



# LÉOPARD 43

THE TEST OF  
TIME FOR:

With varied conditions, up to 35 knots, we were really able to explore the Léopard 43's potential...

THE MULTIHULLS WORLD TEAM OF TESTERS HAS DREAMT OF THIS FOR A LONG TIME... TO BE ABLE TO CARRY OUT EXTENDED TESTS UNDER REAL CRUISING CONDITIONS, WITH A BOAT WHICH IS READY TO GO, ALL TANKS FULL, LOADED WITH FUEL, POSSESSIONS AND A FULL CREW: THE BOAT AS YOU WOULD REALLY USE IT! HERE, THEN IS THE 'DETAILED' TEST OF THE LÉOPARD 43 IN ITS MOORINGS 4300 VERSION...

**[A]**t the origin of the Léopard range, are a large South African builder with a good knowledge of multi-hulls (Robertson & Caine) and the specialist in bare-boat charter, The Moorings. For about ten years now this charter company has understood that a catamaran is the ultimate boat for family

were therefore very precise: excellent liveability, comfort at anchor, low maintenance and ease of handling under sail...

The Léopard 43 is the development of the Léopard 42, designed by Alex Simonis and Voegd Design. It is offered by the builder in an owner's or Léopard version as well as a charter version,

With its well-balanced hulls, the Léopard 43 is capable of respectable averages, in excellent comfort.



A catamaran designed for cruising in warm seas...



With two reefs in the main and 6 rolls in the genoa, the boat is well-balanced and sails easily at about ten knots.

cruising in the warm waters of the West Indies, the Pacific or the Indian Oceans. Moorings specifications for their idea of what a cruising catamaran should be

under the name Moorings 4300. The boat we were offered for five days in the West Indies was the latter version...

## EXTENDED TEST



The only fault; the Léopard slams in rough seas...



The Léopard's cockpit becomes a real play or relaxing area once at anchor.

### AN EXTENDED TEST

We took possession of our catamaran in the Oyster Pond marina, on the French part of Saint Martin, in the West Indies. It was number 18 in the series, registered at Nice

*On the ceiling, the halogen spotlights give off a pleasant light, thanks to the dimmer-switches. Nice touch!*

in 2005. This catamaran had been used in the Mediterranean during the summer, then left to join the West Indian base on St Martin, from where it has been chartered ever since by Moorings. It had already covered a lot of miles, as it had sailed from South Africa to

Nice, had been used for charter, then had crossed the Atlantic under sail.

The first contact was very positive: the boat was just like new, which suggests that it will age very well. The big plus aboard the Léopards is the intelligently designed rear

platform: the cockpit offers a table and comfortable seating for 8, a raised steering position and a wide gangway to the rear of the cockpit allowing easy passage from one side to the other, even when sailing in rough seas (see later...).

The interior has not been forgotten, either: the beech finish on the furniture is very tasteful, whilst on the ceiling, the halogen spotlights give off a pleasant light thanks to their dimmer switches. Nice touch! Opposite, on entering, and to starboard is the saloon table and its (very) comfortable cushions. The children would pass most of their time at sea here, and they immediately adopted it as theirs. The ventilation aboard the Léopard 43 is excellent, thanks to the opening front windows. Even during the roughest sailing (35 knot gusts and 2 – 2.5m seas) we sailed with the windows open and didn't take a drop inside...

On the port side, the U-shaped galley is exemplary: it is easy to wedge oneself in at sea and there is lots of well-designed stowage. The Corian work surface is practical and very hard-wearing (the one on our boat was like new, with no marks or scratches), and the stainless double sink equipped with a mixer tap and retractable shower head makes doing the washing-up almost enjoyable. A slight criticism is that only the head cook (or washer-up) can work in the galley as there is not enough space for two people... To prepare your favourite dishes, there is a classic stainless steel Force 10 cooker with two burners, a grill and an oven. For safety, the gas is shut off by an electric valve controlled from the switch panel, with an indicator light in the galley. Turning round, on the cockpit bulkhead, the cold storage is to port (225 l fridge – freezer with 12V Seafrost refrigeration unit), with two very tasteful and above all practical brushed stainless steel, front-opening doors. On our test boat, which had no solar panels,



The aft gangway is very practical both whilst sailing, to pass from one side to the other, and at anchor...



- > The cockpit is a very well-designed platform to live on at anchor.
- > Easy to handle as a family crew.
- > Accommodation is functional and pleasant to live in.
- > The luxurious and tasteful interior.



- > The rigid bimini: it protects from the sun, but is really big and enclosing. It is easy to bump into and the small opening hatch above the steering position does not give a good view of the sails.
- > The bridge deck is too low; the catamaran quickly starts to slam in a heavy sea.
- > Rope lockers at the mast foot and the winches would be welcome.

we had to run the engine for two hours a day to generate enough energy for the cold storage. Taking into account the temperature in the West Indies (more than 30°C) and the quantity of food to be kept cold (8 persons for 5 days), this is quite reasonable.



The steps allow easy access to the cabin roof. All that is lacking is stowage for the lines...

Finally, still in the saloon, opposite the table to starboard is the chart table and the electrical switch panel. The table has stowage for sailing documents and a few CDs...that's all. The switch panel is, however, very comprehensive, and allows electrical consumption to be carefully controlled. The chart table has no seat, so you will not spend hours here, but will rather use the (large) interior or exterior tables for preparing the navigation, which will allow everyone to give their opinion... To finish off the electrical side of things, note that the Léopard 43 is equipped with two 180Ah deep-cycle domestic batteries and two 95Ah engine start batteries. Running the motor for two hours a day, we never ran our batteries flat, despite the hot water and the

cold storage, as well as the portable computers and digital cameras, which were used a lot... Comfort-wise, our Léopard 43 was equipped with air-conditioning: a plus in the marina, that we never used... The Moorings 4300 we tested was a charter version, that is, with four double cabins and four independent heads. The berths are of a good size (1.4m x 2m) and the varnished beech finish is very attractive. There are numerous lockers and hanging lockers with shelves, easily enough to stow a classic wardrobe for a week's cruising in the Tropics; however when cruising for a long time, or in colder climates, stowage space would be a bit on the light side. The heads are of a good size, each offering a w.c. and direct access

from the cabin; the shower, basin and cupboard with mirror are classic and of good quality. They are both easy to use and easy to clean. Note that the two water heaters, with a total capacity of 45 litres, were more than sufficient. With 780 litres of water aboard, the Leopard has a good range as standard. Living aboard the Léopard 43 is very pleasant...

### AT SEA FOR 5 DAYS

Yes, for once we were not testing a catamaran which had been 'prepared' by the builder and with no water or fuel aboard, but a boat under real cruising conditions. For this test, there were eight of us aboard, with full water (780 litres) and fuel (360 litres) tanks, clothes and food for five days. A laden catamaran, weighing around 14.5 tonnes...

The aim was to test both the boat's sailing ability and the quality of life aboard. After taking over the catamaran, we left the Oyster Pond marina with two of Moorings' sailors aboard, who hoisted our mainsail before disembarking and showing us the (quite tortuous) way out through the channel. This first sail was pleasant: a steady 25-knot breeze sped us at 9 knots towards St Barth. With 25 knots, the charter company recommends two reefs in the main and 3 rolls in the genoa. After several tests, we found that the boat was very well balanced with one reef in the main and the genoa completely unrolled. However, the sea was still calm (it was not to last!) and the Léopard didn't really seem to be suffering in these conditions. With a sea like this, taking a reef (at the



### Sailing to windward: instructions

To successfully sail a proper course to windward aboard a Léopard, there is nothing easier: the boom must be very low, about 30cm from the track (to tension the leach of the mainsail), then the traveller hauled in to about a metre to leeward of the centre line. With a good 20 knots of wind, the boat will settle at 8.5 – 9 knots at 50° to the true wind and not pitch too much or make much leeway. The difficulty comes when the sea becomes rough, or if the apparent wind drops to below 10 knots: it is then time to start an engine...

### MOORINGS service plus

As we had 'borrowed' the Moorings version of the Léopard 43, we took the opportunity to test the charter company's service. The welcome was very pleasant, there was a personalised and very full briefing on the cruising area and the personnel were attentive and ready to help us whenever we asked, either by VHF or telephone. And above all, the fleet of catamarans and monohulls are almost new or in perfect condition and perfectly equipped... Top quality service!

mast foot) is very easy; the Lewmar 44 winches (one for hoisting the mainsail, the other for the reefing line) are powerful enough and the wide steps in front of the cabin windows give a secure footing. All that is lacking is a rope



The steering position is very complete and well protected by the rigid bimini...



The cockpit table can accommodate 8 for meals, under the (appreciable) shelter of the rigid bimini.

locker at the foot of the mast for the tails of the main halyard and reefing lines... Under sail, the Léopard 43 is very simple: the main traveller is very easy to adjust, needing hardly any effort. Just choose the side towards which the traveller should go, port or starboard, engage the

winch handle and turn. As you can't see what you're doing (the traveller is situated on the hard top) it takes a bit of getting used to, but very quickly you learn that X turns of the handle give the right position for the traveller. One small regret is that the foot outhaul on the mainsail is adjust-



The interior is very tasteful, comfortable, well-lit and very well-ventilated.



The U-shaped galley has good stowage space and a large work top... Perfect!



As our test progressed, everyone found their favourite place – here we have the fisherman!

ted from the mast foot, so only a very motivated crew will regularly trim this important control... Finally, we had great trouble finding the right position

heavy seas, and if in addition you want to sail against the wind, then be prepared to suffer. We tried sailing the fifteen or so miles from St Barth to

*It feels as if every detail of the accommodation has been carefully thought out, and this makes all the difference in use...*

from which to winch, on both port and starboard sides... It is difficult to brace yourself whilst remaining in a good position for winching efficiently. After having tried everything, we finally found an acceptable solution (see photo), but if there are any Léopard owners out there who can tell us how to do better, would they please contact us...

As our trip progressed, we had the opportunity to perfect our knowledge of the Léopard 43, and to reach a good compromise between speed and comfort at sea. It must be said that the conditions we met during the five days were not too pleasant: 25 to 35 knots of breeze with a choppy sea, which became more unpleasant in the channels between the islands, getting up to 2 to 2.5 metres. In these conditions, the Léopard shows its two faces: the pleasant one, if your priority is comfort, windward sailing is limited to a strict minimum and speed kept to what is reasonable in the prevailing sea conditions. On the other hand, if you want to sail regularly at more than 10 knots in fairly

## LEOPARD 43 MOORINGS 4300

- > Overall length : 12.95 m
- > Waterline length : 11.50 m
- > Beam : 6.93 m
- > Draft (empty): 1.22 m
- > Draft (half load): 1.30 m
- > Draft (fully laden): 1.39 m
- > Height under bridge deck (empty) : 0.60 m
- > Mast height : 19.20 m
- > Unladen displacement : 8,630 kg
- > Half-laden displacement : 12,210 kg
- > Fully laden displacement : 14,480 kg
- > Load capacity : 5,850 kg

### Sail areas :

- > Mainsail : 76 m<sup>2</sup>
- > Genoa : 44 m<sup>2</sup>
- > Fresh water : 780 l
- > Fuel : 360 l
- > Engines : 2 x 29 hp
- > Prix : 305,000 euros ex. tax, ex. works.

Tintamarre, close-hauled against 35 knots of wind. The boat was well-balanced, with two reefs in the main and 6 rolls in the genoa, and was sailing well, at about ten knots. But the confused sea, the waves which were breaking from time to time and the impacts under the bridge deck made us give up. The boat was sailing well and it was not really dangerous to continue, but for the sake of the

passengers' comfort and enjoyment, we had to do something. As we bore away, the Léopard became more comfortable and even those crew members who hadn't found their sea legs started to smile again. By letting out the main traveller, with the same amount of sail, surfing the waves at between 8 and 9 nights, our catamaran became very pleasant again... Note that in these quite rough conditions, the



The four double cabins aboard our test version are very comfortable and spacious... and the finishing is excellent!



Manoeuvres at the mast foot are easily carried out, even with a rough sea.

Léopard never showed the slightest sign of burying its bows, and pitching remained reasonable. A good mark for the Alex Simonis-designed hulls.

## A CATAMARAN TO LIVE ABOARD

The Léopard 43 is a cruising catamaran which clearly advertises its programme: cruising with the family or friends in warm seas, coupled with a real ability to sail a long way. The proof? Our test catamaran had already covered a lot of miles, as it had set off from South Africa for the south of France, before crossing the Atlantic to the West Indies. The Léopard 43's modus operandi is simple: find the right balance and above all do not push it too hard, in return for which it will take you wherever you want to go.

But it is for the quality of life aboard it offers that the Léopard becomes really interesting... Without being revolutionary, it feels as if every detail of the accommodation has been carefully thought out, and this makes all the difference in use... The living areas are well separated, and throughout our cruise, everyone found a place which suited them, to read, rest, fish or dive... The gangway aft of the cockpit thus becomes a fabulous play area, opening onto a uniquely dimensioned swimming pool – the Caribbean Sea! The Léopard's sugar scoop sterns are wide and give easy access to and from the dinghy, or the turquoise sea at 30°C. Everything has been thought out to offer numerous play and rest areas, including the wide side decks, the steps up to the cabin roof and the bimini and the comfortable trampoline. Inside, the Léopard's cabins are very comfortable and well ventilated, but access to the berths in the forward cabins could be easier. For a production catamaran, the Léopard is really luxurious, with top quality comfort equipment: dimmers for adjusting the saloon lighting levels, illuminated steps in the gangways and a dustbin integrated in the galley work surface – everything has been thought out and designed for comfort and ease of living aboard.

With four double cabins and the two forepeaks, plus the convertible saloon, the Léopard can accommodate up to 12 persons in exceptional comfort. Ideal for a cruise with friends or family in

## CONSTRUCTION

Just like the rest of the boats in the range, the Léopard 43 is built completely in sandwich. Only the hull/deck joints, the 'step' in the hulls and the junction with the fins are in monolithic. The hull/deck joints are glued, bolted and laminated in strategic places. The bulkheads are bonded to the hulls. The core is in balsa, preferred to foam for its strength, even if it is (a little) heavier. The builder uses honeycomb to reduce weight in certain non-structural places, for example in the large bulkhead in the heads. Lamination is by classic vacuum procedure: gelcoat and resin are applied without being sprayed, which reduces the use of solvent, and the micro-bubbles of air whilst allowing better control of thickness. The tissues are saturated by contact and excess resin and air bubbles carefully removed by hand... An operation which eats up the man-hours, but results in a light and homogenous laminate. The result is a very strong catamaran which is rigid and not as heavy as all that... (the builder advertises it as 14 tonnes fully laden – which seems coherent).

the warm waters of the Caribbean or the Indian Ocean... In its owner's version, the Léopard has a gigantic owner's hull, with a real bedroom and a very attractive bathroom. The choice of this version for a sabbatical cruise in the sunshine is very attractive, especially as the basic price of the Léopard is very competitive...



The Moorings 4300 version, with four double cabins and accommodation in the two forepeaks.