

# CIAO, BELLA

*You just can't beat the Italians at the moment for stylish, mid-size performance cruisers. Toby Hodges heads to Lavagna to take the wheel of the alluring Grand Soleil 50, then travels to Varazze to sail the sturdy Solaris One 44. Next month: Comar's Comet 62RS*

Photos: Ruchard Langdon/Ocean Images



**A**ndiamo! Vai! Vai!" Excitable Italian accompanies a flurry of activity on the foredeck as three crew hoist the Cuben Fibre Code 0 up a vast carbon rig and unravel it in an instant to the high-speed mechanical whirr of a spinning furler drum.

The silver Grand Soleil 50 responds instantly to her added firepower, heeling and cutting a clean groove through the flat waters off the Ligurian coast. The crack crew in their cool Slam racing kit return to the cockpit and . . . well, they sit down on the comfy cushioned benches, not quite knowing what to do with themselves.

They now seem a bit out of place, redundant almost, as the pleasure of sailing this iconic Italian machine becomes reserved selfishly and wholeheartedly for the helmsman – me.

Grand Soleil are no strangers to this type of

sailing. Builders Cantiere del Pardo have been producing fast cruisers – boats that they modestly title 'icons of Italian style' – for nearly 40 years. However, the new 50 carries a message of pure sailing efficiency thanks to its structural framework reinforced with carbon fibre.

"The global philosophy of Grand Soleil is to be a very enjoyable boat to sail," Cantiere del Pardo's product manager Gianguido Girotti explains. "It's like driving a Porsche; you can feel the performance, but you can also slow it down if you want and enjoy it in comfort."

With six of these 50s sold so far, interest in the boats is broadening outside Italy, but the type of owner seems to be consistent: typically couples who have upgraded from a smaller, less performance-orientated design, but still like to sail with just two aboard – albeit quickly.



# ON TEST GRAND SOLEIL 50

## GS50 on song

The Botin Carkeek-designed Grand Soleil 50 is so Italian you could almost hear her sing – the test boat *ONE* was just missing a ‘Cornetto’ in the name. The contrasting black and silver is very slick, very tinted sunglasses.

The rewards of the focus on weight and stiffness are apparent when you take the wheel. She redefines the term ‘fingerlight’, giving you a dinghy-like sensation to savour Force 3-4 puffs. In 10-12 knots of true wind, sailing under main and 106 per cent genoa, we slithered into the mid-6s and topped 7 knots, attacking the apparent wind at 35°.

She is beautifully balanced and the figures are commendable, in line with her high SA:disp ratio. But it was unfurling the Code 0 that really showed off her performance in these Med conditions. Instantly, we sailed 1.5-2 knots quicker, losing only between 5-10° pointing, as we glided past a truly stunning stretch of coastline in the evening sun.

With the wind slowly dying, we eased into a bay under genoa, still making 5.5 knots in 6.7 knots of breeze. Gybing her in a couple of boatlengths, we hoisted the gennaker to carry us out around the headland back to Lavagna.

“This is the limit size where owners still enjoy sailing their own boat,” Gianguido Girotti says, so the idea was to keep her as manageable as possible. Side decks are clear to make mooring easy, the low coachroof and recessed sprayhood allow good views forward, while the helm position allows easy control of the main and jib sheets – crucial for the typical GS owner who sails with only a partner aboard. In the Racing package, the primaries move to the coaming and the standards become mainsheet winches.

Foot chocks inboard of each wheel would be useful and a traveller cleat on the side deck coaming would be easier to reach from the helm. Our boat had the standard 2.9m keel, but 2.6m and 2.2m versions are available.

Very comfortable and easy to helm, with both powered winches and traveller to hand

The coachroof can be converted to one big sunbed

There's an electronically operated bathing platform



Sparcraft aluminium mast is standard, with three spreaders to keep the same bend under pressure as the two-spreader carbon Hall rig. A method to hide all the running rigging line tails would be more in keeping with the 50's 'clean' style

Eighty per cent of owners choose the trendy grey caulking – the caulking actually dyes the teak to give a nice stonewash effect over time. The wide toerail is a neat solution for keeping the teak from staining it and is comfortable for hiking crew



The test boat had the optional (£7,108) carbon rudder, stock and quadrant upgrade, which helps deliver that exquisite feel



A huge sail locker with 5ft 8in headroom is standard, but *ONE* showed how this could also be a skipper's cabin large enough to house a berth and sink



Deck storage is in two shallow cockpit bench lockers and a huge aft lazarette. Below the side decks either side of the helms are dedicated gas and liferaft lockers



# ON TEST GRAND SOLEIL 50



**Saloon** This may not appeal to all, but it worked for me. The seating area is very comfortable and I liked the way the table can turn into a coffee table – or a footrest for watching the 37in flatscreen hidden behind the chart table opposite. Alcantara upholstery with white stitching is very designer Italian. The whole area is light, with double hull windows each side, long coachroof windows and large flush hatches.

## Ins and outs

Down below is a pleasant mix of old and new, all of it very symmetrical. White panelling and Corian contrast well with the traditional satin-varnished veneer, while the switch between saloon and galley layout looks fresh. Mahogany is standard, with oak and teak options – most buyers go for the latter.

Bowing to the wisdom of client feedback, Grand Soleil have switched the positions of the galley and saloon from their original design. The saloon table has a carbon-capped insert and transforms into a coffee table, borrowing the chart table stool; the forward cabin can be a twin and the aft cabins can have separate raised bunks.

The galley isn't so far forward as to be impractical and there is a secondary area to port that can be used as a serving worktop, with room below for an extra fridge, washing machine or dishwasher.

Although it's nicely finished, the 50 is certainly not exceptional below decks. Look closely and you'll notice different colours of



**Galley** The C-layout provides a useful alcove for working at the stove and general space, including cold storage and mod cons, is excellent. Good work surface space. The large four-burner Techimplex stove includes flip-up stainless steel flaps to protect those crisp white surfaces. Stowage is excellent and usefully sited, with space to port for a washing machine and extra fridge.



**Forward cabin** The master cabin can be split into a twin, but an island double is standard. There's plenty of light and good ventilation plus generous stowage. Separating the heads and shower to each side helps create an impression of space. Quibbles include low doors (1.7m), impractical varnished cupboards in the shower, and water pumps under the cabin sole that could prime loudly at night.



**Aft cabins** Standard versions have conventional identical doubles, but the test boat had two (2m) singles in each, with the second berth slightly raised – a good use of space and an excellent solution for racing crews. Again, the doorways feel small, but the hull windows contribute to a feeling of space and light and keep the cabins from appearing overly cramped. Good stowage.



timber, grain not lining up and cupboards and soles that are out of line. But it is smart and stylish, and it's understandable that time and money has been concentrated on the structure. All doorways are tight, but there's 1.9m headroom under the coachroof.

Owners have some flexibility in choosing what they'd like, within the limits of price.

### For and against

- + Overhead spots can be angled to suit each owner and I like the use of indirect lighting to the side of the headlining
- + Raised lockers throughout the boat provide practical stowage
- + Tidy hot and cold water, with good access to plumbing at bottom of companionway
- + All berths are ventilated and on slats. Oceanair dual blinds throughout
- Floorboards don't all line up properly, have sharp edges and flex
- Varnish wearing thin already
- Raised lockers don't all align with each other

See our in-depth video of the GS50 and Solaris One 44 tests at [yachtingworld.com/video](http://yachtingworld.com/video)



### Cool to be carbon

The marked improvement in feel results from serious research. The ability to sense every gust is down to how stiff Grand Soleil have made the infused hull – this is the first Grand Soleil with full carbon fibre reinforcement in the grid built into the mould.

Every 2m are complete beam stringers, including across the deckhead, absorbing the inertia loads, forming a ringframed solid structure. Add in a vinylester sandwich hull and deck and the result, say the builders, is 30 per cent more stiffness than the last model.

The flush hatches were developed with Solimar. Their grooves are integrated into the mould and laminated into the deck, thereby eliminating the need for guttering and preventing any leaks into the headlining.

The prototype was tricked up with multiple optional extras, including a carbon Hall mast, push-button Holmatro hydraulics for backstay, vang and outhaul, carbon rudder and stock, electric winches, teak side decks and coachroof. But the standard format does include rod rigging, an electric bathing platform, winches and mainsheet set-up.

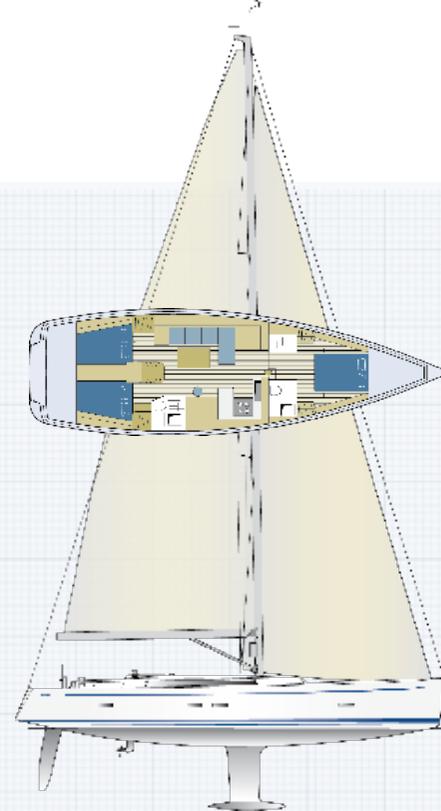
### Coming up

Grand Soleil have just announced a new 39 to celebrate the 39th year of Grand Soleil. She's a remake of the most successful model made by Cantiere del Pardo, of which 238 were sold around the world. The Claudio Maletto design is IRC-optimised, with optional carbon grid and foam sandwich infusion.

### CONCLUSION

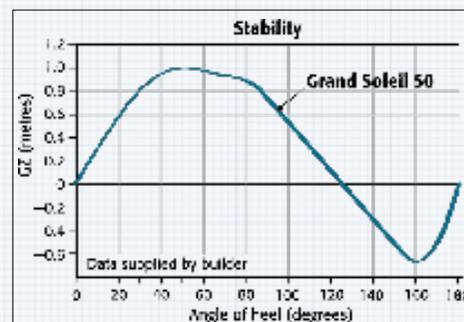
Our test sail was one that would make any sailor smile and realise the money spent on their yacht was worth it, gliding along a film-set coastline able to milk every puff thanks to a finely tuned rig. Just add the Mediterranean sunset.

When we arrived, we were thrown somewhat by the racy crew and while I have no doubt that some will be campaigned, I was assured Grand Soleil's goal was all about sailing pleasure –



SPECIFICATIONS	GRAND SOLEIL 50	
LOA	15.15m	49ft 8in
LWL	13.42m	44ft 0in
BEAM	4.58m	15ft 0in
DRAUGHT	2.9m	9ft 6in
DISP (LIGHTSHIP)	13,000kg	28,660lb
BALLAST	4,550kg	10,031lb
SAIL AREA (100% FORETRIANGLE)	147.2m <sup>2</sup>	1,584ft <sup>2</sup>
BERTHS	6-7	
ENGINE (SAILDRIVE)	75hp Yanmar sail drive	
WATER	55olt	121gal
FUEL	31olt	68gal
SAIL AREA: DISP	27.1	
DISP: LWL	150	
PRICE (EX VAT)	£389,140	

Designed by Botin Carkeek



“a proper sailing yacht is what our owners want,” they said. The GS50 certainly proved slippery, stiff and rewarding to sail – the more rigid a structure, the more breeze goes into performance rather than being lost in flex and torsion.

A caveat is that she carried over £175,000 of extras, including a carbon rig (£71,000) which, although worthwhile when all that effort has gone into the build, would make the £389,000 price seem less flattering. Nevertheless, the standard boat still equates to a lot of pleasure and performance.