



## Leopard 46

Changing up their longstanding formula, Leopard Catamarans reimagined a midsize cruiser to deliver versatile living and greener cruising.

ZUZANA PROCHAZKA

Standing in the aft cockpit of the new Leopard 46, my gaze is directed at the Leopard 50 parked across the dock. “It looks just about the same size,” says Franck Bauguil, global sales manager of the South African boatbuilder. “On the 46, we packed in almost everything that used to be on a boat 4 feet longer.”

It seems a bit of sorcery but it’s true. Starting with a blank sheet, Leopard Catamarans and Simonis Voogd Design reimagined life on 46 feet. The new model feels much larger than its specifications suggest, and it’s poised to become a worthy successor to the popular Leopard 45 that launched 379 hulls since its introduction in 2017. Leopard embraced their formula for years primarily because it worked. Now they’re switching it up and taking risks. The majority of the changes are on the main deck between the salon and cockpit, in the cabin accommodations below, and with the option for a hybrid propulsion system. Let’s look at each in turn and add some details.

Recent catamaran design trends have embraced a more direct connection between the cockpit and the salon via massive opening doors and then stretching inline seating along one side. Leopard gave this a go. The four-panel glass door tucks neatly into the starboard casing below the helm station, creating uninterrupted movement between inside and outside. With a variety of table options for dining and relaxing, the long settee flows along the port side as the cockpit becomes the salon and vice versa.



The helm is located up and to starboard, right. Opposite page: The Leopard 46 under sail in the Bahamas.





The cockpit and salon become one space when the doors are fully opened, top. The forward facing galley has one of the views in the house, below.

Across from the cockpit dinette, a chaise longue is the coveted spot aboard. Relax and look aft over the optional electric platform which extends the cockpit deck when the tender is launched. This platform is different from others of its kind. To help with loading and launching of the tender, it moves down and out, away from the swim steps where there's more room to float the dinghy on before hoisting.

To starboard, steps lead from the cockpit to the helm, which was raised a few inches for better visibility forward. Two electric winches are standard, and another can be optioned so managing large sail loads becomes a push-button affair. With C-shaped seating and a sunpad on the adjacent bimini, the skipper never needs to stand watch alone. These "fly deck" lounges have gained popularity because they add space without raising the center of gravity as much as a full flybridge. They also improve the sightlines to the aft corners when you duck below the bimini, so docking is easier than from a flybridge helm that requires a backup camera.

Leopard stuck to their knitting in the salon with their usual forward galley offering a view over the foredeck that

will take the pain out of washing dishes. My two favorite features are still here including Leopard's signature front door that leads to the roomy forward cockpit. This door is the fastest way to get to the foredeck and the best way to cool down inside on a hot day. I'm also a fan of the port side forward facing navigation station with its wide comfortable seat that you could actually spend time on as you stand watch from inside. Even on charter, the nav desk is the nerve center of the boat, so kudos to Leopard for refusing to minimize its importance.

By peeling away the constraints of a traditional cabin layout, Leopard packed in a lot of living space. Three to five staterooms are available, all with en suite heads. The owner's cabin is in the aft section of the starboard hull with its own entry steps. "You don't really need the whole hull for a good master suite," says Bauguil. "We found that two thirds of the length is plenty and it let us fit in more features throughout."

One of those features is the utility room in the port forward hull where you can store loads of gear or use it as an office, laundry room, or workshop. For cruising, it will be indispensable, and for charter you can make it into another guest cabin. Up to five staterooms can be fitted by truncating the master and adding an over/under bunk cabin amidships with its own wet head for kids or crew.

"We finally eliminated the bow skipper cabins," adds Bauguil. "The crews just refused to use them so now they can be inside the boat, which is more civilized."

The Leopard 46 is powered by 45-hp or 57-hp Yanmar diesels, but hull No. 1 one debuted on U.S. shores with an optional hybrid drive propulsion system. In simplest terms, two 25kW electric pods combine 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

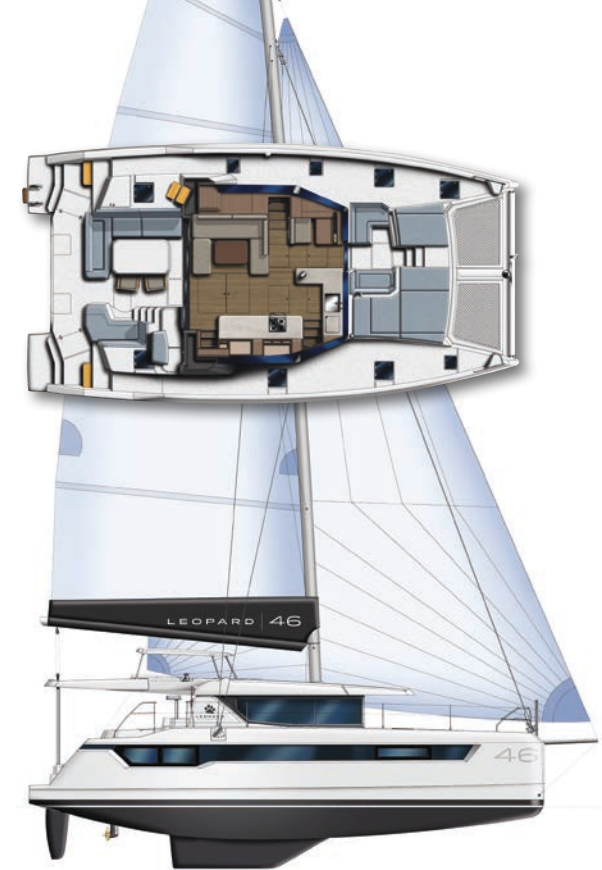
regeneration is accomplished via shore power, the combustion engine generator, 1,600 watts of glass solar panels on the bimini, and hydrogeneration via the two 18-inch propellers spinning when under sail. Although regeneration starts at speeds as low as 5 knots, you'll need to sail 8 knots or more to generate 1.5-1.8kW per hour per hull. At anchor, two 6kW inverters draw on the batteries to power house loads for a full day with just one hour of generator charging time.

It's an impressive system designed in partnership with the La Rochelle-based Alternatives Energies. The brains of this 400-volt DC system is called OneBox and although highly sophisticated, details are presented on intuitive and layman-friendly screen interfaces. Significant automation also makes this complex system function seamlessly without the need for much human decision-making. "The generator automatically starts when the batteries discharge to 40%," says Jeremy Benichou of Alternatives Energies. "It ensures you're never out of juice and usually arrive at the anchorage topped up."

A well-optioned diesel version of the Leopard 46 is priced at \$1 million and you can expect to add upwards of another \$140,000 for the same options plus the hybrid system and its vast lithium power storage. That's not nothing, but it pays more than lip service to greener cruising.

We took the new design out for a spin. Under batteries alone we made good 7.4 knots, and when the genset kicked in we reached 9.1 knots at full throttle. The faster you go under electric alone, the shorter the range, of course, but depending on sea state, you can expect to motor up to four hours at 6 knots on a full charge. That's more than enough for short hops between anchorages or maneuvering around the marina. One drawback to the hybrid regen system is that it necessitates the use of fixed propellers, which induce drag of at least 1 knot under sail. With twin Yanmar diesels (eliminating the regen option) folding propellers can be fitted.

Of course, the Leopard 46 is a sailboat first, so we ven-



**LOA/LWL**  
47'6"/44'0"  
**Beam** 24'1"  
**Draft** 5'5"  
**Air Draft** 75'2"  
**Bridgedeck Clearance** 3'4"  
**Displacement**  
38,925 lbs  
(light)  
**Upwind Sail Area**  
1,512 sq ft  
**Engines** 2x45-57hp Yanmar or electric  
**Designer**  
Simonis Voogd Design  
**Builder** Leopard-Catamarans  
**Price** \$789,000 base, \$999,000 well-optioned diesel version

tured out onto Chesapeake Bay and hoisted the upgraded aramid fiber laminated square-top main by Ullman Sails. Upwind sail area with the genoa is 1,512 square feet and you can add a code zero for downwind work. The mast is 3 feet taller now for better performance, and we sailed consistent low 7-knot speeds in 14 knots of true wind on a beam reach. We hardened up to 60 degrees apparent wind angle and slipped along steadily at 6-6.5 knots. Unfortunately, we didn't have the large downwind sail to play with but with nearly 900 square feet flying, I'd expect double digit speeds in the right conditions. One thing I fully embraced during our sail was standing on the bimini to reach the sail bag and manage the canvas and lines without a lot of climbing.

Leopard sells boats to private owners and into charter with The Moorings/Sunsail. Traditionally, this has split 50/50 but the pandemic skewed the numbers when private owners flooded the market. Today, that ratio is shifting back toward charter. "For the first 50 units, 70% is slated for charter due to strong demand as fleets refresh," says Bauguil. "Then it'll shift back to 50/50. Hybrid propulsion is not targeted at charter."

Leopard loosened its grip on the formula that made them successful for years and ventured into new directions in terms of livability and sustainability. The resulting fresh ideas are likely to proliferate through their future designs. Bauguil relaxes in the cockpit as we sail along. "We couldn't be happier with how it turned out."

The owner's suite is in the aft section of the starboard hull with its own access steps, left.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LEOPARD-CATAMARANS

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