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Jeanneau Yachts 55

With its new 55, Jeanneau dares to think differently about monohull sailing and living.

BY ADAM COVE

Yacht design is an evolutionary process, built on the successes and failures of previous designs. Those that plied the trade before us provided guidance through formulas and reference charts, and these have held true as the fluids we design against have remained unchanged. Advances are generally incremental. However, on occasion, a giant leap forward takes place.

In modern cruising yacht design, monohulls have followed one path and multihulls another, each aiming to satisfy a set of performance and comfort desires. Yet, today's sailors do not necessarily fall into just one camp. Is it too ambitious to want the deck space of a catamaran yet the upwind performance of a monohull?

The Jeanneau team believed it was time to change the status quo with a new look at monohull design. This vision came together as the Jeanneau Yachts 55 and represents a significant leap forward in deck, cockpit, and interior layouts.

I first stepped aboard hull No. 2 on a fall day with the

boat backed into a slip in Annapolis. Right away, it was impossible not to notice something quite different here. Rather than helms leading the show in this area, the 16-foot, 4-inch beam was carried all the way aft, making way for a massive lounging and entertaining space. This particular build carried an optional sunshade that extended entirely over this area, comprised of a well-styled hard outer frame and a soft, manually retractable center.

The twin helms were forward of this space, with optional Carbonautica composite wheels and Raymarine instruments in a molded panel. Forward and slightly outboard, a pair of electric Harken winches and Spinlock clutches provided quick access to control lines for the helmsperson. Jeanneau's trademark walkaround deck opens here to go forward, providing excellent, secure passage forward as well as numerous options for steering position, from standing directly behind or outboard, to sitting outboard on a comfortable triangular seat. Although the teak decks in the cockpit and lounge areas are grippy, a removable foot chock provides extra security in rougher weather.

Beyond the helms, the forward cockpit area is entirely

protected from the front and sides with a full fiberglass enclosure with large Lexan windows that keep the breeze and spray out yet provide near uninterrupted views of the sails or a starry night sky. An above-deck nav station and watch bench/dining area opposite, which can transform into a place to nap, enhance above-deck living even further. This full enclosure is an option, but it's hard to imagine why you wouldn't choose it, just for the sheer pleasure of standing watch entirely dry, warm, and comfy with terrific visibility in all directions.

Jeanneau continued its rattling of the traditional layout cage with the 55's belowdecks accommodations. These begin with two gullwing doors just forward of the helms that lead down into two separate port and starboard guest quarters with their own heads. Moving forward past the nav station and down the companionway, you enter what Jeanneau calls the owner's "apartment"—which is essentially a main salon, galley, large dining/entertaining area, and owner's cabin forward.

This flow encourages enjoyment of the above-deck space while granting an impressive level of privacy for all on board. Positioning the above-deck nav station to communicate easily with the galley and the helm shows how thoroughly Jeanneau thought through this layout.

The interior features Alpi wood veneers, a reconstituted product that delivers the tactile and visual features of real wood but is created with protecting natural resources

in mind. The white oak color in this build brought a welcoming brightness to the cabin.

The galley (as well as the full interior) was designed by Andrew Winch after deep consultation with yacht chefs—in pursuit of perfection, turn to the experts! If desired, a washer/dryer option can replace the extra fridge/freezer here. Complementing this space is the dining area that features flexible twin tables; both electrically raise and lower to reach a height comfortable for those on board. A panel also folds out between them to form one larger table, and lowering the tables entirely makes another massive space to relax.

The owner's cabin forward extends the full width of the vessel, with the bed pushed to port, creating a spacious feel. Dual sliding doors on either side of the mast post allow this space to open up even more by letting it flow into the salon. Optional carpeting throughout this area adds a bit more grip to the composite floor. An en suite head is forward of the cabin and includes a separate shower stall.

The 55 is customizable, like the 60 and 65 in Jeanneau's Yacht series. Owners have chosen to replace one of the guest heads with a washer and dryer, opted for a hanging locker instead of a vanity in the main cabin, and even replaced one of the aft cabins with a workshop space. Most personalized touches, such as lee cloths or additional handrails, will be added by the owner after taking delivery of their new boat. It's often best to sail a

The Jeanneau Yachts 55's hull-length chine and wide beam help make for a stable platform with limited heel angles when sailing.



Clockwise from top left: The on-deck nav station is fully protected under the optional fiberglass enclosure; the linear galley is to starboard; the owner's living space below includes a huge sleeping cabin forward, accessed via sliding doors; Adam Cove enjoys the test sail.

boat for a while to understand what is really needed for your own intended use.

I (and the rest of the *SAIL* Top 10 Best Boats panel) was impressed with Jeanneau's clever rethink of all of these spaces, helping create a multihull-living vibe on a monohull. But how would she sail?

On a crisp fall day, in puffy 10- to 16-knot conditions, we ran the Jeanneau Yachts 55 through her paces in the calm waters of the Chesapeake. Ten of us were aboard, but the extended cockpit was so spacious and protected, with a myriad of comfortable spots to lounge, that it seemed as if we were just doublehanding. Yet, we were having great conversations across the cockpit with everyone.

With little effort, the Incidence main unfurled from inside the deck-stepped Sparcraft mast. Bringing the genoa to life was just as simple with the electric furler (a self-tacking jib is standard). The controls are simplified in the cockpit with no traveler for the arch-mounted mainsheet, a self-tacking staysail, and a locking track system on the side of the mast for halyards (allowing one line led aft to

be swapped between multiple halyards). A code zero also adorned the bow but remained furled for the day as we were above the wind range of that sail.

Off the wind we topped out at 8 knots of boatspeed. Launching an asymmetrical spinnaker certainly would have boosted this, but it would have distracted from the mission of comfort and leisure that the arrangement kept reminding us about. Upwind, sticking with the genoa, she settled in between 7.3 to 7.9 knots of speed and held 30-35 degrees apparent wind angle (AWA). While these results are not wildly impressive for a waterline of just under 53 feet, they're still comfortable speeds, with simple sailhandling, to reach destinations in reasonable times. Perhaps, with a few more tweaks, we could have matched the polar targets. We can be certain that the full 8-foot keel, as opposed to the 6-foot, 2-inch shoal draft that we were sailing, would certainly yield sharper upwind performance. Design is a game of tradeoffs. The additional space and stability cannot happen without an increase in wetted surface area and form drag. Given the

laughs we were having on board, I'd say we were on the right side of that design decision that day.

As typical of a center cockpit, the mechanical steering did have some friction (it's simply a longer run to get to the twin rudders all the way aft), but that is a tradeoff for the spacious deck layout. The rudder was entirely balanced, and while not a preference for performance-oriented sailors that like some level of feel, this approach does reduce fatigue over long stretches driving by hand. A balanced rudder also reduces the need for mechanical advantage in the steering system—so, fewer turns to hard over. It took me a moment, through my first tack, to recognize the wheel only needed a quarter to a third of a turn to bring the boat about. This also equates to more subtle movements when keeping the 55 on a straight course.

Even as we experienced puffs coming down the Bay, the heel angle never exceeded 13 degrees. This is thanks to the chines and wide beam that provide a high level of form stability. This is certainly intentional and yet another focus on comfort and taking a page from the multihull world.

A flatter boat means things don't go flying as often and it's easier to walk around. However, it's best to keep an eye on the sailplan as the breeze builds, because a high level of stability and a balanced rudder means the boat can't communicate when she is getting overpowered; with the benefits of the multihull world also come the challenges.

The slip we returned to was all the way against the bulkhead and far from spacious for a 55-foot yacht. However, with the standard retractable bow and stern thrusters and light touches of the digital throttle, it was comfortable to position her as a few of us casually secured dock lines. The shaft-drive Yanmar 110hp inboard came to stop shortly after the three-blade Flexofold



LOA/LWL
55'8"/52'7"
Beam 16'4"
Draft 8'0" (std),
6'2" (shallow)
Air Draft 82'4"
Ballast 10,803
lbs (std), 12,540
lbs (shallow)
Displacement
40,878 lbs
(light)
Sail Area
Mainsail 732
sq ft (furling
in-mast, std),
850 sq ft (tra-
ditional mast);
genoa 807 sq
ft; self-tacking
jib (std) 581 sq
ft; asymmetri-
cal 2,690 sq ft.
Engine 110hp
diesel
Designer
Philippe Briand
Yacht Design/
Winch Design
Builder Jean-
neau, Jeanneau.
com
Price as sailed
\$1.3 million,
base price
\$900,000

propeller came to rest. At this point, the six 95ah batteries powering the 24-volt electrical system were fully charged and she was ready for her next adventure.

The features of this yacht continue for pages. Take the foredeck locker, for instance. Positioned between the deep anchor locker and forward head, it forms a generous space for storing sails out of the main living areas. This theme continues by skipping the dinghy garage, making up for it with telescoping davits and a built-in electric air pump. Nearby, underneath the aft seat is dedicated liferaft storage and a fold-out electric grill.

Another feature that should be appreciated is the stainless tubular lifeline gate that doubles as a fold-down step. Small touches like this make cruising that much simpler. Integrating features means there is minimal digging through lockers to find gear; the boat stays clean and uncluttered.

While onboard, I learned that Jeanneau surveys their customers after six months and one year of ownership, and they use this information to help the design team develop the next boats. I believe they really take that input to heart. This boat tells that story.

The Jeanneau Yachts 55 is a new style of sailing yacht, sharing in the advancements of both mono and multihulls. It captures the essence of enjoying life on deck and accessibility. It is truly a treat to see something this different hit the market. *AL*

The entire aft of the boat is dedicated to lounging and/or dining with friends.