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1. FIGARO ONE REVIEWED BY JERRY FREEMAN

*Figaro One Reviewed
by Jerry Freeman*

First impressions of a Figaro 1, on charter from Passion Voile, Cherbourg, PB2005.



Josephine, chartered by Jerry for PB2005.

On first approaching the Figaro 1 the impression is of an unremarkable and slightly understated racer-cruiser design, there is no skinny carbon mast or cob-web of runners, no modern plumb stem nor twin rudders. The lines are clean and undistorted, the oversize cockpit leads to modest cabin top with wide and uncluttered side decks. Floating lightly on the water at the bow suggests a boat stripped and ready for action.

The mast head rig is supported simply by double in line spreaders with substantial rods and a wire permanent backstay, but here is a clue to the racing pedigree as the powerful backstay tackle is duplicated each side of the large and shallow cockpit. It is in the cockpit that racing design first becomes apparent, the aluminium fabricated tiller is T shaped and comes nicely to hand when sitting with feet steady in the adjustable stainless steel foot braces, tiller extension on wobbly joint stands ready to grab if required. Mainsheet with fine tune, traveller, kicker, backstay controls are all there for the solo helmsman, hidden under the main track is the pilot and instrument display control at finger tip, Large format instruments et eye level on the mast and twin compasses are all the racer needs to enjoy many hours fixed at the helm, her food and water stowed in the convenient ladder frame of the tiller.



Under way the boat is very responsive without being twitchy, the tiller is of course direct , slightly loaded by the permanently attached auto pilot below decks, but tiller movements are so small as to make this drag unnoticeable in practice.

Weather helm comes on in spades when the boat powers up and this must be addressed to maintain best speed with careful attention to traveller position and sail shape, if the auto pilot is in use such helm load may be overlooked until the opposition starts to move away?

The mainsail on Josephine was a low tech cross cut Dacron sail with a lot of resin filler in the shiny , noisy cloth. One full length batten at the top and bolt rope at the luff. At first sight this was a disappointment, being used to tri radial mylar sails, but it soon became apparent that the controls at foot, cunningham and mast bend allow the sail to be conveniently shaped to suit the varying conditions. Class rules require this form of economic construction, it is superb, fast, and light weight as well as being highly instructive in the art of sail shape control.

The #1 genoa was a conventional tri radial mylar sail, very powerful and full hoist, a cunningham should have been rigged to tension the luff had the wind speeds increased. All 3 halyards are attached with bowlines, there are no snap shackles. (see a sting in the tail). Both white sails cascade onto the deck when dropped from bolt rope attachment and this makes setting and flaking a tedious and dangerous task. The main boom is set high above the deck and cockpit but the lack of solid kicker means it crashes to the deck when lowering the mainsail.

The spinnaker was a general purpose mast head kite of dubious vintage with single alloy pole rigged for end to end gybing. Tweakers set at the beam max came very easily to hand in the cockpit. Gybing the spi solo is one of the skills that has to be planned, rehearsed and practiced in order to raise the upper limit of breeze for this manoeuvre, a steady pilot helps.



The interior is functional minimalist with good standing head room in the working area around the chart table and galley, the engine sits amidships and forms the base for an oversize fixed saloon table, three big batteries live forward of the engine box so that all the weight is concentrated over the keel. All round engine access is thus provided for maintenance but this is not encouraged? The two bladed folding prop is driven by a conventional shaft and visible through a Plexiglas port aft of the steps. Cooling water enters through two sea cocks allowing switching if one is blocked by weed, the vetus strainer mounted high up can be opened without closing the sea cocks.

Two pipe cots on adjustable tackles provide the sleeping berths at sea under the cockpit keeping the weight in the right place and safe from spray and low flying co- skippers with kettles. Internal hand rails are stripped spectra lines from hatch to mast.

The galley has a single camping gaz burner attached directly to a medium bottle in a stainless gimble, there is ample stowage space for the gourmet hermit.

The chart table at standing height is ample with stowage under the lifting desk top, cave lockers above and in the plinth below

There are none of the following; sink, water tanks, toilet, shower, fridge, ice box,

Vents, drinks lockers, oil lamps, berth cushions, heaters or radar. There are two buckets which would be better if different colours! I liked the functionality very much.

Ballast system was not tested because it was not on the IRC cert at 0.998 and did not appear to be in good condition, fearing blocks or leaks. The inlet is a drop down scoop aided by manual pumping with a long cranked handle useable from the helm position. Tacking is by gravity to the low side using two cockpit valves.

The tanks are large plastic structures independent of the hull structure alongside the pipe cots aft.

Figaro 1 has been sailed by two well know PB skippers, Michel Kleinjans campaigned PM Charles in the figaro solo, and two Ostars, holds the record for the 30 foot mono class at

20 days 14 hrs 58 mins since 1996. Pierre-Yves Chatelain chartered Destination Calais for the PB2004 inaugural event and won his class in preparation for the Ostar 2005 in his open 40.



Tim Knight has a nice example for sale on the Hamble 'Fluffy' (Sept 2005)!

I Liked:

- The response to control inputs; educational
- Sail adjustment made easy by simple convenient controls
- Weather helm and feedback
- Stiffness without water ballast
- Simple rig, not likely to make a damaging mistake when tired
- Bullet proof construction of hull and rig
- Easy acceleration in gusts
- Prop checking window in hull

- Minimalist accommodation, with standing headroom and no toilet.
- Dual water inlets for engine in case of blockage, with vetus strainer above WL.

I did not like

- No spray hood, roof mounted winches and jammers in the way?
- String management , long bags in cockpit sides for tails.
- Shallow cockpit, offers little protection at sea, multiple bruising on fittings
- Chain plate rods bisect saloon berths, special y shaped sleeping bag reqd?
- Genoa winches remote from helm position, cross winching may work?
- Shallow bilges mean the two lower lockers in galley and chart table are awash.
- Engine cover is easy to remove, i.e. never stays in place!
- Anti bonking bunks.

The figaro 1 was designed with shorthanded open water racing as its prime objective, long distance and around the cans, it has not been surpassed in this respect by any more recent designs and will make an ideal first solo boat .

The fine tune controls and well balanced helm ensure the figaro rewards the attentive sailor, mistakes may loose speed dramatically but wipe outs are not likely to be expensive as this boat is bullet proof. The competing yachts in the market place with fully fitted interiors and or asymmetric spinnakers can only be had many times the cost of a Figaro and the opportunity for serious damage is not worth the marginal increase in performance.

If searching for a Figaro the first step may be to consider a weekend charter, ideally with the owner to demonstrate the tuning and controls. Finding a well maintained example would be worth the effort of a few trips to France but you may have to kiss a lot of frogs before you find your princess?

Jerry Freeman



Destination Calais, chartered by Pierre-Yves Chatelain for PB2004.