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Bénéteau GT 50

Both versions of Bénéteau's new Gran Turismo flagship were at the Cannes show making their global debuts. By offering a sportscruiser and flybridge variant on the same hull, the yard is cleverly doubling the model's appeal and maximising the flexibility of its new tooling.

Whichever version you opt for, the IPS600 propulsion system, main-deck layout and two or three-cabin lower-deck configurations stay the same. The tender garage is also standard on both (a rarity on a flybridge of this size) and is large enough to carry a Williams Minijet, but the optional hydraulic bathing platform makes launching and recovering other water toys or going for a dip as easy as possible.

The cockpit and saloon merge seamlessly thanks to an unbroken run of seating down the port side and a small infill that can be removed to allow the cockpit doors to close.

The Nuvolari Lenard design is



Scissor-action berths in the forward VIP cabin



An unbroken run of seating runs from the saloon into the cockpit



Full beam owner's cabin is bright and spacious with full standing headroom



Standard of finish is noticeably higher than on Bénéteau's smaller boats

striking from the outside, with rakish glazing and sweeping beams of GRP detailing. The sheer amount of glass makes for an incredibly bright saloon and a very clear view from the smartly finished lower helm. It's noticeable that Bénéteau has worked hard to achieve a higher standard of finish on the GT 50 with plusher materials and more solid cabinetry.

Below decks, the midships master cabin is a real treat, with impressive headroom, plentiful storage and a generous, well-finished ensuite.

If you opt for the third cabin, the lower dinette is sacrificed but with such a comfortable saloon up top, this seems a price worth paying.

The flybridge on the sportfly version isn't enormous and it lacks a wet bar but it's well designed, provides plenty of seating and of course, a valuable upper-helm position.

Contact See Bénéteau website for dealers. Web: www.beneteau.com

AT A GLANCE

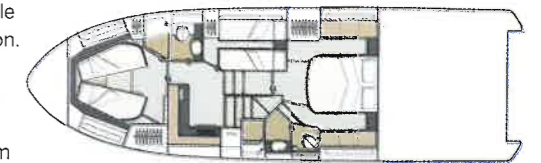
Length 51ft 9in (15.78m)

Beam 14ft 4in (4.38m)

Engines Volvo Penta IPS600

Top speed 30 knots (estimated)

Price from €645,000 inc VAT



Both the sportscruiser and flybridge version (here) share the same hull and cabin arrangements

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sportscruiser and flybridge versions
- Two or three cabins
- Tender garage standard



BÉNÉTEAU ST 35

Can the French firm's universally admired ST 34 be bettered?
We took the Swift Trawler 35 to Île de Ré to find out

Words **Jack Haines** Pictures **Paul Wyeth**

The original Swift Trawler 34 is one of the most successful boats that Bénéteau has built in recent memory, not only winning critical acclaim for its Tardis-like design and workmanlike charm, but also succeeding where it really matters – on the spreadsheets. Over 400 have been sold worldwide, accounting for around 40% of total Swift Trawler sales. It's a boat that makes you smile, pleases sailors and powerboaters alike and punches well above its weight both in the amount of space on board and what it can do out at sea.

Best of luck to the new Swift Trawler 35, then, which has the unenviable task of trying to improve on a design that already feels like it is doing the maximum with what a 37ft hull has to offer.

We meet the boat in La Rochelle, where it has just appeared at the Grand Pavois show. The plan is to dart over to Île de Ré for a night on board and then spend a day circumnavigating the island in a bid to really get beneath the skin of the 35 and see how

effective Bénéteau's updates have been. Five of us will sleep on board, eat on board, brush our teeth, use the loo, fill the wardrobes and use the boat as its designers intended.

First impressions are that the 35 lacks the traditional trawler charms that made the ST 34 so endearing. A radar arch has replaced the quirky if not particularly useful mast and the teak capping that adorned the 34's bulwarks is absent. Much easier to care for certainly, but not so quaint. It's more modern and shares a similar profile to the Swift Trawler 30, also penned by Nuvolari Lenard. The look is more muscular, more purposeful than the previous model and it hides its tubby frame more successfully.

We are met by Anne, Mathilde and skipper Ulysse from Bénéteau, who help us haul our bags and photography kit on board and down to the bunk-bed cabin that photographer Paul and I are sharing. Between the bunks, master cabin and pullout double bed in the saloon, there are six berths on the 35 and we will be filling five of them, testing the boat's sleeping and storage space to its limits.



The sofa in the saloon folds out to create a comfortable double bed



The master cabin is far brighter thanks to the extended windows, and the island bed is lower and much easier to climb in to



The master berth lifts on rams to reveal a large storage void. The heads, with its separate shower, is far better than the ST 34's

There is the option to have a fixed canopy in place of the folding bimini



It's 5pm and there's a 7pm lock gate to meet at Saint-Martin-de-Ré, where we have a berth for the evening so we cast off and after a short stop for diesel in Port des Minimes, are heading west towards the eastern tip of the island.

The lower helm position is familiar to anyone who has been on an ST 34 but the view out is even better. There is floor-to-ceiling glass on the starboard side of the saloon, bolstered by a full-height sliding door that is even wider than the 34's and leads out to a broader side deck. The real joy of this lower helm position is being able to stand and drive so comfortably, even for those well over 6ft tall. The twin helm bench is a good option for longer journeys where autopilot will take the strain but for shorter hops, standing with the ship-style wheel in your grasp is the way to go.

We pass beneath Pont de l'Île de Ré. Constructed in 1987, the bridge allows wealthy Parisians, happy to pay the €17 for the crossing in high season, a hassle-free route to the island and their weekend residences. Though the abandoned German bunkers of World War II provide a stark reminder of the island's past, today's Île de Ré is a peaceful, charming escape that hums with quintessentially French charm.

The revs are up to 2,800rpm and we're romping along at 16 knots, which feels about right as the 35's fast cruise. The Cummins 425hp tops out just above 3,000rpm so this speed ensures progress is quick enough without putting unnecessary strain on the motor. And what a motor it is. The temptation to fit one of Volvo's D6 engines must have been hard to resist but the barrel-chested torque of the single Cummins 6.7-litre diesel is what gave the 34 (and gives the 35) its robust, unflappable performance. Don't let the 'Swift' in Swift Trawler fool you – this is not a fast boat, but it will knuckle down and maintain its cruising speeds in big seas, as we were to discover.

The twisting walled entrance to Saint-Martin-de-Ré appears off our port beam and we enter the harbour with golden evening light illuminating the stone buildings with a tantalising glow of warm honey. We make a couple of passes past the local fishing fleet so that Paul can get some shots and then enter through the lock to take up the last berth in the harbour, perched alongside a small sailing yacht, backed on to the end of a pontoon. This is early October – what must the place be like in August?

Crewing the 35 could not be easier, whether you're single-handed or with multiple crew. Ideally you would always berth starboard side to so that the side door and bulwark gate are in play but even if you're forced to use the port side as we were, it's still very safe to move around and hang fenders on this raised side deck.

Being two boats out from the quay and a long way from the shorepower tower, we couldn't plug in, so the 12/220V inverter, part of a €17,790 lounge pack that also includes things like an electric windlass, Raymarine navigation kit and flybridge covers, came to the fore and meant we could plug our phones into their life cords.

We wander along the cobble-topped quaysides past thronging cafés and bars with locals and tourists enjoying the balmy autumnal evening, the church bell tolling faintly in the distance between the cries of wheeling gulls. If you have never been to Saint-Martin-de-Ré, make sure it's on your list; if you have, a return trip is probably already in the diary.

We find a backstreet eatery and tuck into fresh fish and a crisp bottle of white, before a nightcap or two of local cognac and Schweppes ensures we are ready to put our heads down.

The ST 35's blue decklights and LED downlighters lead us back to her and we set about getting ready for bed. Though the LED lighting is very efficient and undoubtedly powerful, not being able to dim their beams and an absence of indirect lighting means

the saloon is almost uncomfortably bright. The wall lamps of the ST 34, missing on the new model, would be an ideal solution. Another change is the enlarged cupboard space on the port side, which, though useful, means you can no longer walk around the end of the pullout bed when it's deployed. It is a very comfortable double, however, with a proper mattress and an optional (it really shouldn't be) curtain that means those using the bed have some privacy. The side door comes in handy as well because those in the cabins can rise in the morning, make a coffee and exit the saloon via the door without disturbing guests sleeping in the saloon.

DOWN TO BED

The bunks that Paul and I are in are tight, as they were on the ST 34. The top bunk is the most comfortable as it has more space above but an adult is unlikely to want to spend more than a couple of nights in either of them. For kids they are ideal. Small details frustrate though, such as the lack of a hook on the back of the door, which would be useful in a cabin this small, and the fact that only the top bunk gets a plug socket.

The early start and local drop take effect soon enough though, and we doze off with only the odd squeaky floorboard announcing our shipmates' movements to disturb the peace. The bathroom is a big improvement over the 34, which had a wet room and nasty plastic curtain where the 35 has a proper shower cubicle with a handy teak seat that covers the toilet when you're in shower mode.

The master cabin is far brighter thanks to the new Swift Trawler family extended windows and the island bed is lower and far easier to climb in to. These are small changes but they add up to more than the sum of their parts when it comes to day-to-day usability and enjoyment.

One of the simplest additions on the boat is the small cushioned perch in the galley, a place where people naturally stand on passage

The look of the ST 35 is more muscular, more purposeful than the previous model



The ST 35 in the shelter of La Rochelle after a testing passage around Ile de Ré



No need to adjust the throttle as the plucky Swift Trawler ploughs on, brow furrowed

37lph and the hull does a fine job of sheltering the boat's occupants from the effects of the conditions, shoving great sheets of water slapping back across the surface. There have been tweaks to the hull to improve dryness but there's no hope in conditions like this where the wind is picking up the deflected spray and hurling it across the windscreen. A quick flick of the mercifully simple-to-control wipers clears the view and we push on, our 8m Bénéteau Flyer chase boat doing an impressive job of keeping up and keeping its own occupants dry.

As we near the island's western edge and the chillingly isolated Phare des Baleineaux lighthouse, the water shallows, the wave height increases and the troughs deepen. This area boils with unspoken menace; it doesn't take much imagination to picture how nasty it can get here with its mix of shallows, rocks and its vulnerability to the seething power of the Atlantic. No need to adjust the throttle, though, as the plucky Swift Trawler battles on, brow furrowed. The engine's hum isn't totally disguised inside the saloon but on a day like this, it's comforting to have that monotonous, almost agricultural chunter beneath the floorboards.

We round the lighthouse and head downwind back towards the shelter of La Rochelle. Though the speed increases to a maximum of 19 knots, the boat wallows more than when we were taking it on the chin. That's a characteristic of this beamy hull shape and its prominent keel section, which tends to tramline in the troughs before straightening out and finding its path.

As the imposing towers of La Rochelle come into view, the time comes to reflect on what Bénéteau has achieved with the Swift Trawler 35. If you are one of the 400-odd people who bought a 34 then the changes made to the 35 don't warrant an immediate upgrade. The split transom, brighter master cabin and better bathroom are welcome but you can't sleep guests in any more comfort and the seakeeping and performance are exactly the same. If, however, you are in the market for a semi-displacement boat of this size then the Swift Trawler 35 is the one to beat.

I look back at it as we head to the hire car, caked in salt from a day splashing about in conditions that many other boats this size would have been far less composed in. The wooden trim and mast may have gone but the plucky Swift Trawler spirit is still there in abundance. **MBY**

Contact See Bénéteau website for dealers.
Web: www.beneteau.com

and now they can perch in more comfort next to those on the helm seat.

We wake to a blue, cloud-washed sky and enjoy a breakfast of coffee, jus d'orange and buttery croissants in the cockpit, an area where more major changes have taken place. The split transom first seen on the ST 30 is standard fit on the 35, though it's a shame the flip-down seats are a €2,000 option. With them in place, the usable cockpit space is almost doubled and means four or six people can sit around the table and dine. It's a clever and effective way of maintaining the 35's compact footprint but increasing living space.

With the outer harbour shorn of water, we have to wait until 2pm to lock out, so we take to the flybridge to soak up the sun. A flybridge that gains more fixed seating than the boat it replaces but loses some of the open space aft – reason being the tender is now stowed using swing davits on the transom so the overhang needn't be quite so large. Hauling the tender up to the top deck didn't suit everybody and that's been addressed on the 35. It's a shame in a way because this was a versatile space on the 34 but thankfully, there is still enough space to plonk some lounge chairs.

OUT TO SEA

A quick check of the oil and strainers, which is easy enough thanks to the large hatch in the saloon floor, and we fire up and prepare to drop our lines. The stern thruster is a €5,500 option but it's worth every penny because a single-engined boat with this much windage and such a big prop can be a bit of a brute to handle in a blow, even with the standard bow thruster.

We slip out of the harbour and into the teeth of a stiffening north-westerly and shortly spaced chop – Swift Trawler country. We drop back to 10 knots where the Cummins is sipping a mere

The split transom quickly extends the usable space in the beamy cockpit

The saloon table needs to be removed but access to the engine is good

Deputy editor Jack settles down for the night in the snug bunk bed cabin

The helm console lifts to grant easy access to the helm electronics

THE DATA

LENGTH OVERALL 37ft 0in (11.29m)

BEAM
13ft 3in
(4.03m)



The cockpit canopies stow neatly within the flybridge overhang coaming

This small perch is a good spot for a crew member to use on passage

The twin anchor lockers are deep but it would be useful if they were split

FUEL CAPACITY
176 imp gal (800 litres)
WATER CAPACITY
66 imp gal (300 litres)
DRAUGHT
3ft 10in (1.17m)
RCD CATEGORY
B for 8 people
DESIGNER
Bénéteau & Andreani Design
DISPLACEMENT
8.3 tonnes (light)

PERFORMANCE

TEST ENGINES Single Cummins QSB 6.7 425. 425hp @ 3,000rpm. 6-cylinder 6.7-litre diesel

FIGURES	ECO						FAST	MAX
RPM	1,200	1,600	2,000	2,200	2,600	2,800	3,000	3,075
Speed	6.6	8.2	9.3	10.0	13.2	15.7	18.2	19.0
LPH	6.7	13.9	28.5	36.6	50.9	62.5	71.7	75.3
GPH	1.5	3.1	6.3	8.1	11.2	13.7	15.7	16.6
MPG	4.48	2.68	1.48	1.24	1.18	1.14	1.15	1.15
Range	630	378	209	175	166	161	162	162

Speed in knots. GPH & MPG figures use imperial gallons. Range in manufacturer readings from on-board, your figures may vary considerably. All prices include French 20% VAT. Displacement of boat as tested 10.3 tonnes

COSTS & OPTIONS

Price from	€287,640 inc 20% VAT
Price as tested	€350,298 inc 20% VAT
Mooring and anchor kit	€1,254
Folding transom seats	€2,004
Telescopic davits	€3,588
Aft canopies	€5,478
Flybridge bimini and dodgers	€4,350
Foredeck cushion	€2,544
Stern thruster	€5,568
Diesel heating	€4,644
Lounge trim	€17,990

= Options on test boat

RIVALS

RHEA TRAWLER 36
Price from €380,000

Bags of charm, twin engines and a proper twin cabin. Pricier than the Swift Trawler but has the quality to match.



BAVARIA E34 FLY
Price from £220,000

Phenomenal value and blessed with two generous cabins. Unlikely to be as competent offshore, though.



HOWTO Helm downwind

MBY's definitive guide to boat handling. Watch the accompanying videos at mby.com/howto

Words **Jon Mendez** Pictures **Richard Langdon**

The design of the latest generation of hulls, along with the power-to-weight ratio of modern diesels, means most planing motor boats are astonishingly capable at travelling downwind in quite rough conditions. The large flared bow means you can drive them on to the rear face of each wave and hold it there until the weight pushes through and you can move on to the back of the next one.

Be aware that if the wind has been blowing in the same direction for more than a few hours, the waves generated can be moving at considerable speed. Travelling in the same direction as the wind, it's also

very easy to miss a gradual increase in wind speed and you can suddenly find that it's got very rough!

If this is the case, you need to consider how your vessel will handle the conditions if it becomes too rough to continue at planing speeds. If you have to slow to displacement speed, or if a problem means you need to turn back, reaching the nearest port might require a long upwind slog.

Craft which have a displacement or semi-displacement hull form need to be particularly cautious, especially if they have a wide, square stern, as this makes them more susceptible to being picked up by a large following

wave. If the stern is picked up and the boat starts to surf, this may cause the bow to be driven into the trough of the wave ahead, slewing the boat round.

To counter this, displacement and semi-displacement craft generally have larger rudders so the skipper needs to be ready to change the boat's heading as soon as they feel the stern being lifted.

Driving a planing boat downwind is relatively simple and usually involves

maintaining a straight course while applying enough power to get the boat riding up and over the waves. Even when tempted by flatter seas, don't travel at more than 2/3 throttle so that you have enough power in reserve to outrun any larger waves that do catch you.

SEE THE VIDEO



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