

FROM PARIS TO PITTWATER

Sometimes it only takes a boat show and an approving partner to upgrade to the luxury of a Prestige 550 flybridge, as one Sydney owner found





Matt Willett himself at the helm — and looking slightly startled.



Nothing pleases me more than conducting a candid interview with a genuinely delighted new-boat owner — delighted with the boat, delighted with the agent, delighted with the supplier, just delighted all-round really.

Pittwater local Tom has owned several boats, most recently a Sea Ray 48 so he knew what to expect. To be honest, I doubt even Tom expected the experience to be quite as good as it was.

Keen to move on to something new, Tom spent the best part of a Friday at the 2011 Sydney International Boat Show on his own looking at all the latest offerings, hopeful he would find something which would tick a majority of his boxes and all of his wife's. A big ask perhaps, but little did he know just how successful this quest would work out in the end.

At some stage Tom stepped onto the Prestige 500, a quality boat-build under the umbrella of the Jeanneau group (look for our 2012 review of this model at www.tradeboat.com.au), being presented at the Sydney show by MW Marine. Impressed with the layout, including the boat's upstairs galley and private-entry

master cabin, and with an initially good impression of local dealer Matt Willett, Tom headed home convinced his wife would look upon the Prestige 500 favourably.

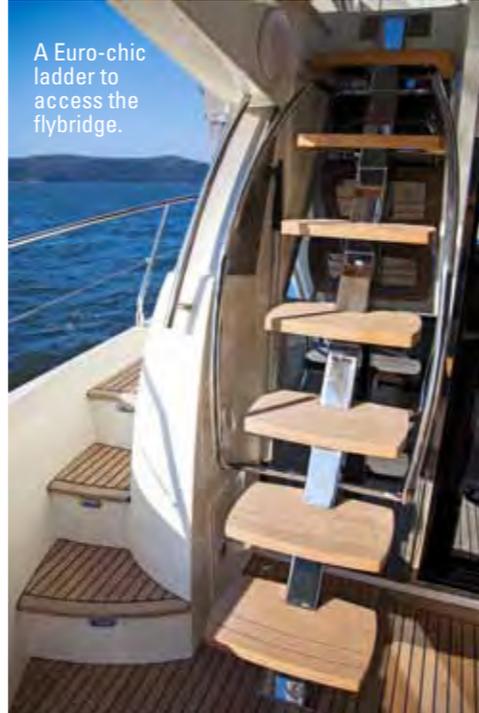
She was impressed; in fact he couldn't get her off the boat. Except for one factor — she would have liked a bigger galley. A good outcome, but not a great one. At that stage the Prestige 550 was still on the company's drawing board and would be at least a year away. A whole year without a boat was a tough pill to swallow.

Still Tom was convinced that with Matt Willett he was dealing with the right person, and with Jeanneau's vastly-scaled economics and the strength of the Aussie dollar a Prestige 550, even one that was still not much more than a concept, looked like one hell of a good-value proposition.

INVITED GUESTS

Okay, so maybe I'm using a little poetic license describing the Prestige 550 at only being in the concept stage. In fact the prototype was due to roll off the production line that November, and Tom and his wife would join Matt in Nantes, France as VIP guests at its unveiling.

VIP is right, there was a chateau



A Euro-chic ladder to access the flybridge.

and plenty of champagne, but what is important was Tom's lingering impression of the new Prestige 550 and the factory that built it. Some companies can build good products without paying much homage to its internal culture. Great companies build great products by leveraging



a great culture, and Jeanneau's Prestige was clearly a great company.

A month later and the group were back at the Paris boat show for a test sail in typically wintery weather. Even rugged-up like they were, with visions of an Australian summer in their mind's eye, both Tom and his wife loved the boat — especially the concept of the open-air top deck and bridge. The deal was done and there was nothing left to do except wait.

Although the usual lead time for

a vessel from Europe is around six months the order list for the Prestige 550 was long and would be a year (December 3, 2012) before this boat would roll off the ship in Sydney for its handover on the 23rd. I'm not sure if Matt Willett's team managed to get a Christmas bow around the whole boat but at least it was under the metaphorical tree.

NO SUBSTITUTE FOR SIZE

Standing at the dock watching *Mon Amie* cruise in to pick our team up

The open air bridge (photos left) was one of two or three features that clinched the deal. The Cummins Zeus system comes with multiple-station options — see the flybridge helm (top right) and the docking-only station (above right).

I was stuck by the volume of this vessel. Even without an enclosed hardtop this is an imposing boat. Where the recent American trends have been for decreasing profiles it seems the Europeans have been moving in the other direction. It's simple mathematics; if you want volume inside you have to have volume on the outside, and the Prestige 550 carries its volume all the way aft ensuring every cabin gets generous headroom and a sense of space.

Boarding via the hydraulically-operated swimplatform, even with all our bulky equipment, was easy. Despite a good-sized inflatable tender being in residence, there was still plenty of room to negotiate our way to the starboard stairwell, which leads to a gorgeous aft deck.

Fully decked out in teak, to my eye the aft deck has more of a patio feel to it than a cockpit. This is a space designed for ambience

...A PRESTIGE 550,
EVEN ONE THAT
WAS STILL NOT
MUCH MORE THAN
A CONCEPT, LOOKED
LIKE ONE HELL OF
A GOOD-VALUE
PROPOSITION

soaking and social mingling, not fishing — the Europeans would never consider engaging in an activity as base as catching their own dinner.

A good-sized settee faces forward behind a solid timber table which, with the addition of a few extra chairs, would easily cope with a dining party of six. If your instant reaction is, “Where am I going to store those extra deck chairs?” look no farther than the crew cabin, the entry to which is cleverly concealed under the settee. On this boat, and in Australia, this crew cabin is not that likely to be utilised by an epaulette-wearing captain, but even if it did there is still plenty of storage space.

The waterfront apartment feel continues and strengthens as you pass through an interestingly configured set of double sliding doors. It's a style that grows on you — galley to port with passage to the saloon proper to starboard, a little serving bar dividing the passageway in the middle. The advantage is the ability to enjoy an unfettered thoroughfare from either the galley or the saloon simultaneously, without the inconvenience of open hinged doors intruding into the patio deck.

The galley itself is bigger than the one in the smaller Prestige 500 so Tom's wife made an excellent

[HIGHS]

- › Private master cabin
- › Increased internal volume
- › Comprehensive galley
- › Open-air bridge
- › Clean styling
- › Standout buying experience
- › Excellent aftersales service

[LOWS]

- › Entry to master cabin needs looking at

A giant sunbed drapes the forward cabin top, cupholders and handrails either side adding to the already luxurious comfort factor.



Featuring a larger galley and saloon area (left), the 550 is a big step-up from the already very good 500. The en suite options (below right) justify some research to exactly tailor your requirements. The much vaunted master cabin and its custom-made Rockdale mattress (below left).



OWNERS OF THE PRESTIGE 550, WHO WOULD UNDERSTANDABLY BE DELIGHTED WITH THE QUALITY OF THEIR OWN PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION, SHOULDN'T HAVE ANY CONCERNS THEIR GUESTS WON'T BE AS WELL CATERED FOR

decision there. What pleased me the most was the abundant and easily-accessed refrigeration and the full-sized under-bench oven. I suspect with use, the ability of the chef to work in isolation, yet within easy conversational reach of the rest of the party and with unobstructed walking access to the alfresco dining table outside, could prove to be the coup de grace of the setup.

ROYALLY ACCOMMODATED

Walk straight ahead from the starboardside thoroughfare and you enter the saloon proper. However, turn to your right and you'll find an inviting stairwell beckoning investigation. It is the private entry point to the much vaunted and completely secluded master cabin. I have to be honest and say the design of the stairwell entry needs further development as it is

a potential stumbling hazard for those who haven't realised it is there. It is the only fault I could find in my notes and could be at least partially addressed with an extra handhold or two.

A short descent brings you to the oasis of seclusion and privacy that first caught Tom's eye on the Prestige 500 at the Sydney show. Naturally the 550's extra beam translates fluidly into extra space and indeed extra head height. The smaller model's cabin was lavish enough but the full-beam of this boat has really allowed this master suite to breathe. Panoramic tinted windows flood the space with cooling water-reflected light, watery patterns illuminating the ceiling above.

A quick test of the bed reveals there is something extra special about the mattress. Turns out it is a locally-made product custom-built for this boat by the Sydney-based

Rockdale Mattress Factory. How on earth one is expected to build the motivation and leave this bed to work diligently at the twin writing desk adjacent I have no idea.

Switch on the artificial lighting and the feeling of added warmth is immediate. With all the switches on a full walk-in wardrobe is revealed. It has that fresh smell of cedar, which I suspect is what the shelving is made of. A clean and inviting walkthrough shower and generous bathroom completes this almost self-contained retreat.

SOCIALLY STYLISED

Back up with the guests in the main saloon, the contemporary Euro-chic styling continues. For me it is the clean straight lines and the well-defined angles of the upholstery, all tastefully highlighted with classic-patterned accessories that define the look as French. As I write those words I picture

urban designers choking on their espressos at my lack of education.

A pair of these precisely-cut couches face each other across the full-beam of the saloon — one U-shaped around a solid timber extendable table, the other a straight two- or three-seater — providing an intimate environment to wile away an evening in pleasant conversation, a pop-up satellite-fed TV on hand should the game be on.

HONOURED GUESTS TO FORWARD

Owners of the Prestige 550, who would understandably be delighted with the quality of their own private accommodation, shouldn't have any concerns their guests won't be as well catered for. Prestige offers a range of forward accommodation options revolving more or less around a VIP cabin and a twin-single cabin, and either

with independent en suites or a single-shared bathroom.

Sensibly, it would appear from the specifications I found online all the bed options up forward can either be separated as singles or pushed together to form a double. I may have this wrong but a quick enquiry with your dealer will ensure the facts are clear.

AND IGNITION

In keeping with its indoor/outdoor brief the Prestige 550 offers two dedicated helm stations, a full helm in the saloon with a slightly abbreviated version on the open-air bridge, supported by a third docking-only station in the cockpit.

Featuring twin 600hp Cummins QSC engines driven through joystick-controlled Zeus pod drives this boat sits at the current leading-edge of fuel efficiency and ease of manoeuvrability. Trade-a-Boat has talked about the features and

benefits of the Zeus system on numerous occasions and will cover it again in detail next month so all that is needed today is a reminder of the extreme user-friendliness of the technology, particularly for novices.

On this day we did most of our driving from upstairs making the most of a balmy summer's day. In a boat that seems deliberately styled to make time for smelling-the-roses, as they say, it doesn't mince words when it comes to some throttle-down high-speed travelling.

Like most modern common rail engines the Cummins QSCs have a little lag in their initial acceleration due to the carefully controlled fuel management system, but the transition is absolutely minimal and soon enough we were throwing her around like a sportsboat. The vessel's cruising speed of 24kts is reached seemingly effortlessly and at this pace you will cover the



The hydraulically-lowered swimplatform (right) makes accessing the water almost too easy. Just press a button and launch the tender.



[tradeboat SAYS...]

The French certainly have a way of presenting a different perspective on the classic Australian boating lifestyle in a highly palatable way. It is apartment-style living by the water without losing touch with its essential ingredients — the smell, the touch and the taste of this perfect marine environment we are blessed with. The boat's volume allows for a highly-useable layout and the total seclusion of the master cabin is priceless.

sea miles quickly and relatively cost effective. It is worth noting the actual figures we recorded are significantly lower than those Prestige publish.

Another interesting observation was the relative lack of wake the boat throws, even when hard in a turn. We were shooting this story from the small Brig inflatable (pictured hereabouts) and I had some concerns about the expensive camera gear we were using. I needn't have worried.

THE VERDICT

The French certainly have a way of presenting a different perspective on the classic Australian boating lifestyle in a highly palatable way. It is apartment-style living by the water without losing touch with its essential ingredients — the smell, the touch and the taste of this perfect marine environment

we are blessed with. The boat's volume allows for a highly-useable layout and the total seclusion of the master cabin is priceless.

From an engineering point of view it is important to remember that this is the total luxury end of a very large business so it will be good and backed-up by excellent customer service.

In summary, yet again I find myself thoroughly impressed by the whole Prestige package. This is a company that understands a quality experience is about much more than a few feet of fibreglass, coloured cushions and an engine. To listen to new owner Tom's genuine enthusiasm and delight with the buying process, the level of customer service he has experienced thus far, and of course his beautiful boat *Mon Amie*, was absolute gold. This is one happy man — and wife. 🍷

Facts & figures

PRESTIGE 550

PRICE AS TESTED

\$1,420,000

PRICED FROM

\$1,325,000

GENERAL

LENGTH 17.92m (overall); 16.06m (hull)

WEIGHT 17700kg (light ship)

BEAM 4.79m

DRAFT 1.17m

CAPACITIES

CABINS 3

PEOPLE (NIGHT) 6+1

FUEL 2200lt

WATER 800lt

PERFORMANCE

REC. MAX SPEED 30kts

CRUISING SPEED 24kts

FUEL BURN 193lt/h (cruising speed)

RANGE 280nm (cruising speed)

ENGINE

MAKE/MODEL 2 x Cummins QSC8.3 w/ Zeus pods

TYPE Electronic six-cylinder turbo-diesel w/ common rail injection and aftercooling

RATED HP 600 (each)

DISPLACEMENT 8.3lt (each)

REC. MAX REV RANGE 2500 to 3000

SUPPLIED BY

MW Marine,
d'Albora Marinas, The Spit,
Mosman, NSW, 2088
Contact: Matthew Willett
Phone: (02) 9930 0000; 0488 821 112
Email: boats@mwmarine.com.au
Web: www.mwmarine.com.au;

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit www.prestigeaustralia.com

LAYOUT



Test day weather information supplied by

