

# The Ideal Vacation Ride



Quick and level sailing. Comfortable and spacious staterooms. Plenty of space for lounging and sunbathing. An all-around terrific party platform. These are just a few of the reasons that contemporary catamarans have become the vehicle of choice for so many bareboat charterers. So it's little wonder that for 2017, the quartet of nominees vying for the designation of **Best Charter Boat** were all cats: the **Bavaria Nautitech 46 Fly**, **Leopard 45** and **Gemini Freestyle**.

"A boat built for the charter market comes with its own set of design puzzles," observed

Tim Murphy. "While a boat aimed at private ownership may give priority to one person or couple in the boat by devoting more volume and amenities to one stateroom over all others, a successful charter boat is different. A charter boat should provide equivalent amenities to three or four couples or more. And in recent designs, the best charter boats also offer multiple separate social spaces around the boat, both in and out of the sun and wind."

In this year's contest, we sailed three catamarans that developed these themes for the overnight charter market — plus a day-charter boat, the **Gemini Freestyle**, which promises fun gatherings at resorts around the coasts.

Because the Gemini Freestyle is built in the same facility that manufactures Catalina yachts, at first the judges had a challenging time

getting their collective mind around the concept of an open-deck layout — not unlike a pontoon boat, but much more spacious and inviting — that can be configured in countless ways. "The Gemini is a great platform for anything you'd like to do in the way of entertaining on the water or sharing an open space in some creative way," said Carol Hasse.

The **Bali 4.0 Lounge** features an open floor plan with an indoor/outdoor gathering space on the bridgedeck. A garage-door-style enclosure at the aft end of the cabin house either opens or closes the bridgedeck saloon to weather.

"The Bali is a new brand developed by the French yard Catana within the last two years," said Murphy. "The company felt they needed boats they could bring into the charter market. They came in with that open floor plan, something we've seen strongly represented by boats like the Leopard from South Africa's Robertson and Caine yard."

The **Bavaria Nautitech 46 Fly** provides a helm and lounging area on a flybridge that separates the lower aft "social cockpit" from the upper "working cockpit."

"This 46-footer is built by another French builder,



**Clockwise from far left: Perhaps the most interesting and unusual boat in this year's fleet was the Gemini Freestyle, a 37-foot cat with an open floor plan that can be configured in countless ways. The Bavaria Nautitech 46 Fly provides a helm and lounging area on a dedicated flybridge. The Leopard 45 is another winner from the South African Robertson and Caine yard. The Bali 4.0 Lounge is Catana's answer to a dedicated charter boat.**

Nautitech," said Murphy. "A couple of years ago, it was purchased by the German firm Bavaria Yachts, which wanted to expand the charter component in their boatbuilding operation and needed cats to make that happen."

"I was impressed with what they've done to appeal to the U.S. market, with larger

air-conditioning units and a lot of the systems they put in," said Ed Sherman. "In terms of fit and finish, I was very pleasantly surprised."

"I was taken with the joinery, the lovely teak grates and the nicely done interior," said Hasse. "There was great visibility from the main saloon; you could see everywhere. And

even in light air, it sailed way better than I thought it would."

But among the nominees we inspected this year, the **Leopard 45** stood out for its exemplary execution of the aforementioned charter-cat themes. The boat offered the category's best forward gathering space, connected to the saloon through a translucent

door of 1/2-inch-thick Lexan. The layout of the main saloon is flipped 180 degrees, unlike on traditional cats, so that people sitting at the dinette can focus their attention forward instead of aft. Visibility through the Leopard is terrific (topped only by the Balance 526 in the Multihulls Over 50 Feet category). Designer Alex

## IN SOME CASES, CREATING A GREAT CHARTER BOAT CREATES A FINE PRIVATE OWNER'S BOAT.

Simonis described the structural challenge of creating so much openness, pointing out the network of structural stringers crossing the bridge-deck and around the insides of the hulls. In earlier designs, a solid transverse bulkhead would have carried those loads. For sailing performance, Simonis moved the mast aft, balancing the aspect ratios of the main and jib. For sailors, that means simpler sailhandling. As on other boats in the category, all running rigging comes to a single work station at the helm, but the organization around two power winches worked best in this boat.

In some cases, creating a good charter boat also creates a good private owner's boat. That's certainly the case with the Leopard 45. With 60 percent of this model's units destined for charter — branded as the Moorings 4500 and the Sunsail 454 — all service items are easy to maintain. They need to be; the parent company, Tui Marine, is responsible for servicing 450 boats at any given time.

With detail after detail executed to an extremely high standard, the **Leopard 45** earned the top spot as **Best Charter Cat** in the BOTY 2017 fleet.