

C&B

by Dag Pike in Italy

Catamaran

The Italians love speed and offshore racing in Italy has a tremendous public following, much more than in any other country. This love of fast boats and the desire to emulate their racing heroes

opens up a large market for fast pleasure boats and it is not very surprising to find many of these boats based on racing boat hulls. In this respect Italy and America are very

similar and this attitude not only encourages boat builders to participate in offshore racing, but it also produces some very exciting sports boats.



C&B Catamaran



There can't be too many sport boats capable of speeds over 70 mph which was one of the inducements which got me to Italy to test the Cigala & Bertinetti boat. The fact that it was also a catamaran made it doubly interesting and to add to the fun, there was also one of the racing catamarans, on which the sports boat is based, to test as well.

This feast of fast boats was laid on, on Lake Como, one of the large lakes in Northern Italy, famous for its long association with power boating and the base for such famous names as Abatte and Molinari. Rapidly rising up the fast boat ladder of fame is Fabio Buzzi, a name which will be familiar to readers of the letter page of this magazine. Fabio has done in Italy for the catamaran what James Beard did in Britain although he has still some way to go in the size scale to match his British rival, and is responsible for the design of most of the offshore catamarans racing in Italian colours.

These catamarans race in Class II and III and are strange to British eyes because the drivers are standing up. This gives the boats a rather staid look but this belies their exhilarating performance and some of this has been transferred to the pleasure boat version which is aimed directly at those people who want to combine high speed with an element of luxury. This boat is aimed directly at the Mediterranean market where much of the time there are blue skies and calm seas.

Whistling Wind

The weather on the test day was far from calm. Admittedly there were blue skies, but the wind was whistling down off the mountains and the early snow on the Alps put a distinct chill in the air. The lake is large enough for a very comfortable sea to build up and in fact it

could have been a sunny winter's day in the Solent rather than an Italian Lake.

Although it is only 24 feet long, this catamaran looks huge when you first see it sitting on its trailer. The bright red colour scheme makes it look large and aggressive, but once off its trailer and in the water it takes on a more docile appearance, that is until the throttles are opened.

The performance really is quite breathtaking. Once out on the lake, the opposite bank was rushing towards us very, very rapidly and the boat had a steering problem. Whilst it was fully controllable at slow speed, at full speed the boat wanted to swing over to starboard the whole time. I had been warned about this and it was due to the fact that the boat was not fitted with handed propellers. In running the boat only a few days before my test one of the bottom units had broken and the only spare was the wrong rotation. Rather than cancel the test, we ran with two props turning the same way, so any comments about the steering apply to this particular boat rather than the boats in general.

It is perhaps a testimony to the design that it was still controllable at all in this situation and it could be steered round either way, but it needed a lot of space to make a turn to port whilst on a starboard turn, it felt as though the boat was oversteering and wanted to turn more quickly than felt safe. Balanced propellers should have a reasonable steering situation and this was borne out in later tests on the racing version.

It took a little while to get used to the steering and then the boat could be driven with considerable abandon. There was a great feeling of safety about the boat even at very high speeds, which was very reassuring. It was much easier to control than a mono-hull would have been in these conditions and the boat



seemed to glide over the short, steep seas generated by the strong wind.

In rougher seas, the throttle would have to be handled with more caution but if the boat was used purely for pleasure you are unlikely to take it out in conditions where careful driving would be necessary. One of my niggling doubts about this boat is that it generates such a feeling of confidence that it would be very easy to forget the speed at which the boat was travelling, and one thing you mustn't do at these speeds is to relax your concentration. To do so is to court disaster.

Allowing for the steering problems, the boat seemed to turn easily and was under control during the turn. A wide sweep was necessary at high speed but the turn was smooth and trouble free. At slower speeds during a turn a fair amount of spray was generated which seemed to end up in the cockpit and the same problem occurred when running at slower speeds when the forward section of the hulls was not lifting clear of the water. The fuel tank is placed in the bow at present and there are plans to move this aft to allow the forward part of the boat to lift more readily and this should overcome this minor, but irritating

Left: The C & B cat is an exciting but safe boat to drive.
 Below left: The catamaran gives plenty of internal space.
 Below: A tidy dash, well placed compass and good steering wheel all speak of a racing ancestry.



problem.

I am very concerned about the way many monohulls point their bows to the sky when getting up onto the plan. This is often at a time when there are other boats around and for a critical moment the driver cannot see where he is going. One of the things I really liked about this catamaran is that there is virtually no change in trim at all as the boat gets onto the plane and the driver has good visibility the whole time. Once on the plane the boat rides level and true and for comfort it would put many monohulls to shame.

For the test we had two 235 hp OMC outboards on the back which is a lot of power for a 24-foot boat but the catamaran makes this power safe and controllable. Hand throttles are used to control these engines and these throttles were nicely placed and because the movement of the boat doesn't throw you about at all, for once a hand throttle on a fast boat seemed perfectly adequate although the biased steering made it hard work on the steering hand.

Hull Motion

Because of the limited amount of hull motion, the seats were quite adequate and comfortable. Such is the quality of the ride that it is not normally necessary to hold on and this is a welcome change from monohull performance.

There is also plenty of space in the boat. Forward there is a large sunbathing well fitted with comfortable mattresses. This is really only usable at slow speed or when stopped. When travelling quickly the aft cockpit seats give a comfortable ride. Access to the forward part of the boat is via a hinged door in the centre of the windscreen and this same opening would allow cooling breezes to enter the aft cockpit in really warm weather.

and it is set so that you can look through or over it. Low guard rails on each side of the forward sunbathing will offer good security and the whole interior space seems to have been well thought out. There are large stowage lockers down each side of the aft cockpit but no lockable or watertight stowage for valuables.

One of the problems with a catamaran which the designers do not seem to have solved is their appearance. Some of the racing catamarans look quite attractive and functional, but in profile this catamaran has the outline of a banana and the steep curve of the cockpit sides as they sweep down to the engines, does nothing to enhance the appearance of the boat. These side pieces flow into the windscreen and I think the boat would look a lot better with a more horizontal line in this region.

Like its racing counterpart, Kevlar is used extensively in the construction of this catamaran. The racing version uses Kevlar exclusively, bonded with an epoxy resin and the weight saving in this racing boat together with modifications to the hull and 15 mph or so to the top speed to make this a very competitive boat indeed.

The racing version is very much a two man boat because the throttles and trim controls are placed in one driving station and the steering wheel in the other. It is the navigator who does the steering and there is a certain logic in this because he should know where he wants to go and this layout overcomes any communication problem. In the other driving station the driver is free to concentrate on getting the maximum performance out of the boat.

This layout calls for a degree of co-ordination on turns and also for considerable trust, but on my test run it certainly seemed to work very well and

is a division of labour we will see more of as speeds rise.

I thought the performance of the sportsboat version was exciting until I tried the racing boat. This made the sportsboat look almost pedestrian. There is the same feeling of security and confidence but with twin 225 hp Mercs on the back in Class III E form this boat really gets up and goes. You begin to realise that the sports version has a good safety margin when you compare it with the racing version.

The standing position in the race boat worked well although it leaves your head fully exposed to the elements and a visor is very necessary particularly going into wind when the boat really gets up and goes. You can feel the lift, generated by the wind in the tunnel between the hulls, in the steering and as the boat lifts the steering suddenly becomes easier. You have to be a bit careful not to overdo the steering at this point and to turn, you nurse the boat round rather than just apply helm.

Slowing Down

Sharper turns are done by slowing the boat down and this is where co-ordination between driver and throttleman is very necessary. However, the steering is generally very precise and we put it to the test by shooting the bridges over the lake where it narrows at Lecco. Two of the bridges have wide spans and were no problem, but the middle bridge is old and narrow, low arches. The problem here was to get both hulls of the catamaran through the same arch and we were also glad that this boat had a good level ride so that we didn't bang our heads on the way through.

A full team of these catamarans will be racing in Europe in 1982. We may not see them in Britain unless this is necessary to pick up championship points. From my limited experience on the lake with this racing boat, they will certainly be a force to be reckoned with.

Back to the sportsboat version, which was really the object of the test, the obvious benefits of this catamaran must be weighed up against the difficulty of towing and launching such a beast, and the extra cost compared with a monohull. To get a fair comparison, this boat ought to be compared with a 27 foot monohull. Then performance and cost become more equal and like the catamaran, a 27 foot mono is not normally considered to be a boat you trail and launch readily.

What impressed me most about this boat was the safe performance. You can get boats which go very fast and you can get safe boats, but it is trying to combine these two qualities which is difficult and I think that Fabio Buzzi has come close to an ideal combination with this catamaran.

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