



FRENCH EVOLUTION

Normally confined to rag-and-stick boats, **ALLAN WHITING** found himself aboard the latest Beneteau Swift Trawler 44 in the south of France

The editor doesn't normally let me loose near powerboats, but he figured the Beneteau Swift Trawler 44 was a safe enough prospect, because it comes with a short aft mast and boom. It's even got a cute little halyard winch and a couple of rope clutches. Yes, I know they're there only to lower and retrieve the dinghy, but it's sailing kit, nonetheless.

I don't know why he thinks I'm so prejudiced, because I

like many powerboat styles; particularly ones like the new Swift, with its upright, practical stance and Scuffy the Tugboat attitude. It says: "Can do!" quite loudly, I think.

Alongside a Swift 42, the new 44 looks like a generational change, but it's more of an evolution, because the hull shapes are virtually the same, with the 44's extra length coming from its swimplatform. The moulded waterline and mid-hull strakes are similar, but three

of the 42's six, traditional, round hull ports have been replaced by larger port glasses, with small opening sections.

It's a clever upgrade of a hull that's far from broke, so Beneteau didn't try to 'fix' it. And, of course, bigger portlights are all the rage in powerboat hulls.

CABIN DRIFT

Above decks and inside, it's a different boat, with new upper works and interior fittings, signalled by vertical



The cockpit (above) is spacious and features an L-shaped lounge to port, alongside a transom gate to the swimplatform, incorporating a concealed boarding ladder (above left). Up top, stylish, S-shaped cupholders (left) adorn the flybridge table.

main cabin glass with dark frames. Talking with some of the Beneteau design crew I learnt that there was more to be gained by the adoption of upright cabin windows than a pugnacious appearance and additional sun protection. Vertical screens allowed the designers to pick-up valuable main cabin and flybridge area, but just as importantly, move the boat's centre of gravity forward, to improve its balance. Side-on views of the 42 and 44 clearly show this forward cabin movement.

The swimplatform makes light work of stepping aboard, whether the boat is moored beam-to or stern-to, and the transom gate leads to a spacious cockpit, flanked by an L-shaped lounge. An optional genset

was fitted to the test boat, in a lidded cockpit box. A teak-stainless steel ladder leads to the flybridge, where there are adjustable pilot and co-pilot seats, an L-shaped lounge/dinette and a bench seat. A section of the ladder lifts on gas struts, to reveal a large gas-bottle bin.

On the flybridge, there's the already mentioned tender-handling mast and boom, and a moulded module with a sink under a lift-up lid and storage cupboards below. Eight can sit comfortably on the flybridge (ED: not subject to NSW state waterways legislation) for a social gathering at anchor.

A black-framed sliding door opens from the cockpit into the saloon, where tinted glazing does nothing to diminish the light, airy feel. There's a central, centre-pedestal table that packs away to allow the sofa to become a double bed and a pair of folding armchairs and a pouffe, so four can sit around the

table; six at a squeeze. Opposite the sofa are a TV wall unit, cupboards and a fiddled bench, with a return that houses the U-shaped galley's double sink. The galley was equipped with an oven and a three-burner gas cooktop.

When it comes to saloon space a steering station is a necessary evil, but Beneteau has done its best to minimise the intrusion on the living area, while preserving helm ergonomics. The dashboard and wheel are high-set and so is the two-place skipper's perch. Wheel-height suits standing steering and seated control, thanks to a footrest at the base of the steering wheel console. A 130lt fridge slots neatly under the helm bench and when the boat is at rest the seat cushion folds forward onto the dashboard, exposing handy bench space directly above the fridge.

Between the galley and the steering station a shallow stairway leads to the dayhead and two cabins. The owners' suite is for'ard, where new, expanded hull ports provide much more natural light than in the Swift 42's cabin. There are two wardrobes, shelves and under-bed storage and a door to the compact forward head and shower.

Adjacent to this bathroom is the dayhead and opposite is the guests' somewhat squeezey double cabin. I reckon guests

WITH ITS EMPHASIS ON REDUCING THE OPERATING COSTS OF A 44-FOOTER, BENETEAU MAY JUST HAVE COME UP WITH WHAT THE POST-GFC BOATING WORLD IS LOOKING FOR. WE'LL SOON SEE



Upright cabin windows gives the Swift Trawler 44 (top) a pugnacious appearance, but this intentional design shifts the centre of gravity forward, improving balance. External ladder leads from the cockpit, through a tinted acrylic hatch to the flybridge (above left), where skipper and navigator are comfortably ensconced in adjustable bucket seats (above right) at the upper helm.

[FAST FACTS]

▶ A lightweight, high-performance hull and engine package now topped by classy superstructure and accommodation make the Swift Trawler 44 an ideal entertainer, coastal cruiser and family holiday boat. It's a relative fuel miser but is quick enough to embarrass many craft with a supposedly sporting mission.



Opposite the lower helm is a U-shaped galley (above), incorporating sink, oven, three-burn gas stove and fridge (left).

would be more comfy (and be freer to snore) on the saloon night 'n' day!

The Swift Trawler 44 has bulwarks, with a small, port-side stair near the cockpit and a higher, starboard stair just in front of the helmsperson's sliding cabin door. The bulwarked walkway sides taper down to toerails on the foredeck, but the survey-height stainless steel railing is reassuringly sturdy. On the test boat this spacious foredeck was fitted with an optional sun mattress.

THE POWERHOUSE

The Swift Trawler 44 continues the lightweight, easily-driven hull concept pioneered by the 42, so it's not surprising to find it can manage 27kts top speed, powered by a pair of relatively small Volvo Penta D4s, rated at 300hp (220kW) each.

In the interests of getting weight forward, the engine bay is under the saloon floor, squeezing it between the flattish bilge of what is a planing hull and a saloon floor that needs to be strong enough to support a Rugby team. The result is an engine room in which you would want to spend the least possible time. Inevitably, the ideal service animal down here would be a multi-skilled octopus.

I know engine makers have

many design constraints on them, but wouldn't it be nice to have regular service items like filters in movable blocks that can be set-up for central access in port and starboard installations? Also, I searched in vain for a water-in-fuel sender and dashboard-mounted alarm — maybe the Europeans don't have this problem.

The engines drink sparingly from twin 750lt aluminium tanks, located under the saloon sole as close to amidships as possible, with filters accessible through lift-up panels. The stainless steel fillers are cleverly hidden away under the starboard deck walkway steps, beneath a

lift-up lid that hides a shallow sump to catch any drips from the fuel nozzle.

If engine access isn't brilliant that's due in part to 40mm-thick insulation everywhere possible and the result is quite low engine intrusion in the saloon. In the common 2500 to 3500rpm band we recorded only 75 to 78dBA at the steering station.

It's possible that Beneteau was on the correct boat-future track seven years ago, when it adopted a lightweight formula for the Swift Trawler range. Back then durability was probably the major unknown with the original Beneteau Swift Trawler lightweight concept, because

IT'S A RELATIVE FUEL MISER BUT IS QUICK ENOUGH TO EMBARRASS MANY CRAFT WITH A SUPPOSEDLY SPORTING MISSION

The tight guest's double cabin (above left) is to port and opposite the dayhead (below right), while new, elongated hull ports provide more natural light to the forward owner's cabin (above right). Sea trials on the Swift Trawler 44 (below) show minimal variation in fuel consumption at speeds between 12 and 23kts.

HIGHS

- › Performance
- › Lightweight design leads to low fuel consumption
- › Flexibility of design purpose, from cruising to 'flying'
- › Handling qualities
- › Low interior noise levels

LOWS

- › Cramped second bedroom
- › Tight engine room
- › Lack of handholds on flybridge





it certainly ticked all the other boxes.

Several years on, well-cared-for Swift Trawler 42s seem to be holding their value quite well, so this augurs nicely for the new 44. Of course, in these days of rising diesel prices economy is a major purchase criteria for power boats. And trawlers traditionally sip rather than swig. 🍷

“TRAWLER? IT SURE DIDN'T BEHAVE LIKE ANY TRAWLER I'VE HANDLED

Outdoors, you can socialise up top in the entertainer's flybridge with L-shaped lounge and table (above left) or go forward and soak up some rays on the fore cabin's huge sunlounge (above right). Mast and boom takes care of tender handling, as well as adding nautical charm.



Facts & figures

BENETEAU SWIFT TRAWLER 44

PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

As *Trade-a-Boat* discovered back in 2004 the Swift Trawler is exactly what the name says: it looks like a trawler, but it's swift. From the flybridge pilot's seat it's difficult to reconcile the fact that you're in a trawler, when the speed at WOT, with brand-new engines and eight people onboard, is touching 25kts, while the boat is sitting slightly bow-up on the water. Push it into a turn at that speed and it complies without any indication that it has too much bulk and windage aloft to handle like a sportsboat. It cut through the Med's notorious chop and the wake-induced slop from the photo boat without reacting, other than dousing the flybridge occupants with a fair amount of spray.

I chucked it around like a small craft and found no handling vices. It performed tight turns with both engines full-ahead in around three boat lengths. Trawler? It sure didn't behave like any trawler I've handled.

Beneteau points out that the 44 comes into its own against most of its competitors when the speed hits around 12kts. Its lightweight, easily-driven hull starts to lift clear of the suction and fuel usage stabilises.

Volvo's sea trials show fuel consumption almost constant at boat speeds between 12 and 23kts, at a rate of only about 38lt per 10nm. At 15kts that's about 30 to 70 per cent better than heavier trawler designs and the tested economy is said to be twice as good at speeds above 20kts.

This economy is achieved without engines that have been restricted by 'doughy' accelerator response. Shove the levers forward and response from the twin Volvo Pentas is almost instant, with revs taking only four seconds to rise from 2500 to 3500rpm. If you need to beat a southerly buster home in a hurry the Swift Trawler 44 could just be the ticket!

All this performance belies the traditional layout of a trawler, but dare I suggest it also dictates some additional handholds around the boat, particularly on the flybridge. If the helmsperson is having fun it's very difficult to make your way up to or down from the flybridge, because there's a virtual no man's land from the top of the ladder to the lounges.

I did most steering from the flybridge and found this perch ideal, being almost directly above the saloon steering station, so orienting to fore and aft proportions was easy. Apart from an electronic info panel the upstairs dashboard is as comprehensive as the main station and a chartplotter screen is provided. Hydraulic steering of the twin bronze rudders in both stations is precise and the engine and bowthruster controls are identically disposed at both stations, including single-lever, low-speed and cruise control buttons.

PRICE AS TESTED

Approximately **\$750,000** fully loaded and delivered (subject to exchange rate)

SEA TRIALS

Twin 300hp Volvo Penta D4s, three onboard, full fuel and water

SPEED	FUEL BURN (lt/100nm)
7.5kts	180
9kts	325
10.5kts	390
12kts	410
14kts	440
16kts	430
18kts	425
20.5kts	420
23.5kts	440
25kts	460

*Official sea-trial data supplied by Beneteau

OPTIONS FITTED

Electronic pack, mooring kit, cockpit bench seat, spray dodger, flybridge covers, flybridge bimini, sunbathing mattress, outside wheelhouse curtains, flybridge upholstery, 9.5kVa generator, air-conditioning, LCD TV plus DVD/MP3 player, and teak-faced foredeck and sidedeck

PRICED FROM

About **\$700,000** landed (subject to exchange rate)

GENERAL

MATERIAL: FRP balsa resin composite hull and deck; monolithic FRP internal mouldings

TYPE: Semi-planing monohull

LENGTH OVERALL: 13.88m

HULL LENGTH: 12.17m

BEAM: 4.25m

DRAFT: 1.05m

WEIGHT: 10,895kg

CAPACITIES

BERTHS: 2 doubles (+ dinette and cockpit berths)

FUEL: 1500lt

WATER: 640lt

HOLDING TANK: 88lt

ENGINE

MAKE/MODEL: 2 x Volvo Penta D4

TYPE: Electronically injected turbo-diesel

RATED HP: 300 (each)

PROPS: Four-blade bronze

SUPPLIED BY

Beneteau France

Web: www.beneteau.com.au; www.beneteau.com.au/Dealerships

All local queries to importers: JW Marine, Jones Bay Wharf

19-21, Lower Deck, Suite 90, 26-32 Pirrama Rd, Pyrmont,

NSW, 2009. Phone: (02) 9518 6977; 0413 879 774,

email: info@jwmarine.com.au

tradeboat SAYS...

Fast, light, spacious and economical at speed, the Swift Trawler could be an entertainer, a day cruiser, a holiday boat, a coastal cruiser, or a passagemaker. It can accommodate a crowd by day, sleep six in relative comfort and be a home on the water for two, with or without a couple of billy lids. And with its emphasis on reducing the operating costs of a 44-footer, Beneteau may just have come up with what the post-GFC boating world is looking for. Interestingly, from 12 to 20kts the boat consumes similar amounts, according to the official data. So we'd drive this trawler fast most of the time.

LAYOUT

