Jeanneau Diamond Anniversary

Sixty Years 1957 – 2017

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January 2017
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The scene is set

If a visitor to the Pays-de-la-Loire region of France in the early 1950’s chanced to go into the Delaire & Jeanneau hardware store in the town square of Les Herbiers, they may well have been served by a quiet, unassuming and perhaps slightly shy, but professional young man in his mid-twenties, who was the son of the shop’s owner. That visitor might have been quite surprised that this same young man, Henri Jeanneau was, in his spare time an active aeroplane enthusiast who had joined the Aeroclub in nearby Cholet when aged only 23. He and his wife Nelly had even flown in a small aircraft as far as Sicily and North Africa. Indeed this adventurous pair would spend their Sundays touring the local Vendéen countryside on a pair of motocycles – Henri on his Terrot 500 and Nelly on her Jawa 350.

Henri was apparently inspired to consider watersports after seeing a speedboat being trucked past the hardware shop, so one weekend in October 1951 Henri and Nelly visited a local nautical fête at the nearby Lake Tricherie and saw a demonstration of water skiing. It must have been love at first sight, for just one week later Henri had found an advert for a second-hand runabout dinghy suitable for waterskiing in Arromanches, Normandy, over 350km away. Not to be daunted he rode there on his trusty Terrot motorcycle, purchased the boat and then extraordinarily managed to tow the runabout, on a heavy trailer, behind his motorcycle all the way back to Les Herbiers, falling off twice in the process. The following weekend he launched the runabout on the lake and despite some pain and difficulties, through perseverance self-taught himself to water-ski.

Initially boating was just going to be a hobby, but his entrepreneurial flair was beginning to show through and in 1954 he formed a consortium for the bulk purchase of ten 30hp Johnson Outboards from the French importer Fenwick.

Possibly due to his grasp of aerodynamics, the boat he then built in his father’s workshop was evidently a great design as he won one of the first “6 heures de Paris” speedboat races on the River Seine. This endurance race was effectively a survival of the fittest contest. The winner of the race was simply declared by the maximum number of laps a boat and driver had achieved within the 6 hour time limit around a short course up and down the Seine and around three of the Paris bridges.

The result was chaos – sometimes with fatalities, both during refuelling stops and through the pinch points. Henri’s success generated such interest he decided to build a few copies, so in 1957 Jeanneau formerly began business as a boatbuilder.
The early years

By 1959 he was employing three craftsman who had existing boat and canoe building skills in his workshop, at least one had previously worked for Pierre Matonnat, famous for building exquisite canoes and wooden speedboats. Indeed these early Jeanneau designs have notable design similarities to the Matonnat craft. Henri’s first production model was named after his successful race as the 6 heures de Paris and was soon joined by the elegant Océane runabout, which has become a sought after classic.

On a visit by Henri and Nelly to America to study current boatbuilding methods they recognised that polyester resin and glass fibre had numerous advantages over wood for volume production. So in 1961 the Calanque, made its debut, a simple dayboat with a fibreglass hull that initially retained a wooden deck and could be fitted with up to an 18hp outboard. The Calanque was quickly followed by Jeanneau’s first all-fibreglass boats, the Sport Polyester, the Mirage and the Squale, in which Henri again personally entered into the 1961 edition of the 6 heures de Paris race.
C'est la coque qui manquait ; légère, élégante, elle sera la clé des calanques inaccessibles. Ce qu'elle vous offre ?... les bains de soleil, la pêche, le ski nautique, la promenade dans le confort et la stabilité... Elle aurait pu s'appeler Farniente. Nous pouvons vous la construire en Polyester renforcé ou en acajou verni. Moteur de 3 à 18 ch.

VENez L'ESSAYER AVEC DIVERS MOTEURS, VOUS FEREZ UN CHOIX OBJECTIF.
In 1961 a brand new Jeanneau factory and showroom opened, representing a considerable investment and self-assurance in the future prospects for his designs. Perhaps a well found confidence as Henri’s personal record for 1961 driving his Squale design, fitted with a 50hp Mercury outboard claimed a staggering number of outright victories:

1st place: Championnat de France
1st place: Lyon de Mer
1st place: 2 Heures de Rouen
1st place: Grand Prix de l'Atlantique
1st place: Grand Prix de Caen
1st place: 100km de Lyon
1st place: l’Heure de Poncin
A mix of performance runabouts and simple dinghy’s rapidly followed including the Lion de Mer, St. Trop, Belle Île, and Calvi. This profusion of names was something that was to stick with Jeanneau well into the 1990’s with at times a seemingly random and even bizarre range of model titles.

Then in 1960 the 4.90m Sea Bird appeared, Jeanneau’s first two-berth cabin boat, typically supplied with a 40hp outboard that allowed water skiing, it was aimed for use by all the family and proved a great commercial success.

The visit to America also clearly influenced the next stage of Jeanneau speedboat design, with futuristic styling elements that included tail fins, front light pods and wrap around windshields. Even the model names witnessed this transatlantic connection – Mustang, Meteor, Rodeo and Rocket.

Henri’s faith in his products and the robustness of fibreglass was demonstrated to journalists by driving the boats at high speed up onto the lakeside banks and even landing on roadways, quite the showman.
In the early sixties, sailing was rapidly gaining the imagination of the French public, and so creating new opportunities for boat builders like Jeanneau. For the first Jeanneau sailboat Henri went in 1963 to the prolific Dutch designer Ericus Gerhardus van de Stadt which resulted in the very sporty Alizé first launched in 1964. This was followed by two other, but much less successful van de Stadt designs, the J Club sailing dinghy and the Storm sailing cruiser in 1966.
But evidently keen and able to expand on multiple fronts 1966 also saw Jeanneau produce their first inboard power cruiser, the **Imperator 900**. The brochure photo shows a simple spartan fit-out, supplemented by loose cane furniture.

Despite the lack of sales for the Storm, Henri clearly remained convinced of the potential of the sailing market so in late 1968 commissioned Philippe Harlé, who five years previously had penned the classic plywood Muscadet, to create the **Sangria**, an inspired move as the model eventually sold 2,700 boats over a fourteen year production run, becoming one of the World’s most successful series production sailboats.
The dollar beckons

Following this very rapid growth, and with the apparent future success of the business assured, Henri decided to sell the entire operation and in late 1969 the ownership was transferred to the Bangor Punta conglomerate. Based in the USA, Bangor Punta had already acquired several American boat builders including Jensen, Luhrs, and O’Day. In addition Bangor Punta also held a complex and diverse portfolio of businesses that included Piper aircraft and Smith and Wesson guns.

The Gib’sea and Dynamique connection

When Henri Jeanneau sold the business to Bangor Punta he was only 45 years old so perhaps unsurprisingly he, or technically, his children were involved in two further yacht builders.

The first was in 1972 when Gibert Marine was established in partnership with Olivier Gibert (the former Operations Director for Jeanneau) and Henri and Nelly’s daughter Chantal and her husband. The yard was at Marans, just north of La Rochelle where Gibert Marine produced the successful Gib’sea yacht range for about 25 years.

There evidently remained close co-operation between the new Gibert yard and the Jeanneau factory as variants of the **Poker, Sangria** and **Gin Fizz** were simultaneously produced, mostly under the Gib’sea brand. Later Gib’sea were absorbed into the Dufour business. The Marans yard closed in the late 1990’s but later was reopened for a short period for the manufacture of the Poncin Harmony range.

Around 1982 Chantal Jeanneau and her husband then established a new boatyard at Andilly (between Marans and La Rochelle) to construct large luxury sailboats under the "Dynamique Yachts" brand. Initially launching the **Dynamique 44** the range was soon expanded with models designed by Joubert - Nivelt and Philippe Briand ranging from 60 to 80 feet and eventually a true superyacht of 110 feet. Henri Jeanneau owned at least one Dynamique that he sailed in the Mediterranean and reputedly the Caribbean. His last one was built in 1988, a **Dynamique 47**, called Sapphire. The Dynamique business was eventually also acquired by Dufour and the Andilly yard was closed in October 2011.
The Bangor Punta years

Bangor Punta retained and invested in the Les Herbiers factory and from 1970 until 1983 an extraordinarily large range of power and sail boats were developed and marketed, many of which became extremely successful.

Following the success of the Sangria, Philippe Harlé, now in collaboration with the Jean-Marie Finot, came back to Jeanneau with a new design in 1970 - the 9.00m Folie Douce, which was later rebranded as the Brin de Folie. Philippe Harlé's next design for Jeanneau was in 1972 with the 6.60m Love Love a fixed keel design which sold consistently for the next seven years.

In 1972 Jeanneau experimented with a new boatbuilding material and method of construction for smaller dinghy's, making a major investment in the design, tooling and equipment for rotational moulding. The result was the creation of a range of ultra-tough roto-moulded polyethylene dinghies mostly marketed under the brand "Rigiflex". These boats were moulded entirely in a single piece, so cutting labour and fitting out time enormously.
The very first model, the **Aquapêche 350**, was an immediate success and ultimately over 15,000 units were produced in the first 30 years and the model remains in production 44 years later. These almost indestructible boats appealed in particular to sports clubs, fishermen and public services. A variety of models were produced up to 4.00m in length included the Aquapêche, **Newmatic**, and the 2.4m **Noisette**.

In 1972 the young designer, Michel Joubert was tasked to produce a fast but roomier 8.25m sailing boat, which was produced in two variants, with the Jeanneau yard producing a high coachroof version known as the **Poker** whilst the Gib’sea yard built the **Flush Poker**, which had a more elegant low coach roof profile.

The following year Michel Joubert came up with the 11.30m **Gin Fizz**, which was viewed by the yachting press as being quite extraordinary and radical, especially when compared with the “traditional” yachts of the time. The low coach roof styling of the Flush Poker was successfully carried over into the Gin Fizz along with relatively light displacement, plus significant beam, yet included a deep safe centre cockpit and aft cabin. The Gin Fizz could be rigged as either a ketch or sloop. From its first unveiling at the 1974 Paris Boat Show it was an enormous and immediate success. Around 600 units were eventually collectively produced by Jeanneau and Gib’sea. Many have since circumnavigated and explored the far reaches of the globe. Perhaps most famously in recent years by the teenager Laura Dekker, whose Gin Fizz ketch “Guppy” took her safely and quite quickly around the World between 2010 and 2012 – in the Pacific she and Guppy reeled off no less 2,960 nm in just 18 days.

Seemingly always looking for new talent, in 1974 Jeanneau next went to the innovative French designers André Mauric and Gilles Vaton who were jointly commissioned to create the **Melody**.
Mauric was then best known for large ocean racers and had just drawn the lines for the fast becoming legendary Éric Tabarly for his 22m alloy ketch - Pen Duick VI in which he claimed victory in the 1976 OSTAR single-handed Transatlantic race, also in this race was one of the first production Melody's, Patriarche, skipped by Yves Olivaux that claimed a very creditable 25th place. Intriguingly in 1972 Mauric had designed the half tonner Impensable for Michel Briand (father of Phillippe Briand) who campaigned the boat to win the 1973 1/2 ton cup and was later put into series production by Chantier Quéré. The Impensable moulds then were purchased and adapted by Bénéteau to become the very first First, forerunner of Bénéteau’s most enduring sailing boat series.

Another success for Jeanneau was the 6m Flirt whose sporty design was credited to the in-house Jeanneau Design Office. Between 1976 and 1984 around 1,750 boats were produced, mostly with a lift keel but a fixed keel was also an option. In 1977 rising star designer, Philippe Briand began his outstanding career and long lasting partnership with Jeanneau aged just 22, when he penned an IOR Three-Quarter Tonner which became the production Symphonie and Briand’s first production boat. To date over the past 38 years, Briand has developed at least 45 of Jeanneau’s sailboat designs including all the Espace series, plus the Sun Kiss, the Sun Fizz, some the first Sun Fast models, many of the Sun Odyssey line and most recently the new prestigious Jeanneau Yacht series.

1979 saw the launch of the 6.6m Brio, or brilliance in English, which replaced the more staid Love Love and was destined to be yet another Philippe Harlé success with production eventually exceeding 1000 units despite being only slightly longer than its smaller sibling 6m Flirt which also had the similarly distinctive full width coachroof, no sidedeck style.
Jeanneau hits the road...

In 1980 Jeanneau made a radical diversification into vehicles with the creation of miniature cars under the inspired brand name of Microcar. Microcars are a rather French concept of ultra-small vehicles that can be legally driven without a formal car licence.

The microcar bodies were also made of glass reinforced polyester, so there were synergies and knowledge transfer from fibreglass boatbuilding. The microcars were initially powered by 49cc petrol moped engines or optional 125cc single cylinder diesels. The first model, the RJ 49 rolled off the production line in October 1980. Jean Rondeau the winning driver of the 1980 24 hours of Le Mans car race, and former racing car mechanic was an adviser to the project hence the model designation RJ.

The project was highly successful and between 1980 and 1993 around 40,000 microcars and light commercial vehicles were sold. Commercial models were even used within the boat building factory to move parts between buildings. In September 2000 a new dedicated facility for the production of considerably more stylish microcars was created on a 7 hectare site at nearby Boufféré.
Jeanneau’s world of sport and cruising

Back with boats, Jeanneau’s powerboat racing roots were far from forgotten and to retain their prominence in the sport, Jeanneau formed a partnership with a local haulage company, Transports Graveleau, in the early 1980’s. The resulting small one seater Jeanneau catamarans were built from composite materials using the specialist knowledge from Jeanneau’s new performance racing division. Two World records were gained by the Team Jeanneau-Graveleau — in 1987 the highest on water speed of 170.21 km/h with a standard outboard motor, followed by a world record in a 24-hour endurance race.
In 1981 American Gary Mull, one of the USA’s most prolific sailboat designers, designed the 5.5m Microsail. Based on the Micro Class promoted by the French Bateaux magazine for a Micro Cup event in 1977, with simple rules intended to encourage the development of readily transportable competitive small sailboats. The Micro class was a success in Europe, but really took off in Poland with over twenty types built in several Polish yards, including Shancie Yachts and remain today a very active class. The Jeanneau Microsail was quite successful with around 300 being produced between 1981 and 1984, the design gave a foretaste of the relatively wide beam boats of the future that would also carry their maximum beam well aft.

Jeanneau also knew that success in yacht racing would also be an important aspect of promoting their sailing boats, particularly for the home market. This aim was achieved when their Ron Holland designed Rush, initially produced in 1980, was selected in the guise of the Rush Royale as the one design boat for the Voile Tour de France series for 1982 and 1983.

Ron Holland, a native of New Zealand was for many years based in Ireland and later became one of the World’s leading superyacht designers whose team then included Tony Castro, who was later to design the Jeanneau Sun Shine. The success of the Rush Royale was then renewed with the new Joubert - Nivelt designed Sélection which remained the choice for the next eight years of the Voile Tour de France events from 1984 to 1991.

To compete in the blue water sector the Trinidad 48 was Jeanneau’s first large Ocean cruiser, designed in 1981 by Guy Ribadeau Dumas, and the forerunner of Jeanneau’s deck saloon series. Later on in the eighties Dumas would also be commissioned to produce the passage making Voyage 1120 and 1250 plus the short lived centre cockpit model, the Sun Odyssey 42CC.

Another long lasting partnership between Jeanneau and a designer commenced in 1986 when Daniel Andrieu’s design of the Sun Light 30 was put into production. Then in 1990
Andrieu’s Jeanneau One Design – the **JOD 35** was selected to succeed the Sélection in the Voile Tour de France from 1992 to 1998. To date over 7,000 Andrieu designed boats, including many of the Sun Fast’s, have been built by Jeanneau.

Meanwhile the Bangor Punta stateside interests and facilities also allowed Jeanneau have limited production in the USA of three Jeanneau models. The Joubert-Nivelt designed **Fun 23**, a strict one design sports boat was produced as the Ranger Fun 23 in the Jensen factory in Tampa, Florida. The Tampa plant also produced the Jeanneau Rush which was marketed in North America as the **Cal 9.2** and the Sun Fizz was built at the O’Day plant in Fall River, Massachusetts and branded as the **O’Day 39** of which around 120 versions were built in the USA. In 1986 the O’Day 39 was remodelled by Hunt & Associates to become the **O’Day 40**.

Never to miss an opportunity for growth within sub-sectors Jeanneau also tried their hand at the then expanding 1980’s sailboard marketplace.

The first sailboard was the **Turbo** in 1983 followed in 1985 by the **Wind 39** designed by no less than Philippe Briand, but it appears that this was not to be a lasting niche for Jeanneau.
Window of new investment

Fortunately a year prior to the collapse and bankruptcy of the whole Bangor Punta conglomerate in 1984, the ownership of Jeanneau was transferred to another USA based group, Lear Sigler (manufacturers of Lear Jets) who initially invested not only in new models but also in extensive promotion of the Jeanneau products to the North American marketplace.

A host of new sailboat designs then appeared including the Arcadia, Sun Kiss, Sun Rise 34 and Espace 1100. In contrast there appeared much less investment in new powerboat models, with two notable exceptions which have become precursors to two of Jeanneau’s most enduring model ranges – the Leader 860 in 1986 and the Merry Fisher 930 in 1987.

Possibly due to influence from Jeanneau’s then USA based corporate owners, another American designer, Doug Peterson was chosen to develop what would become the Sun Legende 41 in 1984. To promote the capabilities of the boat a special One Tonner race version was produced in a modified mould using high tech fibres. This boat “Legend” was extensively campaigned in the 1980’s and 1990’s SORC and PHRF series and might be viewed as marking the successful inauguration of the special projects Jeanneau Techniques Avancées (JTA) division.

In the same year the food producer Fleury Michon, another local company from the Vendée wanted to promote their business worldwide and were already sponsoring the sailor Philippe Poupon, entered into partnership with Jeanneau to create a giant catamaran designed by Joubert-Nivelt. This would become the world’s then largest sailing catamaran (25.9m x 13.2m), Fleury Michon VII. Built in just four months in a specially-equipped, climate-controlled workshop in the Les Herbiers factory grounds, using Klegecell PVC foam, and Kevlar and other exotics in the lamination process.
Jeanneau also continued expand their motor boat activities and a local competitor, Ocqueteau was acquired in the mid-eighties. Based on the Atlantic island of Ile d’Oléron, Ocqueteau produced a range of well-regarded small leisure fishing boats, a few with modest sails. Ocqueteau was established in 1948 but in the eighties, along with much of the leisure boat industry, Ocqueteau suffered severe financial problems just prior to being sold to Jeanneau.

Around 1985 Jeanneau made a new effort to expand away from their existing customer base with the introduction of a range of river cruisers – predominately targeted at the Hire Boat industry. These study boats ranging from 9m to 14m were the three Eau Claire models, the 930, 1130 and 1430 plus the 10.5m Eau Vive. They can still be seen moored or chugging along French canals and rivers. At a similar period, Jeanneau less successfully promoted some commercial 8m -10m Chalutier fishing vessels based on the Esteou hull.

But after just four years Lear Sigler themselves had new owners who sought to refocus the company back to their core business and therefore decided to dispose of the overseas boat building interests. So in 1987 Jeanneau ownership reverted to France, initially as employee owned venture (RES) with the workforce owning 51% of the company with the remaining 49% by other investors.

**Back in French ownership**

Back in French ownership and under the leadership of Michel Richard, the driving force behind the employee owned venture, considerable effort was expended over the next four years on new initiatives to increase the viability and productivity of Jeanneau, including forays into joint ventures, new products and overseas licencing.

The success of the Fleury Michon project had already proved Jeanneau’s advanced technological competencies and resulted in a considerable demand for JTA to produce even more high-tech competition prototypes that included; Formula 40, giant multihulls, F1 monohulls, One Ton, America’s Cup and Globe Challenge boats, as well as Formula 1 and Formula 300 power boats.
Crucially in 1987 Jeanneau harnessed the expertise developed during the achievements of the JTA special projects team to develop for series production, the Lagoon range of cruising catamarans. Designed by Marc Van Peteghem and Lauriot Prevost, the very first was the **Lagoon 55**, launched April 1988 and an immediate success, gaining sales enquiries worldwide. Over next ten years the Lagoon range was expanded to offer capacious cruising multihulls from the **Lagoon 34** through to the mammoth 20m **Lagoon 67**. Demand particularly from the Caribbean charter market resulted in Tillotson Pearson Industries - TPI in the USA also being commissioned to locally produce a number of the Lagoon models.

In 1989 a joint venture was established with Italian Ferretti Craft to develop and build the Yarding Yacht range. Models included the **Yarding Yacht 27**, 33, 36 and 42. Several of these had versions also marketed under the new Prestige brand. Some of the Japec and Jernej Jakopin designed models were crafted in collaboration with Vittorio Garroni – who would later become the chosen stylist for many of the premium Jeanneau’s.

The increasing demand for both the JTA and Lagoon products resulted in a new dedicated factory being opened in Nantes in 1990, this also reduced the transportation nightmare for some of the maxi multihulls that had previously been required for their 80km journey to the coast.

To capture some of the growth of the Greek boat charter market from 1990 until 1992 the Sun Magic 44 was built under license in Athens by Atlantic Yachts as the **Atlantic 44**. Similarly, the Sun Legende 41 was produced under license from Jeanneau by Olympic Marine S.A at Sounio and marketed as the **Olympic Sea 42**.

Despite these four years of active trading and development by the employee backed company, the near collapse of the pleasure boat market in the early nineties left Jeanneau with increasing debt and they filed an overall loss in 1991 which resulted in the banks demanding new capital investment that was unavailable to the employees. So in August 1991 control of Jeanneau passed to Felix Chatellier backed by investment from his Chatellier Industries Groupe – CGI. The Jeanneau employees retained a significant, but minority shareholding. CGI had also acquired the Goiot Marine equipment business, one of Jeanneau’s main suppliers.
**Acquisition by Chatellier**

Chatellier appointed a new CEO, André Ferras whose aim was to concentrate on Jeanneau’s core business and plan the launch of eleven new models by the December 1991 Paris Boat Show. But initially he made widespread cuts and in just two months the workforce was reduced from 1,500 to 850 people along with the closure of four of Jeanneau’s seven production sites. The three sites that escaped the cull were the main factory at Les Herbiers, a new 16,000 m² Mortagne-sur-Sèvre factory and the JTA facility at Nantes-Chevîre.

Chatellier then in 1992 supported the Microcar division’s development of an urban electric Lyra microcar model.

The new management also tried to move into larger sailboat designs with the **Sun Fast 52** and the Bruce Farr designed, Andrew Winch styled, **Sun 63** of which only two boats were completed. Chatellier also rationalised some of the marketing by reducing the myriad of individual model names, with many of the sailboats being rebranded under the family groups of Sun Odyssey and Sun Way.

The Chatellier management considered that to develop the Jeanneau brand worldwide, they needed to overcome the barriers of high importation costs and local taxation and therefore needed to establish local overseas production, so Jeanneau then sought agreements for local manufacture in North America (Canada) and Poland. In addition Chatellier had proposals to also build some models in Italy and also for the Sun Fast range to be produced in Australia. It is not currently known if either of these projects actually resulted in boat production.

The Canadian operation was established in November 1994 as Jeanneau Canada, trading as a satellite business, making a dramatic appearance into the North American marketplace through the acquisition of the large, but failing, Quebec based boat producer Doral. Doral had exported boats to both the American and European markets since 1972 with a range that incorporated the famous Cadorette and Thuncredraft brands.

During 1995 some Jeanneau sailboats were also produced by Jeanneau Canada. The **Sun Odyssey 28.1** was marketed as the Jeanneau 28 and the **Sun Odyssey 36.2** emerged as the Jeanneau 35. Some Doral power models were exported back to Europe, including the **Doral Splash** jet boat which was marketed with the Jeanneau name of **Corail 155 Jet**.
In Poland, Jeanneau had a different approach and outsourced several of its smaller power boat models for production under contract to a number of different factories including Ostróda, Galeon, Shancie, Sportlake and Balt-Yacht. Also some smaller sailboats were Polish built, including the highly successful 1993 **Sun Fast 20**, designed by Dr Jacek Centkowski with a total of around 800 eventually being constructed by both the Galeon and Ostróda yacht factories by the year 2000. In 1994 the **Sun Fast 17** and the **Sun Odyssey 24.1** were added to the growing Jeanneau output from the Polish yards.

A slightly unusual venture in 1994 was Jeanneau’s foray into miniature keel boats with the **Duel** - also known as the **Mini JOD**, designed by Daniel Andrieu and produced for Jeanneau in Poland at the Shancie boatyard. The Duel was marketed for group match racing by the adventurous Fred Beauchêne. This strange 4.8m one person boat is actually a 1/6 miniature of the America’s Cup boat of the 1990’s. The Dual has similarities to earlier micro-keel boats like the Illusion, the Deception and 2.4m class that in turn were miniatures of the International 12m class.

One particularly high profile project also in 1994 was when JTA was commissioned by Universal Studios to construct two 60 foot trimarans, based on highly successful racing trimaran **Pierre 1er**. These trimarans became the co-stars in the 1995 Kevin Costner’s Waterworld movie.

JTA also built several of the French challengers for the Americas Cup, notably the technologically advanced **France 2**, designed by Phillipe Briand and campaigned by Marc Pajot in the 1995 series in San Diego, USA.
Not to be daunted by a failure, thirty years after the unsuccessful J Club sailing dinghy, Jeanneau tried again in 1995 with the **Sun Club 9**. A simple unsinkable beach dinghy, suitable for children and aimed at clubs and beach resorts.

This was followed by a far sportier skiff type dinghy designed by Philippe Thomé, the **430 Deriveur**. However neither the Sun Club 9 nor the 430 seemed to have generated enough sales to gain volume production.

Yet despite all these initiatives sales from the Jeanneau boat building divisions continued to decline in both sail and particular power sectors and employment numbers fell to 650. Following pressure from the consortium of bank creditors and a bankruptcy, the company effectively collapsed in November 1995 amid claims of ineptitude and even maladministration by the CGI management.

Various proposals by would-be purchasers were submitted to the court of administration, notably by Zodiac, who had pioneered inflatable boats, for the power boat production and by Jeanneau’s competitor Dufour, whose interest was solely with the sailing boats. But following frantic negotiations, an eleventh hour bid by Annette Roux and her team saw the then slightly smaller Groupe Bénéteau gain control in late December 1995. History and differing fortunes had now brought these long-term rivals together to form the largest leisure boatbuilding group in the World.

**Groupe Bénéteau arrive**

With the reinvestment and combined buying power of Groupe Bénéteau, the fortunes of Jeanneau were turned around and production gradually increased for both sail and power. But more important than buildings, equipment and model brands was the huge knowledge and expertise of many of the Jeanneau team who had been with Henri from the early days and were retained within the refreshed business.

Notably Robert Rigaudeau, who was Henri’s twelfth employee, and had become the in-house designer for many of the Jeanneau power craft including the **Cap Camarat** and the **Prestige 32**.

Also Jean-François de Prémorel, who since 1982 was the driving force behind the development of JTA and later was to crew with Phillippe Poupon on the winning Flurey Michon multihull teams. He also was the influential designer behind many of Jeanneau’s performance power boats such as the **Leader 8** and the larger Prestige’s and is currently Directeur General of Prestige Yachts.
Reorganisation of the Jeanneau assets within Groupe Bénéteau resulted in the closure of the Jeanneau factory at Mortagne-sur-Sèvre which had specialised in interior woodwork, the factory was later acquired and reopened by Dufour in 1997, but closed again in 2000.

Also as the Ocqueteau boats were considered to have too much overlap with many of the small power Bénéteau models, Ocqueteau were soon sold out of the group, and acquired by a former Jeanneau accountant, Jean-Pierre Mellier who revived the Ocqueteau fortunes. It was a similar story across the Atlantic, with Jeanneau Canada being closed just two years after the acquisition by Bénéteau and the Doral business being disposed in 1996 to Erwin Zecha, under whose management the Doral prospered until 2012, but then failed and its assets wound up in 2016.

In 1996 the rapidly growing Lagoon catamaran range along with the associated JTA division in the Nantes factory were separated from Jeanneau and established as a new individual family brand, but still within the Groupe Bénéteau structure and then intrinsically linked with CNB (Construction Navale Bordeaux) which Bénéteau had acquired in 1992. The following year JTA used an advanced infusion process to create the structure for the 21 foot mini offshore racer Karen Liquid for Sébastien Magnen who campaigned her to overall victory in the 1997 Mini Transat race. The following year, Magnen returned Karen Liquid to JTA for modifications that included a carbon boom and additional keel ballast, improving overall performance and gaining a second Atlantic crossing win in just 24 days 15 hours.

The collapse of Jeanneau in 1995 had impacted hard on the Polish contracting yards, but by 1997 Groupe Bénéteau were working with Piotr Jasionowski at Ostróda Yacht to improve the productivity of the plant. Ostróda Yacht were producing small boats not only for Jeanneau but also the Quicksilver brand for Brunswick Marine as well its own Majestic 20 and 24 sailing yachts. The increasing collaboration resulted in Ostróda Yacht being totally acquired by Groupe Bénéteau in 2001 and it now forms an important part of the group, with a current annual production of around 3,000 boats of length between 5.5m and 8m.
Into the millennium

Marking the turn of the millennium was the launch of a new small Jeanneau sailboat, the lift keel **Sun 2000** designed by Olivier Petit of which almost 1500 were produced before production ceased a decade later. The Sun 2000 was joined in 2004 by a larger, but less successful sister, the **Sun 2500** that in addition had fixed keel and inboard engine options.

One famous Sun 2500, P’tit Jaune featured in a slow circumnavigation of France sponsored by Voiles et Voiliers magazine.

The growing strength of the global Jeanneau brand resulted in a corresponding increase in enthusiastic owners, whose brand loyalty often resulted in them buying a succession of Jeanneau models. Jeanneau dealers in partnership with Jeanneau France or Jeanneau America created a number of owner “Rendezvous” events that continue to be extremely successful and in 2001 the independent **Jeanneau Owners Network** was established and has since grown to more than 4000 members and encourages active dialogue and support via Facebook and a forum to all Jeanneau owners worldwide.

A dramatic new deck saloon yacht in the guise of the **Sun Odyssey 54DS** appeared in 2002, with her signature tear drop windows, the yacht soon established the standard for a highly successful range. Vittorio Garroni provided the inspiration for the extremely stylish details on a fast hull by Jacques Fauroux, the designer of around a dozen sailboat designs for Jeanneau over the previous 18 years that had commenced with the **Sun Rise 34**.

Another design association began in 2002 with Marc Lombard with his design of the successful **Sun Odyssey 35** of which around 1,400 were sold. Lombard to date has created eleven Jeanneau’s ranging from the **Sun Odyssey 30i** to the **Sun Odyssey 42i** together with the deck salons **Sun Odyssey 39DS** and 42DS.
The Jeanneau power boat divisions have also been extremely active over the last decade. In addition to the significant Polish production, numerous successful new designs have continued to emerge from the French factories, such as the **Merry Fisher 805** designed by Patrice Sarrazin who had also created the **Leader 605** and 705, and is the architect behind many of the long running **Cap Camarat** series.

The highly successful Prestige line of luxury powerboats were given a standalone identity in 2004 with the creation of a new marketing division and the production transferred to a dedicated facility in Nantes.

With perhaps a nod to nostalgia, in 2003 the **Runabout 755** retro sport boat, designed by Italian, Vittorio Garroni, can be seen to reincarnate the values of its 40 year old predecessor the Océane runabout.

Another Garroni design, this time in conjunction with Jean-François de Prémorel was the innovative **NC11** that then claimed the “European Powerboat of the Year” award in 2011 in the 40’ and under category.

Tony Castro was reunited with Jeanneau through the creation of the powerful offshore **Velasco 43** (initially known as the Voyage 42).

The Sun Fast series that had first appeared in 1992 with the glorious **Sun Fast 52** gradually lost their independent design status from 1999 onwards, becoming sports variants based on the sister Sun Odyssey hulls and decks.

It had seemed that the Sun Fast line might be consigned to history when the new **Sun Odyssey 36i** arrived from 2006 with only an optional “performance” version.

But the Sun Fast marque made a welcome return two years later with the launch of the Andrieu designed **Sun Fast 3200** which claimed Category 1 European Yacht of the Year in 2008. The Sun Fast 3200 was targeted at a new market of single-handed and short-handed ocean races inspired by growing participation and interest in the Transquadra Atlantic race that was originally established in 1993 by Mico Bolo. The Sun Fast 3200 was so successful that a larger sister, the **Sun Fast 3600** was launched in 2013 and most recently the Sun Fast 3200 was given a major makeover with the release of the higher performance R2 version.

Jeanneau’s 28 years as a miniature automobile maker ended in 2008 when the last Jeanneau owned Microcar rolled off the production line, and the entire brand and production facility at Boufféré sold to Ligier, a French microcar competitor. The focus back to mainstream products also resulted in the sale of the Rigiflex brand of roto-moulded dinghy’s initially to a consortium, that included some former Jeanneau management and the production relocated to Nantes. In 2014 the business was resold to Rototec Engineering who bought the entire Rigiflex business and transferred production to Miniac-Morvan, Brittany and are introducing some new models.
Since the naming excesses of the early years Jeanneau seldom have created a new family name of models. But this changed in 2009 when the successor to the Sun Odyssey 54DS was unveiled as the **Jeanneau Yacht 57**, once again styled by Garroni, this time with the naval architecture by Phillippe Briand. The Jeanneau 57 although a full production model, but styled as a semi-bespoke mini super yacht, was extremely successful and continues in production as the refreshed **Jeanneau 58** and now has been joined by a growing family of similar highly specified fifty and sixty footers.

Sun Odyssey’s go from strength to strength and a third generation was announced in July 2010 with the Phillippe Briand **Sun Odyssey 409** which was quickly joined by the **Sun Odyssey 439** and then the Marc Lombard designed **Sun Odyssey 379** in 2011.

Lombard’s most recent design, the **Sun Odyssey 349** shares the clever reverse sheer profile of its important Jeanneau forerunner, the Sangria. Jeanneau’s long term niche of affordable deck saloon designs also continue with the **Sun Odyssey 41DS** and the 44DS, deckhouse variants of the **Sun Odyssey 419** and 449 hulls.
The new century has brought a welcome respite to the historic financial instability of Jeanneau, and despite the Global downturn of 2008 which hit all manufacturers – and consumers hard, Jeanneau have remained focused on unveiling a regular parade of new models and progressing increasingly more efficient building methods, not only for cost reduction, but also to reduce the environmental impact of production, the sourcing of sustainable materials and to improve working conditions for their workforce.

Henri and Nelly Jeanneau established an enduring legacy and their boats and their proud owners now permeate to almost every coastline and navigable lake shore. Jeanneau boats have also grown much more luxurious, evidenced by the flagship 20m sailing yacht Jeanneau 64, and whilst now technically no longer the same division, the Jeanneau heritage remains apparent in the giant 23m catamaran Lagoon Seventy 7 and the 23m Prestige 750.

But of the current fleet though, it is maybe the smallest, the Cap Camarat 4.7cc, driven by a high performance 60hp outboard, with perhaps a set of water-ski’s, that would guarantee a huge nostalgic smile on Henri’s face.

Malcolm Perrins
Acknowledgments

The images are mostly sourced from Jeanneau corporate sources and Jeanneau owners. Any copyright infringement is not intentional. Grateful thanks is acknowledged to all photographers without whose images this history could not be fully recorded.

This work attempts a collective summary of the history of Jeanneau boats. I have primarily used internet sources as the basis of the information, but only a few sources can be doubly verified. Mistakes and inaccuracies are therefore quite possible and I would welcome any improved knowledge. I would like to acknowledge and thank in particular:

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Note on current Jeanneau production facilities

The original site in Les Herbiers was initially the focus for expansion and renewal, but more floor area also became available with the departure of Lagoon-JTA in 1990 to the new facility in Nantes.

In 2005 a major new plant was built at Cholet and has become a focus for sailboat production. An additional Jeanneau factory in Rochetrejoux closed in the 2008 due to the global financial crisis. The Rochetrejoux plant was later reopened for the manufacture of windows for the Groupe Bénéteau modular housing companies.

The Ostróda plant in Poland, which previously produced numerous small Jeanneau’s under contract, predominantly outboard power craft and smaller sailing yachts such as the Sun Fast 17 & Sun Odyssey 24.1, was acquired in 2001 and fully integrated into the group.

The Groupe Bénéteau facility in Marion, South Carolina, USA opened in 1986 and commenced building range of Jeanneau’s from around the mid 2000’s for the North American market. Past models produced here include the Sun Odyssey 37, 40 and 44 models and currently the Odyssey 389 and 419. The Marion plant is also the worldwide producer of the Sun Odyssey 41DS and 44DS Deck Salon models.

In addition there are the widespread Groupe Bénéteau facilities in France, including CNB-JTA-Lagoon in Nantes.