

TESTED: JEANNEAU SUN ODYSSEY 490

PIP HARE TESTS THE FIRST JEANNEAU SUN ODYSSEY 490, THE EIGHTH GENERATION OF ITS HUGE POPULAR CRUISING RANGE

The battle flags flutter from the forestays of the angular, squat, powerful-looking offshore thoroughbreds dotted around the harbour at Les Sables d'Olonnes, western France. Sitting among this gathering of offshore greatness, in the home of the Vendée Globe race, is the first of the eighth generation Sun Odyssey range, the SO490, and on first impressions there is little doubt that these racing hull shapes have influenced this latest 49-footer (43ft LWL) from French yard Jeanneau.

The new Sun Odyssey range, which also includes the similar shaped 41ft SO440, does not embrace change in a half-hearted way. Philippe Briand, Jeanneau's long favoured designer, has taken a bold new approach, creating a boat that demands to be noticed. Viewed bow on, full-length chines are visible, hard and angular, some 40cm above the

waterline, with near vertical topsides above. The topsides meet the deck via a broad chamfer, the bow section is visibly wide creating a chunky look, with the 4.5m maximum beam carried all the way aft to the transom.

From the side, this 'daring to be different' approach stands out further. As your eye moves aft, the chamfered edges subtly blend to a toerail. Then, abaft the mast, there is a radical change from previous deck layouts. The new SO490 has a totally original 'walk-around deck' concept that permits a sailor to exit the cockpit and walk to the foredeck without stepping up onto lockers or over coamings. This is achieved by sloping the side decks from midships down to the transom, which is at the same level as the cockpit sole.

When Briand designed the deck layout for







this new range, he focused on using the available space to make life on board as easy as possible. The result is innovative. I wouldn't call this walk-around deck beautiful but it will doubtless create a stir. Plus there are benefits to the sloping side deck, such as the extra security of being inside a bulwark when stepping out of the cockpit, and a reduced risk of being hit by the boom due to a lower deck level.

I can also see some disadvantages, such as water collecting in the enclosed aft quarters when sailing to windward (though there are large deck drains to manage this) and crew always squeezing past the helm to go forward. This continuous deck layout could be one of those things that will change cruising yacht design forever – more likely it will be loved by some and rejected by others.

Striking out from the sea walls of Les

Sables in the evening twilight, we hoisted the Code 0, a sail that rightly gave the SO490 its best chance to shine in difficult conditions. Sailing at wind angles from 130°-100° true in 12 knots of wind, the boat easily powered up to 7-8 knots with no interruption from a huge swell.

As I pushed to higher wind angles, interested to test the handling, we steamed along at 85° true with a boat speed of 8 knots. The boat felt smooth and under control when powered up and heeled over, highlighting the benefit of twin rudders with self-aligning rudder bearings. When the Code 0 came down we really did miss the extra power. At 120° true the boat speed dropped to five knots in ten knots of wind. All of a sudden I could feel all 11 tonnes beneath me.

The steering positions on the SO490 are right out to the sides, allowing a good

A fresh look at ergonomics on deck – wide side decks and a sloping walk-around deck create an easy and uninterrupted path from transom to bow

view of oncoming wind, waves and the jib, despite the 4.5m beam. The two small wheels are slightly angled outboard, allowing better symmetry for the helm when standing. The seated steering position is tucked right into each quarter where the side decks join into the cockpit. This allows you to face straight ahead while helming. As we ploughed through the swell I steered comfortably with one hand, my legs stretched out ahead of me up the side deck and the wind full in my face. It was a weird sensation, but I liked it: no neck craning to see the tell-tales and waves – even the plotter screens are angled outboard for best viewing. This position may become exposed with big breeze or breaking waves, but for the 12 knots of breeze on our test sail it seemed a revolutionary new idea.

Upwind performance was not



Above: the cockpit coamings fold out to make sunbed loungers



Left: the steering position is well thought-out, but a little exposed



Right: the swim platform with liferaft stowage built in aft

great on our test sail, but few, if any, fully laden cruising boats really perform well in light winds and swell. The wind died to 8 knots, which meant the jib backed when large waves passed under the bow and we struggled to build enough apparent wind to keep it filled. In this light breeze I managed to steer an angle of 55° true at best and the boat speed was low. I don't feel this is a fair or comprehensive reflection on potential performance, however, as, due to a small rigging issue, we were not able to sheet the boom onto the centre line during the trial.

The action of the boat even in big swell was smooth and at no point did I feel unsteady on my feet. The wheels are positioned quite far apart, so during a tack, at some point you just have to let go and make a dash for the leeward wheel. Working sheets are led aft, through the cockpit coaming to two primary winches, which are mounted in front of the wheels and can be operated from a seated position inboard. I found the winches a little low for operation from a standing position and some crew may find them underpowered for the job – however there is an option to go electric.

We tested the SO490 with the performance rig, which has two sets of

coachroof travellers are seldom used and Jeanneau is not the first manufacturer to simplify this area of the boat.

Due to some problems at the yard our test sail was curtailed to an evening in a dying breeze and so I was only able to form a limited opinion of the yacht's sailing performance. It would definitely be interesting to sail the SO490 in more breeze and waves to get a taste of what this hull shape can really do.

The throttle and engine controls are within easy reach of the starboard wheel, but this position makes it difficult to see a pontoon when mooring port side to. There is a retractable bow thruster as standard so I imagine most owners will favour mooring on the starboard side, reversing where necessary.

A space for the crew

The ergonomic surprises do not stop with the Sun Odyssey's walk-around sidedecks. Coamings, which normally would be dead space, are collapsible and extend over the sidedecks to create flat sunbed loungers. Couple this with the optional table fridge and barbecue and this cockpit could quickly transform to the ultimate in-harbour chill out zone.

By offsetting the companionway almost imperceptibly to port, Briand has created a path to the transom that does not involve dodging around the cockpit table.

The cockpit seats are wide, perfect to snuggle into with your feet tucked up, but anyone with shorter legs, particularly children, would have to perch on the edge to brace themselves when the boat was heeled.

As the lowered side decks have reduced storage capacity aft, the SO490's sail locker is housed in the bow. There are aft lockers big enough for fenders and lines but this cavernous space forward could stow an inflatable dinghy and extra sails. There is a windlass and anchor chain locker forward and the anchor is housed permanently in an integral bow roller and bowsprit. This seems a sensible use of space though excessive loading of the forward locker could impact downwind performance.

Below decks

The Sun Odyssey makeover continues as you head down the wide companionway steps into a light and open cedar interior. There is natural light flooding in from deck hatches, coachroof and hull windows, creating a great feeling of space. This new look is a collaboration between Jeanneau and

'THIS COCKPIT COULD BE THE ULTIMATE CHILL-OUT ZONE'

spreaders and a third set of diagonals supporting the mast exit for the emergency inner forestay. The sail plan hosts 13m² more sail area than the standard rig, boosting the sail area to displacement ratio from 20.8 to 23.4. The gooseneck is lower than the outboard end of the boom, as per ocean racing designs, meaning the sail can be reached and stowed from the deck with no requirement for balancing on mast steps. I was delighted to see this feature.

The overlapping genoa is sheeted through the wide gap between the shroud bases. This allows the use of an inboard genoa track even when using full sail, so there is no requirement to re-lead sheets inboard when furling the headsail.

The mainsheet is fixed forward of the companionway by a bridle, instead of using a coachroof traveller. With the stops correctly set this should hold the boom onto the centre line and allow the user to tension the leech, either with the mainsheet when on the breeze or the vang when fetching. This set-up does restrict the ability to fully play with mainsail shape but, in my experience,



Above: keeping storage space low down and close to the keel has accentuated the feeling of space in the light and bright cedar trimmed interior



Right: a dedicated locker for the connoisseur



Left: the owner's cabin's centre console has a bookshelf, built-in TV, and pull-out shoe rack

Right: the navstation is flanked by bench seats on both sides



Right: there are spacious double cabins aft which are flooded with light through hull portlights and opening hatches. Note the deep fiddled worksurfaces



of the keel. Stowage is available under seats and in large units of drawers and cupboards, which are placed close to the centreline of the boat. These are designed with attractive round fiddles and curved edges to the drawers, giving the boat a luxurious look compared to many production boats. Fabric panels on bulkheads and counter tops are used to deaden noise and removable inspection hatches in the floorboards are fitted with stainless steel pins around their edges to wedge them tightly into their holes and stop rattling.

The extra interior bow volume created by a wide, slab-sided hull shape gives the SO490 a forward master cabin of the kind you might expect in a motor cruiser. There is room enough for a full size double bed (200x160cm), with three large storage drawers underneath. The huge cabin houses a separate heads and shower, two hanging lockers, a central TV console with bookshelf and a vanity unit with sink, mirror and storage. There is even a pull-out shoe rack.

Hull potential

The moment a chine appears on a cruising boat, it brings a temptation to jump on the 'powerful hull shape' bandwagon, so it's important to keep these statements in context. Jeanneau has made a concerted effort to keep the SO490 light, while the sail area to displacement ratio of the performance rig is certainly on the high side for this type of boat. The increased volume created by the new hull shape should provide a stiffer boat and better performance in mid-range breeze, with the trade-off being poorer performance in light winds due to increased drag. Though the SO490 quickly and effortlessly powered up in the maximum 12-knot breeze on the test, to unlock the full potential of this hull shape we needed either more sail area, or a lot more wind.

The ocean racing boats that lay across the dock in Les Sables had more than twice the sail area to displacement ratio of the SO490 and they challenge their skippers to go harder with bigger sails and in stronger winds. But the speed is directly linked to the daring and the effort of the crew. With a cruising yacht such as the SO490, the hull shape will allow good speeds and controllable handling in mid-range breeze compared to previous models and some of the competition, however the power output will be capped at how much effort a potential owner really wants to put into sailing with big spinnakers or staying out in big winds.



interior designer Jean Marc Piaton.

On the port side by the steps is a full size chart table with a twist: instead of one lonely seat in an enclosed space, this table can be accessed from both sides. The conventional navigator's seat faces forward, however facing the opposite direction there is a slightly longer sofa backing onto the galley. I love this idea, and can imagine two people comfortably sitting at the table in port to discuss routing together.

The three-cabin layout has two double aft cabins, both of which are roomy and have plenty of light, a forward en-suite master cabin and a small heads with shower opposite the chart table. The galley is a sensible size for the boat and wraps around the user providing plenty of worktop space and everything in reach from a single central point. The fridge is huge and can be accessed from both the

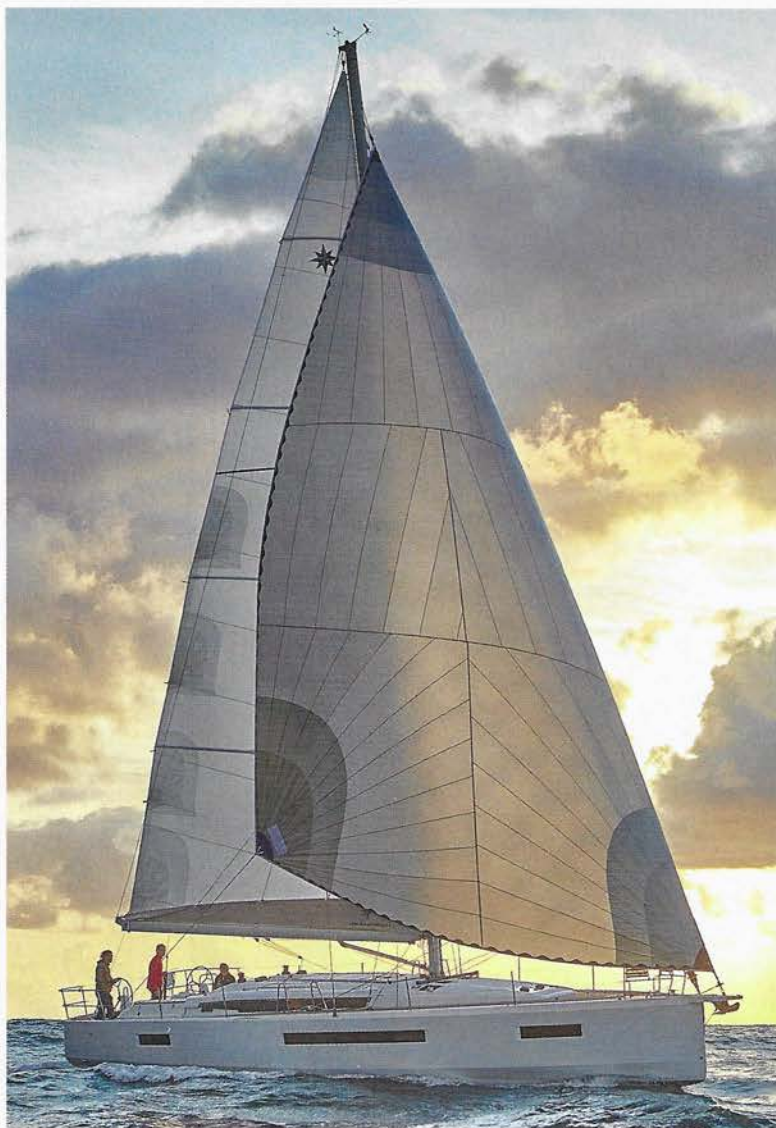


Above: the full bow shape helps create a particularly voluminous forward cabin

Left: a vanity unit drawer cut around the sink plumbing highlights the efficient use of space on the SO490

top and the side. The saloon is roomy and comfortable, with a table that could comfortably seat six to eat and a pull-out bench seat, which is securely stowed under the table while sailing.

In an effort to maximise the potential power of the hull design, interior weight has been kept to a minimum, placed low down in the hull and within 1.5m



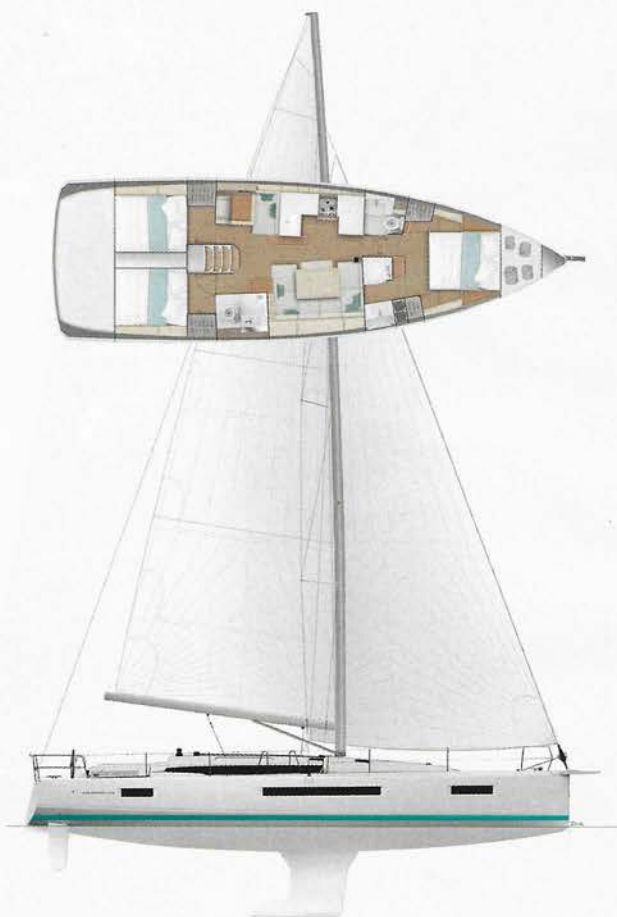
Our verdict

I think perhaps the real genius behind this design is understanding the internal potential of a full bow shape to a cruising boat. Jeanneau has definitely gone large in its attempt to move the Sun Odyssey range forward. The design features on this boat really are different, they have challenged the status quo and asked the question 'why can't this be easier?'

Personally, I don't find the Sun

Odyssey 490 a pretty boat – it is bullish and reminds me of a fist punching through waves – however beauty can be found in function as well as form. This design is about easy living and easy sailing, and it offers a lot for the price. It is a big boat and will deliver fast and fun sailing in the right conditions. It is user friendly, versatile and has a stylish interior that offers no compromise on comfort.

DATA JEANNEAU SUN ODYSSEY 490



SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| LOA | 14.80m (48ft 7in) |
| LWL | 13.24m (43ft 5in) |
| Beam (max) | 4.49m (14ft 9in) |
| Draught | 2.24m (7ft 4in) |
| Disp (lightship) | 11,290kg (24,890lb) |
| Ballast | 2,870kg (6,327lb) |
| Sail Area (100% foretriangle) | 103m ² (1,109ft ²) |
| Berths | 4–6 |
| Engine | 57hp or 80hp Yanmar |
| Water | 635lt (140gal) |
| Fuel | 240lt (53gal) |
| Sail Area/Disp ratio | 20.8 or performance 23.4 |
| Disp: | LWL 136 |
| Price (ex VAT) | €241,000 (Test boat ex VAT: €300 000) |
| Design: | Philippe Briand and Piaton Bonet Yacht Design |

Rivals (all prices ex VAT)

Beneteau Oceanis

51.1 Larger than the SO490, with similar race boat influences. €274,500 (£253,600).

www.beneteau.com



Hanse 505 One of the first to embrace the flat deck for maximised relaxation area.

€269,990 (£249,440)

www.yachts.group



Azuree 46 A fun, sporty and spacious design from Rob Humphreys.

€289,000 (£267,000)

www.azureeyachts.com

