



Big Boat Review

# A boat for all seasons



The Prestige 500S combines European design with universal practicality to offer a great boat for the Aussie boating lifestyle.

By Graham Lloyd



It takes some intestinal fortitude to buy a boat sight-unseen, and even more so when it will be the first of its kind in the country. Add some extra courage when it's a 15m luxury sports cruiser nearing seven digits for the investment and you have the start of this happy-ending story.

It all began when work associates Brett and Darren entertained thoughts of upgrading from the 40ft sports cruiser they had been owner-sharing, along with Brett's wife Niki and sons Harrison and Tylor. The objective was to have some extra room on board and for a boat that could be enjoyed equally well in all seasons – the 40-footer being more suited to warmer weather.

That boat had been acquired through broker Matt Willett, who had done a superb job to the point of earning total trust from Darren and Brett. When a new boat was being considered, Darren approached Matt to advise them and first thoughts were for a 47ft sport yacht. But Matt believed that this Prestige 500S would perfectly suit Darren and Brett's family and he knew it could be shipped from the factory in time for the 2011 Sydney International Boat Show. After much examination of brochures and website information, and with some tempting negotiations by Matt, an enthusiastic consensus resulted in a contract being signed before the boat left the factory.



## *It was a bit of a leap of faith buying the first Prestige 500S in Australia sight-unseen*

Darren commented: "If it hadn't been for our knowing Matt, I wouldn't have done it. We had to have trust in him – he believed in the boat, he'd been there (to the factory) and seen it."

Brett added: "It was a bit of a leap of faith buying the first Prestige 500S in Australia sight-unseen, but we were relying on Matt's advice and expertise. There was an added advantage of the Volvo pod drives for docking, and with the engines further aft it allows the full-length stateroom in the middle, which gives the best accommodation package for our budget."

### HIGHLY REGARDED

Adding to their trust in Matt was an awareness of the boat's heritage. Prestige might not yet be a well-known brand in Australia, but the name is part of the Jeanneau group, which has been highly regarded in this country for many years, particularly amongst the sailing fraternity. And it is especially well regarded amongst the 2500 or so owners who enjoy the company's boats around the world.

With designs ranging from 30 to 65 feet, the brand's success has been based around the simple,

practical concepts of all living spaces being on one level, 360-degree panoramic views from the saloon, and the provision of a separate owner's suite. Indicative of the reputation that has been achieved, in 2010 the Prestige 60 was crowned "European Boat of the Year" by a panel of marine professionals.

Based in France, as is its parent Jeanneau, Prestige is as international as its boats' owners. French designers and engineers combine with the highly regarded Italian naval design team of Vittorio and Camillo Garroni, plus American and Swedish engine manufacturers and an American naval architect to craft each vessel. The company uses advanced Dassault Systèmes software in the design and development process, whilst digitally-controlled machinery and varnishing robots are amongst the advanced tools employed with skilled artisans to build every boat. Infusion-mouldings for hulls and other structures give significant weight savings without sacrificing strength.

Prestige boats are built in the same facility as Jeanneau power boats in the village of Les Herbiers. This 500S arrived in Australia in early July and was unloaded from the ship in Wollongong. Darren related: "I was lucky enough to go down with Matt to see the boat. It was off the ship on stands and we removed the protective plastic wrap, watched as the boat was craned into the water, put some fuel in the tanks and then I was on board for the delivery cruise up to Sydney."

After the boat had been officially launched at the Sydney show, and subsequently demonstrated to other potential clients (another 500S and a 500 Flybridge have already been ordered), it was delivered to Brett and Darren at the beginning of September. Darren then cruised it further north to its berth on Pittwater.

### PANORAMIC VIEWS

A light and very spacious saloon dominates the 500S and emphatically demonstrates the Prestige design goals of the living space being on one level and with all-round panoramic views. Huge windows run down each side, with an artistically raked and curved windscreen forward. U-shaped lounges to port frame a convertible coffee/dining table, and a 26in TV emerges from its cabinet at the front to catch up on your favourite show. There's another settee opposite so the saloon has loads of seating in which to relax and socialise.

*P160-161: The Prestige 500S makes an imposing sight as it powers along. The large windows/portholes in the hull sides allow more than usual natural light into the staterooms.*

*Page 161 inset: Pleasingly upholstered lounges are on both sides of the saloon, and the whole crew can relax to port with those super-sized windows giving wonderful views of the surrounding waters.*

*Above: Darren cruised the 500S from Sydney Harbour to its berth in Pittwater. The helm has seating for two with a full range of navigation and engine displays.*





*The aft cockpit has a U-shaped lounge and a table that converts, with an extra cushion, to a sunlounge. Overhead, a sun shade extends on powered rams to provide as much shelter as required.*

The helm station is to starboard at the front of the saloon beneath a full-width sunroof that electrically retracts to open up the entire front half of the cabin. When closed, the sunroof has two large skylights with slide-out blinds (more of those on the side windows, too), so there is total control of the amount of sunlight and fresh air that the crew can enjoy – or, equally, be protected from in adverse conditions. It delivers indoor-outdoor flexibility and was an important aspect for Brett and Darren in choosing the 500S as it does, indeed, give the opportunity to enjoy the boat all year round.

Niki mentioned: "I love the indoor-outdoor feel of the interior as it allows us to have a lot

more family time together – it works well. I'm really happy with our decision to buy the Prestige."

The helm has a double seat, with traditional dual throttle/shift controls to the side on a shelf that makes a welcome arm rest, and in front of those are the joystick and rocker-switches for the trim tabs. Brett noted: "We use the tabs to adjust the hull trim a bit, but it's pretty much set and forget."

There's a leather-rimmed tilt-adjustable wheel, with brushed stainless spokes surrounded by extensive electronics on the dash. As well as an autopilot screen and controls, dual Raymarine E120W display panels can be set for multiple uses, such as a GPS plotter, radar display or depth sounder. A feed from a camera can also be displayed. "We installed a camera at the back of the boat to more precisely watch the clearance when docking," Brett explained. "There is a small blind spot when backing into a berth caused by the full-height fridge and storage cabinet in the galley – the camera overcomes that."

Additionally, on the dash there's a display for the Volvo engine functions. Ahead of the wheel

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are twin analogue tachometers (with inset read-outs for engine hours), an rpm-synchronisation gauge and a Plastimo ship's compass. Low glare materials and finishes make the whole helm area attractive and prevent any reflections in the windows.

The galley is one step down at the aft rear of the saloon, with an L-shaped arrangement of the three-burner electric cooktop above a microwave oven on the side, with a twin-sink work-bench companionably facing forward into the saloon seating. In the back port corner is a large fridge/freezer. Removable panels over the cooktop and sinks increase bench workspace when needed.

### STORAGE-PLUS

There's plenty of storage in the galley and, indeed, throughout the entire boat, with lots of clever space utilisation and fitted storage where appropriate for items such as glasses and china. "We found that probably one of the greatest things about this boat is the excess of storage. We actually haven't filled it all yet," said Darren.

An unobtrusive staircase opposite the galley leads down to the amidships owner's stateroom, which employs the full beam of the boat to be as roomy as possible. An island queen bed still leaves

*Huge windows run down each side, with an artistically raked and curved windscreen forward*

space for a work desk on the port side that has facing seats beside a monster window featuring an inset porthole (matched to starboard) for keeping the area naturally lit. The ensuite is forward, with a basin, toilet and generous shower compartment. Darren commented: "I like the amidships cabin, which is much quieter at night without the sounds of slapping water on the hull that you get in a forward cabin."

The other sleeping areas are quite separate and entered down a staircase at the centre front of the saloon. Toward the bow is a second stateroom with island queen bed, whilst to port is a cabin with twin side-by-side berths. To starboard is a bathroom with entrance doors from both the small vestibule at the foot of the stairs and directly from the forward stateroom.

Everywhere aboard, the materials blend fabrics and woodwork in welcoming shades, with excellent workmanship and attention to detail.

*When closed, the large sunroof can keep the helm position and the entire saloon snugly enclosed against heat, cold or rain, but opening it in favourable conditions can make the 500S feel like an open dayboat.*



Separate air conditioning units service different areas of the boat.

Aft of the saloon is an open cockpit with a U-shaped lounge and high/low table that converts with extra cushions to be a sunlounge. Overhead, a powered shade extends out from under the saloon

roof overhang to provide as much or as little shelter from the sun as required – another good example of the all-seasons flexibility of the 500S design. A couple of steps with a security gate to port lead down to the wide boarding platform in front of which a large panel lifts on hydraulic rams to reveal the garage, with outboard-powered inflatable dinghy on launch rollers and with an electric retrieval arrangement.

### POWER PODS

Power is from dual Volvo IPS 600 straight-six 5.5lt turbo- and super-charged diesels rated at 435hp each and coupled to Volvo pods with jackshafts.

Access to the engines is through twin hatches in the sole of the cockpit; the engineering is world-class with good space for maintenance. The 500S has a bow thruster, but that's barely used as the computerised joystick control of the pods, with their counter-rotating forward-facing props, gives easy and masterful control of the boat.

"If you're used to operating throttles, gearshifts and the wheel with sterndrives or shaft drives, it takes a little while to adjust to a joystick," explained Brett. "Once you're used to it, it's fantastic. I think this is the way of the future – people new to boating will find the joystick easier."

The Volvo pod drives are known for their efficiency over more conventional drive systems. "This is double the weight of our previous boat, which had much the same engines, although with slightly less horsepower, but this is virtually as quick and uses only slightly more fuel," said Darren. "So the pods must be more efficient. At 22 knots (41km/h) in this boat, we're using about 110lt an hour, and in the old boat at the same revs we were doing 24 knots (44.5km/h) and using about 90lt an hour. So it's not that much different and we're in a much bigger boat."

*Concealed beneath the cockpit in its own dedicated space is the outboard-powered inflatable dinghy ready for fast launching.*

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The 500S comes with a healthy standard inventory, but Darren and Brett have 'Australianised' their boat, including fitting an inverter, cleats and rollers to the dinghy garage, a stern rail on the boarding platform and an electric barbecue.

## PEACEFUL CRUISING

During a run aboard the Prestige 500S, the benefit of good engineering and the positioning of the engines further aft to suit the pod drives resulted in a very quiet onboard ambience, with easy conversation possible right through to full speed. The ride was soft and smooth with a noticeable lack of vibration or harshness. The Volvo diesels spooled up without strain and the hull was soon slipping along at an easy cruise of 17 knots (31km/h) with 2200rpm on the tachos and the Volvo display recording fuel consumption at 86lt an hour. A faster cruise was achieved at 3000rpm for 23.5 knots (44km/h) and 118lt an hour, whilst top speed on the day of 28.9 knots (53.5km/h) came at 3500rpm and 166lt an hour.

"It's a very good boat to drive; very quiet, even at full rpm we can hold a normal conversation," Brett said.

Niki summed it all up very aptly: "Overnighting is very comfortable; the boat is very stable and excellent for sleeping, both for us and the children. We share with Darren across alternate weekends, but given that we're friends we also have occasions when we all go out together such as on Australia Day and New Year's Eve, when we celebrate and make it a bit festive. It's a holiday house on the water." 



*It's a holiday house on the water*

### SPECIFICATIONS: PRESTIGE 500S

Hull length:	14.92m
Overall length:	15.20m
Beam:	4.50m
Draft:	1.02m
Weight:	18,200kg
Sleeping capacity:	3 cabins, 6 persons
Fuel capacity:	1,300lt
Water capacity:	636lt
Power:	Twin Volvo IPS 600 (325kw, 435hp each)
Transmission:	Twin Volvo pod drives
Generator:	11kw
Base price from:	\$850,000

Performance:	
RPM	KNOTS
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More information: [www.prestigeaustralia.com](http://www.prestigeaustralia.com), tel (02) 9960 1112.

*Above left: The main stateroom is amidships for peaceful sleeping, or for Niki to make the most of a quiet time with a magazine.*

*Above: The galley is in the aft port area of the saloon where Niki can prepare a snack without missing out on the conversation.*