

TESTED: JPK 45

THIS QUIRKY FRENCH CRUISER HAS THE SOUL OF A RACE YACHT, AND IS FULL OF INNOVATIONS, SAYS TOBY HODGES

Pascal and Alexis Loison entered the sailing history books in 2013 for an extraordinary achievement. Not only did the father-and-son team win the Rolex Fastnet Race overall, but they did so double-handed, racing against more than 300 fully crewed yachts. They were sailing a JPK 1010 named Night & Day.

Any racing sailor who hadn't heard of JPK before then will now know all about these IRC performers, which are built in Brest. In the last few years JPK yachts, and in particular the 1010 and 1030 models, have continued to dominate just about every coastal and offshore race in British and French waters. They are competent in most conditions, whether sailed short-handed or fully crewed. Now the JPK 45 is the yard's brilliant take on a cruising yacht.

Cruising sailors may be less familiar with this brand and builder. The JPK 45, one of this year's European

FACTS

Test editor **TOBY HODGES**

- **Where we tested:** La Rochelle
- **Wing:** 5-11 knots, calm seas
- **Model:** This first JPK 45 has sailed 12,000 miles in ten months. Options include a doghouse and extra bunk cabin below



Photos by Julien Girardot © EYOTY/J.Girardot



The optional composite frame is strong enough to stand on, to dive off and to lift and stow a dinghy. It also provides a useful support and position for carrying solar panels and antennae



A deep chain locker includes space for housing fenders and warps. The composite bowsprit carries the anchor rollers (one or two anchors). Note the foredeck hand rails too



An optional rigid doghouse provides excellent cockpit protection and keeps the mainsheet clear. The forward window panel opens for ventilation

Yacht of the Year nominees, is only the yard's second cruising model. We tested number one of this purposeful looking design, which was commissioned by a group of three French owners for global sailing. We sailed her out of La Rochelle with Monsieur JPK himself, Jean-Pierre Kelbert, just after the boat had returned from a ten-month, 12,000-mile transatlantic circuit. And what we found on board left me in no doubt that the JPK brand's reputation for building cruising yachts is only going to grow from here.

Hitting it off

It is pretty rare for me to step aboard a new boat and feel totally confident and at ease with its ability. The first word written



- 1 Racing-style foot braces, which are height-adjustable, allow you to get the ideal helming position and angle.
- 2 The inboard winch and clutch layout with rope bin stowage is superb.
- 3 The benches are long and deep with good backrests and have flat coamings onto the sidedecks, which make it easy to step between cockpit and deck.
- 4 Sitting on a bucket seat below the doghouse of the 45 really is the perfect watch position.

in my notebook during our sea trial was simply "YES!!" And this was despite what could otherwise have been quite a nerve-racking experience.

Having just boarded the JPK 45 from a RIB off La Rochelle, Kelbert handed me the helm and set about unfurling the headsail. All around us, however, was a fleet of more than 80 Mini 6.50m race boats, together with a hoard of spectator vessels. The Minis were racing under spinnaker towards the finish line, but I quickly realised there was little cause for concern. Both the direct control of the JPK 45 and the calm confidence of Kelbert himself put me instantly at ease.

With the 110 per cent genoa unfurled we were up to speed in no time. The wind

played ball too, picking up to 10 knots – the most we had seen all weekend. The Dacron sails looked exactly as you would expect from a suit that had done an Atlantic circuit, having lost a little shape. Not that this seemed to affect the performance of the 45. She maintained a handsome 8 knots in 10 knots true at 31-33° to the apparent wind (and 7.3 knots in 7.1 knots true).

And it felt wonderful behind the wheels. The helm is relatively neutral, as can be expected from a modern performance yacht with twin rudders, but is light and responsive to the touch. She is a slippery, stiff boat, too. You can feel the soul of a race boat within her lightweight construction. The 45 has

more curve in the bilge turn compared to JPK's racing models and more volume forward. But beamy aft sections, long, hard hull chines and a high concentration of ballast low down in the fin keel provide oodles of righting moment.

A twin headsail set-up, with genoa and staysail furlers controlled from the cockpit, is a useful cruising solution. It allows you to easily adapt the sailplan to the conditions. Short-tacking through the congested waters proved a little slow under genoa however. Although there is good clearance between the headsails, you still need to pull the genoa through manually from the foredeck if trying to tack without furling.

Our spell of breeze in the double





digits was short lived. Kelbert is a typical short-handed racing sailor, happiest tweaking and changing sails to suit conditions and angles. So a large red asymmetric sail on a snuffer was then efficiently hoisted. This helped produce figures of high 7s in 8.5 knots at 60° apparent – and allowed us still to match or exceed the true wind speed when it dropped to 6 knots.

With the kite doused and stowed in the sock, Kelbert was back on deck, hoisting a gennaker on a furler for the long fetch back to La Rochelle. This is a useful sail for a cruiser's arsenal too, which Kelbert says can be used from 60° to the true wind right up to 120°. We typically clocked 7 knots in 8 knots true, close reaching at 35-40° to the apparent wind. It was the type of sailing you never want to end. It is gratifying to be able to tune

a cruising yacht easily and to be able to take advantage of light breeze conditions so well.

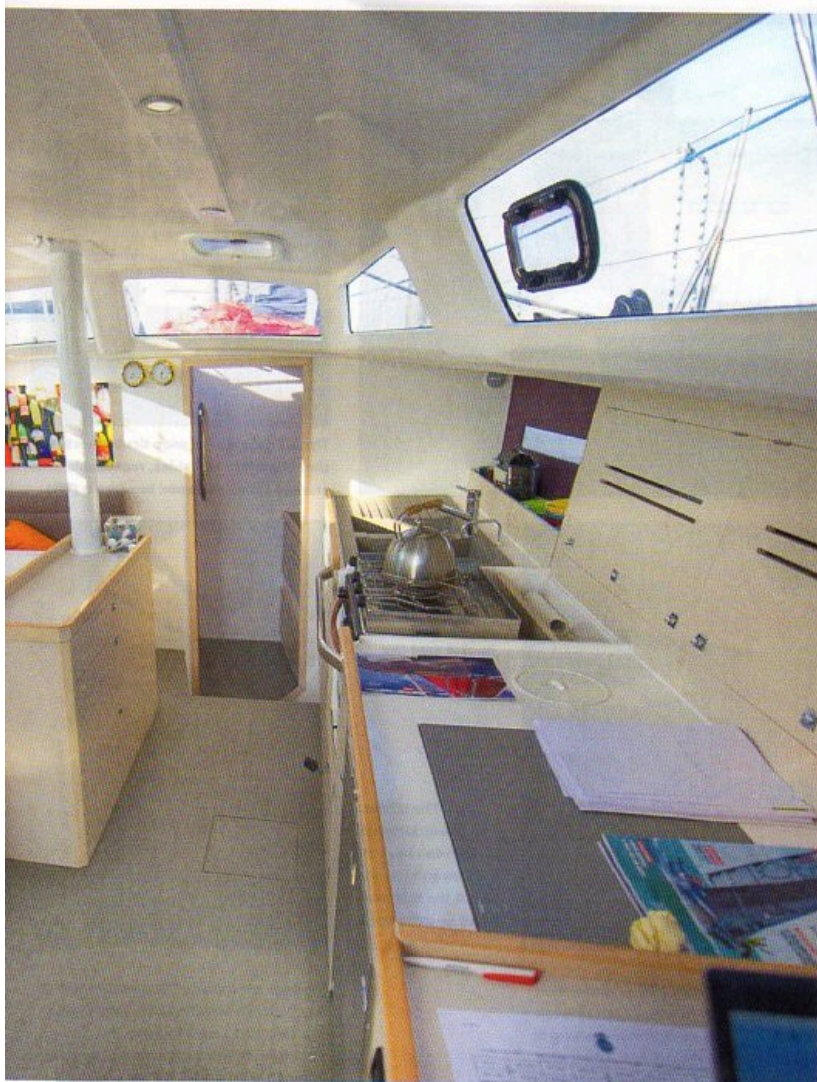
Mini skippers waved to Kelbert as we threaded our way through the fleet, which by now was queuing to get into the old port. We furled the gennaker in the channel and gybed into the marina as if we were on a sportsboat. As the main dropped into a stackpack, I started the engine and eased the 45 into a tight pontoon berth. To do this on a new boat in a seriously congested channel and marina is a testament to the confidence the JPK instils.

Deck layout

The winch and clutch layout is superb and particularly well suited to short-handed sailing. The two Harken Performa winches each side are located inboard, within easy

reach of the wheels and in a position where it is easy to stand and grind. It continues to amaze me that so few cruising yachts have primaries mounted inboard like this. Standing over a winch in the cockpit is so much safer than crouching over the coaming. It can also negate the need for powered winches at this size as you can use your body more efficiently when working the handle.

The JPK has eight clutches each side through which the running rigging and sheets are led to the winches. Even the backstay and runners feed to these winches (although spinnaker halyards use a mast base winch), while large boxes directly below swallow the tail ends neatly. The only negative point of the JPK's clutch and winch set-up is the friction caused by the 90° turning blocks for the headsail sheets and furling lines.



Keeping the sailing systems in a compact area aft, near the wheels, also helps maximise cockpit space. The rigid doghouse (which is optional) provides all the protection you could wish for in the cockpit without needing to rely on a high coachroof or coamings. The benches are long enough to seat four on each side of the large fixed table, and flat coamings allow a particularly easy step out to the side decks.

The doghouse also helps keep the mainsheet out of the cockpit. Instead of a traveller, a bridle attached to the roof is a practical cruising compromise. The blocks attach to the boom using simple lashing strops and the sheet leads forward to the mast before returning aft to the winches.

The JPK has a safe deck. Non-slip grip is incorporated into the whole

deck, a toerail is moulded in and there is a handrail on the foredeck. The swim ladder is a clever design as it doubles to form the central section of the aft guardrail when in raised mode. Beneath the aft helm seats is a large gas locker to port and a liferaft locker to starboard. The latter has an aft-facing flap that operates via a pulley hidden under the foot brace. A large central locker aft also provides access to the JP3 Vectran steering gear.

Why no frills works

Modern French performance cruiser builders, such as Pogo, Django and JPK, keep their interiors lightweight, simple yet practical. But they are in danger of feeling spartan. The interior of the JPK is just the right side of utilitarian for an offshore performance cruiser

The modern interior is simple, practical and light – both in terms of weight and natural illumination



From windsurfers to Fastnet winners

Jean-Pierre Kelbert, who founded JPK, is a former professional windsurfer and European champion in 1988 and 1989. He founded his own board manufacturing company in 1992, but by the late 1990s windsurfer production had moved to Thailand so he started moulding parts for other shipyards.

Kelbert is also a successful short-handed sailor and it was while racing his JOD35 one-design in 2003 that he saw (and lost to) his first Jacques Valer design. He asked Valer to design a 960, which quickly found success (a JPK 960 won its class in the 2007 Rolex Fastnet Race).

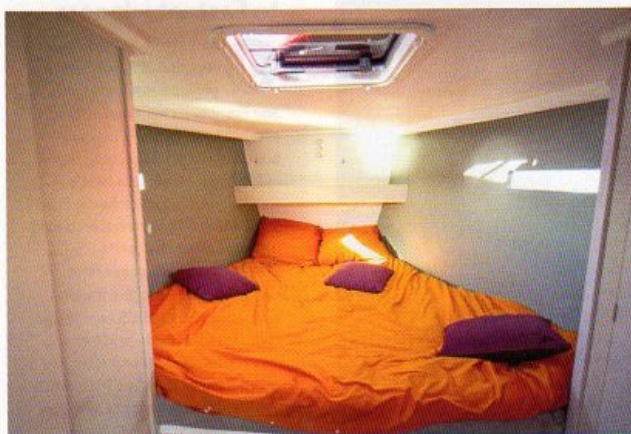
But it was the launch of the 1010 in 2010 that really put JPK on the racing yacht map. Together with the subsequent 1080 (2014), the 1010 'has won everything,' says Kelbert – referring to IRC crewed races, double-handed, the transatlantic Transquadra etc. 'The 2013 Fasnet Race win created a lot of international recognition – since then we've always been full of orders.'

Kelbert says he still tries to train as much as he can, including lots of double-handed racing in Brittany. 'It's because I practise a lot that I know where everything should go on deck and know the height everything should be.'

For the JPK 45 cruising yacht design, Kelbert was thinking of the boat he's always wanted to have. 'I love racing but equally want to spend time cruising with my family. It's all about having fun – maximum pleasure.'



The aft cabins have wide double berths that slope into hull sides, reasonable storage space and good headroom (7ft)



Above: Light floods the modest longitudinal galley. Note the French racing-style bucket seat (far right) and large chart table

Left: The master cabin forward. This can have an en suite heads but the test boat had an extra bunk cabin (right)



– basic maybe, but seaworthy certainly.

The light, bright and practical interior is finished in bleached oak veneer. After 12,000 miles of non-stop hard use by seven to eight sailors, it still looked new down below (although Kelbert admitted it needed a good scrub after its recent return). The waterproof vinyl used on the soles and hull linings is a smart, wipe-clean solution that is vacuum-glued on for a simple light finish.

The test boat had three double cabins, a Pullman and a single heads. While the central galley/saloon section of the layout cannot be altered, there is the option to remove the Pullman in favour of a second heads. One of the aft cabins can also be replaced with a workshop/utility cabin.

The large, near vertical coachroof windows help provide plenty of natural light without glare. The saloon is slightly raised to allow room for tanks to be kept as central and low as possible below, and it shares the beam with the longitudinal galley. The fixed table can seat six. A central unit around the mast base, which

resembles a keel box (there is an option for a lifting keel), provides both stowage in drawers and support when working at the galley on starboard tack. Otherwise there is little usable stowage space in the saloon, but plenty under the berths.

The layout is less conventional forward of the mast where there is a chest of drawers-cum-workdesk unit to starboard and a Pullman cabin to port. The forward cabin is simple, with ample natural light, 6ft 1in headroom and a large, high double berth with roomy stowage below.

The compromise to the layout of the test boat is that there is only one heads (which is relatively compact). But this still has the practical inclusion of a large wet-hanging locker within the shower area.

The secret to JPK's success?

What makes JPK's race boats win so consistently and its cruising yachts slip along so well? Smart design and resin-infused foam sandwich construction. The whole hull is infused in one shot for rigidity. JPK uses a labour intensive method: virtually all the parts that go into

the boat are moulded and all the interior furniture is foam sandwich, laminated into the hull to contribute to the structure. But this method is expensive – the 45 is around twice the price of a series production Beneteau/Hanse of similar size and more comparable in price to an X-Yacht or Solaris.

Jacques Valer, who has designed all the JPKs, calculates the weight of every single component that goes into the boat. There is only around 200kg of wood in total on the 45 – even the doors have foam inside.

The JPK 45 is designed to be efficient to sail upwind – and strong. It is reinforced in key areas with high-density foam, which Kelbert likes using as, unlike balsa, it accepts some water and deformation. In fact, the build technique sounds like a similar approach to that of Pogo. But Kelbert says JPK uses more lead ballast. "JPKs are not as fast in a crosswind, but are faster and more comfortable at other angles," he says.

"If the wind is on the nose, it has to be comfortable."



Our verdict

A boat can be all about the feeling it gives you. And the enjoyment the JPK 45 gave me on the helm is a memory that stayed with me. The proven record of Kelbert's boats and his faith in their build quality combines to put you instantly at ease.

The JPK 45 is not your typical performance cruiser. She is fast, stiff and seaworthy, but she looks more like a workboat for speedy ocean cruising. The aesthetics, inside and out, will be too stark for many. The doghouse is an option, but one you would surely take unless prioritising looks over comfort.

So this is a niche yacht for those who want to get places at a good pace and actively enjoy sailing while doing so. By the time you read this, the boat tested will be on her way to Brazil and then on into the Pacific.

The JPK 45 is a clever culmination of Valer's slippery designs and the yard's weight-obsessive builds. It has a layout born of thousands of short-handed offshore sailing miles, which makes it as practical and as enjoyable to sail and trim as possible.

I predict that the first seven owners who have already ordered this boat will log minimal engine hours – this yacht is one that just makes you want to keep sailing.

Rivals

Django 12.70 Smaller and more basic but a similar design and a clever composite offshore cruiser. €240,000
mareehaute.com



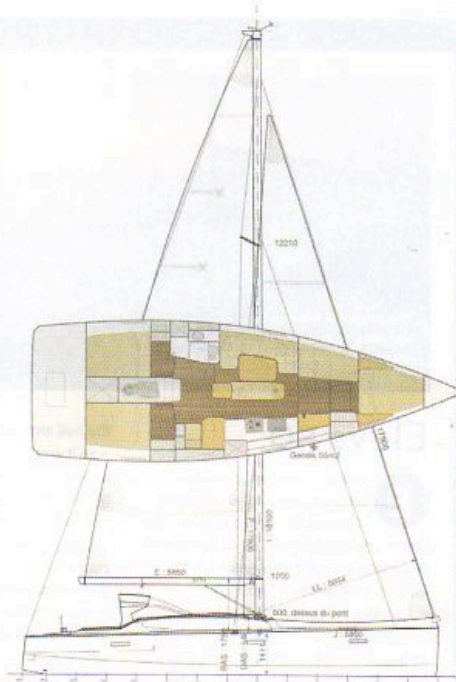
Pogo 12.50 Again a smaller model, but with a similar fast cruising concept and build to the JPK. €211,249
pogostuctures.com



Exploration 45 Aluminium bluewater cruiser – heavier and slower but supremely comfortable. €453,000
garcia-yachting.com



DATA JPK 45



SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	13.80m (45ft 3in)
LWL	12.91m (42ft 4in)
Beam (Max)	4.50m (14ft 9in)
Draught	2.25m (7ft 5in)
Disp (lightship)	9,500kg (20,944lb)
Ballast	4,000kg (8,818lb)
Sail Area (100% foretriangle)	112.8m ² (1,214ft ²)
Berths	4-8
Engine	Volvo Penta D2 50hp
Water	800lt (176gal)
Fuel	300lt (66gal)
Sail Area: Disp	25.6
Disp: LWL	123
Price (ex VAT)	€314,855
Design:	Jacques Valer and JPK Composites