


TWO is better than ONE





Twin-hulled craft have unique and endearing abilities that are not always understood by devotees of monohulls. Warren Steptoe explains their characteristics while evaluating the Sailfish 3300 Weekend, a special boat that offers customisation with enormous potential for offshore gamefishing.

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Cats aren't for everybody. Like their furry equivalents, power catamarans seem to polarise opinion into people enthusiastic about them and those who aren't...

I'll happily confess to having little time for furry felines. But I owned a nautical cat for over five years, and still harbour regrets about parting company with it. My Cairns Custom Craft *Flat Cat* was nothing short of a brilliant bluewater fishing boat, although it did have a few idiosyncrasies.

My experience with offshore cats has convinced me that far more anglers would definitely benefit from using this style of boat. However, these square-bowed, twin-hulled beasts can be quite a leap into the unknown. They have some unique characteristics, and I've seen many people lose patience with a cat's 'different' ways before realising and admiring their several shining advantages.

So while writing this test of Sailfish's 3300 Weekender I'll try to use my own cat experiences to help readers past that choking point, because this is, or at least can be, a brilliant bluewater fishing boat. With, I must admit, all the pros and cons that go with powered catamarans.

SPACE SQUARED

One of the cons hits you right in the eye when you first see this boat. No matter how much you love cats, it's unlikely anyone will ever describe it as a pretty boat.

The plus side of being square, so to speak, is of course interior space – in this case masses of interior space! Non-cat people – please ignore its specifications that say this boat measures 10.5 metres (34.6 feet) from its blunt bows to the end of the transom deck. When you first step aboard, the space is what hits you. The cockpit is enormous, the saloon is bigger again, and thanks to those square bows the cabin is pretty roomy too.

Aaah yes, the cabin; which brings us immediately to one of those catamaran 'differences' that monohull people often struggle with. Because a catamaran has a tunnel up the middle, headroom above the bunk in this boat is quite a bit lower than it would be in a monohull of similar size. Some agility is necessary to get into the 3300 Weekender's cabin, although once inside it is a big bunk – or bunks in our test boat. Sailfish catamarans are all built individually to owner specifications, so our test boat was pretty basic, simply because that's how her owner wanted her. In her cabin, two mattresses lay on what seemed to be a hectare of carpet.



Above: The saloon offers wide-open space with lots of light and ventilation. Besides the huge windows, it has hatches in the roof top, and a large hopper window and glass cabin door opening to the cockpit.

CUSTOMISED KITTY

A significant advantage of being built from (so called 'plate') aluminium is how readily the material lends itself to customisation. Sailfish pride themselves on custom builds, so sleeping accommodations are but one of many considerations left entirely to the buyer. While this particular boat is pretty basic, Sailfish happily build their boats to whatever standard customers ask for, and if some of the boats I've seen previously are any guide, they're no strangers to fitouts with all the 'bells and whistles'.

Our test boat's bathroom was situated in the bow end of the port sponson, where there was plenty of space for a shower and toilet that would do a much bigger boat proud. While this one was as basic as the

rest of the boat, it was anything but cramped. The head (toilet) was in the bows, the shower at the aft end. And there was lots of easy-to-clean painted metal in between.

Back out in the saloon, our test boat's helm station sat to starboard of the cabin doorway. Hardly a classic gameboat helm, this one bore more resemblance to a half-cab runabout, albeit in a considerably expanded version. It featured a Garmin GPS Map 5008 for fish finding and navigation, and a single monitor for the twin 170hp Volvo D3 engines. But there was plenty of dash space left for a way more sophisticated set-up.

SPACE AND LIGHT

We keep coming back to interior space, and this is never more evident than in the Sailfish Weekender's saloon, which is remarkably roomy for a sub-35-footer. It gives an impression of being even roomier thanks to large expanses of glass. Big sliding windows along the cabin sides let in plenty of light and ventilation, and also afford a degree of visibility around the boat that's rare in equivalent monohull boats. Please note at this point that the forward-facing windscreen is well-equipped with wipers (we'll get to why that's notable shortly), and to further improve ventilation, the centre section opens on a pair of rams to let air flow through the interior.

Twin hatches in the salon roof bring in even more air (and light) inside, while a big hopper window and glass entry door in the aft bulkhead can be fixed open for full ventilation. This creates a very open connection

between the saloon and the action in the cockpit.

Along the saloon's portside there is a dinette big enough to host quite a party. The galley opposite had again been kept basic in this boat, leaving ample opportunity for pretty much whatever you may want to make of it. Given the amount of saloon space, and the level of customisation available, making something special of this boat's interior would be inordinately easy.

Sailfish offers their Weekender model in two larger sizes than the boat seen here: a 3700 and 4000 inboard- (like our test boat) or outboard-powered versions. I gather few Sailfish owners so far have asked for an upper station above the saloon roof, but to set one of these boats up that way would work brilliantly.

BLUEWATER POTENTIAL

If this boat, and for that matter every other Sailfish cat I've ever seen, doesn't scream 'gameboat' at you, a tower with an upper station could change that in a blink! And, of course, this boat's 3.5-metre beam, and the inherent stability of a catamaran hull, will only contribute to the overall appeal of this vessel for bluewater anglers.

Moving out into a cockpit big enough to play touch footy, our test boat's owner had specified a barbecue and sink against the saloon bulkhead. No imagination is required to see a tackle and bait rigging station here instead.

Moving aft from there, it's several steps to the transom bulkhead. Leg support around the cockpit periphery in our test boat could be improved simply by adding

Below: Owner Bill Gibson chose a spartan interior for his boat, however, since Sailfish customise as required, they can make the interior as lavish and sophisticated as you would like.





upholstered bolsters along the cockpit sides; and the folding bench seats each side were obviously our owner's prerogative.

Adding a central fish-pit or livewell across the transom bulkhead (our test boat had twin livewells) is similarly obvious. A door on the portside of our test boat's transom bulkhead opened on to a wide, external deck above the Volvo Duoprop sterndrive – the boat's 'legs'. With those drive legs below, I wonder if the transom bulkhead shouldn't be moved aft to incorporate this external deck into the cockpit? This would put the aft-cockpit bulkhead right at the boat's stern extremity, which would be much more workable for serious fishing. Although there's hardly any need to increase cockpit space: it's a whopper!

Before moving on, I must mention the 'rubberised' deck. The non-slip material was semi-soft underfoot, and while we had a chilly winter's day for this test and our shoes were definitely on, I imagine that when fishing barefoot it would be extremely comfortable.

TRIM THE CAT

When they were introduced a few years back now, Volvo's Duoprop sterndrives were a significant step forward. The marketplace instantly recognised them as superior to older

sterndrive designs. Using Duoprop legs, rather than conventional shaft drives, worked very well indeed on this boat and it is worth diverging awhile to examine why.

With power catamarans, sterndrives (or outboards – another power option for this boat) tend to work equally well, or perhaps even better than trim tabs. This is because the power trim that is fitted to outboards and sterndrives can change the angle that thrust is delivered to the water. Trim is even more critical to maximising performance in power catamarans than in monohulls.

Power-cat sponsons are narrow, which makes them especially sensitive to trim. To confuse the issue even further, there's the fact that you often have to trim the drive legs in the opposite direction to that which monohull experience might lead you to expect. The worst thing you can do is tuck the legs in hard against the transom to improve the ride. This is because pushing the bows hard on to the water like that basically prevents the front end of the sponsons, and the compression of air travelling through the tunnel, to work how they're intended.

I'd go so far as to say that bad trim adjustment, compromising what cat hulls are designed to do, is probably behind the common myth that cats don't perform well when quartering

across a following sea. Trimmed appropriately – to let the bow design lift the sponsons, and air entering the tunnel do its thing – a good cat can leave monohulls for dead in terms of across-the-water speed and an amazingly soft ride.

ACCEPTING DIFFERENCE

It'd be difficult to compare apples with apples here, because catamaran hulls certainly have more interior space than a monohull of the same length (it comes from being square). And then there's the fact that, in terms of overwater performance, a good cat of any given size is likely to outperform a monohull the same length by quite some margin.

Learning to drive a cat isn't hard. If the differences aren't perhaps glaringly apparent, sometimes it's only a matter of someone showing you. I mention this here, because for our test of the Sailfish 3300 Weekender, the water was like a sheet of glass and wouldn't have challenged a flat-bottomed three-metre tinny, let alone a 10-metre power catamaran.

The broad beam of a cat hull provides you with enough space in the cockpit to hold a sizeable party – or to work in uncluttered comfort while gamefishing.

“Many people lose patience with a cat's 'different' ways before realising and admiring their shining advantages.”

SPEC CHECK



SAILFISH 3300 WEEKENDER

PRICING

This boat cost \$365,000 but most owners would spend more.

OPTIONS FITTED

Volvo D3-170A motors and Volvo Duoprop drives, Garmin GPS Map 5008, cockpit barbecue and hand basin.

GENERAL

Material: 'Plate' aluminium, 6mm hull bottom, 4mm sides and superstructure

Hull Type: Power catamaran

Length: 10.5m

Beam: 3.5m

CAPACITIES

Maximum Rated Power: 2 x 300hp (outboard version)

People: 9

Fuel: 2 x 180 litres (up to 2 x 250 litres optional)

Fresh Water: Optional

Holding Tank: Optional

ENGINE

Make/model: Volvo Penta D3-170A (x 2)

Type: Direct injected, turbo charged, after-cooled diesel

Rated hp: 170hp

Displacement: 2.4 litres

No. cylinders: 5

Weight: 260kg

Propeller/s used for test: Std Volvo Duoprop

SUPPLIED BY

Webbe Marine, 17 Yalgar Rd, Kirawee NSW 2232
(02) 9521 7944

www.webbemarine.com.au

PERFORMANCE DATA (supplied by manufacturer)

RPM	Speed (knots)	Fuel consumption (litres per hour)
1200	5.7	2.0
1500	6.5	4.0
2000	10.5	9.0
2200	12.0	11.0
2500	15.0	15.0
3000	20.0	20.0
3500	26.0	26.0
4150	32.0	36.0

The point being that this boat has a great deal to offer serious bluewater anglers, and such versatility in customisation that it can be made to be whatever your heart desires. So much so that its rough-water performance deserves checking out, and while we (unfortunately) can offer only slight insight into this here, I should point out that our test boat was set up by Sydney-based power catamaran specialist Webbe Marine.

Being cat specialists, I'm sure the folk there will be only too happy to organise a test run. The incidental beauty of which is that it is an opportunity for people unsure about the whole 'cat thing' to be shown what cats can do in rough water; and maybe deal with some of the disinformation you so commonly encounter about them.


After such a shameless endorsement, I'd like to also discuss one of a cat's downsides – that I suggest you check out for yourself. Look at this boat's bows in our photo spread. Those fine deadrise angles soften the ride sure enough, but please note an absolute lack of flare. In a cat's skinny bows there's simply no room for the flare that monohulls use to deflect spray.

Trimmed appropriately to let the bows lift is the way to get the magic carpet ride that boat testers like me rave about. But with wind coming in on a bow quarter, there will inevitably be times when a considerable amount of water is deflected into the wind – which gets promptly blown back inboard.

This is when those big windows that I mentioned earlier will earn their keep; and you'll probably need the wipers too. At least on this boat the downwind windows can be left open to keep ventilation flowing.

POWER TO WEIGHT

I was somewhat surprised by how well the boat accelerated, particularly when I found out that the two 5-cylinder Volvo D3 motors powering our test boat are only rated at 170hp each. Twin 225s are recommended for outboard-powered models, with twin 300s the max. Outboards, though, don't produce 358Nm of torque like the new age, direct injected, turbo charged, after-cooled diesels powering our test boat do.

While we only managed 28.5 knots at 4000rpm, Sailfish claim a top speed of 32 knots at 4150rpm. Perhaps our practically brand-new motors still needed some breaking in; or perhaps some different propellers. Either way, actual top speed is of less interest than fuel consumption, which hovered around 20lt to 25lt per hour (per motor) at cruising speeds around 20 to 25 knots. At trolling speeds around five to six knots it varied from two to four litres per hour, per motor. These factors make the Sailfish 3300 Weekender an economical and fuel-efficient boat at fishing and cruising speeds – remarkably so when you consider it punches well above its weight by comparison to conventional hulls of similar size. 

HIGHLIGHTS

- Amazing amounts of interior space.
- Ease of customisation.
- Performed remarkably well with minimal power.
- Supplier well versed in power catamarans.