

For the the roached or square-topped mainsail

After starting in dinghies, I progressed to the IOR (quarter then half tonners), a few national titles, some victories at the 'Semaine de La Rochelle' and the Spi Ouest France, a transatlantic race and an honorable career in J80s (Coupe de France), before giving it all up after a family drama. I changed to multihulls after having been attracted by the concept during a charter in the West Indies. A first rather staid boat, then an extraordinary cat: Casa Mariss, a Petter 50' designed by Erik Lerouge – daggerboards, rotating wing mast, a bit of Kevlar and quite a lot of carbon, sublime finishing, in short, a cozy lounge which sails fast...(and even more than that!)

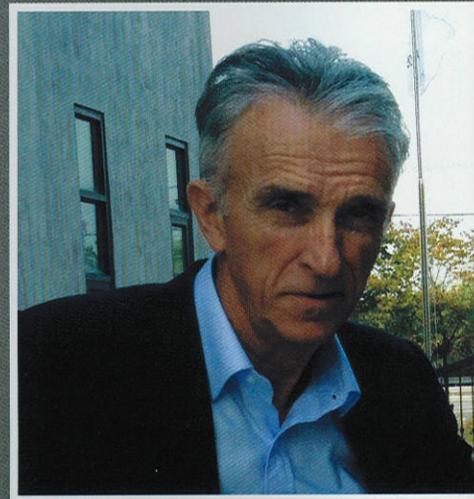
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With a multihull, we try to approach a certain ideal idea of a sailor, combining safety, speed and comfort in an order which depends on each person's priorities. I have opted for these three qualities in an order which is adapted to the circumstances, and each person's mood, because unless you are fanatical about single-handing (which I am also, sometimes), even a very fast cruise must remain comfortable for the crew, and offer good performance without having to continually change sail. The important thing is average speed with ice cubes in your glass, rather than maximum speed with spray in your face. There is also the question of being light to go fast, easily and for a long

time; according to Colin Chapman's creed (the founder of Lotus): 'Light is right'. As the mainsail is the boat's main 'engine', it mustn't be like a jib (I'm joking!). It must therefore not be too heavy, have an adjustable shape and a maximum area for a given mast. Knowing that the further we get above the surface of the water, the stronger the wind, we must put some sail up high, where it is more efficient. (Some people don't hesitate to have cargo ships towed by kites). Let's start therefore by giving our fully-battened mainsail a nice, well-supported roach, or let's go mad and equip it with a square head, which will be to the mainsail what a turbo is to an internal combustion

engine. There are now solutions for raising tensioned battens, but I prefer to haul it up myself (around 30 seconds). To stow it all? About the same time. OK, but where is the brake? Firstly, the braking is assisted...by the square head! A stronger gust? The square head greets the arrival of the stronger, backing apparent wind by naturally spilling wind to leeward. The mainsail's twist is increased, the boat accelerates quietly and we continue preparing lunch. We haven't braked, we have even accelerated! For ex-monohull sailors, it's a bit like the effect of tightening the backstay in a gust. If it gets even stronger, you have to take in a reef: 2 lines are enough, the halyard and the pendant. The tack is hooked on using a Dyneema loop. Well prepared, the operation takes from 2 to 4 minutes, to go from 100m² to...whatever you want, and there is no fear of the system jamming,

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quite a hurry to carry out the operation, leaving my aperitif on the saloon table – when I came back, not a drop had spilt; I could almost boast about having succeeded in this maneuver, if it wasn't so easy! Cheers! Through laziness, I have nevertheless tried the so-called 'automatic' reefing system, with just one line for the tack and the clew. It works in the anchorage, but is not so good at sea! As always, leisure sailing has one eye on the racing world, and soon there will be rigid sails, but hoisting and reefing present problems which are still unsolvable. Progress in the field of sailcloths (on Casa Mariss it's an almost indestructible Hydranet Radial), profile support, and fittings has allowed target speeds to rise in a spectacular manner. I increased Casa Mariss's top speed by over 1 knot on all points of sailing with this type of sail! Over 24 hours, that represents 30 miles and an additional safety margin for getting ahead of any heavy weather. If you leave for the day, it leaves you with time to find a good anchorage and start cooking the sausages on the barbecue without getting in anyone's way, as you will be there before all the others! For me, a mainsail without a square head is like a wing without feathers!

