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FIRST TEST BENETEAU OCEANIS 30.1

Does Beneteau's new entry-level Oceanis redefine what owners should expect from smaller yachts? Graham Snook travelled to Les Sables d'Olonne to find out

Words & pictures Graham Snook

SPECIFICATIONS

MAKE/ MODEL
Beneteau Oceanis 30.1

PRICE FROM
£72,300 inc VAT

DESIGNER
Finot Conq/Nauta

BUILDER
Beneteau

Beneteau has achieved something great with its new 30-footer. For a small production yacht sitting squarely at the entry-level end of the market, it has crammed the boat full of smart ideas. The features and fittings on board are of a level normally only seen in higher-spec boats, and they've created a vessel that sails beautifully to boot. Her owners will be spoilt into expecting every yacht they own after this one to have cockpit locker lights, accumulator tanks in the fresh water system and bronze skin fittings, but you might expect to pay a hefty premium for these features and excellent build quality. So to find stacks of lovely details on the smallest Oceanis that Beneteau produce is very pleasing to see indeed.

The 30.1 has a strong family resemblance to the larger 46.1 and the 51.1, with their Pascal Conq lines and full-length hull chines generating maximum living space below decks while preserving a narrower waterline. Her square-top mainsail and twin wheels look sharply modern, but her narrower beam – to make her easier to transport by road – should please traditionalists and result in a boat that tracks straight even without a hand on the helm. These are bold claims, so does she live up to first impressions? ➔





ABOVE: Twin wheels are an option while a tiller is standard

BELOW: Working space on deck is generally good, though the side decks are narrow

At the end of 2018 Beneteau Group gained the majority share of Polish yacht builder Delphia. Delphia had not only built its own Delphia brand of yachts and motorboats, but sail and motorboats for other manufacturers too. With the recent takeover, however, Beneteau was able to use Delphia's experience and knowledge of small boat production, and reduced labour costs, to give the potential new boat owner more for their money. Build processes were streamlined, which saved money that could then be reinvested into the build and finish of the boat, and the result was a boat that takes the quality up a gear or two.

The 30.1 could so easily have been a Delphia with a Beneteau badge, but Beneteau used Pascal Cong for the hull design and Nauta Design for the interior to create a boat that has the feel and look of a Beneteau Oceanis with an added level of attention to detail. She's designed for new sailors and those coming up from dinghies or smaller keelboats. If those people have children, they will find she has

much to make her comfortable and safe. Because of the type of sailors she's aimed at, she was designed to hit a sweet spot between 10-15 knots of breeze, and if the 10-12 knots of breeze on our test are anything to go by, Beneteau has hit its objectives square on the head with the biggest hammer it could find.

She was also designed to be easier to transport by road so her beam is less than 3m and she has a displacement of less than 4 tonnes. While her width and displacement means that she can't be towed by cars, she can be transported by lorry

without the need for precautions such as outriders in mainland Europe (saving £800-£1,200 to transit from the north to the south of France for example). While this is admirable and will no doubt save some owners money, she's no trailer-sailer (and won't be even with the lifting keel or mast tabernacle).

ON THE HELM

I did still miss the extra beam that gives more form stability and was left wondering how much better she would be if this restraint had been lifted. As it is, on the wind, she is relatively quick to heel but she will stay there, whereas wider boats tend to be slower to heel but gain heel angle quickly in gusts. The 30.1, though, will happily sit at around 20° of heel.

This will be a familiar feeling for dinghy sailors and those who have owned older or narrower boats before, although those downsizing may initially feel she's tender, until confidence in her builds.

She has that lovely feeling on the helm that combines all the fun of sailing a dinghy with the security of sailing a yacht, her twin rudders helping her to track nicely and give a delightfully responsive feel and good grip without stepping into the realms of being twitchy. In the past, I've criticised test boats for having a stiff, unabsorbing feeling on the helm, but there is no such joy-robbing on the 30.1. It had a good balance and weight. The wheels could even be left without her straying off course.

As she has a displacement of less than 4 tonnes – much is saved in keel weight – her light wind performance is sparkling, making almost 6 knots on the wind, and up to 7 knots on a fetch (albeit with minimal kit on board).

A self-tacking jib is standard as is the flat-topped mainsail. This boat had the optional 105% genoa which gives an extra 6.4m² (69 sq ft) of forward sail

She has that lovely feeling on the helm that combines the fun of sailing a dinghy with the security of a yacht

area, as well as the optional bowsprit, code zero and asymmetric spinnaker. To accommodate the flat-topped main, the rig is backstay-less (although if you're set on one, it can be fitted), which has the advantage of giving the helm unimpeded sitting space outboard of the wheel.

A tiller is standard, but this boat had twin wheels. There will, no doubt, be some who bemoan a 30ft yacht having twin wheels, but I'd argue it makes the cockpit a safe area for crew, giving them space to relax, without finding themselves sitting in the wrong place. It also makes access from the transom to the boat a doddle and gives the helm a good view forward. Having said that, I'm not enthusiastic about having the mainsheet forward, out of reach at the companionway – especially on smaller boats – so I might be tempted to take the tiller option and pick having the mainsheet lead to the cockpit, for the type of sailing I do.

The mainsheet on this boat was on a bridle over the companionway, which enables the boom to be kept close to the centreline when close hauled. The blocks on the bridle did seem fairly far aft and within head-height for someone in the companionway, though with a sprayhood raised this would be a moot point.

The cockpit is a good size for a small boat. The 1.51m (4ft 11in) seats aren't quite long enough to lie down, as the moulded wheel pedestals reduce their seat length, though they are longer with the tiller option. The helm seats are perched outboard and

aft of the wheels but the pushpit on two sides offers plenty of secure support. Immediately forward of the wheel were the Harken 35ST genoa winches; as a self-tacking jib is standard, these winches are optional. The coaming is a good height, though there is a slight corner, rather than a rounded edge, on its top edge, which was a little uncomfortable – but I think this would just encourage me to go for cockpit cushions.

The cockpit locker to starboard has the fuel tank beneath it, but even so it's a very good size and can gobble kit with ease. It was a surprise to see gas struts on the long locker lid, and more of a surprise to see light inside – with two different brightness settings. If the light wasn't facing aft, towards the helm, it would have been perfect.

On the transom is a bathing ladder that can be accessed and used from the water, without having to lower the bathing platform – sensible and safe. The gas locker is under the port helm seat – there is only room for one bottle (so the spare could be kept in the anchor locker) but it was excellent to see a LPG gas leak detector fitted.

Forward there's the optional bowsprit and one of the largest offset bow rollers I've seen on this size of

BELOW: With a relatively narrow beam, the 30.1 is balanced and light upwind, the twin-rudders giving plenty of grip

| POINT OF SAIL | AWA* | AWS** | SPEED |
|---------------|---------|---------------|---------------|
| Close hauled | 32°-34° | 14-16 knots | 5.6-5.9 knots |
| Fetch | 60° | 13-15 knots | 6.2-7.0 knots |
| Beam reach | 90° | 11-13 knots | 6.2-6.7 knots |
| Broad reach | 120° | 8.7-9.6 knots | 5.3-6.2 knots |
| Run | 180° | 5.8-6.2 knots | 4.3-4.6 knots |

*APPARENT WIND ANGLE **APPARENT WIND SPEED
Under engine (21hp): 2,500 rpm, 5.1 knots (3-blade folding prop)





When many larger boats are abandoning chart tables entirely, it's nice to see one in the 30.1. Remove the cushion to create the aft-facing seat and you've got a reasonable navigation station

Maximising the space available, the saloon packs in a surprising amount. Access to the engine, heads and cabin all work well



While not huge, the galley is well fitted out, with a large cool box under the worktop



With her narrow beam, there isn't much stowage behind or above the saloon seats, but there's plenty below the bunks. The long hull windows are eye level when sitting, giving great views out of the boat and lots of light



The V-berth master is low and wide at 1.9m, thanks to the hull chines. It also hides the water tank and a good amount of stowage



The heads pump has been moved outboard for better engine access



Locker space and full-length shelving provide stowage in the well-lit aft cabin



The square-top main adds power to her sail plan but is still easily controlled

A hefty bowroller and an electric windlass make light work of anchoring



The mainsheet blocks are a long way aft, giving good sail control, but are close to head height



boat, it's huge! It is led back to the optional windlass, though there isn't a huge drop of chain which would ensure it will be recovered easily.

There's no denying the side decks are narrow, but the high moulded toerails make up for it.

BELOW DECKS

Down below the trade off with her beam is apparent too. Beneteau has done what it can to maximise the width by taking the seat backs right out to the hull topsides. The saloon is a good length and there is room to walk down either side of the 1.20m table which has the mast compression post at its centre. At the forward end the saloon seats are quite narrow, but even with the seat backs in place they are 39cm (1ft 3in) wide – enough to feel like a proper seat, and also plenty for the kids.

Beneath the seats are hinged bunk boards to access the stowage, and I was delighted to see that the edges of the boards have been both sanded smooth and sealed. These are small and seemingly insignificant details, but they are nice touches of quality that are indicative of the care with which a boat is built. Under the aft end of the port seat you'll find the calorifier and an accumulator tank – another rare sight on this size of boat.

Sat in the saloon you're treated to a good view out, thanks to the 1.15m (3ft 6in) long hull windows, and her narrow beam is soon forgotten. Under the sole boards are rubber strips to do away with squeaks of complaints when they are walked on. There are other little details too, like the fiddle behind the seat back

RIGHT: Her narrow beam is well disguised and only really becomes evident when seen from ahead or astern



so you doesn't lose the contents of this shelf when the seat back is removed. Look closely at the solid wood doorframes and the internal corners have been rounded rather than just butted together.

There is stowage in the saloon table, and also in a unit aft of the switch panel. Here you'll find a decent area (72cm x 11cm) with fiddled shelves (the stainless steel bars on this boat will be replaced by solid fiddles to make them more practical). Below this unit is the optional chart table, which can be folded away and an infill cushion makes the berth just over 2m (6ft 8in) long, or it can be removed to make sitting at the aft-facing chart table more comfortable. The chart table itself is a little short, but still measures 53cm x 39cm (1ft 9in x 1ft 3in).

The forward cabin is accessed via double doors, both of which can be opened, although doing so

BELOW: While the helm position is right aft, the pushpit frame makes it feel comfortably secure. Note the bathing ladder that is independent of the fold-down transom for emergencies

BELOW: The fold-down chart table is a neat solution that saves space while still providing a proper navigation space



means you can't access the hanging and shelved lockers behind them. Above these units are partitioned cubbyholes, the one to port having a USB charging socket. Open the doors to the wardrobes and you'll find a coat hook in each. Look down on the floor and you'll find channels that will accumulate the dust, keeping it in one place making cleaning her easier. Beneath the berth is the water tank, while forward is surprisingly more stowage, thanks to her wide bow design. This has also enabled the vee-berth to be both lower and wider (1.9m, 6ft 3in). Strip lights under the shelves outboard can be turned on individually, as well as the reading lights.

The L-shaped galley, like the rest of the boat, has good headroom at 1.90m (6ft 3in). It doesn't have a great deal of unused workspace but it does have a single sink and a huge top-opening coolbox (a fridge is an option). On future models it will be hinged outboard and the lid supported with a spring strut. In the lockers you'll find fiddles, even in the pot locker beneath the stove. Stowage wasn't overly generous and I can see space in the saloon being hijacked for food stowage.

NEAT DESIGN TOUCHES

The aft cabin is a pleasant space with plenty of cubby holes and handy stowage. It's worth mentioning the finish of the headlining throughout as it's more apparent here. It is a durable molded GRP lining, but the finish is a matt surface that is more reminiscent of white marble than shiny plastic – it all adds to the quality feel of the boat.

I was impressed by the design of the heads, where there is a moulded-in sink, a separate shower head and control, and the pump for the forward facing toilet has been moved outboard to give better access to the engine hatch. A curtain to protect the woodwork would have been nice, but this will be added to later boats. Under the sink there's access to the seacocks that, like all those on board, are bronze.

Engine access was well thought out, with gas struts lifting the companionway steps up high enough to give plenty of space to work beneath. Understandably there were a few small places where things could be neaten up, but as this was hull number one and overall I was impressed by the quality. I can't wait to see how good the full production boat will be.

BENETEAU 30.1

THE TEST VERDICT

The rulebook for entry-level boats says they should be built to a price, and well, a little bit basic. With the 30.1 Beneteau have ignored the rulebook. Again and again she surprised me with the attention to the details that have gone into her. She is just what a starter boat should be, and she has lots of features that make life onboard easy and more pleasing – like the neat cubby holes, USB chargers where you need them and locker lights.

By the end of the test, I'll admit, I was little bit smitten by her, she's a cute, fun boat that was great fun to sail but she also has a little cheeky streak, a glint in her eye, that says there's more to her than her appearance suggests.

WOULD SHE SUIT YOU AND YOUR CREW?

It's a fact that most people don't go out sailing in strong winds, especially if they are new to yachting or have younger members of crew, so the 30.1 has been tailored to the conditions most owners will go out in. Because of that she sails really well in light winds. Of course she should be able to cope with a blow, but without taking her out in rough weather, I can only comment on the weather we had.

Her layout works well and, thanks to the broad bows if not her sub-three metre beam, she offers good use of the space down below without any area feeling compromised. The optional fold up chart table is a case in point; it's there when you want it, but not if or when you don't.

It's clear that from the outset a lot of thought has gone into the 30.1. From disguising her narrow beam, to the way she sails, she is a great little boat. There is one problem with her though. The thing is, that if you're new to yachts and you buy the 30.1 you may not fully comprehend how much all the small details improve life on board – even if they are hidden from sight. Only when you move to a bigger boat will it dawn on you how much Beneteau were spoiling you. When that time comes, you'll also realise that in order to get the things you took for granted, you are going to have to dig a lot deeper into your pockets.

PROS

Loads of great details
Easily driven hull
Fun and easy to sail

CONS

Narrow hull design
Limited galley stowage
Corner on cockpit coaming

FACTS AND FIGURES

PRICE AS TESTED
£101,275

LOA 9.53m (31ft 3in)

HULL LENGTH
8.99m (29ft 6in)

LWL 8.65m (28ft 5in)

BEAM 2.99m (9ft 9in)

DRAUGHT
1.89m (6ft 2in)

DISPLACEMENT
3,995kg (8,807 lb)

BALLAST 973kg (2,149 lb)

BALLAST RATIO
24.4%

DISPLACEMENT/LENGTH 170.8

SAIL AREA
45.9m² (494 sq ft)

SA/D RATIO 18.6

DIESEL
130 litres (28.6 gal)

WATER
160 litres (35.2 gal)

ENGINE 21hp

TRANSMISSION Shaft

RCD CATEGORY B

DESIGNER
Finot Conq

BUILDER Beneteau

UK AGENT Ancasta/
Fox's Yacht Sale

WEBSITE
www.beneteau.com

With little weight, her light-wind performance is sparkling



BISCAY 36

PRICE £35,000-£50,000 YEAR 1975-1990

Falmouth Boat Construction already had a reputation for building seaworthy wooden yachts and motorsailers in the 1950s and 60s, but in 1973 it decided to produce its first serious offshore cruiser using GRP. The yard commissioned seasoned naval architect, Alan Hill, to design her and the hulls were moulded by Robert Ives in Christchurch before being taken to

Falmouth to be fitted out by FBC's highly experienced team of craftsmen.

She has classic overhangs, a counter stern, a gentle sheer and a low coachroof, all of which give her stunningly good looks. Not unlike the steadfast Nicholson 35 or Rustler 36 in hull shape, the Biscay had a similar long keel and deep, keel-hung rudder, but was ketch rigged – considered

by Hill at that time to be the most easily handled sail plan for blue-water sailing.

On deck the bulwarks add security going forward and the large foredeck provides room for working and setting the ground tackle. Deck gear, such as the twin bow rollers, cleats and windlass are substantially engineered and most likely still in service today. Non-slip was usually Treadmaster, although many owners opted for a teak deck for the looks.

Below decks she is very practical and quite roomy. Unlike the centre cockpits of the Nic 38 and Westerly 33, the Biscay's aft cockpit allows for a larger saloon with a very generous galley and full-size navigation station, as well as a comfortable quarterberth and spacious cockpit stowage.

Under sail she is nicely balanced and quite powerful, although at seven tonnes and a full keel, she isn't that quick off the blocks. Saying that, owners buy these for long distance cruising and open-ocean sailing, so a half-knot is neither here nor there in the long term. Besides, her sea-kindly motion that allows the off-watch crew to sleep, cook and eat in comfort on passage is important for long-distance cruising.

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA 10.90m (35ft 11in)

LWL 8.30m (27ft 0in)

BEAM 3.28m (10ft 9in)

DRAUGHT 1.62m (5ft 6in)

DISPLACEMENT 7,112kg (15,650 lb)

DESIGNER Alan F Hill

BUILDER Falmouth Boat Construction

OWNERS ASSOCIATION n/a

The Biscay 36 has proved popular for skippers in the Golden Globe Race



BENETEAU EVASION 32

PRICE £10,000-£20,000 YEAR 1974-1980

This masthead, ketch-rigged motorsailer, the Beneteau Evasion 32 was very popular in its day as it offered moderately good sailing performance with all the benefits of a pilothouse yacht.

She has a long keel and enclosed prop with a keel-hung rudder, and her 40hp diesel provided enough power to beat the tide and motorsail with ease.

The first real cruiser produced by this now prolific production yacht builder, the Evasion has a large wheelhouse with a U-shaped dining area, smallish galley and inside wheel-steering position with seat, instrumentation and space for a small chart. Big windows and a hatch above let plenty of light and air stream in whilst giving the occupants a first-class view of the

surrounding anchorage. Stepping down into the main saloon you find a four-seat dinette that converts into a double berth, a roomy heads and a spacious vee-berth in the forecabin.

Her cockpit is a little small and the view forward somewhat restricted due to her long, tall wheelhouse, but there's more room with the tiller hinged up and the stowage is reasonable in seat lockers and lazarettes. Side decks aren't wide, but deep bulwarks and handrails on the high wheelhouse make it safe to go forward at sea.

Like all motorsailers she's not the swiftest yacht around, especially when sailing in light airs, but she has a powerful rig and is lighter than many similar yachts, so she doesn't disgrace herself.

Her long keel keeps her well on track even in rough seas while the substantial cutaway forward enables her to tack without backing the jib.

Despite her powerful engine, her height and long keel mean she can be tricky to manoeuvre into a marina berth, particularly when sailing in gusty conditions.

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA 9.70m (31ft 10in)

LWL 7.30m (23ft 11in)

BEAM 3.00m (9ft 10in)

DRAUGHT 1.37m (4ft 5in)

DISPLACEMENT 5,750kg (12,676 lb)

DESIGNER Andre Beneteau

BUILDER Beneteau Yachts, France

OWNERS ASSOCIATION www.boauk.org



The large wheelhouse makes this a comfortable boat at anchor