

Bamba 50

Sail or engine:
the choice is yours!



Under power, the Bamba has a good range (an Atlantic crossing), if you adopt a reasonable cruising speed.

It is very hard not to find this Bamba 50 beautiful, with its grey finish, shown off by the low sunshine which gives Brittany such pretty colours. In the anchorage at Ster Vraz, on the west coast of Belle Ile en Mer, Christophe Laurent, the boss of the La Rochelle-based builder, Bamba Yachts, came ashore in the big dinghy belonging to this 50-foot trawler, the first example of which has just recently been launched. Trawler, you say,

but it has a mast. Well yes, with the aim of saving fuel during ocean crossings, in the trade winds with the wind aft, the Bamba 50 will unroll its very big roller genoa, measuring nearly a hundred square metres. From the dinghy, access aboard is via one of the two gates on either side of the boat. There are two others at the aft end of the hulls. Enough to provide for all eventualities when embarking... For this test, we had

planned to sail round Belle Ile, about thirty miles, with a few stops. So as not to distort our impressions, we hoisted the dinghy aboard. Here there are no davits, and as it is a yacht, it has a telescopic crane allowing the dinghy to be hoisted onto the flybridge. This crane is essential – don't even think about moving this dinghy by hand; it is propelled by a 50hp motor and is heavy. The crane is manipulated with a remote control, and as

A real long-term cruising trawler, but equipped with a mast and a genoa: this is the Bamba 50!

Half-way between a (blue water) cruising multihull and a pure trawler catamaran, the Bamba reinvents the art of cruising under power.

Text and photos: Gilles Ruffet

The sail allows fuel to be saved downwind...

we used it, we sensed the nostalgia for childhood train sets appearing in the memories of the masculine elements of the crew... Once in position, the dinghy cover was fitted (for more aesthetically-pleasing photos); we were ready to go.

At anchor, the two dinghy cradles fold away, and the area is closed off with stanchions, lifelines and even dodgers. Thus, when the dinghy is not present, the area remains safe (notably for children).

UNDER SAIL AND STEAM

This boat gives off an incredible feeling of seriousness and sturdiness. The same applies to the anchor gear and its windlass. It is heavy-duty, 3.5 kW, running on 220V to deal with one of the two 25kg anchors on 12mm chain. The disadvantage of the power, as we were to note later when we anchored at midday, is that the speed of descent (or recovery, moreover) of the anchor is quite slow, and it takes several long minutes to pay out a sufficient length of chain.

This same impression of sturdiness can be found again in the safety rails around the boat, made from 30mm stainless steel tube. Or again in the flared, high bows, designed to protect the forward part of the boat and its liveable areas effectively. The rubbing strake around the boat, just above the waterline also participates in this same impression of sturdiness. We noted the longitudinal step, which allows the wetted surface area to be reduced. Seen from the exterior, it has an undeniable family resemblance with the Grand Banks, as well as other more fishing-oriented



boats, etc. In any case, successful lines!

We left Ster Vraz. Bamba cruised peacefully at 7 – 8 knots, with around fifteen knots of

boat, and the rudders are therefore reduced to the minimum. Under power, the water flow generated by the propellers amplifies the rudder action, but

dency to carry weather helm when under sail, despite a centre of effort which is quite far aft. The sail's sheeting point is fixed, via a simple block, and in the conditions we had (we were sailing with the wind abeam), a barber hauler would have been useful to refine the trim and align the pennants perfectly.

South of the island, we were able to bear away, and sail further downwind. But if we approached a run too closely, the sail, with its long luff, was in trouble. We now needed a whisker pole, which would have

« Trawler, you say, but it has a mast... »

wind on the beam and the associated chop. Up on the flybridge, the movements could be felt. Wind on the beam is borderline for the sail, but we couldn't resist, we wanted to try it. Unroll the genoa! The crew still has the privilege of sheeting in, but all the rest is electric (including the roller). With 11 knots of wind, we were cruising steadily at almost 6 knots. Beware, however, of the visibility behind the sail. We tried to cut the engines, but it was a waste of time, as the rudders no longer responded. No, the Bamba is not a sailing boat! It is first and foremost a motor

when the genoa is unrolled and Bamba is sailing, the aspect ratio of the rudders becomes clearly insufficient. So we kept one engine in gear, at low revs,



This ocean-cruising boat is also very pleasant at anchor, with numerous areas for the whole family...



and everything returned to normal. An intermediate solution could be imagined with a secondary lifting rudder system (on one hull, perhaps?) with a high aspect ratio, at the stern of one of the hulls, to be used on long downwind legs... But at what price, and to what gain? We noted the boat's slight ten-

allowed the sail to catch the wind and get the best out of its volume. Gybing of course was not a problem; the 'dead' sheet passed forward of the forestay was easily recovered. We entered Port Kérel under sail, on a motor boat – what class! A pleasant smell of coniferous trees filled our nostrils, just like



Access to the flybridge is via an internal stairway, or the external one...

at the end of a long passage.

SAIL OR MOTOR?

We then continued our circumnavigation of Belle Ile, and our route east. Aboard an ocean cruising catamaran, the elements of choice between sail and motor deserve discussion. The cost of a rig is not negligible. On a 50-foot sailing boat, the rigging, the genoa, the boom etc, add up to a large budget. And before spending on fuel (we are not talking here about ecological footprints, the reasoning is purely economic) what the rig cost, we would have enough to cross a few oceans. But the problems lie elsewhere: do we want a sailing boat or a motor boat? It's true

that with the increase in the weight and volume of certain sailing catamarans, which need more and more wind (and thus engine, to move in light weather), the question deserves to be asked.

We now arrive at the consumption. In an era when ecology is fashionable, where it is good to favour sail over steam, isn't such a choice out of touch with reality? We have just replied, partly, and only in theory. Let's let the figures speak for themselves. We carried out consumption tests, with the help of flow metres fitted in the fuel circuits. Even though these figures should be taken with a few reservations, they give us an idea (the Bamba Yachts R & D department estimates the margin of error at 10%).

At 1500 rpm and 8.2 knots, each engine consumed 8.5 l/hr – around 2 litres per mile. On the scale of an Atlantic crossing, an average of 4,000 miles, this gives us a consumption of 8,000 litres, the boat's range. Without of course deducting the litres saved thanks to the assistance provided by the sail. If we cut one of the engines, we lost 1.5 knots off our speed, for a consumption which logically increased slightly, to reach 10 l/hr. But things became more serious when we wanted to get back to our original speed of 8.2 knots (on one engine), as it was necessary to increase the rpm, and the consumption at 2000 rpm flies up to 17 l hr. And if for some reason or another you need power for a moment, at 2650 rpm, the engine swallows 35 l hr for a negligible gain in speed, which reaches 9.2 knots. For just a minute, we pushed the two engines to full power. Bamba reared up, accelerated,



Easy to beach, this voyager will be comfortable everywhere...

« We entered Port Kérel under sail, on a motor boat – what class! »

ploughed through the waves without really taking off, and its speed peaked at... 12 knots. You can't do the impossible: the boat weighs 22 tonnes, probably a bit less for the next models, and the four-bladed propellers are designed to push hard, not to go fast.

We quickly returned to more socially (and ecologically...) responsible behaviour, and opted for a cruising speed of 6.5 knots. At 1200 rpm, the consumption of both engines together was around 13 l hr. In the trade winds, crossing the Atlantic or the Pacific, you can count on a favourable current of at least one knot. Already the average becomes 7.5 knots, at 13 l hr. And by unrolling the sail, there is no doubt that the consumption will decrease drastically. It's then up to everyone to determine their optimum cruising speed.

A VOLUMINOUS INTERIOR

The interior is as successful as the exterior. Movement around the boat has been carefully thought out, including on the flybridge, where there are two means of access: on the one hand at the rear, where a spiral staircase climbs from the gangway on the starboard side, and on the other hand, inside, for-

ward of and next to the external steering position, a stairway leads to the interior wheelhouse. This will be appreciable in tropical squalls. It only takes a few seconds to go from one of the wheelhouses to the other, or again to the aft end of the starboard gangway, where electric controls (bringing the number to three) have been fitted, for harbour manoeuvres astern, as well as when singlehanded, when you have to both place the boat next to the quay and tie it up. The flybridge of course has a table, which can accommodate the occupants of the three double cabins. To one side, behind the helm, there is a small sink, next to the 'plancha'.

Inside, the living area includes notably the inside wheelhouse, with the helm on one side and the chart table on the other. As is the rule on this kind of boat, it occupies the whole available width. It shares this big 'room' (how can we call it anything else?), which is as convivial as you could wish for, with the galley (behind a bar), and the saloon table, with its L-shaped seating. Everywhere, the visibility is very good (on three sides, at least); however we regretted the lack of a view of the exterior when sitting at the saloon table. A little



The crane which allows the dinghy to be hoisted aboard: yacht atmosphere and fun guaranteed for the men aboard who still have the soul of a child...



The interior atmosphere is very successful, and pleasant to live in.



The galley is very well-equipped (fridge, dishwasher...)



The interior wheelhouse: comprehensive and practical, it is duplicated by the one on the flybridge.



The 'pasha's' cabin, with a panoramic view aft.

'podium' should rectify this; or an extension of the 'windows' downwards. The galley is equipped with a single sink, but rinsing the washing up is not important, as there is a dishwasher. The fridge is of the cupboard type, and huge. We noted the door surrounds, all in teak, whilst beech has been chosen for the bulkheads. Overall it is airy, clear, bright and well finished.

This prototype of the Bamba 50 has three cabins. Aft, there is the owner's cabin. It is superb, with its central double bed and the picture windows which look aft over a real balcony, with direct access to the sea. Situated to port, the bathroom is not huge; it offers just sufficient volume for what it was designed for: having a wash. We regret perhaps the absence of a separate WC on a boat of this

standard. But this is a detail, as the Bamba can easily be built as a semi-custom boat, if the customer asks.

The two other cabins are forward, in the hulls. Bamba Yachts has chosen to design this trawler catamaran with the emphasis on its seakeeping qualities, to the detriment of excessive volume. Thus the berths are of a width which is moderate, but sufficient.

The same goes for the heads in the port forepeak. Further forward is the washing machine, necessary on any long-term voyage, the programme for which the boat has been designed. The starboard forepeak has another cabin, with two single berths, one of which is athwartships.

The Bamba brings a breath of fresh air to the world of multi-hulls, and so much the better!



The flybridge is a must on this type of boat. Here the area is pleasant, and both at sea and at anchor, it can be enjoyed to the full...

THE PLUSSES

- A motor boat which also sails.
- Strong, serious construction.
- The organisation of the areas.

THE MINUSES

- Absence of separate heads.
- No view of the exterior when sitting in the saloon.
- Near impossibility of pure sailing, because of the rudders.

Technical Specifications

- Overall length: 15 metres
- Maximum beam: 7 metres
- Displacement: 22,000 kg
- Engines: 2 x 150hp Ivecos
- Fuel: 2 x 2,000 litres
- Water: 2 x 400 litres
- Watermaker: 200 l/hour
- Generator: 9.5 kVA Onan
- Mast height: 16 metres
- Genoa area: 90 m ²
- Price:

With all options: 1,340,000 € exc. VAT
Basic model: 954,000 € exc. VAT