Croatia’s Salona Yachts is virtually unknown in our waters, but that’s about to change with the recent arrival of the super-slick Salona 41 (12.5m) performance cruiser.

**CROAT in the fast lane**

Salona is a relatively new production builder based near the ancient Croatian city of Split. But in the 10 years since its establishment it has developed a reputation for seriously-fast performance cruisers, with the accent on performance. Any follower of the European racing circuit won’t have failed to notice Salona’s growing presence on the podiums.

The facility produces about 60 boats a year, and also runs a charter company operating out of Split. There are four models: the 35, 38, 41 and 44 (all are upgrades of earlier Salona designs), and the latest addition, the company’s new 60, is nearing completion.

All are from the drawing board of J&J Yacht Design, one of Europe’s hottest teams that has received Boat of the Year awards in France, Germany and the US for 17 separate designs. One of Salona’s earlier models (the 37, no longer built) was judged the Croatian Boat of the Year (2006), European Yacht of the Year (2007) and US Boat of the Year (2007). Pedigree and credentials abound.

The company’s meteoric performance can also be attributed in part to the significant investment from Germany’s Prevent Group, an industrial conglomerate involved with, among other things, luxury car seat manufacturing.
The boats are represented here by Auckland’s Richard Wardenburg, the local agent for Greenline Hybrid boats (manufactured in Slovenia) and Maestral RIBs, built at the same Salona facility.

The new 41 Zealous is the only Salona in New Zealand currently, but she wasn’t the first. An earlier-generation Salona 45 was imported a few years ago, although she’s subsequently moved on to Australia.

Zealous belongs to Aucklander Brent McKenzie, a competitive sailor with a strong racing heritage. His grandfather won a Tanner Cup, and both his sons are New Zealand sailing representatives. He’s fairly blunt about his plans: racing, complemented by family cruising, in that order. Brent is happy to show perspective owners over the boat via contact through his www.salonapromotions.co.nz website.

Much of his rationale for selecting the Salona relates to its vacuum-infused, lightweight hull that weighs just 7.2 tonnes.
To that end he selected the optional ‘performance’ upgrade package, coupled with a relatively basic interior fit-out. More on all of this in a minute, but I can tell you the boat’s very quick and super-responsive. She feels like she’s alive.

Test sails in new boats are always a privilege, but the Salona was doubly so because we had an ace helmsman putting her through her paces. Emirates New Zealand skipper Dean Barker has an association with Salona through his previous involvement with Nexus Marine Instruments (Salona has standardised on the brand), and he was a major drawcard at the launch of the new 38 in Croatia last year. Barker likes the vessels. He’s toured the facility extensively and is particularly impressed by the standard of manufacturing, the boats’ performance and balance, and their versatility – the ability to easily tweak the performance/cruising equation to specific preferences. Salonas carry the Germanischer Lloyd stamp.

**SPEED GENES**

Clean decks, flush-mounted hatches, and sheets and lines running in covered channels are all fairly standard drag-reducing features on modern production yachts, but the Salona carries a few additional items that hint at her performance bias.

Chief among these is the internal stainless steel frame interconnecting the keel, mast and rod rigging. It’s a super-strong, integrated unit designed to spread the load from the shrouds and keel across a wider section of the hull. Effectively, it eliminates performance-sapping flex and allows the boat to be driven hard.

She carries a tall fractional rig with two pairs of swept spreaders, easily-tuned by a hydraulically-tensioned backstay. The performance package upgrade includes rod rigging (12mm and 10mm shrouds) and a deep fin-keel with a torpedo bulb (IRC-optimised). The boat draws 2.25m.

The upgrade also adds Dyneema running rigging, Harken’s Black Magic deck gear and a 0.85m carbon fibre bowsprit to the deal. A carbon fibre mast is another option, however McKenzie elected to stay with the
standard aluminium model, but he did tick the box for the carbon fibre spinnaker pole.

Add in the below-deck jib furler and the German continuous mainsheet system running under the side decks, and you begin to understand the brand’s reputation for slippery performance.

The twin helms are mounted on angled pedestals, and McKenzie has added consoles to the pedestals for the GPS unit and electric winch controls. There are two electric winches, one for the halyards (port side cabin top) and one for the port side primary. There wasn’t much point in electrifying both primaries given the continuous mainsheet system.

McKenzie declined the standard dacron sails on offer from Salona, electing to have all the sails manufactured locally by North Sails. Zealous’ 3DL wardrobe comprises the main, #1 and #2. The main and #2 are full-batten sails. The #3 is a furling jib, while the #4 has removable battens, designed for racing or cruising. Downwind sails are an asymmetrical gennaker and a symmetrical spinnaker.

There are two features I particularly like about the 41, and one less enchanting. The boat has an excellent, spacious cockpit and to take full advantage of it the centre table is easily removed, giving the crew plenty of room. The teak infills used to cover the gutter (containing the traveller) when at anchor is a great idea too – no stubbed toes.

I also fancy the well-designed lazy-jack system that can be easily removed.
for sailing, and the sail covers roll up neatly against the boom, minimising aerodynamic drag.

What I don’t like is the lack of bags/lockers for the tails. As a racing-oriented boat there are plenty of lines and sheets collecting in the cockpit. I can appreciate that in the heat of battle they’re being handled constantly by a full crew, but in short-handed cruising mode you could find yourself unravelling a viper’s nest. Could they retrofit a few bags?

That said the boat performs splendidly. We didn’t have much wind (8-10 knots), but flying her scarlet gennaker we ticked along at a very smooth eight knots.

Particularly noteworthy is her acceleration in the puffs. With Barker furiously pumping the hydraulic tensioner, she climbed upwind (pointing around 25°-27°) at just over seven knots.

I also liked the open transom, but with just two life-lines between you and the briny it takes a bit of getting used to.

**ACCOMMODATION**

The 41 is available in four interior layouts and with different levels of styling. McKenzie’s focus on speed means he has opted for a relatively minimalist finish. It’s not bad, but it’s nothing like the options offered in the more cruise-oriented designs. For example, where the 41 offers polished timber floors, Zealous has lightweight composite panels.

She was still waiting for her squabs and cushions during our visit, so rather than use images of a bare interior the accompanying images reflect the Salona 41 in her more cruise-oriented livery.

Layout options include three-cabin and/or two-bathroom arrangements. Zealous is the two-cabin, one-toilet variant. This has the main cabin in the forepeak, with another large double bed in the port aft cabin. In fact, the bed is so large the cabin is more like a rumpus room.

The bathroom is opposite and contains a vanity, pull-out shower and toilet. The port settee in the saloon converts to a double bed, and with another single on the opposite side, the boat can sleep seven. A Webasto diesel heater keeps things toasty down below.

Contemporary is the best word to describe the interior styling – clean, straight lines and edges – with the mahogany panelling contrasting nicely with light vinyl.

The galley, to port, is compact but well-designed with easy-to-clean flat surfaces.

“I also like the open transom, but with just two life-lines between you and the briny, it takes a bit of getting used to.”
and I particularly liked the two separate fridges (one top-loading, with a front-loader below). The gimbaled oven/cooker only carries two burners though, so gourmet meals may test your culinary skills.

My favourite feature has nothing to do with her performance or aesthetics. It’s her 3kW, 240-volt generator. Zealous uses the hybrid technology that is becoming increasingly popular in Europe, with the compact generator incorporated into the driveline between the 40hp Yanmar engine and sail drive. It’s unobtrusive, easy to use, and very clever.

McKenzie selected it because of those electric winches – it will help to replenish the batteries after a hard day’s racing. There are four batteries: a 100Ah start battery, twin 170Ah house batteries, and another 170Ah unit for the electric winches. LED lights help to minimise the load.

Zealous implies lots of enthusiasm and passion, and I think it will be an apt name in the hands of the McKenzie family, especially on race days. Its base price of €159,000 (approx NZ$251,000) means it will be interesting to see if the brand gains any traction against its better-known European competitors. I sense its speed will strike a chord with many club racers.
Boating's Verdict
If you like sailing fast and thrive on adrenalin, this is a contender worthy of your consideration. It has plenty of upgrade and layout options so tailoring the design to your specific needs and preferences will be easy. Don't forget to tick the box for the in-line generator – very cool.

Pros
- Slick performance, stainless steel internal frame, versatile cockpit.

Cons
- Sheet mayhem in the cockpit.

Salona 41
- loa 12.5m ➤ lwl 11.45m ➤ beam 3.84m ➤ draft 2.25m ➤ ballast 2400kg ➤ DSPL (empty) 7200kg ➤ I 15.8m ➤ J 4.8m ➤ P 15.6m ➤ E 6.78m ➤ main 53.5m²
- genoa 57.6m² ➤ total sail area 111m² ➤ fresh water tank 220 litres ➤ black water tank 42 litres ➤ fuel tank 220 litres ➤ engine 40hp Yanmar
- base price from $251,000 ➤ design category A (Ocean) ➤ CE certification GL ➤ design J&J ➤ contact Richard Wardenburg, 09 478 2220 or 027 492 6216

Salona

Sizes available: 35' - 38' - 41' - 44' - 60'

Greenline: Hybrid
Sizes available: 33' - 40' - 46' - 57' - 70' - 87'

Phone for a sea trial in one of our boats from $250,000

Contact: Richard Wardenburg • Ph: (09) 478 2220 • Mob: 0274 92 6216 • Email: richard@hybridboats.co.nz
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