

BROADBLUE 346

Compact but comfortable

Broadblue have been building catamarans for over ten years now, their most prolific model being the 385, close to 40 feet – the starting size for many shipyards. But what about this smaller catamaran? The new Broadblue 346 is an evolution of, and is replacing, the Broadblue 345. Keeping the same hulls as her predecessor, the deck and interior are new.



1

There was a time when the Brits were at the forefront of cruising catamaran production, but decades later this accolade has long since gone to the French, South Africans, Australians and others. So, when a new British cat comes along, it deserves to be celebrated. The current trend in cruising cats is bigger and bigger: many manufacturers ranges now start at 45 feet. Big is all very well, but big is expensive to buy, and to dock. Here, we have a "small" catamaran. But before we sail her, a brief overview: The hull, deck, engines and interior joinery are completed at Broadblue's factory in Poland, and the boats are then motored to the UK (already a good shakedown, not least for the engine installation), where the mast, rigging and sails are fitted, and finishing work completed.

A mast stepped at the aft end of the coachroof

Approaching the boat on the dock, I can clearly see the rig is set at the after end of the coachroof. This is the common denominator of all Broadblue cats, and numerous other manufacturers have recently started to see the advantages of bringing the mast further back. The freeboard appears high but there's no problems stepping aboard onto the wide aft platform in the center of which is access through into the cockpit. But does the high freeboard and short length give the Broadblue a boxy appearance? Well, not really, because this effect is smoothed by the curve of the coachroof and the shape of the windows

- which are all real (laminated) glass by the way - and also by the chine in the hull. Well, the advert is correct: it is a large cockpit. There's seating for more people than I would want to have on my multihull. A bench wraps around the three sides, with the access aft in the middle; there's a table to starboard, around which six people could comfortably eat. To port, the helm station, with 60cm diameter stainless wheel, Raymarine plotter and instruments, and engine controls.

But the pièce de résistance in the cockpit is the sail handling station. Here is a console, just beneath and aft of the mastfoot, which does absolutely everything: hoisting, lowering, reefing, sheeting, trimming - it's all here. In one place. There are a dozen blocks, a dozen clutches and two Lewmar 40 winches, one of which is electric. The sheets for the reacher are led to the console via Antal frictionless rings.

Moving forward, nice, clear sidedecks run the full length of the boat, with a stainless handrail along the coachroof. Something notable along the sidedecks are four (yes, 4) cleats, including a very useful midships one for springs. This boat has clearly been designed by somebody who's been cruising. Up forward, no trampoline between the hulls, but a solid foredeck. As I mentioned earlier, this boat has high freeboard, which means good bridge deck clearance, which means, among many other things, no risk of being "tripped up" by this solid foredeck. It also provides the location for the Lewmar electric windlass and a vast chain locker, plenty large enough to stow all the fenders and warps.



1: A performance rig: mast pre-bend thanks to twin diamond stays on single spreaders, and a generous roach on the mainsail
2: Upwind work is made easy with the self-tacking jib
3: Good bridgedeck clearance, especially forward. Narrow waterline beam
4: The shape of the coachroof and the curved chine smooth the overall lines

Down below, there's all you'd find on a big boat

Bucking the current trend of having the saloon and cockpit combined into one open, flush-decked space (this wouldn't be feasible here, as the bulkhead supports the rig), there are three small steps down into the saloon from the cockpit, clearly defining the two separate areas and their separate functions. The sliding door appears small (at 1.60m -5'3"- in height, it is), yet somehow this doesn't matter. The bottom of the door is level with the lower step, and the top is almost up to the saloon ceiling, which has 2m (6'7") of headroom. Very clever ergonomics.

It's nice and light in the saloon. The wooden table top has an inlaid chess board. I'm sold on this boat immediately. The standard of joinery work and cabinetry is what you would expect to find at the other end of the market.

Measuring 1.35x0.75m (53x30"), and with an L-shaped bench round two sides and two swing-out stools (the ones which can also be used in the cockpit), six to eight people could comfortably eat here.

To starboard is the U-shaped galley, which appears to be from a bigger boat. There is ample storage with both high and low-level cupboards, cutlery drawer, a double sink, front-opening, 75-liter (2.65 cu ft) capacity refrigerator with small icebox, three-burner hob, and a built-in oven with its own separate grill above, and storage drawer beneath. Wow. The sink and stovetop are against the aft bulkhead, and

between the cupboards there is a sliding, toughened glass window measuring 78x57cm (31x23"). The countertop and splashbacks are in light stone colored ammonite, and there is a double 220V socket for your blender/food mixer/etc. Further storage is provided beneath the bench seat forward of the table, for less-frequently used things or longer-term stowing of canned or dry goods. Alternatively, one end of this space can be made into a freezer. In fact, it is already insulated with this in mind. Forward of the galley are the companionway steps down into the starboard hull, and forward of those is the chart table. At 85x50cm (33x20") it is plenty big enough to do actual chartwork on. But there's more to the chart table than just this: with its swing-out seat and the Raymarine system in front of you, it's possible to control the autopilot and so steer the boat. Given the near-panoramic view from this position, on passage, you could easily keep watch sat here if the weather wasn't conducive to staying on deck.

Going down into the starboard hull, you get the feeling of being in the owner's suite of a bigger cat. Aft is the double cabin, with its 2m

x 1.6m (79x63") bunk (yes, that is bigger than your bed at home), but before you get to that, there's a 2.60m (8'6") passageway, with bench seat down one side and cupboards and shelves on the other, making the whole cabin 4.60m (15') long. The bunk is high, but using the

bench seat to step up, access is easy. Forward of the companionway steps is the heads compartment. Actually, I'm not sure compartment is quite the right word, as it's 2.40m (7'10") long! In here, there is an electric WC, hand basin, and separate shower. Above the basin is a cupboard with mirror doors, and the back of the cupboard can be removed to gain access to some of the technical systems. Beneath the basin, I notice

WE'RE SAILING AT
A VERY RESPECTABLE
7.3 KNOTS.
BUT HANG ON,
THERE'S LESS
THAN 10 KNOTS
OF WIND.
INCREDIBLE...
BUT TRUE!

some of the wiring for the toilet could do with tidying up and being better secured.

There is an abundance of natural light below, with two long portlights in the cabin on the outboard side, a small opening hatch into the cockpit and a large hatch at the back onto the aft platform. There are plenty of LED spotlights, along with 12V and 220V sockets in the cabins and the saloon, and USB sockets at the chart table.

The port hull companionway is located just



5



6



7



8

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Builders: Broadblue
Designers: Mark Jarvis, Darren Newton and Derick Reynolds
LOA: 10.2m (33'6")
BOA: 4.85m (15'11")
Draft: 1.01m (3'4")
Displacement: 4,800kg (10,600 lbs)
RCD Category: A (Ocean)
Mainsail area (Std): 28m ² (300 sq ft)
Self-tacking jib: 19m ² (205 sq ft)
Gennaker (Std): 45m ² (485 sq ft)
Spinnaker: 98m ² (1,055 sq ft)
Fuel: 1 x 200 L (52 US gal)
Water: 2 x 250 L (66 US gal)
Engine options: 1 x 20 hp Yamaha 4-stroke outboard or 2 x 16hp or 20 hp Beta diesels with saildrives
Rig: Fractional sloop, aft stepped mast and bowsprit for reacher/code 0 sail
Layout: 2 double cabins, 2 single cabins and heads with shower
Basic price: £139,500 ex-VAT
Price of the boat we tested: £203,000 ex-VAT

5: A dozen clutches and two winches combine all sail-handling functions in one place - 6: Comfortable seats aft on both sides of the cockpit
7: Saloon table with inlaid chessboard shows the quality of the joinery - 8: Owner's cabin to starboard, looking forward to the bathroom. Plenty of space and natural light

forward of the main bulkhead, again with three steps down. Aft is another double cabin with the same-sized bed as to starboard, but this time, it lies athwartships as opposed to fore and aft. Forward in the port hull is a single cabin, and although the bunk is quite narrow at the feet, it is plenty big enough, and remarkably, the cabin also has a toilet and wash basin. Between the two port cabins is a passageway, with a large stowage area inboard which could easily transform into another bunk.

In all, more volume and more living space than you'd expect on a boat of this size.

A nice surprise under sail?

Modern catamaran designs favor fine-entry bows, and here there's no exception. The hulls have narrow, vertical stems, with the beam increasing all the way aft. A chine allows for a narrower waterline beam, and more volume inside, all this contributing to performance I had not expected to find on a boat of this size. Getting out of the tight slip in Haslar Marina was easy with the twin 20 hp Beta diesels. Using the electric winch, the main went up

with ease, and the self-tacking jib quickly unfurled, and we were soon out of Portsmouth's huge harbor and into the Solent. The 40m² (430 sq ft) main by Banks Sails has a fairly square top and big roach. The Selden mast has quite a pre-bend, and this is achieved by having twin diamond stays, a single set of spreaders. Capshrouds, lowers and two forestays make this a very secure rig. In clearer water we swapped the jib for the (optional) reacher, and with the wind now aft of the beam, the Raymarine instruments were showing us making a very respectable 7.3 knots. But hang on, there's less than ten knots of wind. That can't be right? But it was.

Coming back on the wind, we tacked up into Chichester Harbour under main and self-tacking jib again. Mark's local knowledge and the catamaran's shallow draft allowed us to get close to the beach, making the most of each tack and we were soon into the wide natural harbor, still making respectable speeds to windward.

Conclusion

At 33 feet in length, a round-the-world pro-

gram is not really on the cards. Despite being marked CE category A, you might want to think twice about a serious ocean crossing. But Broadblue claim to have the highest proportion of owner-users in the whole catamaran market, and this one is not going to be a charter boat (there's no sunbathing deck with refrigerator and grill up on the flybridge, etc.) I ask Mark Jarvis about the type of customer who'll buy this boat and what they'll do with it. He talks about the British sailor who will cross the Channel, get the rig down and spend a summer on the French canals getting down to the Mediterranean. Then a season or two in the Greek islands, then Turkey, and so on. People spend years in the Med.

The idea of stowing the mast on deck diagonally, means it won't overhang the hull at all – great for going through locks or fitting in the space of two 40-foot shipping containers. This opens up possibilities of programs such as the ICW, summers in New England, winters in the Bahamas. What about the Great Loop, if that's your thing?



- ◆ Unexpected performance under sail
- ◆ Accommodation feels much larger than 33 feet
- ◆ Sail-handling console



- ◆ Some wiring needs tidying up (electric heads)
- ◆ Galley cupboard door and drawer latches a bit "sticky".
- ◆ Not enough blinds