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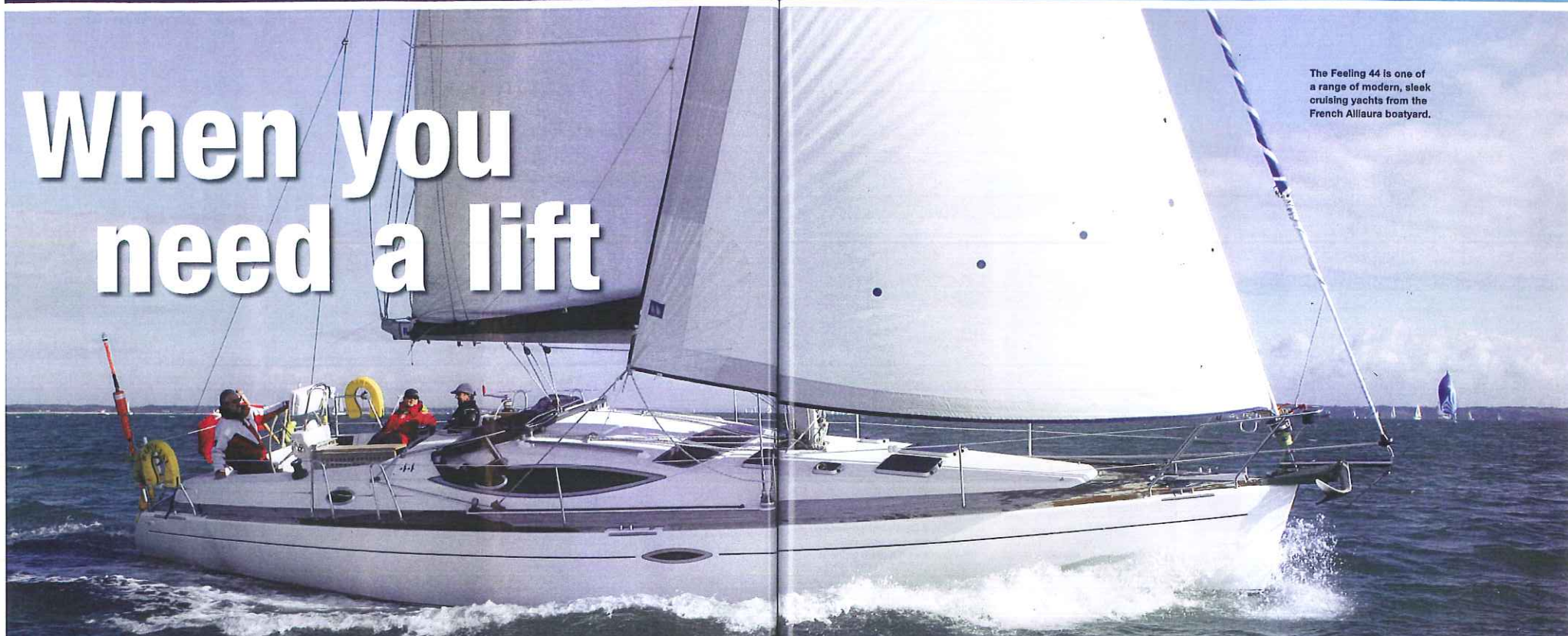
NEW Feeling 44

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When you need a lift



The Feeling 44 is one of a range of modern, sleek cruising yachts from the French Allaura boatyard.

One of the larger lifting-keel boats on the market, the innovative and upgraded Feeling 44 combines solid engineering with modern production techniques. **Duncan Kent** finds out how it all fits together and tries one for size.

Feeling yachts have always stood out from the crowd somewhat. They're well made, very modern, innovative and quite sleek, but for some reason they are not that prolific in the UK. This might be due to the yard's limited production of under 100 boats a year or the fact that they haven't been marketed particularly aggressively in the UK in the past, but with a good range of 32-55ft yachts on offer and a new UK agent selling them, they deserve to become more popular here.

Originally built by Kirie, the

production of the Feeling range of cruising yachts was taken over in 1990 by the manufacturing group, Allaura Marine, builder of Privilege sailing catamarans, Transcat motor cats and Fresco Sport boats.

The Feeling 44 is the group's second to largest sailing cruiser and has been upgraded very recently. She has contemporary styling, modern underwater lines, a sleek coachroof and low freeboard with a pleasant, gently rising sheer line. She also boasts a very generous beam, voluminous interior and large, but secure cockpit – all of which add up to a boat that

is equally suited to both coast hopping or long term cruising.

Three interior versions are available, all with two heads: a 2-cabin model with a large, en suite double cabin forward and one aft double; a 3-cabin model with the same forecabin, but two aft doubles; a 4-cabin boat with the same two doubles aft, but with one double and one twin cabin forward. The standard version is the 3-cabin model, but no extra charge (or reduction) is made if you just want two cabins and a sail locker or deep cockpit locker to starboard.

The hulls are well built, but thanks to balsa coring and precise vacuum infusion techniques, are quite lightweight. Reinforcement is put where it is needed, rather than laying her up heavily all over. Sturdy wooden floors bonded to the hull, along with longitudinal stringers, increase her inherent strength and rigidity and her bulkheads and furniture are also bonded to the hull and deck for extra strength. Rigging loads are spread widely over the hull by linking the chainplates to robust hull-bonded fillets using chunky, stainless steel tie rods.

The fin-keeled boat has a single spade rudder with a high aspect, foilled keel to the bottom of which is attached a 2-ton lead bulb to create the maximum righting moment. The lifting keel version has twin rudders and uses Feeling's tried and tested, ballasted centreplate with two cast-iron stabiliser plates, one each side of the stub, to help her take the ground. The bulk of the ballast on the latter is in the form of an encapsulated cast iron plate bonded to the hull all around the keel box, below the saloon sole boards. On both models the propeller shaft exits through

a longish, chunky GRP log that keeps the shaft and propeller clear of the seabed when taking the ground. One tip – with her twin rudders the lifting keeler can't utilise prop wash for low speed manoeuvring, so a bow thruster is highly recommended.

We sailed *Baboujah*, a 3-cabin, lifting keel model with a fully battened mainsail, overlapping genoa and a furling gennaker on a removable rope headstay. She is owned by doctors Alan and Shirley Lillywhite and is kept in the Solent for regular South Coast and N European cruising. Their previous

boats have included a Seamaster Saller, Macwester and a Hallberg Rassy 97.

Below decks

Just looking down through the companionway hatch you know this boat is going to be different. She is very bright below, thanks to good size portlights, two opening hatches and two fixed lights above, which also allow plenty of natural light to penetrate – enhanced by the light wood finish – and provide good ventilation for hotter climes. The saloon is a sensual mix of smooth curves and seamless

joinery, although I'd choose the matt or satin finish brightwork. A choice of woods is available – beech, cherry or maple – ours being the last.

On going below, your first glimpse is of the centrally mounted navigation station at the foot of the steps, which butts up against the after edge of the keel box and has its own padded seat. Alan likes gadgets and has fitted a 12in colour chart plotter/radar/AIS unit on the roomy console, which is so bright and clear it can easily be read at the helm. But just in case, he also has an 8in repeater on the binnacle as



Clockwise from above: Under full sail in the Solent, the 44 is agile and balanced; her cockpit is spacious enough for entertaining and has a large teak table; inboard genoa sheet tracks allow for a tight sheeting angle; plenty of room on the binnacle for a full array of instruments.

well. This is a great place for the chart table, which is only possible thanks to her ample beam.

The lifting keel has to go somewhere when raised and Alliaura has done a fine job of giving the keel box a secondary duty – as a long, twin-leaf saloon table that will genuinely seat eight comfortably. Removing the top panel also lets you check the keel mechanism through two Perspex panels.

She has two slightly curved settees just over 2.00m long and 0.60m wide, the port side one of which can be turned into a 1.20m wide double berth with a pullout double berth option (+£1,122). There is some storage under the settees and behind the seat backs in caves, but she lacks easily accessible lockers and a better job could be done of the shelf fiddles to allow books to be stowed end on.

At the after end of the port settee, however, is a handy cabinet with a fiddled work surface and a first class electrics panel behind a Perspex door, which protects it from stray fingers while allowing the lights and gauges to be viewed.

The galley is linear in all three models, which might not be to some people's taste, but is safe enough to use at sea with a bum strap and crash bar on the cooker. It is well

appointed with a good cooker/oven, two deep sinks, dedicated gash bin, cool box and a sizeable fridge, not to mention the very generous food and crockery lockers above and pan lockers below. A small opening portlight offers ventilation and lights under the side decks make preparing food easier.

All models have two heads – one forward and one aft, to port opposite the galley. These are a good size – the aft one being the larger with a separate shower area and seat, hanging area for wet oilskins and loads of elbow room. The forward heads compartment is a little smaller, but is still a good size and with plenty of locker stowage. Both have opening ports or hatches for ventilation, but there are no all-weather vents in the entire boat.

The twin aftercabin is mirrored and identical sizes, with generous 2.05m L x 1.36m (6ft 9in x 4ft 6in) berths. If you choose to do without the second cabin, however, the remaining berth stays the same size. Also, the fuel tank is positioned under the starboard berth, which might prove awkward should you want to turn it into a workshop. However, it would still make a useful machinery room or a deep, dual access cockpit locker.

The lavish owner's suite is

forward and is very roomy, light and airy with 1.90m (6ft 3in) headroom and two large hatches. The 1.98m L x 1.78m W (6ft 6in x 5ft 10in) berth is on the centreline with access each side and there's bags of floor space, a seat and abundant clothes stowage. The ensuite, though not as large as the after heads, is still a good size with enough head and elbow room for a comfortable shower.

The two water tanks are under the forward berth and port berth aft. There are also two waste tanks, one under the forward berth and one beneath the port settee. Headroom is excellent, with 1.90m-2.05m throughout the boat.

Engine access is good, the main panel being behind the companionway steps, but with two large side doors as well. The engine room is force ventilated and has an automatic fire extinguisher.

On deck

The 44's teak trimmed cockpit is wide, but divided along the centreline by a large, securely fixed teak table that forms an excellent handhold and barrier to prevent you being thrown across the cockpit. The seats are deep and comfortably angled and the helm seat hinges back to create a step to

the transom platform, where there is a dedicated liferaft stowage locker and a hot/cold water shower.

Her pedestal is solid and supports a medium size wheel and a strong binnacle for instrument mounting, grab handle and cup holder. The push-button controls for the lifting keel are right by the helm and the hydroelectric mechanism raises the keel completely in less than a minute. She has two, 2-speed Harken STA40 halyard winches on the coachroof and a neat row of clutches each side for the sail controls. Just behind them is a pair of chunky, 2-speed STA48 primary winches, where they can be used more efficiently in a safe, standing position. Okay, they're not in reach of the helm, but they are ideally positioned for crew to trim while remaining safe in the cockpit and sheltered from the elements, rather than teetering over the coamings. Most cruising boats have a reliable autopilot these days, so few will stand behind the wheel much on passage anyway, preferring to keep watch under the sprayhood. Two optional (+£2,626) spinnaker/gennaker winches were mounted on the coamings where one might expect to find the primaries.

Stowage is average in two shallow, but long lockers and the

drained gas locker takes two large Camping Gaz bottles.

Her side decks are wide, which makes moving around easy and safe, but being so low and sleek, the coachroof handrails are a little too low for convenience. The coachroof has an effective non-slip surface and slopes gently away onto the foredeck, which is well designed for cruising. I like the clever stemhead bowsprit fitting that combines a self-stowing anchor roller/chute with a short bowsprit for the asymmetric cruising chute. It allows the forestay to be mounted as far forward as possible, but without the furling drum snagging the anchor chain, plus it keeps the



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Rig and sails

As standard she sports a generously proportioned 19/20ths fractional rig and Elvstrom sails, comprising a fully battened, three-reef mainsail and a 130 per cent overlapping genoa on a Profurl furler.

Her pre-bent Sparcraft mast has twin, slightly swept spreaders and is supported by continuous cap, intermediate and aft lower shrouds, all terminating on two, massively engineered, through-deck chainplates.

The backstay splits several metres above the cockpit, but has no quick adjustment mechanism. A Profurl gas kicker supports the boom and enables the mainsail to be flattened more precisely.

Quality Lewmar deck tracks and travellers are used, the mainsheet being forward of the sprayhood and the genoa tracks well inboard on the side decks to give a nice, tight headsail sheeting angle.

Under way

Because of her ample beam and overhanging bowsprit, she seemed a large boat to handle in the tight confines of a marina and I was grateful for the helpful nudge from her bowthruster as I cautiously backed her out of her impossibly narrow berth. There's plenty of power in the engine and prop, but I wasn't convinced braven over brain would have been the right policy in such cramped confines. Instead, once she'd built up a little speed the rudders bit the water and gave us reasonable steerage astern. Going ahead, she's fine and can be turned tightly around her narrow centreplate. If you »

NEW BOAT



Specs and Info

LOA	13.75m	45ft 11in
LOD	13.40m	44ft 0in
LWL	11.90m	39ft 0in
Beam	4.25m	14ft 0in
Draught (fixed keel)	2.20m	7ft 3in
Draught (lifting keel)	0.70m-2.60m	2ft 4in-8ft 6in
Displacement (fixed keel)	8,400kg	18,480lb
Displacement (lifting keel)	9,400kg	20,680lb
Ballast (fixed keel)	2,400kg	5,280lb
Ballast (lifting keel)	3,100kg	6,820lb
Sail Area (std main and genoa)	94m ²	1,010ft ²
Fuel	200ltr	44gal
Water	500ltr	110gal
Berths	4-10	
Engine	55hp Volvo shaft drive, fixed 3-blade prop	
RCD category	A-Ocean (8 persons)	
STIX No.	Not supplied	
Angle of Vanishing Stability	112°	

Designer Mortain & Mavrikos

Builder Group Alliaura Marine (France) www.alliaura.com

UK main agents Williams & Smithells 023 8033 4445 www.feeling-yachts.co.uk

Price* Fixed keel £183,624, lifting keel £196,144. Price includes UK VAT, but not delivery or commissioning (approx £3,366 inc antifouling).

Standard inventory includes: electric windlass, spring cleats, teak cockpit, H&C deck shower, cockpit table, fully battened mainsail, lazyjacks and bag, rigid vang, single-line reefing, fridge, seawater pump, four 95Ah batteries, 230V shore power outlets, battery charger.

Popular factory options: Sprayhood £1,446, in-mast furling £2,864, asymmetric spinnaker and gear £4,666, removable inner forestay £1,432, storm jib and sheets £697, teak decks £8,701, 4th cabin £11,572, 75hp Volvo engine £3,109, bow thruster £4,859, heating (Hydronic) £6,843, Raymarine instrument pack £8,821.

* Note - all prices are converted from euros to sterling at £1 = 1.45, however these may vary according to the exchange rate at time of order.

use the bowthruster to the max you can even spin her around in her own length and her low superstructure makes her far less a victim of windage than many of her competitors. Cruising speed under engine is around 6kn at an economical 2,400rpm.

The day started with a gentle F3-4 southeasterly breeze and bright sunshine, although the forecast was for it to deteriorate later. We hoisted full sail and were soon gliding along gracefully. She feels powerful, but not over heavy for her size and she parts the waves with little commotion or spray. She has a more raked bow than many performance cruisers today, along with a well-submersed forefoot, which gives her a gentle rocking motion under way. As the waves reach her almost unnoticeably flared shoulders they part company with the hull and fall back toward the sea, rather than breaking over the decks. Alan and Shirley say she is just as seakindly in a F6 and I believe them.

We held her closehauled for a while as she comfortably make 4.5-5kn some 35° off the apparent 12-14kn wind. Freed off to 50°, she speeded up to 5.2-5.5kn and was so well and truly 'in the groove' that any human intervention on

the wheel was superfluous. We sailed almost the width of the western Solent hands-free, just keeping her on course by trimming the sails.

On a beam reach she slowed just a tad, to around 4.8kn, but in one prolonged 17kn gust the log easily nudged the 6kn mark - even with a dirty bottom!

The wheel needs no more than a couple of fingers to keep the boat on course and her balanced spade rudders, though small, are bang in the right place once she's heeled.

Tacking is very slightly hesitant in light airs, but this all helps for a smooth transition from one course to another, giving the crew time to handle the headsail sheets without excessive winching.

Off the wind we unfurled the asymmetric cruising chute, which powered her up to a more impressive 6kn on a beam reach, 5.6kn broad reaching in 12kn true wind. In these relatively light air conditions we held onto this sail up to 70° off the apparent wind before the leach started to flap and we were heeled beyond the comfort zone. She tracks surprisingly well for a lifting keeler and a feathering prop would undoubtedly have added another quarter knot to our average speeds.



Verdict

The Feeling 44 is a bright, spacious and positively luxurious boat in which to cruise, so I thoroughly understand Alan and Shirley's preference for *Baboujai* over their apartment! For longer term bluewater cruising you'd need to think hard about stowage - especially for large items such as dinghies, outboard etc - but being so beamy aft, fitting dinghy davits could be the answer.

Her performance under sail is more than competent, although she isn't the fastest 44-footer around. She is very well balanced, however, and really easy to handle under

sail. Under power she takes a little practice, but with the thruster you soon learn to master her somewhat sluggish reactions.

Although a category A (Ocean) rated yacht, her stability figures aren't that of a heavy displacement ocean cruiser, so you might be a little wary of buying her for extended offshore passage making, but generally I'd be happy to sail her in 95 per cent of open sea conditions without any undue concerns.

And, of course, her lifting keel is a real boon for creek crawling and even beaching in favourable conditions.

For

- Very comfortable accommodation
- Well-engineered keel mechanism
- Good deck gear arrangements
- Well balanced and easily handled under sail

Against

- Twin rudders result in poor manoeuvrability under engine
- Light on deck stowage
- Keel box splits the saloon
- Not the cheapest 44-footer around