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Safety gear workshop

Southampton-based equipment supplier Ocean Safety will be running a servicing and safety workshop on 15 and 16 February, offering a chance for yachtsmen to familiarise themselves with safety gear, get advice on buying and see their liferaft and lifejackets being inflated and checked. Book a place from Service@oceansafety.com



Best yachts of 2020

The Amel 60, Dehler 30 OD, X 4.0, Oceanis 30.1 and the radical ClubSwan 36 were named European Yachts of the Year 2020 at Boot Düsseldorf in January.

The five yachts were chosen as category winners from a shortlist of 15 nominees, which represented a mix of fresh designs this year. A race yacht category was created for the first time, reflecting the surge in exciting designs for short-handed offshore racing.

For the first time the 12-strong jury, of which *Yachting World* has been a member since the foundation of the awards in 2004, was able to gather all the shortlisted yachts together in one location. Jury members each sailed every yacht during six days of testing from Port Ginesta, Barcelona.

The result is the most influential and widely respected boatbuilding prize globally. Toby Hodges details all the nominees on page 58.



Rick Tomlinson

Rick Tomlinson

Julien Gazeau

Rick Tomlinson

Rick Tomlinson



Above: the X 4.0 offers supreme balance, perfectly combining performance and practicality. Easy to handle and spacious for cruising, it can easily be tuned to race

Below: the First 53, with its aggressive shape and on-trend styling, is a lot of boat for €480,000, although the test boat with carbon mast, deep keel and 3Di sails cost €850,000



The X 4.0 has a well specified saloon with long berths, a decent galley and plenty of headroom



Curved corners and fiddles of the Beneteau First 53 sees a return to more traditional joiner work

PERFORMANCE CRUISERS

NOMINEES:

Beneteau First 53 // Italia Yachts 11.98
RM 1180 // X 4.0

In recent years performance cruisers have moved away from conventional cruiser-racers to fast and fun yachts with leisure-orientated decks and comfortable interiors. These boats can be handled easily, are a joy to sail at pace and may be optimised for occasional racing. And they always make for one of the tightest and most exciting categories.

The Italia 11.98 is perhaps the nominee slightly at odds with this description in that it prioritises the racing aspect – the second hull won the ORC Worlds soon after launch. Designer Matteo Polli explained that the company wanted to make this model competitive across the full wind range while still being straightforward to sail.

Unfortunately this was the only trial for which I had no wind at all. However, with only white sails hoisted, the 11.98 never stopped ghosting along, while all other yachts were parked up or motoring. No surprise then that those judges who sailed it in proper breeze were quickly smitten.

A deep rudder allows you to push it hard without

having to reef early and the deck layout is impressive, in that any winch can handle most operations without chafing surfaces. Below decks is a light, stylish and very Italian looking interior, albeit compact, in three cabins and two heads.

Converseley, the new First 53 is not out of the First 40.7-type cruiser-racer stable, but aimed more at the luxury fast cruising end of the performance spectrum. Despite the aggressive, modern look there's no traveller and the winches are designed to be in reach of the helmsman and used by short-handed crews rather than race teams.

You might expect this all-Italian design to come from a yard like Grand Soleil or Solaris, but it is designed and built to undercut such competition. Beneteau argues that the 5m/16ft 4in beam of the 53 provides the volume of a typical 55 but for the price of a 50.

‘These boats can be handled easily and are a joy to sail at pace’



Julien Gazeau

The Beneteau Oceanis 30.1 is a clever design that packs in the features on deck and below to provide appeal to lake and sea sailors alike – all at a modest price



Beneteau



The aft helms of the sporty Excess 15 work well but there were issues with steering. Price from: €625,000



The Neel 47's fine bows contribute to good performance, but the finish of the test boat let it down. Price: €449,000

FAMILY CRUISERS
NOMINEES

Beneteau Oceanis 30.1 // Elan Impression 45.1
Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 410

This year's family cruiser category arguably reflects the rather stagnant state of the midsize production cruising yacht market. The nominees comprise an entry-level value-for-money offering, a refined example of a successful formula from Jeanneau and a reworking of a 16-year old, albeit highly popular, model from Elan.

The Sun Odyssey 410 takes some of the main features that made the SO440 and SO490 so popular, including the full bow shape and walkaround deck, and fits them into a voluminous 41-footer. A key addition is the option of a lifting keel – a pity then that the yard wasn't able to provide that version to test.

Elan has sold around 500 of its Humphreys-designed Impression 434/444, mostly into charter, since its 2004 launch. So it knew it had a proven recipe when reconfiguring the hull mould to produce the 45.1. The transom was straightened to create a larger cockpit and walkthrough access to a swim platform and a new interior and deck saloon was designed.

The result is a lot of respectably built and finished boat with plenty of options for a good price. It just looks and feels a little dated now compared with the competition.

WINNER: BENETEAU OCEANIS 30.1

Credit to Beneteau for addressing the entry-level market with a modern, easy-to-handle, spacious and affordable 30ft cruiser. Built in Poland, a clever hull shape buys volume, the cockpit and rig design make it super easy

to sail, while an options list that includes four different keels will attract sea and lake sailors alike.

This smart Finot Conq and Nauta design marries the successful blend of performance and volume found in the 46.1, the latter particularly felt in the forward ends, together with an easy to handle sailplan. The test boat had a square top main and genoa, but an in-mast main and self-tacking jib are optional. It needs tuning – a saggy forestay and a lack of pointing ability were the downsides of not doing so during our sail for example. But twin rudders make it light and assured on the helm.

Tall headroom, saloon berths long enough to sleep on and an L-shaped galley is all somehow fitted in below decks. And the sub 3m beam, shoal draught and a mast rotating system allow the yacht to be trailed.

Verdict: The 30.1 provides the space of a 35-footer from yesteryear in an appealing, small family yacht on which to enjoy simple sailing and overnighting.

Price from €69,400.



Jeanneau has produced a very well-rounded yacht in its Sun Odyssey 410, which is fun to sail and boasts plenty of space. The lift keel option has promising potential. Price: €167,800

MULTIHULLS

NOMINEES: Excess 15 // Lagoon 46 // Neel 47

Despite the recent explosion in numbers of new cruising multihulls, this was a disappointing category this year. The Lagoon wasn't able to make the trials and we had concerns over steering issues with the Excess and the finish quality of the Neel 47.

We featured a report on the Excess 15 last month, the first boat from this new catamaran brand. Although it has many promising aspects, such as very appealing, bright and voluminous accommodation, the jury submitted a number of concerns to Groupe Beneteau, including excess rudder pressure in stronger breeze. It has responded professionally, and the jury's concerns have led to scrutiny of the design and engineering of the production models. Future builds will have modifications to the rudders, for example, and will be issued with tuning guides as a result.

The Neel 47, meanwhile is the boat that frustrates me, as I am a real fan of the design and concept of this trimaran. The sailing performance is undeniably better than a comparable cruising cat – indeed this model proved itself by winning line honours in ARC+ 2019.

However the finish quality of the test boat was unacceptably poor: too many sharp edges, an over-reliance on mastic, misaligned joinery and areas that are too bare and minimalist for purpose.

Note: all prices are base prices ex VAT



The Elan Impression 45.1 is an update of the tried and tested 444, however new models are due this year from this Slovenian yard. Price from €205,900 for the standard three-cabin version with iroko finish

'Credit to Beneteau for an affordable 30ft boat'