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BOATIE'S SMORGASBORD – AUCKLAND ON WATER BOAT SHOW PREVIEW



review

Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 440

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aking her debut late last year, the Philippe Briand-designed 44-footer quickly garnered praise for her innovation and distinctiveness – accolades that culminated in her being crowned the 2018 European Yacht of the Year.

Where new models from European production boatbuilders are typically incremental evolutionary steps over previous designs, the 440 is much more 'left-field' in a number of ways. Briand is Jeanneau's long-time design resource, and this model is perhaps one of his boldest shifts yet.

She's a handsome vessel – sleek and stylish – with obvious 'speed-oriented' features such as the vertical stem and stern (long waterline length), twin helms and rudders, flush-deck hatches, a sprit for a code 0 – and a full-length chine geared to more buoyancy, greater stability and reduced heeling.

You'll be able to see a 440 at the Auckland on Water Boat Show at the end of the month, but I managed jump aboard one (the first in the Southern Hemisphere) at the Sydney Boat Show in August. And it quickly became evident why punters are excited about her. Let's begin in the cockpit.

If she's moored stern-on, you'll be boarding via the expansive fold-down boarding platform – resplendent in teak – an easy step into a cockpit, equally resplendent in teak, bristling with intriguing design innovations. And having stepped aboard, you'll immediately notice the vessel's most distinctive feature: side decks that slope gently upwards – from the aft end of the cockpit to a point about halfway along the hull.

Aesthetically, these contribute to the 440's streamlined looks, but they serve a much more practical purpose. It means forward access is unimpeded and quick – you don't have to clamber over/around coamings or other features that typically define a cockpit's structure.

This sense of free, easy access is accentuated by the arrangement of the cap and intermediate shrouds. The caps terminate at chainplates on the gunwale – the latter are well inboard. Between them is a clear 'passage' to the foredeck.

And if you're wondering about pesky waves coming aboard and slicing down those decks – there is a decent gap between the upright boarding platform/transom, as well as two massive drains (one either side) in the cockpit's aft corners. Effectively, these combine into a 'semi-open transom' cockpit.



Changing tack

With its new-generation Sun Odyssey 440, Jeanneau has introduced a yacht with design features so good they're sure to be migrated to the rest of the models in the French builder's stable.

The 440's other really innovative cockpit feature – and one of my favorites – is the 'convertible' cockpit backrests. In normal mode these spacious cockpit benches have sloping backrests, all embellished with squabs and cushions. But an ingenious bit of design sees the backrests fold 'flat' and, with the squabs, they create large sun beds either side of the cockpit table.

Movement around the cockpit is also improved by the off-centre table – slightly to starboard – leaving a wider 'passage' and easier access to the stern and boarding platform. It's a well-designed table – leafs either side, with two built-in ice-chests for immediate access to another cold one.

The aft end of the table has a moulded fibreglass console with the wind instruments. They're easy to read from either helm – and I also like the display for the 45hp Yanmar diesel. It's positioned on the starboard side of that console.

With the engine controls at the starboard helm (and mounted at a decent height, they're very handy), a simple glance affirms the Yanmar's well-being. My back complains about engine controls/displays at foot-level.

Sail controls also benefit from the cockpit design. The helms are mounted on pedestals sloping inboard, and



This is an easy boat to sail – even single-handed – and I'm confident she'll become a significant factor in Jeanneau's sales figures.

LEFT The full-length chine contributes to buoyancy, stability, less heel – and speed.

BELOW The nav station has a decent-sized chart table.

BOTTOM The second bathroom is shared by the two aft cabins.

BOTTOM LEFT A bright, cheery interior. I like the wide passageway between saloon and forepeak.



the Harken primary winches are immediately forward. It's unusual but, as I discovered on our sail around the harbour, this arrangement works a treat. For a performance-oriented helmsman with twitchy fingers, trimming is easy.

I particularly like the way the sheets run under the coachroof and cockpit coamings – out of sight, tidy, efficient – and around turning blocks hidden under the coamings before terminating at the winches with their attendant Spinlock clutches. The configuration works really well and minimises cockpit 'sheet spaghetti'. With the clutches, switching between main and jib sheet is quick and easy.

Further forward – either side of the companionway – are two more winches and the usual array of Spinlock clutches. The port one is a two-speed electric model, and takes care of halyards, vang and reefing lines. Tail bags keep things neat and tidy.

Also a little unusual is the 440's mainsheet configuration – well, at least for cruising-oriented sailors. Racing crews will feel right at home. It's a



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ABOVE Side decks slope upwards gently, a design that successfully connects cockpit with foredeck.



RIGHT A comfortable helming spot. Note the easily-accessible primary winch, inboard of the wheel.

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German mainsheet system – with a difference – and it helps cater for the lack of the traveler in the sail plan. A cockpit-mounted traveler would impinge on the area's free-flowing spaces.

Instead, the mainsheet runs through a bridle, anchored on the coachroof, just forward of the dodger. Where most German systems have the mainsheet adjustable from both winches, this one sees the port end of the sheet locked-off at the companionway port winch. While this means most of the main's adjustment is from the starboard winch, the bridle helps maintain a good sheeting angle on either tack.

As is standard with all Jeanneau models, the 440 abounds with options. This boat, for example, was equipped with a track for a self-tacker (not fitted – we used the standard genoa) and a spinnaker pole. With the self-tacker, working upwind would be a finger-flicking affair.

One last thing about the rig: Jeanneau has mounted the gooseneck a little lower, bringing the boom closer to the coachroof. This makes tidying the main away a lot easier – no need for orangutan footwork trying to cling to the mast.

BELOW DECKS

It's a bright, cheery interior, with plenty of light streaming in through hull windows and overhead hatches, accentuating the clean, functional layout. But

the 440's most distinctive interior feature is space – thanks in the main to that full-length chine.

While many European production yachts carry chines along the back half of the hull – contributing to the fuller volume in the aft living quarters – the 440 carries the chine along its full length. This boosts performance – providing a longer waterline length when she's heeled. And the flatter, wider hull profile is not only a lot more slippery – it also translates into greater stability.

But down below it means greater volume throughout the boat – and it's most noticeable in the forepeak master cabin, where the extra beam results in an island double bed that's rectangular, a happy change from the more typical 'tapered' bed shapes. It also means there's enough space for a separate toilet and bathroom – port and starboard.

Particularly like the wide 'avenue' that connects the main cabin with the saloon. With the double doors open, there's a glorious sense of space and, when you wander off to bed after a long night, the mast's compression strut is a steady, friendly support.

This vessel is the three-cabin version of the 440 (the four-cabin option sees the forepeak divided into two cabins), and the two aft cabins are mirror images of one another. They share the second bathroom – just forward of the starboard aft cabin, which has its own, separate bathroom entrance.



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