

Choosing your Cat

Multihulls have changed the game when it comes to bluewater cruising and there are many converts. **Kate Ashe Leonard** talks through the process of buying a bluewater cat. Photos by **James Hooper**



When I was just 20, I had my first ever experience on a sailing yacht. It was on a crewed maxi racing yacht, and I stayed onboard with a group of backpackers as mere guests for two nights in the Whitsunday Islands. Blissfully ignorant about the seasonality of sailing, my cabin for the weekend was suspiciously cheap. It was January and cyclone season. I left the boat two days later resolute about one thing: I would never sail or stay on a boat for an extended period again in my life. Sixteen years later, I'm sitting with in the cockpit of our catamaran in French Polynesia. We are anchored at the island of Moorea in its lagoon fringed by coral reef under the backdrop of

the island's green mountainous peaks. It's 6am and a black tip shark glides underneath the boat visible through the most transparent water, iridescent in the morning sunlight. Turtles occasionally surface for air. Yesterday we swam with a mother and calf humpback whale just outside the lagoon. These whales migrate to this safe haven all the way from Antarctica to give birth and raise their young before returning on their long return voyage. I'm thinking about our own migration, how far we've come and the very first steps we made.

We've sailed over 16,000 miles and are almost half-way through our circumnavigation four years after we decided to leave it all behind and buy a boat. It started back in August 2017 when we decided we needed a complete lifestyle change.

ABOVE
Polaris, the author's
Catana 47 catamaran

We worked together on the same project and our weekly schedule often involved taking several flights either within Europe or to and from the US. We lived out of suitcases in the many hotels we had to stay in for work and after two and a half years of airport queues, jetlag and an unhealthy lifestyle, we were exhausted. We had our home base, but also a flat in south west London which was rented out. One evening we started to discuss whether it might be possible to sell our home and belongings to buy a boat to live and sail around the world on. We'd use some savings and the rental income provided by the London property to live off and maybe pick up some paid work here and there as we went. My partner Jim was confident I might really take to sailing despite



my first experience years earlier. With few if any other ties we were more flexible than many of our friends to just up and leave.

Mono or multi?

There were three concurrent areas of focus to make it all happen: closing up our soon-to-be former lives, preparing ourselves to sail around the world and the search and selection for the right boat to take us there. Our work project began to wrap up and had become entirely remote, so we were much freer to make moves towards our dream to buy a boat. The first thing we did was to put our home on the market. Then, when our tenants in London moved out at the end of their lease, we transported our belongings there where we made a temporary home for ourselves. At that point,



ABOVE
A catamaran provides a stable and comfortable living space

BELOW
Solar panels are an important source of power

we still didn't know if we wanted a monohull or a catamaran. Jim had only sailed monohulls but his friend who'd lived on one in the Caribbean for years felt that, in hindsight, a catamaran would have been better overall for the additional space and comfort both at anchor and sailing too. Our plan was to complete a global circumnavigation in three to six years so, if we took his advice the catamaran for us needed to have great performance and safety attributes for the miles of bluewater sailing that lay ahead. Initially we began to investigate the Lagoon 42 and the Nautitech Open 40. As a result of the Southampton Boat Show we arranged to test sail a Lagoon 42 in Cornwall. We also met a Nautitech broker at the Dusseldorf boat show and our test sail of the Nautitech was scheduled to take place from Hamble, Hampshire.

Jim's family had had a boat in

Chichester Harbour when he was growing up, he had completed a few yacht deliveries in his 20s and later had skippered a couple of bareboat charter holidays. I, on the other hand, had lived by my word and hadn't been on a boat since the time in Australia. In the absence of having our own boat to practice on and concerned about my lack of experience, weekends were spent doing RYA sailing courses including Competent Crew, Day Skipper, Engine Maintenance and VHF Radio training. We immersed ourselves in sailing related activities and only spent money on things related to our goal to become full time liveaboards.

Boat shows and test sails

We attended two more boat shows, one at St Katharine Dock and the other at ExCel. The dates for both →



Buying a Multihull



test sails soon came around and we attended both. We loved the outdoor helm positions on the Nautitech Open 40 because we felt more connected to the sailing. The Lagoon with its raised helm position and covering made us feel removed from what was going on outside. The Nautitech had very limited space in the saloon though, and we were disappointed that neither boat had a forward-facing navigation station. Alongside these we'd begun to research the performance end of the market in greater detail. We kept coming back to Catana and Outremer, both of which have daggerboards for better upwind performance. The Outremer 45 had only recently come out and the only second-hand ones available were relatively new, expensive and had comparatively less space than a Catana.

Chartering in the BVIs

We began to home in on Catana as the front runner and ended up booking a two-week bareboat charter on a Catana 42 in the British Virgin Islands. We did our first ever big provision in the local supermarket and headed out sailing between the beautiful islands there. It was less than a year after hurricane Irma and the sunken boats protruding from the water's surface as well as those strewn across the nearby land provided a stark and constant reminder of some of the worst

dangers inherent in sailing. By the end of the holiday though, we both knew we wanted to sail around the world on a boat like that. We loved the access to nature it provided: being able to dive into the sea off the back steps and we had visions of kiteboarding from our own boat in the remote atolls of the South Pacific. Maybe we'd buy a dive compressor too someday. We were attracted to the nomadic lifestyle with the unique benefit of always travelling with your home rather than out of a suitcase. From a performance point of view, we were impressed by the speeds we



ABOVE LEFT
A shot that illustrates the 'tulip' shaped hulls of the Catana

ABOVE RIGHT
The Catana 47 features lightweight construction and daggerboards which improve windward performance

BELOW
Skipper Jim at the helm

were achieving, overtaking many other catamarans on that holiday, aware that, in ocean sailing, the ability to go fast becomes a safety attribute if you need to outrun weather systems. The boat was built strong but light; the blocks, jammers and winches, running rigging and standing rigging were very solid. The interior furnishings were high-end and again, we really liked the twin aft helm positions for the vantage point and immersive experience they provide when sailing. Due to the layout, it was easy to manage all the sails from the cockpit where all the lines run back to. Theoretically the only reason to leave the cockpit is to open or close the sail bag and so it felt much safer than some of the other boats we had been on.

Catana viewings

Arriving home, our holiday blues were interrupted when things began to gather pace. We found a 2012 Catana 47 called *Polaris*, listed online, in France. We had budgeted for a smaller boat though and contacted the broker to see if he had any second-hand 42s. They had two. We flew there the following week and were driven to see the bigger boat first despite our weak protests. It was an owner's version which had never been chartered and was in excellent condition. It had completed several Atlantic crossings and was a proven bluewater yacht. The difference in size between it and →



the four-cabin 42 we'd chartered was attractive to us for the extra comfort and also because longer boat length contributes positively to stability in bigger seas. The hulls were made of glassfibre, reinforced with Kevlar to guard against puncture impacts and carbonfibre was used throughout the rest of the construction to keep weight down. It had daggerboards and the ratio of sail area to displacement was favourable from a performance standpoint. It had everything we wanted; fast and light with generous living quarters, a forward-facing

ABOVE
Anchored off Savan Island, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, in the eastern Caribbean

BELOW
The dinghy davit system utilises the mainsheet winches making it practical and strong

navigation station, a fully battened mainsail, a genoa with roller furling, a gennaker, one of the winches was electric, as well as all the systems you would want on a liveaboard boat like AIS, solar, a generator and watermaker. The davit design was clever because the two winches for the mainsheets could also be used to raise and lower a dinghy as well as having a maximum load capacity of 300kg if we wanted to add more solar panels. The boat itself had beautiful lines with a high freeboard and 'tulip' shaped bows that rose nearly seven feet above the water line.

Although when it came to spares there were few, and *Polaris* didn't have a chartplotter, radar or dinghy.

We tried to shake off the spell being cast over us and told the broker thanks, but please could we view the 42s that we had travelled to France to see. With a shrug of his shoulders, he locked up *Polaris* and we made our way in his car back to the Catana boatyard. Both of the 42s were in Catana's Neo programme whereby they convert ex-charter versions into three-cabin owner's configuration to sell to private buyers. The insides of both were a work in progress and, with lots of carpentry underway, were by no means turn-key. Contrary to our best efforts we were only thinking of *Polaris* and decided we had to find a way.

Back in London we reviewed our financial situation as we realised that these Catana 47s come onto the market rarely and are highly sought after. We decided to contact the broker to schedule a test sail. Soon we were back in the south of France and heading out on *Polaris* in 25kts of wind. But the test sail was not without drama. The mainsheets were over tightened on the winches by the broker to the extent that he caused the main halyard to snap and consequently the mainsail and all its cars came crashing down. He then tried to furl the genoa, but it got jammed because the drum had seized and, in the process, the genoa →





sheets began flogging in the wind, smashing the solar on the coach roof and spraying glass all over the boat. In spite of these distractions, it was hard to ignore how fast we were going at times, doing 8-12kts, and how comfortably the boat was handling it all. When the wind moderated, we tested the boat's upwind performance and with the daggerboards down, *Polaris* pointed high – up to 35 degrees apparent. The survey that followed brought up some points that gave us a basis to negotiate the price slightly and, within one week, we had made an offer which was rejected by the current owner. We made two further offers and by the end of that month, which was July, we transferred the deposit followed by the remaining total sum and *Polaris* was ours.

We packed the first of our bags – as much as we could physically carry – and flew back to France. *Polaris* was now at the dock in the boatyard, and we had the urgent task to, at the very least, buy a dinghy and come up with an alternative to a chart plotter. We would worry about installing radar later. We soon found the perfect dinghy for us in a nearby chandlery, an Ultralight 290 Highfield with an aluminium bottom and a 10hp engine weighing in total only 81kg, making it light enough for us to pull it up a beach. It was also small enough to be driven between *Polaris*' hulls when docked at a town wall or marina. Instead of a chart plotter we began to use Open CPN fully loaded with all the world's charts on our laptop, which was more than adequate. We knew we had a lot of shake down

ABOVE LEFT
The Highfield 290 dinghy

ABOVE RIGHT
Underway with the spinnaker set

BELOW LEFT AND RIGHT
Setting off into the unknown

sails to do and many upgrades to come in the future but for now we were technically ready to sail away.

On one of the final days before our departure we caught the lines of a Catana 65 as it pulled into the berth next to ours. It was a French family with two young children who, only three years earlier, had set off from that same dock and headed west to start their circumnavigation. Today they'd completed it and basked in the glow of their achievement. We joined them for celebration drinks onboard their enormous yacht where they regaled us with stories of their adventures and wished us well for ours yet to come.

Three days later, we set sail ourselves with smiles on our faces and big dreams to sail around the world.

