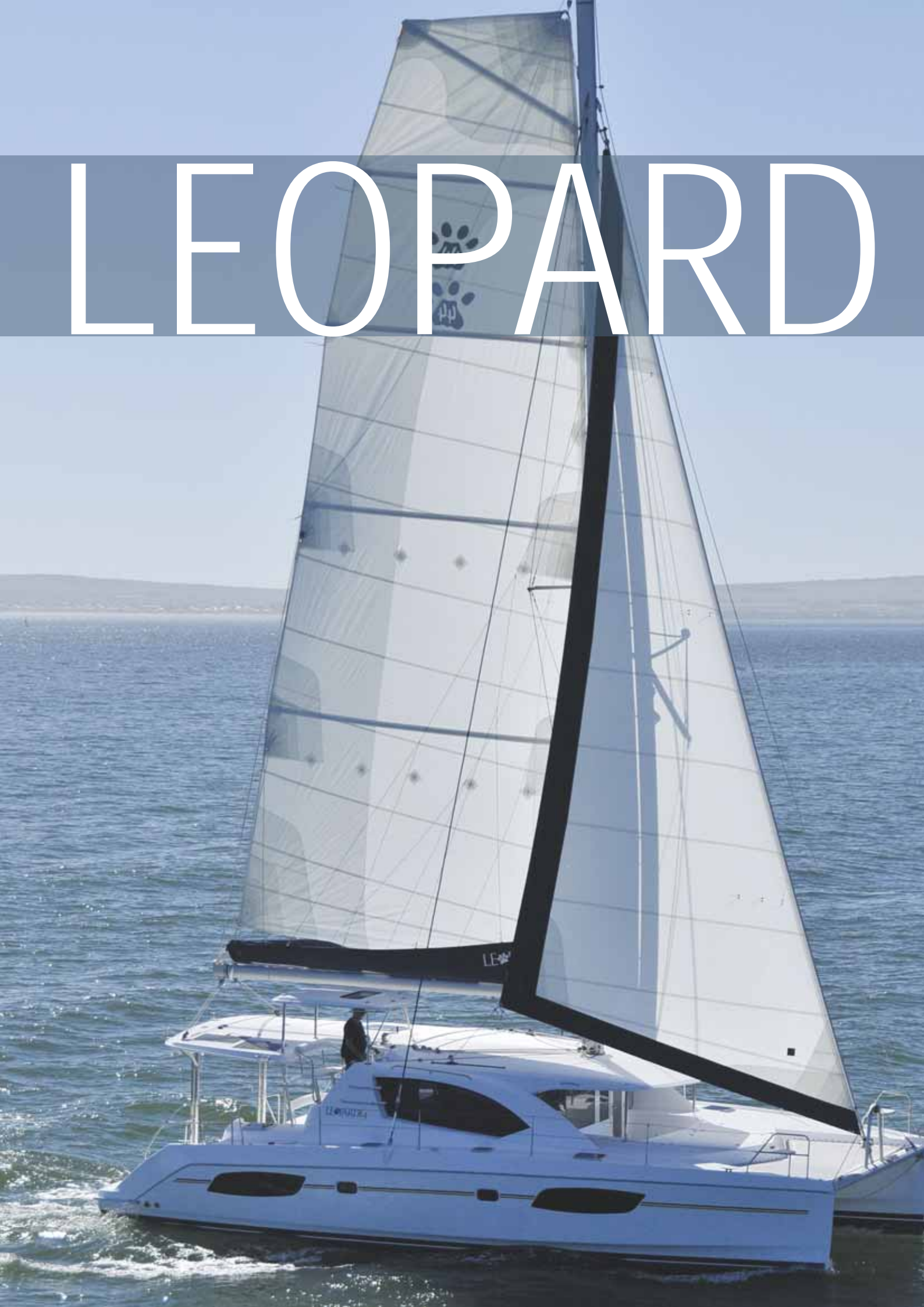


# LEOPARD



# 44

## *new cruising catamaran* new ideas

BY ZUZANA PROCHAZKA (this article first appeared on Boats.com)

The designer and builder of the Leopard 44 teamed up to create a fast, versatile cat that benefits from extensive owner feedback.

The new Robertson & Caine Leopard 44 is a cruising catamaran that introduces some truly innovative features. I arrived at that conclusion not only after being aboard one, but after sitting down with designer and chief engineer Gino Morrelli, and especially after chartering another cat recently in the South Pacific – not a Leopard 44 – where I found my thoughts going back to this design and how its features would have made sense in that setting. The thought that has gone into the 44 design was a result of feedback from owners and charterers who had practical ideas on how a catamaran is used both underway and at anchor.

### **Key Characteristics**

The first and most notable feature of the Leopard 44 is that it has two cockpits – one aft like any traditional catamaran, and one forward with a hardtop overhead and a door that leads directly to it from the saloon. My first thought when I saw that forward space was what a wind scoop that must make. Not so, says Gino Morrelli, now the exclusive Leopard Catamarans designer and naval architect of some famous nautical creations like *Playstation*. “Most cruising cats are about as aerodynamic as a minivan,” he says. “The wind hits the hulls and goes straight up, so whether the cat has vertical cabin windows or a cockpit in the front doesn’t make much difference as far as performance is concerned.”

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The Leopard 44 shows her innovative design features – a forward cockpit with shade overhead and an extensive, practical hardtop over the aft cockpit.

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The forward cockpit offers a private getaway, with great airflow to the cabin when the door and window ports are open.



The forward cockpit will seat three or four or will accommodate a lone lounge with a good book. It's protected from the elements by a bimini of sorts, and it even comes with a canvas splash guard in case of heavy seas or rain on an angle. The front door has additional dog clamps for watertightness in serious conditions, but when open, it creates great ventilation through the interior and all the way back to the aft cockpit – a nice feature when swinging to the hook in the tradewinds.

Another neat benefit of this forward social area is that it provides direct access to the front of the boat from the interior, and this added living space and separation are great when you want a little bit of alone time. Plus, this space will remain shady even as the sun sets in the west and the winds blow from the east. It can

get pretty crispy in the aft cockpit during the late afternoon, but the Leopard 44 offers a cool alternative for cocktail hour. The boat was engineered around this forward cockpit feature, so it never represented a compromise in terms of cost, practicality or performance.

A second notable feature is much more subtle – in fact, almost not noticeable compared to the obviousness of the forward cockpit. There are small molded-

in bumps at the edges of certain exterior surfaces like the steps. Morrelli calls them 'toe kicks'. These are almost like fiddles for the feet to give anyone on deck a tactile clue where a surface ends. If you look at most cats, their surfaces are radiused with smooth edges where the nonskid ends a few inches back. I have found these to be just plain dangerous as I've watched my crew slip, slide, and go down on stairs and cabintops. On the Leopard 44, not only are the edges raised, but the non-skid surface extends to the end. This sounds like a small detail but it's very important in daily use, and especially at night.

### Accommodations

With most boats, my comments on accommodations start down below with the interior. But with the Leopard 44 and its true indoor/outdoor living, it's

unthinkable to skip the exterior spaces that make life aboard so inviting and practical. The aft cockpit features a large dinette that will seat eight. Across to starboard are molded-in steps to the raised helm station with its twin seat and all the electronics at the skipper's fingertips. Both areas are protected by separate hardtop biminis, and the helm cover includes a fixed port so you can see the sails. The cockpit bimini also provides a place for the mainsheet traveler as well as space for solar panels. Not only does this overhead create a sturdy platform on which to stand and manage the mainsail, but it won't need canvas replacement every couple of years like the soft biminis on other cats.

Aft of the cockpit, the Leopard 44 has a traverse that stretches between the hulls and provides a place from which to manage the dinghy and the electric winch for the integrated davit. That means you can get from one side to the other quickly without setting foot in the social area of the cockpit. This adds both convenience and safety.

The hulls taper down to swimsteps that extend well aft beyond the end of the side coamings, and that make boarding easy from both the water and the dock. "We watched people coming aboard at boat shows," says Morrelli. "The swimsteps were lengthened like on powerboats to minimise hazards as well as embarrassment for anyone coming or going."

The interior of the Leopard 44 opens onto an L-shaped galley to port, with a full-sized opening window to the cockpit that forms a natural extension to the outdoors and keeps cooks engaged with all others aboard. A three-burner stove/oven combination and a double sink, combined with ample Corian countertops, will let anyone to turn out great meals for many. The drawer-style refrigeration is just a few steps away to starboard, where there's also an L-shaped

dinette that will seat six with additional individual chairs. The whole area is surrounded by eye-level windows for great light and ventilation.

A few steps down to starboard is the owner's hull with a midships lounge that includes a sofa, hanging lockers, a dedicated desk with a seat, and a sliding door that closes this area off for privacy. Forward is a large, well-appointed head with separate shower, and aft is the

master stateroom with a wide berth, lots of storage, and a sizeable port that makes for a great way to quickly eyeball the boat's position without ever getting out of bed. This is more handy than it sounds, especially for light sleepers who continually check the boat's movement.

The port hull has forward and aft cabins with excellent storage and a good-sized shared head in between. The finishes are mostly cherry veneers, with

an imitation Austrian oak cabin sole. The interior design, fittings, and materials might not be the latest Italian aesthetic, but they are durable, chafe resistant, and able to withstand a lot of use with minimal maintenance. Experienced owners will appreciate this.

### Systems and Options

The Leopard 44 comes standard with 29hp Yanmar engines that can be upgraded to 39hp. This would be a good idea for a boat that will be going any distance into head seas. Both engines are easily accessible via Lewmar hatches. "We added those hatches despite their being a bit more expensive," say Morrelli. "They're easy to use and infinitely more secure and dry than the fibreglass covers we used to use. They're also not in the steps anymore, which makes the steps solid and reduces squeaks and general boat noise." Besides the engines, upgrades worth considering include a generator, air conditioning, watermaker, and solar panels. There's also an option of a gennaker and a sprit.

### What it Does Best

"It looks great at anchor in the BVIs with me in the forward cockpit with a cocktail," laughs Morrelli. I bet it does, but one of the things the Leopard 44 actually does best is sail. With a 120% furling genoa in 10kts of true wind at 45°, the Leopard will sail at eight knots. On a beam reach with 15kts, she'll pick up and go well over 12. The boat is strong and light for its size due to a vacuum-bonded E-glass sandwich construction. The hulls are deep and narrow at the waterline but then angle out – a tulip shape according to Morrelli. This minimises the wetted surface for more speed but then increases interior volume for living comfort. The radiused chine also deflects water and keeps the decks drier.

The Leopard 44 is easy to singlehand, as all control lines are led to two winches and several rope clutches at the helm, and there's a large line storage compartment to keep the area free of clutter. The view from the wheel is excellent both forward and aft, which is a safety must for close-quarters manoeuvring.

Finally, one of the best things about the Leopard 44 is the price. "At an imported



Looking forward toward the bows from the light, airy saloon. (top)

The luxurious owner's suite features double berth, sitting area and storage and large walk-in head with separate shower compartment. (above)

price from \$669,615\* including Australia Duties, GST and in water delivery, the Leopard 44 delivers a great deal of blue water yacht for the money.'

### Tradeoffs

The more time I spent on the Leopard 44, as well as on other catamarans, the more the design innovations in the Leopard grew on me. That said, it has a couple of minor features that are certainly a matter of individual preference. The first is that there is no nav station to speak of. A small counter above the reefer/freezer near the inside electronics has a little

space but no seat. Morrelli emphasizes that this is by design. "Pretty much every space in the interior is valuable real estate, and with today's electronics, nav stations are growing increasingly obsolete," he says. "Most people will sit down at the dinette to do any route planning on paper charts, or on a computer, and the rest of the time is spent at the helm with a plotter." Point taken.

The second feature is the sofa in the owner's hull. As an offshore or coastal cruiser, I would expect to be perpetually in search of more storage for clothes, blankets, or books. The sofa takes up a lot of space that could be put to more practical use. I can see it being used more as a place to drop laundry than as a place to lounge.

### Similar Boats to Consider

Other than a few racing catamarans where forward cockpits are mostly used for sail management, cruising cats don't have the unique forward lounge of the Leopard 44, so there are few direct competitors. Therefore, perhaps the best ways to compare would be on performance and offshore capability. By that measure, you might want to consider the Catana 42 that comes standard with all essential cruising equipment. It's a solid, fast boat with the drawback being twin exposed helm stations on the hulls.

The helm station to starboard has wheel, engine controls, sail controls, and electronics all close at hand.



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Four cabin layout.



Three cabin layout.

Another bluewater cat is the Antares 44i that has a protected starboard-side helm station near the cockpit like the Leopard, but has a galley-down layout inside that some cooks will not like. All three designs are offshore capable and are delivered to their owners worldwide on their own bottoms.

#### Where To Learn More

Check out the Leopard 44 and other Morrelli designed catamarans at [www.leopardcatamarans.com.au](http://www.leopardcatamarans.com.au) or call the local Australian offices on 1300 661 321

**Editor's Note:** You can find a four-cabin version of the Leopard 44 available in the Sunsail fleet as the Sunsail 444 which is also available to own through the Sunsail Yacht Partnership Program.

Zuzana Prochazka is the President of Boating Writers International (BWI) and the Technical Editor for *Latitudes and Attitudes* magazine. She contributes regularly to *Boats.com*, *Yachtworld*, *Lakeland Boating*, *Sea Magazine* and *Boating World*. She hosts *Latitudes & Attitudes Television* and launched her boat and gear review website, *Talk of the Dock*, in 2010. She is the Chair of the BWI New Products Committee and has repeatedly judged NMMA Innovation Awards and NMEA New Product Awards. She is a USCG 100 Ton Master and serves as a judging chair for the BWI Annual Writing Contest.

\* Price quoted in Australian Dollars at the time this article went to print. Final contract price may be more or less subject to fluctuations in exchange rates.

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Builder	Robertson and Caine
Designer	Morrelli & Melvin
Length Overall	42'7 / 12.98m
Waterline Length	41'8 / 12.70m
Beam	23'9 / 7.25m
Draft	4'2 / 1.27m
Sail Area	1,270sqft / 118sqm
Displacement	27,880 / 12,615kg
Water	206 gal / 780L
Fuel	185 gal / 700L
Engines	2 x Yanmar 39hp