



PHOTOS PATRICK BOLLEN

# FRENCH DRESSING

French builder Jeanneau is steadily encroaching on the 50- to 60-foot turf dominated by a raft of big-name Euro brands. Our man **PATRICK "TENPIN" BOLLEN** heads to France for a first look at the new Prestige 550 flybridge model

**W**hen word gets out that something refreshing, new and exciting is about to hit the marketplace, everyone wonders with bated breath just what it could be.

A thrilling new powerboat had been developed by the French, employing the design talents of the Italians. I was intrigued to learn just what could possibly match the likes of established UK brands, such as Princess and Fairline.

I had to see for myself.

When erstwhile *Trade-a-Boat* editor David Lockwood phoned asking if I would be interested in going to France to attend the launch of the new Prestige range, well what do you think I said.

It was a no brainer.

## RAISING THE TRICOLOR

I started asking questions about what the French were up to. I got some sketchy information, a few brochures, some dialogue and a website. Could there really be a bright, new brand joining the competitive 50- to 60-foot powerboat market? A boat to take on the likes of the British models Fairline, Princess, and Sunseeker, not to mention the Italian designs Ferretti and Azimut.

Apparently there is and the French are very pleased with what they've produced and are now delivering to customers around the world.

The product, the result of years of research and development is a very stylish motoryacht that is eye-catching, elegant and distinctive.

Three new models were on display at the sprawling 37-acre Jeanneau factory in Les Herbiers, capital of the northern Vendee-Bocage (name given to the rolling countryside of fields and hedgerows characteristic of the region) province. Les Herbiers is one of the most dynamic areas in France, largely due to the enterprising spirit and solidarity of the Vendee.

## ENTER JEANNEAU

In 1957, Henri Jeanneau, a man who, passionate about motor cars and airplanes, soon discovered a new fervour, that of the powerboat.

Henri built a wooden hull and competed in a six-hour race to Paris, which he won. A couple of years later he employed the services of canoe builders and started building powerboats — so began the Jeanneau shipbuilding company.

Today, nearly 60 years later, what was once a fledgling boatbuilding



Opposite: A model of the new Jeanneau Prestige 550. Top: Toasting the new flybridge motoryacht are Jeanneau's director general Jean-Paul Chapeleau (third from right). Above: (L-R) Our man Patrick Bollen with Jeanneau sales director Asia-Pacific Paul Blanc and Australian agent Matt Willett.

hobby has become one of the biggest production-boat facilities in the world.

The Jeanneau boatbuilding operation now employs almost 2500 people, building and selling yachts, powerboats and the new Prestige range of luxury motorcraft. Jeanneau also has 300 agents in France and around the world.

Jeanneau dealers, customers and a select media representation recently attended a gala presentation hosted by Jean-Paul Chapeleau, director general of the company, and senior staff, who put on a spectacular occasion over three days to usher in the stunning new Prestige range of 50-, 55- and 60-foot powerboats.

On display under brilliant spotlights in a massive showroom at Les Herbiere and in full glory was build No.2, a gleaming white flybridge 55-footer. Hull One had already been sold to a Chinese buyer.

## ADD PRESTIGE

The first Prestige boat was built 20 years ago. The then new brand setting a benchmark in pleasure cruising.

"It is a brand with vision, creating a line of motoryachts combining

exceptional seaworthiness and contemporary design, while preserving traditional maritime values," says Chapeleau.

In short, the new Prestige range simply delivers a beautiful boat. The name alone guarantees a quality, exclusive to the world of luxury yachts.

When I first laid eyes on the Jeanneau Prestige 550, I was knocked out by her sleek lines and lovely sheer. Everything just seems to come together.

The Prestige design comes from the drawing boards of the Italian Garroni Design Group in Genoa.

"Design is something that is very personal. I take my inspiration from cars. It's about the line," says Camillo Garroni, the son of naval architect and Garroni Group founder Vittorio.

"I believe that when you are on the water you must always be able to see the sea, hence the big windows in the topsides," he adds.

## OZ FACTOR

The panorama window is something Australian designers Phil Curran and Jon Bannenberg introduced to yacht design back in 1986, with the



spectacular superyacht *Parts VI* now *Madibue*.

The Prestige 550 is a voluminous boat. "It is the best boat for life inside," Garroni says.

The new Prestige truly is a magnificent craft. From stem to stern this stunning motoryacht exudes style; her lines are a pleasure to behold. Follow the sheer and the whole boat draws your eyes aft giving the impression of speed, even when she is lying alongside or sitting quietly on a mooring.

The foredeck is long, incorporating a sun lounge that includes a folding bench seat and a sun awning that can be erected in a moment providing good shelter from the hot summer UVs, all the time allowing for a draft breeze to cool guests stretching out on the soft and comfortable sunbed.

The flybridge is exceptional for a boat this size and has twin seating at the helm located on the port side, a huge sunbed, a galley and seating for six on a surround lounge around a beautiful raw teak dining table. By the way, another characteristic of this boat is the 12mm teak decking from stem to stern.

Off the transom is a huge hydraulic swimplatform and pivoting passerelle, while the aft deck offers a terrific entertaining area with comfortable lounge across the transom and a beautiful teak table.

The main saloon is where Prestige have excelled, creating an immense open living space on a single level, incorporating the pilothouse and cockpit, plus a brilliant galley centrally located to serve both the interior and the exterior. The chef is no longer separated from the entertainment and his/her guests.

**BEST BELOW**

Down below is the *piece de resistance*. The owner's stateroom is the best there is in this range of boats. The cabin features a large, lateral window in the hull flooding the room in natural light, while affording a fabulous view of the sea outside. It is, to say the least, enormous, light, sumptuous and bright, featuring a king-size double berth, a lavish en suite and walk-in robe plus all the mod cons to make life aboard a very special experience.

The guest quarters comprise a double cabin midships that allows

Top left: The saloon on the Prestige 550 features an aft galley. Left: The 550's owner's cabin. Opposite: Jeanneau staged a gala presentation for its new Prestige models.



THE JEANNEAU BOATBUILDING OPERATION NOW EMPLOYS ALMOST 2500 PEOPLE, BUILDING AND SELLING YACHTS, POWERBOATS AND THE NEW PRESTIGE RANGE OF LUXURY MOTORCRAFT. JEANNEAU ALSO HAS 300 AGENTS IN FRANCE AND AROUND THE WORLD

the berths to be converted to singles and a big, luxurious double bed in the forward section of the boat that can also be converted into two singles. The forward guest cabin also boasts a splendid en suite. All cabins are air-conditioned.

As a commercial skipper, I am impressed with the business end of the Jeanneau Prestige 550.

The pilothouse is exceptional providing the helm with a 360-degree panoramic view at all times when underway, at anchor or in port. It features a two-person helm station, two large multifunctional navigation displays, all the best nav aids and instruments. These facilitate good control and maintain an excellent watch, with engine throttle controls and joystick well located and within easy reach.

### ENGINE ROOM TICKS

Again from a skipper's point of view, I was very impressed with the space and full headroom in the well laid-out engine bay. Here are housed two generators, accessible battery banks, fuel tanks, electrical systems and a pair of powerful and highly efficient Cummins QSC 8.3-600 diesel motors capable of delivering a top speed of 30kts at 238lt/h or a cruising speed of 24kts at 193lt/h.

The Cummins MerCruiser diesel

operation is supported with a superior electronic engine-control system through the innovative Digital Throttle and Shift (DTS) function. This ensures the operator a simpler, easier and enjoyable boating experience.

The advantages of DTS are clear, offering gearshift protection in smoother, faster engagement and acceleration, eliminating the more abrupt shifts so common with mechanical systems, plus it stops the boat quicker.

The shaftdriven boat is a thing of the past on the new Prestige range. The boatbuilding team has incorporated the new Zeus pod-drive system, which gives the owner/operator better protection from flotsam, improved manoeuvrability and incredible performance.

Each pod turns independently resulting in greater turning efficiency. Hydraulic power steers the pods and actuates integrated trim tabs, delivering responsive acceleration and performance and best of all, improved fuel economy.

The best feature of the pod's counter-rotating propellers is that the worry of docking is now also a thing of the past. Using the joystick control, a boater can now pull-up at a dock, align his new Prestige to the berth, rotate the props port or starboard and simply

manoeuvre the boat sideways or aft until safely alongside or stern-to the mooring.

Jeanneau's Prestige range of boats is impressive and I am sure will be a big asset to the boating community right around the world. There are plans on the board to build 70- and 80-foot models.

### NEW SAILS

While the Jeanneau management team spent the afternoon chatting with agents and potential buyers, I took a sneak peek at the yacht factory and the new Sun Odyssey 44 DS keelboat.

What an incredible operation it is, from moulding to finished product, and like the Prestige range, the Sun Odyssey sailboat models are just as fantastic.

Before I left France on the long, long flight back to the land of Oz via the UAE, I was privileged to take the new 44 DS on a test sail out of Les Sables on the Bay of Biscay. This was a thrill and aboard another exciting Jeanneau pleasureboat. (I will bring you that story in a forthcoming issue of *Trade-a-Boat*).

Until then, remember one hand for you and one hand for the boat. Happy and safe boating everyone. 🍷

Below: Flybridge helm on the Prestige 500. Right: The boat includes this nifty pull-out sunshade for the foredeck sunpad.



## QuickSpecs

JEANNEAU  
PRESTIGE 550

**MATERIAL:** GRP  
**TYPE:** Planing monohull  
**LENGTH OVERALL:** 17.92m  
**HULL LENGTH:** 16.06m  
**BEAM:** 4.79m  
**DRAFT:** 1.17m  
**WEIGHT:** 17,700kg (dry)  
**FUEL:** 1930lt  
**WATER:** 800lt  
**CABINS:** 3  
**ENGINE:** 2 x Cummins QSC 8.3  
**REC. MAX SPEED:** 30kts  
**REC. CRUISING SPEED:** 24kts