

The brief...



Platform sharing is all the rage in the automotive world and is being embraced on larger boats. Now Bénéteau follows suit,

spinning a radical new sports wheelhouse model from the hull of their sensible Antarès 8.80, creating the new Barracuda 9. Can a single hull be successfully utilised to create two very different concepts?

Nick

LOA: 28ft 10in (8.78m)

PRICES: from £71,902 inc VAT

TOP SPEEDS: Antarès 34 knots, Barracuda 37 knots

BUILDER: Bénéteau

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Two of a kind?

Bénéteau indulges in some platform sharing for the Barracuda 9 and Antarès 8.80

REPORT BY NICK BURNHAM

The Antarès outboard range is stock-in-trade for Bénéteau. Tough wheelhouse cruisers from 19ft to 30ft, they are derived from boats that served the needs of Atlantic fishermen and encapsulate all that has made the practical pêche-promenade style so popular with motorboaters across Europe.

The Antarès 8.80 is a perfect example of this – a smart sensible upright cruiser, perfect for family boating. But Bénéteau figured the 8.80's

hull had more to give, and has produced the perfect Mr. Hyde to go with its more restrained Dr. Jekyll cruiser in the form of the Barracuda 9.

Park the two side-by-side as we did, and it's hard to believe the two boats are related. The Barracuda's topsides have a lower, more shapely profile. Gone is the usual sportsfisher wheelhouse, replaced by a bolt upright superstructure with sliding side doors and deep bulwarked walkaround decks between two cockpit areas. This commercial look, with

square sides and vertical windows, follows in the footsteps of Botnia's mighty Targas, only here twin 200hp Mercury Verado outboards complete the tough purposeful image. Think chunky double-cab pickup truck and you'll have the right idea.

On deck, the forward cockpit has more space and seating, a deep bench is set into the superstructure with two corner seats in the bows that double as access steps. Aft, a square flat deck feels uncannily like a pickup truck bed,

the only adornments being a full width bench and a flip up seat folded flat against the back of the cabin. It would make a great fishing deck or simply a very safe and practical spot for the crew to work from.

Inside, via those side doors, the purposeful no-nonsense approach continues. Two chunky bucket seats either side for helm and navigator, and a bench seat aft for three passengers resembles a saloon car layout. In port, those forward seats can be swivelled to face the aft

The Barracuda feels more like a boat for the boys, than for a family

bench, and two small sidetables flip up to create an eating area, but a feeling of functionality over form never quite goes away.

A couple of steps lead to the double berth under the foredeck, headroom limited by the forward cockpit area. A small separate heads is situated down here too, with a little stove and fridge under a seat the only concession toward a galley. Overall, the Barracuda feels more like a boat for the boys, than one for a family.

In contrast, over on the 8.80 you immediately know you have arrived in comfortable cruiser-world. Sliding doors join the full beam cockpit to a light and airy wheelhouse, melding the two areas into one. The dinette to port is a shallow step up, with a good view out through the large, deep windows. The sideboard opposite conceals a proper galley with

a two-burner hob, sink and a fridge located beneath the single helm seat. Forward, a couple of steps lead down to the sleeping quarters, the double berth in the bow augmented by another good sized double beneath the saloon floor. Add a heads and shower with full standing headroom, and you have a more useable family cruiser.

Performance & handling

To damn the Barracuda for its lack of cruising comfort is to miss the point, though. Firing up those two big black Verados and heading out to sea, it becomes obvious why Bénéteau wanted to make more use of this hull. The Barracuda is the perfect example of the Sports Utility Boat,

From the helm

Twin helm Barracuda is the skipper's choice

Slim mullions and adjustable bucket seats make helmimg either boat a safe and comfortable experience. However, the Antarès lacks seating inside the boat for crew to sit and face forward. The Barracuda adds that excellent flybridge, a terrific feature that offers superb visibility and a sense of real fun and adventure.

ANTARÈS HELM



BARRACUDA INTERIOR HELM



BARRACUDA FLYBRIDGE ACCESS



Exterior

Barracuda's walkaround decks hard to beat

how different it feels on the water.

The maximum rated twin 150hp Honda outboards certainly provide enough power but, in spite of the Antarès being some 300kg lighter, not the bite of the Verado powered Barracuda. The hull is equally capable, feeling solid and composed, tracking and turning well with no cavitation, yet somehow it doesn't share the same gung-ho enthusiasm.

Visibility is first rate with those large wraparound windows and two sliding deckhead hatches giving a very open feel to what is a snugly enclosed boat. There is just the one, proper forward-facing helm seat inside, and at much past 30 knots it's pretty much all out of ideas. But this isn't a boat for charging from point to point, and a more relaxed cruising gait suits its nature very well.

Interestingly, the increased stability needed for the flybridge on the Barracuda sees its RCD

rating rise to a B over the Antarès' C rating.

Access around the Antarès is good, with large chunky rails on the trailing edges of the wheelhouse aiding access to eight-inch wide side decks protected by useful guardrails that extend all the way back to the cockpit. The walkaround Barracuda is in a different league of course, thigh-high bulwarks and 12-inch wide decks past the wheelhouse making it so safe and easy to use. The two cockpits and mini-fly then add several more new dimensions to the deck area.



BARRACUDA 9

designed to get there fast and give great deck space on arrival. The only question is where to drive from? As well as that inviting wheelhouse, Bénéteau have squeezed a rather improbable flybridge atop the aft end of the wheelhouse roof. And we really do mean atop.

Scaling the vertical ladder that runs up the port side of the wheelhouse finds you sat in a surprisingly deep well, instrumentation and controls affixed ahead on a floating grey GRP console. It's surprisingly comfortable, and nothing like the precarious perch we'd feared. Visibility from up top is excellent, each corner clearly visible as we slip our moorings and creep quietly out of the beautiful surroundings that make up La Ciotat harbour on a clear crisp Spring morning.

The main reason that twin 200hp Mercury Verado outboards grace the transom is that they're one of the few outboard engines available with the option of dual station

controls, but they certainly perform. We're on the plane within seconds of dumping the throttles, and with the bow trimmed up, the Barracuda barrels enthusiastically across the choppy Mediterranean on its stepped hull. High speed turns are vice free, and while sitting high on a small boat will always induce an entertaining perception of the angle of heel in a tight turns, it never feels unsafe.

Back down below with the doors shut, that wheelhouse helm position lends the boat a purposeful air, twin pantograph wipers clearing the occasional wisp of spray from the upright screens. But wherever you're sat, those slim mullions and deep side windows create a terrific view out.

Those sweet running Verados deliver low-

sound levels of around 75dB(A) at 30 knots. One interesting anomaly is that whilst the engines are hung well back off the transom, the hull transmits their vibrations forward through the bilge where a sound box, created by the forward cabin, then amplifies them to the extent that the boat sounds front engined, adding to the automotive feel.

We can see this boat proving very popular in Scandinavia where, if fitted with heating, it'd prove a great high speed aquatic commuter for five people. And that then is what this boat is about. The 'getting there' rather than the 'got there', capable hull, plenty of forward-facing seating, great view, all-weather capability. It's got a lot going for it.

So what of Dr Jekyll, that sensible Antarès 8.80 that shares the same hull? Given the identical stepped hull underpinnings, its surprising just

ANTARES 8.80





Interiors

Light and seating given priority

8.80: Conventional deck saloon layout works well, the large sliding patio doors enabling the cockpit

and saloon to work together. Overhead, two glass skylights slide aft which, along with sliding windows both sides, allow this area to feel as open to the elements as a wheelhouse can. Slim corner mullions and no central screen mullion create a wonderfully panoramic vista.

Slightly raised dinette aids visibility and increases headroom to the mid cabin. Two fixed, good-sized double beds will comfortably accommodate four adults, whilst long slim hull windows forward maintain the light and high visibility aspect of the saloon.

Barracuda 9: Purposeful

wheelhouse arrangement provides fantastic forward facing seating for five, albeit at the expense of a more social layout at rest. Geared more for occasional overnights than family cruising, the sleeping accommodation comprises of just one large double berth forward.

ANTARES 8.80



Specification & value

There's little to separate the base price of these two in standard form, with the 8.80 slightly cheaper. But add the flybridge to the Barracuda and figure in the bigger engines and the gap starts to widen.

Both boats need a little help from the options-list as things like a refrigerator and hot water are an extra cost.

But the truth is that you're never going to choose between these two based solely on price, they're just too disparate. What's of more interest is to compare the Barracuda 9 to other wheelhouse walkarounds. A Botnia Targa 27.1 fitted with a single diesel inboard engine will set you back £140,000.

While the Bénéteau isn't in the same league as the Targa on build quality, not far short of £50,000 is still quite a saving for fans of that style of boat.

Botnia like to refer to its Targas as the "4x4 of the sea". So figure the Barracuda as a Mitsubishi Animal to the Targa's Range Rover and you won't be too far out.

Antares 8.80



Technical data

KEY DIMENSIONS

BUILD	GRP
RCD	C
LENGTH OVERALL	28ft 10ins (8.78m)
HULL LENGTH	26ft 2ins (7.98m)
BEAM	9ft 9ins (2.98m)
DRAUGHT	2ft 7ins (0.80m)
AIR DRAUGHT	8ft 4ins (2.55m)
DISPLACEMENT	2.8 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	88 gallons 400 litres
WATER CAPACITY	22 gallons 100 litres
WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	8ins (20cm)
HEADROOM IN CABIN	6ft 3ins (1.90m)
FORECABIN BERTH	6ft 4ins x 4ft 6ins (1.93m x 1.37m)
MID CABIN BERTH	6ft 2ins x 4ft 5ins (1.88m x 1.35m)
FORECABIN BERTH	7ft (tapering) x 4ft (2.13m x 1.22m)
MID CABIN BERTH	N/A

PERFORMANCE

Engines	2x Honda 150hp 4 stroke outboard
Configuration	4 cyl 2.4 litre, 150hp @ 5000 - 6000rpm
Conditions	westerly force four, sea slight to moderate
Load	0% water, 60% fuel, 5 crew

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	LPH	MPG	RANGE	NOISE
2000	7	2.2	10.2	3.2	224	69
3000	11.5	4.5	20.4	2.6	182	71
4000	20	8.8	40.1	2.3	161	78
5000	30.5	16.9	76.8	1.8	126	79
5400	34	20.4	92.7	1.7	119	80

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 wheelhouse.

PRICES

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with twin Honda 150hp 4 stroke outboards	£77,372
Elegance trim level package	£7614
Electric winch, Refrigerator, Forward sunbed mattress, Solid wood cockpit table, Bowthruster, Hot water system (linked to shore power)	
Trim tabs	£1329
Cockpit solid wood slatted floor	£1924
Lowrance colour multifunction display	£1697
Sea commissioning	£1523
Antifouling	£618

BOAT AS TESTED **£92,077**

Barracuda 9



Technical data

KEY DIMENSIONS

BUILD	GRP
RCD	B
LENGTH OVERALL	28ft 10ins (8.78m)
HULL LENGTH	26ft 2ins (7.98m)
BEAM	9ft 9ins (2.98m)
DRAUGHT	2ft 7ins (0.80m)
AIR DRAUGHT	11ft 7ins (3.52m)
DISPLACEMENT	3.1 tonnes
FUEL CAPACITY	88 gallons 400 litres
WATER CAPACITY	22 gallons 100 litres
WIDTH OF SIDE DECKS	12ins (30cm)
HEADROOM IN WHEELHOUSE	6ft 4ins (1.93m)
FORECABIN BERTH	6ft 4ins x 4ft 6ins (1.93m x 1.37m)
MID CABIN BERTH	N/A

PERFORMANCE

Engines	2x Mercury Verado 200hp outboard
Configuration	4 cyl 2.6 litre, 200hp @ 5800 - 6400rpm
Conditions	westerly force four, sea slight to moderate
Load	0% water, 60% fuel, 5 crew

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	LPH	MPG	RANGE	NOISE
2000	7	2.6	12	2.7	189	60
3000	10	7.5	34	1.3	91	68
4000	20	13.6	62	1.5	105	75
5000	28	18.9	86	1.5	105	75
5800	37	36.9	168	1	70	76

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 wheelhouse.

PRICES

STANDARD BOAT	inc VAT
with twin Mercury Verado 200hp outboards	£90,002
Elegance trim level	£7759
Electric winch, Refrigerator, Bowthruster, Solid wood cockpit table, Hot water system (linked to shore power)	
Cockpit cushions, Interior curtains, Deck wash	
Flybridge fitout	£3104
Steel blue hull	£1924
Lowrance colour display	£1940
Sea commissioning	£1523
Antifouling	£618

BOAT AS TESTED **£106,870**

Engines



Both boats are outboard powered only, with a choice of single or twin installations from a single 225hp to twin 150hp for the Antares, and up to twin 225hp for the Barracuda. Options include Honda, Suzuki, Yamaha or Mercury but specifying the optional flybridge limits the choice significantly due to the need for dual-station controls.

THE VERDICT

So, are you more of a Jekyll or a Hyde? The Antares 8.80 is the more sensible of the two, and provides far more useful accommodation. Indeed Bénéteau confirms that it outsells the Barracuda at a ratio of about 4:3. Yet there's something strangely compelling about the Barracuda's Mr Hyde.

Combining solid purposefulness with a wacky sense of fun, it may not be the common sense decision, but you can be sure that it won't be without its fans. What's most intriguing however is that without the Antares to provide a ready-made, tried and tested hull, the Barracuda wouldn't exist at all. And that would be a great shame.

