

Built in
Vietnam

SEAWIND 1600

A winner in the luxury performance cruising “cat” egoriy

The “luxury performance cruising cat” has been an elusive animal for decades. Upwind agility usually loses out to the added weight of all those “luxuries” like extra volume, multiple refrigerators, huge battery banks, large engines and classy finishes. The term itself holds a vague promise, but to most skeptics it’s a flat-out misnomer. But intrepid builders keep trying to find the ideal marriage of comfort and speed and that’s a good thing. With each effort, we get closer to that “perfect” combination and that’s why I found so much to like on the new Seawind 1600.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION Seawind Catamarans introduced their 52-foot 1600 design in Europe last

year and the new model crossed the Atlantic this year in time to shine at the Miami Boat Show. This Reichel-Pugh design is sleek with a low coach roof that extends into a hard bimini via an angled support. The plumb bows are sharp giving the design a fine entry and an aggressive-looking stance. Hard chines run from four feet aft of the stems all the way back to the transoms. They’re just above the waterline and help create a bit more interior volume. Aft, the transom lines slope gently downward, incorporating three steps out to the swim platforms.

The vacuum infusion construction is a mix of vinylester resin with carbon fibre reinforcement points above the waterline and Kevlar below. Light displacement is 28,000 pounds but expect to gain another 4,000 to 5,000 pounds when fully tanked up

with fuel and water and with bonus items like a generator, extra batteries and cruising gear.

To point better, the Seawind 1600 has daggerboards—with a twist. They're recessed into the deck even when completely raised so there are no more weird looking appendages poking out and getting in the way. The board tops are covered with flip-up deck sections so the lifting mechanism is not only out of the way, it's protected so it presumably requires less maintenance over time. Hiding the boards in this way keeps the deck cleaner, makes the boat look better and reduces windage.

An unusual added feature is the retractable blade rudders, which make this cat beachable—even with the stern to the sand. No other cat of this size has Hobie-style "kick-up rudders." With the boards and rudders up, the Seawind 1600 draws only two feet, one inch and that adds versatility to your itinerary. Now you can cruise in skinny waters around the globe and explore where others don't dare.

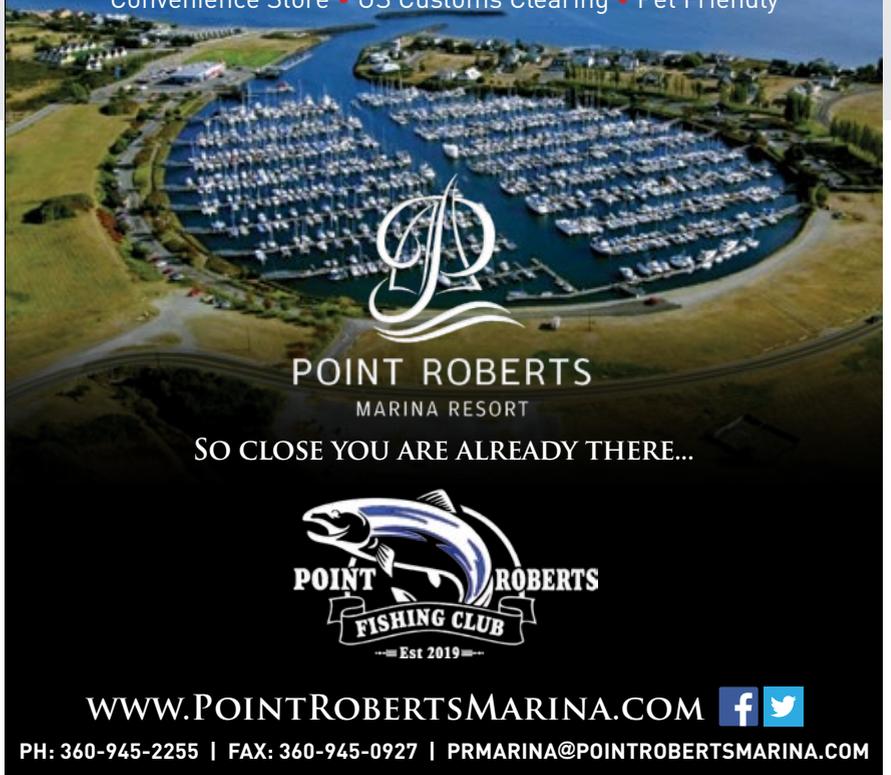
ON DECK The designers succeeded in creating a workable compromise in the age-old dilemma of catamaran helm station placement. They designed a very workable blend of bulkhead mounted and outer hull helm positions. The twin stations are elevated for good visibility. They're outboard and near the cabin house but farther aft than bulkhead helms and not as far out as hull helms. This allows the driver to lean out and see the sails but also tuck in and be protected from sun, rain or splash. It also puts the driver closer to the social hub in the cockpit.

The double seats at each wheel are located two steps up from the cockpit sole and sit just aft of a pair of sleek binnacles. Here you'll find B&G instruments, 12-inch MFDs, engine controls, composite wheels, good handholds and even cupholders in the case of the starboard (main) wheel. The positioning of the stations represents, quite possibly, the best compromise I've yet seen.

The main cockpit is on one level ▶

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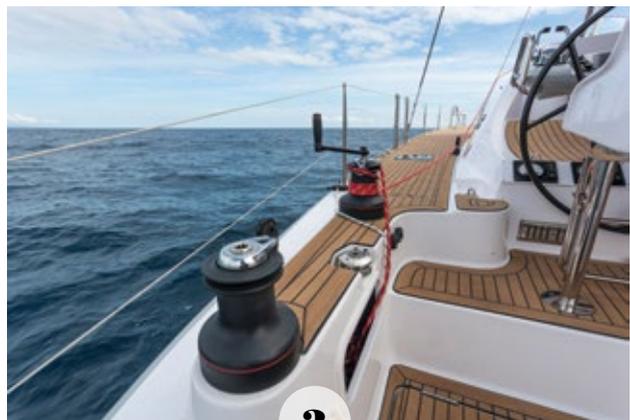
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with an L-shaped dinette to starboard and a straight settee to port. There are two shallow steps to enter the saloon and that takes some getting used to especially when you come out on deck in a hurry or in the dark. Twin transom seats are aft for extra party capacity and an Isotherm refrigerator is right by the door to the saloon, so nobody has to track water inside just to get another beverage.

1. The main saloon is comfortable and loaded with storage. **2.** The bow area has been optimized for both low weight and high comfort. **3.** A pair of self-tailing Harken winches are within reach of the port and starboard helm stations.

Like on other performance designs, there's a central, transom-mounted Harken winch that manages all hal-yards and reefing lines, which are

forward under the deck. This main winch (electric) is just a few steps from either helm so with the autopilot engaged, it's easy to imagine single-handed sailing. Couples on passage can rest easy knowing that one can sleep while the other manages the boat alone.

The bow area has been optimized for both low weight and high comfort. The trampoline is large enough to

accommodate custom-made cushions that create a lounge, but there's still enough space for additional guests to stretch out in the netting. Most importantly, there *is* a trampoline so the weight forward is kept low and that's important for any cat that's going to weather. A lightweight foredeck helps avoid slamming into head seas.

The anchor rests midway between the bows, underneath the structural longeron. Because it's under rather than on top of the deck, the chain is kept off the fiberglass topsides where it usually causes damage as it bangs when raising or lowering the anchor.

The side decks are clear with no level changes and our test boat had high, triple-wire lifelines. Many designers try to lower the profile of a boat by adding puny lifelines as a trompe l'oeil but that's dangerous in open water. It's comforting to see these lines so high and substantial.

Another way it's clear that the designers understand the difference between a boat that primarily lives at the dock and one that's on passage often is the access to the bimini top. There are three ways to get up there to manage the sail in the bag and the usual knot of reefing lines that snakes out when the main is dropped. There is one point at each helm for easy access from the side decks and the third is via the three well-integrated steps forward by the mast. If you need to get up fast from the bow, you don't need to waste time running aft.

INTERIOR Entry into the saloon is via a single-wide glass door, which is different from most production cats where you have more of a double patio door. Ventilation is good with four opening hatches forward and a very wide opening window aft at the galley.

The saloon flows well between the dinette, the large navigation station

and the galley. The forward-facing nav desk is exemplary of what a real cruising command pod should be. There's ample space to work with cruising guides or charts, there's good visibility forward and you even have a swing-out chair that will be comfy for those extended times on watch.

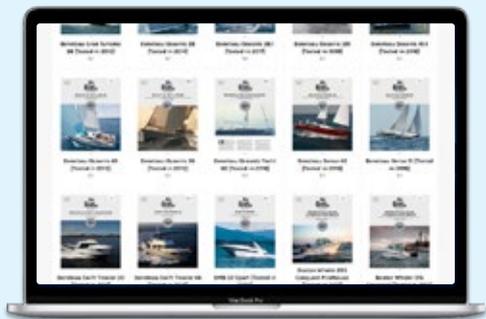
The galley is almost C-shaped so the chef will be secure when cooking offshore regardless of conditions. Although cats don't heel much, cooking in a sloppy seaway surrounded by pots of hot stuff is never fun. There's excellent use of space including several pull out drawers tucked behind the flatscreen TV. You can never have enough cubbies when full-time cruising.

The 52-footer is available in a three or four-cabin layout with the owner's suite in the starboard hull. The queen bed in the master takes up the full beam of the hull with cutaway ▶



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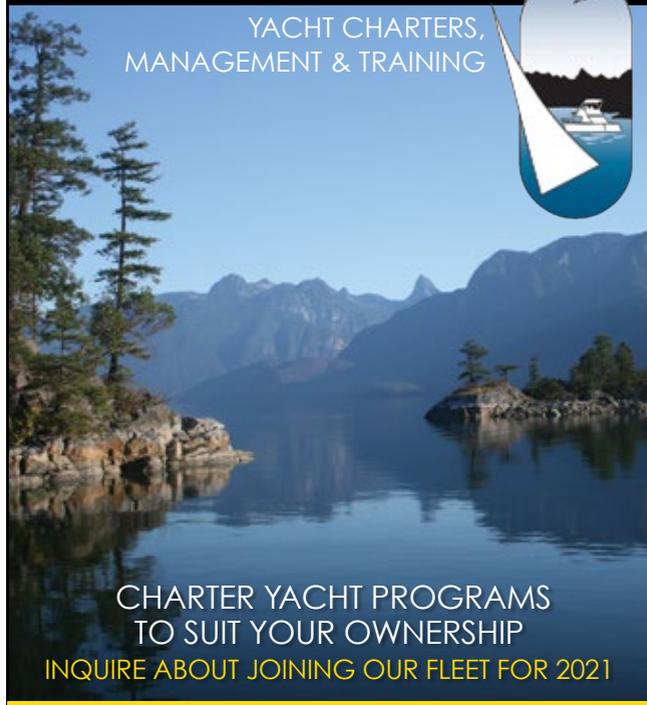
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corners to make it seem like an island berth. The head is forward with a single vanity, a large shower and space for an optional washer/dryer combo.

The port hull offers divided single berths in the aft cabin and a double forward that's a bit undersized due to the narrow bow. Unusual in a boat of this size is the single head on this side. Instead of shoehorning in two small heads, Seawind opted for one large one with a shower stall. The casing for the daggerboard encroaches a bit on the shower but overall, it's a sizable and workable space.

UNDER SAIL We had just about perfect conditions for our test day on Biscayne Bay. In 12 to 13 knots of true breeze with the daggerboards about half down, we sailed 6.3 knots at 60 degrees apparent wind angle on flat water. When we cracked off to 120 degrees, we actually bumped up to 6.5 knots and then came down again to five knots as we kept going deeper. When the wind piped up briefly to 16 knots, things became much more interesting as we nudged 8.9 knots on a beam reach. I'd love to see this cat in 25 knots with one reef sailing downwind. I think it would

be an exhilarating flight.

On our sea trial, we were fully tanked up with both fuel and water and had 14 people aboard. Those aren't ideal conditions for a test since it's likely this boat will sail with two to six people, but the extra human weight sort of mimicked any cruising gear that

THE SPECS

LOA 15.75 m / 51' 8"

Beam 7.9 m / 25' 10"

Draft (boards up) 0.63 m / 2' 1"

Draft (boards down) 2.6 m / 8' 5"

Mast Height 22 m / 72'

Light Displacement 12,700 kg / 28,000 lbs

Upwind Sail Area 144.74 sq-m / 1,558 sq-ft

Fuel 757 L / 200 USG

Water 587 L / 155 USG

Engines 2 x 57-hp Yanmar

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would normally be aboard.

With nearly 1,600 square feet of sail area between the square-top mainsail and the 7/8 self-tacking jib, the Seawind 1600 moved easily and sliced through the tacks. For easy shorthanded sailing, the perfect combination would be the self-tacker and an optional screecher for downwind work.

ENGINE AND SYSTEMS How does a performance sailing cat do under power? At wide-open throttle and 3,200 rpm, we motored at 9.2 knots with upgraded, three-blade Gori folding propellers. A more economical cruising speed was at 2,200 rpm and 8.2 knots where speed took only a slight ding but fuel consumption improved nicely.

With a nearly 26-foot beam the 57-horsepower Yanmar diesels are set wide apart so manoeuvring is easy and the visibility from the helms is excellent. There's an option for engine controls at both helms so no matter which way you need to dock in a tight space, the sightlines are great. That may be listed as an option but any serious sailor will put that at the top of the wish list.

CONCLUDING REMARKS The base price of the Seawind 1600 is US\$900,000. With the requisite "luxuries," expect that to be more like \$1.2 million. Notable options include CZone digital switching, upgraded Mastervolt lithium batteries, a Fisher Panda eight-kW genset, a fuel polishing system, a B&G forward-scanning sonar and a carbon fibre Park Avenue boom from Southern Spars. Racers can upgrade to a carbon fibre mast for a bit more money.

The Seawind 1600 is a good-looking, fast cruiser with ample amenities and a nice finish. Is she the "perfect" luxury cruiser? Arguably, the pursuit of perfection is overrated and impractical, but this boat comes very close. She's a stylish kitty that can sail like a witch and can do so easily with an experienced couple. In my book, that beats the pants off perfection. 