

Absolute 56 Fly

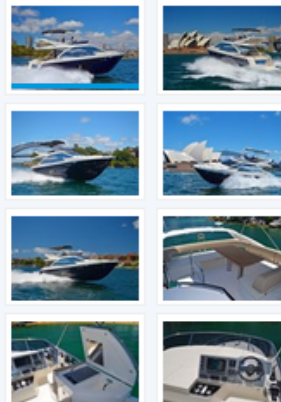
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Image 1 of 31

World first test of sharp Italian flybridge cruiser with IPS 800s

LIKES

- >> Great use of space and full-beam stateroom
- >> Terrific outdoor entertaining and lounging 'stations'
- >> Storage space including huge handy lazarette
- >> First-rate engineering, plumbing and electrical systems
- >> Truly functional and fashionable flybridge cruiser for our way of boating

NOT SO MUCH

- >> No extractor fans in the bathrooms
- >> Radar might be useful for other owners
- >> A little spray blow-back in the cockpit after hard running

OVERVIEW

- Pod-driven pioneer returns to the Australian luxury-boat market

We boarded this first-ever Absolute 56 with a spring in our step. This boating writer had to go back to 2008 for our last encounter with these stunning luxury cruisers. Tellingly, that 56 STC tested six years ago is still built by Absolute today. This exemplifies the progressive nature of this ultra-modern Italian yard.

Absolute is always ahead of its time and puts itself firmly at the cutting edge of luxury-boat design. The company was formed in 2002 by two founders of Gobbi (lovely sports cruisers, too). Located a short distance from Milan, where style matters, Absolute lives by the saying "*lo stile di vita*" or stylish living.

Externally, the Absolutes look *alla moda*. The mouldings are at once complex and fair. Internally, the sense of light is eye opening, the finishes at the forefront of fashion, yet the wow factor doesn't come at the expense of utility. Underfloor the engineering is first rate from a yard that builds 150-200 boats a year.

Following a GFC-inspired hiatus, Absolute returns to Australia courtesy of Premier Marine, located at fittingly flash Rose Bay, Sydney Harbour. The story goes that Principal Steve Hannes – son of Hanimex founder, a boating enthusiast and boat importer – saw the brand at the 2012 Cannes Boat Show. In the display were six new models at a time when others had just a few.

Hannes says he was looking for "a range of awesome flybridges" and the boats seemed a perfect fit for his Sydney dealership, complementing existing boutique marques including Chris-Craft, Fauscher, Baia (not yet imported), and mainstream Regal.

The 56 Fly, a development of the 55 Fly it supplants, is a pod-driven flybridge flyer with sporty handling. Absolute has been a pioneer of pod-driven boats and worked with Volvo Penta from the inception of IPS.

There are other ranges to choose from, most notably a Sport Yacht family of seven Absolutes from 40 to 70 feet without upper stations. But the Flybridge boats are best represented, with nine models from 40 to 72 feet, and the upper decks and second helm stations don't command a big price premium (just \$30,000 on the 56, we're told).



A 64 Fly sister ship is now on its way to Sydney, while Luxury Boat Syndicates at Rose Bay had three shares remaining at the time of writing for a 45 Fly, each costing \$145,000 plus \$1163 a month in outgoings. Look for our story on that new syndication company soon.

Meantime, back to the 56 Fly...

PRICE & EQUIPMENT

- In the ballpark for a luxury European boat

The base engines for the 56 Fly are twin D6 IPS 600s (435hp). You can get triple IPS 600s or, as per the test boat, twin D11 IPS 800s (625hp). These latter engines are the best match, producing 27 knots cruise for five litres per mile and better economy than the other engine combinations, according to the official data.

Among the other key options on our test boat were upgraded generator and tropical-strength air con, Raymarine 12in multifunction displays, 240V flybridge grill, six instead of four opening saloon doors to create a free-flowing effect, extra wrap-around cockpit seat, blue painted hull, 40in retractable TV in saloon, and bedding.

There was a terrific lazarette that can be fitted out as crew quarters if you want. Except for the end-of-year Christmas cruise, you won't need hired hands on the Absolute 56. The storage space, on the other hand, is welcome for carrying watersports kit, your boat-cleaning gear, spare lines, balloon fenders for raft ups, and so on.

The hydraulic swim platform upgrade provides somewhere to tote the tender and, with a 500kg-plus lift capacity, a big one at that.

All told, you get a very complete boat equipped right for the owner coming out of a Regal 52 Sports Coupe. Radar, a tender and watermaker are possible inclusions if you plan to cruise away.

As tested, at the time of writing, the Absolute 56 has a \$1.7 million ticket and a starting price of \$1.55 million. The Fairline 50 we tested last year cost \$1.5 million, while the latest Princess P52 (a bigger boat) was \$1.689. So the Absolute is competitively priced.

DECK DESIGNS

- Lots of outdoor zones, sun pads and dining settings

The 56 Fly is amazingly practical for a boat built in Italy where fashion can be the sole driver of design. It will make a great platform for big-city boating, being open-plan and accommodating, ready to entertain family and friends. The different 'stations' throughout the boat add to the amenity.

The hydraulic swim platform (also useful lowered to dampen roll on the anchor) leads to a watertight door in the transom leading into the lazarette, where we noted a stack of lifejackets, cleaning brooms and boat hook in racks, rubber-backed flooring and big transom windows for natural light.

Above the lazarette is an aft sun pad that, using a couple of the U-shaped lounge cushions, becomes even more extensive. Yet, even extended, you're still left with a decent lunch area.

We also like the fact that the U-shaped cockpit setting, big enough for six, hides mostly under the flybridge overhang. Shade is welcome at lunch. Add a few teak chairs (retrieved from the lazarette) and you can boost seating to eight without hindering the thoroughfare.

There's clever cockpit storage, like the dedicated fender stowage and overhead hatch intended for the liferaft (but which might be utilised for a TV), while the embossed-vinyl upholstery looks smart. Teak decks flow from the cockpit through the big saloon doors to meld into its timber flooring.

Meantime, access to the foredeck is along semi-bulwarks backed by a high and far-reaching bow rail with intermediate wire. It's kid and dog friendly all the way to the twin flip-up sun pads for two couples. Another 'station' on the foredeck. The stainless deck gear is first rate and the elliptical rails a nice touch.

Next comes the flybridge, accessed via an ergonomic ladder with big timber treads. It hasn't full weather protection, but the bimini does cast shade over another terrific U-shaped lounge and dinette big enough for eight. Storage exists under the seats, there's an L-shaped lounge opposite the starboard helm, and an, er, absolutely sprawling sun pad forward with flip-up backrests.

Traced by a very solid elliptical rail and deep windshield, the bridge sun pad will be safe for kids while cruising alongside the helm.

Behind the helm seat, the integrated amenities centre sports an icemaker/fridge, hot-rock grill and sink. Barbecue on the bridge or pull out the Weber from the lazarette, plonk it on the swim platform, and cook for a crowd.

Time for a recap...



Thus far you have sun pads on the transom, bow and bridge; two outdoor dining areas, one up top under a bimini, the other in the cockpit beneath a moulded hardtop; a big lazarette for storage; plenty of floor space in a generous cockpit; safe walkaround decks; plus something extra, a handy starboard-side door leading into the lower helm station that will be handy while docking.

LAYOUT AND ACCOMMODATION

- More glass, more class and generous accommodation

The aft galley is in demand these days. Besides catering straight to cockpit setting there's an internal dinette right opposite. This will seat six with a loose chair for the chef. Bottle storage is in the table base. Galley amenities include upright fridge/freezer, two-burner glass cooktop with range hood, combi microwave oven, dishwasher and stylish mixer atop a square sink. A washer/dryer is an option.

The grain of the walnut timber is a striking feature and the joinery executed deftly, contrasting with the lime-look practical oak floor and bone leather upholstery. It's that understated elegance thing that will go to the next level with all the LEDs blazing at night. An electric opening portside window and the electric door alongside the helm deliver fresh air if you're not making your own.

A step up leads you from galley to the forward saloon where there's a U-shaped lounge around a coffee table, opposite a two-person settee with large concealed television behind and drawers holding supplied crockery below. But the scene playing out through the exceptionally deep mirror-glass windows will be engaging. Views are commanding from the lower helm, its seat slightly wider than a single with a snappy flip-up bolster action.

The three cabin/two bathroom layout places a large VIP queen-sized island berth in the deep bow. The contrasting timber bedhead is a feature, while his and her hanging lockers and open shelves add to the practicality. All cabins have fixed and opening portholes, trick magnetic door catches and high-quality hinges. Thick composite doors provide sound insulation.

The two en suites greet you with large oval wash basins, trendy mixers, marble-look splashbacks and large separate shower stalls. You will also notice the head, shoulder, and foot room, even in the third cabin to starboard with its adult-sized twin single beds.

Of course, the stateroom is full beam, with headroom but the area above the pillows of the king-sized island bed. There are leather-topped side tables, a settee and sideboard opposite. At the foot of the bed is a vanity with pouf and a thoughtful storage locker for soft bags carry-on bags and shoes. It's a glorious stateroom, with big windows, an en suite a few steps away, a sense of something special from the finishes including silk ceiling liners.

HULL & ENGINEERING

- One-piece structure with great engineering

Absolute employs a so-called Integrated Structural System (ISS) whereby a solid fibreglass hull is strengthened by a 3D structural grid. Bonded to the grid are the plywood and composite bulkheads, floors and ceilings, ultimately creating a one-piece or monocoque structure. Composite decks are bonded *and* through-bolted; the 56 certainly felt stiff.

We were mightily impressed by the engineering, plumbing manifolds and electrical systems. Everything is clearly labelled and accessible including strainers on the centreline, the hot-water service between the pods, the wing fuel tanks with sight gauges, the fuel filters and generator forward (it was barely audible in the master stateroom), and the terrific plumbing with common overboard discharge. See the detail photos. The boat was bundled with an 1800W inverter for silent-ship operation, too.

ON THE WATER

- Sporty with scope for driver input

There are joysticks at both helm stations, sports wheels that fall to hand, and the neat Volvo fly-by-wire shifts. The lower helm had a large colour Volvo Penta engine-monitoring panel and well-directed air-con vents. But by and large, with just single 12in Raymarine screens, they are simple helm stations devoid of clutter.

As with so many pod-driven boats, the Absolute 56 rides high. It exhibits excellent hole shot and very good sight lines from the upper helm, but the attitude is bow up, so you need to tab the boat to make it run level and reduce that running angle when driving from inside.

The high freeboard and fine entry keep the water at bay and, after our lengthy, and at times fast-and-furious test, there was only a light misting on the saloon doors and cockpit upholstery. It proved a quiet, dashing and compliant cruiser on the water, at speed or bobbing about on the decks.

At 2000rpm, we recorded 25.3 knots cruise and 160lt/hr consumption for a range of 270 nautical miles that you will get from 90 per cent of the enlarged 1900-litre fuel supply. The official data using these IPS 800s states a range of 342 miles at 27 knots.



At the comfortable cruising groove of 21-22 knots at 1800rpm, we noted 144lt/hr for a safe range of 255 miles. But at (very) fast cruise of 30 knots at 2200rpm we were using 189lt/hr for a safe range of 270 miles again. So you may as well go hard if you can. Top speed of 34-35 knots was recorded.

VERDICT

- *Ticks a lot of our boxes*

If you want the genuine Italian pleasure-boating experience, Absolute delivers. It offers trend-setting nautical style, cutting-edge finishes, design ingenuity, driving pleasure, generous sizing, and luxurious living areas.

Perhaps the pivotal thing, though, is that Absolute pioneered production boats with pod drives. It was one of the first pleasure-boat builders to go down this path, designing its boats especially for IPS and it shows.

The Absolute 56 ticks a lot of end-user boxes, with abundant outdoor 'stations', an aft galley and lounging areas with a sophisticated vibe, generous cabins, joysticks and snappy performance with the upgraded IPS 800s. The sense of space and all the seating is an achievement given the 56 is 10cm narrower and about the same length as the Princess 52. Therein one pod-driven advantage.

Though the styling mightn't be to all tastes, the new Absolute 56 will look the goods in a decade because it's cutting edge. One of the hardest luxe production cruisers to fault in a long time.

Specifications:

Price as tested: \$1.7 million including upgraded IPS 800s and options as detailed in test above (per exchange rate at time of publishing).

Priced from: \$1.55 million with standard Volvo IPS 600s

LOA: 16.65m including pulpit and standard swim platform

Beam: 4.65m

Draft: 1.10m

Weight: n/a

Sleeping: Six

Fuel capacity: 1900 litres

Water capacity: 560 litres

Passengers: Max 14

Engines: Caterpillar 625hp D11 Volvo Penta IPS 800

CE Category Rating: B

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