

FAMILY FUN FACTORY

ALLAN WHITING caught up with a delighted Jeanneau 44i owner whose choice of yacht has worked out perfectly for his family



A competent, safe cruising yacht that's relatively easy for a small crew to handle



Sun begone! The stylish, custom-made bimini (top) ensures a stack of shade for the skipper, crew and guests. Moulded base of the cockpit table is a good place for extra electronics and the occasional chart. Sloping cabin top (opposite) merges into the deck creating an uncluttered area forward.

Gavin Boller is a lucky man, because he cheerfully owns up to buying *La Libertine*, a new Jeanneau 44i, “pretty much on impulse” and yet it's fitted his family sailing needs to a tee. Some buyers spend months and even years on research and still end up with a compromise.

One of the main reasons for his contentment is the fact that Gavin and his family were clear on what they wanted from their boat: family fun. Their idea of fun involves mainly day sailing, the occasional overnighter at a secluded anchorage in Moreton Bay, and an annual three-week holiday cruise up the Queensland coast. Racing is not part of their fun package.

THE BROOD BELOW

The Jeanneau 44i is big enough to house two adults up forward and three sub-teens in two aft cabins, with a head at each end of the boat. There's sufficient privacy space below decks for five people to keep out of each other's way and ample lounging room on deck, in the cockpit and up forward.

The Bollers like the saloon

layout, with its offset dinette that can accommodate up to eight people. They also appreciate the in-line galley that's arranged so that whoever is preparing food at the sink or cooking at the stove doesn't block passage to the forward cabin, between the dinette and the galley.

Modern cruising yacht buyers demand homelike comforts and the Jeanneau 44i's pampering begins at the pointy end. Up front in this two-head, three-cabin version is an island vee-berth, with stacks of wardrobe and secure cupboard space. Clever design shows in a compact, fold-out dressing table, complete with makeup compartments and a flip-up mirror.

The finishing touch to the owner's head is an innovative, segmented screen that unfolds to enclose the shower section, keeping water splash away from the toilet, basin and cupboards, and making bathroom tidying a breeze.

Aft cabins typically become repositories for water toys, but the 44i has enough bin space around the cockpit to swallow most of that kit, keeping the aft “kids' zone” uncluttered — until the





HIGHS

- › Value for money
- › Ease of manoeuvring
- › Accommodation and lounging layout

LOWS

- › Creaky floor panels in saloon
- › Marginal sheet winch capacity
- › Awkward mainsail stowage with bimini in place

juniors come aboard with their own stuff!

Being a Queensland cruising boat, *La Libertine* is fitted with an optional bimini, dodger and infill panel, and does all its sailing with this roofing in place, except for the odd winter sail without the infill panel. Sun cancer and frying aren't fun.

BUG OFF

Gavin has had some heavy-mesh side panels made and with these zipped-in the Jeanneau 44i gains an above-deck lounging or dining area that's insect-free. It's an addition we're seeing on more and more Jeanneaus.

The test boat was optioned with Jeanneau's Preference 2011

Pack that includes a portside powered halyard winch and its inclusion has proved very useful for the Bollers. Gavin stows a hard-bottomed inflatable tender on *La Libertine's* ample foredeck, where it's easily lashed in place and doesn't foul the high-clewed headsail. The spinnaker topping lift is used on the powered winch to hoist the tender effortlessly over the lifelines and to retrieve it after use. A light 4hp outboard is clipped on once the inflatable is in the water.

The Jeanneau 44i has a trademark stepped transom, with small FRP batwing doors and a wire lifeline preventing an accidental dip in the water. There's also a ladder that works

as an alternative entry method to the cockpit and folds down to become a swimladder. A fixed backstay bridle — adjustable on the Performance version — ensures clear stern access to and from the cockpit.

ON THE BAY

Brisbane contributed a gentle eight-knot breeze for the start of our test sail and finished off with 15kts, so we checked out the Jeanneau 44i in typical gentle cruising conditions.

Clearing the marina berth was ridiculously simple — despite a crosswind that promised to make the job quite tricky — thanks to bursts from an optional bowthruster that kept us pointed



towards the breakwater mouth.

With hardly any noise the optional 75hp engine had us loping along at 6kts with only 1800rpm on the tach. Gavin deliberately chose the more powerful engine, so that it would never be stressed pushing *La Libertine* along.

A slab-reefed, well-shaped mainsail and overlapping headsail gave the big boat a fine turn of speed, although in deference to its cruising vocation we didn't expect race-style pointing ability. At 40- to 45-degrees *La Libertine* romped along at 6kts-plus in the morning breeze and that upped to 7kts-plus in the afternoon.

La Libertine heeled gently in 15-knot puffs, while the leeward



rail stayed well clear of the briny. Moreton Bay chop sent the spray flying, but the decks and dodger clears remained largely dry.

Reaching is the Jeanneau 44i's forte and we saw 9kts on a couple of occasions with the sheets eased. I found that the jib sheet

Handrails are a nice addition to the recessed companionway steps (opposite top). The swimladder (top) also serves as an alternative way to enter the cockpit, where entry is also via twin transom gates. With this in-line galley setup (above right), the cook doesn't impede passage to the forward cabin between the dinette and galley (above).



Modern cruising yacht buyers demand homelike comforts and the Jeanneau 44i's pampering begins at the pointy end



The master cabin (left) is a clean, modern design. Aft cabins (above) are perfect "kids' zones". The tender (above right) can be carried on the foredeck without impeding headsail trim.

on a tight reach and held course without helm control unless there was a change in wind pressure. In these conditions the autopilot had very little correcting work to do.

The helm stations featured curved-top thwarts that proved very comfortable and ensured there was no need for the steerer to keep correcting posture as the boat oscillated in the varying wind. Aftermarket cushions were fitted to all the cockpit seats and have been a big hit with the Bollers.

One problem with a canvas-enclosed cockpit is mainsail stowage into a boom bag and *La Libertine* was no exception. We struggled to pack the sail, given its height from the deck with the boom necessarily swung out: hence the trend towards in-mast furling (a \$3K option on the 44i).

Manoeuvring into the marina berth was as easy as leaving it, with the bowthruster doing its bit to counter the crosswind. Easy berthing makes for good family fun.

winches were proportioned to suit the cruising role and were at their cranking-comfort limit when the heady was sheeted in hard: a pair of power winches is a 13-grand option that Jeanneau 44i twilight racers might like to call up.

The twin wheels had a solid, stable feel that made it very easy to walk from one to the other without worrying about the boat heading off course. With subtle adjustment of sheet tension the Jeanneau 44i could be balanced



CONSTRUCTION AND RIG

The 'i' in 44i indicates a Prisma Process resin-injected deck structure with discontinuous balsa block coring and ISO gelcoat surface. The hull is monolithic handlaid FRP, also with ISO gelcoat surface and with Kevlar reinforcement in the bow and front bulkhead sections.

Jeanneau uses a conventional deck-stepped aluminium mast, two-spreader rig on the 44i, with mast steps and a spinnaker pole track that allows vertical stowing. The standard boat has 1x19 standing rigging, gas-strut vang, a fixed backstay and cruising furler arrangement, while the Performance version has Dyform wire, Dyneema halyards and sheets, a slightly taller stick, longer boom, tackle-adjustable backstay and a lower-profile jib furler.

There's a choice of bolt-on bulb keels in shoal, standard and Performance drafts. Water storage is divided beneath forward and aft beds and fuel is stowed under an aft bed in readiness for a day or weekend of family fun. ⚓



The upgraded 75hp Yanmar diesel is a quiet runner.

Facts & figures

RUN DOWN

A competent, safe cruising yacht that's relatively easy for a small crew to handle. Home-like accommodation and plenty of relaxing space makes this an ideal French-designed family yacht.

PRICE AS TESTED

Approx \$407,000

OPTIONS FITTED

Custom bimini, 75hp engine upgrade, spray dodger and infill panel, freezer-fridge dual thermostat operation, microwave, two-burner stove with oven, additional 110amp/h house battery, 60amp battery charger, Bose system including cockpit speakers, twin ST-70 displays, LED navigation lights, vertical fridge door, powered cabin-top winch, autopilot, bowthruster, cockpit cushions, folding cockpit table, teak cockpit floor, mooring and anchoring kit, and steering wheel covers

PRICED FROM

\$354,695.72 (Jeanneau 2011 Promotion pricing)

GENERAL

MATERIAL: FRP hulls and decks (balsa resin composite deck and monolithic hull)
TYPE: Keelboat
LENGTH OVERALL: 13.75m
HULL LENGTH: 14.41m
WATERLINE LENGTH: 11.45m
BEAM: 4.37m
DRAFT: 2.05m (1.65m Shallow and 2.3m Performance optional)
WEIGHT: 9930kg
BALLAST: 2954kg (shallow-draft keel 3160kg; Performance-keel 2865kg)

LAYOUT



JEANNEAU SO 44i

CAPACITIES

BERTHS: Three or four double-cabin berths; two or three heads
FUEL: 240lt
WATER: 615lt
HOLDING TANK: 85lt

SAILS

MAINSAIL: 47.6m²; 52m² fully battened (Performance option)
HEADSAIL: 53m²
SPINNAKER: 120m²; 128m² (Performance option)

ENGINE

MAKE/MODEL: Yanmar 4JH5-CE; 4JH4-TE (optional)
TYPE: Diesel
RATED HP: 54hp; 75hp (optional)
PROP: Saildrive with fixed three-blade propeller (shaft-drive in test boat)

SUPPLIED BY

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FINAL REPORT

The Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 44i is a lot of cruising boat for the money. It's commodious, easy to sail, and ticks all the family fun boxes. Buyers opting for full-time dodger and bimini use would be better off with the furling mast option than the standard mainsail. Manoeuvrability under power is aided by an optional bowthruster and can be improved out of sight by choosing the Jeanneau 360-degree Docking kit.

360-DEGREE DOCKING

Although not fitted to the test boat, Jeanneau's newly announced 360-degree Docking system is an extra-cost option on all Jeanneau yachts from the 44 models upwards. This option has seen a change from Jeanneau's traditional shaft-drive to ZF's saildrive. The ZF leg can spin through a full circle, so in conjunction with a bowthruster can

"walk" the boat in any direction, including sideways, with simple joystick control from the helm position. The 360-degree Docking version of the Sun Odyssey 44i has a 2011 Promotion base-boat RRP of \$391,446.30, which is some 37K on top of the non-docking version, but in addition to the joystick module the Docking package



includes 75hp engine upgrade, autopilot, bowthruster and additional ST-70 display.