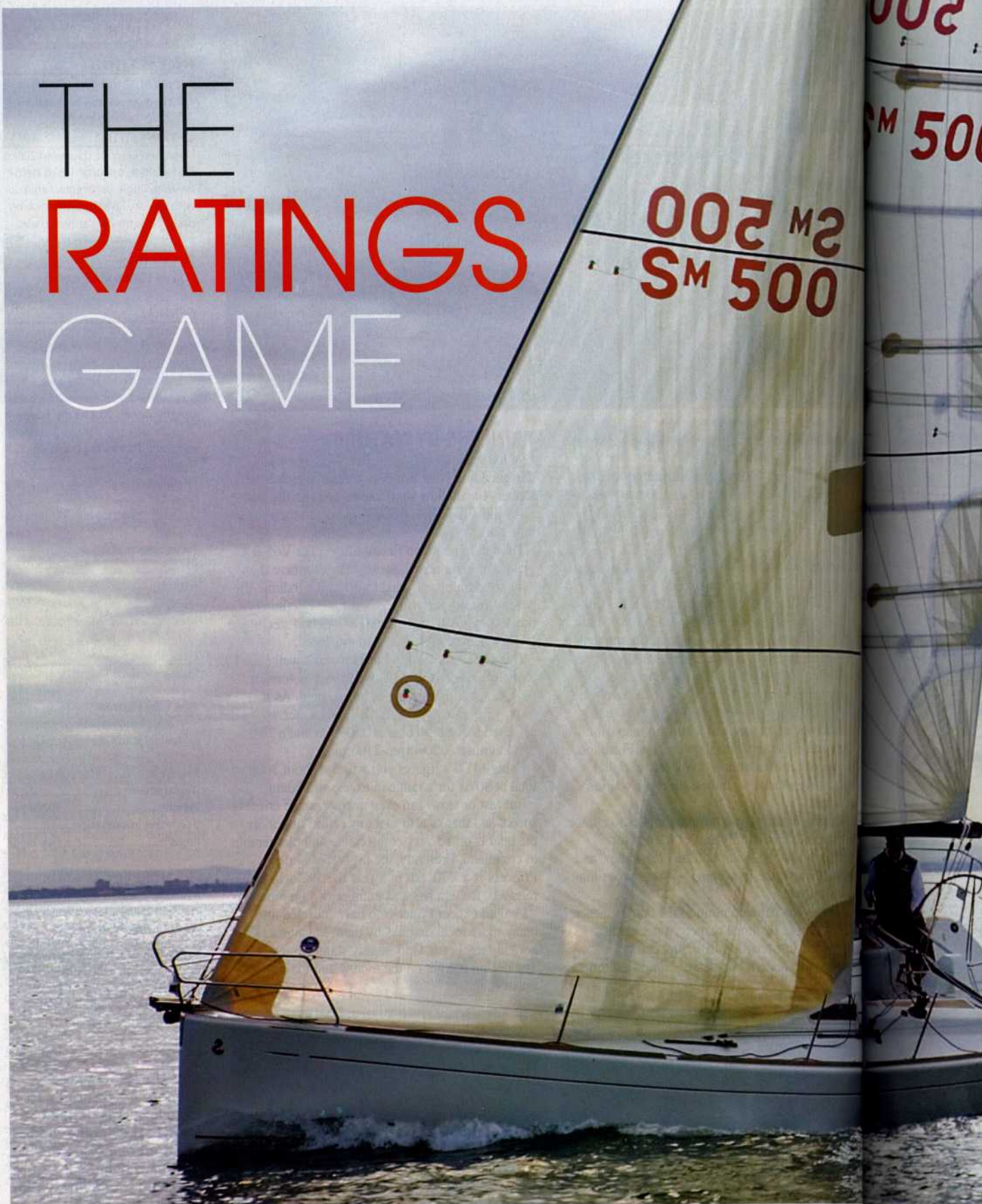


# THE RATINGS GAME





Yacht manufacturers are clamouring to bring out small IRC-optimised thoroughbred racers for inexpensive and exciting racing. The latest of these is the Beneteau 34.7, which Geoff Middleton got a ride on during a shakedown on Port Phillip Bay.

It seems that with a spate of smaller high-quality and very competitive race yachts, some owners are downsizing.

It's not surprising, considering the dearth of marina space in centres like Sydney and Melbourne and, for that matter, around the world. Smaller yachts are easier to find pens for and they're easier to sail. The big manufacturers are seeing this and putting substantial effort into making quality, IRC competitive small race yachts.

Cases in point include Bavaria, X-Yachts, our home-grown Sydney Yachts and now Beneteau. All have very spirited offerings of around 35ft. In Europe, fleets of these smaller yachts are not only doing well in IRC but also comprise substantial one-design fleets.

The reasons for this rush to smaller yachts are not just space, but convenience.

Instead of trying to find 10 or 12 good sailors to get you competitively around the track, these smaller offerings only need four or five. The added bonus is that they can be easily handled by a couple for family cruising and, although they are thoroughbred races, they still offer a comfortable fitout for a weekend away.

Beneteau's latest entrant into this arena is the 34.7. It's Beneteau's first really hot boat since the 40.7 and we were understandably eager to get a chance to sail.

I first saw the 34.7 when it was delivered to our yacht club for commissioning. It stood tall in the cradle on the hardstand, with a deep fin keel with a lead bulb giving a draft of two metres.

The hull was penned by Farr Yacht Design and has a fine entry, sleek underwater lines and a flat aft section, which should make it a good downhill surfer. The fin keel is cast iron with a lead bulb designed by Farr. Incidentally, each keel is weighed to be exact ex-factory.

Farr was given a brief from Beneteau to design a true IRC boat, a new and modern design that would rate well and fast. Farr hadn't done a true IRC boat in the past, as they'd been concentrating on Volvo and America's Cup boats. They studied the rules and with the input of Beneteau came up with what they thought would be a winning combination.

According to David Beck from Sundance Yacht Sales, the boats should rate about 1.012, give or take a bit for sails and, in Europe and the UK, they have been winning.

Standard rig is a carbon two-spreader mast of about 15m with a carbon boom and self-retracting carbon prodder. Rod rigging is standard as well. There is the

