

November/December 2010

# MULTIHULLS

THE LARGEST AND MOST INFORMATIVE MULTIHULL MAGAZINE READ WORLDWIDE

[www.MULTIHULLSMag.com](http://www.MULTIHULLSMag.com)

**Delivering a  
Leopard 460 to Peru**

**Boat Shows in Review:  
Las Olas, Annapolis &  
Multihull Demo Days**

**Exploring Croatia –  
Chartering in the Adriatic**

Cover Story:

***Testing the Alibi 54***

A true high-performance masterpiece

# Boat Test

text and photos by Gregor Tarjan

## First Sail of the Alibi 54



Now, where do I start? Should it be the large number of multihulls that I am currently looking at, or the fact that I have just stepped off the Alibi 54 – one of the most astonishing sailing catamarans that I have ever sailed on?

Ok, so let me give you the backdrop: Sitting 23 stories high next to the giant hotel windows overlooking the Gulf of Thailand, the brand new, state-of-the-art Ocean Marina houses over 100 sailing and motor yachts. Amazingly, nearly 25% of them are multihulls. This is a startling number of cats and tris by any standard. It seems that Asian countries are less burdened by traditional yachting concepts (they simply never had them) and are embracing new ideas, such as the multihull, much faster than us Westerners. In fact, more Thai juniors are learning to sail on beach cats than on more conservative monos, such as the classic Optis, Lasers or 505s.

It is in this exotic, but open-minded world that my friend Loic Goepfert, founder of Alibi catamarans, has decided to launch his first boat. To build in Thailand was his first choice. The sheer amount of craftsman and reasonable access to raw materials streamlined his production to such a level that he was able to produce a 20-knot-capable Wally-style speed machine for under 1,2M euro. If he were to try this in Italy or the US, he would have to double this figure. Loic's background is in the world of racing on experimental ultra high-performance multihulls such as *Hydroplaneur*. He acted as one of the chief designers of Yves Parlier's 60' biplane-rigged speed machine, which I have had the pleasure to test on many occasions. That was also the time where I first talked to Loic about his ambitious project of creating the coolest cruising catamaran the market has ever seen – The Alibi 54.

Customers have very few choices when it comes to fast multihulls. They can either spend a fortune (3-4 million dollars) on a Gunboat or build a custom boat for the same amount, which they will have to wait 3 years for. These two options are really the only way to get a 20-knot-capable cruising cat. The Alibi 54 really fills the gap between the sailors that have graduated from more conventional cruisers and high-end custom multihulls. After the Neel 50 trimaran, it is the only real alternative. If you have 1,2M euro budget you could have an Alibi 54 ready to go in 9 months. This is extremely competitive indeed.

When I first caught a glimpse of the finished Alibi 54, the boat sat in the most exotic location imaginable. Koh Samet is an island in the Gulf of Thailand that is mainly used as a luxury resort for Westerners. With her low silhouette and reverse bows, the Alibi looked menacing and ready to run. Circling the cat, she appeared smaller than her 54' would suggest, but once a person appeared on deck – she suddenly took on a massive stance.

Nothing about the Alibi 54 is ordinary. Loic spent nearly five years using his extensive racing background as reference and translating it into a functional high-performance cruiser. From asymmetric daggerboards, movable fore- and aft-bal-last systems to the ingenious placement of the dinghy; he really created an exotic dream machine that sails like the devil.

I had the privilege to sail with Loic on one of the first sails. Although we still had several craftsmen on the boat installing the galley counter and tuning several systems the boat had full tanks and was loaded with heavy tools. Basically, the Alibi 54 carried over three tons of payload and we started into a building breeze which eventually produced 30 knots of apparent wind on deck. With asymmetric spinnaker set, I had no problem of maintaining 20

knots with a wheel that was as light as my Hobie Cat's tiller. At 16 knots true wind speed and 110-degree true wind angle, the Alibi effortlessly started picking up her twin reverse bows and surfing in full control. At that point the apparent wind angle moved to 60 degrees, creating an apparent wind of 24 knots. Like a giant bird, she plowed through 8-foot-high short seas. What would have been uncomfortable in any other boat was a simple joy and walk in the park for the Alibi. After a 2-mile speed run we bore off to drop the kite and went back to the capable self-tacking Solent jib. What a sail. Like a blade ahead of the square top main, the Solent cleans up the flow and pre-bends the air over the back of the main. With the leeward asymmetric board down, we saw speeds up to 12 knots and were sailing at 40 degrees to the true wind. My complete amazement came after we tacked. As Loic spun the wheel and brought the Alibi onto port tack we found ourselves pointing directly at Pattaya and could clearly make out the glimmering lights in the distance. What would have been a long slog to windward and a two-part beat, only took us one tack. The Alibi 54 is a cat that reminds me of my Star boat, one of the most close-winded sailing boats that I have ever sailed on.

We were hand-steering most of the time and had enjoyed pleasant distractions such as champagne (to celebrate our first 20-knot run), but also Loic's family on board. This caused us to lose focus and twice we put the Alibi into a stall. We were so close-hauled and sailing so fast that it took only 3 seconds to find us dead close to the wind. The fact that we did not have our apparent wind gauge and masthead Windex set up forced us to steer with pure feel of the wind on our face – causing us to stall. It was the ease of recovery however that I will never forget. The 10-ton Alibi behaved like a

little dinghy – dumping the main traveler, the boat started accelerating back on her old tack faster than she came into the stall. It was at another occasion that I appreciated the sailing qualities of the Alibi. We simply sailed off the anchorage and set the main without even touching our hybrid 35hp electric engines. The boat was able to maintain upwind speed and heading while the eased traveler let the main effortlessly feed up the mast. At another occasion (when we blew our windward traveler control line) we simply tacked and hove to. The Alibi came to a dead stop and we could, in full control, quickly hack another traveler line via the Gennaker winch. In short, the sailing qualities are simply wonderful. I had the privilege to sail on many catamarans and the Alibi is by far the best one, with the finest sailing qualities.

Loic has put a lot of thought into the Alibi's design. Every angle and corner seems to have a purpose. Either a chine is used to reflect light thus making the boat appear lower to the water or a hull break is utilized to deflect spray and stiffen the structure. The overhang of the relatively short coalhouse reminds of the roofs found

on Fontaine Pajots – and it works. The protruding roofline provides shade yet takes the verticality out of the profile by allowing steeply angled windows. The seating position in the salon is excellent. Weather standing or lounging, you always have a clear view forward or aft, even from the cockpit. However, in *Difference*, the owner's choice was to select a dark tint for the windows, which made it very difficult to see forward through the windows while standing in the cockpit.

The helm position is close to ideal – in any situation. The retractable rudders utilize low-friction bearings and the direct steering system via Vectran cables gives you responsiveness and excellent feedback. The brilliant design of the twin canting wheel, which has three positions, lets the helmsman steer seated outboard on deck with an unrivalled view onto the windward side and telltales. If it gets real nasty, the wheel can be canted 160 degrees inboard and one can stand in full protection of the cockpit under the solid bimini roof. Coming into a harbor for close-quarter maneuvering, one can navigate into the tightest spaces with perfect views of all four corners of the Alibi.

The decks are flat and all hatches are completely flush with the teak deck. Movement forward and aft is unobstructed, although I would want an easier athwart ship path via a slight extension of the aft beam. Also the transom steps could use a bit of rework and more handholds. These two improvements are planned for hull 2, which is already under way. The forward part of the boat has plenty of areas for lounging. The ingenious forward miniloggia is situated just forward of the mast and is an ideal spot for getting away from it all. Attention though: When the boat starts seeing 17-plus knots (which it did on ever outing) that area can get a bit wet.

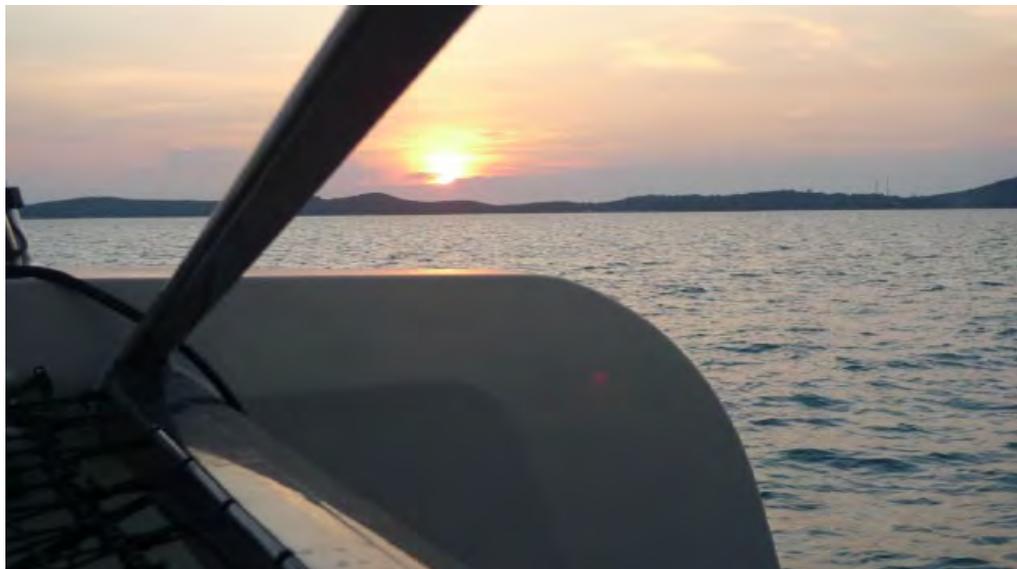
We encountered most conditions a sailor will encounter – from dead calms to close to 30 knots of wind with accompanying sea states. Another amazing phenomenon I experienced was the super quick recovery after pitching hard into short seas. What would take a heavier cat (or monohull) a period of 3-4 steep waves to come back to full speed and flat sailing took the Alibi 1-2 waves at the most. This is due to the smart design of the reverse bows that extend buoyancy into the far ends of the boat, the thoughtful layout of the heaviest weights





in the center of the boat and the powerful and super efficient rotating rig and square-top mainsail. All these key components made the Alibi one of the quickest pitch-recovering multihulls I have sailed on.

The A-frame bowsprit not only looks very cool, but is completely self supporting. There are no nasty stays that need to counteract the upward pull of the forestay. The cavity in the bottom of the A is also the clever nesting spot of the giant 4,2m Exploration tender-RIB with 40 hp Evinrude. When one would see the boat for the first time, one does not even notice that the dinghy is perfectly nestled into a counter recess under the mother ship. Honestly, when Loic first told me about his idea of placing the tender under the bridgedeck I had my doubts of his sanity. Would the dinghy not self-destruct in anything but calm seas? Amazingly, not once did we experienced a slam of a wave against the tender even when slamming into the short 8 footers. So how does one actually use the tender? One simply gets in and out



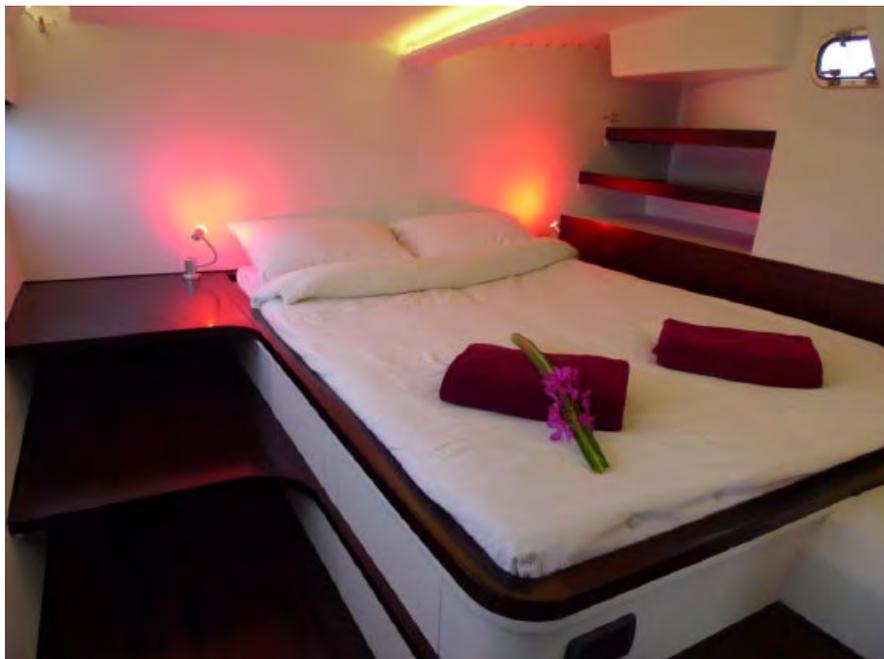
from deck, just forward of the mast. It is extremely practical to load and unload groceries or heavy items. We even tried a flying start. Sailing at 15 knots with the Alibi, one of us clambered into the dinghy from the foredeck, quickly lowered the tender (with him in it) and shot off forward of the boat. The entire maneuver took 2 minutes. Very James Bond.

The interior of the first Alibi is finished in pickled exotic woods from renewable sources, which were handpicked by her owner in Burma. The floor is fashionably dark Wenge wood and all seating surfaces are finished in the finest terra cotta shade of leather. Both the galley and nav station are well laid out with plenty of space to have you either cook and navigate with a

partner or two. *Difference* was equipped with high-end appliances such as Miele stoves, deep freezers, and twin refrigerators (one Isotherm unit in cockpit). All exterior and interior lights are LEDs and there is high tech all over the place. The engines are Kräutler electric sail drives. Virtually silent, they are situated midship and angled inwards to reduce draft. With retracted daggerboards and rudders, the Alibi can sit on the beach with the sail drives safely higher than the boat's rocker.

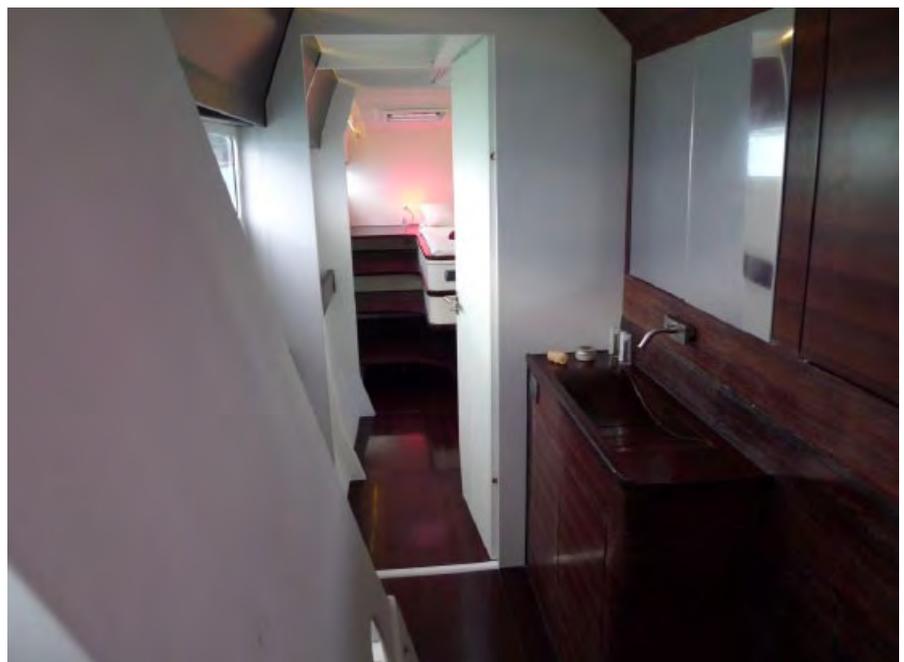
front and rear making the Alibi virtually unsinkable. *Difference* was painted in the coolest shade of champagne metallic paint, which the owner sourced from a Pershing representative. The application by the yard was excellent and the shades ranged from warm beige to gunmetal grey – depending on the angle of the sun and humidity in the air.

The rotating single-spreader mast, as well as the A-frame longeron and forward cross-beam, are impeccably crafted by Marstrom.



The battery bank consists of Lithium Ion batteries, and a trio of Victron 220V inverters comprise the heart of the electrical system. A Fisher Panda 13kw is the main power source with a smaller 7kw unit as backup – all together, a smartly balanced ensemble.

The Alibi 54 is built from female molds to the highest composite standards using 600 g/m<sup>2</sup> woven unidirectional fibers. The skins are vacuum bagged for maximum strength and the core is PVC foam. Carbon fiber omegas and ring frames add to the stiffness. Bumping through short seas I never heard any hull movement noises from below. The bows are “false” and foam filled. They are completely sacrificial and watertight compartments seal



They are constructed of all high modulus clear carbon. The mast has a single spreader and Aramid shrouds are lashed via Spectra lines, reminiscent of race boat rigging. It all works perfectly. The square-top D4 membrane mainsail set beautifully and dumped off wind whenever a puff hit us. The square-top effectively tightened the leach of the main and automatically depowered the boat whenever a gust hit. The traveler, as well as Solent sheet movement was excellent, although I would want to relocate a mainsheet block that posed a load-path threat, which was situated on the roof. If that blew up, you would have a hole in your head standing next to the helmsman. All winches on board *Difference* were electric, making quick short-handed maneuvers very easy. It turns the Alibi into a push-button yacht. Even the twin carbon daggerboards are raised via an electric winch and hidden lines.

If you like surfing or like to lug several bikes aboard—you will love the two giant hatches on the fore deck. One serves as a “convertible” skippers quarter, the other

as an enormous 6’x3’ opening locker that exposes an 8’ deep space which can be used as storage, work-or-technical-space. This is certainly one of the unique features of the Alibi. If you are a diver, the twin aft teak platforms that drop down to sea level let you easily access large stern holds that can house dive compressors and tanks – all very clever.

Was it all good? Well, mostly. What needs improvement are the athwart ship circulations in front of the mast and behind the cockpit, more handholds and a better layout of the transom steps. The two mainsheet blocks on the roof would need a safer spot and primary winch jammer batteries are too far forward to be easily operated. The anchoring locker could use a bit of rethinking for a better chain drop and I would add several stanchion seats around the helmsman for good company – all more or less small improvements to an otherwise brilliant boat.

As the sun is setting over the Gulf of Thailand I see the Alibi’s LED masthead light in the marina at the foot of the giant

hotel. Only 300’ next to this high-tech sailing catamaran are several beached traditional Thai fishing boats unloading their daily catch. They remind me of the diversity of our boating culture and the personalities that made this project so special. It is thanks to the owner of *Difference* and Loic her builder, which have produced a cornerstone multihull yacht and I am grateful to their vision. The Alibi 54 has enriched our high-performance catamaran culture in a big way. You really need to sail this machine!

*Gregor Tarjan is founder of Aeroyacht Ltd., an internationally-known catamaran specialist dealership in NY. He is author of two catamaran best selling reference books: “Catamarans, A Guide for Every Cruising Sailor” and his recent “Catamarans, Tomorrow’s Superyachts.” His Aeroyacht 110 by Wally Supercat Design was nominated for the 2010 superyacht design award. For more information about cruising multihulls and the revolutionary Alibi 54 high-performance catamaran go to: [www.Aeroyacht.com](http://www.Aeroyacht.com)*

