

# A Feeling of tradition

French production boats are often perceived as mass produced and ultra-modern in their approach, but Kirié's 30-footer doesn't fit the stereotype – as **David Harding** discovered

It's easy to pigeonhole boats from different countries. We think of Scandinavian designs as solid, steady and dripping with luxurious, hand-crafted timberwork down below. American boats tend to be beamy, chunky and rather square. The French? Stylish and curvy, perhaps a little radical for British tastes, too lightly built for some, spirited by nature, and usually assembled in a modular manner on a production line. Those are generalities, of course. Some Scandinavian boats – especially those from Sweden's east coast – have slim hulls and tall fractional rigs. The Americans can draw sleek lines when they want to. And the other side of French boatbuilding is represented by yards like Alubat, who build the aluminium Ovnis in relatively small numbers for those who want something different from the mainstream. It's an equally Gallic approach; slightly quirky, catering for the individualist.

Between these opposite ends of the French spectrum, many British boat show visitors would be hard-pressed to think of any other type of cruising boat from our nearest neighbour. But what about the

## PRICES:

■ Fin keel, standard specification:  
**£55,050**

■ Fin keel, Easy Cruise version (higher spec):  
**£59,075**

■ Lift keel, standard specification:  
**£59,192**

■ Lift keel, Easy Cruise version:  
**£63,212**

Prices are based on conversions from the euro and are for guidance only



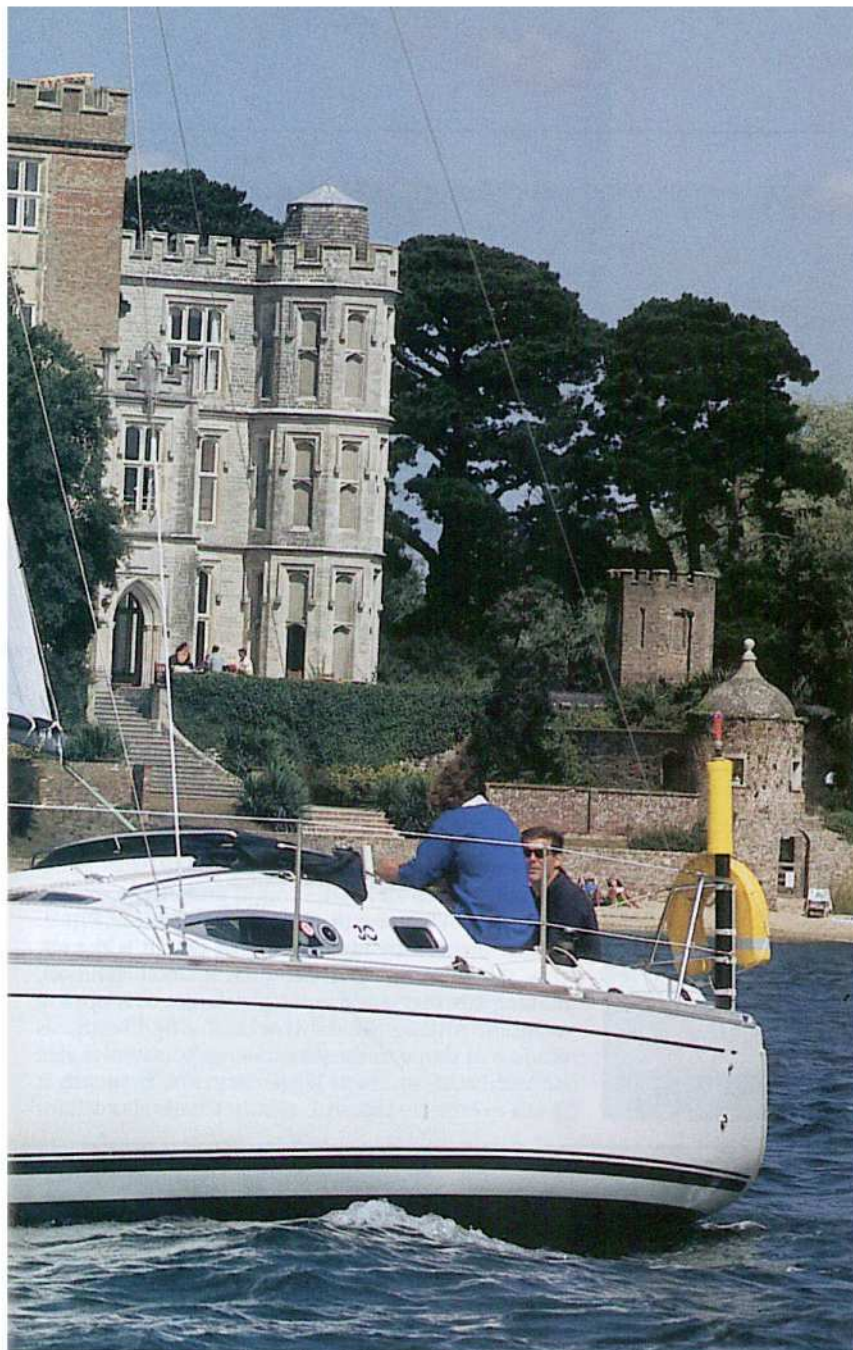
A recess in the transom provides stowage for the liferaft or inflatable dinghy

Feelings? Most of us know them of old – those grey-hulled boats with their name spelled out in international code flags just above the waterline. There are lots of them about, and some of them had lifting keels, didn't they, but are they still built?

You could be forgiven for wondering. Since their heyday back in the 1980s, a lot has happened to their builders, Kirié. First, they bought Kelt, who also used to build lifting-keelers. Then they were acquired by the owners of Alubat. A year or two later, it was all change yet again. To cut a long story short, Kirié is now a sister company of Alliaura Marine, builders of those large and luxurious catamarans often seen in charter fleets. Feelings never stopped being built, but the changes in France were compounded by a lack of continuity with dealers in the UK. There was even a time, just before a major boat show, when one of the dealers didn't know whether or not he was officially selling Feelings, so it's little wonder that everyone else lost the plot.

Simon Derrick is hoping to change all that. Based at Berthon in Lymington, with the facilities of a major boatyard to call upon, Feeling's new man in England is doing his best to bring the brand back to the fore. Unlike some in this business, Simon is an experienced yachtsman who has clocked up miles in





**‘Given the chop, our upwind speed of 4.5 to 5.1 knots was perfectly respectable, especially given the liberal coating of mid-season weed’**

everything from dinghies and J24s to offshore cruisers. And he bought a Feeling 44 for his own use before any thought of taking on the dealership occurred to him.

### Getting a grip

When the possibility of a test on a new-generation Feeling was mooted a few months ago, I expressed my fervent hope that it would be better than the last Feeling I sailed, the 356, back in 1999 (PBO 394).

I had been less than impressed: there was no apparent logic in the choice or position of much of the deck hardware, the sails left much to be desired, the ratios of the rig were more akin to those of an IOR racer than to a modern cruising boat and, most importantly, the lifting-keel version – which I tested – had a single, shallow rudder that lost grip without warning at a modest angle of heel. One moment you would be sailing along comfortably enough, and the next you would find yourself head-to-wind with the genoa aback.

Don't worry, I was told by someone else who knew about Feelings. It was widely accepted that the 356 hadn't been one of Kirié's greatest success. The new ones were much better.

Whatever has changed since the days of the 356,



**Inboard rigging allows a sensible sheeting angle for good pointing ability; the tacking angle is between 75 and 80°**

some elements remain. The older boat (since replaced by the 36) was designed by Gilles Vaton, with an interior by Patrick Roséo. The same pair is responsible for the 30. The exterior styling is not dissimilar, the mainsail is still on the small side by modern standards, and Kirié's well-tried lifting keel arrangement is available as an option. This time, though, it's complemented by twin rudders. Big sigh of relief. I'm no great fan of twin rudders if one will do the job, but when a single blade can be no deeper than the canoe body, there's little choice with a typical broad-sterned modern hull other than to have two – unless you plump for one that lifts. Interestingly, Kirié fit twins whether you choose the centreboard version or a fin-keeler.

So what else has changed? To find out, I joined Simon for a sail on Ian Brown's Feeling 30, *Elbereth*, on a day when 14 to 18 knots of wind (a Force 4 – 5) was blowing up the Channel against an ebb tide and throwing up a short, sharp sea.

Two things were immediately apparent. First, the boat had no problem carrying full sail. We might have felt inclined to reef had the breeze picked up another couple of knots, but our angle of heel was comfortable. Secondly, the rudders kept her firmly on track even during the occasional fresher ▶



patch. That's as you would expect: twin blades usually continue to work efficiently even with the boat well heeled, but the mechanism leads to greater friction and less feedback through the tiller.

The Feeling proved to be both undemanding and satisfying to sail nonetheless. She drove through the confused seas with remarkable composure, rarely slamming or being brought up short, and throwing no more than the occasional dollop of salt water back to the cockpit. If, like me, you prefer to steer from the windward coaming, you need to wedge yourself immediately abaft the self-tailing Harken 32 primary winch. Further aft, the guardwires are too close behind your back, so your torso is inclined forward and life becomes uncomfortable. For those who favour an inboard steering position, a foot-brace is provided in the middle of the floor, while the cockpit narrows sufficiently towards its forward end for most people's legs to reach the leeward seat.

Put through some of the standard circuits and bumps, the boat sprang no surprises. Left to her own devices, she maintained her course to windward with the mainsheet eased slightly and then, with it tensioned normally, rounded up gently before tacking and heaving to with the wind just abaft the beam. From there, she gybed round with the sheets pinned in, wasting little time stalling and slipping sideways before continuing on her way to windward. The Feeling 30 is a hard boat to upset.

### Sails talk

Given the chop, our upwind speed of 4.5 to 5.1 knots was perfectly respectable, especially given the liberal coating of mid-season weed. Having subsequently had the boat lifted, scrubbed and re-



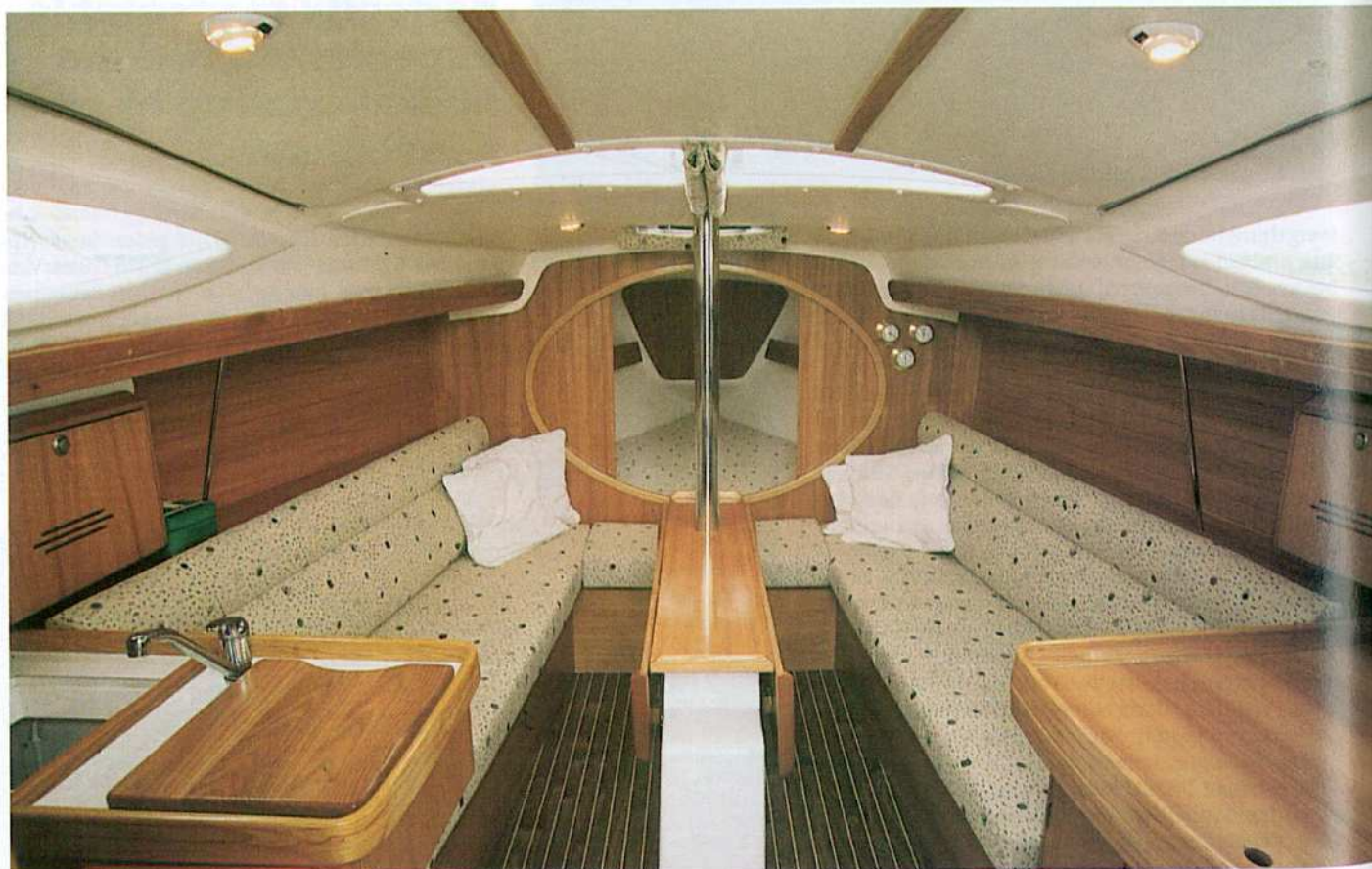
**ABOVE: even when well heeled, the Feeling was kept on course by her twin rudders**



antifouled, Ian Brown has reported a significant increase in performance; 6 and 7 knots, he says, regularly show on the log. Earlier in the season, he averaged 6 knots on a crossing to Cherbourg, despite spending much of the time close-hauled.

With its lower centre of gravity and lighter displacement, the fin-keeler should be stiffer and, perhaps, quicker on some points, though the draft is modest (a mere 4ft 7in/1.40m). If performance really matters, you'll choose the 5ft 8in (1.72m) lead fin.

What puzzles me most about the design is the rig: why did M Vaton give her such a small mainsail, making up the sail area with a large, overlapping headsail? Among the drawbacks of a rig like this is the loss of shape in the genoa when you start to reef it. And being so much bigger than the mainsail, it needs to be reefed more. Larger headsails also call for



**Open plan in elm: the Feeling is nicely finished with elm joinery, which is bonded to the hull rather than to interior mouldings**



more winching, while small mainsails produce less drive downwind but still create enough of a wind-shadow to render the headsail useless on a broad reach. A further consideration is the reluctance of boats with small mains to make upwind without the headsail's help, should they ever need to. The Feeling made progress in flat water under main alone, but slowly.

Whatever the reason for this choice of rig ratio, it doesn't appear to be dictated by the accommodation. The compression post could surely be moved forward from its position near the front of the table, and shifting the tie-bars would seem to present no problem, either. Sail plans in which most of the area is carried in the mainsail have been around for decades – look at the Folkboat, for example – and now, in this post-IOR era, they're enjoying a renaissance. When you've sailed a Folkboat, or a new design like Hunter's Mystery 35 (PBO 439), you can't help but look at a rig like the Feeling's and ask 'why?'

Since the effort involved in winching home the headsail on a 30-footer is never going to be enormous, you might argue that the ratios aren't desperately important. They don't spoil the boat, anyway.

Staying with the rig, another notable factor is Kirié's use of twin backstays. A single one would restrict the helmsman's movement, but a bifurcated stay, split well above the deck, would allow the addition of a simple tensioner. Twin backstays strike me as overkill on a 30-footer with a fractional rig.

As for the sails, their shape was reasonable and the mainsail had blocks on the leech for the two reefing lines, but the cloth looked loosely woven and on the light side. I'd be surprised if either genoa or mainsail holds its shape for much more than a season.

## CONSTRUCTION

■ The Feeling's hull is a conventional solid laminate, moulded in one piece. Balsa stiffens the flat areas of the deck.

Centreboard versions carry most of their ballast in a cast iron grounding plate, which is set into a recess in the hull moulding and incorporates stabilising winglets to keep the boat stable when dried out.

The GRP centreboard itself is relatively light, and lifted by a tackle led back over the coachroof.



The angle of vanishing stability is given as 115° with the maximum righting arm at 50°

The mainsheet is taken to a strong point on the cockpit floor

Twin rudders are used with any of the keel configurations

With the centreboard version, most of the ballast is in the grounding plate

## DOWN BELOW

■ Bonding the joinery directly to the hull rather than using interior mouldings invariably gives a boat a more hand-finished feel, and you know you're on something different as soon as you reach the foot of the Feeling's companionway. Closer inspection reveals neatly-finished joinery in elm, with plenty of radiused corners, very few rough edges, and minimal use of gap-filling sealant.

### PLASTIC IN ITS PLACE

The only internal mouldings are in the heads – logically enough – and, understandably but rather incongruously, over the centreboard case. I thought such a large, shiny white surface in the middle of the saloon looked plain and garish, but you would probably get used to it.

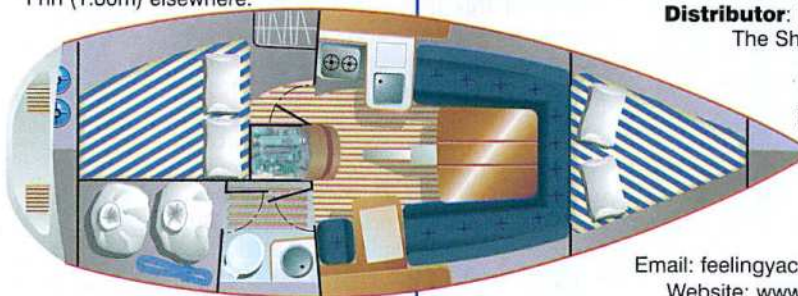
In keeping with their traditional approach, Kirié have used vinyl for the headlining throughout. They have also resisted the temptation to run the after cabin's berth athwartships; by sticking to the fore-and-aft convention, they have left space for an enormous, full-depth cockpit locker to starboard with an enclosed gas locker inside it.

At the chart table, minor niggles included the lack of a support to keep

the lid open and the use of screws to keep the switch panel closed. A push-button release has many advantages. Opposite, the most notable feature in the galley is the cool box which, apparently, is so well insulated that it keeps food frozen for 24 hours.

With the stainless steel fuel tank in the after cabin and the polyethylene, 29-gallon (130l) water tank under the foreberth, under-bunk space amidships is available for stowage. The berths throughout the boat, though, weren't designed for anyone much over 6ft tall; in the saloon and after cabin, they're 6ft 2in (1.88m). The forecabin's berth is 7ft (2.13m) but, inevitably, comes to a point at its forward end.

Headroom is 6ft 2in under the hatch in the saloon and a maximum of 5ft 11in (1.80m) elsewhere.



## FEELING 30 SPECIFICATION

<b>LOA</b>	28ft 10in (8.78m)
<b>LWL</b>	25ft 11in (7.90m)
<b>Beam</b>	10ft 1in (3.08m)
<b>Draught – keel up</b>	2ft 4in (0.70m)
– keel down	5ft 11in (1.80m)
– fin keel (iron)	4ft 7in (1.40m)
– fin keel (lead)	5ft 8in (1.72m)
<b>Displacement – centreboard version</b>	7,385lb (3,350kg)
– fin keel version	6,834lb (3,100kg)
<b>Ballast – centreboard version</b>	2,645lb (1,200kg)
– fin keel version	2,200lb (1,000kg)
<b>Sail area (main &amp; 100% foretriangle)</b>	410sq ft (38.0sq m)
<b>Displacement/length ratio</b>	190
<b>Sail area/displacement ratio</b>	17.3
<b>Engine</b>	Volvo 2020, 19hp shaft-driving diesel
<b>Headroom</b>	5ft 11in (1.80m)
<b>Designer</b>	Gilles Vaton/ Patrick Roséo
<b>Builder</b>	Kirié, Les Sables d'Olonne, France

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Cracked off the wind a few degrees, the Feeling soon picked up to over 6 knots



A separate gas locker is built into the main locker to starboard



Hooks in the heads provide hanging space for waterproofs

### Mechanical feelings

Among several features of the Feeling rarely found on modern boats is a shaft-driving engine. The Volvo 2020 reached 3,500rpm and pushed her along at just over 6 knots with the throttle fully open. She pulled to port initially in astern, but soon re-gained steerage way. What you don't get with twin rudders, of course, is prop-wash in ahead, so you need to make allowances when manoeuvring.

Looking at the engine afterwards, it was good to see a water trap in the exhaust pipe – an essential feature with such a shallow rise – and a fuel filter that would allow a drip-tray to be placed underneath it. And although it's hard to make engines with shafts as quiet or smooth as their equivalents harnessed to saildrives, neither noise nor vibration down below was intrusive.

In these areas, as in most others, Kirié seem to have put plenty of thought into their smallest boat. There are one or two apparent anomalies, but she's easy to like – well-mannered, reasonably quick, sensibly laid out both above and below decks, and nicely finished. These attributes would make her worth considering if you're looking for an easily-managed performance cruiser of this size, but then there's the option of the fully-retractable keel. That takes her into a league where there's even less competition.

Above all, it's Kirié's traditional approach that sets the Feeling apart from the masses. This is a boat on which you find no radical styling, no interior mouldings (except in the heads and over the centre-board case), no headlining, and few signs of mass-production. With her builders producing about 300 boats a year, perhaps that should come as no surprise. She's unlike most of the French boats you'll have seen.

PBO

### Why did he buy?

■ Ian Brown and his wife, Beverley, had a Europa TS 240 for two years before moving up. They saw the Feeling in the early days of owning their Europa, because one was kept in the same marina, and they admired it every time they came in. 'It was so much bigger than what we had,' said Ian. 'We kept looking at it and thinking, "that's a nice boat".'

Reports suggested that it sailed nicely, which was important, and they also liked the interior. The combination of performance and accommodation eventually proved too much to resist, and the decision was made.

The Browns had considered secondhand alternatives, such as Moodys and Sadlers, but Ian explained that the price difference between a good secondhand boat and a new Feeling wasn't that great. 'We just fancied having a new one,' he said, 'partly because we'd already had the 240 from new.'



**'We kept looking at it and thinking that's a nice boat'**

Eventually, they plan to head through the French canals to the Med, but the important thing was to buy the boat so they could start enjoying it rather than put it off until later in life. Among their aims for the near future is some local club racing.

'We've come across people who have made great plans for their retirement,' Ian observed, 'but then never seen them through because something has happened'.

The lifting keel, he mentioned, was chosen so they could sail around the harbour as well as further afield. They have now come to appreciate its benefits so much that they would be reluctant to have a boat with a fixed keel except, perhaps, if they were planning serious blue-water cruising.

PBO