



A 'Hull' in each camp

When a vessel is categorised as 'perfect for charter' one instantaneously conjures up an image of a plain Jane, no frills, bullet-proof, idiot-proof style of vessel that while being totally practical from a user perspective, invariably always lacks the unashamed luxury and appointments of a vessel bound for a private owner. There are however exceptions to that blanket character assassination and one stand-out example that caters equally well to both markets - leaves a foot-print in each market - is the Leopard range of power and sailing catamarans.

by BARRY TYLER

Built by world-renowned South African boat-building manufacturer Robertson and Caine, the brand has found its way here courtesy of Australian importer, Brisbane-based Leopard Catamarans Australia (LCA). While many would venture to suggest the timing of the introduction into our region was tantamount to business suicide, coinciding with one of the biggest downturns in the world economy since the infamous 1987 share-market crash, LCA believe the timing in fact is perfect.

As prolific manufacturers of both power and sailing versions predominantly to the worldwide charter industry, Robertson and Caine have fine-tuned the various

models to such a high level of specification and presentation that there is now little difference in their range, between a charter example and a version for the private sector. As such, there emphasis has been re-directed to include the private sector also. "The major difference I suppose is the four-cabin versus three-cabin layout options," LCA CEO David Flynn explained, "and a lack of teak on the cockpit and boarding platform levels.

"Otherwise, they are virtually the same. Highly sort after by the charter industry, over the years Robertson and Caine have evolved the Leopard brand to a point where with a bit of cunning and innovation they are now a very attractive proposition for the private sector also. Even in this particular charter guise the finish and level of specification is right up there with the best our region has to offer. You questioned the timing of the release of this brand into Australia and New Zealand and this is precisely why we made the decision at this time. Today people are very conscious of cost, in particular running costs, and with this brand we have an almost sublime efficiency factor to compliment the practicality, space and innovation this respected catamaran brand is renowned for," Flynn enthused.

Even walking down the pier the Leopard 47 Powercat was one of those boats that stood out in a crowd. They have proved beyond question the humble catamaran configuration can look stylish, that it doesn't have to be all square corners and high hull and topsides. Step aboard and you are left in no doubt that innovation too is still very much alive and kicking in the boatbuilding profession.

Yes, the Leopard brand has obviously evolved over the years, especially considering they have had so many charter operators to listen to and take notice of, but the underlying realisation is they have obviously listened, and acted, and the net result is a vessel that is as close as you can get to being all things to all people. The fact this vessel is a brand new model, ostensibly offering an alternative to the Leopard 460 sailing version, suggests they have been listening and learning - and appreciating the fact (efficient) 'power' is fast becoming the preferred option for many cruising boaters.

The Epitome of Lifestyle Living

Cruising boaters are a very different breed to your rank and file day-boater; more particular; knowledgeable and therefore more discerning. These owners

The Leopard 47 Powercat capably addresses efficiency, practicality, performance and lifestyle expectations. (below and main pic)



know what they want in a boat and the cockpit for starters was surely indicative of the fact the builders have made every endeavour to accommodate the ideology that is long-range cruising. Boarding was easy, it was low enough to the water to be of practical use for the swimmers and divers, and the steps led you easily up onto the cockpit level.

Special effort for instance had been made to separate the entertaining part of the cockpit from the 'working' area aft of the transom beam (upright), but what impressed me most was the thought and attention that had so obviously gone into the actual moulding of the entire aft end. The shapes, edges and features, even down to the integral rear tender davits, were all very easy on the eye. Wherever you wanted to sit, be it gathering your thoughts, having a cuddle with the bride, doing a spot of fishing, boarding your



The cockpit takes outdoor living to a new level. (right)



tender or indeed enjoying a wee dram around the outdoor table and U-shaped dining setting as the sun sets – there was a seemingly appropriate place for every situation. Idyllic I think they call it!

And if you couldn't find an appropriate 'mood' location there the convenient steps and wide walkways, complete with inner grab rails and a substantial bow rail

assembly, beckoned you up onto a well encapsulated foredeck area. The very stylish (futuristic) louvred front windscreen panels made a great seating position when underway and while this was a charter version and therefore devoid of it in that instance, a padded sun-lounge would be perfect for the sun-worshippers.

The builder's expertise was evident on the flybridge level too - aesthetically very pleasing to the eye. (above left)

The galley - indecently capable in either cruising or charter mode. (above right)

Most guests however would probably gravitate to the fly bridge level, taking the entirely safe semi-spiral staircase up to enjoy the sensation of the ride with the skipper. A single helm station vessel in this instance, and again subtly segregated from the guests but still part of proceedings, the skipper and two others enjoy a commanding view of all corners of the vessel. From an electronics perspective the helm was surprisingly well spec'd with a Raymarine integrated sounder and GPS package complimenting the Seastar hydraulic steering and the Volvo instrumentation and remote controls.

Forward of the helm module was your guest area and again it was a tasteful combo of innovation, curves and rounded corners that softened the often stark look of a gelcoat finish. I would best describe this as a classy rather than outright opulently luxurious level, but none-the-less once you got up here and laid back in the forward lounge or indeed grabbed a drink from the wet-bar module and 'relaxed' at the ambient upstairs dining setting – then

you would never want to leave! Should it rain or blow hard, the open-hardtop setting can instantaneously be enveloped with a set of quick-fit clears around all four sides.

Spacious Saloon

With so much space devoted to the outdoor lifestyle aspect, I was more than a little surprised at how capacious the saloon actually was. The most convenient aspect of a catamaran configuration I guess is the fact that to change from a three to four cabin layout impinges nought on the saloon space above. Any changes are all below decks so to speak, with the net result you would think, of a sizeable saloon area!

Wrong, very wrong, for immediately a number of catamarans as well as monohull marques spring to mind, that definitely do not take anywhere near full advantage of potentially 'available' space. Their consideration of this single-most important facet of the vessel (the saloon), is often abysmal. I am happy to say

however that this was not the case with the Leopard for with a bit of innovation, and indeed experience from the designers, they have been able to include all the expected features – and still have sublime uncluttered floor space left over.

The galley was to port as you entered through the sliding S/S doors, with a really nice touch being the fold-down bench extension that was perfect when laying out the 'nibbles' for guests 'reclining' out in the cockpit. Another pleasant surprise was not only the size of the galley, but its specification. Plenty of bench space, plenty of cupboards and drawers; and standard features such as microwave, house-size oven and four-burner gas stove, dishwasher and twin sinks. Seemingly ambidextrous, it was perfect for a long-

All the features are included but still there was space galore in the rather salubrious saloon. (below)





range cruising situation - or for a charter situation with four couples aboard.

An obviously integral appointment within the saloon was the generous-sized genuine six-person (eight with a squeeze) dining setting across the front bulkhead – it set the mood so to speak. On the end of this dining setting was a pseudo workstation or chart table, complete with a leather side seat. Still room left? You betcha for to portside and just inside the saloon doors was another impressive cherrywood module that housed the appropriately-sized refrigerator and separate freezer and above it, a servery, a cantilevering laser TV and behind the glass doors, the AC/DC switch panel and 'entertainment' fascia.

You aren't going to run out of freezer or refrigerator space here. (left)

Compact where it needed to be, expansive where it needed to be, but the point was it was all neatly and effortlessly dove-tailed into this most impressive saloon that was while ambient, as more importantly (very) well presented, practical and user-friendly!

'Equal Billing' Below Decks

Below decks, as previously stated, the layout options are either three or four completely private (that's important) cabins, each with its own attached ensuite that included vanity, separate shower and Jabsco electric macerator head. In the instance of the three-cabin version, the starboard side becomes the masters quarters and the forward bedroom and central ensuite is replaced by a study and a larger bathroom forward of that again.

An observation from the outside confirmed our impressions once below; all four cabins in our test boat were light, bright rooms courtesy of the generous portside windows and the overhead Lewmar hatches. Décor was a tasteful combination of cherrywood timber, vinyl panels and some gelcoat, but the best aspect for me was the fact both the forward and aft cabins in this four-cabin version were virtually the same as regards dimension, appointments, layout and décor.

In other words, there is no real need to sprint down the wharf to nab the best cabin! Even the (queen-size) berths were the same - apart from the fact there was a little more room either side of the berths in the aft cabins, for ease of 'making' the beds. That was compensated however by the fact the two forward cabins included a single berth forward of the queen-size berth - great for a family situation.

Also within the confines of the aft cabins was direct access to the engines. Down in the aft cabins while underway certainly YES, you could hear the engines 'beating their drums' but NO, it most definitely was not onerously noisy for the insulation did a very good job. Just on the engines, power for this particular 'charter' version was twin 225hp Volvo D225 diesel engines through Volvo gearboxes and conventional shaft drive, to the 4-blade 21"D x 25"P nickel-bronze propellers.

The other engine options recommended for this particular vessel



were either the smaller 150hp Cummins diesels which provided a top speed of 18 knots at the maximum 2800rpm, or at the other end of the scale the 260hp Volvo Pentas which provided a top speed of 22.5 knots at their maximum of 3500rpm. It really depends on what your usage and expectations are but sensibly LCA have bisected the two with in this instance power courtesy of 225hp Volvo examples which returned a top speed of 21 knots - figures I suggest that graphically accentuate the efficiency of this 14,500kg GRP catamaran.

Like the rest of the vessel Robertson and Caine had done a very effective job of maximising space when housing the tankage and all the mechanical peripherals - so the boat was well balanced fore and

The aft master cabin, well spec'd and well presented. (top)

Direct access to the engines is via the lift-up bed-base in the aft cabin. (above)



The three-cabin 'private' version sees the master cabin looking out onto a study and bathroom forward of that again. (top)
Robertson and Caine have done magnificent job of presentation, the angles and shapes were very easy on the eye. (top)

aft. Aft of the engines and accessed through the rear cockpit hatches were the two 600-litre fuel tanks, the 40,000btu of CruisAir air-conditioning, the fire extinguisher system, the three 210Ah AGM deep cycle house and two engine batteries, and the Master Volt battery chargers, inverters and shore power:

Forward of the engines and virtually amidships were the two 500-litre water tanks and then up in the well sealed cavernous bow lockers on the foredeck we discovered in the portside locker a Northern Lights 9kVA Generator. The starboard-side locker was empty in this charter instance but of course it would lend itself nicely to the private sector as a convenient 'home' for a desalinator or a dive compressor.

Bisecting these two deck lockers was a cover that when lifted revealed the Lofrans 1200 windlass and guide channel to the Delta and Brittany anchors secreted under the bow beam – I mean to say, you certainly would not want a messy old anchor chain running right through the middle of your sun-bathing area, would you?!

Conclusion

Forget about the fact this vessel was destined for the charter industry, the Leopard 47 Powercat was quite simply the consummate cruiser. With may I add styling, specification, efficiency, and – class! It was certainly a breath of spring air to go aboard a boat that while practical, still had the styling of a European Sports Cruiser. It looked the part and it certainly embraced the typical ideology of lifestyle boating. Consider the price of AUD\$1,200,000, and what you get for that money?!

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Design Name:	Leopard 47 Powercat
Year Launched:	2008
Designer:	Morrelli and Melvin
Interior Designer:	Morrelli and Melvin
Builder:	Robertson and Caine
LOA:	14.42 metres
Beam:	7.57 metres
LWL:	14.38metres
Draft:	0.985metres
Displacement:	14500 kg
Max Speed:	21 knots
Cruise Speed:	12-15 knots
Construction:	Composite GRP sandwich, stitched E glass
Generator:	Northern Lights 9KVA
Inverter/Charger:	Mastervolt 240V 240-volt Inverter. Battery charger 40 amp Victron Centaur 12 volt/40 amp
Air Conditioning:	CruiseAir 40000 BTU
Anchor Winch:	Lofrans 1200 watt windlass
Anchors:	25kg Delta, 16kg Brittany
Steering:	Seastar Hydraulic
Engine Controls:	Morse Electronic double lever
Lighting:	12V Cantalupi.
Paint (Topsides):	Isophthalic gelcoat
Paint (Antifouling):	International
Hatches:	Lewmar
Heads:	4 x electric Jabsco
Veneer/Plywood:	Cherrywood
Davit Crane:	Robertson & Caine Custom Fibre Glass
Stainless Steel Doors:	Robertson & Caine
Helm Chair:	Robertson and Caine
Batteries:	3 AGM house batteries (210 amp hours each), 2 deep cycle engine batteries
ELECTRONICS	
Autopilot:	ST6002+ Autopilot control unit
GPS:	Raychart A65 chart-plotter complete with RS12 GPS, Ray55 VHF
Depth Sounder:	ST 60 Tri data Ray 55
Entertainment Systems:	Sony Am/FM Radio & CD Player CDXHS radio-CD player
Engine Instruments:	Volvo Penta
Switch Panel:	Robertson & Caine
Price As Tested:	4 cabin version in QLD commercial survey - AUD\$1,200,000