



There's no other award like it in the industry. The European Yacht of the Year winners were announced in Düsseldorf in January after a year of debates and trials. Toby Hodges and Matthew Sheahan give their judges' thoughts on the finalists

For those who think awards like these are a walk in the park for the winners, designed for marketing and to flatter some ego, let us reassure you, they're not. The European Yacht of the Year awards have grown significantly in the past six years to become the most objective and unbiased in the industry, involving judges from 11 countries in a logistical and practical knockout of the year's production yacht hopefuls, both thoroughly and professionally organised.

Firstly, a contender has to have something special even to be nominated and subsequently voted onto the shortlist. The jury then narrow this down by means of (lengthy) debates, to produce the final categories and finalists, which are then test sailed after the HISWA or Barcelona boat shows.

If there's an outstanding candidate in its class, then making the decision can be relatively easy. Typically, however, the categories are hard-fought affairs that require scores from all judges on varying aspects from performance and design, to value and innovation. ►►

CATEGORY 2: PERFORMANCE CRUISER



WINNER:
Arcona 430



This category proved to be a very tough one for the judges, but in the end the Arcona came out on top. In particular, the panel was impressed with the detail and thoroughness of this design, from her broad concept to the consistently high standard of build throughout.

The best aspects of her sistership, the 460, have been passed down to ensure a practical working and racing cockpit, excellent response, good balance and smooth tracking – with an end result of riveting sailing that matched the Finnulf 43.

The finish, especially considering this was hull no 1, impressed. A family cruiser that can race competitively on weekends, this is a versatile boat that will bring pleasure to many and represents good value for money.

€228,365 ex VAT

www.arconayachts.com

RUNNERS UP:



Bénéteau First 45

On the face of it, the 45 is simply a smaller version of her show-stopping sistership, the First 50. Yet, while the 50 was aimed at short-handed fast cruising, the 45 is intended to be more of an all-round performance cruiser-racer.

She is a sophisticated design above and below decks, with the new sleek, modern appearance bordering on minimalist in places – something the buyers will either love or hate. An intriguing boat with strong character.

€203,900 ex VAT

www.beneteau.com



Dufour 45

This Felci/Roseó-designed 45-footer provided tough competition for the Bénéteau within these trials and will do so in the marketplace. Indeed, from a distance it's difficult to tell the two apart. But there are differences, particularly in the cockpit layout.

With primary and secondary winches close to the helmsman, the Dufour is more versatile and suited to both short-handed sailing as well as a full crew pushing her to the limit. Below decks she's more traditional.

€212,175 ex VAT

www.dufour-yachts.com



Finnulf 43

A striking new fast, powerful cruising design from the Farr board, built in solid Finnulf fashion. Stiff and responsive to sail with twin wheels, this all-epoxy beast is sure to prove a handful on the race course.

For the expensive outlay though, the finish on the prototype was pretty sloppy. Good news is that subsequent models have dramatically improved, but it still needed to offer more quality in order to prise the title from the Arcona.

€321,128 ex VAT

www.finnulf.com



Salona 34

Modest on the outside, modern on the inside, the J&J-designed Salona 34 is the latest in a line of good value performance cruisers. On deck her deep cockpit feels secure when cruising, but spacious to work aboard on the race course.

Below decks she has a conventional layout with a galley and a dedicated navigation station, plus aft and forward double cabins. But the stiff competition elsewhere in her group pushed her back in the queue.

€97,800 ex VAT

www.salonayachts.com