

Boat Tests

Over the years a number of magazines have conducted boat tests on both our production and home builder designs. Note, for copyright reasons some of the tests are abbreviated. However, full copies of the tests should be available (at a price) directly from the magazines. For photos please see the relevant design pages.

Boats tested include: Pixie, Strider, Wizard, Strider Club/Shadow, Gypsy, Sagitta, Eclipse, Flica, Banshee.

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Pixie Beach Cat GRP version (PBO) Excerpt from Practical Boat Owner, June 1985

Pixie is a fourteen-foot surf cat from the drawing board of Richard Woods. She has rounded Vee hulls which bite into the water doing away with the need for centerboards, so she is very easy to sail in shallow waters and off the beach. Pixie started life as stitch-and-glue plywood and epoxy design for amateur building but is also given the sophistication of GRP hulls and aluminium tube cross beams.

There is little doubt that the Pixie is a lively craft with an exciting performance. She is a not, however, as extreme as cats such as the famous Hobie, and as a result, is an ideal introductory craft for newcomers to small catamarans. Her hull sections are relatively full forward to avoid the possibility of digging the lee bow in and pitchpoling should you want to sail her to the limits.

Pixie has a trampoline between hulls so you would expect to get a little wet when sailing her in anything of a sea. Pixie's gunwales, formed by a turned down flange hull-to-deck joint, not only acts as spray rails but also add substantially to the stiffness of the hulls, make very secure hand holds when carrying the craft ashore and provides excellent anchor points for shroud plates without drilling through into the interior of the hulls.

The aluminium cross beams slot into snug housings in the hulls and the lacing down the centre of the trampoline bridge deck holds the whole thing together. Erecting the mast involves lacing the two shrouds onto the shroud plates, swinging the mast up on its step located on the front beam and tensioning the forestay onto the bridle between the bows. Running rigging is also kept to a minimum with a multipart main sheet onto the rear beam, a multipart kicking strap and a continuous loop jib sheet

Pixie is intended for single-handed sailing or for a crew of two. But I suspect that if you're in the party mood and the weather is warm, she will happily accommodate more. I sailed her with Richard Woods, her designer, and although she stretched parts of me that had lain dormant for many a year mainly because of her rather low boom - she carried our combined weight of around twenty-three stone with no problems whatsoever.

I found her responsive, easy to sail and thrilling. But at no time did she give me the feeling of sailing on a knife edge. For me the most exciting part of sailing the Pixie was feeling her reaction to the slightest change in wind pressure. At every gust she would accelerate, translating all the winds energy into forward motion or at least that's how it felt...being so close to the water aboard Pixie, you quickly become at one with machine and elements.

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Wizard trailable cat Excerpt from Practical Boat Owner, August 1994

When I first heard about the Wizard, it was the extravagant claims for high performance that caught my attention. According to her designers, Richard and Lilian Woods, she would be capable of 16 to 18 knots which, for a twenty-two footer, means that based on speed-length ratio calculations, she could better the performance of Robin Knox-Johnston's record-breaking catamaran, Enza.

Nevertheless, of equal importance was the claim that the Wizard is a very practical trailer-sailer. But no amount of claims could have prepared me for what was to follow on the slipway at Foss Quay, from where we started our test sail.

The Wizard was firmly lashed to her trailer at the top of the slip and I couldn't help thinking to myself that she was a little bit of an ugly duckling, sat there with her bridgedeck cabin perched high above her two under-slung hulls. Very quickly the transformation began. Lashings were removed and the trailer was manoeuvred onto the slipway, some yards above the, by then, encroaching water's edge.

First task was to lift the mast into its raising attitude and then winch out the hulls from their trailing position tucked under the bridgedeck. This involved no more than winding a winch mounted on a stout post on the trailer. A system of pulleys and lines gradually ease the beams towards the horizontal and in a matter of minutes she was transformed into what is recognizably an elegant little catamaran

Up until this point it had really only needed one person to do the work, with a second pair of eyes to ensure that everything was operating smoothly. But when it came to stepping the mast, a second pair of hands, though not vital, avoided an unnecessary balancing act. The mast was lifted back and located in its tabernacle. That was the only time direct muscle power was used - all went easily...

The mast was raised by using a line attached at the hounds and brought back to the trailer winch. A guiding hand ensured that the mast stayed in line whilst all the strain was taken by the winch. The rigging was completed by attaching her roller reefing system to the bow yoke. The whole operation had taken around twenty minutes of easy work certainly putting her within the day-sailing trailer-sailer category - provided you get your tides right

Auxiliary power is provided by an outboard mounted on a bracket attached to the rear of the bridgedeck. Instead of tilting the engine back, to clear the propeller from the water, the whole engine and bracket swings sideways. This worked very well and provided far less opportunity for ropes to become entangled with the leg when sailing. Being able to steer the engine in sympathy with the rudders gave extremely good manoeuvrability. Certainly, there was no difficulty getting in and out of the tightest corners. She motored ahead and astern equally well and could be made to stop quickly and in a straight line...

I could feel that Richard Woods' claims for speed were well founded. In around 12 knots of apparent wind, we slipped along, close reaching at a good six-knots plus. She was close winded, had very good directional stability and on the whole, was well balanced. Close reaching, very slight lee helm could be induced by having a tightly sheeted jib in combination with a wind-spilling mainsail. With the mainsheet hardened in a touch, she has a completely neutral helm...I found her an extremely easy boat to sail - a nice balance between a sensitive helm and good directional stability.

She tacked round positively without being too lively, and very quickly settled onto her new heading. Off the wind she was equally easy to handle and certainly gave the impression that she would be ideal for the newcomer to multihull sailing. If I were sailing her with small children aboard, I would, however, like to have seen some form of rail around the cockpit. But even without, I felt perfectly secure.

Each hull has space to accommodate two single berths. The area where a great deal of thought and clever design had been directed was in the bridgedeck cabin. For day-time use this has two settee berths with a table between, and a small, but very practical galley. A small amount of rearrangement converted the layout into a double berth. But what struck me most was the way in which the space within the deck-cabin was not divorced from the cockpit area.

When sailing, it made a perfect extension of the cockpit, where people could sit and relax, away from the main business of sailing the boat, but in touch with what's going on around them. When in port or at anchor, the central area of the cabin sole can be lowered to create a foot-well. When I first learned of this, I envisage a rather flexible affair. But in reality, it was very firm and made all the difference to comfort when sitting around the table.

I liked the concept of a practical trailer-sailer catamaran that can be rigged on the beach of slipway without having to lift or heave hulls into position. Yet the design was not compromised to make her easy to trail or rig. And as with most trailer-sailers, she can be used en route as caravan accommodation - albeit for just two people.

For a twenty-two footer, she's spacious and has the feel of a larger craft, and with the cruising rig, she would make a very good family boat with sufficient space and shelter to cater for the somewhat fickle British summers.

As a building project, built in strip planking, she should be within the capabilities of anyone with

reasonable woodworking skills. The designers advise that anyone new to boatbuilding should begin by making the bridgedeck and bridgedeck cabin. Depending on the results, the hulls can either be built, or bought from a specialist builder either constructed in glass-foam or strip planked. However, although the shape of Wizard's hulls looks sophisticated, cedar strip planking is very straightforward and should not present any problems.

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Strider (Boats)

After having passed some twenty odd years of cruising life safe in the conviction that the only prudent way of getting from A to B was in a nice solid yacht with a deep cockpit - self-draining of course and a hefty lump of lead bolted to the under body to prevent the whole affair from turning turtle, it came as a surprise to be seduced by an alternative form of transportation!

Aboard this craft, I found myself perched on a few square feet of terylene trampoline, gazing, not at reassuring and substantial timber coamings and bulkhead, but at spidery straddling beams of extruded aluminium alloy. Dammit all - there were two cabins one either side in each hull!

All right, you've guessed it. I was sailing one of these darned newfangled micro-multihull contraptions - and relying not on a lump of lead to avert a capsize but merely the designer's ability to do his sums correctly. Add to this the fact that I was proceeding in twelve knots of wind at upwards of eight knots, and you may have also guessed that I was sailing in the Woods Design twenty-four foot Strider. And loving every moment of it, too!

To be honest, Strider is not the first catamaran with a cruising capability that I have sailed, though she is the first of this new breed. These Micro's definitely have the accent on performance, and race very successfully, in open handicapped contests as well as their own events.

Strider was developed by her builders (Palamos, of Millbrook, Cornwall) to bridge the gap between more conventional and sedate multihull cruisers and small, hell-for leather daysailers. True, one would think twice about a protracted sea crossing in a Strider, but, with an eye on the shipping forecast and a reasonably fit and knowledgeable crew, the Channel Isles, or the coasts of France or Holland would be quite a feasible holiday objective.

The twin cabin arrangement could be described either as extremely practical or remarkably unsociable - it depends purely on the viewpoint! A couple cruising aboard - and the market for this type of boat is mainly amongst couples in the younger age bracket - could well make use of one hull for living space and the other for the stowage of wet gear.

Each hull has two centreline berths, and while a two burner cooker and grill could be installed in the 'dry' hull (along with chemical toilet, worktops etc.) the wet hull could simply be fitted with

a small single burner, handy for a brew-up for the watch keeper, along with the chart table, navigation aids etc. Come the end of the passage, once safely moored in harbour, simply pitch soggy oilskins into the 'wet' hull, move into the alternative saloon and snuggle into dry sleeping bags: then slam the hatch on the inhospitable world outside!

Although Strider's interior fitments are on the rudimentary side, any competent handyman could provide adequate working areas, lockers, shelves etc. Joinery work though, would have to be carried out with one eye on the additional weight, for each of the cat's hulls only weighs three hundred pounds lighter than many fourteen foot sailing dinghies!

Since the hulls are slim and shallow, there's not a lot of space to go walkabout down below, but that wide acreage of terylene trampoline - fitted with pockets for halyard stowage - that forms Strider's deck, makes up for that. In fine weather it is a sensational sun bed; in fact cushioned by the lines attaching it to the hulls, it resembles nothing so much as a giant size hammock! Coming down to earth, don't take car keys or cash on deck as it is all too easy to drop them through the trampoline joins! A rigid, moulded GRP footwell aft gives security for helmsman and crew when they are settled down to the serious business of sailing the boat.

And she is certainly a serious sailing boat, not however one which need be approached with trepidation for she is a docile cat and, once you have become accustomed to the startling acceleration (and the equally dramatic deceleration when coming head to wind) handling Strider is simplicity itself.

The boat I sailed was all the more impressive in that she was, literally, fresh from the factory, loaded onto her trailer and launched especially for 'Boats' magazine (in fact they were still constructing her the evening before when I drove down from London!)

Strider is quick and easy to rig in spite of a working sail area of 269 square feet, which is large in comparison with that of a monohull of similar length. The mast, which carries the uncomplicated three-quarter rig, is simply stayed with single shrouds and diamond spreaders although running backstays can be fitted to tighten the jib luff.

The sail plan does allow for a spinnaker, although on a boat capable of sustained speeds of around twelve knots, the wind speed is likely to be brought so far ahead as to make setting one impractical; for very light airs the optional masthead drifter could be useful too. As an extra, a fully battened mainsail is available; with the heavy roach, this increases the area of sail by 10%, and makes it very easy to stow as well!

Strider blows away at least one preconceived notion about catamarans in that she tacks surely and positively without the slightest tendency to fall away - and no need to back the jib. She is unusually light on the helm which is free of that 'dead' sensation common to many multi's. She appeared very well-balanced and will heave-to quietly and also trundle along placidly under the mainsail only, if called upon to do so: unfurl the jib and the acceleration is electrifying!

Coupled with the sensational speed is the absence of heel; at first there is the feeling that perhaps crew weight would be better sitting out than sprawling in comfort in the cockpit well, but it doesn't take long to relax and enjoy the ride. Indeed, Strider is so stable it is arguable whether, except in extreme conditions - and if the crew were dead set on playing 'silly beggars' - she could be induced to fly the weather hull; certainly her builders say she has never been known to.

Her high average speed would make a fifty-mile hop in settled weather quite possible and you can then dry out on a beach when you get there!

But what about her sea-keeping ability? Obviously, in the conditions encountered off Plymouth, it was difficult to assess. Judged by the criterion of a strictly cruising monohull, she would be wet and uncomfortable; compared to a sportier type I would say not much difference in it, for modern lightweights are pretty fond of chucking it green over the gang in the cockpit too.

Where she would score is in her ability to sail ahead of bad weather, and any cruise should be planned with careful consideration of alternative harbours should it cut up rough but the same, of course, holds good for any passage-making. Her high average speed would make a fifty-mile hop in settled weather quite possible, and with a well-equipped crew, quite ambitious cruises could be undertaken. The boom tent offered as an extra would certainly be an advantage in harbour.

Since the Strider draws only ten inches when the dagger boards are raised, the boat has a wide choice of sailing areas available - launch straight off a sandy beach in the Med, slip gently through the quiet East coast rivers, explore the delightful tidal harbours of Jersey and Guernsey; all are accessible whether arriving at the destination by sea or trailing overland. With her low all-up weight of around 900lbs, just about any car would be able to tow her. She can be assembled easily by a couple - this has been done in just under forty minutes, though it would probably be better to allow another half-hour for adjustments.

Descended from a successful line of out-and-out racing cats, the Strider had made quite a name for herself, turning in a remarkable performance in the Three Peaks race and, in the Micro Multihulls Worlds, held at Brighton last year, Striders walked off with 3rd, 5th and 6th places.

Personally I think that there is a great future for these essentially simple and cost-effective boats for they offer safe sailing coupled with exhilarating speed, if the crew wishes to take full advantage of it. And, even for a family with young children, the possibilities are endless; since she does not heel she would be less alarming than a monohull. On sunny days that trampoline is a great romping ground - keep 'am in buoyancy aids and harnesses though as not surprisingly, lifelines are not normally fitted.

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Strider Excerpt from Yachting World, October 1986

A small, fast, cruising catamaran available in complete or kit form.

If you are interested in the speed of multihulls and yet want more than just a day sailer, there is a growing number of small multihulls around with minimal accommodation, permitting somewhat spartan weekending or coastal cruising.

One such is Strider, designed by Richard and Lillian Woods of Torpoint, Cornwall. She is a 24ft (7-3m) performance cruising catamaran which has enjoyed increasing popularity since 1983 when she was first marketed...

We sailed No 27 in a fresh southwesterly breeze between the Isle of Wight and the Lymington River and developed a taste for the fast life. The owner of this particular example is interested in performance rather than creature comforts, so both hulls are fairly well stripped-out.

The port hull is fitted with forward and after berths - the head end of each berth forms a seat when the accommodation is not in use. The standard design permits a hinge-up gas stove to be fitted against the outboard topsides, the cook sitting on the head of the forward berth. The area between the berths is the 'saloon' accommodation and here the headroom is 4ft 6in

There is some stowage beneath the forward berths, but the volume beneath the after berths is used as a pair of watertight compartments. Watertight compartments are provided forward and a self-draining deck locker in each bow provides convenient stowage for warps, fenders and ground tackle. All the living accommodation is contained within the hulls.

The area between the forward main beam and the headstay bridle or bow beam is covered with netting. Aft this is a Terylene trampoline extending to the forward edge of the cockpit pan, which is a glassfibre moulding.

In standard form, Strider sets a mainsail with moderate roach and a fully battened head. A fully battened mainsail is available and this was carried on the yacht we sailed. The hulls are spaced by large diameter, aluminium alloy tubes set at the after end of the cockpit pan and ahead of the mast beam.

In standard trim, the forestay is taken to a bridle set between the bows, but the yacht on test had a forward beam assembly fitted and this stiffens the yacht considerably. The beams are held in place to their respective hulls by stainless steel strap clamps so the boat can be disassembled for trailing. A purpose-built road trailer can be trailed behind a small family car.

It was the work of a moment to set the mainsail and, bare-headed, we beat down the Lymington river towards the open water of the Solent. Under this rig the cat was well-balanced and remarkably close-winded for her type. She pushed along at an eager 5.5 knots and tacked reliably. She maintained way through each tack and set off with alacrity. Although the south-westerly wind gusted across the deck at 16-18 knots, the cat kept both feet firmly in the water

and remained docile and remarkably dry....

The helmsman sits on the deck area just abaft the accommodation access. Two people can sit here without overcrowding and they are afforded some protection when the spray starts flying by the after end of the raised house top. Although the tautly stretched trampoline was easy enough to move about upon and the raised house top of each hull created a pleasant feeling of security when working between them, the solid section of cockpit pan gives the cat almost a 'big boat' feel.

Lateral resistance is provided by a pair of hand-operated dagger boards, the cases of which are bonded against the inboard topside of each hull. This creates the minimum intrusion into the living space and allows each board to protrude from the top of each case alongside the edge of the trampoline where it is easy to reach. In the stiff breeze, the cat pushed to windward with enthusiasm, tacking through a commendable 80 degrees and requiring no help at all from a backed headsail to throw her onto a new tack. Acceleration was excellent and on a close reach she immediately leaped into a 15-knot stride.

The ends of the hulls are nicely balanced, there was very little tendency for the lee bow to bury even when we ran into the back of a wave with a little extra puff up our tail and the motion was pleasantly devoid of the jerkiness so often associated with fast multihulls. We felt that relatively long coastal passages could be achieved in moderate weather without the crew being too tired by the motion.

In her most basic form, Strider is a fast, light and exhilarating day sailer, but there is shelter within the hulls should the weather turn inclement. It is also possible, however, to fit out the cat as a relatively comfortable little cruiser with cooker, chart table both foldaway, maybe - and a chemical toilet. A simple curtain across the hull would provide acceptable privacy.

The cat is a very able performer, strongly built and has an attractive outboard profile. She is great fun to sail and, in both complete and kit form, represents very good value for money.

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Shadow/Strider Club Excerpt from Practical Boat Owner, February 1989

Designed by Richard and Lillian Woods, the Strider Club is a 24' long by 14'2" beam catamaran and her pedigree is that of a highly successful racing micro-multihull successfully bridged the historical divide between sensible cruising and highly competitive catamarans. But she has been detuned with a smaller rig and is one of the few small cruiser/racer catamarans aboard which the complete novice can cut his teeth without putting himself or his craft at undue risk.

There's no doubt that the most striking difference between the 'racing' Striders and the Club is that the Club sets just 202 sq. ft of sail compared with 285 sq. ft. Beneath the waterline things have changed too. Instead of the twin daggerboards that occupied the space alongside the

raised cabin area of each hull, the hulls have been given long, shallow fin keels, resulting in a draft of 1 ft 10 inches compared with just under 10 inches with the daggerboard versions - boards up.

The fixed keels may result in a small decrease in windward performance - though not much - but the advantages of simplified sailing, more room inside the hulls and full protection for the rudders when taking the ground, not to mention the fact that they make it far easier to dry out and scrub off her bottom, far outweigh any loss in performance. Doing away with the daggerboards has also allowed the repositioning of the hatches leading into the hulls. This gives easier access into the hulls and creates a more comfortable and protected area for the helmsman. Below decks it makes much more useable space with areas equally divided between the ends of each hull.

Another change, important to the cruising owner, is her large box-section moulded GRP mast-beam in place of an aluminium extrusion, and a solid GRP bridge deck in place of the main trampoline. This gives a secure feeling to the boat and gives good protection from flying spray. It also creates a 'fenced in' area where younger members of the crew can frolic without being in danger of falling over the front...a tent can be rigged beneath the boom to enclose around two-thirds of the bridge deck and extending out to the gunwales, encompassing the companionways. This provides a snug yet spacious living area and at night, two can sleep in comfort on an airbed on the bridge deck. An upstand forms a threshold to the tent to keep the interior dry and leaves an area of the deck free for boarding and so on. When sailing in light winds or rain, the tent can be left rigged to give shelter for the family.

But how did she sail? The short answer is that she's a very enjoyable craft to helm. I sailed her in a light breeze and in the shelter of Plymouth Sound, she slipped along without fuss. Out of the shelter of the sound the breeze strengthened and she really started to move. They claim that she can do nine knots in twenty-knots of wind and I'm sure they're not exaggerating.

Compared with her racing counterpart she has a dinghy-like sail area and is somewhat heavier, she is still a performance craft with a jolly good turn of speed. But although she's exciting to sail, I didn't find her frightening nor was she particularly difficult to handle - though a couple of times she did demonstrate that apparent wind direction is far more relevant to multihull sailing than to monohulls.

As for windward performance, she is certainly close winded and tacks round without fuss. She sailed under jib alone but is happier under main when we sailed with just one sail set. Her controls could not be more simple, with only two sheets and a kicking strap to worry about. To reduce sail she has conventional slab reefing on the main and roller reefing on the jib. On all points she is great fun to sail. She's light on the helm and responds quickly to her rudders.

Considering her background, I was interested to know how far she could be pressed before things become too lively for steady family sailing. I put this point to Richard Woods who

explained that the Club could be taken up to the top end of force five with full sail set without flying a hull. This figure is based on having a crew of three adults aboard...

For the newcomer to multihull sailing who wishes to combine fast cruising with family day sailing and learning to handle a lively catamaran, the Strider Club takes a lot of beating. If you are a competitive cat sailor used to fast lightweight catamarans, but now wish to take the family along, she will not disappoint.

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Shadow/Strider Club Excerpt from Yachting Monthly, March 1989

The concept of the Club has diverted from its cruiser-racer micro-multihull role to more of a daysailer/weekender knockabout funboat. She is detuned to a degree, although this doesn't stop her being a sparkling performer, but the addition of a full deck 'pan' bridgedeck has suddenly made sailing the boat a much drier and therefore more civilised affair.

A major change from the old boat is that the new Club is fitted with low aspect ratio fixed keels and fixed rudders, which makes her more forgiving and a simpler boat to sail. Any beachwork is also simplified with this configuration...Simplicity is all, and the longer you spend on the boat the more you see the beauty of it no electricity or complicated rigging; there aren't even any winches. A small 4hp, 360 degree swiveling outboard is mounted at the after end of the bridgedeck to push her into the corners that the sails won't take you, and so on.

Accommodation is about as basic as it can be. Single berths fore and aft in each cabin have moulded lockers beneath them, but owners of the Strider Club will probably need to add some netting pouches and a shelf here and there if living aboard regularly for weekend cruising.

....In flat conditions under power, the Strider is very maneuverable, with the swiveling outboard making her easily controlled....

...Sitting behind the deep mast crossbeam with back against the angled cabin side, crew are dry and comfortable with all sail controls easily at hand....

We had ideal conditions to sail the Strider Club, bright sunshine and Force 4, in which she revelled. She was so docile, light and fast, it almost seemed like sailing a dinghy. She slid upwind with no effort at all under full sail, making a steady 6 1/2 knots whilst tacking through 90 degrees. Off the wind the speed increased to around 8 knots, and broad reaching on a little swell let her surf to 10 1/2 knots peak speed, all the more exciting as you're so close to the water rushing past.

The Strider Club appears to be a very forgiving catamaran. We sailed her in Plymouth Sound where regular gusts come through the bays that could have given some hairy moments on other boats. She just seemed to pick up her bows and go, although at first my hand was firmly

on the mainsheet until confidence was gained.

This really is what the Strider Club is all about; the longer she is sailed, the more she grows on you. She is a practical little boat, can be dismantled quite easily and towed behind a car (she weighs just 800kg). However, with a good reefing system and, bearing in mind her size, a forgiving configuration, she makes a seaworthy coastal cruising boat which offers great enjoyment and satisfaction under sail.

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Gypsy Excerpt from Practical Boat Owner, June 1999

Richard Woods is no stranger to boating on a budget. Back in 1980 he designed a 30ft catamaran called Cockleshell Hero, built it for £1,500 and spent the next five years living aboard. If you don't want to wait until retirement - and then spend £50,000 or more on a suitable yacht for blue-water voyaging - the Woods philosophy has a lot going for it.

One of the most interesting features is the central bridgedeck cabin which, since it doesn't connect with the accommodation in the hulls, creates an entirely separate living area. As Richard explains, *"It's a very efficient use of space because, with a conventional full width bridgedeck cabin, you lose a couple of feet each side for the walkways down into the hulls more useful room and privacy if you split the accommodation up. You also have the bonus of a nice safe passage forward from the cockpit between the cuddy and hull cabins."*

Another feature I liked was sitting in the galley in the central cuddy right by the cockpit you can sit on the companionway step out of the weather, look forward through the cabin windows, keep an eye on the kettle and still be within easy reach of the tiller and mainsheet.

As you'd expect, accommodation in the Gypsy's hulls is distinctly cosy. There's room for two, 3ft-wide berths in the starboard hull or one berth and a workshop/tool store - plus a fold-down chart table and plenty of under-bunk stowage. Sacrificial bows and double floors ahead of the forward bulkheads are built into both hulls, to minimise drama in the event of a collision.

To port you find the heads and shower, plenty more stowage and a berth which could pass as a double for a honeymoon couple - but the central cuddy is far more civilised. Richard offset the 12in deep nacelle to starboard, creating a bigger under-bunk locker to port and reducing 'dead' space behind the cooker. *"People always think boats should be symmetrical,"* he said, *"and I've never seen this done before, but why shouldn't you?"*

Yet another benefit of the separate cabins is economy of building, since the cuddy, cockpit, beam and hulls can be built separately in a relatively small space and joined together at the end....Minimizing costs and ensuring easy building were priorities from the start hence the use of flat or single-curvature panels throughout, which enable the boat to be built in plywood by a competent amateur.

"One advantage of not being a professional boat-builder is that if I can build it, anyone can," said Richard. *'And this boat was designed to be built on a budget - not designed for professional construction and then built cheaply as that can lead to problems.'* Richard launched less than 12 months and 1,000 man-hours after starting work in his spare time during 1994; the next three years were spent finishing her off in the water.

By the time of my test sail last summer, he'd sold 20 sets of plans and the prototype was one of four boats already afloat between the Solent and Australia. Most owners have chosen the flat-bottomed hulls, but a round-bilge alternative is offered for building in cedar strip. *"If I were racing, I'd definitely have a round-bilge section,"* he said. *"On the other hand, building is easier with a flat bottom - the hull stays upright by itself and you can put the keels on last, so the boat stays low down while you're working on it.'..*

Her low aspect-ratio keels, moderate hull beam and modest rig mark her out as a cruiser, albeit a fairly nippy one. Her designer chose the size carefully, as he explained: *"My smaller central-cuddy designs - the Elf and Wizard - are suitable for coastal or cross-channel sailing. This time I wanted something bigger, but it also had to be the smallest boat that could sensibly be used for ocean cruising, to keep the cost down... 28ft is about the minimum that will carry the weight you need for long-distance cruising. The other factor is motion, or seakindliness. Then of course there's standing headroom it's not essential, but nice."*

For all her cruising pedigree, the Gypsy doesn't hang around. We were lucky to have a south-westerly breeze gusting to Force 6 in Plymouth on the day of my test, which gave us flat water in Cawsand Bay and some distinctly lumpy patches once clear of Penlee Point.

I soon found that anything under 5 knots feels like walking speed - she'd slip along effortlessly at 7 knots with two reefs and the full jib, and shoot straight up to 10 or 11 when hit by a 25-knot gust on the beam. Dramatic though it may sound if you're used to 28ft cruising monohull speeds, it was all very relaxing - as was heaving to, when she sat quietly crabbing at around half-a-knot with the jib backed.

... turning corners was surprisingly easy - she gybed round from a hove-to position without hesitation, never needed a backed jib when going about, and proved easy to tack even under main only. What's more, she'd complete a 360deg circle (starting through the wind) with the sheets pinned in. Given daggerboards rather than long, fixed keels, she'd undoubtedly spin more readily still - and upwind speed would be improved, especially in a seaway.

'The difference between daggerboards and keels is probably greater than between round-bilge and flat-bottom hulls," said Richard. *"With boards, the boat pitches less and points higher The effect won't be particularly pronounced upwind in a flat sea but, in a chop, boards give you a big advantage because they're working in deeper water Since shallow keels only go down about 18in, the boat tends- to slide with the surface drift"*.

I wasn't expecting too much in the way of windward performance from our flat-bottomed,

shallow-draft cruising cat. So I was pleasantly surprised when we maintained a steady 6 - 7 knots and according to the compass - tacked through around 80' in the steep seas off Penlee, though she still maintained an average of 5.5 knots, bobbing along with the sort of short, buoyant motion so characteristic of multihulls.

Not that it was uncomfortable - she showed no tendency to hobby-horse, and we only provoked the occasional muted thud from under the hulls and central nacelle when driving off a few degrees at around 6.5 knots. If life threatened to become too jerky for an enjoyable sail, hardening up a little proved to be the easy answer.

In Richard's words, "*The difference between a multihull and a monohull is that on a multihull, you go as fast as you like. On a monohull, you go as fast as you can.*" As fast as we comfortably could in these short, lumpy seas meant tacking through just over 100deg, which gave us a VMG of around 3 knots (disregarding leeway) - not spectacular, but reasonable for a 28ft cruising boat. Thanks to her rapid acceleration, I could pick exactly the right spot to bear away down the face of the waves - we frequently topped 11 knots, once hitting 12.8.

Had we not kept the reefs in for hardening up back in the sound later on, I've no doubt we'd have done even better. But in any case, if a similar size monohull had managed to pull away to windward, her crew wouldn't have seen us for spray once the sheets were cracked.

With such an enormous cockpit, you're spoiled for choice when it comes to helming positions. I favoured perching on the wide-topped coaming and steering with the tiller extension, but for longer stints you can drop down a level and lean back in the shelter of the hull cabin while still retaining good visibility. Either way, you stay remarkably dry - very little spray came abaft the mast all day..

To me, it all makes a lot of sense in theory and in practice. In fact, of all the cats I've sailed, the Gypsy presents about the strongest case in favour of cruising on two hulls. Even if you don't plan to build her yourself.

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Sagitta Excerpted from Practical Boat Owner, April 1993

We were soon under way and it was fascinating to see how easily she slipped through the almost mirror sea. She handled well, tacking without hesitation and answering accurately to her helm. But in those light airs, even her 500 sq ft was insufficient to demonstrate what she could really do so up went a very large cruising chute, set on the end of a modern aluminium bowsprit. This improved matters a little and provided enough push to at least give a hint of what she was capable of.

Her stability calculations certainly suggest that she has sufficient sail area to give her a very respectable performance and anyone thinking of using her exclusively for cruising may well

decide to have the smaller sail spread of her cruising rig. But that's one of the interesting features about this design.

Within the range, the owner has a great deal of flexibility with a choice of rigs and whether or not to have the dagger boards. Certainly, dagger boards improve windward performance, and aboard the Sagitta, the simple rope-and-pulley mechanisms by which they are raised and lowered worked well. But here again, I felt that the dedicated cruising owner would probably choose the low aspect ratio keel version.

The gentle conditions certainly gave me that opportunity to sample the comforts of her very spacious bridgedeck cockpit area which has a proper well, two extremely comfortable side seats, complete with upholstered back rests which, with dodgers, provide good protection against the weather. Visibility forward, when sitting at the tiller bar, is excellent and the nicely balanced helm makes light work of steering the boat. Sheets and halyards are easily accessible but don't intrude into the sitting area.

The Sagitta is powered by a single 9.9hp 4-stroke Yamaha outboard mounted in a well, set beneath the rear cockpit seat. The installation certainly worked well and although it could be argued that twin diesels would provide far better manoeuvrability, the counter is that the outboard costs far less, avoids holes in the hulls and is a fraction of the weight.

The actual layout is conventional with a large table and seating on the bridgedeck with 'working' and sleeping accommodation in the hulls. I suspect that sea-cooks will be particularly impressed by the galley.

She's a thoroughly modern, practical catamaran with sufficient design flexibility to appeal to anyone looking for performance combining style with comfort.

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Sagitta From-Multihull International, March 1992

I had the opportunity to sail Sagitta from Plymouth a few days after the Boat Show. So far this boat had sailed from Plymouth and on the Solent and made passages between. Not a huge mileage, but Richard and Lilian are confident that it meets their aims; after a brief showing against the Banshee they are happy that it is indeed a faster boat.

While the open bridgedeck versions of this 30ft class are unmistakably Woods' designs and the same shapes can be seen in the hulls of the Sagitta, the bridgedeck accommodation is curvaceous and similar in style to some French designs. Some might argue that it looks something of a hybrid but it is a tribute to their design skills that Richard and Lilian have made the shapes blend together so well and of course the curved coachroof provides a great deal of strength and extra headroom for very little weight.

There are deck lockers just forward of the coachroof windows and the whole of the forward

part of each hull is also devoted to storage with access only from the deck. Working around the boat proved straightforward with cleats well placed and ample safety precautions. She also proved easy to board which some of the more curvaceous catamarans are not.

The cockpit is huge - fully 12ft across and more than 6ft front to back, in fact, it's longer fore and aft than the inside of the saloon coachroof. This is very attractive for entertaining in harbour or taking a very large party sailing in the warm. But otherwise it is larger than could possibly be useful at sea, in fact crossing from one side to the other when tacking caused one to look for something to hold onto while making the long trip across.

The lifting rudder system and the daggerboard arrangements are the same as the Woods have used on earlier designs and proved just as satisfactory and straightforward.

Our sailing opportunity in Plymouth coincided with a southwesterly 25 to 35 knot wind (and sometimes a bit more) which provided good testing conditions to see whether she did indeed slam and how the boat felt in a strong wind and a moderate sea. However, the experience was somewhat spoiled by rigging which had stretched more than could be adjusted so the mast didn't get the support it would like and the jib luff looked horrible.

One can only guess what the performance would be like under normal conditions; we all know how expensive headstay sag can be when on the wind. That said, the boat certainly performed very well, she was going up wind with two reefs in the mainsail and a few rolls in the jib at a comfortable 8 knots plus while feeling as though she was not doing any more than 6.

The motion was remarkably pleasant, only occasionally was there a sound of a slam underneath and most of the time that seemed to be a wave hitting the inboard side of the lee hull, not the actual bridgedeck slamming at all. There was certainly no discomfort out in the cockpit, nor indeed inside when we tried the saloon for comfort. Some heavy spray came up onto the forward coachroof occasionally but there was no feeling at all that the boat was under any pressure.

Helming was a delight partly because the boat handled so very easily and felt responsive without any pressure on the helm and partly because one could sit on a comfortable cushion on a slatted seat and lean against a comfortable backrest with a spray dodger outboard. The view is excellent and you're nowhere near the edge of the boat, there is another two feet of hull further outboard again.

Richard demonstrated well just how easy sail trimming is, with everything to hand on the coachroof between the two saloon doorways. The daggerboards proved equally easy to work from the same place. All the Harken deck gear performed to the expected high standard and the Dolphin sails set well.

The Woods considered a two engine layout but have settled for one Yamaha 9.9hp electric start 4-stroke outboard which has proved satisfactory with manoeuvring in Port Solent lock proving

straightforward. The engine is mounted on a lifting tray in what appears to be the centre of three cockpit lockers and has been fitted with lines to the rudders which successfully assist handling. Certainly it seemed amply powerful and delightfully quiet during our experience.

There are accesses port and starboard to the saloon with a lower washboard in wood and the top half in perspex. This provides a nice arrangement as far as draughtproofing is concerned but it also provides the dilemma of where to stow all the boards when they are not in use. Hinged Bomar hatches are provided to further ease access and increase headroom in the step area.

Predictably the saloon seating and table area can convert to a large dinette while the table is the exception to the yellow and white style having a mottled blue and metallic surface. Distinctly hi-tech and unusual for a boat built in Cornwall. Furthermore, the table is in two separate pieces, each on a support so that either or both parts can be set up as a cockpit table. The mast support, just abaft the table, acts as a convenient handhold when walking across the saloon, when a slight crouch is required.

In the aft end of each hull is an amply wide double berth with a curtain across the forward end of it, far enough forward clear of the berth to allow changing room. There is useful locker space outboard, abaft the curtain and forward of the bunk cushions. Forward of the steps down into the starboard hull is the galley area which is extremely roomy and neatly laid out with lockers, drawers and fiddled shelves, some of them using higher spaces which would otherwise be wasted.

An eye level oven and grill is an attractive feature set in the forward end of the galley area while a two-burner hob, draining sink and deep sink are outboard. On the port side, forward of the steps down into that hull, there is a small navigation area outboard with a fold-down shelf which could be used as a table in an emergency, but would really be rather inadequate, small and poorly supported for the job. It would be much simpler to carry the navigation kit up to the main saloon table and simply use this space as a nav gear storage. Forward is a roomy heads compartment with hot and cold water while forward of the heads again is a good, big oilskin drying locker.

Headroom in the hulls is good throughout but the only ventilation comes from small hatches on the outboard sides of the hull which obviously can't be opened if the wind is on that side. In the saloon the forward centre window opens and, of course, the two hatches over the entrances.

An owner who wanted more berths could achieve this by arranging access forward from the heads and the galley to provide a single berth in what is now the forward storage areas in each hull which looked bigger than the boat could ever need.

Overall the Sagitta proved a comfortable boat at sea with an easy motion even in the prevailing lumpy conditions and easily ran up to 14 knots on a reach despite not increasing the sail area once we came off the wind. She tacked positively in the open sea and handled easily under power. The accommodation plan provides exactly what the Woods intended so that altogether

she makes a very attractive boat.

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Eclipse From-Latitudes and Attitudes, August 2006

Before discussing the Eclipse, indeed before even outlining why a catamaran makes a great cruising boat, let's first agree on what we all want from an ocean cruiser. One good double bunk, plus a sea berth useable when sailing to windward in 25 knots, is enough, although maybe a spare for friends or family is useful. More important are a big galley and a good heads compartment.

Absolutely essential is a comfortable saloon with an all round view. After all, when on land we don't choose to live in a basement, so why shouldn't cruisers, who spend most of their time at anchor, be able to look out at views of white sandy beaches and coconut palms? We also want a large, safe deck area and a boat that can look after us in bad weather. Shallow draft and good light-wind speed are further priorities.

Above all, a comfortable home on the water.

These requirements help explain why catamarans are now so popular as live-aboard cruising boats, for they offer fast, level sailing, with no heeling at sea and no rolling at anchor. One goes "inside" not "down below" and there will be all round vision from the saloon. Finally, there is an incredible level of comfort and useable space, both on deck and below, when compared to a similar length monohull.

Multihull critics will say, "Yes, that's all very well, but what about capsize?" In fact statistics collected by the MCA (the UK equivalent to the US Coastguard) list only a couple of hundred cruising catamaran capsizes world-wide during the last 40 years. Most were during races in the 1960-70's. Today the incidence of capsize is very low and is reducing steadily.

These days it seems one is much more likely to hear of a monohull that has lost its keel (as recently happened to several Bavaria yachts, not to mention to most of the swing keel race boats) than a live-aboard catamaran capsizing. Don't forget that ballasted monohulls are the only vessels in history that can theoretically recover from a knockdown. Fishing boats, motor yachts and traditional sailing ships can't. Furthermore, a monohull will only self right if it doesn't sink first through an open companionway hatch.

Most production catamarans are now designed for the charter market and not for cruising, thus they tend to be larger than strictly needed for a liveaboard couple. That's why the Maine Cat 30 and, especially, the Gemini 105 have been so successful.

Now joining these two mid-30ft designs is a catamaran designed and built in the UK - the Richard Woods designed 32ft Eclipse. Richard Woods has been sailing for nearly 50 years, and catamaran sailing for over 30. During this time he has lived on all sizes of both monohulls and

multihulls, from snow-decked British anchorages to the heat of the tropics. He is one of the world's most successful multihull designers and has sold nearly 2,000 designs.

Eclipse comes in two versions.

Either the version maximising performance, as seen in the prototype, which has daggerboards, tiller steering and a 9.9hp outboard engine. Or the cruising version fitted with shallow keels for windward work, twin 18hp diesel engines and wheel steering.

Clearly the daggerboarded boat will offer better performance while the cruising version is easier to sail, but still no slouch. Both versions use the same flared, round bilge hulls with a pronounced knuckle just above the waterline. This knuckle both increases the space inside and reduces wave slap under the bridgedeck. This starts well back and has 21in clearance even when loaded. The two versions also share essentially the same interior, deck layout and rig.

The rig follows the modern norm of a large fully battened mainsail and small, just overlapping, genoa. Halyards and reefing lines are all led aft, so there is never any need to go to the mast for reefing or sail handling. Forward are big sail and anchor lockers - the prototype carries 8 sails, 3 anchors, plus two 30 lb propane bottles.

Aft, the cockpit can seat twelve, while the wrap around cockpit seats are cushioned with 4in foam, making Eclipse one of the most comfortable of all sailboats. Think about it, when did you last drive a car with wooden seats?

Inside there is standing headroom in the saloon with all round vision. Six people can sit comfortably round the table, while the saloon also boasts a fixed 3ft x 2ft chart table with lots of space for electronics, charts and pilot books. The wet locker is also here, complete with a small seat, which makes putting on boots so much easier. The whole cabin is well ventilated with 7 opening ports and hatches. Book shelves total 8ft for paperbacks and 3 ft for large pilot books. Other shelves hold racks of CD's, DVD's, even potted plants.

The galley is centrally located in the starboard hull. A built-in oven and 3 burner stove, together with 20 sq ft of work top and masses of stowage space make the Eclipse galley bigger than those found on most 40fters. A large fridge-freezer is located under the forward bunk.

Overall, it has proven more than enough for two people living on board full time for 3 years and even cooking a roast Christmas dinner for 5 was no problem.

There is a 4ft wide double bunk aft in each hull. A bookshelf runs its full length. A hanging wardrobe for shore clothes is hidden behind the daggerboard case, while open lockers hold most sea-going wear. A large locker under each bunk can be used for dried food and spare bedding.

Many boats boast "vanity units", but Eclipse's is one of the few that can genuinely be used as such, as it's fitted with a mirror, a make-up table and a seat. The heads compartment is over 20

sq ft and has a moulded-in basin and large shower sump. A locker forward gives easy access to seacocks and can be used for stowing things like the vacuum cleaner, swimming gear and laundry.

Richard Woods built the prototype Eclipse for his own use. It has been well proven since launching in early 2001, as it has now raced and cruised over 15,000 miles and visited over 25 countries.

Everyone claims that their boat is faster than the competition, but in Eclipse's case that is no idle boast. Shortly after launching, when the boat was empty and sails new, Eclipse recorded its highest ever speed of 21 knots. Eclipse is naturally slower now, but even so GPS recorded speeds of 16 knots or more are still common, even when loaded for cruising.

It's rare for magazine boat tests to be sailed in ideal conditions, rarer yet for them to last more than a couple of hours. So in reality a magazine report doesn't give a very good impression of sailing performance. A far better test is to race a boat against its competitors on the race course.

The UK's Round the Island race is one of the biggest races in the world with typically 1700 starters, including over 50 multihulls. It is a 60 mile race starting and finishing at Cowes in the Solent and boats race right round the Isle of Wight so are certain to sail both to windward and off wind. Furthermore they will be sailed hard in the lumpy overfalls off the Needles and at high speed in flat water through the Solent.

Eclipse entered the 2002 event held in 15-20 knot winds and was easily the first cruising catamaran to finish. The next production catamaran was a 43ft Belize, which finished over one hour later. Eclipse also beat several F27 and Dragonfly trimarans boat for boat. Possibly a greater feat though, was to overtake Mumm30 racing monohulls to windward in the closing stages of the race. Who says multihulls don't go to windward? Boats like the J92 (racing monohulls the same length as Eclipse) were left far behind.

Under power the outboard version will cruise at 5.5 knots and motor flat out at 6. In comparison the twin diesel version reaches 7+ knots flat out. But more importantly, the twin diesels allow Eclipse to not just turn in its own length, but pivot on the spot.

There is no point having a fast boat if it is difficult or frightening to sail. Cruisers often say, "I don't want a fast boat" when they really mean "I don't want to be frightened" for no one, when pressed, ever admits to wanting a slow boat. Fortunately Eclipse is indeed safe and easy to sail. A small autopilot, Raymarine's ST1000, has steered Eclipse for thousands of miles in all conditions. When hand steered the twin tiller extensions are ones normally seen on a dinghy. So steering is always light; in fact Eclipse can usually be steered with just two fingers. Tacking is quick and positive, yet Eclipse will also sail "hands off" for long periods.

Normally Eclipse is reefed in 25 knots apparent wind. Under double reefed mainsail and a much

reduced genoa, Eclipse has day-sailed to windward in 50 knots. Offshore, Eclipse coped well in over 40 knots when crossing Biscay (the crew stayed below, steering using the remote-controlled autopilot - all round vision helped of course).

Following its successes on the race course, for the last three years the prototype Eclipse has been used as a live aboard cruiser. Eclipse left the UK in late 2002 and sailed two-handed across a stormy Bay of Biscay to the Canaries. From there, and now with three on board, Eclipse sailed across the Atlantic to the West Indies in 18 days. A single handed cruise through the West Indies and Bahamas followed, then double handed along the whole US eastern seaboard from Florida to Maine before heading south again, via Cuba, to Central America.

The main drawback for all small catamarans, and yes, there has to be one, is limited load carrying capacity. Having said that, the prototype Eclipse carries a sewing machine, watermaker, generator, 3 anchors, parachute sea anchor, Christmas tree, probably enough tools to rebuild the boat if necessary, and 3 computers (plus scanner, printer etc). Not to mention all the normal paraphernalia that a liveaboard couple need. There is even a rigid dinghy hung in davits, a solid fuel stove and a built-in safe. So load carrying is probably sufficient!

Maybe Eclipse can best be summed up in the words of the reporter from Practical Boat Owner (the UK's largest yachting magazine) who, after testing Eclipse extensively, wrote: "Eclipse makes you realise the value of a designer's practical, hands on experience. Everything works....Whatever your inclinations it's hard to deny the practicality of the Eclipse for long distance sailing. Or even for a quick whizz round the Isle of Wight"

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Flica 37 Excerpt from Yachting Monthly, January 1989

The Flica 37 is intended as a pure cruising catamaran, a modern boat that utilises both up-to-date construction techniques and design philosophy. The result is a catamaran with a safety-conscious wide beam, good bridgedeck clearance and comparatively light overall weight. Performance was an important criterion, as was comfort, and Woods Design appear to have created a happy balance between the two.

The hull design of the Flica 37 is broadly V shaped with rounded sections to soften the apex, and a full-length knuckle in the topsides above the waterline which serves to stiffen what is a fairly flat panel, and provide additional buoyancy and accommodation volume. The V-shaped hulls will make her a good load carrier in her ocean cruising role, which she is clearly intended for. She has full ends which, combined with the inherent flare, are intended to minimise pitching the Flica has a very pleasant sheerline which helps to create overall a good-looking vessel.

Compared to the original Flicas, the new 37 has extended sterns which serve several functions - they give her marginally improved load carrying, give the water a cleaner exit, help to dampen

pitching, and lastly with moulded-in steps make an easy passage aboard from a dinghy or pontoon.

The saloon is amidships, down a step from the cockpit level and a very spacious, well-lit area with ports all round. Hove-to, one could keep a reasonable watch from here whilst plotting a course or eating a meal from the large table. The latter slides up to the deckhead, opening up the seating which was otherwise not particularly accessible. Large flat surfaces forward are a luxury on which to put papers, magazines and even, of course, the potted plant.

The two forward cabins are identical, each offering plenty of room to change clothes, and a full length shelf into which several owners have stipulated a sink and vanity area be incorporated. The berth is 5ft wide, with an opening hatch above it and six spacious cave lockers lining the inboard side. At the forward end of each cabin is a single berth, quite satisfactory for a child but probably better adapted to a hanging locker.

The berths in the after cabins of the Flica 37 run athwartships, from waist down being under the cockpit sole...the cabins have ample elbow room and stowage.... the galley is a slave's dream with ample worktop space and more lockers, both drawers and cupboards, than we have space to catalogue here. There is a split-level cooker with a flush hob and eye-level oven - very easy to use. Hot and cold pressurised water is supplied as standard (with a wall-mounted gas heater) and it was nice to see that a hand-pumped, fresh water back-up is also supplied to the two sinks.

Moving around was quite easy, sidedeck widths are good and the non-skid appeared better than most. One is spoiled with deck area; the foredeck can accommodate an inflated dinghy in three or four places (assuming you don't want it on the platform designed for the purpose, right aft) without obstructing anything. Foredeck lockers are enormous and whilst we were sailing we were able to put the entire helmsman's seat assembly in one that had the deflated dinghy in it already.

The Flica 37 is conservatively rigged with a single-spreader masthead rig with shrouds well inboard to allow reasonable sheeting angles. A babystay is provided which can be adapted for use with the storm jib, making a snug heavy weather rig.

Under mainsail and No 1 genoa she made 6 knots on a beam reach in 7 knots of apparent wind, and our top speed was 7.2 knots on a reach when the apparent wind was 11 knots. In flat water to windward she made 5.5 knots in 14 knots apparent tacking through 90 degrees, but when there was an awkward land-bounced chop, she slowed down to 4-4 1/2 knots and needed 100 degrees to tack in. She clearly hated the conditions (although tacked under main alone, happily enough) and her bridgedeck slapped, rather than slammed, quite regularly.

As soon as the swell drew out into a regular pattern she added a knot to boat speed. The Flica's tacking ability is excellent and, with fairly large keels, she doesn't appear to make much leeway

in the conditions we sailed her in.

In general the Flica paced well in the light conditions we experienced and, as is normal with catamarans, seemed to be sailing effortlessly with little fuss or feel through the helm. We surmise that she'll need perhaps 15-17 knots of wind really to start showing her paces, when boat speeds of between 7-10 knots can be confidently expected off the wind.

The safety implications of a twin installation make it highly desirable. Not only does one have the obvious advantage of not worrying if one engine starts playing up, but the boat carries a full set of spares and a dual charging ability if one of the alternators gives trouble. If one starting battery is flat, it is possible to start up the other engine and recharge the bad battery bank. For the above reasons the twin engine installation is a major advantage for anyone considering long-distance cruising in the yacht.

One needs to experience manoeuvring a twin-engine catamaran to believe how handy they can be. With propellers 15ft apart, it seems there are very few corners or berths she can't be wriggled into or out of. Interestingly, she still manoeuvred well under a single engine, making 5.8 knots in flat water at 3,000rpm. Sound levels were below average in the main part of the accommodation.

ConclusionsThe Flica 37 represents a thoroughly modern cruising catamaran that thankfully eschews many of the old multihull preconceptions she is good-looking, very seaworthy, happily powers upwind and handles like a top under power.It is no coincidence that the Flica is being chosen by those heading off long-distance cruising; she makes a very good choice and, as multihulls go, will carry moderate loads without too great a penalty.

With her massive volume, it is hard not to be impressed by her accommodation which seems to go on forever. God forbid that anyone should try and fill all her lockers; they seem never-ending.

Overall, we came away from the Flica 37 feeling that she meets all the requirements made of a serious offshore cruising boat, whether that be home waters cruising or heading off for sunnier climes. It seems inevitable that she will become a well-travelled class.

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Banshee Excerpt from Yachting Monthly, November 1986

The Banshee, reviewed here, is the cruiser-racer option which, whilst maintaining a lot of accommodation, has generous (but not excessive) sail area with fully battened main, a lower coachroof profile and daggerboards and is powered by an outboard engine. She is intended as a fast cruiser with the capability to do well in races such as the Round Britain, Azores and Back or the Yachting Monthly Triangle.

One of the principal design features of the Banshee is her great beam; this has a number of

advantages, not least of which is less wave interaction between the hulls, much improved stability and, of course, more spacious accommodation than other multihull designs which stick to the more traditional 1:2 beam/length ratio. The hull shape is broadly a soft V, with rounded underwater sections and a knuckle in the topsides a foot or so above the waterline intended to cut down spray as well as increase panel strength and internal volume. The slightly veed shape, combined with ample freeboard, an attractive sheerline and bow overhang, gives the Banshee good seakeeping qualities.

Whichever way you look at it, the accommodation of the Banshee is vast by 35ft standards. A large sliding hatch opens up the saloon (in much the same way as the Catalacs) which is a wide cabin and not particularly deep. The seating here is ample for the numbers likely to be aboard, although the saloon is smaller than other more conventional 35ft cats.

The Banshee is intended as a cruiser-racer so, in order to keep the coachroof and windage low, there is only 1.37m (4ft 6in) headroom until you come down into the hulls, where it increases to 2.08m (6ft 6in). This headroom is ample for sitting around in the saloon and, whilst the large hatch opens up much of the bridgedeck area, it is nevertheless something of a crouch when you want to get from one hull to the other

To port, next to the saloon, is the navigation area, with ample space all round for stowing books, siting instruments and stowing a variety of equipment. The navigator is spoilt by a 93cm x 1.06m (35in X 40in) navigation table which has to be the largest ever fitted in a production 35ft cruiser.

In the port hull is a double quarterberth, .90m (34in) wide with sitting headroom, five good-sized bins for stowing clothes, etc. and an opening hatch to provide light and ventilation. Forward of this is the spacious heads compartment which can easily convert to a shower if the owner wishes. It is unfortunate (and unavoidable) that access to the port double cabin is through the heads, but it's a point you can forgive when you see the sheer size of this cabin with its 1.60m (5ft) wide double berth, full-length shelf/countertop, excellent hanging locker and six large cave bins that a couple using the cabin would be hard-pressed to fill. A cushioned seat runs the length of the cabin opposite the countertop, and there is an opening hatch over the berth.

In the starboard hull there is a double quarterberth the same as to port. The two 100 lit (22 gal) water tanks are fitted under these berths. The galley is wide enough for two people to pass and has a combination stainless sink/drain/cooker on the outboard side. An oven is an optional extra and has to be installed independently. Forward of the galley is a further double cabin, identical to the port side.

The rig is quite interesting, being three-quarter fractional with no standing or running backstays (allowing a generous mainsail roach) but her shrouds swept quite some way aft to the corners of the coachroof giving support for the forestay which sets a medium sized roller-reefing jib. A

drifter can be set in light airs from the masthead and an adjustable inner forestay is rigged to take the storm jib. The net result is a rig whose jib is an all-rounder used in most general conditions with sail area controlled by mainsail reefing. The spinnaker is set from the forestay hounds and needs no pole.

Under sail, first impressions were of great stability, even by multihull standards; her wide beam meant she heeled hardly at all and at no point did we feel pressed under full sail. In Force 3-4 she tacked unhesitatingly through 80 degrees making a steady 6-8 knots boat speed which increased quickly to 10-11 knots with the sheets cracked a touch. With her big daggerboards down, she showed no signs of any leeway. Beam reaching she was able to maintain a consistent 9-10 knots and our best speed of the day was 14 1/2 knots, powering up Southampton Water on a broad reach in gusty conditions.

Bridgedeck slamming is invariably a problem with most cruising catamarans but this was not the case on the Banshee. She sliced through the minimal seaway running without any fuss and, when we deliberately sailed close to a container ship dragging a good wash behind, the Banshee still didn't slam going through it. Although the bridgedeck clearance is not exceptionally high, the combination of an open trampoline foredeck (with the bridgedeck commencing a fair way aft) with good reserve buoyancy forward and widely spaced hulls seems to have cured this curse.

When I first saw the 9.9hp Yamaha outboard auxiliary, I doubted that it would be anywhere near big enough for even the most basic needs. I don't know where the power comes from, but the four stroke long shaft Yamaha had ample thrust to push the Banshee along at 6 knots at cruising revs. (going flat out only gave an extra knot speed. With a little bit of chop and a Force 3-4, the Banshee didn't seem to slow down under power as I'd expected, and one has to say that the outboard is amply powerful enough. The outboard is situated in a central mini-nacelle under the cockpit which also provides near self draining stowage for the often messy fuel tank.

The Banshee's concept is not dissimilar to a bigger version of the Iroquois catamaran updated into the 80's but proportionally much wider, resulting in a capable and powerful offshore cruising yacht well suited for ocean cruising. Her sailing performance is really quite scintillating for an eight-berth cruising boat and this sort of speed potential is going to open up a wider radius of cruising grounds from one's home port.

She is a modern catamaran a lot of people have been waiting for and clearly has a very rosy future.

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