

BLUE WATER BOATS

Oceanis 50





*The new 50-foot
cruising boat
from Beneteau
combines solid
marine design and
engineering with
the latest green
technology and
Euro-styling*

Blue Water Sailing prefers to test large cruising boats offshore when we can, but that is not always possible. If we can't arrange a long test, we at least hope to have some significant breeze to see how the boat handles upwind and down, and what sort of real motion it has in a seaway. An hour of coasting around in a zephyr won't really do.

So in February, we were lucky to be in Miami, Florida for an afternoon test of the brand new Oceanis 50 on a day when the wind was holding the flags straight out and causing the palm trees to bow their heads.

We joined Beneteau USA president Wayne Burdick, sales director Mike Lechelop and three experienced Beneteau dealers on the new boat at Sea Isle Marina, where the Strictly Sail boat show was to be

held the following weekend. Walking down the dock, we could see the new boat in profile at the end and recognized it immediately.

The new cockpit arch is the signature difference from Oceanis boats of the last few years. But the low-slung cabin top with squared off windows, fairly plumb and balanced stern, and gun slit topside windows all marked the boat as a new generation Beneteau that is thoroughly immersed in modern design, technology and style.

SEA TRIALS

Once aboard and with our gear stowed, we set off from the dock and headed for the drawbridge that would give us access to Government Cut and the ocean. We had to wait a few minutes for the bridge to open, so we took the opportunity to put the boat through its paces under power.

The 50 has a 110 horsepower Yanmar engine that drives a Max-Prop feathering propeller. It is also equipped with a bow thruster. The engine controls and dials are at knee level at the starboard wheel, so that's where you steer from. Getting in and out of the dock at Sea Isle, Wayne used the bow thruster to swing the boat into the wind and make the sharp turn from the marina to the channel. The maneuver worked flawlessly; it would have taken some real backing and filling to make the exit without the thruster. Modern, light boats of this size with high bows certainly benefit from the power of a bow thruster.

In the channel, we revved the engine to 3200 RPMs, full throttle, and didn't have to wait long to get her up to her designed hull speed of 8.9 knots. The hull is well-balanced fore and aft, so it did not squat unduly at





All halyards and control lines for the mainsail lead aft to winches on the cabin top under the dodger, left; the 50 steered easily in the rising conditions and the view from both helms is excellent, right

full speed. From full speed, we threw the engine into reverse and brought the boat to a full stop in three boat lengths. Obviously, the MaxProp was doing its job and the big engine had ample power to stop the boat's momentum.

While we were waiting for the drawbridge, we stopped the 50 and slowly backed her up the channel. The boat steers nicely in reverse and did not show much propwalk or a tendency to veer violently when the rudder was turned slightly from side to side. Backing into a slip should be fairly easy, particularly with the bow thruster controlling the front end of the boat.

We steamed through the open drawbridge and then motorsailed out Government Cut to the ocean. The wind was a steady 15 knots as we cleared the jetty and buildings. The seas were still quite flat, but a chop was beginning to rise. The 50 we sailed had a roller furling Selden Mast and a Profurl roller furling unit on the genoa. The mainsail had vertical battens, so it had a bit more

roach than a normal in-mast sail. The mainsail sheets to a fixed point in the middle of the arch, and the mainsheet runs forward to a block and then aft to an electric winch on the cabin top. The whole rig has been set up for easy sail handling from the cockpit.

Once in deep water, we hardened up to close-hauled and trimmed to the telltales. With 15 to 18 knots true and 22 knots apparent over the deck, the 50 was slightly overpowered with the full main, but chewed upwind nicely and did not put her rail underwater once.

To reduce weather helm and regain balance on the helm, we reefed the main by a third. The 50 settled down at about 12 degrees of heel and charged ahead even faster than she had with the full sail. The helm felt steady, and even though there was a building chop, the boat fell nicely into an upwind groove. Trimming the genoa with the two large Harken electric winches was easy—we could get used to this. The only thing we might add to the rig

would be a traveler on the top of the arch for the mainsheet so we could depower or power up the mainsail as conditions warrant.

Off the wind, the 50 really gathered her skirts and started to fly. We reached offshore for a while and then jibed back toward the Cut. The wind was still building and the seas getting up, so we rollicked along at a steady 9 knots and occasionally saw 10s on the GPS. The 50 has an adjustable chartplotter pod on the aft end of the cockpit table that is visible from both wheels, so we had all of the nav and performance data right in front of us.

With the wind now well over 20 and gusting higher, we rolled up about a third of the genoa and shot the genoa car forward to maintain a good trim angle. Still, the 50 surged ahead at a good speed, and we saw 11 knots on the GPS as we surfed down the front of a wave. In the brisk breeze and quartering sea, the 50 steered positively and tracked well.

Back inside the Cut, the wind came around on the nose, so we



Beneteau USA's president Wayne Burdick works at the chart table, top; the 50's seagoing galley is well laid out for preparing meals both at anchor and underway

fired up the Yanmar and rolled in the sails for a quick motor back to the marina. We had sailed for about two hours and had seen how the 50 behaved on all angles of sail and in a good breeze. We never had spray in the cockpit and never put the rail under. The boat handled well and behaved like a pro when reefed and trimmed properly. I would not have worried about facing breezes of 30 knots or more. The 50 didn't creak as it heeled and did not pound in the head seas. And off the wind, she really flew. Designers Berret Racoupeau have once again got their lines,

weights and non-dimensional ratios just right.

ACCOMMODATIONS

There were seven of us aboard for the sea trials and we all fit into the cockpit with room to spare. The cockpit seats are ergonomically well designed, so you have nice back support on the bench seats, a place to curl up under the dodger and good leg braces against the table when the boat is heeled over. While sailing, the helmsman can sit on the side deck either to windward or to leeward, and can see forward without obstruction.

Under power, he can see forward along the deck or through the dodger windows. The dodger attaches to the arch, so it is quite high off the deck; Mike was pleased to note that he could stand up under it.

There is a low bridge deck at the companionway that provides headroom in the aft cabin below and will keep cockpit water out of the cabin in wet conditions. Down below, the 50 has several layout options. The boat we sailed had a large aft cabin with an off center and angled double berth, a built-in desk cum vanity and a large head with a separate shower. Except under the bridge deck, headroom in the aft cabin is six-feet, six-inches—that's a lot.

The engine room lies under the bridge deck and companionway. There is good access from the front under the stairs, on the starboard side, and from the back through a large panel door. The engine box is well-insulated; the big Yanmar did not sound loud down below.

The U-shaped galley lies to port with the twin sinks on the centerline so they will drain on both tacks. The three-burner stove-oven is mounted outboard with storage cabinets all around and plenty of counter space. The top-loading fridge can double as a freezer, and the front-loading refrigerator is large enough for extended cruising. Having redundancy in the refrigeration department is a good idea.

The chart table is to starboard, with the chartplotter and radios mounted outboard above the futuristic electrical and meter panels. There is a U-shaped dinette to port that will seat six with two perched on the moveable stools amidships. The bench settee to starboard will double as a sea berth for smaller people, and the dinette will work well as a sea berth, too.

The master stateroom forward has

a centerline double berth, a large hanging locker, cubbyhole lockers and plenty of shelf space. The head has a large, enclosed shower stall and ample locker space for medical and washroom supplies.

The new 50 has mahogany-colored furniture that is made of a processed wood known as Alpi, which is easy to work with and maintain, has consistent color values, and is quite durable. The flooring throughout is a laminate with an attractive dark planking pattern and a slightly non-skid surface, which is both attractive and durable.

The innovation in the new 50's interior, created by Nauta design, is the synthetic fabric used to face the main bulkheads and the overhead panels. A PVC cloth, the fabric has the feel of leather and an elegant, interior-designer look. With off-white bulkheads and mahogany-colored furniture, the 50's interior has become a modern variation of the classic Herreshoff look known as "Bristol fashion."

The 50 is a spacious boat that has not been carved up into too many smaller spaces. You can divide the aft cabin into two smaller double cabins, and you can add a fourth cabin aft as well. The boat we sailed had only two large sleeping cabins and a lot of open and airy space in the interior. The light-colored ceiling and bulkheads added to the brightness down below.

BWS THOUGHTS

Over the last few years, Beneteau USA has spread its wings as it worked its way through the recession by building some Jeanneau boats at its plant in Marion, South Carolina and now adding the biggest Oceanis it has built on this side of the pond.



The 50's saloon is open and bright; the dinette to port seats six for meals; and, the Nauta-designed interior has fabric covered bulkheads to add to the boat's unique style

The company has been a leader in lean manufacturing and has pioneered—both in France and the U.S.—modern labor-saving techniques that result in production boats with a lot of strength, quality and durability at a very fair value. With the 50, Beneteau is building the largest infused decks in the marketplace, which allows them to build lighter, stiffer, better decks with less styrene emissions and lower cost. This move is part of the company's commitment to green manufacturing. Another part of that commitment is the use of relatively expensive LED lights throughout the interior and on deck; even the running lights are LEDs. With every light on the boat switched on, the amp meter shows a draw of less than five amps.

The Oceanis 50 came through sea trials with high marks; this is a boat that any experienced sailor would be happy to take to sea once it was fitted out with all necessary sailing and safety gear. The boat's styling and systems are modern and well-conceived for living aboard, occasional racing and cruising. It is no surprise to us that the Beneteau brand is often the most popular production boat name in big offshore events like the ARC or the Bermuda Races. The 50 is a boat BWS would be happy to sail anywhere. ~

Beneteau Oceanis 50

LOA	49'6"
LWL	43'8"
Beam	14'9"
Draft (std)	5'9"
Draft (deep)	6'10"
Ballast (std)	9,480lbs.
Ballast (deep)	8,267 lbs.
Displacement (light)	28,660 lbs.
Fuel	62 gals.
Water	149 gals.
Waste	21 gals.
Engine (Yanmar)	110 hp.
Mast height (std.)	70'1"
Mast height (short)	63'2"
Hull speed	8.9kts.
Sail area/Displ.	17.24
Displ./LWL	175
LWL/Beam	2.96
EC Certificate	Category A

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