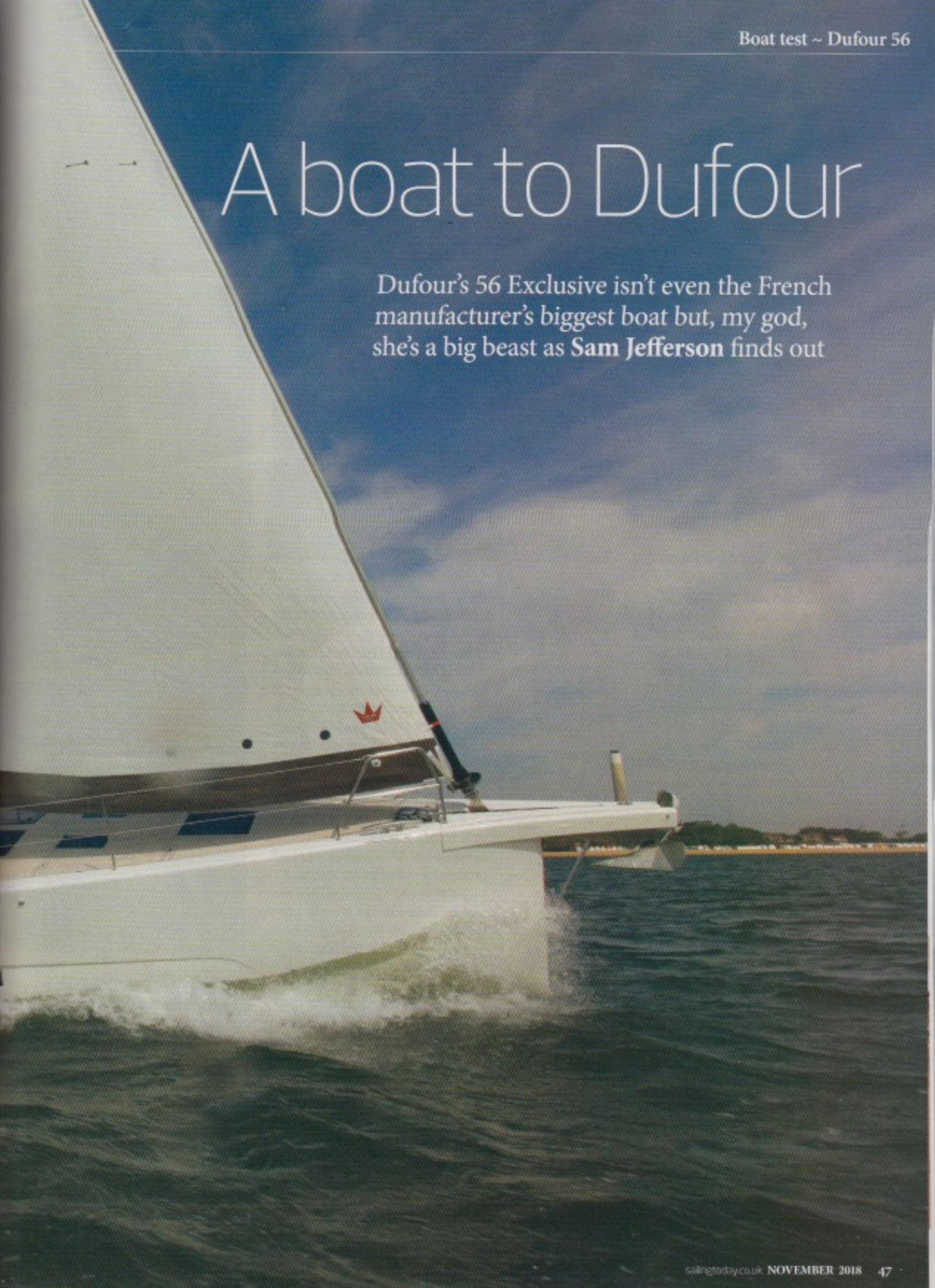




A boat to Dufour

Dufour's 56 Exclusive isn't even the French manufacturer's biggest boat but, my god, she's a big beast as **Sam Jefferson** finds out





have heard it said that less can be more – and doubtless that is sometimes true. But even a cursory glance at the Dufour 56 Exclusive also confirms that more can most certainly also mean more (Theresa May would no doubt understand this truism). Anyway, it was a fact that smacked me right spang across the eyeballs as I strolled down the pontoons to the test boat – this is a bloody big boat. Twenty years ago a 56ft boat would have been considered huge, nowadays it is no longer out of the ordinary for a cruising yacht. In fact, it's rather normal. Nevertheless, 56 feet is still bloody big.

There are a number of reasons for this sea change. The main one is probably simply that a yacht such as the Dufour 56, with its fin keel, bow thrusters and optional stern thrusters, if you so desire, is a good deal easier to handle when parking at a marina pontoon than, to pick a fairly random example, a 28ft Albin Vega. It is also going to be a hell of a lot more comfortable once you have parked up in your marina.

So that's that. No more talk of size here. It is not important, is it? Except of course, it is – because the 56 is actually the smaller sister to the monster Dufour 63. Both these boats

ABOVE
The 56's hindquarters have barely any taper and give her a maximum beam of 5.05m. This points to a powerful off-wind performer with a good deal of internal volume

are of particular interest because they signal a bit of a change of tack for the company. Prior to this, the manufacturer had its Grand Large range of yachts that was topped by the 560 GL. All that changed with the introduction of the Dufour 63 which offered what manufacturers are terming 'mini superyachts' – Hanse has its 675, Beneteau and Jeanneau the 64 and 63 respectively.

The basic concept is essentially a production yacht on steroids with a little bit of added exclusivity. Dufour has spelt out the second part of the concept very clearly. It started with the 63 and has now shifted the concept down the chain to the 56, which is entirely fair and sensible because – as already mentioned – the 56 is still a fair-sized yacht.

Felci flair

Like all the yachts in the Dufour portfolio the 56 is designed by the Italian Umberto Felci and it must be said that, over the years, he has given Dufour yachts a distinct look that sets them apart from the crowd. Generally they are quite angular with a certain intangible, aggressive sportiness that belies the yacht's cruising credentials. The fixed sprit is becoming something of an, ahem, fixture on cruising yachts

these days but Dufour pushed it from the start and it is now rather a signature look. The other really striking thing about the 56 is her hindquarters. They feature barely any taper even right aft and give her a maximum beam of 5.05m, which is really substantial and points both to a powerful off-wind performer and also a yacht blessed with a good deal of internal volume.

Before we head down below, however, there are the cockpit and decks to inspect and there really is a



the mainsheet is also led aft, meaning that everything is within reach of the helmsman. The only downside of this system is that it has the potential for creating a cat's cradle of ropes around the steering pedestal. The two pairs of winches by the helmsman are supplanted by a further pair on the coachroof for hoisting sails and reefing purposes.

Aside from that, the decks are incredibly clean and uncluttered and with masses of lounging space along with decent amounts of storage. The cockpit is fairly shallow, yet you feel well enclosed thanks to the well-proportioned coamings and the arrangement at the transom. This being a Dufour, it consists of a distinctive set of lockers at the stern that work both as storage and also the helmsman's seat. There is a flip-up section that allows access to the bathing platform and acts as a good natural barrier between the helmsman and the elements. They also provide the opportunity for Dufour to provide its hallmark outdoor 'kitchen' area beneath one of the locker lids, replete with barbecue, sink and chopping board. On deck there is also a hatch that provides access to the dinghy garage beneath. The whys and wherefores of dinghy garages have been perplexing designers for a number of years now, simply because by including one you eat up a lot of internal space compared to just having it on davits. Nevertheless, the 56 Exclusive carries a modest garage.

Step forward and the side decks are wonderfully wide and the raised integral toerail gives a nice feeling of solidity and quality, which is further augmented by the beautifully laid teak decks with their distinctive and rather stylish grey caulking. Up forward there is a large lounging space with cushions if conditions allow, while crew quarters are set in the bow and can be accessed through a flush hatch set into the deck. Having experienced the delights of skipper's cabins first hand, this one looked a giant step up from many of the damp and smelly hovels I have come across in my time. That said, inevitably you are still essentially sharing your bedroom with a toilet.

good deal of acreage to go over. It is important to mention that none of this new class of 'mini superyachts', or whatever you want to call them, is necessarily designed with the concept of having a professional skipper/crew aboard. Indeed, all the manufacturers working with this concept expect the yacht to be handled by the owner and their partner. As such, ease of handling is an absolute priority and a self-tacking jib is a sensible option that keeps things simple. Meanwhile,



ABOVE
The decks are incredibly clean and uncluttered, with plenty of lounging room

BELOW
Down below the general theme of 'bloody hell this is huge' continues, and with a plethora of skylights the main saloon is very pleasant

Down below

So that's above decks largely dealt with and very nice it was too. Head down below and the general theme of 'bloody hell this is huge' continues. The yacht I tested was perhaps a tad on the brown side in terms of the choice of trim but I'm not going to mark it down on that, as such things are very much a matter of taste and there is no accounting for some people's.

Dufour has gone big on light and there is an absolute plethora of skylights and, yes, actual light. It makes the main saloon a very pleasant space. I'm a big fan of a lateral galley placed forward of the main saloon. I'm not sure why, perhaps it's the novelty factor but it does also feel somewhat more inclusive and provides a nice enclosed space for the chef. It also means that the saloon feels even larger somehow and this really is an immense space on the 56. This allows for such outlandish luxuries as a very generous chart table which gives any skipper a lovely space to get on with the admin of sailing and navigating a boat. Sadly, my boat





did not have that option and instead featured a bunk room to starboard.

Dufour offers a choice of four layouts. All of these keep the basic premise of a forward galley, so it is only in the berths that things change. The favoured option is going to be twin doubles aft with a large stateroom forward. There is the option of twin doubles forward but that is more for those with an eye to chartering out the yacht and cramming a few extra passengers in. It means that if you wanted to you could fit 13 people in the various cabins without even obliging anyone to sleep in the drop-down double in the main saloon. In single-cabin format the forward stateroom is a delight. The heads/shower room has been set in the bow and this means that there is masses of space to wander around in the main bedroom. The bed is actually offset to port with a couch – yes, that's right, a couch – to starboard. It is all very comfortable and the heads compartment is also more than adequately commodious.

All in all, the interior is a triumph of space and the quality of the fit-out is very good – I have noted that French manufacturers these days provide markedly high quality of fit-out and Dufour is no exception.

Under sail

So what about out on the water? Well, she was a breeze to get out of her berth thanks to her bow and stern thrusters and we pattered out into the Solent to be greeted by very friendly conditions with

'An overall length of 56 feet means you have an awful lot of potential for speed'

flat water and a pleasant 12kn of breeze. To be honest, the boat was an absolute joy. An overall length of 56 feet with very few overhangs means that you have an awful lot of potential for speed and Dufour generally tends to whack a slightly sportier rig on its boats than its French rivals. Heading upwind that big mainsail was immediately working in earnest and pushing the 56 along at an impressive clip – 8kn was achieved with almost nil effort, and with zero fuss easing her off the breeze a tad we were soon surging along at 9kn plus. This is good going for a cruising yacht and she felt surprisingly lively and nimble for a boat that is weighed down by such extras as a washing

ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT
The interior is a delight. French manufacturers provide a high quality of fit-out and Dufour is no exception

BELOW
Out on the water the 56 felt surprisingly lively and nimble. She pushed along at an impressive clip

machine and dishwasher. There was something rather surreal about throwing a yacht this big through the tacks like a dinghy, but the 56 was well up to that challenge and she demonstrated exactly why the self-tacking headsail is an absolute boon when shorthanded.

My big regret was that we did not have the Code 0 for heading downwind. It was a bit of a shame, as it would have been great to see precisely what this beast of a yacht was capable of with a bit of extra sail area. Despite this, it was impossible not to enjoy sailing the 56 and I returned to dry land marvelling at how a boat as big as this could feel so small when you were actually sailing her.





SAM'S VERDICT

The 56 is the third 'mini superyacht' I have tested. The other two are the Jeanneau 64 and the Beneteau Oceanis Yacht 62. These being, essentially, the bigger iterations in the class. Dufour has cunningly shifted things down the scale with its 56, which is no bad idea as it gives the it a little bit of je ne sais quoi while still being relatively affordable. At the same time, this is a boat that is extremely easy

to handle and can be cruised at an impressively rapid pace. Like all the big manufacturers, Dufour knows its market and caters for it very well. Easy handling, good volume and decent sailing are required, and the 56 is tailored to perfectly fit that remit.

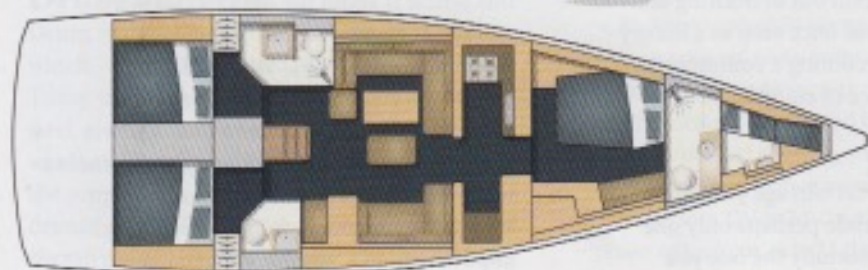
PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

COMFORT: ★★★★★

BLUE WATER CAPABILITIES: ★★★★★

THE SPEC

LOA: 17.15m (56ft)
Hull Length: 16.30m (53.4ft)
Waterline Length: 15.17m (49.77ft)
Max Beam: 5.05m (16.56ft)
Light Displacement: 17.625kg (38.85lb)
Draft: 2.50m (3.3ft)
Keel Weight: 4.9kg (10.8lb)
Engine Power: 110Hp
Sail Area: 141.67sq/m (1,525sq/ft)
Price: £356,039 (base)
Contact: universalyachting.com



CAROLINA WAXTON

ALTERNATIVE YACHTS



BENETEAU OCEANIS 55

Getting a bit old now and probably about to be supplanted, the Oceanis 55 is nevertheless smart, stylish and surprisingly modern looking given that the design is a few years old. She features Beneteau's distinctive arch over the cockpit.

Beneteau.com
£507,000



JEANNEAU 58

Jeanneau also sets its 58 outside of its Sun Odyssey cruising range and she is the smaller sister of the Jeanneau 64 – the yacht that started this trend. As such, she's got all the luxurious trappings of her sibling.

Jeanneau.com
£466,000



HANSE 588

Second in line behind the Hanse 675, the 588 is the first yacht in the range to boast a dedicated tender garage. Her lines follow the distinctive template set up by Judel/Vroljik with virtually no overhang at bow and stern and no sheer. As ever, ease of handling is key

Hanseyachts.co.uk
£387,535