



Our Last Hurrah

A cruising couple goes from monohull to catamaran by Julie Palm

When we announced to our sailing friends in January that we, dyed-in-the-wool monohull enthusiasts for over thirty years, were going to buy a catamaran, the response was immediate. From the monohull people, we heard, “What-are-you...nuts?” From the cat folks, it was an equally vocal

chorus, “What took you so long?”

Here we are looking back at age 65, determined to stay on the water and moving for as long as we can. Some, with that mission in mind, have turned to trawlers. But we think cats can offer some of the same benefits and retain the essential elements of sailing. It's easier to

get on and off a cat than a monohull from a dinghy. The rig is somewhat simpler. There are no steep companionway steps to navigate in tough seas. There are more ways to stay out of the sun and the elements. And, of course, there is no heeling.

We also have two grandsons, ages 11 and 7, and we would like to entice them to join us on the water with their parents. A cat offers the living space to comfortably allow that to happen.

Our cat search began in St. Lucia where we spent time with friends on their cats—a Nexus 60, an Outremer 49 and a Fountaine Pajot 46—all of which were headed for the Panama Canal.

“Aha!”, we said. “These are ocean-going cats that actually go places. Now that is a concept we



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can warm to."

From this introduction, we learned that not all cats are decked out for charter with 10 bunks and four heads.

As we cruised north from St. Lucia, we knocked on the hull of any interesting looking cat we saw in each anchorage where we stopped. We checked out an Antares 44 and ran into people we knew from the Caribbean 1500 on a Conser 47 and a Dolphin 46. We learned a lot from each boat tour and began to see how the compromises each boat owner made fit their cruising style. An owner's layout with one hull devoted to a master stateroom, a head and a shower is a must for us. Having a galley up in the saloon is preferred, but may be compromised to get a full nav station in the main saloon. Of course, boats with an owner's hull are less common and more expensive than those with a traditional charter layout.

Our first struggle was to get used to the interior craftsmanship on catamarans. On *Altair*, our Saga 48 monohull, the interior is American cherry aged to a rich patina over the last 12 years. On cats, the need to reduce weight is paramount and the first thing to go is the solid wood interior. Some cats don't have any wood, others have wood trim and still others are fully decked out with wooden cabinetry. But the wood surfaces are all veneer and only the best even begin to match the look we have on *Altair*. Largely because of the fine craftsmanship of the interior, we looked seriously at a Privilege 495. Which is truly a lovely boat. But, when we sailed her, we found her to be no faster than *Altair* and decided to compromise some of that craftsmanship to get better performance.

Rick's six foot four inch frame turned out



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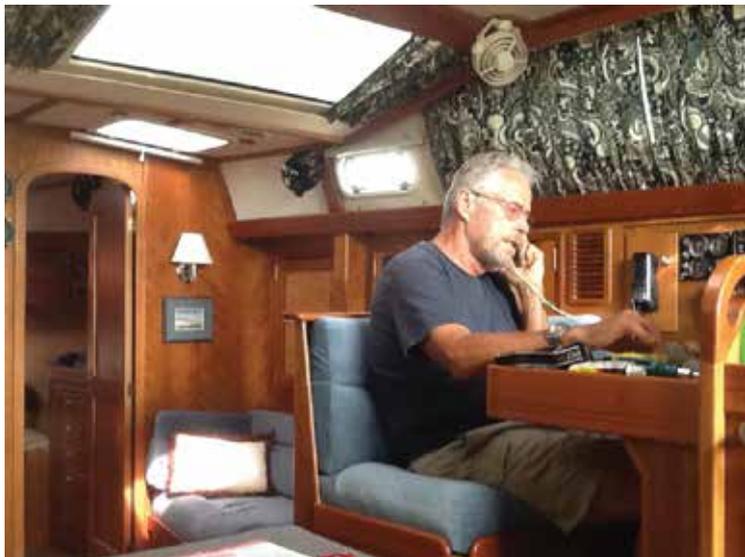


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to be more of an issue than we expected. We started out looking for boats under 47 feet but soon found out that they had areas that caused Rick to stand with a crook in his neck. On a Dolphin 46, for instance, he had trouble standing

in several places, even in part of the main saloon. We soon realized that a boat had to be at least 48 feet to give Rick the headroom he needed.

Somewhere early in our cat search, we began to transform

our ideas for future sailing from the original plan which was to cruise the Eastern Caribbean and leave the boat somewhere in the islands each summer. More and more, we began to talk about doing an Atlantic Circle, the Western Caribbean and maybe even heading through the Panama Canal again. As we talked about continued passagemaking, we began to think



more about the importance of performance. A boat that goes faster gets into port sooner. The boat that gets into port sooner avoids the next squall or approaching front. And the cruisers on the faster boats have more time to explore each destination than those that spend more time at sea.

So, performance rose to the top of our list. Performance on cats is a factor of hull design and sail plan, of course, but is also heavily influenced by weight. We began to look for good performing used boats that were not loaded heavily with dishwashers, washing machines, icemakers, microwaves and generators. We were intrigued with some of the newer performance features in cat sailing like the Chris White Atlantic 47 with mast foils, but, in the end, zeroed in on more traditional performance-enhancing

features like dagger boards, sleek hull designs and square-topped, full-battened mainsails.

But our motto is still "Cruising is not Camping," so we were not willing to give up a well-designed galley, comfortable bunks, electric heads and large showers. And, we need to protect our skin better to slow the eternal donation of epidermal bits to the dermatologist. Protection from cold and wet conditions in rough seas is also more important than when we were in our forties, so a covered cockpit and an inside steering station rose to a high position on our wish list. The boats with exposed aft steering stations dropped from our list.

Sailing on cats, we soon found out, is a very different feeling than sailing on a monohull. Just because a cat doesn't heel, doesn't mean it won't hop around a lot. Several cats

dropped from our list because of an excessive hobby-horsing motion or slapping of water against a low bridge deck—both can be exacerbated by unbalanced weight loads in a specific boat, not just hull design. Steering a cat is more a result of looking at gauges and less by the feel as it is in a monohull. Mechanical steering systems, however, allow more feel than hydraulic systems. We learned that early reefing is even more important than on a monohull, and once again, the signal to reef is more by looking at a gauge than by feeling the strain on the wheel or sensing the motion as on a monohull. We liked the way the Catanas and Outremers sailed and those experiences reinforced our determination that "faster is better."

And so our search continued. Very quickly, we were looking at



only a few boat designs that could meet our evolving criteria—48 to 52 feet; dagger boards and/or other performance-enhancing features; newer and faster than *Altair*; owner's layout; few if any appliances; not a project boat or an ex-charter boat; and one that is equipped and can handle the rigors of passagemaking.

All the while our price limit kept rising. Our new boat had morphed from a seasonal island-hopper to a long distance passagemaker. We also felt increasing pressure to get the new boat soon, thinking that if we only have five or so cruising years left, we better not waste them outfitting a boat or waiting for the normal production cycle of a new one.

In the end, we traveled to La Grande Motte, France to visit the Outremer Yachting manufacturing

facility. An Outremer 51, hull number 32, was out of the mold but the company had not yet identified an owner for it. Fortunately, it is far enough along in the production cycle that we can take delivery in the fall, but early enough that we can specify the features, systems and options that we want.

If all goes well, we will be boatless for less than three months, our shakedown cruise will be done in the Mediterranean next fall before bringing her to the Caribbean in the ARC+ Rally, and with that, the transition from monohull to catamaran will be complete. This is truly our last hurrah! ■

Julie Palm has made a circumnavigation with her husband Rick and for the last decade they have worked with the Caribbean 1500 as advisors and inspectors.

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