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BENETEAU GRAN TURISMO 50 SPORTFLY

New from the hull up, this classy express cruiser is a boat for all seasons and all destinations.

BENETEAU'S GRAN TURISMO LINE debuted several years ago and found a lucrative market. But as with all successful products, it was important to keep up with changing tastes and technology while capitalizing on a good concept. So when the builder started to revamp the line, I thought we'd see the same thing but with slightly different amenities and décor choices. Not so. As the GT 40 replaced the 38, so the Beneteau Gran Turismo 50 replaces the 49, and I'm pleased to report that the French builder started fresh, from the aerated hull all the way up to the flybridge.

The new Beneteau GT 50 comes as a coupe or a flybridge, or Sportfly in company parlance. The former is more popular on the East Coast, where people tend to escape temperature extremes, while the latter lets West Coasters take advantage of a longer boating season. Our

test boat in Southern California was the Sportfly, the first in these waters.

The GT 50 is technically an express cruiser but it really does double duty as an enclosed motoryacht with a flybridge. It has benefited from Nuvolari & Lenard's stylish rounded lines and is all about open living just as before, but now it's a bit more seamless.

A deep hydraulic swim platform (3 feet, 8 inches) is the way to board both from the dock and the water. This expanded teak beach submerges below the waterline to form a playground and to help load and carry a tender that sits either outside on popup chocks or stows in the dinghy garage above the engine room. An optional winch is tucked up in the starboard corner to help pull in the spec'd Williams 270 jet tender (a 9-foot dinghy

Bow, stern and flybridge social zones make dayboating and coastal cruising aboard the Beneteau GT 50 a large-group affair.



The GT 50 has a playful way of combining the inside with the outside.

with an outboard may be accommodated).

When the dinghy garage door is closed, a module containing a sink, a Kenyon grill and a prep surface protrudes from the transom at waist level and within conversation distance of the cockpit. The chef stands on the swim platform while cooking. That's a great use of space and keeps the heat and smoke out of the cockpit.

And speaking of the cockpit, it has morphed into a nice continuation of the salon, as the port settee flows aft and then curves to form a transom seat that is tucked behind a folding table. To starboard is a module with a sink and an optional ice-maker under the steps that lead up to the flybridge.

Stepping up to the Sportfly, I found the helm to starboard and across from a companion seat that converts to a large sunpad. Seating for four is around a cocktail

SPECS

LOA 51 ft., 9 in.

Beam 14 ft., 5 in.

Draft 2 ft., 11 in.

Dry weight
30,746 lbs.

Water 106 gal.

Fuel 344 gal.

Power

Twin 435 hp
Volvo IPS600

Price (as tested)
\$1,188,000

table aft. South Coast Yachts added a very functional soft top with lots of stainless steel handholds that help steady the crew in a seaway.

Visibility forward from the single helm seat is excellent, giving the driver a view down over the large sunpad — with moving backrests — onto the bow and all the way to an anchor locker that holds a Lewmar windlass.

The helm station dash holds a 12-inch multifunction display, a joystick and bow thruster control, an engine screen and a remote VHF. Up here the display would benefit from a backup camera, since the seating area obscures the sightlines aft, but this may not be necessary thanks to the main helm. Keep reading.

The GT 50 has a playful way of combining the inside with the outside. Just slide the glass salon doors to starboard and then insert an armrest to connect the interior and exterior settees that run along the port side. Not only does this make the seating seamless, it also provides two built-in cupholders, so no table is needed.

The interior section of the settee has a foldout table with stitched leather sections. A straight settee to starboard rests just aft of the double helm seat. The steering wheel is on the centerline of the helm pod, which is the only way to describe it. It's almost like a module right off a large PWC. To starboard is a small opening window that



Tester's Opinion

Overall, there's very little not to like about the new GT 50. It's clear that a lot of thought went into the next iteration of the wildly popular GT 49, and the new model isn't just a do-over with a few color changes.



Inside and outside are seamlessly tied when the aft door is open. The helm pod supplies the captain with everything important. Two or three (optional) staterooms are belowdecks.

lets air in and helps with communications on deck. To port are two cupholders and a large cubby for cellphones, eyeglasses, pens and the detritus that helm stations accumulate.

A single 12-inch Simrad NSS multifunction display sits just above the wheel, but buyers can upgrade to a larger screen. Two rows of rocker switches and AC vents are on either side of the screen. The top of the pod is covered with stitched leather, a feature that helps cut down the glare from the windshield.

Beneteau's Ship Control digital switching system is behind a Lexan panel, at knee level, by the helm. This Scheiber system controls many of the onboard systems, including AC, pumps and lighting.

What seems odd at first is that the engine throttles and the joystick are inboard and to the left of the wheel. But don't lose faith, right-handers, because the joystick is actually in a great place for backing into a slip. Tight maneuvering during backing is usually when the joystick comes in handy, and with this layout the operator can stand in the middle of the boat with one hand on the joystick and look aft through the glass doors and have a good view of exactly where the boat is going. Driving from down here doesn't call for a backup camera.

The GT 50 is available with two or three cabins and two heads. The master is full beam and amidships and has 6 feet, 3 inches of headroom around the island bed. The mattress is on gas shocks, so it can be lifted easily to access the engine and AC water inlet through-hulls. (More on this later.) Long lounges run along either side — perfect perches on which to relax with a book and enjoy the breeze from the opening ports that are set into long hull windows. To port is an *en suite* head with an elegant vessel sink and a sizeable separate shower stall.

The VIP cabin in the bow was my favorite, truthfully, due to the amount of natural light. Large hull windows and opening ports are at eye level for anyone in bed, and air funnels in via the hatch above. The bow sunpad is cut out around the hatch, so people can lounge above

and below simultaneously even when the hatch is open.

The bed can be split when the outer edges of the island are lifted up and out to form two berths if the cabin is occupied by people who aren't a couple. A door leads into and through the shower compartment to the head, but there is another door by the sink, since this also doubles as the day head.

Grooves in the headliner show that a third cabin may be added, and that's how our test boat was laid out. Without the cabin, an L-shaped settee forms companion seating for the chef in the galley, but with the cabin in place, large families may be accommodated easily. The three-cabin layout also provides a great place to stow luggage or supplies and will help with resale value.

An L-shaped galley is to port. It's compact but well equipped with refrigeration drawers, twin sinks and what Beneteau calls the Magic Corner: a clever rack system that slides out and over when the under-counter cupboard is opened. It's a great way to maximize stowage capacity even in hard-to-reach corners. A lot of boat owners aren't fans of a galley-down arrangement. However, since there's a sink, an ice-maker and a grill in or near the aft cockpit, this

Inside, the salon is roomy and well-lit, and the operator can be part of the conversation. Docking is easy thanks to a Volvo Penta joystick.

layout shouldn't be too off-putting when it's time to serve sundowners.

As usual, San Diego Bay was flat on test day, though we found a 12-knot breeze rounding Point Loma. The dealer had a photo shoot planned for the day, so the boat had eight people aboard but it never felt crowded, even as everyone moved around to set up nice shots for the circling drone. Barrett Canfield and Tamara Krimstock of South Coast Yachts were on hand to answer questions.

The GT 50 rides on an AirStep2 hull that introduces air from vents along the hull-sides and funnels it beneath the boat. The resulting air cushion reduces friction in the aft third of the hull as the air is channeled back and out the transom, providing a bit of lift and increasing fuel efficiency. (Due to all this aeration, the raw-water intakes are farther forward and therefore accessible under the master berth, as mentioned earlier.)

Like all pod-driven boats, the GT 50 makes wide, arcing turns at speed. It leans inward about 10 degrees and then gracefully comes about. From a full stop, the boat came up on plane in 7.9 seconds with the wind and 9.3 seconds running into it. It planed at 15 to 16 knots and 2500 rpm. We found a top speed of 23.1 knots at 3450 rpm, where the Volvo Penta diesels burned almost 44 gph. An economical cruise would be around 18 to 20 knots where the engines burn a combined 36 gph. At this speed, the GT 50 has about a 200-mile range with a 10 percent reserve.

The only propulsion package for the GT 50 is twin Volvo Penta 435 hp diesels with pods. Joystick control is available at the main helm, the fly helm and in a well on the starboard side of the cockpit.

The engine room is accessed via a ladder when a section of the portside cockpit seating is raised. It's a tight engine room but has decent access to all systems. I could get around the twin diesels and even squeeze between them. Front and center is an 11 kw Onan genset and the pods are tucked all the



DETAILS

Standard Equipment

Twin Volvo Penta 435 hp engines with pods, joystick, hydraulic steering, Lenco electric trim tabs, bow thruster, 11 kw Onan genset, 2,000-watt inverter, Tecma electric heads, microwave, drawer refrigerators, Lewmar windlass and more.

Optional Equipment

Hydraulic swim platform, Simrad electronics pack, Glendinning CableMaster shorepower cord manager, ice-maker, outdoor galley on the transom, washer/dryer, third cabin, dishwasher, third joystick in cockpit, underwater lighting, forward sunpad w/adjustable backrest and more.

Builder

Beneteau, France; beneteau.com.

West Coast Dealer

South Coast Yachts, scyachts.com
San Diego, (619) 224-7784
Newport Beach, Calif., (949) 673-1607
Passage Nautical, passagenautical.com
Point Richmond, Calif., (510) 236-2633
Oakland, Calif., (510) 864-3000
Denison Yacht Sales, Seattle;
(206) 686-5400; denisonyachtsales.com
M&P Yacht Centre, Vancouver, B.C.;
(604) 692-0333; mpyachtcentre.com

way aft. Headroom is tight due to the dinghy garage that is shoehorned in above. I had no issues moving around while crouched and I could sit comfortably, but I'm 5 feet, 5 inches tall, and larger folks may not love this. However, a very handy access hatch in the cockpit sole allows for quick checks of vital engine fluids without ever having to set foot in the engine room.

Andreani Design has worked with Beneteau's Monte Carlo and Gran Turismo lines for several years, and the aesthetic is all about clean surfaces, hidden functionality and luxury touches that elevate the finish. Indirect lighting, leather accents and designer materials combine for eye-catching style. Our boat had walnut Alpi wood, dark brown leather accents and cream interior Sunbrella that worked well to create a soft and elegant style.

Base price for the GT 50 is less than \$845,000. Groupe Beneteau provides packages in trim levels (Essential and Lounge) and packs, which include electronics, seating options, décor and system upgrades. This is a simplified approach and is easier to understand. This fully loaded coastal cruiser with joystick control, good fuel economy and a luxe finish is a bit of a bargain at just under \$1.2 million as tested. 🍷