

Bénéteau Antares 9.80

Buyers looking for a £100,000 flybridge cruiser have never had it so good, with several of the big European builders bringing out new models. How will Bénéteau's contender stack up in a tough market? **REPORT BY CARL RICHARDSON**

Good news for prospective boat buyers! The 30ft flybridge market hasn't been so healthy for years. With Sealine about to unveil a successor to the long-standing F33, and new offerings from Rodman, Jeanneau and Bénéteau, competition is rife and pricing looks keen.

Back in the 1970s and 1980s, there were many boats of this size and type to choose from. But gradually the trend towards bigger craft reduced the options. It took the dawn of the sports-fisher and pêche-promenade to bring a new breed of practical, affordable vessels to fill the void.

The genre has evolved over the years, becoming ever more comfortable though still retaining that functional edge, and blurring the line between luxury flybridge cruiser and practical boat.

And none seem to blur the line as much as the latest Bénéteau. Don't adjust your set, it's the Antares 9.80.

DESIGN & BUILD

Style and aesthetics are always subjective, but there are certain prerequisites that most

buyers look for. The 9.80 hands them to you on a plate.

The no-nonsense lines of the sports-fisher are still clearly visible within the smart exterior. As well as ensuring a large, safe deck area, the design allows the boat's height to be spread along its full length, avoiding the top-heavy look that some craft of this size suffer from.

Additionally, our test boat came with the optional blue gelcoat colour, which looks classy and highlights the semi-whaleback sheer.

Below the waterline, the same design team that were responsible for the Antares 13.80 have created a planing hull with a sharp entry that flattens smoothly aft. Propeller tunnels have been incorporated to help maximise the screws' forward thrust and, as the engines can be set lower, the boat's stability.

The most unusual aspect of the 9.80's layout is its sliding transom, which glides fore and aft on runners between two lockable settings. This enables you to extend the cockpit area at the expense of the bathing

platform, or vice versa.

An intricate stainless steel, teak stepped ladder leads up to a flybridge that offers a reassuringly deep coaming and a wraparound seating arrangement to keep the skipper company.

Bénéteau's recent investment in their joinery division has made a difference to the style and quality of their interiors, even if it is still a peg or two below the solid level of some Spanish yards. This boat's wheelhouse/saloon has an open, airy feel with plenty of laminate panelling helping to warm things up.

Our only major design reservation concerns the galley. Sited at the head of the saloon, adjacent to the helm, it uses its space intelligently enough, but your natural standing position when cooking leaves your heels just inches from the stairwell that leads down to the cabins and toilet compartment. Even when the boat was at rest, we felt uncomfortably aware of the drop behind us.

But it's not just cuisine that is affected. We can't help thinking that this layout denies the boat an attractive seating position and the skipper some company. We appreciate the desire for novelty, but in this case a conventional galley, set into the starboard cabinet, might have been better.

✓✓✓✓
Family-friendly layout, let down by the galley's positioning.

flybridge Driving is enjoyable from the upper helm, and the coaming is reassuringly deep.





interior helm Plenty of window area, demisters and wipers make this a practical station.



galley Opposite the helm and alongside a stairwell, this has an awkward location.



midships cabin Twin bunks could be an ideal layout for children in the crew.



master cabin Although quite basic in fit-out, this is good and wide.



toilet The WC is white and bright.

ACCOMMODATION

A usable layout spreads the accommodation evenly around the boat, offering an airy wheelhouse/saloon, two good cabins, a decent toilet compartment and headroom that never falls below 6ft.

Not as warm and wooded as some, it has a

saloon A practical and airy open-plan layout is enhanced by the use of cherry wood joinery.

slightly utilitarian feel due to the abundance of bare white mouldings. This is relieved by some darker cherry wood joinery and laminate, but the result is no match for the luxurious feel of the similarly priced Rodman 30.

You can't fault the boat's practicality, though. The saloon is a model of efficiency, with an open-plan layout enhanced by a wooden floor and cherry-stripped deckhead.

A long cherry cabinet incorporating plenty of storage, and a refrigerator set close to the galley, looks smart and doubles as useful worktop space. The U-shaped settee opposite is thickly upholstered and comfortable for four. It also converts into an occasional double berth.

Apart from the question-mark over its positioning, the L-shaped galley works well, within tight dimensions. A stainless steel sink and a gas hob (a gas locker is located in the port flank of the wheelhouse) are set at either end of the counter, leaving a small amount of workspace in between. An oven (and a proper gas one at that) sits beneath the hob, leaving enough space for a neat slide-out basket storage system under the sink.

The design of the forward master cabin maximises space by pushing its walls right back to the flared hull, although the prominence of blank areas does leave it feeling slightly bare.

A far cosier affair is the midships cabin, with its family-friendly under-and-over bunks. Older guests might find it a tad confined, but kids will love it to bits. Both cabins offer enough storage for extended cruising.

The bright toilet/shower compartment is of the moulded variety, broken up by the wood of the doorframe and by a square cabinet. A locker door gives handy access to a large

✓✓✓✓
Light and spacious living space, but more basic than some.

storage area that includes all of the plumbing, including water pumps and the calorifier.

EXTERIOR

The clever sliding transom is a winner. Fully extended, it increases the length of the cockpit by just under 2ft, which might

not sound very much but actually makes quite a difference.

There are two by-products of this design. The first is that the cockpit and bathing platform sole have to be flush, which is good news as there is no step to trip you. The second, the lack of any fixed seating, is less good, although there is plenty of space for fold-away chairs in the large lazaret.

Access to the flybridge is via a stylish stainless steel ladder. Complete with scalloped teak steps and an intricate grabrail, this works fine on the way up. However, the top step is an uncomfortable stretch down when the time comes to descend.

The entranceway is a fully encircled hatch, unlike the open-backed design that is found on the Antares 10.80. It might be a little tighter, but it is far more practical, allowing you to wedge yourself in when underway.

The flybridge itself feels deeper than most, due to a tall helm console, sensibly provided with a useful cubbyhole, and a solid stainless steel rail that runs on from the screen. On top of the two pedestal seats, an L-shaped moulding provides further seating and doubles as a single sunpad.

Moving around the rest of the boat is easy. Guardrails rise up as you leave the safety of the cockpit coamings and follow you forward. They lack a mid-rail, but are helped by a grabrail on the superstructure.

At the bow, a single-compartment anchor locker is augmented by a standard-fit electric windlass. Deckware is well provided for, and some neat teak flaps cover the aft cleats.

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Safe access to all areas. Some neat detail and plenty of stowage.

ENGINE OPTIONS & ACCESS

At the time of writing only two twin-diesel engine options are offered: Volvo Penta's 230hp KAMD43s or the new kids on the block, Nanni's 200hp 4.390s, as installed in our test boat.

This was our first experience of Nanni's new 4cyl range, and our impressions are all positive. What's more, its compact dimensions could be a real bonanza for boat designers saddled with ever smaller enginebays.

Entry to the enginewell is via four basic lift-out boards. When these are fully open, the starboard engine enjoys best access, although it is possible to crawl around both engines. At least the large strainers and pre-filters are easy to get at.

Finish looks good, but with no engineroom light it proved difficult to see into the darker recesses.

When all the boards are up and the cross-members removed, we noted that the fixed pedestal of the saloon table becomes a little vulnerable. Its structure might not take to being used as a grabhandle.

✓✓✓
Limited but suitable engine options. Basic access and fit-out.

PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

Having taken up the opportunity of a tour around the Nanni factory, we can testify to the 3.0lt Toyota-based engines' quality out of the water. Afloat, they suit the Bénéteau's no-nonsense nature, instantly making the skipper feel at home with the engine set-up.

The balance of the boat feels excellent. The hull remains stable and sure-footed from rest

all the way up to a maximum speed of 26 knots at 3600rpm. It is quick off the mark too, the responsive Nanni getting us onto the plane in around 6sec and reaching 20 knots in under 8sec.

Nanni service manager Michel Kozulic recommended keeping in the 3000-3200rpm band for cruising economy, and this equated to 19-22 knots.

Pushing along in a moderate sea the Bénéteau delivered a dry ride, turning smoothly and consistently as required. Natural trim is good, and the boat responds steadily to any application of the tabs, in contrast to the overly-sensitive Rodman 30

engineroom Access is helped by the compact Nanni, and you can crawl around both units.





which we tested last month.

The abundance of window area around the wheelhouse means its just as easy to drive from below as it is on the flybridge. The commendable inclusion of two-speed warm-air blowers as standard along the solid two-part forward screen ensures that your view stays intact in all weathers. In conjunction

with auto-park wipers and clear trim gauges (repeated on the flybridge), this helps make helming relaxed and enjoyable.

At the lower helm, you feel the odd hollow slam resonating through the hull when moving along a beam sea, although the percussion from the galley makes it sound worse than it really is. The Nannis seem to

purr along, so noise levels are around 10% lower than in the 9.80's competitors, hovering at a very comfortable 74-75dB(A) at cruising speeds and only rising to 77dB(A) when flat-out.

Down in the cabins, unfortunately, the volume increases to over 90dB(A), as thin wooden bulkheads and GRP mouldings do not offer the best soundproofing. So if you want an en-route

snooze, our advice is

use the saloon settee. The ride itself never wavers, retaining its poise throughout.

✓✓✓✓
Stable and intuitive hull. New Nanni diesel is a class act.

SPECIFICATION & VALUE

At just over £92,000, the basic price of the 9.80 looks good. But, as with other French imports in the UK it needs to be taken in context, excluding as it does such prerequisites as delivery and commissioning.

It is a similar story with the options list. Surely items such as an anchor and chain, indeed a battery charger, should be standard on a boat of this price?

Add these, plus a few other bits and pieces to the bottom line and very soon you are looking at the best part of £110,000. Still a fair price for the boat, but not quite the bargain it first appears.

In the past some French boats have

struggled to match the resale values of their better-known British rivals. However as more and more UK buyers start to appreciate Bénéteau's innate quality and desirability, their depreciation should fall into line with that of other comparable craft.

With no track record as such, running costs with the new Nanni engines are difficult to quantify. However, the fuel figures look good, matching similarly powerful products from Yanmar and Volvo Penta.

An interesting point is that our fuel figures do highlight the benefit of letting off the

power a bit: the difference between 26 knots and 24 knots saves more than 4.5gph.

✓✓✓
Fairly priced but not cheap. Running costs still unproven.

Verdict

In some quarters the term 'easy' might not be taken as a compliment, especially when attributed to the female of the species. But if one word sums up the Antares 9.80, that is it.

This Bénéteau is easy to handle, easy to live with, easy on the eye and easy on the wallet. All of which makes it easy to see why people will take to it.

The slightly sparse level of interior fit-out could be better, and the positioning of the galley leaves it open to some criticism, but this is still an intelligently thought-out craft.

As a possible first step onto the flybridge ladder, it makes a compelling case for many UK buyers, as a family-friendly boat that is well-suited to British conditions.

Just don't be duped by the headline pricing: it's not quite the cut-price bargain it appears to be.

MBM RATING 7/10
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Bénéteau Antares 9.80 technical data

specifications

LENGTH OVERALL	32ft 6in (9.95m)
BEAM	11ft 2in (3.40m)
DRAUGHT	2ft 6in (0.90m)
AIR DRAUGHT	15ft 1in (4.60m)
DISPLACEMENT	5.5 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	140gal (640lt)
WATER CAPACITY	48gal (220lt)

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	0ft 11in
HEADROOM IN WHEELHOUSE	6ft 4in
HEADROOM IN MASTER CABIN	6ft 2in
HEADROOM IN MIDSHIPS CABIN	6ft 2in
MASTER CABIN BERTH	6ft 4in x 4ft 10in
MIDSHIPS CABIN BERTHS	two 6ft 2in x 2ft 1in

performance

engines twin Nanni 4.390 TDI diesels, configuration 4cyl, 2.982lt, 200hp at 3600rpm.
conditions wind northwesterly Force 3-4, sea slight, load fuel 75%, water 25%, crew 3.

rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	noise
2000	10.1	3.9	17.6	2.6	364	71
2500	14.6	7.0	32.0	2.1	294	74
2800	16.9	9.0	40.8	1.87	263	75
3000	19.4	10.5	47.6	1.85	259	75
3200	22.0	11.4	52.0	1.92	270	75
3400	23.8	14.2	64.8	1.67	235	76
3600	26.1	18.7	85.0	1.40	195	77

Range figures above are in miles, with 20% margin.
Noise figures are in dB(A), recorded in the saloon.

acceleration
0-15 knots in 6.0sec;
0-20 knots in 7.9sec;
0-26 knots in 11.4sec

prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with twin 200hp Nanni 4.390 TDIs	£92,686
with twin 230hp Volvo Penta KAMD43s	£96,666
DELIVERY, ANTIFOULING, LAUNCH & COMMISSIONING	£4,394
LEISURE PACK (includes covers, shorepower, battery charger, mooring/anchoring kit, foldaway chairs)	£3,077
TEAK COCKPIT	£2,274
BOW-THRUSTER	£3,874
MICROWAVE & CONVECTION OVEN	£947
ALUMINIUM FUEL TANKS	£1,200
TRIM TABS	£782
BLUE GELCOAT	£681
BOAT AS TESTED	£118,000

ENQUIRIES Dickies, Fishmarket Quay, Swansea Marina, Swansea SA1 1UP. Tel: 01792 654303. www.dickies.co.uk

the rivals



JEANNEAU PRESTIGE 32

from £121,141 inc VAT

Smooth design and a good flybridge catch the eye on another French contender. Tel: 01932 226266. www.waltonmarine.co.uk



RODMAN 30 CRUISER

from £109,000 inc VAT

High spec interior and modern lines make this the luxury leader. Tel: 01243 512454. www.seasportmarine.com



ASTINOR 1000LX

from £107,512 inc VAT

This impressed us on a recent test with its solid joinery and excellent handling. Tel: 023 8045 8585. www.astinor.com



above The transom glides back and forward on runners, so you can reallocate deck space.



above Walking along the side decks is easy, with the help of inboard and outboard grabrails.