

Bénéteau Flyer 12m

It's got startling looks and spacious accommodation, and it's one of the first sportscruisers to benefit from Volvo Penta's revolutionary IPS drivetrain. Does its bold red colour scheme spell danger to its market rivals?

REPORT BY RAY SARGOOD

• IPS propulsion • twin 370hp diesels • 35 knots • £246,339 as tested

Bénéteau's latest 41ft hardtop sportscruiser has stunning looks and cruising refinement, but the French builders weren't satisfied with that. They required it to live up to its name.

They wanted to give the Flyer 12m brute power and sportsboat agility, in a bold attempt to outperform the competition.

They found what they wanted by going shopping at Volvo Penta, not just for their

efficient common-rail D6 diesel engines but also for their radical IPS drive system, with its forward-facing, counter-rotating twin-prop legs mounted through the bottom of the hull rather than through the transom.

Is this mix of classy design and technical innovation about to take the cruising world by storm? There was only one way to find out, so we grabbed a test at the earliest possible opportunity.

DESIGN & BUILD

From the drawing board of former Jeanneau designer Patrick Sarrazin, the Flyer 12 looks very much like an Antares 12 without the flybridge. In fact, the differences that are out of sight are more fundamental.

The hull shape has not only been heavily modified to accommodate the IPS legs but is also split-moulded: constructed of a double-skin polyester laminate with balsa core below



the waterline, and a single-skin construction for the flared topsides.

The deck moulding is also double-skinned for added rigidity and noise insulation, while its 4in raised gunwales with teak capping contribute to the boat's aesthetics and safety.

The interior accommodation comprises two en-suite cabins with large berths, ample headroom and plenty of stowage, as well as excellent galley facilities.

Practical design touches are everywhere, not the least of them being an electrically opening sunroof to open up the saloon to the elements when required. The woodwork is of pear-coloured Mukali.

✓✓✓✓✓
Good build quality, roomy interior and neat design touches.

ACCOMMODATION

Each of the two cabins has a generous double berth and its own en-suite WC.

The master cabin is dominated by a gargantuan berth, measuring 6ft 7in from head to toe by 4ft 8in at shoulder width. Deep pull-out drawers underneath could easily swallow up spare bed linen and there's a tall, deep wardrobe fitted to port to take your smartest clothes.

To starboard are a dressing table and the optional flat-screen television/DVD player, while shelving runs along both sides, with extra cupboard space above. A large mirror sits between the two reading lights in the bow, and an overhead hatch and two portholes provide light and air.

The en-suite, larger than you would normally find on a boat of this size, is subdivided into two parts. The first has an electric-flush toilet and glass bowl handbasin, and this leads on to a large shower cubicle via a smoked-glass screen. With a maximum headroom of 6ft 6in and the cubicle measuring 4ft 0in x 2ft 3in, there is ample room everywhere.

The guest cabin, to starboard, also has a large berth, measuring 6ft 5in long by 5ft 3in wide. There's not much headroom above it, as this cabin burrows beneath the helm seating area, but standing room elsewhere is fine and good use has been made of the rest of the available space. A small wardrobe and side shelving provide stowage,

and there are two portholes.

The en-suite WC is exclusive to this cabin, which means that neither toilet can be reached directly from the saloon. Although not as grand as the master toilet/shower, it offers the same facilities.

The galley runs along the port side of the saloon, but you could almost say that the saloon runs along the starboard side of the galley. This layout is quite practical, but the space would benefit from being a little less slab-sided.

The galley's sideboard, 9ft 6in long and nearly 2ft 6in deep, neatly contains all the goodies you might need, including a fridge/freezer, a two-ring electric hob, a microwave oven and a stainless steel double sink.

It also houses the television, facing towards the U-shaped saloon seating. Here, the inset bar and glass stowage within the centre of the table are among the interior's many nice touches.

Also to starboard is the raised helm position, with its well-placed double bench seat providing good all-round visibility for the driver and co-driver. The three-spoke steering wheel is height-adjustable, and electrically controls the movement of the IPS legs.

All gauges are neatly laid out and the switchgear is within easy reach, including the controls for the electric windlass, navigation lights, sliding roof and bow-thruster. There is also ample room for fitting navigational equipment.

Although headroom is generous throughout the accommodation, with 6ft 2in in the saloon, 6ft 4in in the guest cabin and as much as 6ft 6in in the master cabin, all door frames oddly have a clearance of just 5ft 8in.

Also lacking are steady handholds in the saloon, which are needed on a boat with the Flyer's performance. We understand that securing them overhead was made awkward by the electric sliding sunroof, but

Bénéteau have acknowledged the shortage and are looking into adding some in other places.

✓✓✓✓✓
Excellent cabins but low doorways and a slab-sided saloon.

EXTERIOR

The cockpit benefits from exterior lighting and inset speakers located in its extended hardtop, so you can read your copy of Motor Boats Monthly while listening to your favourite tunes late into the evening.

The refrigerator and grill within the port coaming could be used to chill your drinks or rustle up a quick snack. The starboard coaming houses the gas locker, unless you specify an all-electric galley, as on our test boat, in which case the space is free for general stowage.

The aft bench can seat three people comfortably, with stainless steel cup-holders provided on each side, but also converts neatly into a full-size double sunbed. Add this to the



below The dinette table's integral drinks cabinet.



below A modern hand basin sets the design tone.



below The master suite has a separate shower.



two foredeck sunpads, and all four sun-worshipping crew can be appeased at the same time.

The bathing platform, 2ft 4in deep, boasts an inset locker and a transom locker to starboard, providing handy storage for warps, fenders or a liferaft. The cantilever door through the transom conceals the switchgear for an electric boarding ladder, and the hose and taps for a hot-and-cold shower.

As an option, you can have two underwater spotlights to light your way at night, although these would cost you an extra £4,081.

The side decks are some of the safest we have come across, opening up from 12in wide to more than 20in towards the bow. They are non-slip moulded and you're never far away from a supportive stainless steel handhold, either on the superstructure or by way of the wraparound pulpit.

Concealed hatches within the side decks reveal the diesel and water tank fillers, and there's also a saltwater wash-down pump to port. The three 12in stainless steel cleats on each side are well placed.

On the foredeck there's an electric windlass, which can be controlled

✓✓✓✓✓
Wide, safe decks and a very comfortable cockpit for relaxing in.

remotely, and two lockers, both of which offer good stowage and are self-draining.

ENGINE OPTIONS & ACCESS

There are small individual hatches within the cockpit sole for inspecting fluid levels, but for full access to the engineroom the main part of

below The guest cabin boasts a large double berth. The galley is hidden within the saloon sideboard. Flat-screen television is an option in the master cabin.



below The saloon gets lots of natural light and offers excellent 360° visibility from the helm. But a lot of relaxation space is lost to the sideboard and galley.





above The cockpit is spacious, and the sole lifts hydraulically to allow complete engine access.



above The self-draining chain locker is matched by one for warps. The sporty helm is well laid out.



above The engines have individual inspection hatches. It's spaghetti junction behind this bulkhead.

the flooring is lifted hydraulically.

This allows you to reach all the service points, the raw-water strainers and fuel filters, and even the IPS drive units, helped by the compartment's fluorescent lighting.

The primary fuel filters are aft, on the sides of the twin 600lt aluminium tanks port and starboard, engine oil levels can be checked easily as the installation is handed, and the raw-water strainers are comfortably within reach.

Electric fans keep the engineroom well ventilated, and the automatic fire-extinguishing system can also be activated from the helm.

From this angle the IPS units, which sit aft of the twin Volvo Penta diesels, resemble circular pods mounted into the hull. Their operation is effectively fly-by-wire.

IPS-400 legs are fitted if you choose the 310hp D6 engines, or IPS-500s if you have the 370hp D6s fitted.

✓✓✓✓✓
Good access to a neat installation, with IPS drive compulsory.

what is it going to do for leisure boating? The signs are that it will transform it!

This 41ft boat feels like a race-ready sportscruiser, with astounding handling. Throw the lightweight steering into full lock at 20 knots, and within just 20 seconds you are crossing your own wake having described a full 360° circle. You can do this with complete confidence, as the IPS legs just dig in and pull you round.

Turning at speed is instant. The steering feels light — there are no cables, only wires sending electrical instructions to the drive units — but it works well.

Acceleration is swift, and our test boat's twin 370hp D6s carried us from 0-20 knots in just 10 seconds, and up to 30 knots in a further 6 seconds. Full throttle, equating to 3500rpm at the crankshaft, will give you a respectable 35 knots, while 3200rpm allows you to cruise comfortably at 31 knots.

IPS drives require less power than conventional shafts to achieve similar performance figures, and therefore consume less fuel. So the icing on the cake is that this installation will also save you money in terms of fuel bills.

Compare data with the similar-sized Cranchi 41 Méditerranée fitted with the same total horsepower (740hp) but in a shaftdrive installation, and the benefits are clear. Not only is acceleration from standstill to 20 knots 1.9sec quicker, and top speed 4 knots higher, but fuel consumption at 31 knots is vastly improved: 116lph rather than 159lph.

All these advantages are delivered quietly and comfortably. Our highest noise recording was just 79dB(A) when running at full revs.

✓✓✓✓✓
IPS offers great handling and pace, with fuel economy to boot.

SPECIFICATION & VALUE

At a starting price of £238,411 with IPS, the Flyer 12 costs £84,000 more than the award-winning but smaller Elan 35, and £23,000 more than a shaftdrive Sealine C39 or a sterndrive Windy 37 Grand Mistral.

PERFORMANCE & HANDLING

Volvo Penta's IPS is the result of a multi-million-pound investment, and more than five years of research and development. It's a fascinating piece of original thinking, but

below Guest cabin hatches give access behind the bulkhead.



below The bathing platform has an electric boarding ladder.



below The side-decks are wide, deep and safe.



below You can lounge on the foredeck, but it's unwise under IPS acceleration!



An electric windlass, an electric bathing platform ladder and the electric sliding sunroof come as standard, but an electric toilet in the guest cabin will add £606 to the bill. Given that you can have an all-electric galley, you might feel that a generator is a must, and this will set you back at least an extra £9,056.

Other desirables that could make a large dent in your wallet are a coloured hull, at £1,393 for blue or £1,836 for red, a teak-laid cockpit at £3,037 and teak decking at £4,344. And you will need to find £3,055 for commissioning, launching and handover in the UK.

✓✓✓✓✓
More expensive than its rivals, so you pay for sharp performance.

All told, a realistic final price for a smart-looking Flyer 12 with a full specification is around £255,000.

Verdict

The stunning looks of the Flyer 12 coupé, with its flared topsides and raised gunwales, will instantly appeal to many potential buyers, and the comfort of its accommodation will surely win over any doubters.

We've picked up on a few niggles, such as the low door apertures and the lack of saloon handholds, but these tend to fade away into insignificance once you start to drive and enjoy this boat.

With Volvo Penta's IPS drive system instantly impressing, it's the boat's performance that really wins you over. Its handling instils self-confidence in the helmsman, and its acceleration and ultimate speed are more than respectable. As a bonus, its fuel consumption is frugal and its cruising range remarkable.

This new technology is no flash in the pan, and will work its way into many new twin-engined cruisers in the months ahead. But if you want it right now, it's already available in a great package.

The Flyer 12 will soon be landing at a marina near you.

MBM RATING 8/10
✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓

Bénéteau Flyer 12m technical data

specifications

BUILD	glass-reinforced plastic
RCD	design category B
LENGTH OVERALL	41ft 5in (12.62m)
BEAM	13ft 1in (3.99m)
DRAUGHT	3ft 10in (1.16m)
AIR DRAUGHT	13ft 10in (4.20m)
DISPLACEMENT	8.9 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	264gal (1200lt)
WATER CAPACITY	70gal (320lt)

key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	12in
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 2in
MIDSHIPS CABIN BERTH	6ft 5in x 5ft 3in
FORWARD CABIN BERTH	6ft 7in x 4ft 8in

performance

engines twin Volvo Penta D6 diesels, IPS 400 drives

configuration 6cyl, 5.5lt, 370hp at 3500rpm

conditions wind southwesterly Force 2, sea slight

load fuel 50%, water 0%, crew 4

rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	noise
1500	9.5	4.4	20	2.16	456	68
2000	11	7.9	36	1.39	293	69
2500	20	14.1	64	1.42	300	74
2800	25	19.5	89	1.28	338	75
3200	31	25.5	116	1.21	255	76
3500	35	32.6	148	1.08	227	79

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

acceleration
0-20 knots in 10sec;
0-30 knots in 16sec

prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with twin 310hp Volvo Penta D6/IPS diesels	£238,411
LAUNCHING & COMMISSIONING	£3,055
ANTI-FOULING	standard
BOW-THRUSTER	standard
GENERATOR	from £9,056
COCKPIT TEAK DECKING	£3,037
RED HULL COLOUR	£1,836
BLUE HULL COLOUR	£1,393
BOAT AS TESTED	£246,339

ENQUIRIES

Dickies. Tel: 01248 363400. www.dickies.co.uk

Fox's Yacht Sales. Tel: 01473 604200. www.foxsyachts.co.uk

the rivals



ELAN 35
from £153,781

This great-looking, great-handling winner of MBM's Sportscruiser Of The Year Award for 2004 offers three cabins, and twin sterndrive diesels make it capable of nearly 35 knots.
Tel: 01489 885000.
www.elanyachts.com



SEALINE C39 COUPÉ
from £214,336

This two-cabin contender has beautifully clean lines and features Sealine's extending cockpit system. You can get up to 36 knots with the 310hp Volvo Penta D6 diesels.
Tel: 01489 885115.
www.sealine.com



WINDY 37 GRAND MISTRAL
from £215,470

This speedy two-cabin sportscruiser comes with the choice of open or hardtop styling. Twin petrol or diesel sterndrives give it a top speed of up to 42 knots.
Tel: 01590 673312.
www.berthongroup.co.uk