

OPTIONAL SPRIT

GERMAN SHEETING

BLUNT TRANSOMS

BY ZUZANA PROCHAZKA

LEOPARD 42

An outstanding “greatest hits” package from South Africa

Sticking with its proven design formula, but also cherry-picking popular features from its recent models, Leopard Catamarans has launched a “best of” package with this new boat that sold nearly 30 units before hull #1 even touched water. Like a greatest hits album, the Leopard 42 combines the best of its 40ft and 50ft sailing siblings, even grabbing some of the interior styling from the Leopard 53 powercat. The result has been rolling off the production line in unprecedented numbers.

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

Naval architects Simonis Voogd and South African builder Robertson and Caine created a boat that cruising couples as well as full charter groups will love. The construction consists of a foam-cored vacuum infusion topped by a one-piece cabinhouse—a departure from the three-section tops on the boat’s predecessors. The sailplan is a fairly simple one, with an aluminum mast and 1,256ft² of canvas (including the square-top main). German, or bridle-style, sheeting controls the large, fully-battened Ullman main.

Like other Leopards, the 42 has what looks like a vang, which is unusual on a cat. However, its main function isn’t sail trim, but rather keeping the boom from hitting the cabintop accidentally when the mainsail is lowered without tensioning the topping lift. Like the Leopard 45, the 42 also has an inviting lounge atop the cabinhouse. In a nice touch it allows the boom to stay at the same height as it would normally be, so the boat doesn’t have that high, tiered cake profile.

ON DECK

Aft, the transoms are blunt for easier boarding from a dock, and the flush-level cockpit flows to the interior without interruption. As with other Leopards, there’s a glass door that provides immediate access forward from the saloon as well. Unlike the 45 where there’s a forward cockpit with seats, on the 42 you’ll find a giant sunbed topping a cavernous stowage space for hiding extra sails or a 6kW genset.

The bows include crashboxes with watertight bulkheads just ahead of the sleeping cabins. Although the trampoline on the standard model is uninterrupted, the addition of the optional bow sprit necessitates an accompanying compression arm, which splits the net in two. That was the arrangement on hull #1 that served as our test boat.

The helm is integrated into the starboard cabinhouse and has the standard Leopard hardtop with a skylight overhead, so you can see the mainsail. To port, a staircase leads to the L-shaped lounge above. Floating steps are used to avoid obscuring visibility from the cockpit.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Our test boat was laid out in the three-cabin owner’s version, with the master suite taking up the entire starboard hull, which is surprisingly devoid of supporting/obscuring structures. There’s a nice clean view from the bed all the way forward to the shower, made possible in part by the strength of a stainless-steel “H” frame that is central to the entire structure and minimizes bulkhead intrusion. Where there are bulkheads, they’re now made of fiberglass and not GRP-covered plywood.

An alternate layout offers four cabins and four heads, which might have been a tough squeeze aboard the Leopard 40 with its 39ft of LOA, but which works well here and will be welcomed in charter.

The saloon has the standard Leopard features: back-to-

LOA 41ft 7in LWL 40ft 10in BEAM 23ft 1in DRAFT 4ft 7in DISPLACEMENT 27,485lb SAIL AREA 1,256ft² WATER/FUEL (GAL) 174/158 ENGINES 2 x 45 hp Yanmar saildrive SA/D RATIO 22 D/L RATIO 179 DESIGNER Simonis Voogd BUILDER Robertson and Caine, South Africa U.S. DISTRIBUTOR Leopard Catamarans, Clearwater, FL, leopardcatamarans.com PRICE \$669,000 (as tested)

back settees between the saloon and cockpit, a forward galley in the starboard corner and a nav desk by the glass door to port. Also still present are twin Virtrifrigo drawers by the aft sliding door. However, the electrical panel, which used to be above, has been replaced by an optional TV, with the panel moving down near the steps close to the starboard cabin, a clean and workable solution.

Headroom was improved and is now 6ft 7in in the saloon, which also allows the windows to grow and bring in more light. One niggling issue (for which there isn’t really a good fix) is the height of the steps leading down to the cabins. The rise is unusually high, but there’s no way to cover the height difference between the two levels without adding a step at the bottom for which there is no room. Going up isn’t a problem. However, coming down can be tough on the knees, especially when the boat is bouncing.

The 42 sailing borrowed its interior styling and color scheme from the Leopard 53 powercat. The finish is called “Driftwood,” and it’s not as stark as the previous gray tone, but rather more of a warmer “greige.” Accented with soft white trim, the result is a nice one.

Useful features include a tap at the galley sink that purifies (as opposed to just filtering) water, which means you can make full use of the water tanks. Raymarine’s digital switching platform minimizes clutter, and lithium batteries are an option. A genset is available, but not necessary for most house-power needs, assuming you don’t spec air conditioning.

UNDER SAIL

It was a crazy breezy day in Fort Lauderdale for our test sail, with gusts to 30 knots; so gnarly, in fact, the decision was made to avoid going outside and stay in the still windy but less choppy channel in Dania Beach. Tacking in the channel wasn’t easy as it’s not very wide, and the big 501ft² genoa had to be pulled through the foretriangle each time we came about. Nonetheless, we did see 9 knots in a 25-knot wind gust at a 60 degrees apparent wind angle.

Unlike other cats that offer a self-tacking jib for easier



singlehanding and a Code 0 for downwind work, Leopards don’t have a self-tacker track, opting instead for a more powerful, overlapping headsail. Although we had a Code 0, we didn’t unfurl it on such a blustery day. However, we still managed 6-8 knots on various points of sail on flat water.

Hull #1 had a standard rig and fixed props. A performance package that includes upgraded rigging and folding props will likely add 1-3 knots of sailing speed. The option is another \$27,000, but that’s a rounding error on a price tag that may be upward of \$670,000 for a fully-equipped model and well worth it in my book.

UNDER POWER

Standard propulsion is provided by twin 45hp Yanmar diesels with saildrives. Cruising speed is around 8-9 knots on calm seas. The hatches for the engine compartments open inboard, which makes things safer for anyone climbing down, since they don’t have to worry about pushed out onto the swim steps. Move the steering tie-rod mechanism to one side, and the entry is easy, with good room all around the two engines for basic service work.

Fuel tankage is 158 gal of diesel. The water tanks, which most cats have just ahead of the mast, moved down into the hulls. This keeps the center of gravity low and also moves the water weight aft, out of the bow area to help minimize hobby horsing. The tanks also shrank. The Leopard 40 has 206 gallons, but the 42 has 174, reflecting that fact that more and more people are now adding watermakers, which actually come standard on the charter versions.

CONCLUSION

Pandemic-related boat buying has revved up the marine industry in unprecedented ways. There has been a worldwide frenzy for new boats, especially for boats going into private ownership. Charter yacht sales may have stalled in 2020, but as stated earlier no less than two dozen people purchased the Leopard 42 for private use based purely on specs. Maybe that’s not as crazy as it sounds, given the way this new model started with a solid formula and added the best of its recent siblings. If you want one of these “greatest hits” editions, place an order now and you may be able to get one by the summer of 2022. *

