

Used Boat Notebook

By John Kretschmer

Jeanneau Attalia 32

This lightweight sloop was one of the first to blend spaciousness with performance

Jeanneau, a division of Groupe Beneteau, is a key part of the largest sailboat manufacturing company in the world. Today Jeanneau builds a range of quality cruising and performance boats from 20 to 54 feet and aggressively markets its line in North America. Jeanneau, however, had a long history before consolidating with Beneteau in 1995. The French builder was one of the first European companies to gain a toehold in the U.S. market more than 20 years ago when European boats, especially the modern French variety, were still something of a novelty.

Founded by M. Henri Jeanneau in 1956, the company originally built wooden motorboats before switching to fiberglass a few years later. In 1970 Jeanneau began production of its first successful sailboat design the Sangria, a 25-foot sloop that sold nearly 3,000 boats during a long production run. Later that year Jeanneau sold out to Bangor Punta, an American Conglomerate that also owned O'Day, Ranger and Cal. That connection opened the door for exports into the United States.

In the early and mid-1980s Jeanneau offered several models

on this side of the Atlantic, all with somewhat unusual names that didn't sound quite right to American sailors accustomed to identifying boats simply by the manufacturer and length overall. The Jeanneau Aquila, Arcadia, Melody, Symphonie and Gin Fizz sold in modest numbers. A lightweight sloop available with either a fixed keel or centerboard, the Attalia 32 was probably the most popular of the lot. Several hundred Attalias were built from 1982 through 1987 and there is usually a decent selection of boats available on the North American used boat market.

First impressions

The prolific team of Michel Joubert and Bernard Nivelt, who in those days specialized in boats less than 35 feet long, designed the Attalia 32 and patterned it closely after their 1981 half-ton world champion, *Air Bigouden*. The Attalia, which has an LOD of 30 feet, 2 inches and an LOA of 31 feet, 10 inches, blends a performance hull shape with a surprisingly comfortable interior, a concept that French builders would essentially patent over the next 20 years.

There isn't much sheer, but there is plenty of freeboard, and at first glance, the Attalia seems to bob on the water. The trunkhouse is fairly low and features dark Plexiglas portlights. Under the water, the forefoot is quite narrow, the iron fin keel has a relatively short cord and the rudder is mounted on a partial skeg. Although the majority of boats had fixed keels, Attalia's centerboard option with a board-up draft of just 3 feet, 8 inches accounted for its popularity in the

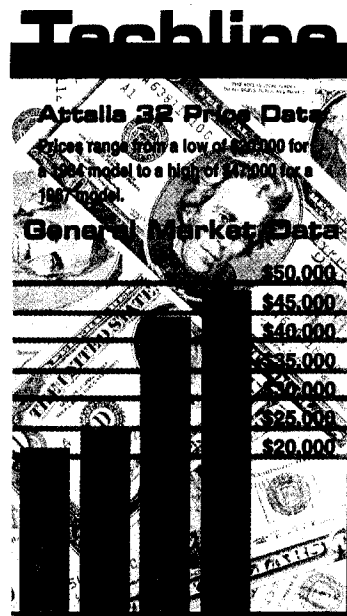
United States. The standard draft is 5 feet, 9 inches. The design displacement is 7,500 pounds. By way of comparison, the Hunter 30 of the same period displaces 9,700 pounds and the Catalina 30 weighs 10,200 pounds. Of course, the Attalia seems downright heavy compared to a ULDB like the Olson 30, which displaces only 3,600 pounds.

Construction

Although the Attalia was a thoroughly modern design in 1981, the boat was built conservatively. The hand-laid hull is solid fiberglass, and the deck is balsa cored. The hull and deck are joined on a flange and bonded both chemically and mechanically. The joint is also sealed with a layer of fiberglass making it strong and essentially watertight. The iron keel is epoxy-coated and bolted to the hull. The keel bolts are then fiberglassed-over, a good technique for keeping the bolts dry but not for replacing them or dropping the keel. The rudder is glassed-over wood with stainless steel drift pins. The rudder stock is stainless steel as well.

Jeanneau has always done excellent fiberglass work, and one of its trademarks is to bond all the interior components to each other. The bulkheads are securely tabbed to the hull, and the settees and lockers are tabbed to the bulkheads. The result is that the interior furnishings act as structural members.

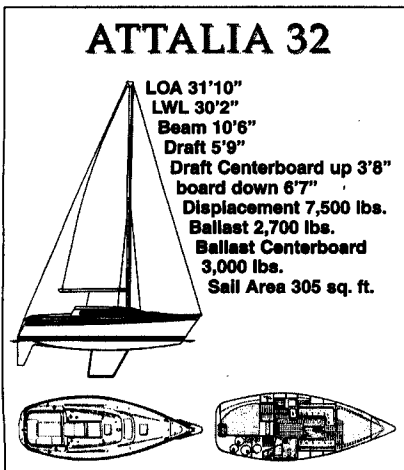
I have had plenty of personal experience sailing Jeanneaus of this era. My mother sailed her 1978 Gin Fizz sloop most of the way around the world in the early 1980s, and I later sailed it across the Atlantic twice. It was a standard production boat that held up incredibly well. Neither of us had encountered structural problems. In fact, another owner sailed the



same boat around the world again in the early 1990s. The Attalia is not considered a bluewater cruiser, but it was built to similar scantlings. Bernard Belisle sailed his Attalia from Mexico to Quebec City and had nothing but praise for the boat.

What to look for

Owner comments tend to compliment the Attalia's construction, and by almost all accounts, the boat has aged well. There are, of course, a few common problems to look for. I was amazed that the Plexiglas ports on the Gin Fizz didn't leak, but several Attalia owners reported leaks, cracks, crazing and the need to replace the ports on the Attalia. The nature of the hull shape results in a shallow bilge that is difficult to drain, especially because the limber holes clog easily. Also, any water in the bilge tends to slosh onto the sole when heeled, and although the sole is glassed-over on the bottom, this water will eventually cause some delamination.



Boats & Gear

Jeanneau also used fabric and vinyl for liners and locker covers that become droopy when the adhesive gives out, making repair difficult. One owner also noted that the icebox needed better insulation when he installed 12-volt refrigeration. Another owner complained about the difficulty in finding metric replacement parts. Probably the most common complaint about the Attalia is that it is underpowered. The standard engines were either a two-cylinder Yanmar or a Volvo, both around 13-horsepower. Naturally some Attalias have been repowered, and if you find one with a larger engine, consider it a bonus.

On deck

Most European Attalias came from the factory with tiller steering, which is my preference for two reasons. First, the boat is light and responsive and you can feel the rudder in your hands with a tiller. Second, the tiller is mounted well aft and can be pivoted to open up the cockpit when at anchor. Speaking of the cockpit, it isn't huge, but then again it is easy to forget that this is just a 30-foot boat. The seat backs are bit abrupt, but the fairly deep well and bridgedeck make the cockpit secure in a blow. There is a large locker and a clever life raft locker under the helmsman's seat. Two scuppers are located in the transom.

The mainsheet traveler runs across the bridgedeck, like most boats of this vintage. If you simply can't live with this arrangement, it's possible to convert to midboom sheeting with a traveler over the companionway. There is a good possibility the original two-speed sheet winches have been upgraded. The Attalia was one of the first production boats to lead all sail controls, including halyards, aft to the cockpit.

Spinnaker gear was standard. The genoa tracks are inboard, as are the chainplates, allowing for tight sheeting angles. The single-spreader, deck-stepped anodized aluminum mast and boom are likely by Isomat and feature internal halyards and slab reefing. Most deck hardware is by Goyot and above average in quality. The nonskid is likely a little worn, but the side decks are fairly wide. Full-length teak grab rails are mounted on the cabintrunk and double lifelines were standard.

The Attalia also came from the factory with a stout stemhead fitting that included double bow rollers, a chain stop and a large external chain locker.

Down below

The Attalia interior plan is deceiving. It would be easy to think the boat was designed in 1991 or even 2001, not 1981. The overall spaciousness is a result of high freeboard, a beamy hull shape that is carried aft and clever design work. The cabin is trimmed in teak and workmanship is good for a production boat. A light headliner with teak battens and forward-facing portlights really help brighten things up below.

The forward cabin has a large double berth with storage below and narrow shelves alongside. There is a hanging locker to starboard and an overhead hatch for ventilation. A sliding door offers privacy and takes up less space than a hinged door. The saloon includes a centerline table with leaves that fold up to accommodate six. In the centerboard version, the housing is located in the table. The port side settee is L-shaped with a wine cabinet above and a bladder water tank underneath. The back rests lift up and there is storage behind. The French have always offered distinguishing touches like blinds on the hatches and ports and panoramic roof screens. The headroom is just a pinch less than 6 feet.

The L-shaped galley is to port and includes a single stainless sink. Pressure water was standard, which wasn't always the case 20 years ago. A seawater foot pump was also standard on most old Jeanneaus but never worked well. There is a two-burner stove and oven, usually by Plastimo, and the icebox is decent sized but poorly insulated. The nav station is opposite the galley and the chart table is quite large for a boat this size. The fuel tank is located beneath the nav station. The head is aft to starboard and includes a wet locker. This is the best place to squeeze in the head on a small boat. The aft cabin is tucked under the cockpit to port and is surprisingly commodious. There is a full-sized double berth, a hanging locker and shelves for storage.

Engine

As stated earlier, the engine is a bit undersized, although it was

designed for docking and close quarter maneuvers only, not for long motoring trips as evidenced by the 12-gallon fuel capacity. Owners report motoring at around 5 knots, and both engines are extremely stingy on fuel. The engine box is well insulated with foam soundproofing and access is excellent from behind the companionway steps and through a panel in the aft cabin. The stuffing box and batteries are easy to service from under the aft cabin mattress. Unfortunately, the Jeanneau engine control panel uses idiot lights instead of gauges.

Under way

The Attalia is a bit tender and sails best on her lines, avoiding excessive heeling. The boat is close-winded and easily driven. Although the centerboard model has slightly more ballast, the keel model is stiffer. Approximately 70 percent of the boats were built with keels. Two owners reported that they were surprised at the lack of pounding, although I suspect that beating into a choppy seaway you'd feel the shallow forefoot. Another owner who sails in Alaska notes that the helm is well balanced and is easily steered with a Tillermate autopilot even when reaching in 20-plus knots of wind. On the wind, he strongly recommends reefing early to keep the boat flat. Weather helm does not appear to be a common problem.

Bernard Belisle, who completed a 5,000-mile passage, agrees that the Attalia lacks punch under power, but that it doesn't affect passagemaking much. "I don't worry about the power situation because I prefer to sail the boat and don't motor unless I have to. It sails well in light air," Belisle said. Although most Attalias are used for cruising and casual PHRF racing these days, several boats were actively campaigned in Europe when the boat was first introduced. The Attalia will respond to aggressive sailing and that can be very rewarding.

Conclusion

The Jeanneau Attalia is surprising boat. Because it hovers just off the radar screen for most U.S. sailors, it is an excellent value. The Attalia delivers comfort, performance and quality construction at a most affordable price.

Technique

SAILING Magazine's Value Guide Attalia 32 (5-sailboat rating system)



PRICE: Attalia asking prices range from just under \$20,000 to around \$25,000 for a newer model in top condition.



DESIGN QUALITY: Joubert/Nivelt combined to create a lively performer with a very roomy interior. The high freeboard is a bit unsightly, and you either like or don't like the flat-lined French look. The centerboard model offers the option of shoal draft.



CONSTRUCTION QUALITY: For a production builder Jeanneau builds strong boats. Although the Attalia's design was modern in its day, the construction techniques were tried and tested.



USER-FRIENDLINESS: The Attalia is easy to sail with all lines led aft. The interior is well thought out and comfortable. The shallow bilge means that even a little bit of water will slosh onto the sole when heeled.



SAFETY: Although the boat is a bit tender by design, it is well constructed. The deck is easy to navigate, although the nonskid is likely well worn. There is a bridgedeck and a special life raft locker for offshore sailing.



TYPICAL CONDITION: By most accounts Attalias age well, but they vary widely. Most boats were imported while others were sailed across the Atlantic on their own bottoms.



REFITTING: The Attalia is not the easiest boat to work on and finding parts, especially special metric parts, takes a bit of patience and persistence. The Attalias were not built with refitting in mind.



SUPPORT: Like most production builders, Jeanneau focuses on new models, although the company Web site provides good information about old boats. A useful Jeanneau owner's page can be found at <http://jeanneau.tripod.com/owners/ld217.htm> on the Web.



AVAILABILITY: Although hundreds were built, Attalias were exported in limited quantities. Fortunately, for buyers anyway, the boat is not well known so they tend to linger on the market. Be sure to include Canada in your search.



INVESTMENT AND RESALE: Attalias have held their value adequately over the years and most of the depreciation has been absorbed. This is a good time to buy an Attalia.

