

# Yachting World

MULTIHULL  
SPECIAL

GET SET TO...

# SAILAWAY!

FIRST ATLANTIC + FAMILY CRUISING AROUND THE WORLD



WE TEST

Beneteau  
First 44



Fountaine  
Pajot 51

## HEAVY WEATHER TACTICS

ape Horners share their secrets

EXPERT TIPS

OUTING IN  
WAVES

STARTING  
STRATEGIES

CHOOSING A  
FAMILY YACHT

NEW SERIES

## SAILING TWO-UP

WITH  
PIP HARE



FIRST LOOK // BENEteau FIRST 44



Gilles Martin-Raget





Tested by  
**RUPERT  
HOLMES**



**Where:** Les Sables  
d'Olonne, France

**Test conditions:**  
Wind 3-10 knots  
with flat sea

**Model tested:**  
Cruising model  
with optional  
carbon mast and  
2.6m deep keel

# FIRST 44

EFFICIENCY IS THE BYWORD FOR THIS  
NEW MODEL, IN BOTH PRODUCTION  
AND PERFORMANCE ON THE WATER

**There's a glassy calm, without a ripple on the water, yet we're slipping along under Code 0 at four knots of boat speed. Of course, there's a zephyr of breeze at the masthead, but even then this wouldn't have been possible in a 44ft yacht weighing 10 tonnes a decade or two ago.**

The First 44 is a great example of the recent shift towards designs that are rewarding to sail in very light airs. This makes sense whether you're based in southern England or the Mediterranean – in both cases summer winds are statistically Force 3 or less for at least 50% of the time.

A boat that will sail well in light airs is therefore to be welcomed and reduces the amount of tedious motoring needed to maintain acceptable speeds on passage. In the past good light airs performance was all too often a result of an oversized rig, or lack of ballast, and therefore came at the expense of ability in stronger winds.

However, that's not the case with this boat. Conceptually, it's very much like a smaller version of the First 53, which is well proven in heavy weather. It benefits from a hull shape with very high form stability, along with a choice



**Right: First 44 performs well in light airs. Below: water ballast option gives additional stability equivalent to four crew on the rail**



of deep, low centre of gravity keels. Naval architect Roberto Biscontini gave the new design a proportionately narrower waterline beam and consequently a slightly deeper canoe body with a little more rocker. These are changes that promote the light airs performance at the expense of early surfing and only marginally reduce form stability.

In addition, there's an option for 300lt of water ballast each side – equivalent to four people sitting on the rail. The system is commendably simple with the tanks filled and emptied individually using electric pumps operated from the helm stations. This takes three to four minutes, so is not designed for short tacking, but is perfect for a long beat or when fully powered up on a reach.

The helm stations have a bench seat that allows you to steer while sitting facing forward, as well as decent folding foot chocks for use when standing. Instrument pods are of a generous size with space for MFD, compass, engine, thruster and windlass controls.

In a little more breeze we made a solid 6 knots in only 7-8 knots of true wind, with occasional bursts of 7.5 knots boat speed in stronger puffs. Helm positions are great, with a good view of the headsail luff, whether standing up or sitting on the coaming outboard of the wheel.

In these conditions many yachts lack positive feel in the helm, but steering was finger-light, responsive and rewarding throughout.

Our test boat was the cruising version, which has a 1m-long bowsprit with integrated anchor stowage, plus provision for tacking a Code 0 halfway along it and asymmetric spinnakers at the end. It was also fitted with the optional carbon two-spreader mast, with discontinuous rod rigging and textile backstay with Harken hydraulics. This is 1.8m taller than the standard rig, which adds 11m<sup>2</sup> to upwind sail area and around 10% to the size of the Code 0 and spinnakers. The boat was also fitted with the lighter, but deeper 2.6m draught keel, with iron fin and lead torpedo bulb.

All lines are led aft through conduits to banks of clutches and stoppers, as well as a pair of winches, including electric primaries, ahead of the helm stations. There's a below deck furler for the headsail, while sheets lead via conventional towed jib tracks on the coachroof. The German-style mainsheet is taken to a single point on the cockpit sole between the wheels and is operated by winches on the coaming each side, just ahead of the helm stations.

#### EXTRA OOMPH

The Performance version adds two extra winches in the pit area, with a bank of clutches and diverters each side for cross winching, plus a longer 1.5m carbon sprit. It also has smaller tanks, no windlass or associated battery, and lithium service batteries to minimise weight.

There's only one small step up to the side deck from behind and outboard the helm stations, but there's no lowered working area on the side deck outboard of the winches. The deep moulded toerail is effective, but during manoeuvres and when sail handling crewmembers are likely to opt to stand inside the cockpit ahead of the helm stations, where there's limited foot room. Rope bags, rather than bins, are provided but are of limited capacity.





Nicolas Claris

Above: saloon is large and bright. There's good stowage below the seats, and the dinette can seat six



Nicolas Claris

Left: view from the L-shaped galley through to the forward en suite cabin. Below: forward cabin has a peninsula double bed but lacks stowage

There are shallow cockpit lockers under the aft section of the cockpit seats, plus a gas locker under the cockpit sole where it's easily accessed. The liferaft is stowed under the forward section of the cockpit, which is neat in some ways, but means it must be manoeuvred past the table before it can be launched.

The sail locker is relatively small, measuring little more than a couple of feet fore and aft, but offers room for reaching sails, a heavy weather jib, plus some lines and fenders. The wide transom includes a bathing platform that folds down electrically to reveal a small tender garage, which also has space for fenders, lines, and other paraphernalia.

Below decks designer Lorenzo Argento has retained a ▶



Nicolas Claris





Powerful shape for offwind sailing: bowsprit can fly both an asymmetric spinnaker and a Code 0 (shown)





Gilles Martin-Raget

**Far left: transom bathing platform folds down electrically. Left: stability combined with plenty of sail area helps achieve sporty sailing**

similar concept and layout to the First 53. Small changes include extending the dinette to give space for six people to dine, and there's generally more efficient use of space, including good stowage below the seats.

The saloon is a wonderfully large and bright space that occupies the full width of the hull and benefits from excellent eye-level hull windows. In addition to the dinette to port, there's a 1.9m-long settee (with optional lee cloth) to starboard, the aft end of which doubles as a seat for a small aft facing navstation.

The classic L-shaped galley has good fiddles, adequate worktop space, a very large top and front opening fridge, plus a single bowl sink and decent stowage. The forward en suite cabin has a peninsula bed, but not a great deal of stowage, while the two identical aft cabins are of a decent size and have reasonable natural light, but only two small opening ports for ventilation.

### OUR VERDICT

This is a desirable yacht with potential to bring owners, their families and friends a lot of pleasure.

There's enough space and comfort for very civilised fast cruising, plus scope to race, with enough room to take a full team offshore.

In light airs the combination of hull shape and powerful rig enable more passages to be completed predominantly under sail. At the same time, it's a design with the ability to take heavy weather in its stride and has a lot more interior space than earlier performance cruisers of a similar length.

This boat also completes Beneteau's fully revamped First line, which now includes a wide range of distinctive designs aimed at specific sectors of the market for performance boats, with seven models from the First 14 dinghy up to the luxury performance cruiser First 53. ■



**SPECIFICATIONS**

**LOA** 14.15-14.65m 46ft 5in-48ft 1in  
**Hull length** 13.15m 43ft 2in  
**Beam** 4.24m 13ft 11in  
**Draught** (standard keel) 2.15m 7ft 1in  
**Draught** (deep keel) 2.60m 8ft 6in  
**Displacement** (cruiser with standard keel) 10,300kg 22,700lb  
**Displacement** (performance) 9,800kg 21,600lb  
**Ballast** (standard keel) 3,300kg 7,275lb  
**Ballast** (deep keel) 3,000kg 6,613lb  
**Mainsail** (aluminium rig) 53m<sup>2</sup> 570ft<sup>2</sup>  
**Price** from €335,000 ex VAT  
[beneteau.com](http://beneteau.com)


