

STORY PATRICK BOLLEN PHOTOS SUPPLIED

# TOUR DE FORCE

Trade-a-Boat is in France for a firsthand look at the mighty Jeanneau boat manufacturing complex and process

From Charles De Gaulle International Airport in Paris it is approximately three hours by very fast train to the township of Nantes in western France and then another hour farther south to Les Herbier in the French countryside. A city of approximately 300,000 inhabitants, Nantes is the sixth largest city in France located on the beautiful Loire River just 50km from the Atlantic coast.

An hour south and I was in Les Herbier, capital of the northern Vendee. Les Herbier, named after the rolling countryside, one of the most dynamic and enterprising regions in all of France with national, European and international businesses operating in the district including, STX, Airbus and Jeanneau.

The Jeanneau boat operation and factory is a massive 37-acre complex situated just outside Les Herbier and is one of the region's major employers.

Jeanneau has been in the business of building boats since founder Henri Jeanneau built his first under the brand-name in 1957. He had commenced boatbuilding the previous year, when he also won the 6 heures de Paris powerboat race. Two years later in 1958 Henri produced his first fibreglass moulded hull, thus marking the beginnings of the now world-renowned brand's Jeanneau yacht range.

From 1958 to 1970 Jeanneau produced a series of speedboats under the Calanque brand and sailing yachts with the Sangria appellation. In 1970 corporate ownership of Jeanneau became the property of the USA based Bangor Punta, with yachts being produced under licence, and in 1990 a joint venture was set in place with the Italian builder Ferretti.

While the Sun brand was first established in the '70s it wasn't until 1992 that the range became popular with the production of the





Sun Legende 41 under licence to Greece and the arrival of the Olympic Sea range. Then in 1995 Jeanneau was acquired by Groupe Beneteau creating the largest sailboat manufacturer in the world.

### ASSEMBLY LINE

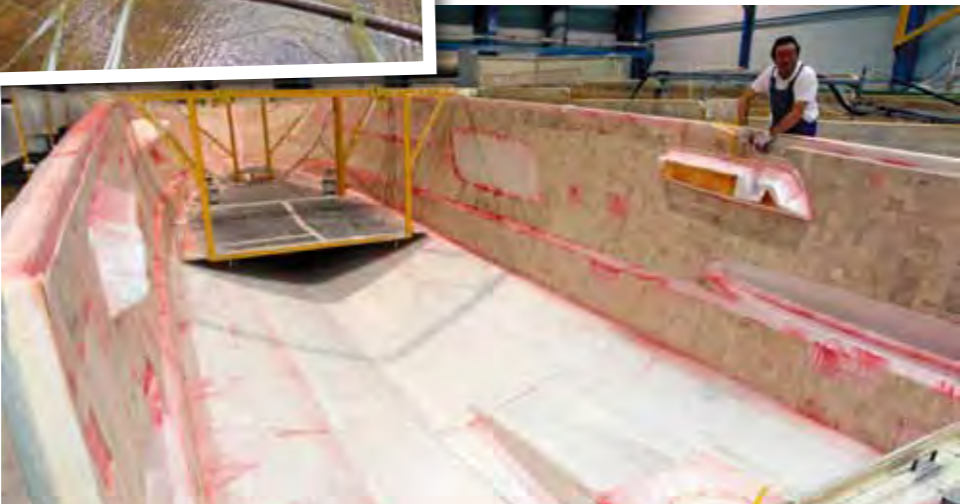
With that short history in place I can now take you on a tour of the build process of the extraordinary Jeanneau production facility at Les Herbier. First sighting of this massive complex left me astonished, to say the least. I had never seen anything like it in recreational boat manufacturing. The closest is motor vehicle production and pretty much the build of Jeanneau yachts is exactly what Henry Ford pioneered back in 1913 with the assembly line.

Today the build process is very much akin to the Ford ideal. Starting with the laminating and moulding of the hull and deck, the layup process is carried out using a special chemical dye that reacts with the fibreglass to ensure an even spread of resin over vinyl ester layers that are incorporated to provide osmosis protection. Jeanneau uses considerable amounts of woven rovings during the build to provide strength, and yachts 37 feet and bigger also use Kevlar rovings in below waterline areas to ensure strength in the keel to hull area. The layup is completed using a team of four or five laminators.

Jeanneau continues to use traditional hull strengthening systems bonding wooden stringers



The 37 acre complex (top) is best appreciated from the air. Viewing it in this context explains why the Jeanneau factory is one of the region's most significant employers with more 1200 staff on site. State of the art fibre glassing processes are employed at all stages.



to provide rigidity.

Once the hull is complete it is transferred to another monster hall, where the moulded deck is shaped and computer cut to fit the hull. After arriving at the beginning of the fitout line it undergoes engine mounting, installation of pump and sump systems, generator mounting, plumbing, electrical and all through-hull fittings.

The deck is bonded to the hull using a special Sikeflex adhesive with self-tapping screws fitted below and through the toerail assembly. The transom joint is reinstated and from the inside, additional woven rovings are laminated into place.

Computer pre-cut bulkheads using the best marine ply timbers and veneers are laminated into place. All panels are varnished using the most modern spray techniques in special dust-free enclosures within the complex. The joinery shop is equipped with a fully automated varnishing line approximately 150 feet in length.

Huge sheets of teak-veneered marine plywood are automatically sprayed with three coats of varnish between sanding and drying. The varnished sheets are then intricately cut into desired shapes using big computer controlled cutting machines. All interior saloon settings, saloon furniture, cupboards, closets, lockers and drawers — all previously sliced to size by computer controlled cutting tables — are then lifted into place using big overhead gantries.

The interior fitout continues as the boat progresses through the build. The boat is moved across the hall as each section nears completion from bilge fitout to the lowering of the deck.

The cabin top or deck head (ceiling) is also cast during the laminating stage of the build.

### TEAMWORK

Teams of workers — Jeanneau employs 1200 staff, technicians, craftsmen, designers, shipwrights, engineers and electricians — follow the boat from moulding to finished product. Detail is everything and quality control is stringently measured from moulding to completion.

The deck is laid as the boat moves across the floor. Located in a well, moulded to accommodate the new hull, shipwrights are able to work comfortably and safely at bench height laying each plank of 10ml-thick teak to the fibreglass deck



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A production facility of this scale can afford few errors. Computers control the vast majority of the pre-assembly cutting work (top two photos) and the consistency in the resulting hulls ready for outfitting (above and this photo) is staggering.



## THE BUILD PROCESS FOR THE PRESTIGE RANGE TAKES PLACE IN THE SAME WAY AS THE JEANNEAU YACHT RANGE AND AT THE SAME MONSTER FACTORY IN LES HERBIER

and cockpit. Once this is complete shipwrights then install the toerails and, if required, the rubbing strakes.

The deck hardware, including winches, blocks, cleats, jammers and hatches are then fitted and secured with the required backing plates of end-grain balsa to ensure rigid stability.

### QUALITY CONTROL

As the boat nears completion technicians and engineers constantly monitor the installation and setup of all systems, including state-of-the-art communications and navigation components being fitted throughout the vessel, both in the navigation station located in the main saloon and on deck in the cockpit. Simrad is the navigation-GPS technology of choice employed by the Jeanneau operation.

From this point the cabin sole is laid and the keel secured to the hull, the pushpit and pulpit rails and stanchions are installed before the boat is lifted from the production floor and lowered into a testing tank, where all through-hull fittings are checked for leaks.

At this point the boat is again inspected. The hull and deck undergo a rigorous scrutinisation and final oncover before being shrink-wrapped and located outside the factory ready for shipment to sailing enthusiasts all around the world.

Probably the most impressive factor of the entire build is how clean and tidy the entire operation is from hull mould to the ready-to-sail finished product.

Jeanneau has more than 300 agents worldwide representing the famous brand's yachts ranging in size from 26 to 57 feet, and most recently the new and exciting Prestige range of powerboats.

### PRESTIGE PROCESS

The build process for the Prestige range takes place in the same way as



the Jeanneau yacht range and at the same monster factory in Les Herhier.

I have spent many years in the business of boat project management, restoration, repair and as a commercial skipper. I was so impressed by the Jeanneau factory that I needed to spend another few hours inspecting what I can say simply blew me away.

We finished our tour by early evening before retiring to the stunning, historical and luxurious Chateau Boisniard in the Chambretaud region.

### SECOND SIGHT

The following morning I went back to the Jeanneau factory, where I once again took an unaccompanied tour of the whole complex to reinforce what I'd experienced the day before. I was right. This boatbuilding facility in the French countryside is indeed one of the best boating experiences I have ever enjoyed and to any prospective buyer of a Jeanneau yacht or Prestige powerboat I strongly recommend jumping aboard a V Australia jet and heading to France to check it out for yourself.

The Jeanneau operation has several facilities throughout France. In Les



Once the basic hull is completed, the process takes on a very automotive production line look. With the engineering in place (top image and insert) the pre-moulded floors (middle) and cabin tops go on, and the product starts to look more like a finished boat (above).

Herbiers, the company produces the Merry Fisher and Cap Camarat range of outboard speedboats, the Prestige range of luxury power craft to 60 feet, and the Sun Fast and Sun Odyssey range of yachts.

In Rochetretoux, Jeanneau specialises in the manufacture of the Leader range of sportsboats and the Prestige 36, while in Cholet it produces a range of 10m to 14m sailboats. 🚀