



# Leopard 46

## 'Stepped' hulls for SPEED and COMFORT

*The 46 clearly prefers sailing off the wind, especially in light weather.*

The South-African builder, Leopard Catamarans, supplier of the Sunsail and Moorings charter companies, has acquired a solid reputation with its robust cruising catamarans. The 46, replaced recently by the 44 and the 48, will not disappoint mile-eaters.

*Text: Emmanuel van Deth  
Photos by the author*

Launched in 2006, the Leopard 46 already belongs to the generation of South African cats which have 'gone far': you must understand that the models from the beginning of the 2000s, and their very low bridgedecks are no longer current. The 46 is thus a boat whose architectural design is compara-

ble with the French productions. And the architects - Gino Morelli and Pete Melvin - are far from being beginners: to their credit, for example, they have the famous record-breaker, PlayStation. The hulls are characterized by a very marked longitudinal 'step' on each side. The break runs almost to the bows. The idea is to retain slim forward sections, and a limited waterline beam - less wetted surface area, for speed in light weather and higher average speeds in stronger breezes - without affecting the comfort of the cabins nestling in the hulls. The advantage of this quite high 'step': no 'slapping' during the night, at anchor. The appendages selected are classic: two bolted-on stub keels - and a pair of quite short rudders, so they don't get hit in a collision with objects on the surface of the water, and also don't bear any weight when the boat is beached. Construction is in glass fibre/balsa sandwich with a vinylester resin, which is a good guarantee against the risks of osmosis, especially in warm and

brackish water. The structure is solid: there are no squeaks or suspect deformations even in strong winds and rough seas. Just a glance at the doors will give you a quick idea: heavy, but robust!

**DESIGNED FOR LONG-TERM CRUISING, NOT RACING!**

On deck, the builder has prioritized ease of movement and safety: all the passages are wide and uncluttered, and there are handrails everywhere. The cockpit has a large table, offset to port, and another seat opposite. All this seating is remarkably well protected by a rigid bimini - imposing, perhaps, but very effective for protection from the midday sun and tropical squalls. The forward part of the coachroof slopes gently - nothing like the vertical facade of our Lagoons, and to a lesser extent, the cats from Fountaine Pajot - and is equipped with big steps, which allow easy access to the boom, whilst acting as very effective slatted shutters to protect the brid-

gedeck from the most vertical of the sun's rays. Between the two bows there is a huge trampoline, very welcoming in good conditions. The builder has not skimped on mooring cleats: there are four on each side. As for the anchor gear, it is stowed just forward of the coachroof, for better weight centring.

On the water, its quite moderate displacement - close to that of a Fountaine or a Catana - and the powerful sail plan result in good performance in light weather. On condition (we can never repeat this enough) that you opt for folding propellers, and make sure you don't over-equip or overload the boat. In from 5 to 8 knots of wind, the 46 is capable of the same speed, which is flattering for a cruising catamaran. The Morelli/Melvin design is however much more comfortable downwind under spinnaker - during our test sail, we noted 11.2 knots, with 20 knots of true wind on the beam.

#### RAISED STEERING POSITION

Two reasons for this: the boat makes quite a bit of leeway, especially at low speed, no doubt due to a slightly deficient keel arrangement, and the

pointing angle is not wonderful. Here it is the genoa tracks which are concerned. They are too offset, and don't allow the sail to be sheeted in enough. All that is needed is to attach a barber hauler (a simple 5m line is sufficient) from the clew, to the roller of the windward traveller then to the winch. Let's talk about the winches: there are only two of them around the steering position. This is sufficient when cruising, but not for advanced manoeuvring with a crew. But who will do that? Because this Leopard 46 is an ideal support for dawdling in the tropics. For this boat, racing means launching into a nice transat from Las Palmas to St Lucia - we are thinking of the ARC, of course. The helmsman has a nice raised two-seater steering position, but the bimini masks the view of the sails, and access is only via the exterior. "On the latest models," Arnaud Savignat from Leopard France points out, "an interior access via the cockpit has been arranged." A modification which is completely conceivable on the first examples of the series... Inside, the nacelle is full of light and volume. Access is easy - the openings are wide and the step is discreet. Even in hot weather, it is comfortable, thanks to the care taken with the ventilation. Movements are easy, thanks to nice uncluttered floor areas. Great comfort then, with a U-shaped galley accessible from the outside, a 1.65m by 0.5m, forward-facing chart table and a saloon which is big enough for eight to ten people to eat, with two stools. The woodwork in cherry is classic, and the finishing is flattering. The hulls are fitted out with three or four cabins with bathrooms, electric WCs and opening hatches for good air circulation. They are comfortable to sleep in, but, for a long stay, there is not much space for belongings.



The sail plan is quite generous... The mast is tall; the roach and the genoa's overlap are significant.



Volume, light, ease of movement: the 46's nacelle is a success.



The cockpit is remarkably well protected from the sun and the bad weather thanks to the bimini... which is more like an upper deck.



#### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Builder: Leopard Catamarans
Architect: Morelli & Melvin
Material: balsa/polyester sandwich
Hull length: 14.12 m
Waterline length: 13.59 m
Beam: 7.57m
Draft: 1.35 m
Unladen weight: 10.98 t
Mainsail area: 92 m <sup>2</sup>
Genoa area: 42 m <sup>2</sup>
Number of cabins: 3 or 4
Engines: 2 x 40 hp
Water: 780 l
Diesel: 700 l
Production: 198 examples from 2006 to 2012
Second-hand price: 280,000 euros

#### ○ The points to be checked

Another strong catamaran on which no structural problems are to be feared. Most Leopards, built in South Africa, go to Europe or the American mainland by sea, whilst many builders favour the barges. The boats stand up well, you are more likely to note details in the finishing, such as perfectible Sikaflex joints, door catches which may have come off after intense use, or the bilge pumps. Things which must be checked on any boat over five years old.



- ◆ Robust construction which stands up well to intensive use - charter, ocean cruising.
- ◆ Good performance.
- ◆ It's the last with the steps forward.



- ◆ Leeway when close-hauled in light weather.
- ◆ Three quarters of the 46s started their life as charter boats; they are sometimes a bit worse for wear.
- ◆ At the helm, reduced view of the sail plan..