

## Sail Magazine

### New Boats: The Beneteau 361

Is 36 feet of family cruiser enough? With the trend toward ever-bigger boats (40 feet is the average length of auxiliary sailboats introduced last year), there has been resurgence in mid-30-footers as well. The Beneteau 361 is a leading example of what a 36-footer can deliver under way and at anchor. The boat has a big interior that will suit a sailing family (a double berth forward for the kids, an "adults" master cabin with ensuite head/shower aft) and a moderate-size sailplan that won't add to Mom and Dad's stress level on the weekend.

Under sail the feel coming through the leather-covered 42-inch wheel is that of a balanced and responsive boat; visibility from the helm station is above average, and the console-mounted throttle controls and bracing places for feet are located in handy spots. Overall, the Beneteau 361 is an average performer—a performance cruiser in which a touch more emphasis has been placed on "cruiser" than performance.

The Lewmar 44 self-tailing genoa winches are within reach of the person at the helm, but (in common with almost all family cruisers this size) the mainsheet is located out of reach on the cabin top, requiring help from another crew. Sail controls have been kept basic for casual cruising, and the anchoring setup (an electric windlass is optional) functions well. But the boat's side decks are narrow, and there are no cabin top handholds forward of the mast.

Below deck the Beneteau 361's layout performs in superior fashion in terms of a free-flowing traffic pattern (the cook is happily removed from the main cabin thoroughfare in a zone of his/her own) and the many dimensions and angles that make an interior work for real-size people. In the saloon, for example, an adult can take a seat at the table with ease instead of (one of sailing's more telling euphemisms) "scrunching in." The forward-facing nav table effectively adds another seat to the already large saloon area, making the main cabin a natural for entertaining. Natural light, lighting, and ventilation are superior in the saloon, though the forward cabin could benefit from the strategic positioning of a fan in the bow area, and the master cabin could use a fan in the aft port corner—just to make sure that air doesn't stagnate at either end of the ventilation chain.

Beneteau has invested a goodly amount of the boat's interior space in the head enclosure (with dedicated shower), and they've invested even more space in the boat's showpiece—a galley that is safe, secure, and offers abundant stowage (dry and refrigerated) and counter space. There's very little downsizing needed, in either the cook's ambitions or his or her collection of favorite food-prep hardware, to make the culinary transition from house to boat.

The boat's wiring, hoses, and through-hulls are clearly labeled and accessible, and the swing-up companionway steps make getting to the engine easy (but engine access needs

to be more complete). Engine soundproofing could use upgrading, and the 20-gallon diesel-fuel tank and 275-amp-hour battery bank are on the small side.

If you're itching to move up from the 25- or 30-footer your family loves but has outgrown, the Beneteau 361 can deliver a world of cruising in 36 feet.—T.L.