

# Best Cruising Catamaran

Another category that showcased great diversity in design and execution was the cruising cats. The HH 55 from China unanimously claimed the prize.

- By Herb McCormick

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**Winner: HH 55 Jon Whittle**

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In this unusual Boat of the Year fleet, the Best Cruising Catamaran class was yet another category made up of three boats that were very different in terms of size and execution: the 38-foot Maine Cat 38, the 47-foot Fountaine Pajot Saona 47 and the 55-foot HH 55. All three addressed their respective stated purposes very well, once again leaving the judges a challenging task in sorting out a winner. “We’ve got small, medium and large in this class,” said Bill Bolin.

Starting with the smallest of the three, the Maine Cat 38 was, according to its entry form, “a performance cruising multihull designed to be fast, comfortable and easy to singlehand from a central weather-protected helm with excellent 360-degree visibility.” Built of thermoformed Corecell-infused polyester resin, it was one of the highest of high-tech boats in the entire contest.

“The builder, Dick Vermeulen, has said, ‘If I’m not building the fastest boat out there [for its size], I’ve failed at everything I’ve done,’” said Tim Murphy. “So his whole goal is to get weight out of there and have the speediest cat around.

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“I really like what he’s doing with the thermal forming of the Corecell,” continued Murphy, summarizing how the Maine Cat achieves that weight savings. “The only other option beyond that is having cuts in a flat panel that you curve, and all those cuts fill with resin, which adds weight, and they’re brittle, and there are different mechanical properties in all that. So I think the quality of the basic structure in itself is quite high.”

Of the Fountaine Pajot Saona 47, Murphy said, “In terms of living space, they’re working with a fairly traditional layout. They’ve got a modified helm station between a bulkhead helm and a flybridge. It’s on the starboard

side over the top of the coachroof, which clears the area in the cockpit under the hard dodger for a social area that's completely separate from the working of the boat. We inspected the three-cabin version that dedicates the entire portside hull to one berth with an office and a head. It's got the best shower in the fleet, I think. They had the space to burn to do it, and it was a lovely space down there."



Of the high-performance Maine Cat 38, its builder says if he's not creating the fastest boat in its size range, he's failed at his mission. Jon Whittle "I think this would be a really fun charter boat or party boat," said Bolin. "Like Tim, I think the owners cabin and the interior worked very well. I'd love to spend some time on the boat in a nice anchorage someplace. I

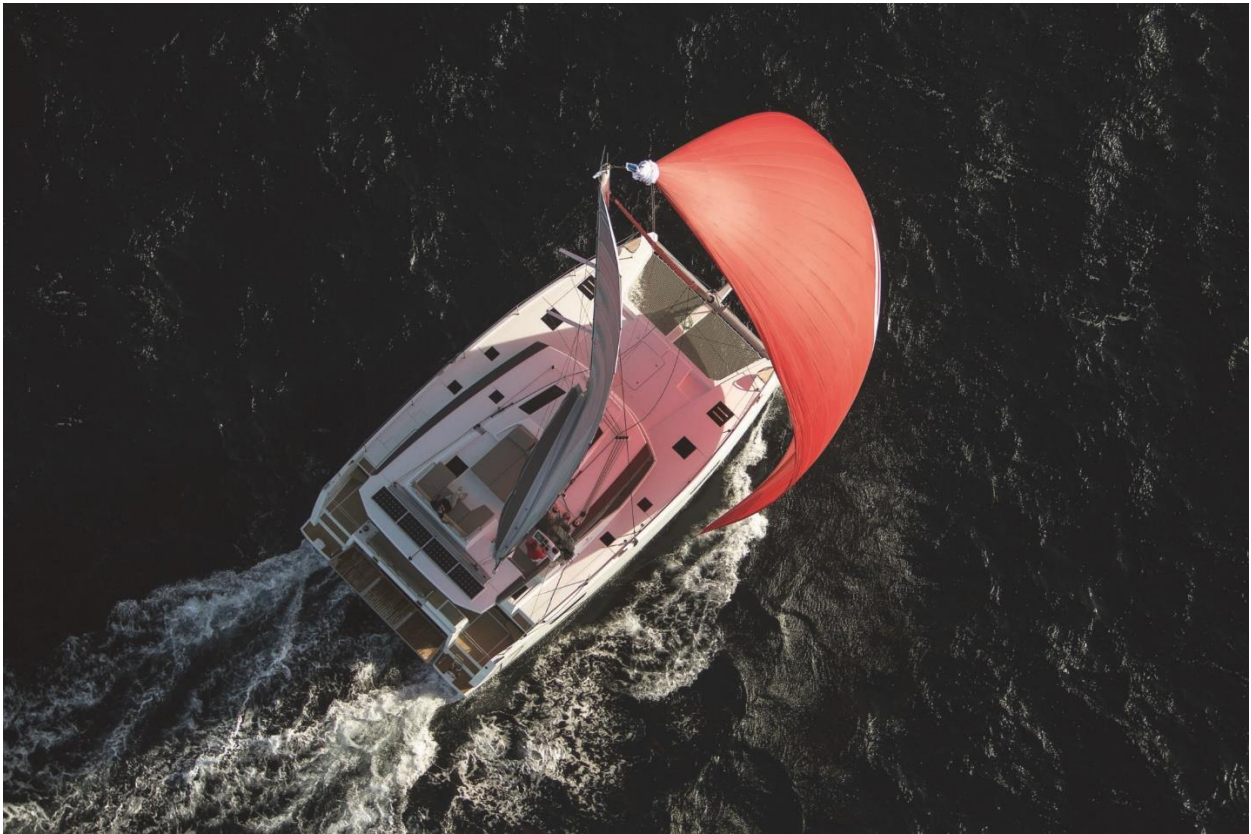
think it'd be a lot of fun. They really maximized the storage. It's a very flexible layout, with a great cockpit aft and a sun deck next to the helmsman that would be a terrific place to sit and watch the world go by. The anchoring system was very well-done. The windlass was fairly far aft, there was a beautiful anchor well that was deep enough that all the chain went down, and there was a big anchor and bridle ready to go."

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The final boat in the class, built in China, was the HH 55. Designed by Morrelli & Melvin, who previously were involved designing Gunboat cats — some of which were built in the same yard in a previous incarnation of that company — the HH owes some of its fundamental DNA to the Gunboat brand, a point of which Murphy expanded on during deliberations.

"We had two boats from HH in the contest," he said, "this 55 and also the 66, which we reviewed in the Best Luxury Cruiser class (see page 82).

The two boats have fundamentally different design purposes. This 55 is designed to be sailed by an owner-operator couple; we had such a couple aboard their boat for the test sail. This boat is stretching the market and is part of a trend that Gunboat started. I would credit Gunboat for pushing the trend into a performance side that hadn't existed before, of boats with high-quality interiors and accommodations."



The Fountaine Pajot Saona 47 is a more traditional catamaran with an excellent layout inside and out. Courtesy of Fountaine Pajot

“And then,” he continued, “it’s going to give them performance that, before recently, had not been available. So I think what HH is doing is iterating on a model Gunboat had created before. Gunboat opened the door, but I think HH is implementing it better. I think the HH is a very, very strong boat in this category. I think it’s a very, very strong boat in the whole market of cruising sailboats. I believe something new is, if not being invented here, is being developed and pushed further than ever before.” “This boat hits its target,” said Ed Sherman. “I do believe there are couples who are looking for a boat like this who’ll have a blast with it. I

think it would be criminal to ignore this whole category of new-age sailing yachts.”

“These guys deserve recognition,” said Bolin. “They’ve done a fabulous job with this boat. It truly is a couples boat, as proven by the owners who were aboard. The construction is as high-rate as we saw on any other entry this year. To me, I think it’s the class winner.”

Bolin needed to employ no arm-twisting to make his case with the other judges. Collectively, they handed the prize of Best Cruising Catamaran to the HH 55.