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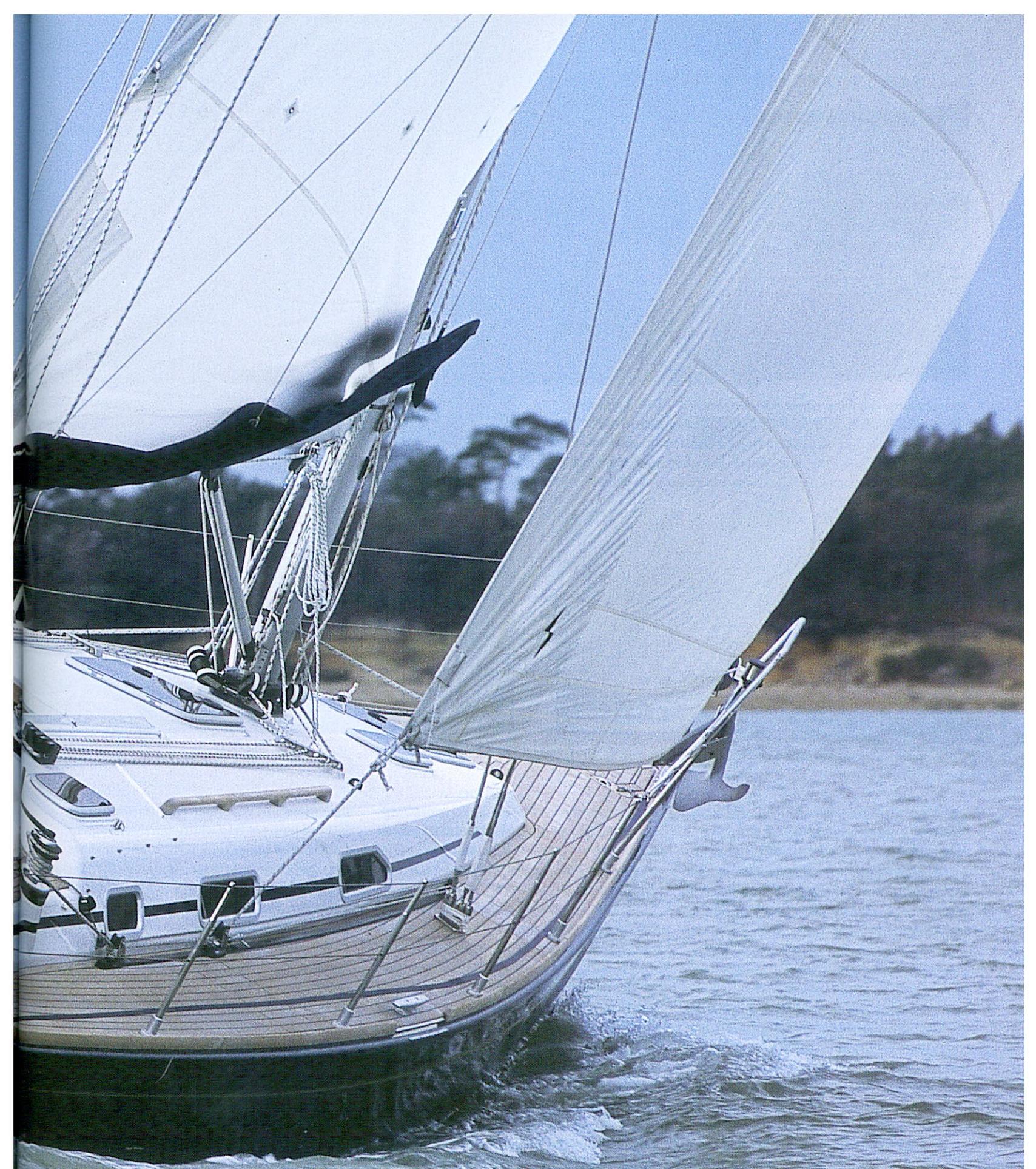
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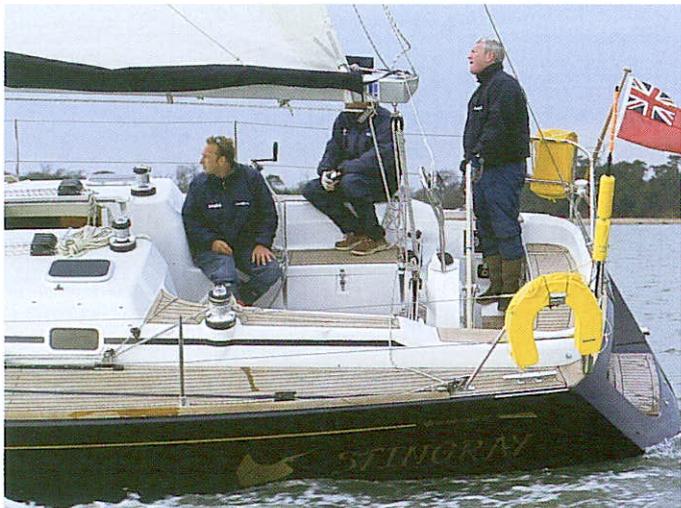
**On test**  
**Grand Soleil 40**



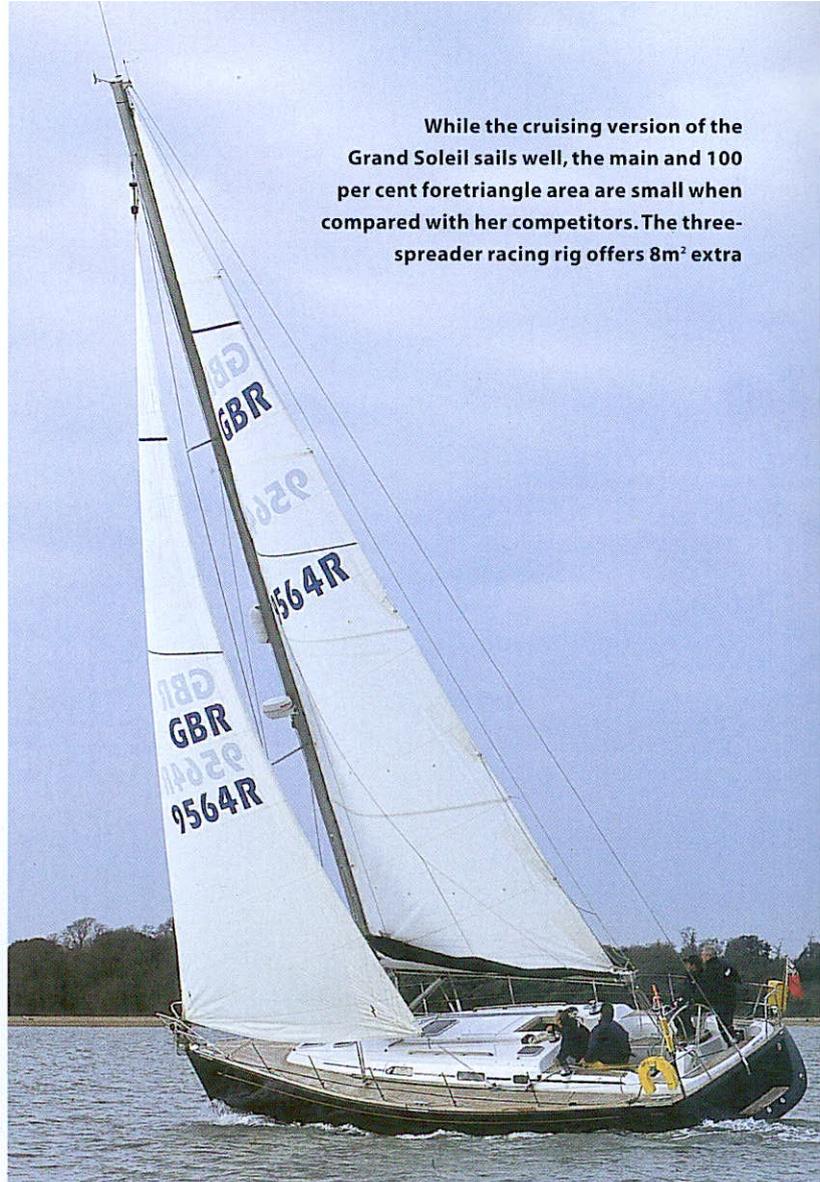


## Fit and forty

Grand Soleil's latest 40-footer takes the Italian company one step further into performance cruiser territory. Matthew Sheahan evaluates her performance under sail and Tim Thomas considers what you get for your money and how she stacks up against the competition in this hotly contested sector of the market



Above: a large-diameter wheel makes steering this boat a pleasure. The wheel goes from lock to lock in one revolution. Below: the cockpit is not as spacious as that of the Bénéteau 40.7, which has removable deck boxes, but does open as you go aft so trimming will not be a squash. A conventional mainsheet system is available



While the cruising version of the Grand Soleil sails well, the main and 100 per cent foretriangle area are small when compared with her competitors. The three-spreader racing rig offers 8m<sup>2</sup> extra

All photos: Christel Clear

Somehow between the value-for-money production cruisers and a shockingly priced carbon-rich full-on race boat is the fiercely fought middle ground that is cruiser-racer country. In an attempt to prise open your wallet, many builders in this league claim their boats strike the perfect balance by slicing upwind like a witch on the race course yet behaving like a soppy Labrador when family and friends step aboard.

The truth is that there are few production cruiser-racers capable of achieving such a balance. While plenty of popular 40-footers have attracted sailors from both persuasions, only a few – X-Yachts is one – really manage to feel like true racers under way without becoming family frighteners when in cruising mode.

But now there's a new boat that looks set to give the likes of X-Yachts a spot of bother on the cruiser-racer scene. Over the past few years Italian builders Grand Soleil have quietly eased themselves into the racing scene with some slippery hulls and sleek appendages. Their latest 40-footer was designed by Massimo Paperini of Duck Design and if you looked at her topsides

and underwater profile on separate drawings you might never have made the connection between the two. But connected they are and the resulting performance and handling made us sit up and take note.

### Under way

Large after-cabins might sell boats to those who rush below at the first opportunity but wheels give me the first hint about whether a boat might have what it takes. Indeed, I'm struggling to think of a boat I've sailed that had a big wheel but didn't feel good. It's a simple rule of thumb but it certainly applies to the Grand Soleil 40.

From the minute we slipped the lines, her crisp handling and swift response to engine revs and helm angle meant you could spin her around confidently in the tightest of spots. In a straight line she's fairly quiet and smooth, too. In fact, the only slight drawback might be that at full chat in flat waters and very little breeze she only just nudged seven knots and that's with the larger 39hp engine (although admittedly our test boat had a folding two-bladed prop).

Fortunately she feels anything other than

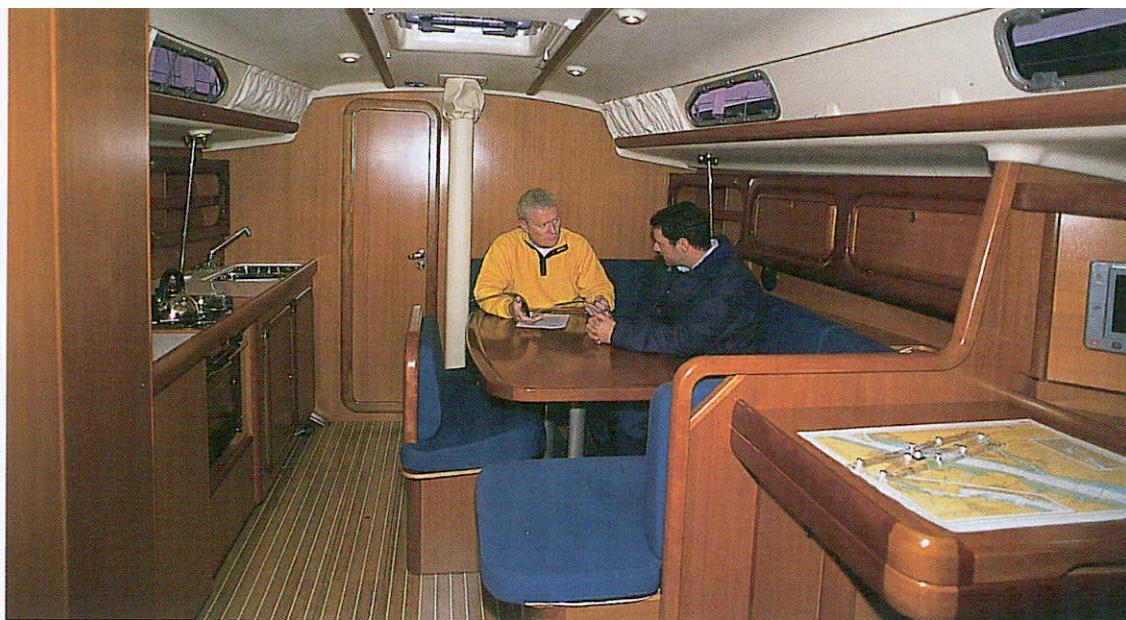
under-powered under sail. Our trials started in just five knots of true wind – barely enough to bother – and while she didn't hit the big-time we managed to conjure a response through the light zephyrs. As the breeze built to around 12-14 knots she slipped easily into the groove and was a pleasure to sail on all points.

One thing that helps in this department is the layout of the cockpit. Although the helmsman's footwell area feels a little too snug, the large diameter wheel means the best place to helm the GS40 is from the side deck. Here, the seating, the position of the steering pedestal, the angled footsteps in the cockpit floor and the good visibility forward mean there's little reason to steer from directly behind the wheel anyway.

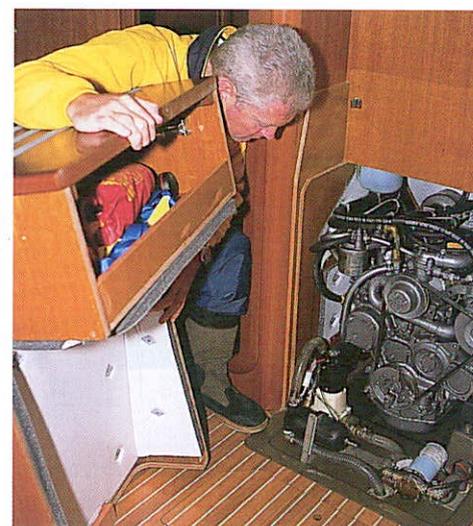
Unlike many other boats of this size and type the Grand Soleil's wheel goes from lock to lock in just one full turn as opposed to about one and a half. Again this adds to the sensitive handling without making the yacht feel twitchy.

The mainsheet controls are close to hand, making her easy to handle when cruising or racing. One neat detail of the mainsheet system is that the free end of the sheet is led forward along

Despite the aft head encroaching into the after end of the saloon, the interior is actually quite spacious. There is a good-sized corridor to allow crew to drag sails out of the forepeak without interfering too much with the accommodation



**Left:** a deep deck locker in the two-cabin version provides excellent stowage – particularly if you don't want to haul racing sails through the boat  
**Right:** the larger 39hp Yanmar engine is now standard on both cruising and racing versions. Access to it is good, although hingeing companionway steps would make life easier



the boom and back to one of the secondary winches, meaning the sheet can also be easily handled from further forward in the cockpit.

The fractional rig sports a modest-sized headsail, which keeps sail area down and manageability up – again a winner for both cruising and racing.

A carbon three-spreader mast with rod rigging and a slightly larger sail plan is an option for those who would like to pump up the performance even more, although this might simply push the Grand Soleil's rating out of step. And here, as always, is the rub.

No matter how good she might feel on the helm, nor how slick she is, her handicap will dictate how successful she will be on the racecourse. For the cruising sailor there are fewer problems – she's simply a lovely boat to sail. **MS**

## Below decks

Most cruiser-racers around the 40ft mark can be divided into two layouts below. Leaving aside the choice of cabin arrangements for a minute, the saloon will either be cut in two, with two bunks flanking a central drop-leaf table, or will

feature an offset dinette with one bunk outboard and a moveable bench seat roughly amidships. The Grand Soleil opts for the latter layout, with a longitudinal galley.

At first view, the amount of room seems to be miserly (compared with the Bénéteau 40.7, for example) but this is mostly an illusion due to the position of the aft head, which is set to port where you might normally see the galley and intrudes into the corner of the saloon. In reality, there is little difference in size inside.

Our test boat featured a full-size forward cabin and one double aft. This meant the aft head featured a separate good-sized shower cubicle and there was a large handy wet locker abaft this. It also created room for an excellent deep cockpit locker to port.

If you were to opt for the second aft cabin, a chunk of this head would be lost. That decision really comes down to whether you plan to let a troop of crew monkeys crash on the boat during regattas or prefer to ship them off to digs and keep the accommodation for cruising.

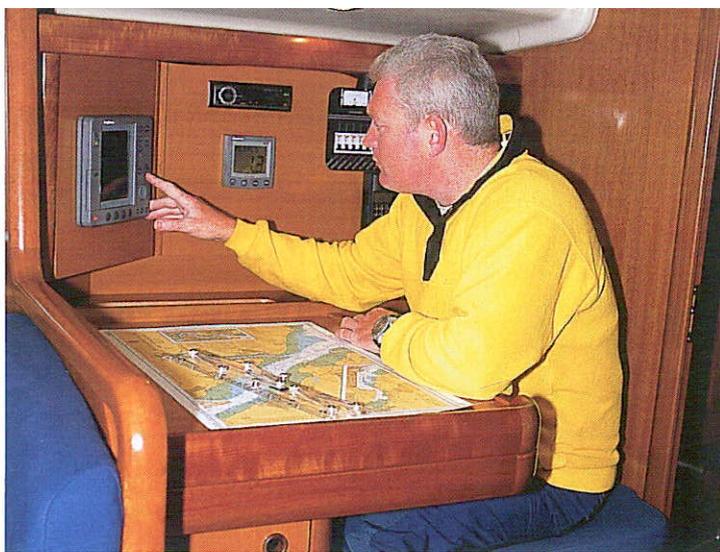
In spite of my initial doubts about the layout, I have grown to like it. Regular racing on a 40.7

means I know all too well about the difficulties of lugging bulky sails from the forecabin through the constricted passage between the seat and saloon table. The result of this layout, which is mirrored to some extent by that of the X-412 Modern, is a comfortable, separate seating and dining area and easy access through the interior for those sails.

The forecabin on the test boat felt spacious and light. Stowage was excellent throughout, although the aft cabin suffered a lack of underberth stowage due to the large tankage in the GS40, so was limited to the wardrobe only.

Work surfaces were ample, another benefit of the longitudinal galley, and throughout the yacht the joiner work was competent, with no obvious ill-fitting corners or open seams.

A look at her competition shows the Grand Soleil is one of the lightest boats in her grouping, tipping the displacement scales at even less than the IMX40. Her hull is built using 12 hand-laid layers of unidirectional glassfibre laced with vinylester resin, strengthened by six longitudinal stringers and topped with an isophthalic gelcoat. The stringers are glassed in ▷



**Above: the saloon benefits from a longitudinal galley and a sliding bench seat amidships, giving plenty of worksurface and an intimate feel to the dining area. Top left: a dedicated nav station is included, albeit quite snug. Left: the Grand Soleil's hull is very pleasing on the eye, with curves in all the right places**

around the keel, as is the transverse rib running up to the chainplates. The deck uses Termanto sandwich reinforcing and the five transverse ribs and bulkheads are bonded to the hull with 60mm width of lamination. The keel is fixed to the hull with bolts and an epoxy bond.

## The competition

When it comes to making a decision about boats in this very competitive size range, the buyer is faced with a dilemma. A closer look at each of the Grand Soleil 40's competitors will reveal small differences between the boats and then it all comes down to personal preference.

The X-412 has been around for a while and is now in its third incarnation, the Mark III. Available with two interior layouts, this boat costs much the same as the Grand Soleil but offers a slightly longer LOA, although the waterline length is shorter. And having consistently proved herself as a cruiser and on the race circuit she is still a firm bet, although she has recently fallen under the shadow of her newer and more sporty sister, the IMX40.

The Bénéteau 40.7 has also proved extremely popular; she now has her own class within a class. It offers a slight saving over the GS40 and in many ways is very similar; personally, I would tend towards the GS40 at this point for no other reason than I find the latter better looking.

It will be interesting to see how the two

square up on the racecourse – and also to see how the ratings compare. Under IRC the 40.7 does suffer slightly from a relatively poor rating and a comparison of these might be what ultimately swings your decision. Don't forget, too, that although the 40.7's successes have been well documented, a racing version of the GS40 was quietly taking honours in several of the Mediterranean regattas last year.

More competition comes from the French Jeanneau Sun Fast 40, which seems a little more geared toward the cruising end of the market. You only have to look at the interior to see that she has been designed around comfort rather than all-out racing; an offset dinette to one side and two seats with their own table on the other means that dragging spinnakers through the saloon will knock all those lovely sandwiches onto the floor.

As with the other boats in this bracket, Grand Soleil are offering a racing package, featuring a taller three-spreader rig, an extra 8m<sup>2</sup> of sail area and a comprehensive kit list and deck hardware upgrade for roughly £10,000 ex VAT more than the basic cruising spec price.

There is also the option to go for a carbon rig and even a scrimp hull but, as with the 40.7 whose IRC rating jumps from around 1.078 to nearer 1.093 with the modified rig, this is likely to lose more in rating than could be usefully gained in performance. **TT**

## Conclusion

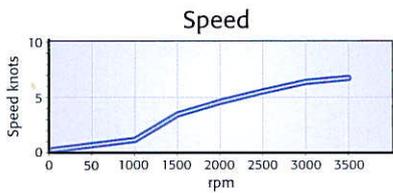
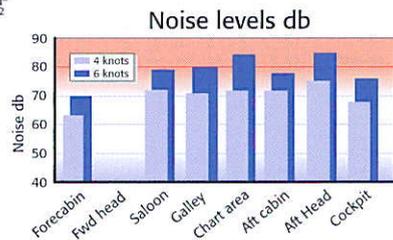
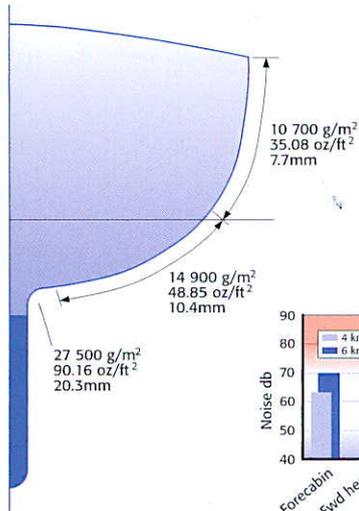
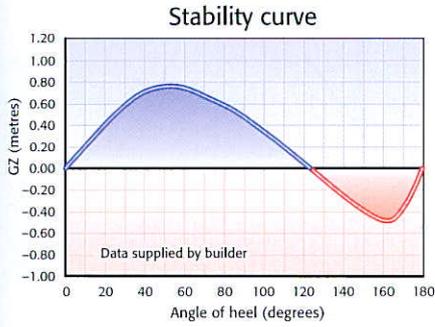
It gets harder and harder to distinguish between the yachts in the competitive 40ft cruiser-racer market and even now there are more pretenders waiting in the wings – the new Elan 40 and the Dehler 39 are two such.

The cruising version of the Grand Soleil slips in at around £15,000 ex VAT more than the benchmark Bénéteau 40.7, although an upgrade to the taller rig would seem necessary as the cruising rig is small compared with others in this size range. This upgrade would bring the GS40 and the 40.7 very close in terms of spec.

As a cruiser, the Grand Soleil offers good sailing performance with a standard measure of cruising comfort – she is not a stripped-out plastic fantastic nor is she a sumptuously appointed world cruiser. However, her interior joiner work is of a good standard and as a good sailing boat with reasonable comfort below she may well swing the buying public to her cruising aspects.

Striking the perfect balance between racer and cruiser is always going to be hard and all too often a yacht will nestle among its contemporaries without managing to stand out from the crowd. We suspect the same might be true of the GS 40, whose success is as likely to swing on her price and rating as on her good sailing performance and interior comfort.

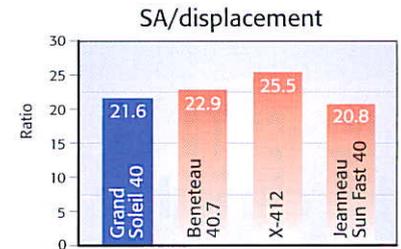
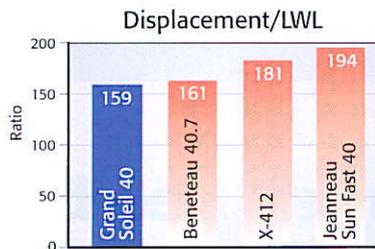
**Designed by:** Massimo Paperini/Duck Design  
**Built by:** Cantiere del Pardo, Italy  
**Marketed by:** Grand Soleil (UK), Saltmakers House, Hamble Point Marina, School Lane, Hamble, England SO31 4JD. Tel: +44 (0)23 8045 5977; Fax: +44 (0)23 8045 5877. e-mail: rbiyachtbrokers@btconnect.com



**Stowage**

Forecabin	7.5
Saloon	2.5
Galley	3.0
Head	2.5
After cabin	1.0
Nav. area	1.0

Stowage = 9.82%  
Total = 3.46m<sup>3</sup>



COMPARABLE BOATS	GRAND SOLEIL 40*		BENETEAU 40.7		X-412 MK III		JEANNEAU SUN FAST 40	
LOA	12.29m	40ft 4in	11.94m	39ft 2in	12.90m	42ft 4in	12.19m	40ft 0in
LWL	10.60m	34ft 9in	10.62m	34 10in	10.44m	34ft 3in	10.16m	33ft 4in
Beam (max)	3.80m	12ft 6in	3.76m	12ft 4in	3.89m	12ft 9in	3.94m	12ft 11in
Draught	2.15m	7ft 1in	2.39m	7ft 10in	2.11m	6ft 11in	2.15m	7ft 1in
Disp (lightship)	6,800kg	14,991lb	6,900kg	15,211lb	7,400kg	16,314lb	7,300kg	16,094lb
Ballast	2,500kg	5,512lb	2,200kg	4,850lb	3,500kg	7,716lb	2,620kg	5,776lb
Sail area (100% foretriangle)	76.3m <sup>2</sup>	821ft <sup>2</sup>	81.66m <sup>2</sup>	879ft <sup>2</sup>	95.2m <sup>2</sup>	1,025ft <sup>2</sup>	76.92m <sup>2</sup>	828ft <sup>2</sup>
Berths	4/6		6		6		6	
Engine	Yanmar 3JH3CE		Volvo 2030 Saildrive		Yanmar 3JH3CE		Volvo 2030 Saildrive	
Power	29kW	39hp	22kW	30hp	29kW	39hp	22kW	30hp
Water	370lt	81gal	318lt	70gal	370lt	81gal	318lt	70gal
Fuel	180lt	40gal	132lt	29gal	127lt	28gal	136lt	30gal
Sail area: disp	21.6		22.9		25.5		20.8	
Disp: LWL	159		161		181		194	
Price (exVAT)	£103,664		£85,979		£100,883		£81,618	

\*Cruising version