

AN AGILE CAT



Forty foot is the sweet spot for a cruising catamaran as there's enough waterline and accommodation for couples, yet without too much bulk; so a few good reasons to view and sail the Leopard 40, writes KEVIN GREEN.

THE LEOPARD 40

The new Leopard 40 has unique features and sails very well for a cruising catamaran with mini keels. Photo Leopard Catamarans



An evolution of the Leopard 39, which I found to be a competent rather than outstanding boat when I sail tested, this new model is 25% greater in volume, surprisingly nimble, yet retains all the signature features of the South African brand. These include foredeck access directly from the saloon, a new and refreshing forward facing galley and the elevated starboard helm which gives the skipper commanding views of the four hull quarters. The new 40 is the entry level model in a range comprising the Leopard 44, 48 and 58 in sail. While the power range has the upcoming 43 along with the 51. Second only in production output to French builder Lagoon, the Robertson & Caine yard is a prolific maker of boats and supplies Leopard owner Tui Marine with all of its output – 180 catamarans last year. With these kinds of numbers, it's not surprising that I've found the Leopards to be highly functional boats. "We get a lot of feedback from our charter guests so if something's not right they let us know," laughs Sales Manager Pierre-Yves Chanau as we walk around hull #2 of the Leopard 40 in Nice harbour. As I write this, hull #3 is on its way to Sydney, Australia, so an ideal time for a good rummage through this three cabin (or four) cruising catamaran.



Leopard's unique saloon-to-bow walkway gives easy access for sunbathing or chilling out below the overhangs, which also shades the interior nicely. *Photo Kevin Green*

RENOWNED DESIGNER

This new model has the design input of Alex Simonis and Maarten Voogd, a Dutchman famous for his monohulls but who has penned some fast cats, including the carbon Q-Cat that he told me about a few months ago when I had the pleasure to race against him. So, as I walked around the Leopard 40, I was looking for signs that differentiated it from the armada of similar cruising cats. Looks can be deceiving of course and the profile of the new boat is very similar to the previous model – tall narrow hulls, especially at the bows but with a bridgedeck clearance of 0.78m. The

LEFT FROM TOP:

Quality fittings in the forward facing galley include Vitrifrigo drawer fridge, Corian surfaces and a high standard of joinery. *Photo Kevin Green*

Volume and floor space are at premium in the saloon; and the dinette table descends to become a berth. *Photo Leopard Catamarans*

The unusual forward facing galley is a functional workspace. *Photo Kevin Green*

Double shelves, ample ventilation and light are good points in the owner's berth. *Photo Leopard Catamarans*

The chart table faces forward, alongside the galley. *Photo Kevin Green*

same pronounced hard chine – that gives more beam up top where it's needed – runs from the bow to stern but more contemporary rectangular portlights are used now instead of rounded ones of the previous model.

On deck, the elongated hard top covers the entire aft cockpit where Leopard's trademark electric davit hoists the dinghy high above the water, while the hulls create bathing platforms on both quarters. Alfresco dining will be enjoyable with three large bench seats to throw cushions on and the stern one flips for swim parties. Deck fixtures are substantial all around including sensible midships cleats, cabin top grab rails and effective non-slip topsides. Other good features include corner seats integrated into the forward stanchions. A fairly conventional bow area includes an effective anchor layout of vertical 1000W Lewmar windlass with the 10mm chain wisely hidden in a gutter at the front of the smooth nacelle. There's also a secondary bow roller for a second anchor line. Nearby are large storage lockers which should cope with fenders and the optional watermaker plus Northern Lights 6kW generator set – the latter needed for running the air conditioner. Moving aft, the cockpit bench houses a three AGM battery bank (220amps), an upgrade from lead acid, and these have input from the solar panels. Near here is the elevated starboard helm which is well equipped with sizable Lewmar 45 winches, a bank of eight sturdy metal Spinlock XCS jammers for all sheets and halyards that run here via deck blocks. A slight downer is the proximity of the winches to one another which precludes simultaneous use unless you electrify one. At the helm, the Raymarine instrumentation, autopilot and plotter is ideally positioned, as are the analogue engine gauges and twin throttles. Behind the helm, on the fibreglass bimini is the mainsheet which now has blocks instead of a track as on the 39 but was easily controlled by me at the helm. The free space aft is used for two 70Watt solar panels.

SURPRISING SALOON

From the helm, it's an easy step down to the cockpit where you are then on the same level as the saloon, with a simple sliding door and window used but deep scuppers should prevent the ingress of water. Volume is maximised by the vertical sides which are cleverly disguised by the exterior saloon sloping bulkheads. But a surprise awaits here. The layout has been radically changed from the previous model and is unique in this size of cruiser, as the galley is now forward beside the foredeck door, alongside the navigation

RIGHT FROM TOP:

An unusual interior, with the forward galley distinguishes the Leopard 40. *Photo Leopard Catamarans*

The owner's forward area has a separate shower cubicle and plenty of natural light along with ventilation. *Photo Leopard Catamarans*

The owner's suite is complete with vanity table, crawl-in double bunk and privacy door. *Photo Leopard Catamarans*

The saloon dinette is very airy and adjoins the outside dinette. *Photo Kevin Green*

The unique bow walkway is a major attraction for potential buyers, the Leopard sales team tell me. *Photo Kevin Green*





station which also faces the bows; so the skipper easily knows where he or she is heading. This leaves the saloon aft area for the L-shaped lounge and plenty fresh air if you slide the large window open. Hard wearing PVC is used on furnishings and the joinery is precise as only CNC machining can do but I'd prefer rounded corners to reduce bruising at sea.

Usefully, the table descends to become a bed and is strongly supported, a good example of the 'strong and simple' Leopard philosophy gleaned from the experience of supplying large numbers of boats to a global market. So there's nothing too quirky or awkward. The galley is a good example of this despite its innovative location, as it has a functional L-shaped configuration, hard wearing real Corian worktops, energy saving drawer refrigeration (one Vitrifigo freezer and one fridge); and deep single sink. A three burner gas hob and oven takes care of cooking but there's space for a microwave as well, along with ample cupboards. Stepping down into the starboard hull brings me to the owner's suite.

Closed-off by a sliding door, the entire hull is devoted to the owner with a step-in double berth (1.50m by 2.05m) aft, office table/vanity midships and large bathroom forward. A moveable stool at the vanity ensures the floor space is kept clear. Nice touches in the owner's berth include adjustable reading lights, a spacious hanging locker and most importantly, plenty headroom. One niggle for me was the smallish hull windows and skylights but it's not a show-stopper; although I'd like an escape hatch which also enhances natural light. But quality features abound such as sturdy fittings and a high standard of joinery throughout. The owner's bathroom is spacious with shower cubicle separated by a perspex door and electric head. Portside, the layout has the bathroom central and berths fore and aft. The forward berth contains an inner second bunk, ideal for children while aft is a

LEFT FROM TOP:

The rather confined navigation station will struggle to house electronics. *Photo Kevin Green*

Substantial construction on the dinette table supports its secondary role as bed. *Photo Kevin Green*

The foredeck is clutter-free and the guard rail seats offer a thrilling ride. *Photo Kevin Green*

All fresco entertaining is good with fully covered cockpit and note the moveable bench backrest. *Photo Kevin Green*

Short runs for all lines to the single bank of jammers, so easily controlled by one person. *Photo Kevin Green*



The large roached mainsail is an option worth having on the Leopard 40. *Photo Kevin Green*



The steering bimini has a useful window on the GRP to view the mainsail. *Photo Kevin Green*

substantial double; and with plenty volume to avoid stuffiness. Other features include ample lockers, bookshelves all around, and storage under the forward berth. Ventilation is good throughout with Lewmar hatches topside, electric fans and opening portlights.

SIMPLE RIG

Ease of use is the raison d'etre of Leopard so there's no unpleasant surprises with the sail plan either.

The rig is a Z-Spars mast supported by outboard wire shrouds, attached to substantial chain plates. A hard, sprung vang is used to tension the boom. Ullman sails came from the factory, with a 120% genoa as standard. In addition the Performance Pack was optioned, which includes a large roached mainsail and bowsprit-hung cruising chute. Hull construction is conventional balsa core but vacuum bonded for higher consistency and to ensure no moisture ingress while E-glass stitched fabric is used for maximum strength. As is best for a cruising catamaran, mini keels are used with spade rudders ending above them, so that grounding is possible without damage. Hull engine access is via two large deck hatches but is impeded by the steering cross bar. However there's enough working space around the Yanmars' for maintenance and our review boat had been upgraded from the standard 20-29hp, with two bladed fixed propellers; but folding ones would be my preference for blue water cruising.

RIVIERA SAILING

The sun shone brightly over us as we turned the Leopard 40 in the tight confines of Nice harbour, the ancient stone quays sheltering an interesting mix of superyachts and antique fishing boats, before we reached the breakwater where a brisk breeze ruffled the Mediterranean. Motoring out I gunned the twin Yanmars that propelled us to nearly

RIGHT FROM TOP:

All lines come through a bank of jammers and an electric Lewmar is a good option, in addition to the manual one. *Photo Kevin Green*

A smooth bridgedeck deflects waves and there's enough clearance from the waterline. *Photo Kevin Green*

Access to the Yanmar 29hp saildrive is slightly hampered by the steering bar but there's plenty space around the engine for maintenance. *Photo Kevin Green*

The owner's ensuite has a lot of bright GRP but is wipe-clean and spacious. *Photo Kevin Green*

The Lewmar windlass and rode is fully enclosed so safe for the kids to play near. *Photo Kevin Green*



8kts without any juddering or complaints from the mechanical steering, before easing off to hoist the sails. With the Raymarine wind gauge showing 20kts true we put one reef in the mainsail – using the optional electric halyard winch to tighten the two line setup – before rolling half a genoa as we sped off west towards the glamorous skyline of Monte Carlo. The Leopard 40 surged forward strongly, surprising me with its nimbleness I must confess as its smaller sibling hadn't given me this joie de vivre, so I was more than happy to steer us to windward. Height was another pleasant surprise for what is a conventional cruising catamaran – and I can't substantiate the manufacturer's claims that it trounced the opposition Nautitech and Lagoon during the La Grande Motte sea trials – but undoubtedly the Leopard 40 sails well. My notes showed that we managed 7.1kts SOG at 55°

with 22.5kts apparent and the steering was responsive and enjoyable. My only mistake was tacking, when I forgot to ease the mainsail to help us round in the bumpy conditions but with all controls to hand this was quickly done. As we neared the coast the sea breeze became heavier and just strong enough to induce us to tuck in a second reef before I bore off to 120° and watched the SOG rise to 7.7kts. Handily, the hardtop steerer's bimini has a window in it so I could check the battens of the mainsail hadn't stuck while going through a gybe – which went without drama – as all sheets are to hand for the steerer. Similarly, dropping the Dacron mainsail was done without much effort as it concertinaed into the lazy jacks and my host for the day Arnold walked out on the GRP bimini to zip the bag up. Neatly done, like all aspects of this very competent cruising catamaran.



All controls are centralised so ideal for short-handed sailing and the fibreglass bimini can have a plastic front for weather protection.
Photo Kevin Green

LEOPARD 40 SPECIFICATIONS



Price	
Base price ex-factory	\$AU449,000
Australian delivered	\$AU659,000 (taxes paid)
LOA	11.99m (39ft 4in)
LWL	11.62m
Beam	6.72m
Draft	1.25m
Bridgedeck clearance (light)	0.78m
Displacement (light)	9,340kg
sail area	
Mainsail	56.4sqm
Genoa	39.5 sqm
Gennaker	94.0 sqm
Fuel	360L
Water capacity	780L
Engines	2 x 29hp sail drives
Design	Robertson&Caine/
Simonis-Voogd	

Distributor
Leopard Catamarans Australia
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