

# THE POWER CATAMARAN'S LIFESTYLE ADVANTAGES REVISITED



The power cats beam forward provides another safe entertaining area and a wonderful place to sit when underway

| story **PETER BRADY**

Over the past 25 years while designing and building power catamarans, I have been asked over and over again why I am such a strong believer in them and in particular the type that I call displaning. To answer this question, I wrote an article for *Multihull World* in 2004 called Power Catamarans – setting a new standard in boating lifestyle and in the article, I discussed what Lorma and I had learnt about the type's strengths to that stage and why the displaning power catamaran was starting to gain an enthusiastic following. Fourteen years on, we have been through the GFC and seen a very strong Aussie dollar for a period of time: both have had a huge effect on the local boatbuilding industry opening the door to imported boats with their huge scale and financial strength which now dominate the market. As we predicted, the power catamaran market is still growing, but its emphasis has moved from the long-range cruiser towards the bareboat charter market where it still has many of the same advantages over monohull power boats and sailing catamarans without even touching on its unmatched range and high economical cruise speed.

Since writing the original article we have doubled our time at sea on power cats and talked to as many people as possible about their advantages and have received a huge amount of feedback from power catamaran owners. During this time we have also designed, built and modified a large number of displaning power cats and have developed or refined new design features including our Controlled Vapour Dampening (CVD) ride control system and different interior and equipment layouts.

The past 25 years has been a continuous learning curve in literally every detail of displaning power cat design and construction. We have refined everything from hull and wingdeck shape to interior and mechanical layouts, power requirements and the suitability of different engine types and drive train components, to the construction and where the strength needs to be concentrated to withstand slamming loads and torsion. Our belief has not wavered in the slightest over this time and the feedback from the owners if anything has strengthened our beliefs. Some of the boats have completed huge sea miles including one that I believe has been around Australia two and a half times or the equivalent mileage. The owners have taken their power cats through all types of weather and sea conditions and have cruised every part of the Australian coastline from the Kimberley to Tasmania: the one constant is that the boats have always got them home safely regardless of the conditions. Following is an updated version of the original article with amazingly little changed. For those who read the original article, the message is still very much the same and for those reading it for the first time, I hope it either gets you thinking or confirms your own experience.

## So, why chose a power cat over a monohull?

Whilst fuel economy, a higher cruising speed and range are the stand out performance advantages of the displaning power cat, they are not the dominant reason



**TOP:** Free standing domestic furniture can be used to create more flexible layouts.

**ABOVE:** Power cats can provide more open plan inclusive arrangements.





why the decision to purchase a power catamaran of any hull type is made.

***Surprisingly lifestyle is still the reason why most people choose power cats.***

#### **How do we know?**

For the past 25 years that we have been designing and building power catamarans, Lorma and I have spoken to or corresponded with thousands of people about power cats, mostly in Australia but also from other countries around the world. In the course of these conversations or correspondence, we have had the opportunity to informally survey people who are considering power cats as to why they would choose them over the more conventional existing types of power boats and what they would want on them.

In the beginning, our clients were considered on the fringe or the leading edge depending on your perspective and whilst we have predominantly been talking to them in regards to building a displacing power cat, most of what we have learnt from this research is relevant to all power cats.

**From our informal survey, let's start with the reasons people have given for possibly not buying a power catamaran:**

When we first began the conversations, there was a lot of talk about the possibility of capsizing a power catamaran as it was still a very hot topic because of sailing multihulls, however these days it is never mentioned.

The next issue raised was the failure of overloaded planing cats to deliver on their promise of performance and while this is still relevant, it was and still is just as much of an issue with monohulls. The difficulty when dealing with this negative was there was no understanding that there was another option in the form of the displacing hull, because there was no history or examples for the public or even designers at that stage to study.

In the early days there was also the issue of the power cat's beam and the difficulty in finding marina berths and their cost. The power cat's extra beam will still generally cost more for its length in a marina than a

monohull, however the greater availability of berths since the GFC and the growing number of multihull berths now available in newer marinas has made this less of an issue.

Lastly there was the "power catamarans are different and more expensive to build for their length plus I am not sure how the resale values will hold up" argument. Yes, power cats are more expensive to build for their length as they have up to a third more surface area and generally two engines, stern gear and rudders so it is not fair to make the comparison on length alone. As with all boats, resale value is about how good the boat is not what type it is. Well designed and built boats that perform as intended will always hold a higher resale value than boats of a lesser standard, regardless of whether they are a monohull or catamaran so this is more a question about quality rather than type and can be easily explained. With more and more boats on the water, gradually power cats have become more main stream losing the 'different' tag and this is reflected in the number of European and Asian production boatbuilders entering the multihull market.

**So what is it about power cats that makes the boating lifestyle on them different or better?**

We have asked both men and women over the years what features they wanted in a power boat that would allow them to enjoy their boating lifestyle to the fullest.

Because the women were talking to Lorma, they were more open about what they did and didn't like about boating in general and also what their requirements were, than had they been talking to a man. Because she was a woman with thousands of sea miles behind her in power cats and offshore yacht racing, including a Sydney to Hobart, she could answer their questions honestly and provide answers that they respected. Our survey spread is not absolutely representative of all boaties, however it is a good cross section of experienced boaties looking for something different and those who were looking to own a power boat for the first time. It is particularly representative of families and retired or soon to be retired couples and we have also talked to a fair number of boaties over the years who have experienced offshore yacht racing in their younger days and are now looking to relax rather than compete.

**When women were asked what they wanted in a powerboat, their overwhelming response was:**

#### **1: STABILITY**

This is the dominant feature that makes power cats popular with women. When cruising or at anchor, they just want to relax. They don't want to be thrown out of bed when another boat passes their anchorage, nor do they want to have put every item away in secure storage after they have used it. Power cat owners

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**TOP LEFT:** In power cats over 13.5m bridgedeck level bedrooms provide another level of comfort and privacy.

**LEFT:** Power cats' bridgedeck level bathrooms are spacious, bright and well ventilated.

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report a much lower incidence of seasickness and therefore a higher rate of enjoyable times on the boat. Women are far less macho than men and do not see throwing up as one of the rites of passage when going boating. As they aged, both sexes commented that power cats were much easier on tired and damaged backs, hips and knees.

The power catamaran is not constrained by rigging considerations like a sailing catamaran, so its beam in combination with the cabin shape provides a unique opportunity for designers to create vastly different layouts from either monohulls or sailing cats. Monohulls are bound, up to a certain length, by a tube or corridor arrangement that tends to create long, narrow lounge seats and tiny galleys with minimal bench space and storage. In the past, galleys on both sailing cats and monohulls have often been stuck down amongst the

sleeping arrangements almost as an afterthought, with very little visibility or ventilation however this has changed as more women have got involved in boating and is very unusual these days. From 10m up, power catamarans can provide galley facilities equal to, or better than many small apartments with seating around a table suitable for all those on board and on power cats larger than 12m, separate dining and lounging arrangement are possible. Even on 10m power cats it is possible to use domestic type furniture in the saloon and this allows owners to use their favourite chairs or to be able to change the furniture arrangement depending on how many are on board.

The two separate hulls of the power cat provide privacy for sleeping arrangements, both visually and acoustically and whilst smaller power catamarans are slightly restricted in their sleeping arrangements by the wing deck height and shape, in vessels over 13.5m the possibilities are amazing. In our most recent launching of the Pathfinder Offshore 45 we have been able to arrange the owner's stateroom across the front of the boat on a single level floor with a queen size bed and large en-suite, along with a queen double cabin and en-suite in one hull and a double bunk cabin with en-suite in the other. In larger cats we have even fitted a spa bath and lounge plus a king sized bed in the owner's stateroom. Whilst creating the headroom for the forward bridge deck cabin does require higher topsides to keep the profile proportional, this has no direct effect on the boats performance or sea keeping like the ultra- full bows being designed into monohulls these days to get larger front bedrooms. We believe it is this feeling of space that can be created in a power cat along with the stability that makes them very attractive to women in particular and boaties in general.

2: VISIBILITY

Again, this is connected to seasickness. Most boaties find good visibility and the light provided by it far more conducive to a relaxed lifestyle, therefore they are less likely to feel seasick if they can see what is going on around them. One of the main attractions for women to power cats was the possibility of much more open plan arrangements allowing the helm station, galley, dining area and saloon to be connected, providing a more inclusive atmosphere and a feeling of being on the boat, not down in it.

3: VENTILATION

Fresh air is also important in combating seasickness and keeping the interior cool. Ventilating the boat when locked up was talked about, as it made the boat far more pleasant to arrive at – starting a cruise in a dank, musty boat is not exactly a bonus in getting the family

on board. Because they do not roll, power cat's decks are normally fairly dry, allowing some windows and portholes to be left open in more extreme conditions than usual, providing much better ventilation. The trend towards power boats with all fixed windows that rely completely on air-conditioning was also a topic often discussed, with weekenders not so bothered by having the genset running constantly (not so sure their neighbours will be impressed) but serious cruisers were not keen on this trend as they either do not want to have a genset, and if they do they do not want it running constantly as it uses valuable fuel, reducing range. A fresh, cool interior along with low maintenance and easily cleaned surfaces was also on most women's want list as it allows all the family to enjoy the holiday or cruising – no one wants to spend their holiday scrubbing and cleaning.

The fitout materials don't have to be stark, plastic or cheap – they just need to be carefully considered as to how they will work on a boat. This is not exclusive



The power cat width and stability allow flybridges that are more usable at sea with room for all guests.

to catamarans, however they are less hidebound by tradition and therefore modern low maintenance materials are more acceptable and used, although the trend towards sharp corners on the imports was not appreciated as both men and women considered it dangerous at sea.

6: STORAGE

Most women asked for as much storage as possible for food, clothes, personal effects, appliances, etc.



TOP: The power cat's open plan arrangements provide a more inclusive atmosphere.

ABOVE: Large shaded aft decks allow relaxed multi-generational entertaining.



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Men wanted storage for fishing rods, crab pots, barbecues, tools, engine spares, bait tanks, iceboxes and beverages. Unfortunately as with all boats, weight is a consideration and therefore storage has to be smart and tailored to the type of gear that is used and carried on the boat and common sense must prevail when storing these items so as not to affect trim and therefore seaworthiness. The best way for designers and builders of power cats with their greater sensitivity to fore and aft trim to ensure that everything is controlled, is to provide the space to store heavy items where they will have the least effect on the boats trim. Space is the power catamarans greatest asset; therefore it is in the designers and builders hands how they allocate it.



Powercats provide galley facilities equal to, or better than many small apartments.

**7: THE ABILITY TO ENJOY AS MANY OF THE CREATURE COMFORTS THAT ARE AVAILABLE AT HOME**

Old time boaties will scoff at this request, however times have changed and if families want to go cruising together then concessions have to be made – after all, men want every fishing aid and water toy they can purchase along with the full electronics package. Toasters, bread makers, coffee machines, icemakers, dishwashers and washing machine-dryers are requested – all can be accommodated in power cats down to 12m in length, but it requires careful planning. In most cases, the above deck layout of a power cat can be designed around a series of cubes which fits well with the shape of domestic appliances and the power catamarans stability allows most appliances to be used even when at sea, as they will not get tipped over or internally damaged.

**8: FAMILY FRIENDLY, SAFE AND COMFORTABLE**

Boats that are not family friendly make hard work for women. Trying to keep a close eye on children or inexperienced boaties is hard enough at the best of times, but if the design of the boat by its very nature forces people into small groups that cannot be supervised easily, then it is very difficult to enjoy a relaxed lifestyle. Conversely, a design that does not have room to move and forces people long term in to one area is very testing on relationships. A common comment from both women and men was that if a fly bridge was fitted on a monohull, it was often too small to seat more than three to four people in

comfort and the motion on the flybridge was often so unpleasant that they never used them. In comparison, the large comfortable flybridge or pilothouse on a power catamaran provides a stable drive station with unmatched views for helming and with its all-round elevated views, makes a superb waterfront location for alfresco dining or cocktails because it catches the cooling breeze as does a large uncluttered back deck. The second trend we are seeing is boat design heading back towards no flybridge because as boaties age, trawler style doors give direct access to the side decks and this is now a popular feature.

Both sexes also commented that ergonomics are important in relaxing and enjoying a boating lifestyle. Injuries caused by sharp corners or badly designed or located steps are not conducive to good times. Well-designed power cats can provide wide clean decks with multiple, safe entertaining areas, space for sunbathing and chatting on the foredeck, fishing or swimming from the cockpit during the day and entertaining in the cockpit, flybridge or saloon at night. These multiple areas are large enough to accommodate all the guests

at one time yet they also allow groups of adults, teenagers and children their own space if required.

**When men were asked what they wanted in a powerboat, they wanted two types of boat rolled into one.**

Most wanted all the things that would encourage their wives, partners, children, grandchildren and friends to cruise with them. But on top of this, they also wanted to be able to go fishing or diving with their mates and raised issues such as:


**1: SPACE, PRIVACY AND VARIABLE SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS**

For family or groups of friends to enjoy themselves on anything longer than a day trip, there must be a level of space and privacy. Power cats are unmatched in this regard with different deck levels and a wider accommodation layout that allows both visual and acoustic privacy. Accommodation plans can provide both sleeping arrangements for singles or couples and power cats, with their many level floor spaces can easily accommodate additional guests by utilising air beds or camp stretchers. A number of our clients have used sofa beds in the saloon as a backup sleeping arrangement and have flybridge layouts which provide extra berths and if long-range cruising is planned, then a settee that converts to a day berth close to the helm is a huge bonus.

**2: POWER AND SPEED**

While absolute speed was not the highest priority, a better than displacement cruise speed in the mid-teens with a sprint speed around 20kts was a requirement of most men. This allowed them to get to fishing grounds quicker, to reach quieter and more private anchorages on day trips, to stay with the wave train in a following sea and to out-run worsening weather. Getting home quickly when kids and grandkids are tiring

after a big day out on the water keeps the family happily boating together. The power cats twin engines in separate hulls not only gives a high cruising speed from smaller power plants, but also provides unmatched safety with separate systems in each hull. Most of our clients cruise between 12-16kts when offshore, but they find it reassuring to have the ability to go quicker should they need it. The displaning power cat has an added advantage in that it does not have an 'on the plane or off the plane' attitude or trim, so owners can chose the correct speed for the conditions.



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FAMILIES, COUPLES OR FRIENDS THAT REGULARLY **ENJOY A BOATING LIFESTYLE** TOGETHER FORM UNIQUE BONDS, AND RETIRING COUPLES OFTEN **START A NEW LIFE TOGETHER** WITH DIFFERENT CHALLENGES SUCH AS NAVIGATION AND **MEETING NEW FRIENDS**

**3: RANGE**

Range provides options. Range also allows faster passages as constant fuel stops eat up time or require the running of bars in less than ideal conditions. Often the weather has changed by the time refuelling has been completed, delaying voyages and ruining plans. Displaning power cats have created a unique ability to be able to combine a high cruising speed along with long range. Planing boats of any type cannot carry the weight of fuel required for faster long range cruising (not just passages) unless they are either very large or carry extra fuel on deck and displacement boats do not have the speed. The ability to make longer passages without

refuelling adds a versatility that could only be dreamed of 25 years ago.

**4: FUEL EFFICIENCY AND THEREFORE ECONOMY**

Fuel efficiency means smaller engines and running gear which not only means a lower build cost but reduced service costs in the future. With fuel prices again on

the rise, economy also means the family can afford to use the boat more often and go further for their dollar.


**So what is the ideal boating lifestyle and why do power cats come closer to providing it than monohulls?**

It is slightly different for different people, however there are some very common threads running through it. Most women see a powerboat as an alternative to the beachfront holiday home. Yes, it may not have as much room and sometimes it can get a little uncomfortable, however this is balanced by the fact that they can have a different view every day and if they don't like the neighbours, they can pull up the anchor and move. A boat will also provide their family and friends with unique opportunities like whale watching, diving and fishing without having to deal with tourism boat schedules or crowds.


Men see power boats as a family beach front home, a shed at the bottom of the garden to escape the pressures of life, a fishing shack, a dive platform, a chance to pit themselves against nature and an electronic – mechanical toy to play with.

Families, couples or friends that regularly enjoy a boating lifestyle together form unique bonds, and retiring couples often start a new life together with different challenges such as navigation and meeting new friends. Many retired or semi-retired people just get to relax, read a book, visit places they have never been to and catch up with friends. Grandparents and parents get to hand down their nautical knowledge and life skills to the next generation and there is nothing like an invitation to stay on a comfortable boat in an exotic location to bring friends or family back together again.

Beautiful surroundings, great company, good food, new experiences and no pressure – that's the ideal boating lifestyle. The power catamarans stability, space, pace and range provides the visibility, privacy and facilities of a waterfront apartment combined with the boating experience. This in turn makes families, and in particular new converts to boating, feel more familiar with their surroundings and therefore relaxed and if everyone on board is relaxed, they will enjoy themselves. That's what makes power catamarans something special and why their popularity will continue to grow.



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