

LEOPARD 48'

An innovative
and balanced
ocean cruising
catamaran



The Leopard 48, voted Multihull of the Year 2013 by Cruising World magazine, has been particularly long-awaited by lovers of this type of cruising catamaran, whether demanding private owners or future charter customers waiting for new experiences. Here is our test of this original catamaran...

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RETURN TO IMAGES

The Woodstock boatyard near Cape Town, was founded by John Robertson, over thirty years ago. Jerry Caine joined him as an associate in 1991. From 1995 onwards, close links were developed with Moorings, with a view to supplying the budding bareboat charter market; the fusion with Sunsail and the integration into the Tui international group propelled Moorings-Sunsail to the rank of world giant in the sector. Their logistical expertise and knowledge of the clientele (mainly American in the Caribbean area at first) oriented the design of the Leopards (Moorings' main multihull supplier) towards a rationalisation of the functionalities and increased internal equipment (cold storage, air conditioning, electrical independence). The choice of accessibility for the old platforms (very low bridgedecks!) however penalised their perception in the European opinion. The globalization of the bases and the enlargement of the multi-loving public, led the decision makers at the 3rd biggest catamaran builder (with Lagoon and Fountaine Pajot) to have a rethink and call on the American architects, Gino Morelli and Pete Melvin, designers of the famous



THE LARGE FORWARD COCKPIT IS A DEVICE WHICH IS NOT EASY TO INTEGRATE INTO A CATAMARAN'S SILHOUETTE; SIMONIS AND VOOGT HAVE HOWEVER SUCCEEDED!



PlayStation (Steve Fossett's unlucky giant in The Race). A new generation of catamarans, narrower, lively, consensual and high above the water saw the light of day and frequented the boat shows from 2005 onwards (Leopard 39, 40, 44, 46...). The results came quickly and more and more private owners allowed themselves to be tempted by these robust boats with a coherent specification.

2012: SIMONIS AND VOOGT ARE BACK!

The 39' is a lively, balanced and rather fast catamaran. The 44, by risking the forward cockpit, seemed less dynamic. The arrival of the 48' seemed to want to be a synthesis of the qualities of the two models, and marked the return of the historic designers: Alexander Simonis and Marteen Voogt. This international office, today based in Holland, still has its office in the southern hemisphere, in Cape Town, which brings the points of view closer. The Simonis-Voogt designs are rather oriented towards racing or fast cruising monohull yachts (90' Nicorette I

and II, 85' Les Folies...), but the office has integrated the segment's own developments, to offer a mature and relevant 48-footer.

THE LEOPARD 48': BETWEEN AUDACITY AND BALANCE

By adapting the forward cockpit from the 44' onto the 48', Moorings and Robertson & Caine assert their commercial confidence in this accessory, which is now displayed as a mark of identity. Introduced by Daniel Tortarolo on Sud Composite's Grand Sud 45, the idea was reinterpreted by the Morelli/Melvin office when creating the Gunboats. Their aims were different, of course: a manoeuvring area inspired by racing for the Gunboats, or a relaxation area with no direct link to the rest of the boat for the others. Lagoon also seized on this arrangement on the 440, the 560 and the 52', but only the Leopards broke completely free from the prejudices and designed a genuine second cockpit forward, with completely free access! As for the rest, the 48's definition is quite classical, and intelligently acknowledges the current

- 1 : The Leopard is a distinctive catamaran, in the right sense of the term...
- 2 : A clever design - the forward cockpit is well integrated into the overall lines.
- 3 : The quite slim hulls allow the boat to sail well to windward.
- 4 : The Leopard 48 is a boat which dreams of wide open spaces and sunshine. It's up to you to take it there!

trends (ergonomic navigation station, relatively slim, stepped hulls, modern coachroof design, generous sail area, careful interior decoration and finishing).

A QUALITY CREATION BY A DEVELOPING INDUSTRIAL TOOL

The Woodstock factory has grown, and now covers four and a half hectares! It employs 600 members of staff and tradesmen, who produce around three boats per week. The range, exclusively dedicated to catamarans, includes 4 sailing models (39', 44', 48', 58') and 2 Power Cats, the 39' and the 51'. The user requirements of the main customer (Moorings/Sunsail), combined with the builder's historic experience, orientate the choices towards strong construction and reinforced technical fittings, to guarantee reliability in intensive use conditions, whilst reducing the maintenance and repair interventions. The sandwich under vacuum uses multidirectional E glass cloths, contact lami-



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FROM THE START, ON A CLOSE REACH,
THE 48' PROVED TO BE STOUT-HEARTED, GENEROUSLY
CANVASSED AND WELL-BALANCED.



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nated on a high density balsa core. Isophthalic resins and gelcoat prevent the appearance of hydrolysis, but the builder doesn't go as far as applying an epoxy barrier below the waterline. The stub keels are completely filled with closed cell polyurethane foam. The 48', just like all the Robertson & Caine boats, is doubly certified, EC and IMCI: the construction satisfies all the current ISO standards.

A CONFIDENT SILHOUETTE AND UP-TO-DATE ACCOMMODATION!

The forward cockpit is a device which is not easy to integrate into a catamaran's silhouette; Simonis and Voogt have however succeeded! The skilful design of the lateral Perspex panels attracts the eye to this dynamic element, the plunging coachroof support and the coachroof extension attenuate the impact of the vertical front bulkhead. Unless seen from directly ahead, the eye retains the perception of a wedge-shaped coachroof; a nice example of design! We must now tackle the question everyone is asking! Does this original arrangement raise safety issues? Let's note first of all that it is quite far aft, and that modern hydrodynamics and weight centring allow the boat to ride over the waves delicately rather than force its way through. The in-house delivery skip-

pers who every year cover several hundred thousand miles (average delivery distance: 6 – 7,000 miles) say they never see green seas fill the cockpit. It's to the credit of the boat's behaviour, but let's imagine that it did happen... Robertson & Caine and the architects, probably pursued by vigilant standards and their sense of responsibility, seem to have understood the full extent of the issue! During an attentive visit, I was struck by the robustness of the scantlings and the watertight barriers, and the drain scuppers seem capable of emptying the cockpit quickly if necessary.

Having arrived alone at the end of the afternoon, for a first night aboard, I was first of all positively surprised by the 'boat's welcome'. I didn't need to grope around looking for the technical equipment. The electrical switch panel, the switches, the pump operation, the WC were all to hand with good readability. After a scorching hot day, the ventilation quickly cooled the 48'; from this point of view, the front door is a decisive factor! Completely renewing the areas, this nacelle, open on two sides, with its well-designed traditional aft cockpit (excellent exterior soft furnishings, clever ergonomics, with sunbathing areas, a relaxing chaise longue, table for 8 people...) and its nautical patio forward, transforms life aboard. The panoramic 'picture windows' bring the marine sce-



DELIVERY SKIPPER'S REPORT

I have not sailed a cat like this before which so effortlessly picks up very light air and turns it into solid boat speed. At 8kts of true wind coming in off the beam

we would make 6 kts of boat speed, just beautiful! And the boat behaves very well in bigger conditions too, like you normally find the first few days out of Cape Town, it sails like a big boat, it just ploughs through the waves, and without losing speed and without the familiar slamming of boats with lower bridge decks, it is a really well balanced boat. If I had a little more money I would buy one myself!

Kenneth Hoiem, delivery skipper for Mana Mana, our test boat

nery inside, without generating a greenhouse effect. The atmosphere gains from this convivial arrangement, which reinforces the boat's vocation as a versatile water sports platform at anchor, and encourages leisurely cruising in the lagoons. If you want privacy and safety, the watertight door and its 3 levels of closure, as well as the venetian blinds, allow a rapid and effective reaction. The galley has been dealt with carefully; the Force 10 cooker/oven, almost of professional standards, the drawer type fridges, the double sink, the generous Corian working surfaces, all meet the expectations of a demanding sailor, the hostess or the crew member who loves his food. I must admit that I immediately appreciated this interior organization. The quality of the finishing is high, the choice of cherry wood for the classic facings is superb, the harmonious marriage with the contemporary

materials is successful, and avoids the ostentation of an all-wood interior – this balance is at the origin of the warm style of the 48'; the woodwork is remarkable. Sleeping comfort (access, environment, peripheral ergonomics, privacy) is excellent; the attractiveness of the bathrooms in the private owner's version, tested and validated, deserves a special mention.

HANDLING AND PERFORMANCE

On arriving aboard, the day before our test, convinced that the 48' had arrived in France on a cargo ship (like the previous model!), my examination was carried out using this conviction as a criterion, without discovering any proof to the contrary! It was only the next day, when clarifying this question, that the importer confirmed the delivery trip had been by sea – 7,000 miles! I confess to being blown away by this revelation, that nothing aboard confirmed, not even the inspection of the engine lockers, which are perfectly eloquent in this respect...

We were lucky, in summer, in the Baie des Anges (Nice) there was some wind: a steady 15 – 17 knots from the south, with a choppy sea but no swell. From the start, on a close reach, the



5 : In Nice harbour, our 48 awaits us patiently, before setting off for the dynamic test.

6 : The famous forward cockpit: more than a marketing ploy, a real plus in terms of pleasure.

7 : The deck plan, organised around a navstation which gives pride of place to the electric winch.

8 : Comfortable, spacious and well protected by the rigid bimini, the aft cockpit nevertheless remains the area where everyone likes to meet up.

9 : The forward cockpit is accessible from the interior – the saloon ventilation is taken care of in a tropical atmosphere.

10 : The galley is carefully designed and will meet the expectations of the most demanding sailors.

11 : The accommodation in the private owner's version is not really new, but proves to be particularly comfortable and practical.

12 : The cabins are very pleasant, with good ventilation, essential in the tropics.

13 : The bathroom in the owner's hull is perfect – pleasant, well-ventilated and easy to live with.



The electrical switch panel, the switches, the pump operation, the WC...all to hand with good readability.



The engine lockers are immaculate, yet the boat has come from South Africa by sea.

48' proved to be stout-hearted, generously canvassed and well-balanced. At 50° to the apparent wind, we were doing almost as well as the theoretical polar, around 8.5 knots, and the boat

passed pleasantly through the waves. Ignoring its quite heavy frontal aerodynamics, this Leopard benefits from the work carried out on its nice stepped hulls. These quite slim hulls made headway smoothly in this 80 cm – 1m chop, and sailed to windward without making a fuss. By bearing away a little, around 80° to the apparent wind, the 48' took off and hovered at around 9 knots, which is remarkable and frankly a nice surprise. The 48's balance and agility were really superior to those of the 44' in these conditions. Under spinnaker, the catamaran will sail deep downwind and maintains a steady speed, accelerating in the gusts. As is the current trend, the navstation proved practical, readable and easy to use. The steering wheel is linked to the rod connecting the rudders by cables; the steering precision is appreciable and the directional effect of the rudders is sensitive. The electric primary winch is the essential

companion to this grouped manoeuvring architecture, which, despite its advantages, is biomechanically less suited to manual use.

The Quantum South Africa sails are of a generous specification and well cut; the Sparcraft (South Africa) mast, with a 6° rake, is elegant and nicely finished. Manoeuvring under power with the 54 hp engines is a model of smoothness and motor power. I emphasize the balance when pivoting and the ease of use; our test 48' was equipped with fixed propellers (left free to turn)! The dynamic feel under way is therefore to its credit, taking into account the drag induced by these appendages! Folding versions are essential; they will also offer the same manoeuvrability and better performance under sail.

CONCLUSION

I discovered a distinctive catamaran in the good sense of the term; the cockpit arrangement is not a marketing ploy, but a very good idea for this type of programme. The serious construction is reassuring; the equipment and finishing make life aboard pleasant. Its performance is satisfactory, in the upper half of the segment, and it is very pleasant to helm.

- ◆ Dynamic, balanced catamaran
 - ◆ Good finishing and interior design
 - ◆ Strong, reliable boat
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- ◆ The curtains in the cabins don't guarantee total blackness
 - ◆ The laminated floors rest on varnished wooden supports (ageing?)
 - ◆ Contact between the martingale and the aluminium struts on the forward crossbeam (electrolysis?)



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Architects: Alexander Simonis and Marteen Voogt.

Builder Robertson/Caine (Cape Town, South Africa)

Length: 14.75 m

Beam: 7.64 m

Draft: 1.34 m

Unladen weight: 14.46 t, half-laden: 17.28 t

Bridgedeck height: 0.91 m

Mast height above the water: 22.60 m

Mainsail area: 90 m²

Genoa area: 53 m²

Gennaker area: 150 m²

Engines: 2 x 39 hp or 2 x 54 hp

Fuel: 700 l

Water: 780 l

Black water tank: 170 l

Price: 429,000 euros exc. VAT

Main options, exc. VAT:

54 hp engines + folding Brunton propellers: 9,000 euros

Raymarine electronics pack: 9,300 euros

Battery charger: 824 euros

Lewmar 54 electric primary winch: 2,706 euros

4 solar panels on the bimini: 5,238 euros

60 l/h Spectra watermaker: 15,840 euros

Bowsprit + Code 0 + square-headed mainsail: 9,800 euros

Commissioning: 10,818 euros

Safety equipment: 4,727 euros

Delivery to Nice (France): 28,000 euros,

Fort Lauderdale (USA): 27,700 euros

THE COMPETITORS

Model:	Nautitech 482	Salina 48 Evolution	Lagoon 450
Builder:	NAUTITECH	FONTAINE PAJOT	LAGOON
Windward sail area in m ² :	116	136	134
Weight in t:	11.2	10.5	15.5
Basic price in €, exc. VAT:	525,550	472,000	371,000

Does the 6° mast rake play a role in the Leopard 48's dynamic qualities? It's a fact that the catamaran tacks perfectly under just the main, gybes well and displays a real dynamic balance.

The mainsail area (90 m²) and the square head offer extra power in light weather, but the boat remains tolerant in moderate winds under full sail.

The navstation seems to be establishing itself on this generation of catamarans, the grouping of the control lines is appreciated by both helmsman and crew, and works very well on the Leopard 48.

Adjusting the mainsheet tension using two tackles as opposed to a track is not a problem for this type of boat. A strong pad eye aft of the cap shroud chainplate allows the leech to be tightened downwind!

The emblematic forward cockpit is pleasant to use and does not prejudice either performance or safety.

The bridgedeck height is comparable to European models: 90 cm.

There are no davits; an articulated gantry takes their place. The system is strong and reliable, and avoids putting a strain on the aft side of the crossbeam.

The hulls' hydrodynamics are good, the 'step' increases the internal volume without increasing the wetted surface area, the bows are quite slim and the aft sections don't provoke suction.

