



MAJESTIC 530

Passagemaking with panache

BY TOM DOVE

➔ **WALKING THE DOCKS AT A SAILBOAT** show, you might think that all the big catamarans you see are pretty much alike. They're not, of course, and Royal Cape's Majestic 530 is a fine example of how different a cat can be, as this well-built boat has a number of unique features. This particular model was developed over the course of several years. The original design was a 50 footer and was sold in South Africa as a kit with a bare hull and deck. When Ken Bircher bought the company in 2003, he mod-

ernized the plant, got Lloyd's approval for his building systems and began selling different models worldwide.

Construction Bircher said the design has evolved in response to owner's input. The boat has a gross tonnage capacity of about 100,000 pounds, but the actual displacement is just under 38,000 pounds, so there is plenty of reserve buoyancy. And of course cruisers tend to load up their boats. "That will

slow it down a bit," admits Bircher. "But speed isn't that critical."

The reserve buoyancy, along with a long waterline, chines and a moderately sharp entry, make the Majestic 530 a competent sea boat. There's little slamming in waves, even though the bridgedeck clearance over the water is fairly low.

The factory vacuum-bags the hulls and deck and reinforces the hulls with balsa core above the waterline. It also takes all the usual anti-blister precautions. Quadraaxial cloth reinforces high-load areas in the handlaid hull structures.

Quality of workmanship is good. Plumbing systems are neat and accessible, and all electrical wiring is tinned and routed through conduits. The two engines are isolated in compartments that can be easily accessed from the deck. Because a delivery from the builder's yard in South Africa means crossing an ocean, all boats have gone through a thorough shakedown before arriving in the U.S.

On Deck I boarded one of these handsome craft in Miami. "The owner of this boat wanted to store a lot of diving and fishing gear," explained

Décor in the cabins and all living spaces is warm and welcoming



Bircher, and sure enough, most of the stern area was taken up with bait wells, a filleting board and space for serious fishing tackle.

This was the only sailing cat I've seen laid out just like a big sportfisherman, but the basic open design of the catamaran's stern lends itself to such modifications.

All sail-control lines run to electric winches on the cabintop. Some excellent TBS antiskid on the deck and well-located, solid welded railings make the decks secure. There are also several well-positioned padeyes and jacklines.

The boat's cabintop is a vast space, even with the 10 50-watt solar panels. While the steps leading up to it from the foredeck are a bit narrow, it is easy to reach all parts of the boom, the Doyle Stack Pack and the mainsail itself.

Accommodations

"What makes this boat really different are the accommodations and the space belowdeck," says Bircher. Because almost all his boats are built for private owners, the five-cabin layout is the most popular. There are three full cabins in the port hull, all with queen-size berths. The aft cabins also have a single bunk tucked underneath the main berth at a right angle. All toilets pump into gravity-drain holding tanks.

Two thirds of the starboard hull is occupied by the owner's suite, with four steps leading to a king-size berth on the bridgedeck.

Thanks to a bi-level divider separating the galley from the main saloon, the cook has ample counter space, a full-size dishwasher simplifies cleanup. An alternate layout puts the galley down in the port hull, which increases the bridgedeck's entertainment space. A 20-gallon/hour watermaker and sizable tankage keeps water flowing. Headroom is plentiful, and there's great ventilation via ports and hatches that make the interior airy and bright.

Other boats to look at:



Lagoon 500



Gunboat 48



Outremer 55

Under Sail

For our test sail off Miami we had a good breeze of 14-18 knots, with 6-foot rollers. We were happy and comfortable flying the full main and jib. The professional skipper aboard said he doesn't put the first reef in the main until it is blowing 25. I found the motion easier underfoot than on most catamarans of this size. As expected, the helm felt neutral. The boat tracked straight on all points of sail and tacked easily through about 90 degrees. Speeds were remarkably consistent whether we were beating or reaching. Although the boat is no speedster, somehow it always managed to do just a bit over 8 knots. On the 8,000-mile 45-day passage from South Africa to Miami the cat had several daily runs of 235-240 miles and many others in the 140-150 range. This kind of consistent performance is, for me anyway, a lot better than a short straight-line burst of speed.

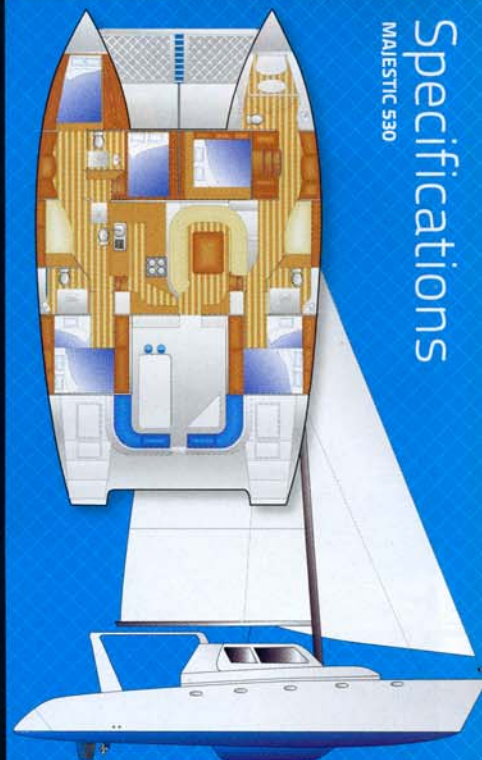
Under Power

The 530 can perform all the usual close maneuvers without fuss. Its turning circle is about 1.5 boat-lengths, and it can make a graceful cat pirouette using its two engines. Although our boat was fitted with two optional 135hp shaft-drive engines I see no advantage in this; the standard 75hp saildrives should do the job.

Visibility from the helm is exceptional, with no lurking head knockers or shin bashers in the well-designed cockpit. Lanky sailors will find ample headroom throughout.

Conclusion

If you seek a strong boat with spacious accommodations that is well set up for voyaging, take a close look at the Majestic 530. Good engineering, careful construction and high value make this cat a contender for everyone who is serious about extended tradewinds cruising. **NSR**



Specifications

LOA 52ft 6in // LWL 49ft 8in

BEAM 29ft 2in // DISPLACEMENT 37,479lb

SAIL AREA 1,378 ft²

FUEL/WATER/WASTE (GAL) 317/317/63

ENGINE 2 x 75hp Volvo Penta diesel w/saildrives

DESIGNER Pieter Volschenk/Van Der Stadt, navalafrica.co.za

BUILDER Royal Cape Catamarans royalcapecatamarans.com

PRICE About \$775,000 FOB Durban, South Africa. Price includes sails, electric winches, ground tackle, 8 kW genset, RIB with outboard, chartplotter, air conditioning ducts, wind instruments, radio, radar, autopilot, microwave, freezer/fridge, barbeque, TV and electric heads

Sail Area-Displacement Ratio

LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
14	19.7	30

Displacement-Length Ratio

LIGHT	MODERATE	HEAVY
50	135	300

Performance

Racer
Cruiser

Our Take

PROS

- Good seakeeping qualities
- Spacious, with excellent headroom throughout
- Innovative, customized layouts
- Quality construction
- Price includes extensive equipment

CONS

- Smallish heads
- No real nav station