

LEOPARD 43 PC

Its predecessor, the 39 PC, made a very practical charter boat. But is this stylish replacement good enough to tempt private buyers too?

Words **Jack Haines** Pictures **Richard Langdon & The Moorings**

The predecessor to the Leopard 43 PC is a boat that I know well. I have chartered a 39 PC both in Europe and the United States, and have used the boat for week-long stints with a full compliment of guests on board to test its layout to the limit.

The 39 PC was very good at what it did, which was provide wipe-clean practicality for charter guests, but it lacked finesse in places and felt rather basic. The lion's share of them went to TUI Marine (the company buys about a third of Leopard's total production for its charter arm The Moorings) and the same will be the case with the 43. That said, Leopard has made a concerted effort to improve the interior styling and quality of the 43 so that it appeals to private owners as well as charter operators. A good job it's done too, not just by creating a more attractive look with fresher colours, but also by a claimed 30% increase in internal volume and a wholesale change in the layout of the main deck.

On the 39 you entered through a sliding door with a compact galley to port and the dinette in front, beneath the windscreen, whereas the 43's dinette is to port with the galley spread out across an L-shaped counter diagonally opposite. This is a far better use of the space, meaning more than one person can use the kitchen at the same time while the saloon seating allows people to face forwards as opposed to backwards as on the 39.

One other significant change is the addition of a door at the forward end of the saloon granting access to the foredeck. This is a vast improvement that gives you an easy route from stern to bow, as well as encouraging much better natural ventilation.

Tucked to port of the forward door is a small desk with storage for paper charts and other navigation tools. It's also possible to spec a pair of throttles in this position and a repeater for the autopilot, so you can drive within the shelter of the saloon if you prefer.

Just like on the 39, you access the sleeping accommodation via companionways on either side of the saloon that lead down into both hulls. Our test boat had the charter configuration, which means two cabins per hull with bathrooms in the middle. The aft cabins are the pick of the bunch as they have slightly wider berths than the forward ones, which are compromised by the foredeck moulding. Storage is better forward, though, because the space beneath the beds aft is full of Yanmars and the forward cabins get a single, coffin-like berth in the very peak of the bow that will most likely be used to store bags.

The alternative layout sees an enormous master cabin in the starboard hull, which stretches from a double berth aft to a stunning bathroom forward and a dressing area and study in between. Though long and thin, this is an incredibly spacious and luxurious cabin for a boat of this length. Think of the sort of master cabin you're getting on a 43ft (13m) monohull and then compare it to this – no contest. As a privately run boat, this is a superb layout where you as the owner get a fabulous master cabin but you can still sleep four guests in real comfort, five at a push.

TWICE THE FUN

The beauty of a catamaran is that the deck spaces can easily accommodate the ten people it's capable of sleeping. Between the enormous cockpit dinette, broad foredeck and vastly improved flybridge, people are always going to find their own space to relax. No longer do you have to make your way back to the cockpit to get down from the flybridge either, thanks to a dinky gate at the forward end of the flybridge. This leads out to a small sunbathing area on the deep ledge overhanging the windscreen.

On passage during our charters of the 39, we found this was our guests' favourite place to sit, facing forwards with the cooling breeze pouring over them. So it's good to see that Leopard has recognised this and created a proper cushioned area surrounded by grab rails. The foredeck itself goes without cushions



SEE THE VIDEO

mby.com/leo

The generator lives aft rather than in a forward void, so guests won't be lying in bed with their teeth rattling if you fire it up in the morning

but makes up for this with its sheer size and the amount of storage beneath the deck hatches. Even with water tanks in place, there is plenty of space around them to store cruising gear. Two more vast lockers aft supplement this, where the engines used to be mounted on the 39. This is where the generator now lives, an improvement over the old boat, which had the generator in one of the forward voids, so guests would be lying in bed with their teeth rattling if you fired it up in the morning.

Another major design improvement on the 43 is the size and configuration of the flybridge. The 39's layout saw the skipper tucked out back with all of the seating wrapped around the forward end. The 43 has the sort of layout you would expect on a monohull of the same size except with more space. The double helm bench is moved to a far better spot forward, adjacent to the dinette, which in turn means more people can sit alongside the skipper on the move.

There is also the option to have a wet-bar on the flybridge, just aft of the dinette. Right aft, there is space for a couple of sun loungers or to lash down a kayak or similar. This is a far more practical and sociable flybridge layout, and clear evidence of this boat being designed from the hull upwards to be a powercat, not a doctored sailing cat.

That is a crucial point about the 43; it's not merely a case of stretching the 39's hulls and adding power to give the illusion of a brand new boat – this is a brand new boat. The hull mouldings are new and it has different engines and improved performance to match. Spec the optional Yanmar 260s over the standard 220s and a top speed north of 21 knots is perfectly achievable. Alternatively, you could drop it back to 6 knots and give yourself a very useful 1,400nm range.

GRACE AND PACE

What most impressed me about the 43 PC's performance was how comfortable it felt charging along at 20 knots. Other cats I've tested feel skittish at higher speeds, as if they're surprised at being able to travel so quickly.

The 43 PC is a natural, comfortably cleaving the surface with its pair of knife-like hulls. So effective is the boat at slicing through chop that on occasion, it carves up some spray which catches on the wind and can end up on the flybridge.

Though they are slender, the bows aren't so fine that they bury themselves into the back of a following sea. Admittedly we weren't testing it in huge rollers, but the short, choppy conditions off Nice perfectly demonstrated this cat's ability to smooth the path through a head sea which a similar-length monohull might be slamming over uncomfortably.

The steering itself is pretty stiff and rather lifeless and there isn't a jot of adjustment on the helm seat, but in reality, this boat is going to live on autopilot, so that isn't so much of an issue. The boat naturally tracks arrow straight and feels immensely stable, so the interaction with the helm really is minimal once you set a course. There's no point trying to steer around waves like you might on a monohull – just let the hulls do their thing. I would go as far as saying that dynamically, this is the best power catamaran I have ever driven.

There are a whole host of 'standard' catamaran features that haven't even been mentioned yet, like its inherent stability at rest, the excellent slow-speed manoeuvrability thanks to the distance between the props, the shallow draught and the ease with which you can nose it up on to the beach.

And, though our reasonably well-specified test boat came in at just under £500,000 including tax – if you were to buy it privately and not through The Moorings' ownership programme (see page 62) – it does feel like a lot of boat for your money given the number of people that you can comfortably host on board and the sheer amount of space both within the cabins and on deck.

The hose-down nature of a charter-spec boat won't appeal to everyone and private owners will probably want to add a few more splashes of teak and upholstery in the cockpit, but the interior especially feels so much more sophisticated than the 39.



The flybridge is a vast improvement over the 39 and works far better

The dinette is to port with the galley efficiently spread out across an L-shaped counter diagonally opposite



The aft cabins have slightly wider berths than the forward ones



The test boat had two cabins per hull with bathrooms in the middle



The optional master cabin is something we'd definitely opt for



One of the cosy forward cabins



A CLOSER LOOK WITH JACK HAINES

FORWARD DOOR

This door out on to the foredeck transforms the way the way the 43PC works, not only giving an excellent avenue for guests to travel forward but also to allow breeze back into the boat at anchor. Either side, there are two large storage voids in the deck.



SIZEABLE SIDE DECKS

It goes without saying that the side decks on the 43 PC are so wide that crew can pass front on without issue. An improvement on the old model is flush deck hatches to stop crew catching their toes, making the path from stern to bow even easier.



AND TO BED

The accommodation being split across two hulls makes for a very private boat. Yes, guests share a hull and a bathroom but if you opt for the larger master cabin, you have the entire saloon between you and your guests, which is excellent privacy for a boat of this size.



ENGINE ROOM

Or should that be enginerooms? The Yanmar motors are tucked away beneath the aft berths in each hull. Despite being in the cabins, access is very good thanks to the bed bases rising up on powered rams to reveal the engines beneath. One drawback is the difficulty with which an engine would be removed if major work needed to be done.



If you're looking for a cat, the transformed Leopard is one of the best on the market

As well as buying a 43 PC purely for private use, The Moorings offers an ownership charter programme with two choices.

Option 1: Buy the boat outright (or with finance) and get a guaranteed income of 9% per year.

Option 2: Pay a lower initial purchase price of 45% and at the end of the term, pay a further 20% to keep the boat or walk away and The Moorings will pay you 20% back. Ownership benefits include up to 12 weeks' use every year, the choice of 20 destinations worldwide, access to other yachts and sister ships worldwide, zero berthing, insurance and running costs and a dedicated owner care team. For more information visit www.mooringsyachtownership.com.

The cockpit door slides all the way back to open up the saloon to the aft deck



VERDICT

There are still plenty of people who aren't sold on the virtues of a catamaran thanks to their size, the way they look, possible berthing issues and higher costs. And, frankly, a lot of them don't live up to the finish or quality of their monohull counterparts.

However, if you are looking for a catamaran, then the improvements that Leopard has made over the outgoing 39 transform the 43 into one of the best power cats on the market. This isn't just a dismayed sailing cat – it's a purpose-built power cat that looks, rides and cossets as well, if not better than, many rival trawler yachts.

The ownership programme offered by The Moorings adds an extra element of interest, too, and can take a lot of the pain out of buying and running an expensive boat in an overseas location.

Most pleasing of all, it now has an interior that has been designed and finished with some love, and performance that allows you to eat up a vast amount of miles slowly, comfortably and economically or cruise at a decent pace.

I think I'd better get my charter booked. **IMBY**
Contact Leopard Catamarans.
 Tel: +44 (0)2392 222225.
 Web: www.leopardcatamarans.co.uk

THE HELM VIEW

Some adjustment to be able to get the helm bench closer to the dashboard would be useful

Nothing all that flash about the helm station but it is clearly laid out and easy to use

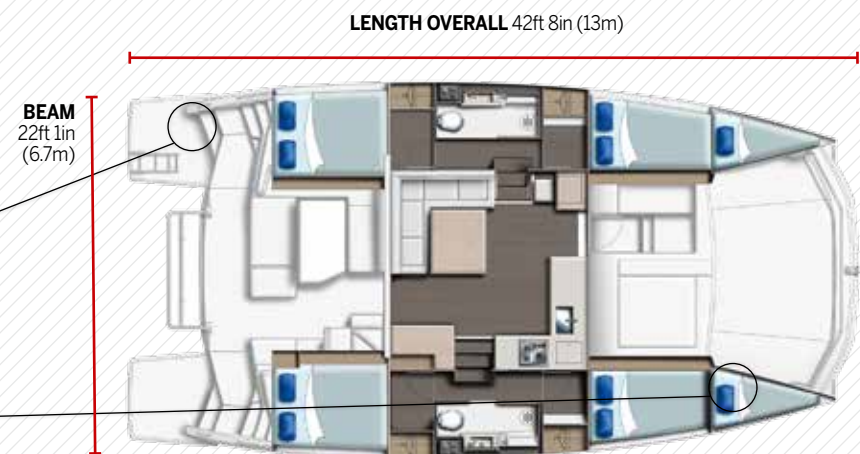


Practical, safe and versatile the 43 PC may be, but it isn't the most attractive boat on the water

The optional tender launch makes it very easy to quickly get the dinghy down into the water



THE DATA



FUEL CAPACITY
220 imp gal (1,000 litres)

WATER CAPACITY
172 imp gal (780 litres)

DRAUGHT
3ft 1in (0.94m)

RCD CATEGORY
A for 12 people

DESIGNERS
Robertson and Caine

DISPLACEMENT
11.7 tonnes

PERFORMANCE

TEST ENGINES Yanmar 6BY3-260. Twin 260hp @ 3,600rpm. 6-cylinder, 2.9-litre diesels

FIGURES	ECO	1800	2100	2400	2700	3000	FAST	MAX
RPM	1200	1800	2100	2400	2700	3000	3300	3600
Speed	6.2	8.7	9.8	11.2	14.1	16.0	17.5	21.2
LPH	3.5	8.0	11.8	16.1	20.7	28.0	36.0	44.8
GPH	0.77	1.76	2.59	3.54	4.55	6.16	7.92	9.85
MPG	8.1	4.9	3.77	3.16	3.10	2.84	2.21	2.15
Range	1,417	870	664	557	545	500	388	379

SOUND LEVELS dB(A)

Cockpit	73	76	77	79	79	80	81	83
Saloon	65	67	70	71	72	72	73	76

THE COSTS & OPTIONS

Price from	£346,800
Price as tested	£492,798
Upgrade to twin Yanmar 260hp	£9,289
Raymarine base pack	£6,635
Autopilot and throttles in saloon	£3,318
11Kw generator	£26,382
Air-conditioning (Twin 16,000 BTU)	£13,750
Underwater lights	£4,234
Water maker (63lph)	£19,574
Composite teak decking	£3,270
Stainless steel davits	£3,982

Options on test boat

RIVALS

Lagoon 40MY
 Price from £266,967
 A converted version of the Lagoon sailing catamaran but good value for it.

Fountaine Pajot 44 MY
 Price from £561,700
 Not launched yet but with IPS350 and smart styling, it looks a promising prospect.



Speed in knots. GPH & MPG figures use imperial gallons. Range in nautical miles and allows for 20% reserve. Calculated figures based on readings from on-board fuel gauges, your figures may vary considerably. All prices include VAT, converted from € at the time of writing. 60% fuel, 50% water, 4 crew, charter equipment liferaft on board, 2°C air temp, F2+ moderate conditions for sea trials