

Light wood interior is bright and airy; layout is conventional cruiser/racer.



Big shoes to fill

BENETEAU'S NEW FIRST 40 FOLLOWS IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE WILDLY SUCCESSFUL 40.7, BY ANDI ROBERTSON

THE new Farr designed First 40 is the follow up to an all-time best seller, the First 40.7. Beneteau's 40.7 became the industry standard racer/cruiser, the adaptable do-it-all keelboat which could and did win regattas and offshore races worldwide under a variety of handicap systems.

Despite the fact it was very much designed to an IMS brief, the 40.7 became an accomplished performer under IRC. It offered good value for money, held good resale values – and still does.

As they say, success breeds success. As numbers grew worldwide, so the reputation of the 40.7 as a no-nonsense, easily kept boat grew and grew.

Eleven years since the boat was launched, winning performers include *Sequana*, top individual boat at the 1998 Commodore's Cup, *Smile* and sistership *Fruit Machine* at the Kenwood Cup back in 2000, Michael Spies' *First National Real Estate*, the 2003 Rolex Sydney Hobart race winner under IRC, right through to Thierry Bouchard winning last year's Middle Sea Race on the First 40.7 *Ad Hoc*.

The honours have been many and widespread. There are now fleets racing worldwide including Australia, Spain, France, the United Kingdom and the USA, and at most major regattas there will be at least a handful of 40.7s slugging it out. Over 800 40.7s have been sold and the geographical spread is testament to

the genuine success of the design, not simply the selling power of Beneteau.

In an ever more condensed and competitive market, Beneteau needed to tread a pretty careful line with the replacement. They know, for example, that they have a worldwide market of 40.7 owners who simply want a newer, more modern and slightly quicker boat of the same size and genre. The Farr-designed 34.7 has never proven the success it could have been, and lessons have been learned. For that matter the First 44.7 met some resistance to its interior. The First 45 has sold well, 80 in the first year, and has sailed well while the First 50 perhaps represents too much of a compromise to cut it as a racer/cruiser, needing too much spent on it and a very good crew to be competitive against custom and semi-custom boats in an IRC arena (which is more of an arms race in that size range), but it has sold 80 boats over two years.

With these facts as a starting point it is little surprise that Beneteau commissioned Farr Yacht Design to a pretty tight brief. Same again, but more IRC friendly. Same kind of cockpit layout, same interior plan, but modern and IRC friendly.

Standing the test of time

The new First 40 shows the same hallmark styling references as the new First 45: the recessed, semi-hooded windows, the low deckline and sleeker freeboard.

In essence it looks everything that the 40.7s, the original "beachballs", are not.

Personally I think the 'Farr' transom ages the boat unnecessarily, but that is a purely subjective call.

In every respect the 40 is a good-looking boat which does have as broad an appeal as possible in terms of the appearance. Beneteau could have gone for something much more contemporary, but this boat is about creating something which will stand the test of time.

The size range is also critical. There are many owners of 40-footers who don't want to go bigger, including 40.7 owners within that group.

Compared with ten years ago, the market in this size range is probably more competitive, too. Up against the new First 40 on the European production yacht market, the Elan 410 is a very good boat, as is the X41 at more competitive prices than the more cruiser/racer Xs. The Archambault RC40 is more racer-orientated; also the J/122, and there there is the Grand Soleil 40 and the Dufour 40.

Inevitable comparisons

The new First 40 is stiffer than the 40.7, with 25 per cent more righting moment, while having a taller, high aspect rig and non-overlapping headsails. The hull is about a foot longer and is stiffer due to the newer build technologies. It is quicker on all points of sail.



ABOVE: Pressing on the symmetrical spinnaker; downwind performance was impressive.

LEFT: The new 40 is quicker than the 40.7 on all points of sail.

It was a delight to place in the waves and play around, almost like a grown up sportsboat but not quite as lively.

Typically the First 40.7 is rated under the IRC system with a TCC of around 1.060 to 1.073, while the new 40 is reckoned to come in around 1.088.

Just as with the First 45, there is a carbon rig option for the more serious racers, and the standard keel is T-shaped.

For this type of racer/cruiser the keel configuration is a slightly difficult call. The T-shape keel is taxed within the IRC hull factor, believed to be around 0.005 to 0.006 but the performance benefits are worth it. Also, according to Beneteau, most customers won't accept the draft of 2.5m or 2.6m that a deep fin would require on a boat like this, and the T-keel gives a draft of 2.45m, less wetted

surface and significant performance advantages, but there is a down side.

The hull shape is generally pretty moderate and appears beamier, lower and sleeker than the 40.7. The stern sections are quite powerful, but with a generous though shallow overhang to shorten the static waterline and reduce wetted surface in light to moderate conditions. As the boat heels a little and picks up speed it maximises the effective waterline length.

The shorter static waterline brings the wheel forward, typical of the modern IRC design. There is a payback in plenty of space behind the helm for a tactician's play area or even a nice flat sunbathing platform for those idyllic days away from the race course.

Rig and deck layout

The cockpit is generous and safe, a place to work efficiently. The wheel pedestal is cast steel A-shape to reduce weight and keep the centre of gravity low. Under the helm's feet is a generous cockpit sole locker, ideally suited to house the liferaft when required.

Access to the steering quadrant and for the emergency tiller could not be better, protected by a lift-up, locking flap.

The transom crossbeam is removable, as are the twin cockpit lockers.

The three-spreader rig is easily set up and controlled with a Navtec hydraulic PBO backstay, Dyform rigging on the aluminium rig, or solid rods on the carbon mast.

The standard jib is 106 per cent, but



Upwind it did not seem overly stiff and responded nicely and predictably to the puffs.



Light and bright interior

Down below, the layout by Nauta is very much the same as the 40.7, with the heads forward and to starboard, with access from the forecabin too. The light oak finished wood and ample natural light provide an airy, spacious feel.

The nav station has lots of flat surface area and easy access for mounting instruments.

The aft cabins are good too, spacious with 1.85m of headroom and decent-sized berths with fair hanging lockers.

The main saloon is spacious and would be very pleasant for evening meals while cruising, as well as providing a very comfortable option for staying onboard during regattas.

Overall it is not great for sail storage and working space and I felt a little vulnerable moving around downstairs and looking for hand-holds when the boat was well heeled.

Sailing performance

Beneteau insisted we test the new boat at their world press test in Marseille, rather than take the chance to sail one of the three race-prepared boats in La Trinite. I maintain that readers want an informed view of the actual performance in something close to race conditions, rather than a whirl around with media of widely differing levels of ability and interest. Also, presenting Boat 1 without the speedo calibrated could be a passport to all kinds of misinformation and suppositions.

But in fact we had to the opportunity to sail the new First 40 in different conditions across a morning and an

afternoon which gave a pretty good overall picture of the boat's potential.

In light conditions of 5-8 knots the boat seemed pleasingly quick all round. There was no obvious stickiness. It is very light on the helm and in the chop there were certain similarities to the 34.7. It certainly likes to speed build and get movement across the foils in the choppy Med conditions.

While just finding our feet (even Eric Ignouf, Beneteau's manager for the First projects, had not sailed the boat that much), it certainly seemed to like some depth in the jib to create a wider groove in the lighter breeze and sloppy seas. But once the boat was powered up upwind it was relatively easy to keep it tracking well, and quickly. It did not seem overly stiff and responded nicely and predictably to the puffs.

The high aspect rudder and very light steering does take some getting used to, especially upwind. Good co-operation and communication with the trimmers to keep the boat well powered up through the lulls is rewarded. Across the wind range it was noticeable how much difference it made having the finesse of Ignouf on the mainsheet. But, that said, it was also perfectly acceptable to just let the boat do its own thing upwind, and sail to an average course in fast cruising mode. The First 40 is still in every sense a utility cruiser/racer which will cruise happily.

Downwind and reaching in the lighter stuff, the same principles applied. Speed seemed to be everything, and again the one thing the First 40 did not seem to like was getting depowered, where it takes time to

there are additional full-length cars for a bigger genoa. The cruiser/racer option suggests a 135 per cent genoa, but the American PHRF system apparently accepts up to 155 per cent with very little penalty.

The headsail is sheeted through inhaulers, which the jib did not seem to require during our test sail. In flat water and moderate conditions with a good steerer I suspect there would be an advantage, but there are more situations where they would hamper the average club helm.

The mainsheet is a standard German A-style (bringing the sheet tails back along the sidedecks to the winches on each side of the cockpit) and there is a good, secure space for the mainsheet trimmer alongside the helm. The kick-bar footrests are extra, but definitely needed for active racers.

A small gripe: the engine throttle control on Boat 1 was sited directly in the small gap between the wheel and the starboard side of the cockpit, meaning you had to step over it to enjoy the best helming position with your legs to either side of the wheel.

Rig is taller, high aspect and with non-overlapping headsails; aluminium mast can be replaced by carbon fibre racing option.

LEFT: Best helming position is with legs either side of the big wheel.

BELOW LEFT: Transom crossbeam is removable; so are the cockpit lockers/seats.



get the foils powered up again. Certainly you'd guard against getting squeezed by the lee, say at turning gates and things like that, but overall these are all the traits of a boat which is necessarily aimed further up the performance curve than its predecessor.

Fresher conditions

In 15-22kts of breeze the First 40 was an absolute pleasure to sail. Even with just four of us it could be kept nicely balanced upwind in a moderate, choppy swell, just easing a couple of centimetres on the mainsheet from time to time. Upwind we could make a good 6.7kts to over 6.9kts on the GPS without too much effort and no weight on the rail, sailing moderately fat angles, and the boat was happy to be squeezed hard into 'high' mode, the light

helm and rudder area allowing a very precise and positive feel to be maintained. It seemed keen enough to hold its way through the tacks and accelerated evenly as you came out on the other side. In the biggest gusts we always felt there was rudder traction to spare, even if at times it perhaps took a little more helm application to get the initial response.

Downwind under kite with 20-22kts of breeze, the new First 40 was something of an eye-opener. It had an almost unexpected urgency. It was a delight to place in the waves and play around, almost like a grown up sportsboat but not quite as lively. In every respect it was responsive with nice, smooth acceleration, tidy water release and remaining always light and enjoyable on the helm. Only time will tell how much

Specifications

Length overall	12.58m
Length waterline	10.67m
Beam	3.89m

Draft	
Standard cast iron	1.95m
Deep draft lead bulb	2.45m

Displacement	
Standard keel	7536kg
Deep draft keel	7210kg

Ballast	
Standard keel	3342kg
Deep keel	2998kg

Sail areas	
Standard rig	
Mainsail	46.00sq m
Genoa 135%	52.00sq m
Symmetric spinnaker	128.00sq m
Optional regatta rig:	
Mainsail	50.00sq m
Genoa 106%	40.50sq m
Symmetric spinnaker	132.00sq m

Construction
Infusion moulded GRP/polyester/balsa sandwich deck and hull; structural counter moulding of unidirectional fabrics laminated to hull; deck/hull join screwed, stuck and banded with solid wood bulwark. Standard shallow keel of cast iron, or optional T-shape deep keel of cast iron with lead bulb. GRP rudder on GRP stock with self-aligning rocker bearings.

Engine	Yanmar 40hp diesel saildrive
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Capacities	
Water tankage	200lt
Fuel tankage	130lt

Price
From \$395,000 ex sails, instruments and options, or from \$460,000 for racing pack version ex sails.

Designer Farr Yacht Design

Interior designer Nauta Design

Builder
Chantiers Beneteau, Saint Hilaire de Riez, France; www.beneteau.com.

Australian distributor
Beneteau Vicsail, Rushcutters Bay, NSW.
Tel: (02) 9327 2088; www.vicsail.com.

more kite area the boat will take, but there was never any issue with control, even when pushing on to a tighter reach.

During its first time out on the race course, Gery Trentesaux's *Courier Zen* showed a clean pair of heels to the other 40-footers in light 5-10kt conditions, but on our evidence it's a boat which will be a pleasure and very rewarding to sail in more robust conditions.

In conclusion

In every respect the 40.7 is a tough act to follow. Beneteau seems to have produced a worthy successor in the new First 40. The cruiser/racer market is very much more competitive than when the 40.7 hit the spot at the right time, but the new boat ticks all the right boxes for both racing and cruising. 