



FLYING HIGH

ALLAN WHITING heads to the south of France to get the scoop and first drive on Beneteau's new Flyer GT38, while also inspecting the smaller 34 sister ship

It's no accident that the Flyer GT styling embraces automotive themes. It's to the point where you'd step out of your Porsche Cayman or Ferrari 458 and feel quite at home behind the wheel of a Flyer GT. Both GTs' powered sunroofs are car-like, as are the steering stations and on-deck upholstery. Beneteau knows full well that Flyer GT prospects are probably motoring enthusiasts as well.

The Flyer Gran Turismo designs are the result of a combined effort by Beneteau Power's hull and hardware inputs and Andreani Design's interior flair. Construction is polyester laminated FRP hulls and decks, with hull and deck counter mouldings in monolithic FRP.

I must say I found the styling of the new Flyers outstanding:

particularly the 38 that actually looked smaller than its near 40 feet OAL. These boats have great dock presence, but look like they can hardly wait to cast off their mooring lines.

STEPPING ABOARD

Both boats provide easy swimplatform entry and exit, whether moored stern-in or side-to, with simple transom-gate entry to spacious cockpits. U-shaped seating and folding centre-pedestal tables are similar in both boats, but the 38's sunlounge and transom seats are larger. There's also more under-seat storage space in the 38 and you'd probably fit eight around the table, compared with six in the 34. The tables split-fold in half and swivel to make moving around the cockpits easier.

Both boats have transom showers and 42lt cockpit fridges. Steering station layouts and consoles are similar in concept and style, but the 38's is amidships, with flanking seating either side of the pilot, while the 34's is offset to starboard, in front of a two-seat bench. The observer's perch to starboard in the 38 is a bucket seat with a grabrail and there's a walkway between it and the steering bench.

Like the Monte Carlo range, the diesel-powered Flyer GTs can be specified with IPS-controlled sterndrives and both test boats were fitted with optional Volvo Penta IPS joysticks, adjacent to stylish throttle-lever modules that integrated trim, trim assist, single lever and cruise control. The 5.7lt twin petrol engine Flyer GT 34

Our tester was tentative going for broke in the Flyer GT 38 on testing Med' chop, but was assured by Beneteau engineers and he soon had her humming along at full speed, returning with a dry windscreen.

version can be specified with a bowthruster.

Shorepower is standard, with 220V air-conditioning and a generator as options, and there are several electronic equipment packs, including AIS and radar. Foredeck space on both boats is generous and twin-tube safety rails make progress back and forth quite safe. Both test boats had upholstered sunlounges on their foredecks, but shallow lounge recesses and positively cambered deck mouldings discourage bowriding. Drinkholding recesses in the deck show forethought.

While the Flyer GT DNA is apparent on deck it's a totally different story below and it's unlikely the 34 will appeal to a 38 buyer and vice versa.

Galley designs use the same materials: white Corian bench tops contrasting against satin-finish wood laminate cupboards, two-burner LPG cooktops and microwave ovens, wine storage, venetians and opening galley ports. The bathrooms are also similarly finished in high-gloss gelcoat with varnished wood cupboards, but there the layout similarities end.

The 38 has an owner's forward cabin, complete with island bed and an amidships double cabin that can be set-up as two singles. A four-place dinette (six with a couple of folding chairs) is located in the saloon. In contrast, the 34 has an amidships double and instead of the 38's owners cabin is a vee-shaped dinette that can

QuickSpecs

**BENETEAU FLYER
GRAN TURISMO
34**

GENERAL

MATERIAL: FRP
TYPE: Air Step planing monohull
LENGTH OVERALL: 10m
HULL LENGTH: 9.67m
BEAM: 3.35m
WEIGHT: 5400kg
DRAFT: 1.1m (max)
FUEL: 490lt
WATER: 160lt
HOLDING TANK: 80lt
REC. MAX POWER: 2 x 200hp diesel;
 2 x 300hp petrol (optional)
CE CERTIFICATION: B8/C8

WHAT'S STANDARD

Six opening portholes; cockpit six-person dinette (converts to sunbed); cockpit cupboard with sink and foldaway tap and deckshower; 1000W electric windlass; 3 x 110amp/h batteries (two engine, one house); two-person helm seat with bolster; electric wipers and washer; 1.95m saloon and galley headroom; five-person saloon sofa and wooden table (converts to double berth); CD/MP3 radio with speakers inside and out; saloon shelves and bookcase; double-berth owners cabin; galley sink with mixer tap, two-burner gas stove, microwave and 80lt fridge; head with loo, 1.82m headroom, basin with mixer tap, mirror and shower hose; 3 x bilge pumps (two electric, one manual); shorepower; forward sunlounge



Inside the Flyer GT 34 is a bow dinette (top) that converts to a double berth, and a rear owners cabin with a double berth (above) running athwartships.

convert into a double bed or two singles. The dinette can seat six and a seventh could sit in a folding chair. So, a couple with two kids could be in a virtual home-away-from-home in the 38, while an entertaining couple of DINKS would be happy with the 34.

ON THE PLANE

Getting the Flyer GT 38 out of its stern-to pen was simple with twin pod drives and there was no need to operate the IPS joystick. Engine noise was subdued and vibration quite low. Naturally, NVH (noise, vibration, harshness) increased as the speed built up, but with a pleasant ambience. Lots of horses were working!

Both boats are built around Beneteau's Air Step hull design and there was plenty of Mediterranean chop, with short,

steep swells to check out the 38's ability. Beneteau claims some cushioning characteristic from the hull design, as well as fuel efficiency and it certainly cut neatly through the lumpy stuff.

I was initially somewhat tentative with the engine speed levers in this chop, but the Beneteau engineers assured me all was okay for full speed from twin D4 Volvo Pentas at their optional 300hp setting (260hp is standard). Inevitably, there were some bumps once the speed climbed over 25kts, but the 38 felt quite assured in these conditions. It was also quite "chuckable", echoing the automotive theme once again.

I didn't manage a run in the 34, but I saw it howling along at various times. Although down on power, with twin Volvo Penta D3 200ZDs, it's also nearly one-third

lighter, so performance didn't seem to be compromised.

Where a test run in the new Swift Trawler 44 saw the windscreen wipers going almost constantly, the Flyer GT 38's screen was almost dry after a solid hour's hurtling around in a cross-sea. Ample spray chines on the hull obviously do their bit.

Vision in all directions from the high-set driver's two-seat bench station was superb, making 25 to 30kts cruising a safe prospect.

IPS PLAYTIME

On the way back to the berth I had a play with the IPS system and found it took some getting used to. However, after a half hour or so I could spin the boat in its

THESE BOATS HAVE GREAT DOCK PRESENCE, BUT LOOK LIKE THEY CAN HARDLY WAIT TO CAST OFF THEIR MOORING LINES

own length and set it motoring slowly in pretty much any direction I wanted. The joystick is positioned where it's easy to reach when seated or when standing and facing aft, which is more likely when you're backing into a pen.

The only downside of the IPS system was a loud clunk and shudder as the transmissions changed gear. An upside was that the noise alerted bystanders to throw a dock line aboard!

One of the great appeals of the new Flyers is the optional IPS system that can take the stress out of mooring at the end of a long day's fun in the sun. Trying to grab mooring lines, while the skipper battles a late-afternoon southerly, isn't much fun and joystick control can take much of the workload off the helmsperson's shoulders.

LIVING WITH A GT

I reckon the Flyers should be easy enough to own, particularly if buyers opt for a cockpit cover to keep UVs and dirt out of the boat. Hosing off and cleaning would then be straightforward, with no exposed wood and furniture to worry about.

The good point about under-cockpit engines with sterndrives is less noise and smell inside the boat, but engine access is a compromise between cockpit



Unlike the interiors, the two Flyers share similar layouts topside. Above middle is the cockpit dinette on the 38, while above is the 38's sporty dash, which differs from its sibling by having a starboard navigator seat alongside the two-person helm seat.

QuickSpecs

BENETEAU FLYER GRAN TURISMO 38

GENERAL

MATERIAL: FRP

TYPE: Air Step planing monohull

LENGTH OVERALL: 12.1m

HULL LENGTH: 11.31m

BEAM: 3.77m

WEIGHT: 7470kg (light ship)

DRAFT: 1.1m (max)

FUEL: 650lt

WATER: 200lt

HOLDING TANK: 80lt

REC. MAXIMUM POWER: 2 x 260hp diesel; 2 x 300hp petrol (optional)

CE CERTIFICATION: B10/C10

WHAT'S STANDARD

Eight opening portholes; cockpit deckshower, cupboard with sink and foldaway tap; eight-person cockpit dinette (converts to sunbed); 1000W electric windlass; 3 x 110amp/h batteries (two engine, one house); two-person helm seat and navigator seat, both with bolsters; electric wipers and washer; 1.92m saloon headroom; 1.9m galley headroom; four-person saloon sofa and wooden table (converts to berth); CD radio with speakers inside and out; saloon shelves, bookcase, mirror; saloon dinette converts to double berth; owners cabin forward with island double berth and hanging locker; guest cabin (single or double berth); galley sink with mixer tap, two-burner gas stove and 80lt fridge; head with loo, 2m headroom, shower curtain, basin with mixer tap, mirror and shower hose; 2 x bilge pumps (one electric, one manual); 4 x bilge pumps (petrol version); shorepower; forward sunlounge.



The bigger GT 38 is more family oriented below decks, with a forward owners cabin (top) and an amidships double cabin that can be split into singles for the kids (above middle). Both cabins are separated by the saloon-galley (above) with six-person dinette opposite (middle right).

volume and the need for servicing, so the ideal Flyer mechanic is a slim one. I did my best to check out the enginerooms in detail and I couldn't see a water separator warning sender or contamination alarm.

Lightweight woodwork and furniture construction is common to most production boats these days, so the cupboards would need house-like care in use. Owners could also spend some time sealing some laminate end

grains against possible wicking.

The Beneteau Flyer Gran Turismo 38 and 34 should suit the Australian market very well, with sparkling performance, diesel economy, shallow draft, excellent on-deck and accommodation choices, all with an intended automotive ambience. Vive la différence.

Specifications weren't finalised at the time of going to press but preliminary details in the Quick Specs panels hereabouts. 🚗