



## Royal Cape Catamarans: Majestic 500 and 530

A spacious family cruiser from South Africa redefines the limits of a luxury catamaran

In the fall of 2010, I had the good fortune to travel to South Africa, where I visited with most of the major builders of catamarans in the country. South Africa may have more small and medium-sized cat builders than anywhere else on planet earth except, perhaps, France.

My last stop along the cat trail was to visit Ken Bircher at Royal Cape Catamarans. As well as being owner and chief bottle washer at RCC, Ken is also the president of the South African Boat Builders Export

Council (SABBEX), which was my host while traveling in South Africa. Ken's knowledge of boatbuilding in his country is deep; he has been building boats for more than 25 years and knows everyone in the business. He was a great help when we published our long feature on South African builders, "Big Cat Country," in the February 2011 edition of MQ.

The Royal Cape factory is in the suburbs west of Durban on South Africa's east coast. There, Ken and his team build the Majestic 500

and 530, which is an evolution of the 50-footer that he built for many years. The 530, like its early sisters, is based on hulls originally designed for a monohull by Van De Stadt. The boat held the speed record from Richard's Bay to Durban for over 25 years, so Ken adopted the lines and put two hulls together to create the 500 and then 530. The hulls do not look like those on most cruising cats because of their volume. But that was just what Ken was looking for—sweet sailing hulls that can also carry the weight of truly luxurious living accommodations.

Seeing three boats in various stages of build tells you a lot about the quality of the workmanship. We could see just how the balsa-cored hulls were laid up, how the interior frames and stringers were glassed in, and how the floors, bulkheads and furniture were tabbed, glued and screwed in place. The 500 is as solidly built as any cat on the market, and the fit and finish are as fine as that on many megayachts.

The 500 comes in four-, five- or six-cabin versions, and since the boats are custom built, owners can choose from layouts, veneers and



equipment options designed specifically for them from the keel up. The 530 is the same basic boat, but with extended sterns and the addition of a stern platform and a utility counter and storage. The 530 makes SCUBA diving from the boat easier and allows you to rig, catch and clean fish while underway without having to get the cockpit all "fishy."

We had to wait until February 2011 to sail a Majestic 530, following the Strictly Sail Miami sailboat show, and true to the weather at that time of the year, we had light easterly trade winds on Biscayne Bay and lovely sunny skies. We motored the boat away from the marina and noticed at once that the boat has plenty of power generated by the twin 75hp turbo Volvos. Also, with the twin engines it was easy to make the big boat pivot in just about its own length.

The 530 is 52'6" overall and has a 26'4" beam, so she has plenty of deck space and tons of volume below decks for accommodations. There were eight people on board that afternoon for the test sail, but you almost had to go looking for someone to talk to since the boat has so many different interior and exterior places to sit or recline.

Once into Biscayne Bay, we hoisted the full-battened mainsail



and rolled out the genoa. The main-sheet leads to the raised helm on the starboard side of the cockpit, where it can be controlled with a winch. The genoa sheets run to winches on either side of the coach roof and are easily accessible from the cockpit.

In the light breeze, the boat took a moment to gather her skirts and get moving nicely, but once she did, she was capable of sailing at very reasonable speeds and tacked and jibed handily. The 530 tacks through 90 degrees and was happiest broad reaching at about 140 degrees.

We hoisted the spinnaker for the run back to the marina and had a lovely sail at good speed. For the fun of it, we flew the chute under

the Key Biscayne bridge and up the narrow channel to Miami. The boat handled well in tight quarters and had fingertip steering at the helm.

The cockpit of the 530 is huge and laid out for outdoor living, with a table that seats six, a smaller cocktail table for two and a large cooler for storing drinks. The helm is raised to starboard and visibility from the seat is good. The cockpit is covered with a hard top that attaches to an arch aft. A full array of solar panels can be installed on top of the hardtop.

The 530's side decks and fore-decks are wide open and easy to move around. There are essentially three levels for sitting or lounging in the sun, and the trampolines forward for reclining.





The 530, like the 500, is a pure luxury cruising boat that handles well and is easy on the crew. The boat we sailed had crossed the Atlantic comfortably and was ready to head offshore or wherever her owners might want to take her.

#### LIVING ABOARD

The 530 is built on a semi-custom basis, so an owner can choose from four different layouts offered. And, he can select wood veneers and fabric to match. The thing that you notice when first exploring below decks is the amount of space in the hulls.

The beam of each hull is about twice that of many comparable multihulls, and that volume can be used to great advantage when fitting in sleeping cabins, en suite heads, storage spaces and lockers. The master staterooms in the boat we sailed are forward and are proper seagoing cabins with double beds, vanities, hanging space, places to sit down and their own large heads with tubs and showers.

While the look of the interior furniture is elegant and very nicely finished, the 530 is also a practical boat with a lot of molded, gel-coated surfaces that are bright and easy to

keep clean. And, with many opening hatches and ports, the boat is very airy and well-ventilated.

The saloon and galley are laid out for entertaining and life at sea. The galley is U-shaped, so you always feel secure even if the boat is pitching. The builder offers a "galley down" option that really opens up the saloon and makes room for a truly spacious dinette.

A small but useful chart table is built in just inside the saloon door, where you have the electrical panels, and where you can mount radios, instruments, a chartplotter and a phone.

The overall appearance of the 530's fit and finish is of a very high quality yacht that has been created for owners who will be sailing far and will often have family and friends aboard. This has to be one of the most comfortable 50-footers out there.

#### MQ THOUGHTS

The Majestic 500 and 530 are both great cruising boats that offer a huge amount of space on deck and down below, a very stable sailing platform, and well-thought-out living and sailing spaces. The boats

make great family cruising craft.

But, the 530 is also potentially a unique and capable crewed charter boat that could be run by a couple and could offer diving, fishing, kayaking, windsurfing and other activities to guests as well as luxurious accommodations and dining.

Whatever your interest, the Majestic 500 and 530 can be custom built to your tastes and needs and will serve you well blue water sailing or coastal cruising. ■

#### Royal Cape Catamarans Majestic 530

LOA	52'4"
LWL	49'3"
Beam	26'3"
Draft	3'3"
Displ.	37,400 lbs.
Sail Area	1,227 sq. ft.
Mast height	68'10"
Engines	75hp Diesel
Fuel	250 gals.
Water	250 gals.

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