

# Beneteau First 235

## Sailboat Data and In-Depth Review

The **Beneteau First 235** is a compact cruiser-racer introduced in 1986 by renowned French yacht builder Beneteau and designed by Jean-Marie Finot of Groupe Finot. Developed during a period when trailerable sailboats were gaining popularity, the First 235 was aimed at sailors who wanted the versatility of a small boat without sacrificing the excitement of performance sailing. With over 700 units produced until the early 1990s, it remains a beloved choice for coastal cruisers, weekend racers, and sailing enthusiasts who value portability, simplicity, and spirited sailing.

Intended for both novice sailors and seasoned skippers looking for a fun and responsive boat, the First 235 successfully blends affordability, clever design, and practical performance in a hull that can be easily trailered and launched.

### Design and Construction

The First 235 features a fiberglass monohull with sleek, modern lines that have aged remarkably well. At 23.5 feet (7.2 meters) in length with a beam of 8'2" (2.49 meters), it strikes a balance between compactness and usable space. The hull design incorporates a moderately plumb bow, a wide beam carried aft, and a slightly rounded sheer, offering both good interior volume and efficient waterline length for speed.

Several keel configurations were offered: a swing keel for shallow water access and trailer convenience, a fixed fin keel for better performance upwind, and a wing keel variant popular in U.S. markets. The boat's twin rudders — rare for vessels of this size — provide excellent control when heeled and allow for shallower draft options without compromising handling.

Rigging is a fractional sloop, which allows for better mainsail control and simplifies sail handling, particularly under varying wind conditions. The deck layout is straightforward, with all lines led aft, enabling singlehanded sailing with ease. Construction quality reflects Beneteau's production

standards of the era: robust for coastal use, with solid glass below the waterline and cored deck structures above.

## Performance

Despite its modest size, the First 235 sails like a larger and more performance-oriented yacht. Its light displacement (approximately 2,400 lbs or 1,090 kg) combined with a relatively generous sail plan results in a high Sail Area to Displacement (SA/D) ratio, giving it excellent light-air responsiveness. Hull speed is around 6.0 knots, but in favorable reaching conditions, it often exceeds this thanks to its slippery hull and generous beam aft.

The twin rudder setup gives the boat balanced and responsive handling, even when heeled over, and contributes to a forgiving and confident ride in gusty conditions. The boat tracks well and points higher than expected for its class, especially with the fin keel. Though not intended as a competitive racing platform, it performs admirably in club races and casual regattas.

Downwind, it's lively and fun, benefiting from the hull form and wide stern, which adds planing potential and improves stability in following seas. While it can't match the upwind punch of a purpose-built racer, it remains engaging and satisfying to sail.

## Comfort and Accommodations

Interior space is surprisingly generous given the boat's 23.5-foot length. The layout typically features a V-berth forward, two quarter berths aft, a small galley to port, and a portable marine toilet (head) to starboard. The open-plan layout enhances the sense of space, and though standing headroom is limited (approximately 5'0"–5'4" depending on placement), it feels airy and uncluttered for a boat of this size.

It's officially rated to sleep four adults, but it's more realistically comfortable for two or three on overnight trips. Storage is minimal but smartly distributed, with compartments under berths and cabinetry in the galley area. A sliding hatch and multiple opening ports provide decent ventilation.

Amenities are basic — a simple alcohol stove, limited freshwater capacity (typically 10–15 gallons), and no fixed refrigeration — but are sufficient for weekend cruising. The accommodations reflect the boat's mission: functional, compact, and surprisingly livable for short trips.

## **Safety and Practicality**

The First 235 is particularly well-suited for coastal cruising, lakes, and inshore waters. Its trailerable size and optional swing keel make it easy to transport, launch, and store, which is a major advantage for sailors without permanent moorings. Setup and rigging are straightforward, allowing one or two people to prepare the boat quickly.

On deck, non-skid surfaces and sensible handholds contribute to safe movement, while the deep cockpit provides a secure space for crew and passengers. Sail handling is made simple with the controls within easy reach, and reefing can be done efficiently thanks to the slab reefing system.

However, this is not a bluewater boat. While stable and well-behaved in coastal chop, it lacks the displacement, tankage, and structural reinforcement for offshore conditions. In protected waters, though, it's a solid and confidence-inspiring platform.

## **Known Issues with the Beneteau First 235**

Most issues reported with the Beneteau First 235 are related to age and owner maintenance rather than inherent design flaws. However, there are a few commonly noted concerns:

- Keel pivot wear (swing keel models): Over time, the pivot mechanism for the swing keel can wear or seize if not properly maintained. Regular inspection and lubrication are essential.
- Water intrusion through deck fittings: Like many boats of this era, poorly bedded or aging deck hardware can lead to leaks, particularly around stanchions and ports.
- Rudder system wear: The twin rudder system works well when maintained, but the

mounting brackets and bushings may develop play or corrosion, especially in saltwater environments.

- Limited tankage and systems: As a design choice, the boat was not equipped with pressurized water, holding tanks, or electrical systems beyond the basics, which may limit extended cruising without upgrades.
- Headroom and condensation: Some owners report issues with condensation inside due to limited insulation and tight spaces, especially during colder nights.

None of these issues are unique to the First 235, but prospective buyers should carefully

## Conclusion

The Beneteau First 235 is an impressively designed pocket cruiser-racer that offers a well-rounded package of performance, livability, and portability. Its strengths lie in its agile sailing characteristics, clever use of space, and approachable systems, making it ideal for sailors who want to enjoy a responsive and fun boat without the complexity and cost of larger yachts.

While it does have limitations — notably in offshore suitability, headroom, and cruising systems — those are expected in this class and are offset by its versatility and charm. Whether for day sailing, weekend getaways, or casual racing, the First 235 remains a rewarding and accessible choice for both beginners and experienced sailors seeking freedom on the water.

## Specifications

|               |                           |
|---------------|---------------------------|
| Hull Type:    | Fin w/transom hung rudder |
| Rigging Type: | Fractional Sloop          |
| LOA:          | 23.33 ft / 7.11 m         |

|                              |                        |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>LWL:</b>                  | 20.25 ft / 6.17 m      |
| <b>Sail Area (reported):</b> | 248.00 ft² / 23.04 m²  |
| <b>Beam:</b>                 | 8.17 ft / 2.49 m       |
| <b>Displacement:</b>         | 2,826.00 lb / 1,282 kg |
| <b>Ballast:</b>              | 825.00 lb / 374 kg     |
| <b>Max Draft:</b>            | 3.80 ft / 1.16 m       |
| <b>Construction:</b>         | Fiberglass (FG)        |
| <b>First Built:</b>          | 1986                   |
| <b>Last Built:</b>           | 1991                   |
| <b>Number Built:</b>         | 680                    |
| <b>Builder:</b>              | Beneteau               |
| <b>Designer:</b>             | Group Finot            |

### Sailboat Calculations

|                                   |                    |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>S.A. / Displ.:</b>             | 19.90              |
| <b>Bal. / Displ.:</b>             | 29.19              |
| <b>Disp. / Len.:</b>              | 151.93             |
| <b>Comfort Ratio:</b>             | 12.57              |
| <b>Capsize Screening Formula:</b> | 2.31               |
| <b>Stability Number (S#):</b>     | 3.75               |
| <b>Hull Speed:</b>                | 6.03 kn            |
| <b>Pounds/Inch Immersion:</b>     | 591.14 pounds/inch |

### Rig and Sail Particulars

|                                       |                       |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>I:</b>                             | 28.61 ft / 8.72 m     |
| <b>J:</b>                             | 7.87 ft / 2.40 m      |
| <b>P:</b>                             | 26.41 ft / 8.05 m     |
| <b>E:</b>                             | 10.30 ft / 3.14 m     |
| <b>S.A. Fore:</b>                     | 112.58 ft² / 10.46 m² |
| <b>S.A. Main:</b>                     | 136.01 ft² / 12.64 m² |
| <b>S.A. Total (100% Fore + Main):</b> | 248.59 ft² / 23.09 m² |
| <b>S.A. / Displ. (calc.):</b>         | 19.95                 |

**Est. Forestay Length:**

29.67 ft / 9.04 m

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- Complete [catalog of Beneteau sailboats](#) analyzed on our website