

A French revolution

Peter K Poland rates some of the 34-36ft yachts made since the 1980s by Beneteau and Jeanneau – two of the 'big four' manufacturers

Yachts between 34ft and 36ft have long been popular with cruising and racing sailors alike. Many production boats of this size achieve a magic mix, combining ample space and comfort for family cruising, ease of single- or short-handed sailing and the ability to go offshore in comfort with moderate purchase and running costs.

Those who also want 'big boat sailing' often charter a 40- to 50-footer once a year, letting someone else pay to moor it, maintain it and pick up the big bills.

In the old days, 34- to 36-footers were thought of as large yachts. However, as British brands Westerly, Snapdragon, Macwester, Sadler, Moody and others prospered in the 1970s and 1980s, boats of this size became commonplace. They were the builders' bread and butter, selling by the hundreds. Then the French, German and Scandinavian yards expanded,

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Peter K Poland crossed the Atlantic in a 7.6m (25ft) Wind Elf in 1968 and later spent 30 years as co-owner of Hunter Boats. He is now a freelance journalist and PR consultant

competition hotted up and – slowly and sadly – the British builders fell by the wayside. The modern volume production methods of their continental competitors left them wallowing in their wake.

These builders – both British and continental – featured in earlier articles in this series on 34- to 36-footers. However, there were four deliberate and major omissions – Bavaria, Beneteau, Hanse and Jeanneau. Why? Because these four builders have outlived most volume production competitors – making major contributions to the demise of many in the process – and dominate the market. The 'big four's' relentless expansion and drive towards ever-bigger yachts has taken them to 60-footers and beyond. The times they are a'changing.

So, anyone looking for a brand-new 34- to 36-footer has little choice but to investigate these brands – unless their funds stretch to a more expensive yacht from a smaller yard. Indeed, a 34-footer from one of the 'big four' now tends to be near the bottom of the range, qualifying as a 'starter boat'.

Immediate success

Beneteau's first model of this size – the Berret-designed **First 35** – hit the market in 1980 and was an immediate success. Over 450 were built. Like many cruisers of its generation, it evolved from an IOR

racer – in this case a 3/4-Tonner. With fine ends and a beam of 3.7m (12ft 2in) situated amidships, good windward performance is assured. The forepeak is used for stowage with the heads compartment immediately aft. The saloon features settee berths and an outboard pilot berth (to port) while a galley and forward-facing chart table live by the companionway. Two separate and enclosed quarter berths ('friendly doubles' at a pinch) lurk under the cockpit.

Again typical of the era, the masthead rig features a small main and a large genoa. The slender IOR keel gives a draught of 6ft 3in and a healthy ballast ratio (by modern standards) of 46%, while a DLR of 195 and SA/displacement ratio of 18.6 indicate good performance.

The First 35 is still an attractive package, promising fast cruising and club racing potential at a budget price. However, a luff insert in the genoa is needed to retain a good shape when reefed. The 35 is a prime example of how an IOR-influenced design still has a lot going for it. Furthermore, many regard it as easier on the eye than today's bulky and stubby-ended offerings.

The larger **First 375** development of 1985 – also by Berret – has a more contemporary layout down below, a higher DLR of 208, a lower ballast ratio of 31.88%, and is equally pretty.

The same can be said of Berret's



Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 36i

Sailing Scenes

Evasion 36 (34ft 9in). This handsome cruiser offers a deckhouse layout complete with an extra helming position located in the saloon with superb all-round visibility.

Different character

As the 1990s loomed, the Firsts began to take on a different character. The appearance of the Océanis range had led to a clearer delineation between cruisers and racers, so the Firsts became a bit more 'racey'. The 1988 First 35S5 is a good example. Complete with its unorthodox Philippe Starck styling, this Berret design has a very different look – both inside and out. The wrap-over windows, sculpted stern platform and 'winglets' on the keel options make it stand out from the crowd while its boldly styled interior follows the now predictable norm of aft heads compartment and double stern cabin. They built 430, proving that this 'new look' appealed to many.

The 1993 First 35S7 (34ft 7in) took the next step into contemporary yacht design by adding a bulb to the keel and carrying its substantial 12ft 6in beam well aft. So the boat offers twin double-berth aft cabins. With its CG-lowering bulb on keel, the DLR is 173 and the ballast ratio 32%. Then the slightly larger 1996 First 36S7 took these trends a little further. Slowly but surely, the Firsts were changing.

By the time the 2000 Bruce Farr-designed First 36.7 arrived, the slender bulbed keel had got even deeper while the SA/disp



Sailing Scenes

Beneteau First 35

winglets. A DLR of 181, SA/disp ratio of 16 and ballast ratio of 32% suggest steady rather than supercharged performance.

Océanis models are designed for maximum cruising comfort – not for racing – so the generous beam (12ft 5in) and long roof offer space galore. Different versions are available with one or two stern cabins and heads compartments. The longitudinal galley (to port) has ample stowage and all mod cons while the L-shaped settee (starboard) wraps around a large table.

The generations of Berret Océanis cruisers that followed evolved in style but shared similar qualities. The 351 (34ft 9in; 1994), 352 (35ft; 1997), 361 (36ft 5in; 2000), 343 (35ft 5in; 2005) come with many options and are all capable and comfortable. Those who like a centre cockpit and a spacious stern cabin should also consider the 36CC (1998). It shares the First 36S7 hull so it sails faster than its looks might suggest. It could make a great 'liveaboard' yacht.



Beneteau First 375

Sailing Scenes

First 345 (DLR 182, Ballast Ratio 45%), of which 460 were built.

If you can find one, the cruiser 1983 Idylle 1150 shares the First 35's hull but has a longer, shallower keel and a more luxurious interior. It gains a twin-berth forecabin and a larger double stern cabin, and the heads moves aft. It's an elegant yacht with a lot to offer.

The slightly smaller Idylle 1050 (from 1985), designed by André Beneteau, has a similar character and 'look'. Not many Idylles were imported, but these models have a definite appeal.

Equally rare is the Briand-designed 1990

ratio rose to 19.28 and the ballast ratio went down to 29%. Then Farr's 2008 First 35.2 went racier still, putting a large T-shaped torpedo at the base of the keel.


In the meantime, the Océanis cruising brand was building up a head of steam. Popular with charter operators and private buyers alike, these models outsell the sportier Firsts. The Briand-designed Océanis 430 (43ft) and 350 (33ft 10in) launched the range in 1986 while the 1990 Océanis 370 (35ft 8in) was the first in the popular 34 to 36ft size band.

Unlike a First, this model offers a long fin keel or a shallower option with CG-lowering

Dramatic changes

In 2008, Beneteau switched to Finot-Conq for the smaller Océanis designs and to Nauta for their interiors. The resulting changes were dramatic.

The 2008 Oceanis 34 (33ft 11in) has a heavily bulbed keel, small-overlap genoa, outboard-mounted chainplates, short overhangs and 12ft beam carried well aft. *American Cruising World* magazine's panel of readers voted it 'Best Value Boat 2009'. In 15-25 knots of wind on the test day, *CW* wrote: 'This affordable performance cruiser is a blast to sail, with details often lacking on more expensive boats.'

Then – following on from their award-winning 2013 Oceanis 38 – Finot-Conq and Nauta introduced more major new features that are now shared by the rest of the range, including the new 35ft Océanis. Twin 



Jeanneau Sun Fast 35

Sailing Scenes

rudders and wheels, wide beam, mainsheet arch, chined hull, heavily bulbed keel and near-vertical bow and stern add up to a striking new look. Different interior layouts also offer the buyer a wide choice.

American Sail magazine wrote: 'Sailing on Chesapeake Bay in 15-20 knots true wind with apparent gusts to 35, we hit a top speed of 7 knots sailing on a close reach to a beam reach with a partially furled mainsail. We maintained 6.8 knots close-hauled at a 40° apparent wind angle, and when we pinched to 35° our speed dropped to 5.4 knots.'

'The helm was extremely stable, thanks to the twin rudders... Thanks to the pronounced hull chine, form stability was excellent, and even in the robust conditions we experienced, heeling was moderate.'

A perfect fit

Don MacKenzie bought his Océanis 35.1 (34ft 3in, including sprit) at the 2016 Southampton Boat Show, and told me:

'We bought it because we were retiring from our dental practice and had funds to upgrade from our previous boat – a MacGregor 26 power-sailer. Quite a jump!

'We wanted a boat to satisfy specific requirements, which were: under 10.5m length to fit on the mooring, three cabins so we could take the family, a lifting keel for Solent anchorages, in-mast reefing, a bow thruster and power winch. Realising we wouldn't find all this on a second-hand boat, we splashed out on a new one.'

Don enjoys the boat's spaciousness.

'For 35ft, the accommodation is spectacular. All the berths are large and comfortable, including the forepeak, which has room for me – 6ft 3in – to lie full stretch. And the quality of workmanship and level of finish are exceptional.'

'Generally, we are thrilled with this boat. The quality of the build has been remarked on by everybody, as has the level of quality fittings. Due to the wide beam, the amount of space below is fantastic with a greater sense of space than in older boats of this length. She is easy to handle despite being very beamy, although I suspect close-quarter manoeuvring would be challenging without the bow thruster, because with twin rudders there's no prop wash.'

'In addition, the level of pre-and post-sale

help and advice provided by UK dealer Ancasta has been terrific – replacing thin jib sheets and rectifying minor blemishes to saloon table and boom.'

Spacious and airy

Sister-company Jeanneau was acquired by Beneteau in 1995, having traded since 1956. With the exception of the famous Gin Fizz 37 and Sun Fizz 40, it majored on smaller yachts until the Espace 1000 (34ft 11in) appeared in 1980. This spacious Briand-designed deck saloon cruiser (with cockpit and internal steering positions for all-weather sailing) comes with a lifting or fin keel. A DLR of 237 suggests comfortable cruising performance, confirmed by Bob Mullins, whose Espace has been in his family since 1983.

He says she 'sails well for a motor-sailer. I have replaced the original mainsail and will soon take delivery of a new furling genoa. I'm expecting the previous 100° tacking angle to improve [which it will!]. Off the wind, she is good.'

Bob adds: 'The accommodation is spacious and airy with lots of windows and light.'

When we're entertaining people have been impressed by how wide

the saloon is. Not having two aft cabins means that the saloon isn't so far forward. This also allows for two huge cockpit lockers, so storage isn't a problem.'

He also loves the deck saloon, saying: 'The inside steering position is wonderful for Scottish sailing weather'.

Of course, the boat's getting on now, and Bob says: 'The foam-backed lining has crumbled and is part replaced. There has been a leak where the babystay goes through the foredeck that caused water damage/rot in the forward bulkhead where the tang is secured. This was replaced.'

All the same, not a lot of grief for a 37-year-old boat.

In 1982, Jeanneau followed Beneteau's

The dark-hulled Beneteau Océanis 361 Wave Whisperer taking part in this year's Round the Island Race



Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 349

Sailing Scenes

fashion of basing cruisers on top race boats. The Sun Shine 36 (36ft 5in) stems from a Tony Castro One Tonner and is a good all-rounder. Its DLR of 183, SA/disp ratio of 18.8, ballast ratio of 41% and fine ends give excellent performance – yet there's enough space aft to fit in two stern cabins.

Generous galley and navigation area, saloon settees and pilot berths, a

forward heads and forepeak berth complete the picture. It's a great seagoing layout and – combined with the 36's performance and elegant looks – makes this boat an attractive package. More than 700 were sold, and French magazine *Bateaux* summed it up by saying it is 'one of the best performing and most enjoyable of its type; recommended to those keen on a lively sailing boat rather than to those looking for a placid cruiser'.

Sailing reputation

The 1984 Fauroux-designed Sun Shine 34 (34ft 6in) was an equally successful IOR-derived cruiser: well over 600 were sold in less than six years. One was even

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Sailing Scenes

sailed solo around the world by Frenchman Alain Maignan. Available with a fin or centreplate keel, the Sun Shine has an excellent sailing reputation, and – like most Jeanneaus of this era – the wood finish below gives a relaxing feel to its 'aft heads plus stern cabin' layout. Definitely one to consider.

The 1988 Andrieu-designed Sun Dance 36 followed on. It differs from the earlier Sun Shine 36, offering twin stern cabins and aft heads compartments and a large U-shaped settee facing a linear galley to port. Its 27hp Yanmar provides adequate power under engine while its ballast ratio of 34% follows the downward trend.

Then in 1990 it was renamed the Sun Odyssey 36 as Jeanneau introduced a new 'Twin Range' marketing policy. While Beneteau introduced its Océanis range of pure cruisers later than its sporty Firsts, Jeanneau did the opposite by introducing its Sun Fast range later than its cruisers.

The 1994 Sun Fast 36 (perversely, a smidge over 37ft LOA) was the first '36-footer' in the range. Designed by Briand, this handsome cruiser-racer has two- and three-cabin options, a tasteful interior plus a shoal or deep draught bulbed keel to lower the CG.

Michael Thomsen keeps his SF36 in Flensburg, and says: 'Being an active sailor with a not-so-active wife and twin girls aged six, I was in the market for a boat that provided some comfort below decks while at the same time offering at least club racing capabilities. Also, the boat had to be seaworthy enough for a single-handed Atlantic crossing – a plan for the future.'

'She's solid, fast, reliable, comfortable and has excellent cockpit ergonomics suitable for short-handed sailing. Although more than 20 years old, she still looks hot. She's excellent value for money as even her standard spec is very comprehensive and the build quality is superb!


'OK, the interior maybe is not as fine-lined as a Hallberg or Comfortina – but after 20

years flying a rod rig with quite high tension there is no flexing in the hull and no soft spots in her sandwich deck. You have a very solid yet fast boat: a cruiser/racer in the truest sense.'

Sprightly performance

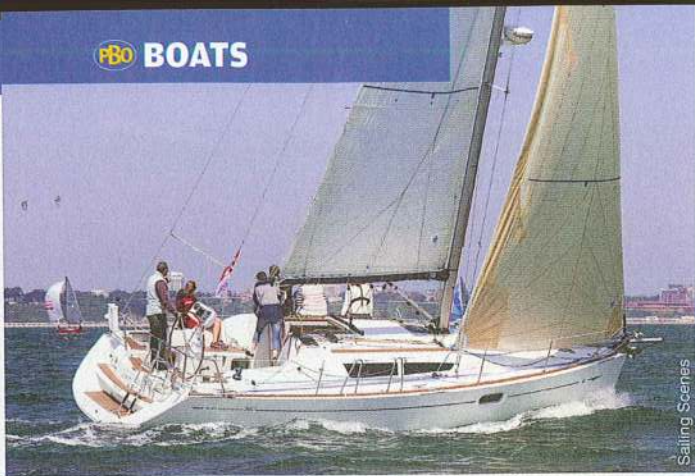
Marc Lombard (another famous race boat designer) came up with the smaller but similar **Sun Fast 35** (35ft 3in) in 2004.

With wide beam (11ft 9in), a DLR of 167, SA/disp ratio of 17.36, bulb keel and ballast ratio of 26%, the 35 offers an excellent mix of a comfortable teak-trimmed interior (two or three cabins) and sprightly performance. In short, ideal for the owner looking for stimulating sailing in a boat capable of performing well in club races and coastal cruising.

For those looking for a more cruisy alternative, the Sun Odyssey 35 shares similar lines but also offers a lift keel and twin rudder option. Andy Cox bought a 2006 SO35 in 2016, telling me he went for the lifting-keeler because 'for the type of sailing we do, based in Chichester Harbour, a lift keel with the option of drying out – thanks to the twin rudders – is what it's all about. They sail OK and can dry out at the end of the beer' 



Beneteau Océanis 35



Sailing Scenes

Jeanneau Sun Odyssey

garden in places like Tuckenhay on the River Dart and Wareham in Poole harbour!

When I asked what appealed most, Andy replied: 'Overall looks – friends comment on how nice she looks down below – reasonable build quality and simplicity of use at an affordable price.'

'She won't win any races, but she was not bought for that.'

'We have the two-cabin "Owner" version but started out looking at the three-cabin version. However, the extra stowage offered by the lazarette, accessed through the shower, and the inclusion of a reasonably large hanging locker in the cabin swayed us away from the extra accommodation on offer.'

Built to a price

'I'd love a Southerly, but one of a similar age and length would be twice the price – though to be fair the Jeanneau is deliberately built to a price to make it affordable for many more people, not to a premium specification.'

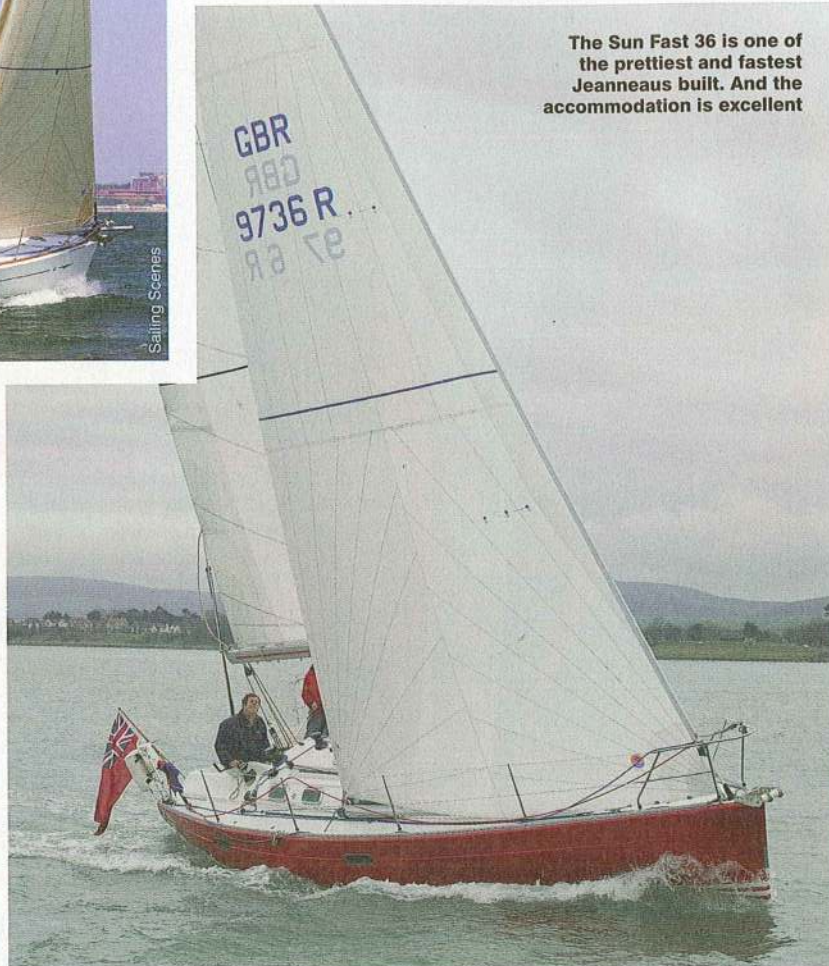
And what about performance and handling with twin rudders and shoal keel? Andy said: 'We took her round the Channel Islands by way of a shakedown cruise this summer, and she performed well'. He's now planning a 2018 cruise to the Med via the canals, returning via the Bay of Biscay.

'As long as you reef early there is no problem. She does not point as well as a fin- or long-keeler, but the compromise is fine for non-racers like us. Coming from our old boat – a Jouet 760 which was also a lift keel, and thoroughly recommended as a pocket cruiser – she seems so solid in a blow. We think we're spoilt in comparison!'

'Close-quarters handling in marinas in a blow, though, does perhaps require more planning and thought than a boat with a rudder in-line with the prop.'

On the maintenance front, Andy found that the disintegration of a small component meant replacing the keel lifting mechanism, and a faulty heat exchanger on the Yanmar 3YM30 had to be swapped.

His succinct conclusion sums up modern boat buying well: 'There are things on the boat we don't like, but you are going to have to compromise on a mass-produced boat at this price point. Conversely there are things that we love, like the large shower compartment and the sliding, decent-sized chart table. I am



Graham Snook

The Sun Fast 36 is one of the prettiest and fastest Jeanneaus built. And the accommodation is excellent

old school, so it gets used a lot!
'The big deal for us is that she's 10.7m long and draws less than a metre... which is of course why we bought her!'

Sleek and capable

The 2008 Lombard-designed **Sun Odyssey 36i** has also been a success. With a bulbed keel (deep or shoal), it has a DLR of 166 and ballast ratio of 27.5%.

Its beam of 11ft 9in is carried well aft, and there's space for one or two stern cabins and a comfortable accommodation layout. It's a sleek-looking and capable modern cruiser.

Marcus North bought his new shoal-draught 36i in 2009 because he 'particularly liked the layout below and the large heads with separate shower: we use the boat for holiday and weekend accommodation as well as sailing it.'

'The boat also sails very well, and is easily managed by myself and my wife: 90% or more of the sailing we do is just the two of us. The worst we've encountered is a Force 8, and it handled it very well.'

Any niggles? Marcus said on his version the access to the large cockpit locker is via a door in the shower, so the deflated dinghy won't get through – and the water tank position in the forepeak prevents installing a bow thruster.

'But overall I've been very happy with my Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 36i and have no plans to change it for another boat.'

David Kramer sails his shoal-draught SO36i in the USA, and told me he did the famous Baja Ha-Ha this year.

'It's a two-week cruiser rally from San Diego to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico; about 900NM in each direction,' he said. 'The weather was a little rough at times, but the boat handled it all beautifully.'

His few niggles include 'poor-quality seacocks that many owners have replaced, a gap at the top of the rudder that catches kelp, and poor insulation around the fridge and compressor [that he has rectified].'

And his conclusion? 'I've learned to reef my shoal-draught boat early and sail it within its capabilities. In turn it treats us well and the performance is fine on most points of sail. I wouldn't race it, for many reasons; one of which is that it doesn't point well because it's shoal-draught. On the whole, we love our boat. It continues to give us great pleasure.'

Last but not least, if you're in the market for a brand-new Jeanneau, the **Sun Odyssey 349** should be on your list. It may be a smidge less than 34ft LOA, but its contemporary design provides the space of a far larger yacht: and with over 600 sold in less than four years, it's a runaway success.

And what about the Germans? After all, the main competition for Beneteau and Jeanneau now comes from Bavaria and Hanse. Over the years they too have produced fleets of fine 34- to 36-footers. But more on these next time.



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