

MOTOR
BOATS TESTED

French flagship

Bénéteau takes on the trawler yacht once more, and this time the results are even better

REPORT BY MARK TURLEY

FACT FILE

Bénéteau Swift Trawler 52

LOA: 55ft 9in (17m)

PRICE: from

£649,300

TOP SPEED: 25 knots

A serious Trawler Yacht, such as this new 52 from Bénéteau, deserves a serious kind of boat test. So instead of the usual hop out across the bay, we opted for a no holds barred 400-mile delivery trip. Covering half of Biscay and a run past the Channel Islands, our time aboard the ST52 delivered just about every sea condition you could wish for and quite a few you'd pray against.

Design & build

It came as something of a surprise when Bénéteau launched the Swift Trawler 42 a couple of years back, being a complete departure from its usual sportsfisher-tinged fare. Bénéteau emphasised then that it wouldn't be a one-off model and here is the evidence – a very serious 50ft hull that finishes up just over the 55ft mark once the anchor

platform and three-foot bathing platform are added in. In deference to its size, Bénéteau is building the 52 at its CNB yard near La Rochelle, a place which is entirely geared towards commercial and bespoke projects. Looking over the heavy-duty shipwright engineering and overall build quality this is clearly no bad thing.

The ST52's hull has been extensively tank tested allowing the design team to work in a few clever twists to help create some very untrawler-like performance and cut back the amount of troublesome spray. The result of this testing is huge chines being worked into the fore body, while at the transom a neat tuck in the hull's side helps obviate much of the misty spray that so often finds its way into the cockpit.

Nuances aside the family resemblance to its smaller sibling is readily apparent with its

“we kept up an unphased 15 knots, cutting through the 2m head seas”



The saloon boasts huge windows, masses of floor space and practical touches like grabrails and even fiddled edges

deep forefoot, huge flair to the bow and no nonsense bulk carried through to the squared away superstructure. But this new flagship isn't simply a scaled up 42, the Bénéteau design team has given the 52 its own distinctive and very handsome edge and it certainly boasts features worthy of its stature. A Portuguese bridge – an extra bulwark that separates the foredeck from the wheelhouse – and a huge full-beam midships master cabin complete with large, oval topside windows are the two headline grabbers. And when it comes to exterior cosmetics, the teak cladding on the superstructure's rear is an optional extra but we like its eye-catching boldness and warmth as it helps break up the omnipresent gloss of GRP.

The boat's considerable volume delivers three cabins in all, plus crew quarters aft. However, for all its interior space we were surprised to find that

the guest cabin forward is laid out as a V-berth rather than the usual – and to our minds more luxurious – island double.

Thankfully, the same criticism cannot be levelled up at the main deck where three main areas – the saloon, co-joined galley and the excellent raised wheelhouse – are all given just the right proportions to work well and be enjoyed. There is a great view out wherever you end up and although the interior follows

Bénéteau's usual bright, cleanly-styled finish there still remains an inviting, liveaboard feel.

Access to the Portuguese bridge is either via a ladder up from the aft deck or a set of steps from the wheelhouse. Ordinarily we might have a bit of a dig about the bygone ladder aft but in this case we'll let it slide. Owners will doubtless opt to

nip down the short internal ladder and head out through the wheelhouse side doors when access to the side decks is needed. Better still, when coming alongside you can use conveniently positioned side gates let into the taffrail topped coamings to step ashore.

As to the underwater sections, the hull has a measure of keel which tends to put it in the semi-displacement camp and although we tended to run at around 15 knots during our passage – a tidy balance between fuel economy and making useful progress – the 52 is good for nearly 25 knots.

Design & build

Bénéteau has created a truly great trawler



Accommodation

When it comes to interior design there is a fine line between plain (as in dull and boring), and a finish that is unfussy yet inviting. To our mind the

ST52 falls into the latter category. The man responsible, Pierre Frutschi, has managed to give the largely moabi-wood clad interior a very welcoming edge, while keeping things shipshape – the round portholes and the fiddled cabinetry for instance. What is also noticeable is the uninterrupted and wide thoroughfare that runs from the aft deck through to the wheelhouse. Not only does this make it easy to get from A to B but it allows each area to borrow light and space from one another while the deep window line gives a superb and constant view out.

The saloon makes the most of this space and light. The roomy, six-seater dinette can be added to by way of a pair of smart armchairs that reside either side of the central sideboard across the companionway. The sideboard houses a drinks cabinet and a pop-up flat screen TV. While lounging here you might like to stroll over to the fridge or freezer – for mixers and ice – that are a step or two further towards the galley, but not actually tucked away within it. This is a neat move as it allows the fridge – the most used galley item – total and clear access. The U-shaped galley, which is separated from the main saloon area by some subtle cabinetry, is clearly geared towards practical, liveaboard cooking. Most importantly there is loads of free work surface and no shortage of stowage, nor is the chief bottle washer short of a view as the double sink is positioned under one of the large, opening side



Visibility from the wheelhouse is superb. A chart table and twin 12in screens at the helm keep you in the know

windows. With any luck, though, they won't be tied here for long as there is also space for a dishwasher. The rest of the galley is similarly all-electric – a three-ring hob with extractor hood above, and an all-singing microwave/oven complete the line-up. A 7kW generator, to keep this lot running, comes as standard.

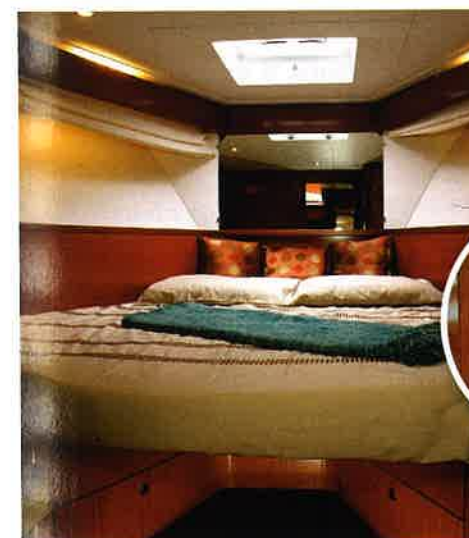
A couple of steps up from the galley – past more cabinetry incorporating several handy lockers – leads you to the wheelhouse, a roomy spot which is going to be a favourite venue whether out at sea or tied up. A raised settee to port is extremely comfy and a great vantage point, the accompanying handhold-topped table in front adds to the occupants' security when underway.

The skipper has his own separate Bezenzoni adjustable

armchair sited in front of a large, single tier, easy to scan console and we liked the look and feel that the yacht-type wheel gave to things. It was also good to find a chart table area across the companionway even though there is room for two 12in screens on the helm console.

When it comes to sleeping accommodation this is a proper six-person boat, or seven if you count the crew cabin. That means that wherever you lay your head you will be looked after – even the rather cute twin-bunk midships cabin enjoys great clothes stowage and headroom. However, as we have already alluded to, the forecabin does lose some VIP status with a V-berth infill rather than an island double. All that said, if you cruise with more than two children the numerous single bunks might well be a plus.

The two forward guest cabins share the same toilet compartment but there is no shortage of stowage for wash bags and a proper separate shower stall, rather than a cubicle, is a real bonus.



The V-berth lacks some wow factor but it still works



Smart little portside cabin will be a hit with the kids



Comparable to 60ft cruisers, the full beam master is dressed to impress



A shower stall is also worked in



No triple doors but access is still good



The galley enjoys masses of counter and stowage space



Raised wheelhouse sofa creates the perfect vantage point



A boat of many levels: the ST52 enjoys a long and very safe upper deck plus a large deep cockpit below

Electric toilets and a holding tank system are part of the standard spec.

The master cabin has similar ablution facilities but here the cabin enjoys the full run of the hull's 16ft (4.92m) beam and rather than gain just a modicum of light via portholes you get the full benefit of those huge, oval hull windows.

Underway, it is something of a daunting sight to see tons of water rushing past that close but the windows are well braced by a longitudinal frame. Structurally sound it may be, but while we are all in favour of some ventilation whose idea was it put in the cheap looking vents at the top? Those aside it is a great cabin, closer to 60ft proportions than 50ft. With no

Accommodation

Super-size master suite but no VIP cabin



intruding overhang above the berth you get total standing headroom around the queen-size double plus there is stowage in abundance and a dressing table.

Exterior

Doors through the ship-like side deck coamings make for easy boarding and for added assistance there is a step set into the topside too, just below the well-placed rubbing strip.

The aft cockpit is spacious and there is room to add some free-standing furniture to supplement the built-in seating. In fact, this whole area can be battened down to make extra living accommodation thanks to the deep flybridge overhang and a couple of unobtrusive doors that can close off the side decks. Stowage for any extra chairs can be found in the lazarette and crew quarters below the cockpit sole but this admittedly big area aside, there isn't much storage back here – the fixed seating being part and parcel of the crew cabin rather than locker space.



Cute side deck doors

Exterior

Whether up front, back aft or on top, this is deck heaven



The flybridge is a different story. The large U-shaped dinette set to port has umpteen lockers let in the seating, while to stow and dispense sustenance there is a large wet-bar over to starboard. This forward section of the flybridge is well tucked in behind a solid coaming and you feel very much inside the boat rather than perched on top. The rear portion of the flybridge is kept clear to take some form of tender – in which you will need a crane or davit arrangement – with plenty of space left for access.

Engine options & access

Rather than the usual plethora of horsepower, the only engine option here is a pair of Volvo Penta D9s rated at 575hp a piece, which to our mind doesn't immediately smack of over-powering. But Bénéteau has worked hard to deliver the right

Helm from helm: it's a short hop from the lower to upper helm



Deep and safe the upper deck seating wraps around the central helm and is served by a wet-bar



A clutter-free foredeck will be a very safe place to work from



Space for freestanding furniture back aft. Hatch in teak sole leads to the lazarette

horsepower for this hull, we just hope the company has got its sums right.

To access the engineroom – 'room' being the appropriate word – you must lift the large gas-strut supported hatch to the lazarette where you'll find an aluminium ladder easing the drop down from the cockpit. The lazarette is boarded out and home to a number of auxiliaries, including the generator and in this case a washing machine as well as a crew cabin built across its aft end. From here, a three-quarter height door leads to the engine bay. The D9s look a bit lost among the treadplates that surround them and with the twin-2000lt tanks sited forward there is plenty of space outboard too.

The engineering looks solid, tidily executed and easy to access. Of course, the main items the skipper needs to check are the raw strainers and

primary fuel filters and these can be readily monitored by nipping forward between the widely spaced engines.

Engine options & access

No options but D9s are right for the job. Tidy installation



It was also good to find a moulded floor pan that stretched across the whole space, which makes it much easier to mop up any spillages and keep things clean down below.

Performance & handling

Setting off from La Rochelle, France, the first day's run was met with a hefty uneven chop, often a good 2m-high smack on the nose, which most similarly sized planing hulls would have complained about with plenty of slam. But this



Portuguese bridge creates safe walkaround decks. Fore deck seat offers privacy



Access around the boat is first class, the side decks are particularly good

was perfect for the ST52's finer entry and we kept up an unphased 15 knots at 2000rpm throughout, cutting smoothly through the seas. The second day saw us bowling along at the same revs but with a large following swell which pushed the Speed Over Ground (SOG) to well over 20 knots at times, as the hull got into some controlled bouts of surfing. The final stretch from the Channel Isles to Brighton delivered a more quartering sea, followed by a stiff Force 6 on the beam as we neared our destination. The latter situation was the most irksome of the lot but aside from keeping the wipers busy it did not trouble the hull or our steady 15-knot progress.

So what did we learn from putting 400 miles or so on the boat during our three ten-hour days at sea? Surprisingly, that we wouldn't hesitate to do it again! The whisper-quiet noise levels and the



Wheelhouse – upper deck steps



A ladder leads down to the lazarette and enginebay



Even with 2000lt fuel tanks there is still space all around the D9s

hull's comfortable head sea performance made the extended test very pleasant. Passage making on the ST52 is also made enjoyable by virtue of the wheelhouse and the raised settee is inviting enough that you can take to it for a good few hours before taking a turn at the helm. The view ahead, round to past the beam, is unencumbered but it fairs less well astern.

The hull responds surprisingly fast to the wheel, faster than most 40ft flybridge cruisers, and powers up quickly into 20-knot territory with the same reliable manners. The last few knots come slowly but as a long-legged passage maker this Trawler is a class act. Back in port, slow speed work is helped along by thrusters fore and aft, both of which are provided as standard.

Performance & handling

Comfortable, quiet passage maker with fast reactions



Specification & value

As standard the ST52 is impressively equipped – electric toilets, a hefty 7kW generator and thrusters – but clearly on a boat of this size there is going to be plenty of options and so Bénèteau has tried to simplify things by packaging them up. The first 'Avantage' pack is dominated by a comprehensive spread of Raymarine electronics while a further 'Elegance' pack includes teak decks. The total cost of both these upgrades adds a further £50,000 to the price. Dip into the rest of the options list, like the blue hull over the standard white for £4756, and it's pretty easy to hit the £750k mark.

So where does that put the Swift Trawler among its competition? In terms of engineering and build quality the 52 certainly delivers, even if its interior is still readily recognisable as a Bénèteau. All in all that fully splashed-out £750,000 price tag looks about right, even when you take into account the recent strength of the Euro.

Specification & value

Strong build and standard spec deliver value



Verdict

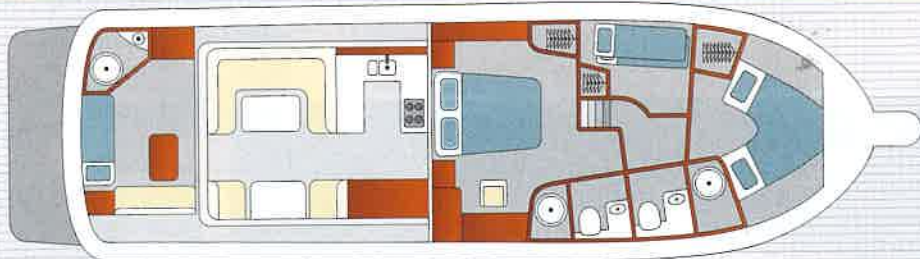
Bénèteau's ST52 does all the right 'trawler' things. It combines good liveaboard accommodation, loads of safe, easy to use deck area, and last but not least it distinguishes itself as a comfortable passage maker which can crack-on. But the best part is that not only does it tick all the boxes, it does so in a fresh, exciting way. This is a serious boat, worth a serious look.

8/10

MBM rating



Bénèteau Swift Trawler 52 technical data



specifications

BUILD	GRP
RCD	B
LENGTH OVERALL	55ft 9in (17m)
HULL LENGTH	50ft 0in (15.2m)
BEAM	16ft 2in (4.9m)
DRAUGHT	4ft 3in (1.3m)
AIR DRAUGHT	21ft 0in (6.4m)
DISPLACEMENT	28 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	880gal (4000lt)
WATER CAPACITY	176gal (800lt)

performance

Engines	Twin Volvo D9-575 diesels
Configuration	6cyl, 9.4lt, 575hp at 2600rpm
Conditions	Delivery trip wind NW'ly and W'ly
Load	fuel 50% water 50% crew 3

Rpm	knots	gph	lph	mpg	range	noise
1000	7.7	4	18	1.93	1359	62
1800	13.5	20	92	0.68	479	66
2000	15.7	25	116	0.63	444	69
2200	19.2	32	144	0.60	422	71
2400	22.2	40	184	0.56	394	75
2600	24.4	46	208	0.53	373	77

Range figures are in miles based on standard fuel tanks and include a 20% margin. GPH & MPG refer to imp. gallons – they may vary due to water, weather conditions, air, engine temperature, crew numbers, hull fouling, fuel quality and other issues. Noise readings in dB(A) were taken in wheelhouse.



key dimensions

WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	17in (43cm)
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 6in (1.98m)
MASTER CABIN BERTH	6ft 6in x 5ft 9in (1.9 x 1.75m)
FORECABIN BERTH	6ft 5in x 2ft 6in (2.95 x 0.76m)



prices

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with twin Volvo D9-575	£649,300
BOW & STERN THRUSTER	Standard
HEATING & AIR-CON	£27,370
GENERATOR	Standard
WINDLASS	Standard
BLUE HULL	£4756
TEAK DECKING	Part of Elegance package
COMMISSIONING & ANTIFOUL	£8890

BOAT AS TESTED (with Elegance package) £716,200

ENQUIRIES Dickies Int. Tel: 01273 675755
for nearest dealer go to www.beneteau.com

the rivals



SKAGEN 50

Price on application
Similar layout and main deck accommodation to the Bénèteau ST52 but it feels more open-plan if that is possible. Three good, even-handed cabins.
www.skagenyachts.com



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