

JEANNEAU SUN ODYSSEY 490 TESTED AND REVIEWED : SAILING TODAY Oct 2018

Sam Jefferson heads to the Cote d'Azur to see if Jeanneau's new 490 has what it takes



Wine racks. In the bilge. Moulded into the GRP. It's an oblique opener I agree, but let it serve as a warning to anyone who regularly reads boat reviews. I'm going to let you into a little industry secret here, which is that I firmly believe that if a reviewer highlights that there is a wine rack integrated into the bilge of the yacht it's time for alarm bells to start ringing.

What the reviewer is really screaming out is that there is such a paucity of new and exciting features on the yacht in question that they have to resort to highlighting a feature that is so utterly perfunctory it really doesn't deserve a mention. Imagine going to look at a house and the estate agent promptly highlighting, well, the wine rack. You couldn't help but think: Is that it?

Anyway, the reason for this rant is that whenever I'm asked to review a yacht that has been put together by one of the big four (Beneteau, Jeanneau, Hanse, Bavaria) I'm terrified that I'm going to have to resort to the wine rack comment or, as a more exciting variant, perhaps a chopping board that slots into the sink top. You see, the fact is that the big manufacturers simply cannot afford to make a boat that isn't much cop and the reality is that these days they simply don't. The danger is they build a yacht that is so hideously efficient, capable and soulless that the only thing that remains lodged in my mind on leaving it is the ruddy wine rack in the bilge.



On to the new Jeanneau 490 and, before anyone at Jeanneau starts grinding their teeth with fury, the point is that on this particular model I don't even know if it had a wine rack in the bilge because there was enough innovation here to keep me well satisfied. To be fair to all the big players within the yachting industry, they are all trying very hard within the constraints of the cruising yacht to innovate and Jeanneau has clearly worked pretty hard at that with its new 490. She's one of the first of a new line of yachts that sits between the 479 and the 519, both of which are part of the last generation of Oceanis's that are now being phased out. Philippe Briand, who designed that previous generation of Sun Odysseys, is still at the helm but the interior on the new

range is in the hands of Jean-Marc Piaton. In terms of the overall look of the yacht, you can see that Briand is still at the helm and this is more of a development on the idea of the previous generation of Jeanneaus as opposed to a revolution. The angular lines and chined stern are still in place and she retains that almost Lego brick look of modernity. Yet there are significant changes too.

Below the waterline there are now twin rudders, while the hull shape beneath the line is a more toned down version of the concept used so dramatically on Beneteau's Oceanis 51.1. This concept marries fine, narrow lines sub surface with a significant 'step' out above the waterline which gives you greater volume and plenty of power when heeled over combined with reduced wetted surface area in light winds or when motoring. Construction has changed, too, with the hull now balsa cored. This is part of a weight-saving regime as Jeanneau's aim was to make the new range of yachts 10 per cent lighter than their predecessors. Weighing in at 11,000kg, the 490 is no lightweight flier, but it makes an interesting comparison with Bavaria's new C50 which weighs in at a tad over 17,300kg. It's also worth noting that the 490 is actually 47ft 3in on deck excluding the bowsprit – so not as long as you'd expect. That said, she certainly doesn't want for internal volume.



A new angle

So far so good – no requirement to mention any wine racks – and there are more pleasant surprises on deck, as Briand seems to have managed to do something quite revolutionary here in that the side decks slope downwards aft, making for a clearly delineated walkway as you head aft and also channelling any spray away from the helmsman. Large drains ensure that this area doesn't simply fill with water and it is a nice, interesting touch that gives a good feeling of security. I guess if I had one criticism of it, it is that I like to sort of slump between the cockpit coamings and the guard rail from time to time and this arrangement does preclude this, although that might be a good thing for my posture. The cockpit set up is – as ever these days – aimed at ease of handling and works very well that way with a pair of substantial Harken winches set up just ahead of the twin helms and then a secondary pair of winches on the coachroof. This is slightly different from many of Jeanneau's rivals who have gone for completely delineating between the 'working' end of the cockpit aft and the 'lounging' area forward. What you gain by not doing this is a rather less complicated aft area of the yacht with the sail controls clearly separate from the rest of the running rigging.

Other than that, there's nothing particularly earth shattering going on up here but it's a pleasant space and, although the beam is fairly modest, it's carried right aft in the modern style and this makes for a very roomy and social cockpit. Moulded helmsman's seats that double up as lockers also ensure that the helm feels reasonably enclosed. The bathing platform is a good width and when raised keeps you nicely enclosed. The liferaft is tucked behind this and Jeanneau has not done anything so crazy as try to shoehorn a tender garage in here, which has to be a wise move as far as I'm concerned.

Up forward things are nice and uncluttered and I noted the very low positioning of the gooseneck with the boom angled up to allow for good clearance in the cockpit. This is something I first saw on a Dufour and it makes reefing and stowing the sail a whole lot easier. At the bow there is a very large lazarette that could comfortably take a deflated dinghy and a dozen fenders. The anchor locker is decently dimensioned too. The fixed sprit at the bow with integrated anchor roller is an option I would urge anyone to take because the advent of the easily rolled away Code 0 has transformed the potential for fun in mid range cruising yachts.



French polish

Head down below using the thoughtfully angled steps and you enter a very pleasant space. My thoughts strayed to the bilge and whether someone had moulded in a wine rack, but I resisted the temptation to check. The interior was very nice, as a matter of fact, and the test yacht was set up in what Jeanneau assumes will be the most popular configuration, with a large master suite forward and two doubles aft. There is the option to split the forward master into two doubles and even add a fifth bunk room, but I think that is strictly for the charter companies or the likes of Jacob Rees-Mogg and his ever-expanding brood. In its classic configuration it all works very well. I realise some purists would say that the master cabin should be at the back but if you are in a marina, then the bow is the place to be and Jeanneau has honed this yacht to its customer base. Anyway, it's a big master cabin, with class leading space according to Jeanneau, and I'd be disinclined to argue. It has the added benefit of a heads compartment to port and separate shower room to starboard.

I like this, as showering aboard can often feel like you're showering almost in the toilet and once you get that idea lodged in your head you sort of feel less clean than when you went in. As a bonus, Jeanneau has moulded a wine rack into the shower stall to keep the bottles nice and clean. That's not actually true by the way for those who haven't been following. Anyway, the galley is situated well forward to starboard and there is room aplenty for preparing all the food.

One thing that was notable was the lack of a chopping board integrated into the sink top – that's another joke – although it doesn't have one. The dining area is pleasantly roomy and the table drops down to provide yet another double berth. So theoretically you can fit 12 people on this yacht. This might seem crazy but, having worked in the charter industry, I can attest to yachts being rammed that full regularly and I'd have to say that the Jeanneaus were well equipped to stand up to the unique rigours of such a beating. In this iteration the two aft cabins were perfectly pleasant.

The chart table is refreshingly roomy considering the trend these days to treat them as rather incidental. All in all, I also found the living space homely. This is a good thing as often with new yachts, while they always feel slick, clean and modern in terms of furnishings, I leave with the slight feeling that I have just checked out of the deluxe suite of a Premier Inn.



Under sail

It was time to get sailing and I was nervous because, again, there can be little to comment on these production yachts. They never sail badly – they sail well in a sort of forgettable way so you are left wading through a no man’s land of inane platitudes. One point where modern production yachts do occasionally come unstuck is with the steering – particularly if you are testing ‘hull No1’. To Jeanneau’s credit, the steering was exceptionally light without feeling soggy and this is in part down to the twin rudders and also due to Jeanneau using fibre cables for the steering. Anyway, a helm with good feel really is important and this was extremely good. The two-geoa winches were also extremely well placed, being positioned slightly more inboard than usual and meaning that the helmsman would easily tack the yacht himself if he so desired without any undue rushing around. On the test boat, all the winches were electric which takes any remaining effort out of sailing. Conditions for the test were dreamy really. First up we were on the Cote d’Azur in spring which meant it was a pleasant temperature with gentle sunshine. I realise that’s not strictly relevant to the test, but it does help with the overall ambience. I guess the factor was the breeze, which was a pleasant 10-12kt, dying off to 7kt by the time the test was over.

The yacht performed well, on the wind with the breeze at about 10kt we hit 7kt which is always good going, while with the Code 0 up and the breeze dying off, we were still hitting 6kt in 7kt of breeze which is, again, impressive. By comparison to some of her rivals, the 490 is lightweight and this was reflected in her performance. There was a nimble feel to her and she was eager to accelerate.

Her lighter displacement and the addition of a Code 0 give you a broader window in which you can sail. The refined steering is also a nice touch as it adds to the pleasure. We returned from a highly relaxing sail ready for a glass of wine. It was time to find out if there was a bottle chilling in the bilge...



Sam's Verdict

Jeanneau's 490 is expertly tailored to its customer base and if you were considering buying one, then I do not think you will come away disappointed.

You could happily sail a 490 across the Atlantic – or around the world for that matter. Yet she isn't really an out and out bluewater cruiser in the Hallberg-Rassy mould, nor does she pretend to be one. For sailing with a family in the Med, this is a real contender. Jeanneau knows its game and the 490 is a supremely good performer, both as a family yacht and also a charter yacht. The weight-saving measures have also upped her game somewhat compared to her predecessor.

The Spec

LOA 31.42m (47ft 3in)

Beam 4.49m (14ft 8in)

Draught 2.24m (7ft 4in)

Lightship displacement 11,290kg (24,890lb)

Price (base) £204,000

As tested £247,000

Contact: [Sea Ventures UK Ltd](#)