

- Elaine Bunting

## A work of art

A featherweight 54ft fast cruiser like no other - it's almost a piece of modern art



One of the hallmarks of a really good design - any design, not just a yacht - is that the closer you look, the more you find to delight you.

Having just sailed on the JP54, a 54ft super-lightweight fast carbon cruiser that is the result of a collaboration between French designer Guillaume Verdier and solo racer Jean-Pierre Dick, I put forward this boat as a work of art.

The new yacht was launched from New Zealand earlier this year and is in the south of France where she has been shown off at Cannes Boat Show and is on her way to St Tropez.

Yesterday I took her for a spin off Nice in very light winds. In 5 knots of true wind we were slicing along at 6.5 knots under main and gennaker.

Not bad, but then this highly unusual cruiser is a featherweight at only 9 tonnes.

She is like a scaled-down IMOCA 60 - not surprisingly given that it is a spin-off of the work done by Verdier for JP Dick's new IMOCA 60 Virbac-Paprec 3. Dick and some of his team formed a company to build and market this metamorphosis of the solo sailors' concepts of simplicity, power, ease of handling and speed.

So the JP54 is all in carbon, inside and out and has twin rudders and a canting keel. What she does not have is water ballast, and there are no daggerboards to intrude too much in the interior; upwind the keel is canted to 20° so that it will provide lift as well as extra stability.

The deck layout is beautiful - what can I say. It's so simple and logical. The furling lines for gennaker, solent and staysail lead aft under the starboard side deck foothold and are joined by

the main halyard, mainsheet, staysail sheet, barber hauler and cunningham which all come down to starboard of the coachroof and to a hydraulic winch just ahead of the starboard wheel and close to the offset companionway.

It means that everything can be controlled easily close to the wheel, as the gennaker (or solent) sheet leads to another hydraulic winch just aft. In practice, albeit in light winds, this worked perfectly. The whole of the port side deck is completely clean and clear, and it is on this side that the cockpit seats and table will eventually be fitted.

Although the carbon mast has rod rigging, and swept back spreaders so that the backstays aren't critical, the influence of IMOCA 60s is obvious from the complete absence of shackles. Gennaker turning blocks are open blocks; every other attachment is made with a Spectra lashing.

Unusually, there's no traveller, mainly because a large part of the transom is taken up with a dinghy garage that hinges up to open (there's an ingenious system of ropes and pulleys to slide the tender in and out).

Instead, the mainsheet attaches to two Spectra lines attached to (and easily detached from) dog bone fittings on deck. Again, this is becoming more and more commonplace on grand prix racers which, like the JP54, have very powerful hydraulic vang to control mainsail twist.

There are other clever cruising ideas on deck such as a seawater jet that blasts along the bowsprit when the windlass is winding in the anchor chain to clean it.

The keel can be canted to 50° to reduce the draught to 2.5m for shallower marinas and anchorages and there is a 1,000lt ballast tank aft to starboard, the sole purpose of which is to trim the yacht flat when the keel is canted hard over to port. Clever stuff.

But down below this yacht is even more amazing. The JP54 is like no yacht I've ever been on. It's not for everyone, to put it mildly, but it's impossible not to admire the lavish ingenuity behind every curve and every detail.

The centrepiece, quite literally, is a carbon pod containing nav station and galley which is on a rotating carousel. The whole centre of the saloon, table included, rotates from one side to the other using a Magic Trim hydraulic ram.

Why? It's not to change the view from the chart table - though it does that, creating a very weird sensation - but so that the heaviest items below, the hydraulic pump and boat's batteries, about 700kg between them, can be moved to weather, right out to the hull sides.

On such a light yacht the weight of this carousel moving is really very noticeable.

Weight saving ideas are everywhere, and often beautiful. The central structural bulkheads are marvellous - just think of the load bearing work they're doing here, but how wide the apertures are; most IMOCA 60s have only tiny holes and usually have twin bulkheads here either side of the keel ram.

The shapes of the moving pod and galley and the saloon table legs, which are shaped like a tree, are superb, all beautifully made from carbon. And I loved the ingenuity of ideas the

hanging lockers which are simple gill-shaped openings with shock cord restraints, the little fold-out tables in the cabins, gorgeous wave-shaped shelves in the forecabins... the list of lovely detail work goes on.

Respect to the interior designer Stephanie Marin, who'd never worked on a yacht before, and to the boatbuilders at ~~Southern Ocean Marine~~ Absolute Dreamer NZ in Tauranga; their work is superb.

To put the immensity of the task in perspective, this design is so complex it needed 138 different moulds and the total build time was a staggering 30,000 hours.

Which brings me neatly to the price tag. To you, sir: €2 million. Though that doesn't buy you the sails. So perhaps add another €250,000 to get you started.

So, this is a rich man's fast toy. And although I'm brimming with admiration for this work of genius, I'm not sure how big a market there is going to be for such a specialised yacht - one with scant privacy and only one heads. These points are not trivial, not in cruising terms, and certainly not for that sort of moolah.

But more of that in the January issue, for which I am going to be extruding a full and frank report.

For now, here are these detail snaps from our sail yesterday. I'll post up some video soon as well.



Sailing the JP54 in light winds off Nice



Looking forward along the starboard side deck and showing the IMOCA 60 style sheet lead twacker



Lines lead back to a hydraulic winch to starboard. It is surrounded by rope tidy bags and a large bin for mainsheet tail. If necessary, a second line can be turned round the ring on the base and cross winched to the hydraulic winch to port



Water jet along the chain on the bowsprit. The bobstay is detachable



The mainsheet can be easily detached from these Spectra lines on dogbone fittings (below)



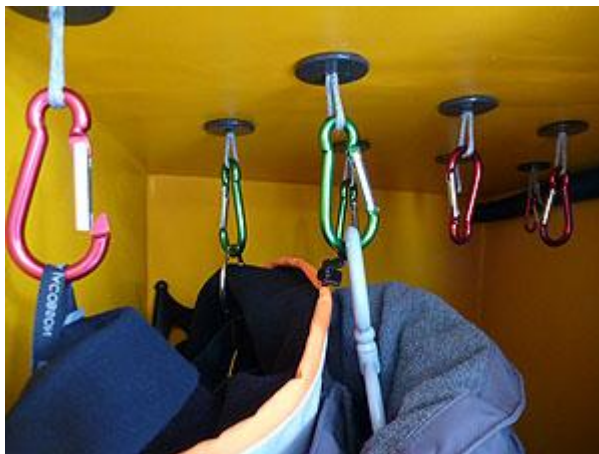
The dinghy garage behind the transom



Me at the nav station which is part of a rotating pod, with the galley on the other side



The interior of the JP54 looking forward. Look at the beautiful shape and flared openings of the central carbon bulkhead



A neat and light solution for a hanging locker: carabiners hung from Spectra loops



Part of the hydraulics system, power management system and batteries which live on shelves behind the rotating central carousel - getting their 700kg weight to windward was a key idea in the concept

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