

Leopard 45: New Sailing Catamaran from Robertson and Caine

A new cat with sharper angles, more living space and greater visibility comes to town.

South African catamaran builder Robertson and Caine just debuted the Leopard 45 in North America, and this new model is set to replace her predecessor the Leopard 44, which is the last of the Gino Morrelli designs in the current line. The 45 carries forward and improves upon a few of the details now equated with Leopards, and highlights some of the new aesthetics introduced last year on the Leopard 40. With her enlarged spaces, refined ergonomics, and a more open feel, the 45 is sure to be a people-pleaser in both charter and private use. But before we get into too many details, here's an overall look at the boat on video.

Naval architects Simonis & Voogd teamed with Robertson and Caine's in-house design team to create an angular boat. The 45 has nearly plumb bows for a longer waterline, hard chines down low to keep spray off the decks, and wide, squared-off transom steps that are easy to maneuver from the dock or dinghy. The engine rooms are just below these steps with good access to twin 45 HP Yanmar diesels and with 185 gallons fuel, this is a go-far cat.

Gone are the swoopy lines and softened bulkheads; the Leopard 45 features angular lines both inside and out.

Rectangular hull ports bring light into the lower cabins. Also, the saloon windows were enlarged and given sharper lines. The hardtop is one piece that flows from the aft cockpit forward and over the forward cockpit, a design element that remains but has increased in size, comfort and weather protection. Deck lockers just ahead of the forward cockpit house the optional genset and the water tank and encroach on the trampoline, which has been downsized.

The helm is still raised and to starboard. Visibility to the four corners isn't bad: the starboard bow is in plain view and tall skippers can stand on their tiptoes to see the port bow. A dip below the hard top affords a line of sight to the port transom and stepping out onto the side deck provides an unobstructed view of the starboard quarter. The helm is optimized for two with a double seat and room enough for one to work with lines and winches while the other steers and manages the Raymarine electronics suite. A composite cover protects the driver and companion from the sun or rain and there are steps down to the aft cockpit. This way, the helmsman has direct access to the social areas below as well as to the starboard side deck when it's time to handle lines and fenders.

Inside, the Leopard 45 resembles the recently-launched 40. The galley has moved forward and to starboard with the U-shaped settee aft and to port. The cockpit and interior settees sit back-to-back for better conversation flow and more integration between the outside and the inside. Using both dinettes at a dinner party, you could accommodate 10 to 12 guests seated at real tables rather than with plates on their knees.

You'll really notice those enlarged windows from the inside because they provide nearly 360 degree views. The panorama is enhanced by the large, flat, forward window and a watertight door that leads to the forward cockpit as well as the sliding glass door and opening window aft. From the cockpit, you can see all the way forward, through the interior to the bowsprit, and that adds to the perception of length. When everything is open, the airflow through this boat is unmatched by any other catamaran in this class. A rectangular fixed skylight also lightens things up and the Ocean Air sliding blinds provide shade to keep it cool inside when the sun is beating down.

Just inside the door to starboard and near the helm is the control panel that groups everything for the skipper's convenience. It's well laid out and also includes the VHF radio as well as the control head for the Fusion stereo. To port is a forward-facing desk, which could be a navigation station but with all the electronics at the helm, it's more likely to be used for working on a laptop and charging personal electronics via the USB outlets. It's a fairly decent-sized desk, much more functional than the one on the Leopard 40.

Two layouts are available: The owner's version has the master suite in the starboard hull with a double bed aft and a full head and large shower stall forward. In between is another small desk with plenty of clever drawers and cubbyholes for things that seem to accumulate on a voyage. Other stowage options are voluminous and plentiful so the owner won't need to leave much behind when going on an extended excursion. There's even room for a washer/dryer combination. The port hull has two guest cabins and two heads, each with its own shower stall. But in the four-cabin, four-head version, both hulls are identical and there's an option to choose a crew cabin that consists of a bed in the port bow and a head in the starboard. Neither will be terribly comfortable but for crewed charter, it will be manageable.

The 45 will sleep 11 in a pinch, but why? This is a great boat for a cruising family and occasional guests. The sailing is easy with a large full-roach mainsail and a slightly-overlapping jib that together total 1,328 square feet of canvas. For downwind work, a Code 0 on a furler would be ideal.

Leopard Catamarans has launched over 1,500 boats with each succeeding model benefitting from owner and charter guest feedback. The Leopard 45 is a culmination of lessons learned, and it will be featured in charter at both Sunsail and Moorings bases. So, if this sounds like the ideal cruising cat for your needs, you can try it before you buy it.