beam aft

that has an added feeling of security aft when you tread out onto the side decks, with the bulwarks getting progressively shorter as you get to the bow. It's not a feature I've seen before but it seems to work pretty well, and is a marked contrast from the flush decks of the First 53.

Down below

If the deck is radically different from the 53, the interior is not nearly such a departure. The big difference is that there is a bit more light in here thanks to the larger portlights in the saloon. Aside from that, the seating area to starboard has been altered to accommodate a U-shaped dining area - the 53 has a slightly more 'lounge' style area here, with the dining area to port instead. The space saved on the port side has been used to create a chart table/office space, which works very well. Other than that, there are differences in trim but all in all, things are very similar - no bad thing, believe me. Given the yacht's very broad hindquarters, there is a lot of space down here - and this despite the fact that a lot is lost to the dinghy garage. But this is only a minor issue as the premise of this boat is not to cram in many people at all. The result is a yacht with two modest





double berths aft and a big stateroom forward. You have the option of three ensuites, or a shared bathroom for the doubles aft combined with an ensuite for the stateroom.

The galley is to port and is U-shaped with all the bells and whistles you'd expect from a luxury yacht.

Up forward, the main stateroom is a sumptuous affair with an ensuite that features the heads set to port and a separate shower room to starboard, which I always find a more satisfactory set up compared to showering in close vicinity to the toilet. The aft cabins were performed more modest and unremarkable but they were perfectly pleasant places to be. Engine access was also good, and the steps down to the saloon were thoughtfully angled with the amount of handholds had been well thought out. In addition, the quality of the finish was good, in line with expectation of Beneteaus these days. One added thing to note here was the almost complete absence of creaks and groans down here, even when the boat was pressed hard – or when I was tramping on the floorboards.

Under sail

Given that I tested the First 53 in the autumn and have done precious little sailing since, I was a bit worried that this would just be a slightly less thrilling sail than the previous one. Thankfully the south of France dished up a surprisingly nasty day given it was late June, with strong breezes and a short chop. This negated to some extent the extra weight and slightly reduced sail plan of the 54 and meant instead we just had a rollicking sail. This

is a moderate displacement yacht with twin rudders and a relatively deep T-keel married to a decently proportioned rig with spanking new sails. How did she perform?

Well, ask a silly question.. she performed superbly - as any modern yacht would in those circumstances with those appendages in 15-17kn of breeze. The steering was a joy; light and responsive with tons of grip and masses of control – even with once we'd hoisted the gennaker. The speed never dropped below 7.5kn and we were well into double digits off the breeze with the gennaker. The sail controls were also eminently sensible, and it's easy to see how you could handle this boat single-handed without any great shakes. As an added bonus, Harken's Assisted Sail Trim system was also available, which will actually trim the sails and even tack for you. I've used it before and while it's incredibly clever, I prefer to do things by hand myself.

ABOVE
A light and extremely spacious interior

BELOW
Comfortable lounging areas abound

Under power, the boat was impressively silent down below but perhaps the most fascinating feature was the optional extra Dock and Go system. This greatly eases engine-powered manoeuvring in tight spaces by combining a 360 degree rotating pod with a retractable bowthruster. I was cynical about the use of this as I observed the chap from Beneteau twiddling with a little joystick to park the boat, silently musing that I would be happier Med mooring by eye.

On trying it though, I must admit I was deeply impressed. This genuinely takes all of the stress out of parking to an absurd degree. Even in blustery conditions you have pinpoint control, and Med mooring a boat like this with such a broad derrière, this really is a bonus. It's an optional extra which costs €30 210, which is the equivalent to a bow and stern thruster option but means you only one joystick.

SAM'S VERDICT

If the First 53 was a cruising boat with racing potential, the Oceanis Yacht 54 is a fast cruiser pure and simple. Nothing wrong with that either. I guess the biggest and most important thing was that there was a clear demarcation between the 53 and the 54. This, to my mind, has definitely been achieved. This is a very refined yacht that is genuinely

very easy to manage. It could demolish an ocean passage with ease but I still feel its natural home is the Med, where its mixture of style, speed and ease of handling make for a very pleasing mix.

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

LOOKS: ★★★★★

COMFORT: ★★★★★

THE SPEC

Length overall: 17,16m (56'4")

Hull length: 15,98m (52'5")

Beam: 4,99m (16'5")

Light displacement: 16 600 Kg (

Standard draft: 2.50m (8'2")

Shallow draft: 1.95m

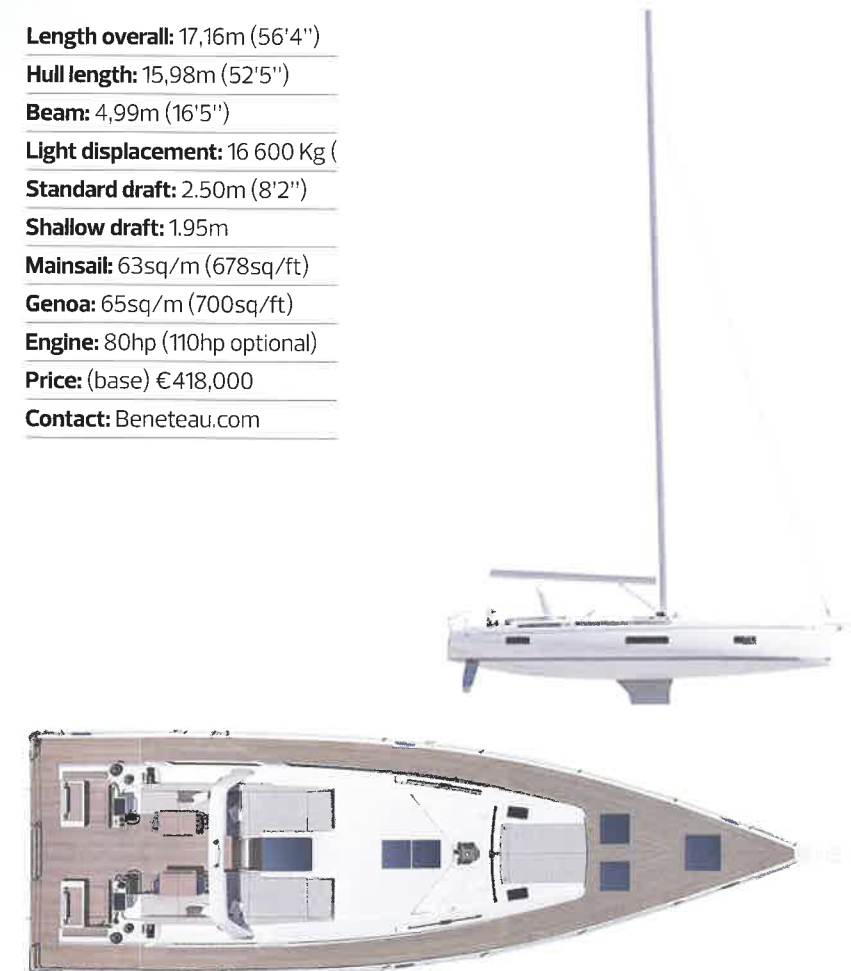
Mainsail: 63sq/m (678sq/ft)

Genoa: 65sq/m (700sq/ft)

Engine: 80hp (110hp optional)

Price: (base) €418,000

Contact: Beneteau.com



ALTERNATIVE YACHTS



EUPHORIA 54

Turkish boatbuilder Sirena Marine's venture into high end yachting commences with the Euphoria 54. Designed by German Frers, this lovely yacht is slightly more traditional in styling, with less extreme beam aft and no cockpit arch.

euphoriayachts.com.tr



X-YACHTS XC 50

A bit smaller than the 54 but certainly working on roughly the same concept albeit in a higher price bracket. The Xc 50 marries pleasing styling with high levels of comfort ease of handling and belting performance.

x-yachts.com



GRAND SOLEIL 52 LC

Here is a yacht that probably has the closest DNA to the Oceanis Yacht. In collaboration with Nauta Design and intended for bluewater cruising, the sporty 52 has been adapted into LC - or Long Cruise - format. It's a slick Italian design with perhaps a slightly greater focus on performance.

grandsoleil.net