



OUT OF AFRICA

Sam Jefferson takes a big cat from South Africa out for a spin and discovers a beast that has been thoroughly tamed

William Shakespeare is generally noted for being a bit of a sage. Personally I have always thought his comedies lacked a bit of oomph but it must be admitted that he had a great knack of coming up with a pithy line. Anyway, the one that comes to mind when I think of Robertson and Caine, builder of Leopard Catamarans, is the following: *There is a tide in the affairs of men, Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat. And we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures.*

This may seem somewhat obscure but let me elaborate. At present, Leopard is the third biggest manufacturer of multihulls in the world and the largest in the southern hemisphere. How did this happen? Well, for one, I'm sure it has always built excellent boats but, up until the late '90s it was producing relatively modest numbers of quite sporty boats (anyone remember the Fast 42?). All well and good, but there are many excellent boatbuilders who don't go on to grow exponentially. The pivot point in Robertson and Caine's growth appeared when the manufacturer came to the attention of the Moorings charter group that asked the company to build a line of catamarans that

would dovetail with the demands of their charter clients. One thing led to another and Robertson and Caine's Leopard Catamarans are now ubiquitous not just in the Moorings fleet but also Sunsail's which is part of the same group.

Now, that is all very well but it has meant the Leopard catamarans can end up getting a bit pigeonholed as pure charter vessels, and this is far from the truth. In reality, the yard has been turning out boats that are good for both charter and private ownership. Mass production has kept costs down and the price of labour in South Africa also helps. All of which this convoluted preamble brings me to the new Leopard 46; first of a new generation of Leopards. It replaces the Leopard 45 which was launched back in 2017 and sold over 400 units. The 46 is a tad bigger and, as with all manufacturers these days, the aim seems to be to offer more space and comfort while not compromising performance. The launch of the 46 also finds the company looking to diversify and underline that it has a product that is well cut out for private ownership. That, I guess, is where I come in. so what have we here? Well, it's clearly a pure cruising catamaran – there are stub keels as opposed to daggerboards – so this is a boat built to compete with the likes of Lagoon, Bali and perhaps

LEFT
The new 46 replaces the successful Leopard 45

Fountaine Pajot. Weighing in at 17,000kg, this is not a particularly light boat but, as with all cruising cats these days, you can expect performance to be respectable. As with all Leopards, the design is by Simonis and Voogdt who have a lot of experience in this sector. In terms of construction, the boat is something of a break from the norm for the manufacturer. Whereas previous models used three separate moulds for the hull components then glassed them together, this new boat is built in one single mould which should aid stiffness.

What is important to understand about this genre of cruising catamarans is that they are capable of quite extraordinary feats. Sailing around the world is far from mission improbable; it has been done many times. By the same token, don't expect too many thrills; your Lagoons and Leopards etc are competent performers but, ultimately, the autopilot is your friend. Use it and you can enjoy the boat's finer qualities. One of the other fascinating features of this boat was the electric motors used on the test model. These are an optional extra and are supplied by Alternative Energies, a company that is actually a subsidiary of rival boatbuilder Fountaine Pajot, which has taken the laudable step of making its units available to anyone in an effort to boost innovation and drive costs down. The test boat →



was equipped with two 25kw electric motors and, of course, all the extra gizmos and batteries that come with that. We'll get onto the nitty gritty of the electric motors later in the test.

On deck

You step aboard the boat via broad aft platforms which offer excellent access. The first thing you notice is the huge bathing platform which doubles as storage for the tender. This is one of those elaborate designs that is raised and lowered electrically in order to allow it to be fully submersed for easy launch and recovery of the dinghy. They are clever but both heavy and elaborate and it's no surprise that this is an optional extra; electric davits are standard. Two steps up and you're into the cockpit that's kept completely rope free and is reasonably enclosed with a big L-shaped seating area to port which is ideal for dining in warm weather.

There is plentiful seating here, with a long bench seat running latitudinally and enclosing the transom. This seat has a bolster which pivots, meaning you can look at the sea facing aft if you like – a nice touch. To starboard are the steps up to the fly bridge and there is a fridge set into this, while the barbecue is integrated into the coamings to port. It looks neat and is well hidden but is not that well sited as I'd anticipate that smoke from the barbecue would tend to blow into the cockpit.

Leopard wanted to retain defined indoor and outdoor spaces so, even though there is a large sliding patio door, there is still clear definition between the spaces. Nevertheless, in warm weather, the cockpit itself is a wonderful living space, with the solid Bimini which runs all the way aft, adding protection.

As mentioned, the fly bridge is accessed from the starboard side of the cockpit although there are

ABOVE LEFT
Broad side decks and a well thought out deck layout

ABOVE RIGHT
The bridge deck is a great spot for a sundowner

BELOW LEFT
The helm position has everything to hand and short-handing is relatively easy

BELOW RIGHT
The drop down bathing platform/ dinghy cradle is an optional extra

also steps up from the starboard side deck. The fly bridge is the nerve centre of the 46 and all the sail controls are led here meaning that in theory the boat can be singlehanded with minimum amounts of stress and no need to leave your seat. Catamarans with fly bridges often face a dilemma in that you don't want to have the skipper too separated off from the lounging area, while also wanting to separate off all the sail controls and have the skipper at a height where he or she can see what's going on. In the 46, there is a decent connection between the two areas, as the steps up are quite open and offer a clear line of vision if the skipper looks down into the cockpit.

Once installed at the helm, the seat is very comfortable and also sociable as two can sit alongside each other without any stress. The set-up is good with all lines leading back to three powered winches all situated close to the





helm. To port of the helm is a bridge deck which, once again, is all about the lounging space. This is accessed from the side decks to port and, as you can imagine, is nicely involved with the skipper's space while also remaining separate from all the ropes. It's the ideal spot for a sundowner. Aft of this the solid bimini stretches a long way back and has recesses moulded in that will accommodate solid solar panels. Right aft is the mainsheet on a traveller. The mainsail is at a good height for stowing but it is worth noting that you need to brief crew not to stand on the solar panels which, being the rigid type could get damaged if you tread heavily on them.

Stepping back down to deck level and the side decks are wide, making for a pleasant walkway to the foredeck, although this area can also be accessed via a watertight front door from the main saloon. The foredeck is semi solid with only a small



trampoline area. The seating area is in a recessed well with loungers on deck in front and decent storage underneath. The charter versions do not have a bowsprit but the test boat did. All in all, there was a simply vast amount of outdoor space and a good blend of shaded and sunny areas.

Down below

Head down below and you're in a big saloon with a lot of light. The windows are apparently the largest in the class and are glass instead of the plexiglass seen on the old Leopard 45. This has less issues with heat expansion than plexiglass according to Leopard. There is a U-shaped seating area to port with its own table that can be folded out to double the width. The galley is to starboard and set well forward with the double sink set against the forward bulkhead latitudinally, and the electric cooker and drawer fridge set

ABOVE
A sensible saloon layout

BELOW LEFT
Looking aft into the master cabin

BELOW RIGHT
A well proportioned forward cabin

longitudinally almost the length of the cabin, only interrupted by the descent into the forward and aft cabins. There is a chart table forward to port and this is large and comfortable with a great seat meaning that it could definitely double as a very pleasant office space.

Descend down into the starboard hull and the master cabin is set aft with a good sized king sized bed set fore and aft and a heads with separate shower stall. It's a sensible size and there's also a small vanity table and a TV making for a very practical and comfortable sleeping area. Forward of this and still to starboard is another double set latitudinally with a narrow heads/shower set right forward. It's a sensible use of space. The double bed is well raised up which can be a pain to get into in a seaway but this does give you a nice view through the port light.

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The port hull has a double aft which is a good sized bed with partial walkaround access and plentiful light. There is a decent sized ensuite forward to port. Forward of this is a corridor with a washing machine set into the storage units on the starboard side. On this boat there is a utility room which seemed a bit superfluous but good for storage – particularly as it linked to the bow storage compartment. As you can imagine, on the charter version, this can be turned back into a double berth but for bluewater cruising a utility room and all the storage it brings could be a real boon.

Electric motors

In standard configuration, the 46 is powered by twin 45hp Yanmar diesels although these can be upgraded to 57hp. However, from our point of view, the hybrid electric option on the test boat was of far greater interest. This features twin 25kW electric pods combined with a 24kW range-extending generator and two 27kWh lithium-iron phosphate battery banks. The banks are identical but separate for redundancy should one side fail. Power regeneration is accomplished via shore power, the diesel generator, 1,600 watts of solar panels on the Bimini, and hydrogeneration via the two 18in propellers spinning when under

sail. Although regeneration starts at speeds as low as 5kts, you'll need to sail 8kts or more to generate 1.5-1.8kW per hour per hull.

The key statistic here is that the electric motors give six hours of autonomy at half speed. The solar panels and hydrogeneration are more for domestic power when you're at anchor. Realistically, you're going to need to use the generator to replenish those battery banks. That sounds a touch disheartening but it's worth bearing in mind that the generator is more efficient than a pure diesel motor as it will always run at maximum efficiency for the conditions and requirements of the battery. The cost of the hybrid electric version is circa 200,000 Euros which seems quite a lot but it is worth bearing in mind that you get the whole kit; generator and upgraded lithium ion batteries for this price and these items alone are costly if you take them from the options list but stick with a diesel engine.

Under sail

Under power the boat is eerily silent when leaving the dock and it is a real pleasure not to have the rumble of the diesel engine in the background. At higher speeds the electric motors make a bit of a whining noise but obviously it's far, far less than a

ABOVE
Performance was good and sail handling effortless

diesel engine and we easily did 6.5kts. In terms of handling, the powered winches made making sail on a day when there wasn't a huge amount of breeze at least to start with, an absolute breeze. The steering is cable driven as opposed to hydraulic which gave it a decent amount of feel but it was still relatively uninspiring and the autopilot is definitely your friend. As mentioned, in the early stages of this test, there was not a great deal of wind so it was a good opportunity to play with the electric motors. We experimented with firing up the generator which obviously created some noise but was still markedly quieter than a standard diesel-propelled yacht. In part this was because the generator on the 46 is in the storage area in front of the saloon meaning that you are generally well away from the motor. Going flat out with the electric motors we hit 9.2kts in relatively flat water. That's not bad going at all although obviously without the generator as backup, you're going to flatten your batteries relatively rapidly. As the test progressed, the breeze filled in, although it was never more than 10kts. Nevertheless, in these modest conditions, the boat hit 4.5kts on the wind and, easing the sheets we were doing 6.2kts which was good in the fickle conditions.

ALTERNATIVE BOATS



SAM'S VERDICT

Given that Leopard mass produce these boats, it simply cannot afford to turn out a dud and it has the experience and expertise to ensure this doesn't happen. The 46 is a great boat for cruising in comfort and works well both as a charter boat or as a privately owned yacht. Performance is good as opposed to exhilarating but that really isn't what these cruising

catamarans are all about. The pricing is very attractive, and if you are interested in shared ownership, then the strong relationship the company has with Sunsail/The Moorings makes this a really enticing option.

BLUE WATER: ★★★★☆

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★☆

COMFORT: ★★★★☆

THE SPEC

LOA: 45'7" (13.9m)

Beam: 24'1" (7.35m)

Draft: 5'5" (1.65m)

Displacement: 38,925 lbs (17,656kg)

Sail area: 1,512 sqft (140.5 sqm)

Price: €699,000 ex VAT

Builder: leopardcatamarans.com

Information on shared ownership: mooringsyachtownership.com



BALI 4.6

Bali catamarans has always put space at the forefront of its designs and this Xavier Fay-designed cruiser is no exception and features the trademark tilt/slide 'garage door' aft entrance between cockpit and saloon plus a solid front deck which further boosts space.

bali-catamarans.com



FOUNTAIN PAJOT 44

Freshly launched in 2025, the latest generation of cruising catamarans from Fountaine Pajot multihulls offers a good level of comfort and performance coupled with plentiful space. The 44 benefits from the option of the same hybrid drive system used in the Leopard 46.

catamarans-fountaine-pajot.com



LAGOON 46

French manufacturer Lagoon remains the biggest builder of cruising catamarans in the world and that expertise shines through in its models. The 46 is tailored for ease of handling and comfort combined with decent performance, and is a clear rival to the Leopard 46.

catamarans-lagoon.com