



The 431 doesn't lack room but, weight kept under control and quality fittings guarantees a fast platform.



Catana 431

A quality product

Among production multihulls, Catana has always cultivated the difference putting the accent on sailing performance and construction quality.

The 431, from the new range, is a perfect illustration of the current preoccupations of the yard : to compete with the most comfortable units without necessarily renouncing their original credo.

BY PIERRE-MARIE BOURGUINAT

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

A few figures to start with ! For 30 cm less hull length than her elder sister the 44, the Catana 431 announces 30 cm more beam, 10 cm more freeboard and almost 20 m² more sail area. In any case, just take a side look at the Catana 431. The new range has become more portly – a portliness which is topical and dictated by competition from other yards. But it would be dishonest to forget in this rapid overview a final figure : on the weigh scale, the 431 tips the balance at the same displacement as the 44. Conscious of the irresistible swelling at the haunches of

cruising multihulls, the yard has been very careful to keep weight under control, through very careful attention to construction techniques and equipment.

A CAREFUL COMPROMISE

Built entirely in sandwich with slightly more sophisticated cloths than in other yards (see box on page 31), the 431 is aimed at a clientele sensitive to the idea of sailing on a performance catamaran. At this level, the yard wished to preserve all the characteristics which have made the success of the range – bulbed bows, hulls inclined outwards for extra power, long daggerboards, weight concentrated amidships – and on adding a few others, like the carbon mast from Espace Composite. One can only applaud this policy of quality. You can feel it on the water, in particular in the conditions of our test with little wind.

In less than 10 knots of wind, when many other multis would resort to their engines, you can have fun fine tuning the boat to get the maximum out of the 431. When sat on the moulded leeward helmsman's seat, the sensation of speed is not necessarily evident (you are high off the water), but at least with the wheel directly linked to the

quadrant the boat's bows can be guided with precision. With a good electronics inventory, you can juggle at leisure with the daggerboards and mainsail trim, to find the best VMG. With 8 knots of true wind, we managed 6 knots at 60° true wind angle. With 10 knots, you can easily do 8 knots at the same angle. You get the impression that the boat could point even higher without losing speed, but you are in fact limited at these angles by the incidence of the genoa, which is sheeted fairly well outboard because of the diamond wires of the mast. As has been done on a 471, it is possible to ask for a more efficient self-tacking solent, but then you would need to put a few more horses in the main to compensate for this loss of area. At 110° off the wind, under symmetrical spinnaker, you can manage 6 and 8 knots.

That might not sound too impressive in itself, but you must bear in mind that we are talking here of the most unfavourable wind range for a cruising catamaran. The Catana 431 comes out well. We didn't have the chance to drive her hard with much more than 10 knots of true wind. But it's a safe bet that with good clearance under the wing bridge (80 cm), an efficient rig and rather finer hulls than the average,

it should be possible to start having fun very quickly and reach the high VMGs which are the hallmark of catamarans of this size. We were able to verify on the other hand that with only light airs, the boat remains very lively and doesn't refuse to tack thanks to the daggerboards and the respectable speed.

SAILING IN AN ARMCHAIR

The boat can be handled with great simplicity, and most operations can be carried out from the cockpit. Only hoisting the spinnaker requires a trip to the foot of the mast and onto the trampoline. One of the options (tending to become standard when you consider the wishes of owners) consists in returning all mainsail controls via a system of sheave boxes, they pass under the nacelle and lead out onto a central console in the cockpit equipped with an electric winch (on option). Halyard, foot outhaul, reef tacks and pendants are always ready for use in the cockpit and as the genoa is a roller furling type, it is clear that particular attention has been paid to the safety of the crew, well settled in their cockpit. This return of lines generates quite a lot of friction and the electric winch option would appear to be preferable. As for the considerable length of lines, Catana has solved the problem by providing as standard a stowage box in the after beam. To simplify this zone and to reduce the risk of injury when gybing, the 431, like all Catanas has no mainsheet track, it is replaced by two solid tackles fitted bridle fashion, each one leading to a winch. No problem from a trimming point of view, but it is regrettable that the helmsman does not have direct access to the leeward winch if necessary. So you must have a crew member on station at the winch in blustery or squally weather. As for the rest, the seating positions around the big cockpit table are pleasant, especially as the bay window giving onto the galley opens completely for perfect communica-

tion. Two large lockers in the bottom of the nacelle are plenty big enough for stowing all the wet equipment (diving gear, dock lines, fenders, buckets, etc.). The helm stations somewhat obstruct access to the transoms, but the care put into the design of the latter (design, handrails, etc.) forgives this little inconvenience. The moulded steps are hinged to give access to the stern posts and engines, two 40 hp Volvo Sail Drives. The folding three blade propellers are extremely efficient. We noted 8 knots on flat water at 2500 rpm and 10 knots at 3 500 rpm, with remarkable soundproofing, even in the aft cabins. The standard equipment conveys the spirit of quality that the yard wishes to endow its products. Several spare pad-eyes are always available (including one by the side of the helmsman's seats for the person on watch who is rather exposed in a rough sea), the cleats are of a decent size and the aluminium tubes of the bimini are lacquered white as standard...

INSIDE, JUST THE RIGHT BALANCE

You will find the same sort of care inside. It is difficult to criticise the layout, which is fairly classical really : veranda galley just inside the bridgedeck to port, saloon and chart table under the large coachroof glazing, starboard hull for the owner with a real bathroom and office, port hull with two double cabins and a shared head. No surprises then. The finish is pleasant, and just what to expect from the type of customer targeted. There is plenty of mahogany veneer ; very little solid timber has been used in order not to put a strain on the weight specification. As standard, all the soles are in balsa sandwich with a wood veneer surface on one side. The rest of the bulkheads and furniture facades use sandwich or plywood depending on the structural requirements. A few defects are to be noted in this perfect panorama. The



Sat at the helm station, you have a good view of the bow ahead. It's not quite so true for the opposite one.



You only need to go to the foot of the mast to stow the main in its lazy bag or to hoist the spinnaker sock.



The main is hoisted from the cockpit thanks to the electric winch. The rope box and set of jammers are well thought out for peace of mind cruising.



