

Beneteau First 38 after 70,000 miles

After several voyages, including a circumnavigation, it has proven to be the perfect combination of seakindliness, seaworthiness, performance and fun, while providing a comfortable home at anchor

by Liza and Andy Copeland

We purchased *Bagheera*, a Beneteau First 38s, from the factory in France in 1985. Our criteria for a cruising boat included sound construction, good performance on all points of sail, and sufficient accommodation and storage to provide a long-term home for a family of five. Budget was a major consideration. We planned to cruise for two years in the Mediterranean and Caribbean, then sell the boat in Florida. We never dreamed that six years later we would have completed a circumnavigation. To date, we have cruised over 70,000 miles aboard *Bagheera* and visited 88 countries.

The Beneteau First 38s is a Jean Berret-designed sloop introduced into the European market in 1979 with both medium- and deep-draft versions available. A tall double-spreader “S” rig, keel-stepped as opposed to the standard deck-stepped single-spreader rig, was available also. In 1985, the tooling was updated to become the First 405 using the same hull and keel but with a modified deck and interior. At this time, Beneteau considered the Beneteau First series a line of performance cruisers, while the First Class models represented the racers. More recently, Beneteau has oriented their Oceanis line toward blue-water cruising and the First series has become more race-oriented.

About our dream

Our love affair with the Beneteau First 38 started in 1983. Andy was a part-

ner in a yacht dealership in Vancouver representing Swan, C & C, Whitby and Yamaha. The French boats exhibited at the London Boat Show that year were noteworthy, and a few weeks later both of us toured the five major French manufacturers. The Beneteau company’s approach to the building of high-quality, affordable cruisers was impressive, as was their willingness to adapt their production to suit the North American buyer. Andy returned to Canada as their dealer, and that summer we took delivery of our own personal First 38, a boat that subsequently we sold to order the new boat in Europe.

Some may question whether a production-built boat has the structural integrity to undertake a prolonged offshore cruise. The French government has long imposed strict requirements on their builders, who must specify the standard to which each boat is constructed. The First 38 has a Category 1 certificate, built for

unrestricted offshore use. Others may question the modern hull and keel and the moderate displacement that contrast so with the traditionalist’s view of the ideal passagemaker, but we had no doubts on the matter.

Dozens of offshore passages were being made each year by the better production boats, and in Andy’s dealership they had encountered no structural problems with Beneteaus. As to design philosophy, we both had sailed offshore extensively – as amateurs and as professionals – in a variety of boats ranging from ultralight racers to the heavy and traditional. And over the years, we had grown to favor boats that are somewhere in the middle – quick, well mannered, not too heavy, and a joy to sail. For us, the most desirable characteristic from the perspectives of safety *and* comfort in an offshore cruiser is sailing efficiency – the ability to make fast passages and to sail out of trouble upwind and down.

Had money not been a consideration, we might have chosen a boat such as a Swan, similar in design concept and beautifully built. But being on a budget we felt that the First 38 offered us the most “bang for the buck.” It’s a decision we have never regretted. In fact, we know of four First 38s besides ours that also have circumnavigated.

Bagheera, named after the black panther in Rudyard Kipling’s *Jungle Book*, is a standard deep-keel Beneteau First 38s, the tall-rigged version with American specs. Besides its performance, workable deck design and comfortable cockpit, we were attracted to the layout below. For our family of five, the





(Clockwise from left) *Bagheera*, a Beneteau First 38s, started life as a production racer-cruiser. After 70,000 miles, the boat was transformed into a world voyager that still sails like a champ. As a liveaboard home for the Copeland family, *Bagheera* attracted the cruising kids in the harbor wherever they sailed – with Duncan leading the plunge off the spinnaker pole. Andy and Liza, looking hale and hearty from the cruising life.



accommodation works well: two aft double cabins, workable galley, large chart table with abundant space for electronics, long settee/sea berths, full-sized table in the main cabin, and spacious forward cabin.

The boat came with two heads, but before long we'd turned the small aft head into storage. To give each of our three children his own sleeping area, Andy added an upper berth in the port aft cabin. We had the berth cushions divided lengthwise and fitted with leecloths – both in the interest of sea berths and to provide extra storage on long passages. To protect the upholstery, we had light slipcovers made, comfortable and easy to launder.

The interior has good stowage, including four hanging lockers and a wet-locker. We modified the galley to include extra drawers, and Andy fitted bookshelves and lockers outboard of the settees, soon filled with school supplies and books. Whether fiction or reference, reading was a major source of recreation for the whole family; at one time we had over 600 books on board.

Initially, *Bagheera* enjoyed basic electronics. These included a log, wind, depth, VHF radio, Transit satnav and Autohelm 6000 pilot. Three furling headsails, a storm jib, a conventionally battened mainsail with three very deep reefs, and a racing spinnaker completed our sail inventory. Two changes included a) going up one millimeter in wire diam-



As miles piled up under *Bagheera's* keel, equipment continued to sprout on deck and below. The Aires windvane does the heavy steering chores; the solar panels and wind generator top up the 690-amp/hour battery bank; radar keeps an eye on the horizon; below decks, the new fridge and watermaker make life aboard more civilized.

eter for all standing rigging, and b) fibreglassing in a 5/8-inch marine-ply horizontal bulkhead at the waterline under the V-berth forward to improve impact resistance should we encounter a hard floating object. Belowdecks, the stove, batteries, floorboards, drawers and lockers were all made secure in the event of a knockdown.

About our voyages

Andy commissioned the boat in England, then two months later Liza and the boys arrived. Duncan had just turned nine, Colin was six and Jamie two. Following a shakedown cruise along the coast, we headed south and the first year went by very successfully. The Mediterranean was ideal for our boys, with short passages, great cultures, interesting food, and sightseeing ashore. We fitted quickly into the routine of schooling on board.

On our return to Gibraltar from Turkey, we increased the lengths of passages to prepare the boys for the Atlantic crossing. Time was starting to run out on our two-year cruising plan, but, we asked ourselves, did we really want to go home? An invitation to join the Tall Ships events in Australia in 1988 to celebrate their bicentenary, a successful Atlantic crossing, and the boys' enthusiasm persuaded us to keep on going.

For the longer Pacific passages we added a Ham/SSB radio, an Aries windvane, a wind generator and a cock-

pit bimini. We departed Panama for the wonderful nature fix of the Galapagos Islands, then sailed on to French Polynesia, Rarotonga, Tonga, Fiji and New Caledonia, making our Australian landfall in November 1987 at Coffs Harbor, New South Wales.

We loved Australia with its friendly people and exotic birds and animals. The boys did well at school and we, having been given work permits, rebuilt the kitty. We also made several additions to *Bagheera* which included a freezer with holdover plates, solar panels, radar, an electric anchor windlass, and a weatherfax. April 1989 found *Bagheera* heading up the Barrier Reef, then taking part in the Darwin-Ambon race and cruising through Indonesia, Singapore Malaysia and Thailand.

For a year we ambled across the Indian Ocean, meeting few cruisers and stopping in the Andaman Islands, Sri Lanka, India, the Maldives, Chagos and the Seychelles. Then it was down the East African coast to Madagascar and around the Cape of Good Hope in early 1991. After visits to St. Helena, Fortaleza, Brazil and French Guyana, we crossed our outgoing track northeast of Barbados, and in Antigua we celebrated the completion of our circumnavigation.

After six years, it was time to go home. The boys wanted to be in regular high schools, and we had to recoup financially. Andy returned to yacht brokerage and



(Clockwise from left) On the bow of their floating home the Copeland family –Jaimie, Glin, Duncan, Andy and Liza— pose inside a tropical lagoon. *Bagheera's* interior is homey and comfortable, with the main dinette to port. Home from a diving expedition in Indonesia, Duncan displays dinner. Andy and Liza at the chart table, with Andy in the process of changing the paper in the recording barometer.



formed a new dealership. Liza started to write cruising books and articles, and to give seminars at the major U.S. boat shows. *Bagheera* sat for too many weekends (when Duncan wasn't using her) at the yacht club dock, although we did manage a trip to the rugged Queen Charlotte Islands and a few weeks of cruising with her every summer, and her mileage continued to mount.

Two years ago, we decided we'd earned a sabbatical. We upgraded a lot of the old gear and added a Profurl in-

boom mainsail furling system, a Spectra watermaker, extra solar panels, a second GPS, 12-volt refrigeration, and a cruising chute. A wind generator was installed during the trip. In August 1998, we left from Vancouver to spend a fascinating year cruising 11,500 miles down the Pacific Coast, through Panama, gunkholing Central America and Cuba, then continuing up the U.S. Atlantic Coast to Nova Scotia. Now we are again at work in Vancouver, but *Bagheera* sits in a cradle in Deltaville, Va., wearing her 70,000

miles like a teenager. Future plans include exploring the U.S. East Coast more extensively, and then of course there is the lure of the Caribbean...

About *Bagheera*

Hull and deck: The hull is hand-laid fiberglass with a massive grid glassed inside. The balsa-cored deck is bonded and bolted to the hull, and all bulkheads are secured for their entire perimeters to the hull and deck. The result is an incredibly strong structure with so little move-



The chart table is surprisingly large for a 38-footer. A standard NOAA or Admiralty chart will fit on top or inside the table with a double fold; light lists, coast pilots and cruising guides sit on the shelf next to the HF radio; and the seat is wide enough to be comfortable on both tacks. The U-shaped galley is compact but works well at sea and has enough shelf and locker space for living aboard.

ment that we have never been troubled by leaks or squeaks. The keel is a deep cast-iron fin and the rudder a balanced spade.

In Australia, areas below the waterline were treated for osmotic blistering at Beneteau's expense. The hull was painted with Awlgrip at the same time to hide the damage done when a teenager in charge of a fast aluminum runabout tried to take a short-cut through our topsides while we were at anchor. There are wide side decks and a very large anchor locker. The cockpit is large and is protected by a dodger, bimini and side-curtains. A stainless steel scaffold mounted aft carries four elevated solar panels, a wind generator and radar.

Sails and rig: The original Hood genoa furler was replaced in 1998 with a Profurl unit when the new in-boom mainsail system was fitted. We feel the latter is one of the best cruising developments we've seen in recent years, giving us an efficient, fully battened, deeply roached and nicely shaped mainsail that can be reefed or stowed quickly by one of us from the cockpit. There are three furling genoas, a storm jib that hanks on to a retractable inner forestay, a new

cruising chute with a snuffer, and a very old racing spinnaker. Except for the spinners, all sails are of cruising Dacron, which we find long-lasting, reliable and easier to handle and repair than laminated sails. Before heading offshore again last year, we replaced all the standing rigging and the lifelines, as we feel strongly that stainless steel rigging more than 10 years old cannot be relied upon in extreme conditions.

Engine and systems: The standard 50-h.p. Perkins 4-108 has lived up to its reputation for reliability. It continues to start instantly and run well, though now it is using oil and lacks vigor. After 10,600 hours, this is hardly surprising, and this winter we'll have it rebuilt. Except for a rear oil seal, which entailed removing the engine in Fiji to change this \$2 part, the only replacements needed have been three exhaust elbows. One of the great features of the Beneteau First 38 is the cockpit floor that unbolts, allowing the engine literally to be lifted straight out.

Bagheera has a high-output alternator, an Air Marine wind generator, and 240 watts of solar power to feed six 12-volt deep-cycle batteries that provide 690

amp-hours. Refrigeration started with a 12-volt system, then an engine-driven holdover-plate arrangement for a freezer that necessitated running the motor once or twice a day. We replaced this five years ago with a Nova-Cool 12-volt unit that has proven excellent for both refrigeration and freezing, even in 90° weather. In addition, it is self-maintaining when we leave the boat to travel inland.

To cope with unreliable diesel quality around the world, we fitted a double Racor filter system ahead of the two standard fuel filters, enabling us to switch filters instantly if the one in use chokes up. We generally use biocide to prevent bacterial contamination.

The Spectra watermaker produces a genuine nine gallons per hour for eight amps, and reliably; it has made life on board infinitely more comfortable. We always have full tanks, take frequent showers, and have no concerns about polluted water. It is quiet, its output is virtually unaffected by temperature changes, and as it draws very little power, it can be run either by solar panels or by the wind generator. Mechanical servicing is minimal because the high-pressure pump has no fast moving parts.

Electronics and navigation: Andy is an ex-navy pilot who likes his gadgets, but we *both* enjoy good instrumentation, and like most cruisers we continue to add toys and we always have a wish list. Following a lightning strike in Mozambique that destroyed most of the electronics and many of the electrics, we re-equipped the cockpit with Autohelm instruments, and now also have their 7000 autopilot and 24-mile LCD radar, plus a Furuno fishfinder/depth-sounder. We replaced the damaged weatherfax with a SEA unit and the Transit satnav with a GPS.

At the chart table, we have the VHF radio and ICOM single-sideband/ham radio from which, with a TNC (which converts the radio's analog signal to a digital one the computer can read), we can send e-mail, plus a cockpit instrument repeater and gauges for electrical outputs and consumption. We carry a 121.5 MHz EPIRB, two magnetic compasses, one electronic compass, one hand-bearing compass, a recording barograph, two sets of binoculars, a handheld VHF and a powerful searchlight. We have over 300 charts on board, with guides, almanacs, sight-reduction tables, nav-aid lists, and tables, and we are beginning to use electronic charts,

tidetables and whatnot on the laptop.

Safety gear: Last year, we replaced our original Beaufort life raft with a new Winslow six-person raft packed with food, water and a 406 MHz EPIRB. A full range of man-overboard recovery gear goes with us, plus a seven-foot drogue with 400 feet of 5/8-inch nylon, and a collision mat. We find it is prudent to carry two large radar reflectors to avoid the threat of a blind spot from the mast. Cruising as a couple, usually there is but one person on watch, so we have strict rules about using harnesses and jacklines: No one leaves the cockpit to go forward on deck unless the other is there keeping an eye out. At night, offshore we use our masthead tri-color, but in coastal waters we use the conventional bow and stern lights because we feel they are less confusing to others trying to gauge our range and heading.

In addition to our 33-lb. Bruce anchor on 300 feet of 5/16-inch high-test chain, we carry a 45-lb. CQR with 80 feet of 3/8-inch chain and 400 feet of one-inch octoplait nylon, and also a 22-lb. Danforth with chain and line that is used as a kedge, or in a blow in tandem with the Bruce. We find the electric anchor windlass indispensable, not only for the ground tackle, but also to hoist the dinghy on deck and to take a person up the mast.

Bagheera is a dry boat, thanks to its moderate displacement and reserve buoyancy in the ends. We love the finger-light steering in all conditions, a sailplan that can be handled by a single not-so-young watchkeeper, and the performance that has allowed us to average more than 150 miles per day on all our ocean crossings. To us, she is the perfect combination of seakindliness, seaworthiness and fun on the ocean – and she’s a comfortable home at anchor to boot.

Liza Copeland is author of the recently updated Cruising for Cowards, Just Cruising (Europe to Australia), and Still Cruising (Australia, Asia, Africa and America), the latter two about her family’s circumnavigation. They are published by Romany Publishing, 3943 W. Broadway, Vancouver, B.C., Canada, Ph: 604-228-8712, Fax: 604-228-8779. “Incidentally, they are all Canadian Bestsellers,” says Liza with justifiable pride.



The Jean Berret-designed First 38s, above, was first conceived as a racer-cruiser, with the emphasis on racing. Beneteau’s First line of designs has always emphasized performance. By today’s standards, the 38s design falls at the moderate end of the performance-cruising spectrum, providing good all-around sailing performance with accommodations for extended cruising and living aboard. Jaimie tackles school work under the awning at the cockpit table, below. Even with a family of five aboard for world cruising, *Bagheera* offered enough interior and cockpit space for everyone to find a place to work or play.