

ON TEST THIS MONTH

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BELOW LEFT: The winches can be comfortably operated while standing, with one hand on the wheel. BELOW RIGHT: The Leopard 40 is ideally suited to hot places and sociable sunshine cruising

Two hulls are better than one

Leopards can't change their spots, but that's no bad thing since this new Leopard 40 catamaran offers space, speed and safety says Paul Jeffes

Multihulls are one of the fastest growing segments of the marine market. Visit any exotic charter location, from the Caribbean to the Seychelles, and you'll find a wide choice of cruising catamarans. Why so popular? They offer incredible living space for families. Two

couples sailing together can have the privacy of a hull each, with their own shower and heads. Shoal-draught opens up new horizons in today's crowded anchorages and twin engines offer superb manoeuvrability. Cats may not be everybody's ideal, but their design and safety has come a long way in a short

time. Fewer modern cruising cats capsize than monohulls sink.

The Leopard 40 is a brand new design for The Moorings, one of the largest charter companies, with around 880 boats in 41 bases from Trogir, Croatia, to Tahiti. Our test boat was sailed to the UK from her





ABOVE, LEFT: With a 6m beam, a spinnaker pole is superfluous. RIGHT: The cockpit layout allows for most tasks to be controlled from the helmsman's seat

Cape Town builder, Robertson & Caine, who since 1995 have launched more than 400 catamarans from 38ft to 62ft. More than two million ocean delivery miles have been made without incident and cats now represent around 28% of The Moorings worldwide bareboat charter fleet.

The Leopard is The Moorings' first cat from the design board of Morelli & Melvin, who created the record-breaking round-the-world racing cat *Cheyenne*, formerly *PlayStation*, as well as the award-winning Gunboat 62 cruising cat. From a distance, first impressions are of a futuristic 'spacecraft', and stepping aboard, space is what you get – above and below decks. Catamarans have enormous deck area and adding the forward trampoline must bring it close to 70m².

UNDER WAY

Speed was the other factor. In the crowded Solent, the only thing to overtake us all

day was a container ship! We sailed from Lymington to Hamble with the asymmetric chute up in 20-25 knots of wind, averaging over 10 knots in complete comfort. For anyone who feels nervous when the coloured sails come out, this is the boat for you. At each of the three gybes we simply snuffed the kite, gybed, switched sheets and 'unsuffed' again. With a 6m beam, a spinnaker pole is superfluous. Simply switch from one bow to the other: only one deck crew and helmsman are required.

The rig is attractively simple, with conventional roller furling headsail, fully battened main with stackpack and lazyjacks. The 6m-plus beam allows a wide shroud base to accommodate the loads and a tall slim 19m mast. With her 120% genoa, the Leopard has a sail area of 98.4m² and is easily driven with no lead ballast to drag around.

With a displacement of 7.63 tonnes she achieves hull speed of 8 knots-plus upwind

with no fuss. Her shallow draught will doubtless hamper her pointing ability, but in the tropics, the possibility of stepping ashore on the beach and tying your boat to a palm tree is a significant compensation!

ON DECK

Though the deck has space for a small orchestra, this is a boat set up for short-handed sailing. The cockpit layout means everything (except reefing) can be done from the helm. Sheets, furling line and rope clutches can all be reached from the helmsman's seat. Despite suffering back trouble, the position of these winches allowed me to operate them standing up in comfort with one hand on the wheel. The mainsheet track on top of the fixed GRP canopy, leaves the cockpit area free of clutter. A vang is scarcely needed as the mainsheet track is over 5m long. Even when reefing or hoisting/lowering the cruising chute, the operation can

be handled by the helmsman and one crew on deck.

The Leopard's fixed hardtop, or GRP bimini, is less claustrophobic than a conventional sprayhood and allows the helmsman some shelter, with an opening hatch to check the set of the mainsail and masthead.

UNDER POWER

Berthing a 40ft yacht in three knots of tide in the crowded Hamble River requires skill and confidence. Now imagine two yachts side by side with a cross current. The Leopard's secret weapon is her twin engines located around 4.5m apart offering great manoeuvrability in confined spaces. With little practise and no bow thruster, Jerry Tutt from The Moorings UK made it look very simple as he put her into a space just half a length more than the boat.

An owner's version of the Leopard 40 will be at Southampton Boat Show with trial sails after the show finishes.

The Moorings is the global distributor for Leopard sales and charter holiday ownership. For further details contact Christian Brewer (Tel: 01227 776678).

PROS AND CONS

Pros: Space. Superior deck and cockpit area. Stability. No heeling, even when hard-pressed only 5°. Bunks stay level and drinks stay on the table. No rolling at anchor. Plenty of storage, plus shoal-draught and privacy. Modern cats are also virtually unsinkable.

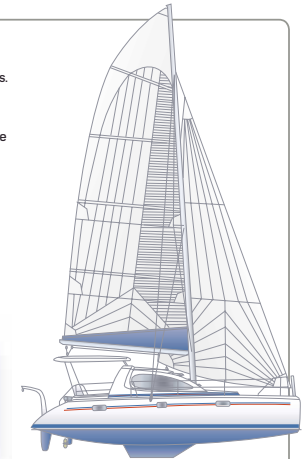
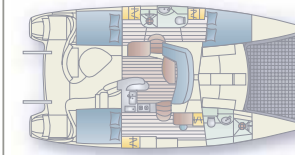
Cons: Cats are more expensive length-for-length than monohulls. Marinas may charge extra. If you fill up the incredible storage space, the extra weight will kill your speed. The jerky motion of cats going to windward may not suit everyone. Capsize risk.

LIKES:

- Handling under power in confined space
- Short-handed operation: helm position and winches.
- The layout doesn't segregate cockpit and saloon/galley and there is plenty of personal space with a large foredeck and sleeping cabins offering complete privacy.

DISLIKES:

- When the dinghy is not on its davits, the aft deck feels exposed and needs a guardrail or wire.
- No dedicated chart table and stowage. Chart work is done on the saloon table or fridge top.
- The rope clutch for the headsail furler is on the deck edge where careless feet could kick it off accidentally. It needs a guard.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

PRICE	£199,000	FUEL	350 litres (92 US gal)
LOA	11.97m (39ft 3in)	WATER	780 litres (206 US gal)
LWL	11.43m (37ft 6in)	BERTHS	10 (maximum)
BEAM	6.13m (20ft 1in)	CE CERTIFICATION	Category A Ocean
DRAUGHT	(Lightship) 1.10m (3ft 7in) (Full load) 1.23m (4ft)	DESIGN	Morelli & Melvin
DISPLACEMENT	(Lightship) 7,630kg (16,820 lb) (Full load) 11,780kg (25,975 lb)	BUILDER	Robertson & Caine
LOAD CARRYING CAPACITY	4,150kg (9,150 lb)	UK AGENT	The Moorings, Bradstowe House, Middle Wall, Whitstable, Kent Tel: 01227 776678
SINKAGE RATE	240kg/cm (1,344 lb/in)	OPTIONS	
SAIL AREA		Shore power pack	£2,852
(Main & 120% genoa)	96m ² (1,030 sq ft)	Complete instrumentation pack	£5,468
(Gennaker)	94m ² (1,014 sq ft)	Stack pack system	£316
ENGINE	Two Volvo MD2030 29hp saildrives	Complete cockpit enclosure	£681
BATTERIES	2 x 180Ah engine batteries, 3 x 180Ah service batteries	Delivery to UK, Europe or Caribbean (bimini, hot water, fridge-freezer, holding tanks, 1,000W windlass and commissioning included)	£15,000

BELOW DECKS



The Leopard's spacious aft cabin. The boat offers two accommodation options: a three-cabin owner's version or four-cabin charter version. The four-cabin version, which we sailed, can sleep eight adults and two children without using the saloon



Two hulls means more privacy, with separate heads and showers in each hull



The aft-facing galley is unusual and has a serving window that overlooks the cockpit dining area. And, since catamarans produce less than 5° of heel, these wine glasses aren't likely to be going anywhere



The light-coloured joinery is carried through into the galley which, together with its serving window, adds to the bright appeal



The lack of a dedicated chart table is a minus point, with chart work done on a table or fridge top



Twin Volvo MD2030 29hp saildrives offer greater manoeuvrability

THE VERDICT

I would be very happy to cruise this cat with friends in the tropics or the British Isles, though with her blue-water capability she's ideally suited to hot places and sociable sunshine sailing. For a retirement or holiday home in the sun it's a great deal of boat for £199,000.

The Leopard has also won some serious awards in America including Cruising World Best Overall Import USA 2005 and Best Multihull 40ft and under, plus the NMMA Innovation Award 2005.

The incidence of capsizing among cruising cats like the Leopard is almost nil. A multihull can run aground on a falling tide and sit and wait for it to come back.

If she springs a leak, she doesn't have a great lump of lead to drag her down to Davy Jones' locker.

The boat offers two accommodation options: a three-cabin owner's version or four-cabin charter version. Both have two heads with showers and the four-cabin version, which we sailed, can sleep eight adults and two children without using the saloon. There is certainly room to seat that number between saloon and cockpit tables. The unusual aft-facing galley has a bar and serving window overlooking the cockpit dining area.

Stowage, is important for living aboard and is always going to a bit tight with a full complement of 8 adults, but there is substantial space below the bunks. The designers have created a huge deck locker space forward of the saloon, ideal for that orchestra's instruments!

ENGINE CAPTION: By using sail-drives in place of conventional stern gear and mounting them back to front, puts the engines away aft, freeing up more hull space and putting the engine noise further away from the accommodation.

ACCESS CAPTION: Access from pontoon or dinghy could not be simpler, a low step (or steps?) on either transom, even when the boat is moored alongside. After ascending two transom steps there are no further changes in floor level between cockpit and saloon. An innovative structural honeycomb floor grid underneath stiffens the hull and eliminates the need for an aft beam bulkhead.