



The new Jeanneau 44i offers great sailing qualities in an innovative and comfortable cruising boat

By George Day

It was our sixth and last day in the B.V.I. aboard the brand new Jeanneau/Sunsail 44i, which was hull number one in the Caribbean. We had stopped in Soper's Hole for lunch and had a few hours before we had to have the boat back to the base in Road Town, so we took the time to go for one last sail in Sir Francis Drake Channel. We raised the main and rolled out the genoa just off West End and began beating into the easterly trade winds. It was lovely afternoon with a fairly flat sea and a pleasant 15 knots of wind right on our nose.

What made the sail even more fun was the Swan 48 that emerged from Soper's a few minutes after us. They

too raised and trimmed sail and began to pursue us. We had a brand new, untuned boat rigged for chartering. They had a grand prix racer with laminated sails. But like us, the 48 was sailed by a couple.

So, it was to our infinite glee that the 44i put her shoulder down and started to really chew up the miles to windward. We were sailing at just over 40 degrees to the true wind and making 7 to 7.2 knots. Behind us the Swan trimmed up nicely and began to reel us in but it was a slow pro-

cess. They were a little higher and a little faster, but we were going just fine. By the time we had tacked as far as Peter Island, we could lay the entrance to Road Town so we made our final tack. We thought we would cross the 48 but knew it would be close. Luffing the genoa trim as we tacked ensured that we wouldn't cross ahead of the 48 so the Swan—on port tack—had to dip behind our stern. As we passed, we shared big waves and big smiles.

There is something very special

Très Rapide! Très Jolie!

about two good boats sailing well together, competing a little, honing the sail trim, and we were pleased to be on one of the two out there.

That last day's sail served to cement in our minds the essential quality of the new Philippe Briand-designed 44i—here was a cruising boat that even experienced, competitive sailors will enjoy. For a week it had shown us all it could do. On our first day out, we jibed our way dead downwind from Road Town to the Bight at Norman's Island at a good 6 to 7 knots.

The next day we bashed 21 miles to windward in a rising breeze all the way to the Bitter End Yacht Club in North Sound, Virgin Gorda. We made five long tacks and covered the distance in less than four hours. Despite the larger rollers coming into the channel between Cooper Island and Virgin Gorda, we had very little water on deck and virtually no spray in the cockpit.

And then we spent a couple of days wending our way westward to Guana Island and Jost Van Dyke, always with the wind over our shoulders and always cruising at 6 knots or better. Given a fair breeze of 15 knots, the 44i really skips along.

Under power the boat handled easily and will go 8 knots if need be. The boat we sailed was fitted with a large, three-bladed fixed prop, so it had a pretty ferocious prop wash that tended to unbalance the spade rudder and created some hefty prop walk in reverse. But, a folding two or three blade prop, which is the right kind of prop for this design, would reduce drag while under sail and ameliorate the vices of the big fixed wheel.

Over six days of cruising and after sailing the 44i through a 60-mile circumnavigation of Tortola we were impressed with the design of the 44i and very enthusiastic about the qual-

ity and value that Jeanneau builds into their boats.

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

In 2007, Jeanneau commemorated the company's 50th anniversary and celebrated the fact that in those five decades the company has become one of the leading innovators in cruising boat design and construction. Over those years as well, Jeanneau has built many race winners and many high tech offshore boats for events such as the Route du Rhum, Transat, Mini Transat, Transat Jaques Vabre and even round the world races.

The technical know how and advanced construction techniques that go into the 44i and the rest of the present-day line of racing and cruising boats all flow from the innovations that set the company apart from the fleet of production builders.

The 44i was designed by Frenchman Philippe Briand who has been working with Jeanneau for 30 years. The design brief for the 44i was to create a performance cruising boat that is easy for a couple to cruise but

quick enough to be useful in off-shore events and around the buoys.

The hull form Briand designed has a full transom married to a fairly fine bow. The U-shaped hull form at the bow carries all the way aft so the run is very fair and true. With a 14-foot, four-inch beam and a 37-foot, six-inch waterline, the 44i has a beam-to-length ratio of 38 percent, which is moderate by modern standards. This type of hull form has plenty of initial stability and likes to be sailed fairly upright. We found that it responded well to a single reef when the apparent wind built to more than 20 knots.

The boat's stability and big boat feel underfoot comes from the placement of the bulb on the keel. The 44i's draft is six-feet, eight inches. That's deep by charter boat standards and even quite deep by general cruising boat standards. With the ballast bulb that low, the boat has a lot of righting moment that adds plenty of ultimate stability to the hull.

The boat has a displacement of 21,892 pounds and a displacement-

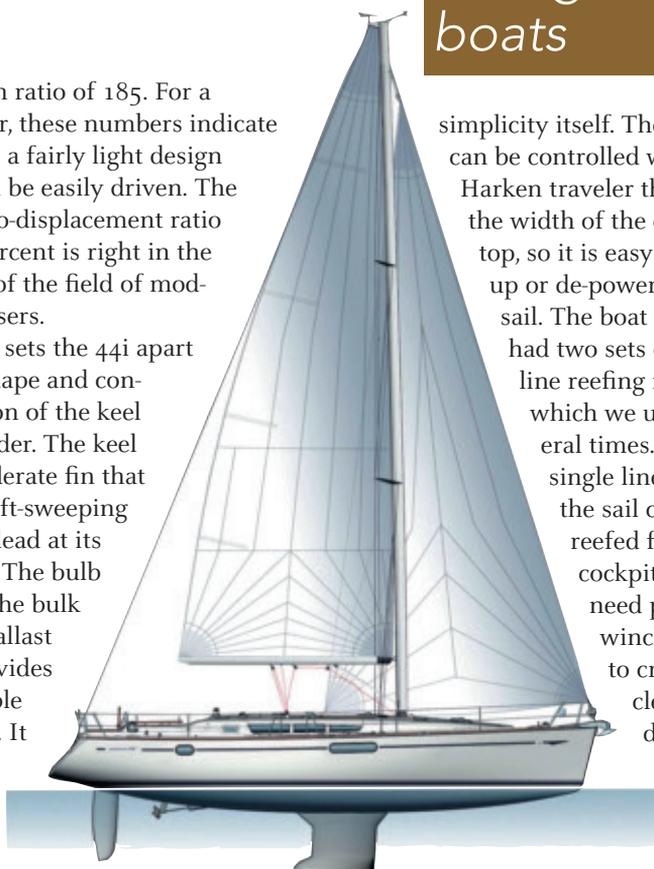
The 44i's dual helms offer great visibility and the sail plan is easily handled by a couple or even a singlehander



The technique reduces styrene emissions and creates a finished part that is fair and smooth on both sides—both lighter and stronger than hand-laminated boats

to-length ratio of 185. For a 44-footer, these numbers indicate that it is a fairly light design that will be easily driven. The ballast-to-displacement ratio of 30 percent is right in the middle of the field of modern cruisers.

What sets the 44i apart is the shape and configuration of the keel and rudder. The keel is a moderate fin that has an aft-sweeping bulb of lead at its bottom. The bulb carries the bulk of the ballast and provides noticeable stability. It also acts as an end plate



to the foil shape of the keel, which enhances the keel's lift as it moves through the water. This is part of the reason the boat sails so nicely to windward.

The high aspect spade rudder is quite large and deep. It provides a truly good bite on the water and a sense of confidence and authority at the helm. We had puffy conditions on the second day's beat up the channel but never felt the boat round up in the gusts, nor did the rudder lose its grip as the 44i heeled hard over. Instead, with the mainsail trimmed for balance the boat sailed as if on rails and was easy to steer.

The simple sloop rig with a slab reefed mainsail and a roller furling genoa on a twin spreader mast was

simplicity itself. The main can be controlled with a Harken traveler that runs the width of the cabin top, so it is easy to power up or de-power the big sail. The boat we sailed had two sets of single line reefing rigged, which we used several times. Like all single line systems, the sail could be reefed from the cockpit, but you need plenty of winch power to crank the clew line down

tightly. Sailing upwind in a breeze,

we found that the 44i sailed more upright and faster with one reef tied in as the apparent breeze got above 20 knots.

The 125-percent roller furling genoa was a good cruising sail and small enough for one person to handle both sheets during a tack. The sheet runs through adjustable cars on the side decks, so it was simple to move the cars forward and aft for different wind strengths and sailing angles. The sheeting angles are tight, which is the second half of the equation that makes the 44i close winded.

With a sail area-to-displacement ratio of 17.9, the 44i in cruising mode is not over canvassed but equipped with enough horsepower

to sail nicely and easily in a wide range of conditions. For those who want maximum performance for their boats, the 44i can also be built with a deeper keel and a taller performance rig.

As part of Group Beneteau, Jeanneau has access to the most advanced design and construction technology. The design and engineering of the 44i were developed using Catia 3D CAD software, which allows the designers in Briand's office and the engineers at Jeanneau to model out and spec every piece of the boat before the first layer of gel coat is laid down.

The molds for the hull and deck are constructed using a five-axial robotic shaping tool that literally sculpts the shapes that are fed to it through the CAD software. Once the molds for a new design have been built, the hull, deck and interior parts can be produced. Jeanneau has developed an advanced injection molding system called the Prisma Process, which allows the hull and deck to be molded in a vacuum between two mold forms. The technique reduces styrene emissions and creates a finished part that is fair and smooth on both sides. And, the parts—hull and deck—are both lighter and stronger than hand-laminated boats.

The 44i has a structural grid that is laminated into the hull on which the furniture is tabbed into place. The grid breaks the bilge into numerous smaller lockers all of which are connected with limber holes that lead to the small bilge sump on top of the keel. There was a little rain water in the bilge when we got aboard but we never had a problem



The bright and spacious interior is perfect for a charter or as a floating home. The charter version has four cabins, two fore and two aft, while the owner's version converts the forward cabins into a large master cabin

with it sloshing into lockers and the bilge pump removed it in about five seconds.

The engine sits on mounting frames that are integral to the interior grid. The soft engine mounts under the Yanmar diesel produced no vibration at cruising speeds and helped to keep the engine remarkably quiet. The shaft runs aft through a small skeg molded into the hull and a bronze strut so it is well supported and also protected by two cutlass bearings.

The production line on which the 44i is built looks more like a automobile factory than an old-style boat shop. Robots handle many of the cutting and drilling chores while technicians install preassembled gear, equipment and furniture. The Prima Process, advanced CAD tools and modern robotic manufacturing all combine to streamline and perfect the boat building process and allow Jeanneau and other modern builders to create advanced sailing

yachts that are also very solid values for your money.

LIVING ABOARD

We had six nights aboard the 44i, so we had a good opportunity to really experience how it served as a cruising home. There were only two of us to inhabit the four sleeping cabins so we rattled around a bit. And since we were in the B.V.I. and always anchored or moored next to a great restaurant, we did not do a lot of elaborate cooking.

The charter version of the 44i has twin aft cabins, two aft heads, twin forward cabins and a spacious saloon with the galley along the port side and the dinette to starboard. There are two other owner's versions that convert the forward cabins into either a large master stateroom with a centerline double berth or huge V-berth. In the four-cabin version and the V-berth version, small fold-up berths are available for children.

We slept in the starboard after

cabin and found it comfortable and roomy. Ventilation via the overhead deck hatch and two opening ports into the cockpit was adequate when the trade wind was blowing. But the cabin did become warm and airless without the breeze. The Hella fan at the foot of the berth helped on windless nights. One hot night we slept in the forward cabins with the overhead hatches open and felt the benefit of the breeze all night.

The in-line galley is a design feature that originated in the charter fleets because it clears space aft for a second large aft cabin and a second aft head. In-line galleys work well when moored or sailing downwind but are hard to use when the boat is heeled over. If the galley is on the downhill side, the sinks can flood and the cook is always leaning over the hot stove. When it is on the uphill side, the cook has to hang on with one hand.

The 44i solves these issues to a large extent by placing a firm back



The aft cabins, top, are comfortable for one or two and make excellent sea berths. The owner's version forward cabin can be designed with an island berth, above, or a large v-berth

and rail on the amidships seat at the dinette. The cook can lean against and hang on to it while the boat heels. Also, rails in front of the stove and along the counter front provide secure hand holds and protection from the stove.

Throughout the 44i, storage is beneath the berths and under the large settee of the dinette. The centerline seat will be home for most of the galley stores while spare parts and long term stores will find homes under the settee and under the forward berths.

On deck storage is good. The two lazarettes are voluminous and the seat lockers are big enough for a lot of deck gear despite the sleeping cab-

ins beneath them. The anchor locker in the forepeak is deep enough for two complete rodes plus a spare anchor and rode.

In the saloon, the outboard cabinets above the galley and behind the dinette are large enough for some provision storage and can also be used for mounting radios and home entertainment units.

Since we were sailing for only a week, we did not bring a lot of personal gear with us, so we found the storage in the after cabins to be more than adequate. And we found the locker space available around the galley ample for the supplies we brought aboard. The wine locker in the middle of the dinette's table

holds four bottles.

The heads on the 44i we sailed were compact and had hand-held shower units integrated into the sinks. In the tropics we tend to shower on the swim platform but we did shower in the heads in port once and found the system to work fine.

With 163 gallons of fresh water aboard we barely made a dent in our supply during the week. Had we been sailing with two or three other couples, that story might be different. The holding tanks for the heads are large and positioned above the waterline, which allows them to self-drain overboard when you are out at sea. You just have to remember to close the seacocks when you enter a harbor.

The interior finish of the 44i is warm and inviting. The woodwork is simple but of good quality. Bulkheads and the flat panels of the furniture are made of Alpi wood from Italy in a pattern known as FineTeak. The wood-grained laminate is more durable than real teak and does not require cutting down endangered stands of teak trees.

The overheads are fabric covered panels that can be removed to work on wiring or deck fittings. The underside of the decks and the cockpit moldings are as smooth and finished as the outside. This is the result of the injection system used while constructing the parts. Overall, the quality of the fiberglass work is very high throughout.

Spacious, light and attractive, the interior of the 44i offers a lot of accommodation in the 44-foot envelope. For a family of four or five, the four-cabin version will work well for chartering and coastal cruising. For couples or families living aboard for a while, the three-cabin version will work better.



The 44i is a Briand design and carries the designer's unmistakable elegance of line and proportion



Sunsail/Jeanneau 44i

LOA	43'11"
LWL	37'6"
Beam	14'4"
Draft (standard)	6'8"
Draft (shoal)	5'4"
Draft (perform)	7'6"
Displacement	21,892 lbs.
Ballast	6,512 lbs.
Sail area (standard)	875 sq. ft.
Sail area (perform)	980 sq. ft.
SA/D	17.9
D/L	185
B/L	38%
Water	163 gals.
Fuel	63 gals.
Designer	Philippe Briand

BWS THOUGHTS

The Jeanneau 44i may be the best sailing new charter boat we have sailed in a long while. It is handy around the docks, sails close to the wind, reaches off with gusto and can be handled easily by a couple or a singlehander.

The design has a lot of integrity and the construction has been undertaken with blue water sailing in mind. Once fitted out for ocean

sailing, we would not hesitate to sail the 44i across an ocean or race it in an offshore event.

Jeanneau has a long history of building stylish, high-quality boats. The 44i is a Briand design and carries the designer's unmistakable elegance of line and proportion and is one of the prettiest production fiberglass sloops we have seen in a long time. Très Rapide! Très Jolie! ≈

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