



Capital gains

The Prestige 550 builds on the award-winning layout of the 500, so have Jeanneau delivered a better boat? Or just a more expensive one? **REPORT BY MARK TURLEY**

Scan the QR code to watch the Prestige 550 in action bit.ly/KTeDvk

The brief...



For once it is very simple; will this bigger, more expensive three-cabin 550 offer enough over the smaller but very clever three-cabin 500? Mark

LOA: 58ft 9in (17.92m)
PRICE: from £745,570
TOP SPEED: 30.5 knots
BUILDERS: Jeanneau
ENQUIRIES
www.prestige-yachts.com

With five new models above 50ft launched in the last year or so, Prestige clearly means business. Its range now runs from a 35ft flybridge to a 60ft flagship that incorporates the latest in hardtop 'flying-bridge' design, making it one of the most accessible line-ups in cruiser-dom. And while the Prestige name is not new, it has certainly come of age with the launch of its acclaimed 500 series. These 50 footers, available as a flybridge or hardtop, have sold easily in difficult times – with a total of 80 boats sent off to happy owners. Both models have identical floor plans that include vast saloons and a particularly eye-catching take on what constitutes a master

suite. Not only is it full-beam with big topside windows, but it also benefits from its own stairwell access, which is something that lifts its prowess as well as its privacy. The 550 model we are looking at here boasts a near identical design and three-cabin layout, only bigger. But the real story is not the extra 5ft of elbow room you get, but rather the serious motoryacht ethos that comes with it.

Design & build

Like the 500, the Prestige 550 comes in flybridge and hardtop guises. The boat featured here carries a full flybridge while the 'S' Express variant not only sports an opening sunroof

over the helm and saloon, but also a formidable upper sundeck area abaft of this. The only disappointment is that the builder has not gone so far as to kit this out with a helm position, reserving this 'flying bridge' concept – basically a reduced size flybridge – for the significantly more expensive 60S. One thing all these models have in common is that they are designed around pod drive propulsion systems, with the 550's hull being specifically tooled to take the Cummins Zeus system rather than the Volvo IPS set-up on the 500. In effect this means that the hull has ended up with two large, angular tunnels let into it, separated by a wide, flat area at the transom. The tunnels are needed because the

aft-facing Zeus drives are set vertically rather than those of the forward-facing IPS, that run at a slight camber, following the hull's deadrise. Above the waterline, a plethora of topside windows give each of the three cabins a beneficial dose of daylight, especially the midship's suite where the windows offer a great view out. Hull windows also adorn the transom, for a standard fit crew cabin that effectively makes the 550 a four-cabin cruiser. A further instance of the 550's serious big boat credentials is a hydraulic bathing platform for launching a PWC or mini-RIB. The grown-up feel spreads to the decks, with wide steps up from the cockpit and a foredeck where there's a social sun mattress with pop-up seating.

Back in the cockpit, the 550 flybridge has a deep, comfortable fixed transom seat and teak table. The S-variant has a bulkier module that readily transforms from dinette to sun lounger, complete with sloping backrest. An electric sun awning is available to protect the cockpit, as there is less structural overhang here than on the flybridge model. On both boats an open-treaded stairwell leads to the upper deck. The 550's full-on flybridge is a good size and aside from the generous dinette aft and the pitch-proportioned mattress area forward, it comes equipped with a wet bar and barbecue plus a separate cool box. Seating up top incorporates



an element of stowage plus there are lockers around the cockpit, but with the pod-drive engines sat aft there is no space for a lazarette. Deck stowage, then, is the one blot on the 550's cruising landscape and it will be a disciplined skipper indeed who does not turn the crew cabin into a most luxurious fender locker. Better to focus on all the accommodation which the aft-sited engines allow.

Interior mastery

The galley is located aft, serving the cockpit and saloon and leaving the greater portion of the slightly raised saloon area to be fitted out with wide, comfortable sofas, the main U-shape one forming the dinette. The view out is panoramic thanks to the deep, uncluttered window line, but should this

pall then a telly can be made to spring out of a console.

The three-part sliding cockpit doors can be rearranged so the galley receives priority access to the great outdoors, while the bar unit across the way is useful for dishing out libations. The main electrical panels lie to the rear of this, tucked behind opaque protective covers, making them handy when first entering the boat or shutting things down.

"The midship's suite where the windows are, offer a great view out"

The galley is well appointed – complete with domestic-sized fridge/freezer – and a good shape to work in with space enough for a couple to do their bit. Stowage is also plentiful; an attribute that runs through the rest of the interior.

Opposite the galley is the stairwell to the master suite and if the saloon hasn't already proved the vessel's extra volume, this cabin will. Although the 500 and 550's suites have much the same format, the smaller boat must work in a myriad of different floor levels as it tries to sustain decent headroom. By contrast, the floor plan here sweeps across without interruption, and the extra space means that along with the umpteen cupboards and drawers in the cabin there is also a walk-in wardrobe.

The adjacent en suite incorporates a larger separate shower stall, however, the 'free-standing' basin set on the generous vanity unit is still made from the same moulded resin used on smaller boats and looks somewhat low-rent here. In a similar vein, the cherry joinery – while of a good standard – is a ubiquitous feature of just about every Jeanneau ever built, and the sheer amount of it gets a little dull here. Surely the dawn of a new generation of cruisers merited some new cabinetry?

Moving on, the other two cabins, accessed in the usual way by a forward companionway ahead of the saloon, share a good-sized toilet compartment with separate shower stall. The toilets in both compartments have electric WCs.

The forward cabin utilises the increasingly popular scissor-berth idea where the island double can be pushed apart and made into two separate singles. There is ample sitting room at the headboard end of things when in its default setting of a double, and there is no shortage of clothes storage. The midships cabin is laid out with a pair of good sized singles, although with rather less locker space.



MASTER SUITE



EN SUITE

STAIRWELL TO MASTER SUITE



SALOON

Interiors

A shining light for cabin space

Masses of natural light and great views out lift the 550's sometimes conservative interior fitout.

Two areas do really stand-out though. First up is a completely separate stateroom that would not disgrace a 60-footer, with a private, sea-view table for two. Second is the location of the near domestic-sized galley which means it is central for all catering concerns, be they inside or out.



CREW CABIN



MIDSHIPS CABIN



FORECABIN

SCISSOR BERTH



FORWARD HEAD



GALLEY



Performance & handling

Just as the 550 and 500 look very similar, they also handle the same way at sea, sharing an easy, relaxed manner. Prestige aim to maximise the performance of the pod drive system, squeezing every last knot out of engines that wouldn't cut it on a shaftdrive boat of this size and displacement. That means you get a boat that is designed to cruise in the mid-20s rather than make headlines above 30 knots.

The 1200hp 550 is slightly faster than the 860hp 500 but given its cruising ethos, the more important point is that the 550 also manages to improve on already low noise levels, with a reading in its saloon at 24 knots of just 70dB(A), that is nothing short of a milestone; so well done them.

Fuel consumption at this same rate runs in at around 0.6mpg, which is no more than par for the course and perhaps reflects the fact that

the engines are running at their outer limits.

Back on the handling front, this is a very easy boat to drive. Put through a slalom, it proved 100 per cent predictable and although the 550 labours under plenty of helm, it reacts smartly



ZEUS DRIVE

to quick course changes. This slow but steady feel to the planing speed handling is largely down to how the pod drive system is programmed. But for most needs the Zeus package seems to have things completely wrapped up with several 'extras' built in as standard. For close-quarters work, the joystick control is aided by Skyhook (the function that keeps you on hands-free station). There is a built-in autopilot and an automatic trim tab facility that lifts the 550 onto the plane quite effortlessly. The tabs themselves are integral to the pod drives and work to ensure the boat runs efficiently whilst maintaining a healthy planing speed.

Reading from the Smart Craft display, we found that the auto-trim system was deploying around 80 per cent tab as the boat powered up to 20 knots and maintained that level through to 30 knots. Override the auto-trim and we lost a couple of knots immediately. A case of 'boat knows best' it seems.

From the helm

Great visibility and well laid out

Both helm stations cater for two occupants and with seating immediately adjacent, the skipper isn't likely to get lonely even if most of the flybridge - being mattress area - lends itself to a lie down and

a doze. The lower helm incorporates space for a pair of widescreen displays in its charcoal coloured console and the windscreen also comes equipped with demisters. Both these details



SMARTCRAFT DISPLAY AND JOYSTICK

ensure your view forward is never likely to be impaired, either by reflections or misting up, and indeed it is a superb view over the bow and for that matter down the sides, too. Only once the helm is put over hard do you need to duck your head and check things astern as the boat heels. The package of engine-related electronics that includes the joystick, autopilot control pad and Smart Craft

multi-function display are all grouped just where you want them. The only minor niggle is the usual lack of any fiddled flat tray to pop down loose items or a cuppa, although there are a few cubby holes dotted about. The flybridge helm, set on a lectern-type console, has much the same comprehensive array of control systems and still leaves adequate room for Nav electronics.

FLYBRIDGE



FOREDECK



Exterior

Room fore and aft for sun lovers

Moving round is easy, with chunky toerails to the full side decks and plenty of handrails. Other seaman-like features include rope bins to tidy away the stern lines and a partitioned chain locker. Sun lounging is taken just as seriously,

and the foredeck, with its bimini protected mattress and pop-up seating, offers privacy when moored stern-to. The flybridge has another massive sunpad area that runs beside and in front of the two-person helm, but you can't help thinking that some of this would be better utilised for seating. Not that this is exactly in short supply either up here - there is a huge dinette with a solid teak table set back on the cockpit overhang - but seats in and around the helm never go amiss.

COCKPIT DOCKING CONTROLS



SUN LOUNGER AND SEATING



WET BAR



SIDE DECKS



FLYBRIDGE ACCESS



COCKPIT



HELM



Specification & value

The standard on water price of £745,000 is pretty eye-catching compared to other boats of this size. However, it can require a fair amount of dressing up. Another £34,000 is to add the more basic of the two factory-fitted packages, which gives you a generator and Bose sound system you will probably want, and a bow thruster that you probably won't. But it's terrifyingly easy to get through another £100,000 of options and push the price into £900,000 territory, where boats like the soon-to-be launched Princess 56 and Fairline Squadron 55 preside.

Technical data

KEY DIMENSIONS

BUILD	GRP
RCD	B
LENGTH OVERALL	58ft 9in (17.92m)
HULL LENGTH	52ft 8in (16.06m)
BEAM	15ft 9in (4.79m)
DRAUGHT	3ft 10in (1.17m)
DISPLACEMENT (light)	17.7 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	425gal (1930lit)
WATER CAPACITY	176gal (800lit)
WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	12in (30cm)
HEADROOM IN SALOON	6ft 6in (1.98m)
FORECABIN BERTH	6ft 9in x 5ft 0in (2.06 x 1.52m)
Aft CABIN BERTH	6ft 7in x 5ft 3in (2.01 x 1.60m)

PERFORMANCE

Engines	twin Cummins QSC8.3-600 Zeus diesels
Configuration	6cyl, 600hp @ 3000rpm
Conditions	wind NE'ly Force 2, sea calm
Load	fuel 50%, water 50%, crew 8

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	LPH	MPG	RANGE	NOISE
2000	12.0	22.0	100	0.55	187	65
2200	15.8	27.3	124	0.58	197	68
2400	20.2	32.3	147	0.62	211	69
2500	22.1	35.0	159	0.63	214	69
2600	23.3	37.8	172	0.62	211	70
2800	27.0	44.0	200	0.61	207	73
3000	30.5	53.7	244	0.57	194	74

Range figures quoted above are in miles based on standard fuel tanks and include a 20% margin. GPH & MPG refer to imperial gallons. These figures may vary due to weather conditions, air, water, engine temperature, crew numbers, hull fouling, fuel quality and other issues. Noise readings in dB(A) were taken in the saloon.

PRICES

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with twin Cummins QSC8.3 Zeus, landed UK and commissioned	£745,570
Preference Package (Includes bow thruster, 11kW gen set, TV and Bose audio system)	£34,966
HEATING	£8971
RETRACTABLE COCKPIT AWNING	£5504
HYDRAULIC PLATFORM	£20,612
TEAK COCKPIT	standard

BOAT AS TESTED £925,720*

*Boat as tested price may include alternative options

Enginebay

As noted earlier, the 550 comes with just the one engine installation, a pair of Cummins 8.3lt units set-up on the Zeus drive system. These roll out 600hp apiece but unlike Volvo's IPS system, whose twin prop leg units face forward, here they face aft in the same way as sterndrives. A large hatch in the cockpit lifts with the aid of gas struts to reveal a roomy, neatly laid out engine space. A sturdy run of ladder helps you down to the tread plate and there is plenty of space to get to the various auxiliaries, as well as the main service points. The fuel tanks are set forward with



space for the optional generator in between. Pipes and wiring are well ducted and all the important electronics and electrics are protected behind a Perspex fronted cabinet. The only things missing are the Zeus drive pods, but if you follow the jack shaft off the back of the engines, it's apparent that they are tucked under the berth in the crew cabin.

THE VERDICT

Prestige, according to the Oxford dictionary, means 'reputation, derived from past achievements', and that's exactly what this boat radiates. The 550 owes much of its success to the 500, that it beats its smaller sibling at almost every turn is perhaps the best plaudit we can give it.



Meet the family



BIGGER

Prestige 60 from £1,055,000

LOA: 64ft 0in (19.50m)

Three en suite cabins, but the master midships one does not have its own private stairwell. New 'S' version benefits from a 'flying bridge'.



SMALLER

Prestige 500 from £532,000

LOA: 49ft 10in (15.20m)

Slightly smaller than the 550 with the same layout. Available with flybridge or without, in which case the saloon opens to the elements.

The rivals



Sessa 54 from £968,400

LOA: 56ft 5in (17.22m)

Stacks of style and on IPS, plus choice of coupe or flybridge models. Significantly pricier, but then there is real glamour here.



Princess 56 from £882,000

LOA: 53ft 2in (16.20m)

Soon to be launched replacement for the 54. Galley is up, opposite raised dinette and huge flybridge (see Making waves page 20).