

by Trygve Roberts

Royal Cape Catamarans Majestic 500



As I stepped on board the flagship Majestic 500, I immediately noticed several peculiar things. Firstly, the boat was kitted out like a luxury condo. A bowl of fruit

in a porcelain jar; six wine glasses standing next to a selection of red and white wines; a plate of fresh muffins on a glass plate; magazines, cell-phones and spectacles lying on various tables. A quick glance at Table Mountain showed a white cloud billowing over the top. Despite the relaxed facilities next to the Cape Grace hotel, I knew that out in the bay, the 'Cape Doctor' would be in full cry. I chuckled quietly to myself, as I wondered what a big job it would be securing all these pretty accoutrements as we headed out to sea for the test sail ... and the inevitable wet and bouncy ride a 30 knot South Easter would produce.

Immediate impressions are of large size and scale. It's a big boat at 15 metres LOA and 8.75m beam. Helming the big cat (in the words of her young skipper for the day) is akin to sailing a floating tennis court. And that's not far off the mark. The deck space is huge!

Before we set sail, CEO of Royal Cape Catamarans, Ken Bircher, took me for a quick tour of the boat. The design is based on a twin set of RCOD hulls, originally designed by Van der Stadt. The basic concept has been improved, modified and stretched over time with this latest 50 foot version being boat number three. To date, 17 Royal Cape Cats grace the international charter waters.

Each boat is custom-built to the owner's requirements with a choice of a four, five or six cabin layout. Even in the six cabin version, each cabin is a double with en-suite. The cabins are pleasantly proportioned and filled with light and excellent ventilation. In the test boat, the layout had three cabins in the starboard hull, and a crew cabin and the spacious owner's cabin with study area in the port hull. The white stippled finish throughout the boat appealed to me as being functional, practical and very easy to maintain – quite frankly much more attractive than all that 'over the top' panelling so ubiquitous in top-end boats these days. Again, finishes are the owner's prerogative.

The main saloon houses the galley and dining/sitting area. Every conceivable appliance is there: Microwave, oven, hob, TV, DVD, dishwasher, washing machine, fridge, freezer, fans, air-conditioning, stereo sound throughout - basically every possible thing one could possibly want for a very pleasant and lengthy stay on this vessel. The cockpit is massive and covered from end to end with GRP bimini. There are several tables, with fixed stools. Steps have been designed at various points on the boat allowing for safe and easy access.

There were only three crew and a skipper (Raoul Van Aardt) for the day. We cast





off to catch the swing-bridge on an open cycle and headed straight out to sea. The twin diesels were pushing the 15-ton boat along at a respectable 6.5 knots in flat water. The boat is surprisingly manoeuvrable in tight mooring areas. With a 30-knot south easter in the bay, the skipper decided to stick two reefs in the main – prudent enough, but I thought the boat would have easily carried a single reef under those conditions.

The genoa was unfurled and I was handed the helm as the motors were cut. It's always such a nice feeling when the engines are shut down and one is left with the sounds of the ocean and the boat. The helm was neutral to the point where

I could steer with two fingers. A bit more mainsail area would have given that bit of extra weather helm a skipper needs. Soon we were sporting two rooster tails off the back as we sailed effortlessly across the face of the strong south-easterly. The bits of spray off the windward bow didn't make it anywhere near the helming position. What a nice change to be dry!

This was my first touch on the helm of a boat this size. The previous biggest cat under my control was a Hobie 16, so this was giant leap for me and just a tad intimidating. I wasn't quite sure what to expect, but I soon got the hang of things and the dynamics of big catamaran sailing. I had a bank of instruments in front of me, which

a 747 pilot would have been happy with, and put the big cat on 60 degrees apparent wind. The speed quickly built to around 10 knots. I checked and re-checked the wind speed and it was constantly between 25 and 30 knots true, with a 1.5m chop. I suppose the double-reefed main had something to do with it, but the boat hardly needed me to tell it what to do. It just galloped along at a steady 8 to 10 knots and was fully stable and predictable at all times. I think a 10-year-old boy could have steered it without a problem.

On board we had several guests, including Magnus Lewin, CEO of Trade Wind Charters in the Grenadines. He was there to evaluate the new cat and already has four Royal Cape Cats in his charter fleet. We chatted about the Caribbean-based charter industry and I was interested to hear that his company sells cabin space to clients on a time share basis, as opposed to the more traditional chartering of an entire boat. The boats are professionally crewed and guests simply arrive for a luxurious, carefree holiday. His business is doing well and they are looking at increasing their fleet. South African boat builders are a strong force in this international charter market.

Blaauwberg beach was fast approaching and I asked the skipper if it was OK to gybe. Before gybing the genoa had to be furled and hauled out again on the new tack. The beach looked a little too close for my liking, but then again the cat only draws 1.1 metres, so I needn't have worried. After the gybe, the genoa was un-



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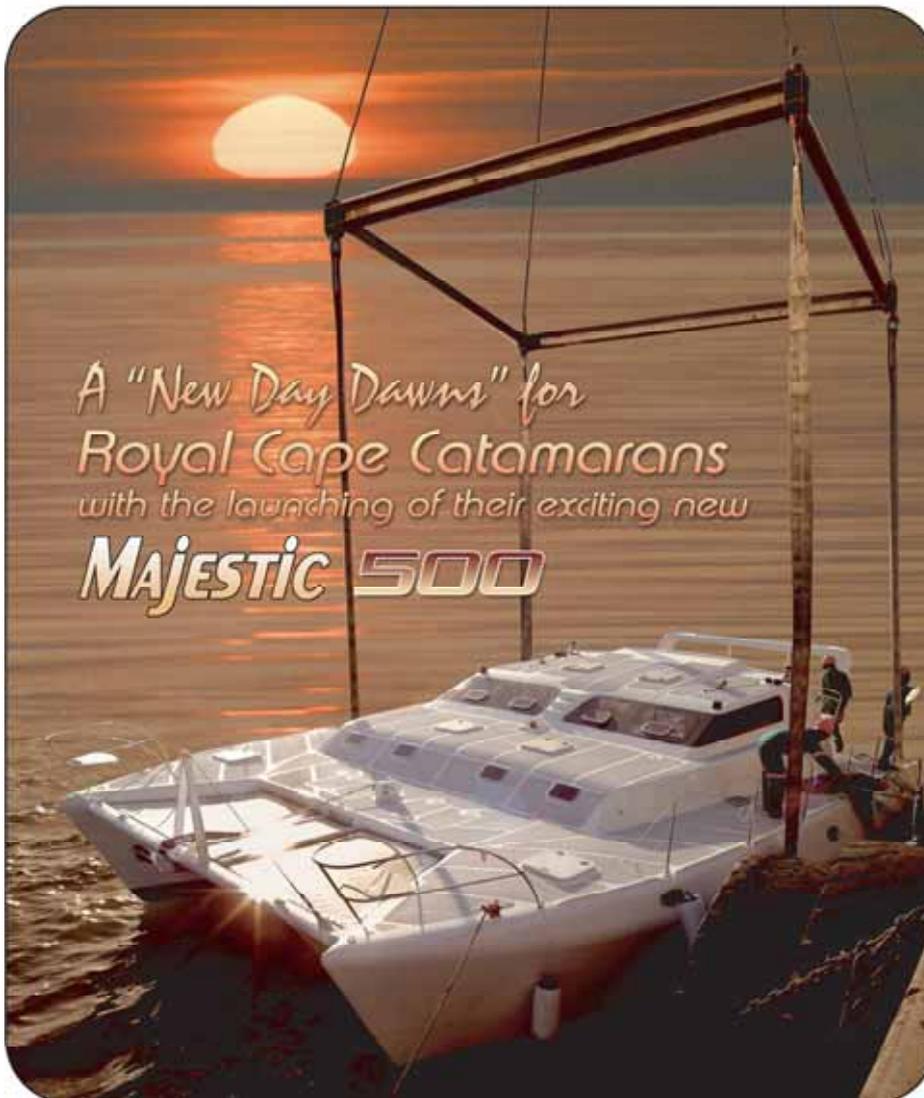


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A "New Day Dawns" for
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 with the launching of their exciting new
MAJESTIC 500

furled and we were back on course for the harbour entrance and going along very comfortably. Trimming the headsail was a simple press of a button to activate the electric self-tailing winches. Now that is a nice feature!

The 30 knot wind did not bother the boat at all. The chop on the bay had no effect on the boat and all the passengers seemed very comfortable and relaxed with not even a hint at sea sickness. Then I remembered the wine glasses and the fruit bowl, fully expecting to see them lying all over the saloon, but they were exactly where they had been back at the dock. You have to see this to believe it. Sailing at 10 knots in a 30 knot wind and your wine glasses don't have to be packed away! Unbelievable! (On my boat we would be six very wet and salty sailors with the bilge pump going flat out) The stability of this boat is so impressive, that I even checked for Prestik or Velcro, sceptic that I am. This will be a superb boat to have a holiday on – and that, is exactly what it is built to do. And ladies, if you don't like boats that tilt over, this is for you. No need for gimbals on the stove.

The one hour sail was over too quickly and I reluctantly handed the helm back to the skipper for the final bit into the dock area. Again the tying up process was efficient and done with a minimum of fuss.

Ken Bircher, who has taken over Royal Cape Catamarans for the past two years, is a genuine, down to earth person with a passion for honesty and integrity. It shines through everything he says and does. His hands-on, practical approach and interaction with his clients seems so refreshing to me in this age of smooth talkers and glib businessmen who are unable to walk their talk.

The detail and technical specifications are all first class and only the best equipment is used. Another different angle is that these boats are supplied complete. And when they say 'ready to sail', they really mean just that. A new owner (especially a novice) will have no nasty surprises waiting after delivery. The very long list even includes a RIB with 25HP outboard, a 12-man liferaft, EPIRB – the lot. Every boat comes with full Category A international certification. So many companies cut out the frills to get the price to appear cheaper. Royal Cape Catamarans are here to stay. ?

Specifications

LOA	15 m
Beam	8.75m
Draft	1.1m
Mast Height	21m
Engines	Twin 55hp Volvo Penta
Navigation	Radar, Chartplotter, Auto Pilot, Full Raymarine Instrumentation
Water Capacity	1000 Litres
Fuel Capacity	1000 Litres
Electrical	800a/h – 12v DC plus 220v – AC from a 1.4 KVA generator included
Wind generator	included
12 man Liferaft	
EPIRB	
Full Cat. A safety equipment	
Tender	RIB with 25hp Outboard