

ARCHAMBAULT 35



The 35-footer market might be highly competitive, but this latest offering from Archambault is making a serious impact. **Andi Robertson** put one to the test.

Some race boats are successful by virtue of finding a niche in the market, spotting a rating slot or size band which is untapped. Archambault Yachts' A35 has built its runaway success, both on the racecourse and in solid sales figures, by taking on a very competitive area of the market and ensuring they come off best.

Archambault Yachts have sparked something of a quiet revolution. They are a relatively small French company based miles from the sea, in the town of Dange-Saint Romain where their factories build up to 140 boats a year.

Archambault was started in 1954 by Jean Archambault and is still very much a family business, now run by his sons. The foundations of their business has been the Surprise, which was designed by Michel Joubert in 1976 and which is now a very successful one-design throughout France and neighbouring countries, having sold

something like 1,600 boats.

The company employs 50 people and prides itself in being a small artisan firm with no aspirations to become a giant like Beneteau. They are building their strategy to increase their export market by 10 per cent each year from about 50 per cent to 60 in 2007, to over 70 per cent in 2008, but even so they see 200 boats as their likely production in 2010.

The slight downside of this is that when they have a success story on their hands, like the A35 is, delivery dates can seem distant. At present the lead time for an A35 is about 9-10 months, but some dealers may hold demo boats or build slots. The business is still of a size where customers are welcome to come and visit the factory before confirming an order. The boats are built by small, highly motivated teams who maintain a level of specialisation and pride in their product, with many having worked for years with Archambault.

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Right The majority of A35s sold will be on the back of its racing credentials, rather than for its family holiday potential, but the cruiser-racer would be fine for a few relaxed days afloat too.



Development and successes

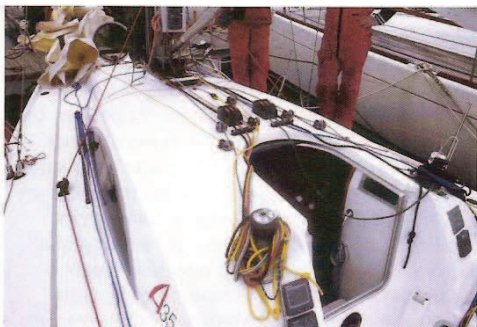
The A35 started with the A40 as an initial reference point. The 40 was a good looking and quick enough boat, but suffered badly under IRC – hence this year's Paris Boat Show saw the launch of a brand new, replacement A40. Learning from the 40 and also the 2004 Commodores' Cup, designers Joubert Nivelte were given the J/109 and the Ker 32 as starting points, assimilating all that was good and bad with successful 35-footers at that time.

Just 18 months down the line the A35 has emerged in a very tight market which includes the X-35, Beneteau 34.7, and JPK 110 – but has sold 28 boats since January. For their new build year (September 2006 to July 2007) they have already sold a remarkable 53 more A35s, and that's before really hitting the European Boat Shows.

Success on the racecourse has been the boat's catalyst. The boat started with second place at Spi Ouest on her first outing and since then 'Batistyl' won Class 3 at this year's Rolex Commodores' Cup, third individual boat (after John Shepherd's Class 1 'Fair Do's' and their winning French Blue teammates on the Sinergia 40 'Paprec-Recyclage'). It should be noted that the Commodores' Cup

Far right The cockpit is deep and open, with the mainsheet track set behind the tiller – a wheel steering option is also available.

Right The coachroof and decks have minimal furniture to climb over and maximum crew working space.



triumph was no runaway win, up against good J/109, 34.7 and Ker 32 opposition, but a high level of consistency was maintained.

It was undoubtedly the 2006 Commodores' Cup which led to international interest, plus of course the spread of IRC. Since then five A35s have already been sold to the UK and Ireland in just four months. It has also sold into Spain, Turkey and Greece with substantial interest from Australia, New Zealand, Dubai and Sweden. A dealer network in the UK and Ireland has emerged, composed of experienced companies, some who have worked for many years with other major brands. The common thread is that they all wanted a quality IRC boat that they race locally, straight out of the packet, as well – of course – as selling some boats.

According to export director Christophe de Kerdel: "Batistyl" was a standard production boat with the racing package. We felt it was essential that it was as close as possible to what the customer will buy. Our philosophy is not to build special boats.'

With customer test sails squeezed into a tide-dictated time window our test in St Malo could not follow our usual routine. We would have preferred to sail the fully sorted 'Batistyl', and the downside of this arrangement was a rag-bag assortment of very average sails. However, the upside was the chance to sail with discerning pre-purchase customers and their agents. Hence we had sailmaker Steve Goacher along with Nick Stratton, who have a boat coming to the north of Britain.

While its racing reputation has made the biggest contribution to the success of the A35 so far, it is a very well proportioned and attractive performance cruiser-racer. The majority of these boats will likely not be destined to entertain a regular family holiday, but that is not to say it wouldn't do a few days cruising here or there.

Design and layout

The lines are pleasingly sympathetic. The signature teardrop window and soft, rounded coach roof make for a good looking boat, but the deck and cockpit area and layout is pure race-bred with plenty of space.

The hull shape is powerful looking. The stern sections are relatively broad, carrying her beam well aft. The design is more orientated towards form stability and dynamic lift than going down the route of slender hull and heavy keel. For its length it is proportionately wider and lighter than the 34.7, and slightly heavier than then X-35.

It has a deep, open cockpit with half-length splash coamings forward. There is a choice of tiller or wheel steering but so far only two or three



boats have gone for the wheel. The tiller is quite well forward in the boat with the mainsheet track behind it and a clear hatch covering a large locker set into the back of the cockpit floor. This leaves plenty of space in the aft cockpit for helmsman and main trimmer, and keeps crew weight in the centre of the boat. In an ideal world your tactician will double on mainsheet, keeping shoulder to shoulder with the helm. And for the helm, sitting in front of the mainsheet means one less head bobbing about.

Primary sheet winches are well forward, with deck hardware from Lewmar and Ronstan. What we particularly liked was the real race boat layout, so there is ample cockpit space and the crew are not falling over themselves. The deck area follows the same concept so there is no scaling of caravan walls, upping the bruises count.

The fractional rig is pretty conventional. A carbon mast and boom is available but it adds about €25k to the price and so far only one boat has had one – not 'Batistyl'. Otherwise the race package includes a carbon spinnaker pole and all necessary spinnaker control lines, as well as the essential genoa inhaulers.

There is a choice of either A-sail or conventional symmetrical spinnaker packages. In the UK the majority of boats have gone for the asymmetric package while in France only a very few have gone down this route. 'Batistyl' used a conventional pole and did not even have a sprit fitted. The boat is moulded with a pole aperture and it is relatively easy to retro-fit.

The hulls and decks are built by a new, wholly owned subsidiary of Archambault. The hull is the first for the company to be built in foam sandwich using a vacuum infusion process, while the decks are manufactured using a new vacuum injection process.

Sailing

Afloat we had little to measure ourselves against except Open 60s and Classe 40s warming up for the Route du Rhum, although the boat's race record confirms its potential. The breezes were generally sub-10 knots. In particular we were disappointed with the size and shape of the jib, which we felt left the boat a little underpowered in the lighter breezes, although the A35 gave a good account of itself on all points of sail.

We could not get to the bottom of whether the helm was a little heavier than expected. For the size and weight of boat it felt pleasingly positive and very neutral but as if there might just have been a problem with the rudder bearings. We were assured by Christophe that it felt normal. That is not to say we felt it a problem at all, it was just slightly heavier. The response was there and the boat tracked beautifully upwind. The slight extra weight simply reduced any tendency to saw away with the helm so economy of use quickly prevailed. What was pleasing was that the helm retained excellent feel and neutral weight when the boat heeled, meaning it was very easy to extract those extra fractions of a knot in the puffs. We were never close to being overpowered, other than trying to push hard with the asymmetric up and sailing as hot as we could.

Standard jib overlap is about 105 per cent, which could probably push to 110 per cent depending on what you feel you live with on IRC.

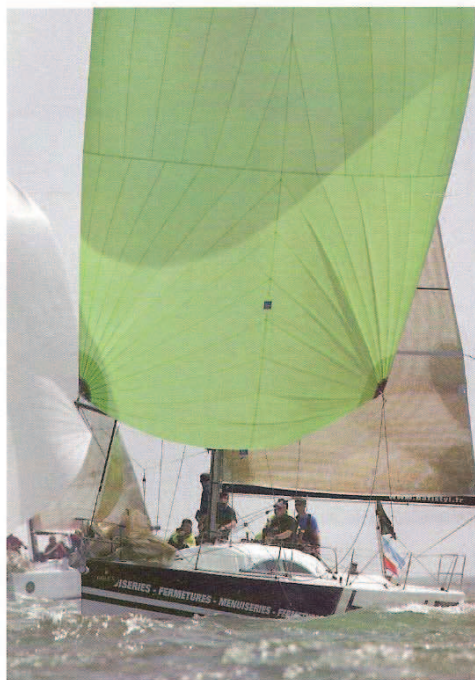


PHOTO OCEAN IMAGES



Above left 'Batistyl', a standard production A35, was third boat overall at the Rolex Commodores' Cup.

Above and left Down below the A35 is quite basic – there is a utility area with a pipecot, plus access to the batteries – and could feel cluttered with full racing crew and sails onboard.



Upwind, even in light winds, it accelerated well from standing and out of the tacks. Though we had no gauge it felt close-winded, holding her height and speed well, and seemed quite stiff.

Downwind in the lighter breezes we kept the angles reasonably high to build speed. The boat was pleasingly quick downwind and did not feel particularly sticky, even given the relatively broad transom. Where it scores is in being able to reduce the wetted area downwind by keeping the weight forward but by gaining power downwind in a breeze. Certainly it feels like a boat that would enjoy a good blast offshore.

The asymmetric versus symmetric debate will run forever, but we'd go with the majority at the moment. On IRC with a conventional kite the handicap is about 1.022-1.026. So far the boats which have chosen to go down the asymmetric route have opted to sail off a similar rating but to take the rating advantage in added sail area. By comparison the Beneteau 34.7 races off 1.011-1.016 and the J/109 around 1.033.

Interior

Down below it is an interesting mix of cruising comfort but it remains at heart quite basic. It has a fully-fitted, open plan interior with a separate

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PHOTO DANIEL FORSTER / ROLEX

heads and shower room and big double aft cabin, and is spacious and airy below decks.

The standard of finish is high enough and the light and ambience is fine. To starboard the heads open back to a utility area which has a pipecot, plus access to the batteries. Here the boat feels simple and a little more utilitarian than a Beneteau or Elan, and the open plan saloon can quickly feel less spacious and cluttered once sails, bags and gear are strewn round, but that's life with this kind of cruiser-racer.

The verdict

Overall the A35 successfully confirmed why it is selling like hot croissants at the moment. In France, and even elsewhere, it is at least a match for the 34.7 and has been a definite thorn in the side for Beneteau. It will be interesting now to see how that racing success continues in the UK and other IRC territories. ■

Above There is a choice of either A-sail or conventional spinnaker: in the UK most boats have gone asymmetric while 'Batistyl' used a conventional pole. The boat is moulded with a pole aperture and the sprit can be retro-fitted.

ANSWER BACK

from Richard Poulson

We would like to thank Y&Y and Andi for the time taken in testing the A35 in St Malo.

The design brief called for a good all-round sailing boat, not just in the obvious IRC rating areas, but also for a boat that was good for a family as well as race crew and that performed out on the water. We feel that the boat does 'exactly what it says on the tin'.

Although Andi was disappointed with the jib, the boat still performed to a high standard. The A35s are supplied without sails, and owners have the benefit of choosing their own – this could be their favourite loft or to a budget. The sails on board the test boat were the owner's own choice, and had been used for the months leading up to the test.

Due to the popularity of the A35 and her smaller sister the Grand Surprise, we have found ourselves taking orders for the A35 for late next year. Not rushing boats or cutting corners – and keeping the boats as close to what we feel the customers want as they leave the factory (this also keeps the quality and customer satisfaction to the highest standard) – leads us to believe that the discerning owner will wait for the right boat. We will, however, have the smaller Grand Surprises available from February.

Our dealers have A35s, as well as more of our range, to test sail in the UK. We look forward to you starting out with a manufacturer who already has a huge following in Europe in one-design and IRC racing, and who believes in designing and building boats for sailors.

A35 specifications

DESIGN:	Joubert Nivelt, 2005
LOA:	10.59m
BEAM:	3.55m
DRAUGHT:	2.1m
DISPLACEMENT	4,450kg
SAIL AREA:	100 PER CENT 67.5sq m
	MAIN 38sq m
	GENOA (105%) 29.5sq m
	SYMMETRIC 95sq m
	ASYMMETRIC 109sq m

PRICE: £79,900

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COMPARISONS... Where does the Archambault 35 fit in? Here are some alternatives...



■ J/109

Well-established as a bestseller and IRC performer in Europe. Bonuses are good resale value and increasing options to go one-design racing.

LOA:	10.75m
BEAM:	3.51m
DRAUGHT:	2.1km
DISPLACEMENT:	4,944kg
SAIL AREA:	UPWIND 54.3sq m
	ASYMMETRIC 95sq m

GUIDE PRICE: £105,000**

■ BENETEAU FIRST 34.7

Good choice for second or third-time owner. Not the easiest boat to get the best from but steadily earning accolades worldwide.

LOA:	10.3m
BEAM:	3.37m
DRAUGHT:	2km
DISPLACEMENT:	4,400kg
SAIL AREA:	UPWIND 70.3sq m
	ASYMMETRIC 91sq m

GUIDE PRICE: £81,900*