

# ON TEST ADVANCED YACHTS 44

## TEST FACTS

Test Editor: Toby Hodges



► Where we tested: Santa Margherita, Italy  
► Wind: 4-22 knots, 2m seas  
► Model: Lightweight epoxy build version, with square-top mainsail, single-point mainsheet and two-berth interior. A workroom or third cabin is also offered below



# Bonkers, but in a good way

Is this the ultimate plaything for the macho, Ferrari-loving Italian sailor? Toby Hodges tests his mettle aboard a high-performance weekender

**I**f there is a yacht even more Italian than the Italia Yachts 15.98, it's this one. This brave, brazen, brawny example of modern design is arguably the most contemporary monohull of 2014. How she looks, how she feels and, crucially, how she makes her owner feel, define this flamboyant plaything.

The relatively new Milan-based outfit Advanced Yachts wanted pulsating performance together with style and some comfort for this design. Seeking innovation, it teamed up America's Cup veteran designer Roberto Biscontini with the gurus of nautical styling, Nauta Yachts. The result is bonkers, but in a good way.

The muscular, supercar-like chassis, for example, would not lead you to expect a classy pad below. In this way, the A44 is rather like the Wally concept scaled down, yet more edgy and extreme. It's a novel approach for a semi-production yacht line.

The A44 is certainly a very hard yacht to compartmentalise, which perhaps explains why she was placed in the Special Yacht category for our European Yacht of the Year trials. She can be a high-performance raceboat, yet is still promised to be a fun cruiser manageable by two.

"Darling, do you fancy a weekend cruise? Great, hold on tight..." This I had to see.

### Sizzling performance

We were dealt unseasonable weather for our sea trials in Santa Margherita. Enough rain fell to wash Fiat Puntos down streets and there was either too much wind or none at all. So although it wasn't models in swimwear weather, we still felt quite lucky to find a puff while aboard the A44. During a brief spell when it blew 18-20 knots we managed an exhilarating upwind ride.



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maintaining 7.8 knots at 30°A with one reef.

What a sensation! Stable, direct and responsive, the A44 tracks beautifully. There is so much grip and control she cuts to weather and through the heavy swell like a sportsboat. I had expected a scintillating downwind sleighride, but the windward performance was a pleasant bonus.

She does heel enough upwind to give gravity frequent consideration though. Her broad beam is carried right aft, an area that is also left completely open. Trust me, 4.25m looks like a long distance to fall when you are gripping the windward helm.

The A44 is the type of feather-light, planing design that makes you drool for a downwind run. But just as we worked our way uphill to create the room to do so, the wind cruelly began to die. A tantalisingly brief spell in 12 knots when she clocked 9 knots plus under gennaker was our lot.

Designer Biscontini claims she can do 14 knots in 20 knots, flat water, and my fellow European Yacht of the Year judges who did find some sustained breeze seemed to confirm that when they came ashore.

After stable, sustained surfs in the low teens this is a yacht that can make you feel like her asking price – exclusive.

The A44 is the first production yacht Roberto Biscontini has designed in 30 years. His day job involves designing America's Cup yachts (see panel). He approached the project with raceboat mentality, running 25 CFD models to optimise drag and lift figures.

The result is that the A44's stats, including her sail area:displacement and displacement:LWL ratios, are off the scale for a production yacht – they can only be compared to a lightweight multihull.

She is built in epoxy-infused glassfibre, with carbon for reinforcement. She weighs just seven tonnes. A slightly more affordable vinyl ester version is offered for €500,000.

### What's a beach loft?

The Italians understand the art of lounging better than anyone. And the beamy boats that inspired the A44 happen to have space for lots of lounging area, according to Nauta's Mario Pedol. "The cockpit and interior are comparable in terms of volume to a much bigger boat," he says.

Go below on the A44 then and you'll be welcomed by a comfortable 'beach loft' style interior – minimalist, with pale colours, lots of light and sofas you wouldn't let children near. It also seems unusually spacious because you can see through to the bow. Opening out the bulkhead forward of the saloon is a trick Nauta has also used with Beneteau on the new Oceanis 38 and 35.

During the day, this creates generous seating in a large open-plan area. A sliding panel is being designed to close off the whole of the saloon and forward berth to create a spacious owner's cabin at night.

- 1 The square-top main is 10m<sup>2</sup> larger than the cruising alternative. It is sheeted to a central winch (a traveller is optional), which provides a much-needed bracing point
- 2 The boom is abnormally high, something Advanced Yachts wanted for safety reasons, says designer Roberto Biscontini
- 3 Large hull windows encourage the enticing view that most A44 clients will have from the comfortable sofas below
- 4 The cockpit and interior feel huge for her length – a benefit of designing the boat around a small crew for limited periods aboard



▲ Above: the minimalist, open-plan saloon provides plenty of lounging space. There is good storage in drawers and lockers, but watch out for sharp corners

### Roberto Biscontini

You may not have heard of Roberto Biscontini, but the 57-year-old has been quietly designing America's Cup yachts for 25 years, including Il Moro di Venezia, BMW Oracle Racing and Team NZ. He has taken a break from the Cup following the Luna Rossa cat for the last campaign.

"It's so all-consuming and, with foiling boats getting smarter and smarter, I decided to stop and to do other projects," he explains. Biscontini has been friends with Nauta's Mario Pedol for 30 years and they always wanted to do a project together. The A44 is the result.



◀ Left: practical areas and storage in both the heads and forward cabin. ▶ Above: the mainsheet and plotter pedestal helps to break-up the cockpit beam



## SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	13.46m	44ft 2in
LWL	12.70m	41ft 8in
Beam (max)	4.25m	13ft 11in
Draught	3.00m	9ft 10in
Disp (lightship)	7,100kg	15,653lb
Ballast	2,600kg	5,732lb
Sail area (100% foretriangle)	112.5m <sup>2</sup>	1,211ft <sup>2</sup>
Berths	4	
Engine	40hp saildrive	
Water	300lt	66gal
Fuel	200lt	44gal
Sail area:disp	31.0	
Disp:LWL	97	
Price (ex VAT)	€650,000 (£510,000)	
Design:	Biscontini Yacht Design/ Nauta Yachts	
<a href="http://www.advancedyachts.it">www.advancedyachts.it</a>		



### Conclusion

The A44 is a fast, fun and reassuringly expensive object of desire. She's designed for couples to be able to enjoy sailing, but I'd

like to see them try that in the conditions we experienced. There is a lot of sail to handle in a very open, beamy cockpit.

The difference between the marketing (below) and test sailing photographs paint this picture perfectly. Yes, a Gucci swimwear-wearing couple could enjoy a comfortable weekend in light conditions. But when the wind pipes up, so too will the testosterone.

The A44 is an animal and needs a crew to get the best out of her. But equally she does have the design credentials to help her compete handsomely on a racecourse.

Potential A44 owners (probably Italian) will be those who want to sail like they drive: as fast as possible. Park this plaything in any select Med destination and the ego boost will also rocket. Above all, however, the A44 achieves the ultimate objective of Italian design – she provides a beautiful feeling.

