

# cruising helmsman

**BUYING  
A BOAT**  
Get the Hull Truth

## Horror at sea

One person's near  
death experience

Playing chicken  
with pirates

**TESTED**

The Beneteau  
Oceanis 51.1

**SPECIAL FEATURE**

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JULY 2019

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# Broaden the horizon

WHO IN THEIR RIGHT MIND WOULD RETIRE, SELL A COMFORTABLE POWERBOAT AND BUY A YACHT IN WHICH TO GO CRUISING?

**PHIL ROSS**

 IT is not often one meets a person who decides to sell his powerboat to buy a yacht and go sailing, usually it is the other way around. Not so with the owner of the latest Beneteau Oceanis 51.1.

Not only have Stephen and Anne Hardy relished at the challenge, they have chosen one of the biggest yachts in the Beneteau quiver in which to do it, “yes funny,” notes Stephen, “when I told people what I was doing they looked at me like I was from Mars! These days yachts are, or can be, as luxurious as powerboats.

“While we looked at secondhand boats upwards of 50 feet we could not find a boat that fitted our requirements. Coming out of a Riviera 47 we did not want to go backwards in comfort. The design of the new 51.1, the quality of the boat and knowing what goes in to building the boat was reassuring. I regard Beneteau as the premium quality production-built brand.

“Additionally and a big part of our buying decision, was that my wife is not a sailor. While she is great around the boat as we have been boating for 20 years or more, boating for her is about relaxation not about working sheets, winches and fine-tuning the sails etc.

“The 51.1 is designed so you can single-handed sail as fast as you like or just set the sails and forget with your feet up.”

## A TWO YEAR PROJECT

While keen for the opportunity to expand their adventurous spirit, they have been methodical in preparation.

Stephen explains, “two and half years ago I retired, I had flybridge cruisers for the past 20 years but, as I was no longer working, time was not so much of an issue. I also wanted the ability to go cruising, not just up and down the east coast of Australia but into the Pacific.

“I had sailed, off and on, most of my youth but never actually owned a monohull yacht.

“After months of research between the leading production brands, after we sold our Riviera 47, I narrowed it down to two. It turned out to be great timing as Beneteau was about to release the new design 51.1 Oceanis and Flagstaff Marine had some details that had been sent to them from France.

“It has been a journey one would say, we paid the deposit, sight-unseen, to book a production slot as even before the release Europe and the US dealers were taking up the production slots.

“Having faith in not only Beneteau a trusted brand, but also in Flagstaff, was very important as we were very specific about our requirements, we wanted an easy to sail cruising yacht that was comfortable to live on and had all the features of a big powerboat.

“In ‘specking’ the boat it was important I got this right, I spent hours and hours working on this doing research talking to people. Anna was not a sailor so we needed a boat that one could single-handed sail. The new design 51.1 achieved just that with both winches located at the helm stations. We also wanted to have the same luxury that we had enjoyed on our other boats.”

By utilising the basis of a standard fast hull shape, each Beneteau 51.1 is then optioned

**MAIN:** That MPS is going to get a work out cruising the east coast.



according to each owner's preferred sailing intentions, the Oceanis 51.1 is sleek looking, whether at anchor or in motion and ready to sail for Stephen and his family.

Looking at the list of options added to *Loseca*, it is easy to see that the ex-powerboat owner is looking for the same standard of appointment that he enjoyed on the more stable platform: 9kva generator for the air conditioning, dishwasher, clothes washer/dryer and watermaker; plus a bigger engine, leather upholstery and a cracking good sound system.

Given he is a novice in sailing the other added options assist him in that purpose: electric winches, retractable dinghy davits, wireless navigation equipment including forward scanner, plus bow thruster with Beneteau's easy Dock And Go system. All these, plus many more, added just 16 per cent to the base boat price from Flagstaff Marine.

This yacht is set up to take its owner anywhere.

**"THE HELM IS LIGHT, THE YACHT RESPONDS QUICKLY YET CHURNS OUT MILES WITH LITTLE EFFORT."**

In reality there are three different models available: charter, comfort or performance. There are four different below deck combinations from three cabins and two bathrooms, to three cabins and four bathrooms; four cabins and four bathrooms up to five cabins and three bathrooms. Within that range there are a whopping 700 combinations of upholstery, wood trim and other trimming customisations.

The performance model rejuvenates the old Beneteau First Line of cruising yachts with a racing fit out. *Loseca*'s owner Stephen opted for the comfort option with the three cabin two bathroom layout; this yacht is not for charter.

## LOSE THE CHINE BY DESIGN

The first noticeable characteristic of this 50 footer is the hull chine. Beneteau are calling it a 'stepped' hull designed by Berret-Racoupeau Yacht Design, which is a good description.

Previous iterations of chined hulls ran the full length of the hull side or, at least, started halfway and led aft for those big wide stern sections. But this chine is pronounced from the bow and smooths out just one third of the way back along the topsides.

Visually this deep 'step', along with the upsweeping stern sections, give a nice band of shade along the waterline, making the hull sides appear 'squat', for a long, sleek look.

I am assuming this is a decided move away from the previous full hull chines. While they had certain advantages: increased waterline area and increased interior space; I feel the disadvantages may have provided enough feedback for the aft chines to be replaced by rounder stern sections due to high heel angles even in low wind speeds and possible irritating wave-slap noise in the cabin.

With the chine gone we now have a profile view of nice smooth rounded lines; full bow sections due to the forward step finishing with a plum stem. A deep canoe draft holds well aft of the torpedo keel that, by the way, looks to have a strong wide butt connecting it to the hull.

**LEFT TO RIGHT:**

Beneteau stock photo of the main forward cabin, note the space around the bed sides and the large hanging lockers either side.

Beneteau stock image of the saloon layout. In *Loseca* the storage cabinet aft of the galley houses the washer/dryer with a refrigerator underneath.

On the specifications this deep canoe draft may explain the rather high displacement for a 50 footer, reflected in a light ballast ratio. I figure the torpedo bulb at the bottom of the keel and the wide butt at the top may well counter this imbalance. The other specification that may help is the sail area to displacement ratio, which shows a comfortable number placing it in light cruiser class.

When you design a sleek hull shape you do not require so much sail area to drive it, which then lends itself to being easily handled by a couple. A major selling point for these new owners: easily driven hulls handled by one or two people living in a certain level of luxury.

The Beneteau Oceanis 51.1 does not disappoint on all points.

Stephen and Anna intend to spend a lot of time cruising in Queensland so they ordered the optional shorter keel, "what little we have lost in not being able to point as high makes no difference to us when you can get through and around the Gold Coast and the Great Sandy Straits without a lot of issues.

"Money well spent," claims Stephen.

As part of their journey the anxious couple went to the Beneteau factory in May last year to see not only the boat in the production line but to have a good look and get an understanding of how Beneteau build. "We spent two days at the factory with another couple from Australia who ordered, again sight unseen, the new 46.1 that was in production.

"It was a lifetime experience for all of us as it gave us a very good understanding of the production process and how the production team at the factory take such pride in producing a great product.

"As for sailing we did not want to make a work program out of this, so we specked the boat with four electric winches, self-furling mainsail and a multi-purpose sail (MPS), which we ordered from Hood Sails. We do not have a pole nor did we want one.

"The boat comes standard with a self-furling, self-tacking headsail, which is large enough to impress you with boat speed sailing up or just off the wind. However, downwind, the self-tacker is useless so, when I am not using the MPS I take the self-tacker out of the self-tacking track and use the genoa sheets and cars which I had fitted as an option. This works very well as basically the headsail is a number 2."

## SHOWING OFF

In a 15 metre yacht with just three cabins and two head bathrooms you are left with a lot of area for the main living space. Beneteau's preferred Nautica Design have had plenty of space to play with.

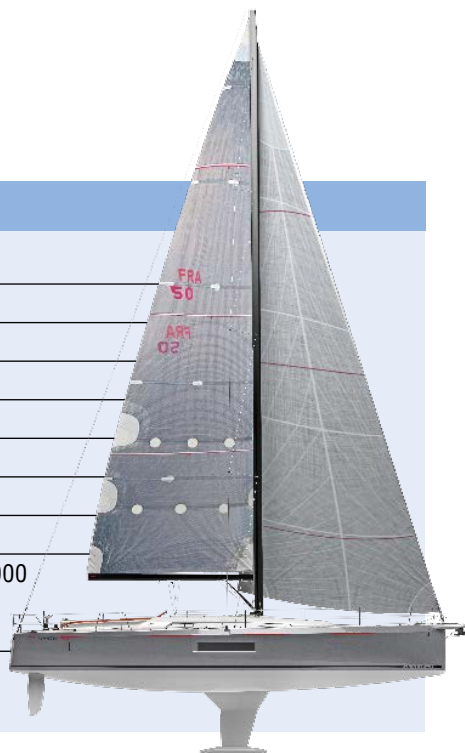
The main saloon includes the table offset against the starboard hull with seating for up to six on the comfortable leather-style upholstered bench. To port can be found the dedicated navigation station facing forward against the mast bulkhead.

The nav. table is large and has a tall bookshelf alongside it forward of the mast step. Its seating is so long that it can be bent upwards at the middle to provide a bent leg support to be the most relaxing lounging chair when heeled. All the instruments are at hand.

This day lounge bench wraps around the galley bench running parallel to the saloon table. A simple fold-out mechanism has been added to the already-large dining table that then extends



SPECIFICATIONS	
Length overall (m)	14.98
Waterline length (m)	14.52
Beam (m)	4.80
Draft (m)	2.30
Displacement (kg)	13930
Ballast (kg)	3396
Sail area (m <sup>2</sup> )	103.1
Air draft (m)	21.35
Base boat price (AU): (comfort trim pack and mooring/anchoring kit inc.)	\$670,000
My thanks to Flagstaff Marine and Stephen and Anna Hardy.	



the table to incorporate the extra seating. You could squeeze in ten people around this dining setting. Check out the sequence of photos (page 38) to see how this works.

Twin hull windows on each side make for easy viewing outside and add to the lightness down below along with the cabin side windows and the fore and aft opening cabin top hatches.

The G-shape galley provides plenty of bench space despite including two large sinks. Owner Stephen has included a single drawer dishwasher and there is a five kilogram load clothes washer/dryer as well, which tucks inside a cupboard aft of the galley.

There is a fair amount of large and small storage but, with full width of the interior being used, there is little shelving along the hull, just some overhead lockers.

On the starboard side is the main cabin head and shower. While the toilet is a bit tight it is no problem as it provides some security in a seaway. The shower area is quite large, although it has a closeable door to keep the rest of the head dry when showering, I would leave this open to provide even more room and better ventilating to the cabin side porthole above the sink.

Further aft into the two aft cabins that, in a boat this large, are quite spacious. Both cabins have extensive hanging and storing spaces. The port cabin includes more by virtue of not having the head cabin encroaching.

Up forward is the business end of the yacht: the main cabin. First of all, by virtue of the stepped hull and full forward bow sections, this is a wide cabin able to include side access to the full size queen bed. Plus, it allows the splitting of the usual bathroom into a head cabin to port and a shower cabin to starboard.

Both cabins have overhead opening hatches for fresh air. The starboard shower recess is quite massive and includes seating, which I like.

Both sides of the cabin have extensive hanging lockers and drawers for an easy 'his and hers' set up.

Confirmation of their choice was made during the owner's first long sail up the east coast, "a mate from Brisbane who has a Beneteau 54 jumped on in Sydney with Anna and I and he was very impressed at not just how well the boat sailed but the comfort that the new layout offers."

## BACK ON TOP

Such a wide and long cockpit allows plenty of scope for the sailing crew. A large boxy centreline table dominates but does not impede the passage of people either side. It is boxy because it holds the liferaft in its aft section and a refrigerated

space above, a wooden cover over the spacious storage space even doubles as a serving tray.

The cockpit benches are two metres long with lazarette lockers beneath. They curve into the companionway to make a wine glass shape and lots of seating.

The twin steering station pods are angled outboard to keep the central walkthrough to the transom clear. This means the steerer can sit straddling the wheel facing inboard or behind the wheel facing inboard or forward, or standing up.

The drop down transom is massive, as you would expect on such a big, wide yacht. The retractable davits are a great innovation to making it easy to move around aft without restricting the ability to haul the yacht tender out.

Entry into the stern sections is through large hatches, opening up large storage space for the gen set, watermaker plus plenty of other stuff. Access to the steering system is also facilitated.

Owner Stephen is particularly proud of the dodger and bimini design, "it was important to us, I put hours in to this making sure the design did not spoil the lines of the boat and at the same time offer maximum coverage with the flexibility to pull the middle bar back.

"Shane Beashel, who I worked with and who manufactured the dodger and bimini, entered the design in a worldwide competition in the US. He won the best design for a sail boat 50 plus in the US!"

Even with the full bimini the view from the steerer's position is excellent. A shallow cockpit floor, along with the low cabin top with such a deep hull, the view is not restricted. There are clear patches in the bimini to view the mainsail, mast and sky.

All halyards run out from the mast to the side of the cabin top and disappear under a channel under the handrail to feed back to the winches in front of the steering stations. Two big winches on the cockpit coamings control all halyards and running rigging.

## "WHEN I TOLD PEOPLE WHAT I WAS DOING THEY LOOKED AT ME LIKE I WAS FROM MARS!"

This allows the cabin top alongside the companionway and under the bimini to be free of working gear, so Beneteau have kindly added some lounging cushions here for the perfect off-watch relaxing spot.

Safely walking along the side decks is enhanced by a full length bulwark keeping slide slip inboard, plus raising the stanchions a little higher.

Once on the foredeck there is not much to do so, once again, Beneteau offer some lounging cushions to take advantage of the sloping cabin roof.

**BELOW:** Beneteau stock photo showing the move away from the sharp aft chine to a more rounded topsides but retaining a flat section underwater.

**OPPOSITE PAGE: TOP:** Graham Raspass from Flagstaff Marine and the award-winning bimini. Note the spacious cockpit despite a large table, plus the battery of jammers controlling the lines just forward of the steering pod.

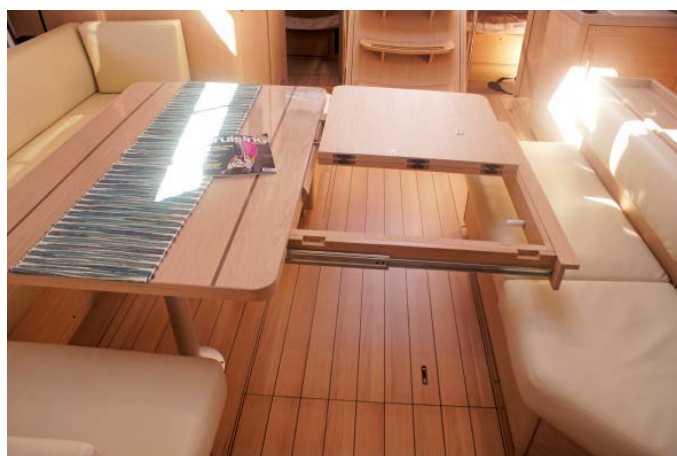
**BOTTOM:** Owner Stephen Hardy, right, and Michael Coxon of Flagstaff Marine enjoy the best spots in the house.







**TOP TO BOTTOM:**  
Simple four step process to double the size of the dining table.



There is a forward storage locker behind the collision bulkhead that is deep enough and long enough to hide the bodies. Or fenders, ropes and gennakers et al, whichever is more important. It is so deep Beneteau include a four step ladder to get into it. This locker could be retrofitted to become a mini workshop.

## SAILING AWAY

Out on the water, once more we were restricted in a good test by the vagaries of the light Pittwater breezes. But the desire to get to a destination quickly is evident with the 15 metres slipping peacefully along in the 10 knot to 15kn breeze.

That being said, on the wind, *Seneca* could hold 35 degrees to 40° off the wind and still pull six to seven knots in under 10kn apparent.

Course change is easy with the German mainsheet system and the self-tacking jib set up, barely a spilt drink as we glided up Pittwater. The mainsail in-mast furling just adds to the ease of getting out there.

The design direction away from the harsh aft chine means the yacht heels a lot softer. Downwind does not appear to be affected by any loss in waterline area; crack the sheets and the speed increase is imperceptible but substantial.

It goes to say that under engine the Beneteau Oceanis 51.1 also slips peacefully along. Owner Stephen upgraded the standard 58 kilowatt engine to have even more power when needed; something about always being a powerboat man!

At nearly 40,000 kilograms it was no problem for us to glide along at well over six knots at around 2100 revolutions per minute. Given its ease of sailing I suspect the 200 litre fuel tank is more than enough for this boat's iron sail duties.

The point, for Stephen, is that it is easy to sail. The learning curve you would expect a non-sailor would have to go through is, in reality, quite flat. The helm is light, the yacht responds quickly yet churns out the miles with little effort.

On their first long voyage from Sydney to Mooloolaba, Stephen and partner Anna were suitably impressed, "it was awesome," Stephen said, "coming up the east coast we had great weather and, for a lot of time over the five days only sailing during the day, we had the MPS up and just cruised along at eight to nine knots.

"Am I glad we made the switch? Yes, without question. While it is not for everyone, we figure in front of us we have some great times kicking back in what is, in our view, the best boat we could have purchased for our use.

"At 62 I am more than comfortable in this boat coming out of my comfort zone and taking on a new challenge." ≈