

The NEEL 47 is the latest evolution of this successful French builder's range, so KEVIN GREEN investigates if they have created the perfect performance cruiser.

The 2019 launch of the NEEL 47 at La Grande Motte International Boat Show in France was a spectacle for us visiting journalists, as it was not alone. Surrounding it were the larger models, the NEEL 51 and the flagship NEEL 65, all testament to the success of this performance cruising trimaran concept conceived by company CEO Eric Bruneel. The former Fontaine Pajot general manager and his La Rochelle trimaran yard have made steady progress since NEEL's inception in 2010, as I discovered during a visit there to meet Eric.

WHY TRY A TRI?

For those considering a trimaran, like anything in life, there are pros and cons. At the extreme end, such as the 105-foot *Sodebo3* that I was aboard with iconic skipper Thomas Coville after its launch in Brittany last year, this represents the world's fastest sailing yacht. Yet, the reasons why this vessel will do 50 knots are some of the same reasons discerning sailors may consider a performance cruiser like the NEEL 47. After all, they share traits such as minimising the wetted surface while the amas adds stability without too much drag.

Also, 80 per cent of the weight is centralised in the hull and a lifting keel gives decent windward ability, while the large single rudder even feels like a monohull. This centralised weight also allows them to operate in wider wind ranges than similar catamarans, as the trimarans typically can heel to about 27 degrees compared with about 12 degrees for cats, and with a 30-foot beam, their stability is immense.

The polar chart for the NEEL 47 shows good windward ability: 8 knots in 15 knots of wind at a 55-degree wind angle, while off the wind in the same breeze with asymmetric up the NEEL 47 flies at 14 knots. This gives an average cruising speed of around 10 knots, allowing impressive 200-nautical mile days.

Multihull Solutions is NEEL's Asia Pacific dealer, and its chief operating officer Nod Crook sailed one a few months ago in mild conditions, recording a speed of 7.8 knots in 11.3 true wind on a beam reach under genoa and main - fairly impressive figures.

As for some of the cons, well, forgive the pun, but they can be trying to handle in

close confines, even with the bow thruster fitted, as found on the first hull that arrived at La Grande Motte. Also, at 8.2 metres wide, marina fees could be an issue at some locations. Inside, accommodation can be quirky with lots of bulkheads, as seen on the early Joubert/Nivelt/Muratet-designed 45s, but this has improved with the Marc Lombard-designed 47, especially in the amas, which have raised roofs to increase internal volume.

IDEAL COUPLES' YACHT

Sailing performance alone, of course, does not win many friends. Having recently raced on the MOD 70 trimaran *Beau Geste*, I was quite happy to get off, despite the nearly 40-knot top speeds.

"It's pretty exhausting and wet," skipper Gavin Brady warned me beforehand, and he was right. NEEL boss Bruneel is also a racer, in fact a former OSTAR winner (on his 55-foot *Trilogic* trimaran), and the NEEL yard has produced race boats like that MOD 70, so they are very aware of weight efficiencies, and this is reflected in the modest 11,600 kg displacement of the NEEL 47.

So, combining this performance with a main deck built around a couple that includes the owner's berth in the saloon means the NEEL 47 scores high marks if you're a blue water sailor. Yet, contrasting with this is the social aspect of the NEEL 47 which is found in the near 28-foot wide cockpit that Eric Bruneel has cheekily dubbed the *cockloot*.

THE COCKLOOT

It was clear to me that the company has incorporated in the NEEL 47 much of the earlier 51 ideas, especially in terms of usable space. Stepping aboard into the vast aft deck reveals the most obvious feature.

"We've integrated the inside seating seamlessly with the outside seating to create what we call a cockloot," said Eric, about his idea of combining the terms 'cockpit' and 'saloon'. Some competitors have tried similar ideas, but none that seamlessly create this vast space for socialising.

Also integrated here is the single helm station on starboard that has dual access from the deck and cockpit. For the saloon, sturdy doors drop down to ensure this becomes a seaworthy space when required with deep

NEEL 47

Triumphant Trimaran

scuppers for water shedding, and the wetbar means drinks are handily placed. For that run ashore, there's stainless chocks on the transom and below them a slot for the life raft.

FUNCTIONAL LIVING

Walking through the spacious cockloot, past the aft lounge seating takes me to the forward galley with steps nearby down to the bow where the single set of ablutions is located. The head and shower are in separate rooms with a vanity sink between, and headroom is good, plus the deck hatches open to ventilate the entire space.

The U-shaped galley rather restricts the number of users, but it does keep you safe in a swell. Numerous Alpi-clad cupboards allow plenty of storage, and equipment includes a two-burner gas stove and oven, plus optional microwave and dishwasher. A deep drawer fridge with chest takes care of perishables, and double sinks are surrounded by ample worktop space for food preparation.

Natural light comes from tall windows all round, only let down by the rather small forward-facing opening one limiting ventilation. Over on the starboard quarter is the spacious navigation station with wide bench seating, and conveniently placed underneath is the main switchboard.

Just behind the nav station is the deck-level owner's suite, an ideal feature for the newbie sailor or anyone suffering claustrophobia. The bed is against the outboard bulkhead to give walking space, and the headboard lies along the keel line so you can relax while admiring the view through the forward window.

Guests have the two symmetrical cabins in the amas, which are accessed via the cockloot. The two guest cabins have a small corridor to each - which can be a handy wet locker - and there's a sink and optional head.

IMPRESSIVE RIG

The NEEL 47 has an extensive sail plan, ideal for the varied conditions often found while blue-water voyaging. The cutter rig is standard with a self-tacking staysail for easy handling and outside genoa, while the fully battened mainsail has a big top and is slab reefed. A fibreglass bowsprit ensures good separation for flying an asymmetric, which has winches outboard on the amas. Sails are a personal choice, but Dacron comes as standard with a performance Hydranet option. The review boat came with the optional carbon spars supported by Dyneema-vecron shrouds, which minimises stretch and weight aloft.

Two steps up from the cockloot is the single starboard helm station protected by a canvas bimini. At the helm, a moulded fibreglass seat for two gives good support - a good idea for



Top: The NEEL 47 has incomparable space to relax and entertain.

Below: The deck-level owner's suite is filled with natural light.

Opposite: The innovative cockloot seamlessly blends the interior living space with the outdoors.

an elevated steering position. The console controls include a Maxpower bow thruster (a wise option) and B&G electronics with autopilot near at hand and throttle outboard. Just in front, separated by the corridor from the cockloot, sits three Antal winches - two electric halyard ones and a central manual one for sheets. Overhead is a canvas bimini that can be unzipped to view the mainsail. The mainsail is controlled by twin sheets running on transom-mounted blocks to give good leverage on the boom and is easily accessible from the flybridge sunpad, plus there's lazyjacks to gather the sailcloth. Moving around the NEEL 47 is easy thanks to its flat decks. At the bows, the nets on each side of the main hull minimise weight and drag while also creating a sunken seating position. Anchoring is fairly well taken care of via a substantial horizontal windlass, which runs to the anchor beneath the bowsprit. Two large lockers are also handy for general storage.



The NEEL 47 won 'Boat of the Year' in the Multihull category of the prestigious 2020 Cruising World awards.

NEEL 47 SPECIFICATIONS	
Overall Length:	14.3m / 47ft
Overall Width:	8.23m / 27ft
Draft:	1.58m / 5.2ft
Air Draft:	19m / 62.3ft
Displacement (CE norms):	10,600kg
Fully Battened Mainsail:	753.5 sq ft
Furling Genoa:	538 sq ft
Self-Tracking Furling Staysail:	215 sq ft
Water:	600L
Fuel:	300L
Engine:	60 HP Volvo sail drive
Builder:	NEEL Trimarans, France
Design:	Marc Lombard
CE certification:	ICNN



Below: Unwinding on one of the foredeck trampolines.

DEEP CENTRAL HULL

Construction techniques have advanced for the build of the NEEL 47 as the three hulls are moulded in one process, which increases structural rigidity and reduces costs. "We've constructed a new factory for the 47 allowing us to build one every six weeks, and these are fully infused and vacuum moulded," said Eric.

Materials used are polyester with vinlyester resin that impregnates the closed-cell PVC foam core, which is covered in quadriaxial fibreglass cloth. The deep hull allows plenty of volume, which means the engine room is spacious with near-standing headroom.

A hatch beside the galley has a ladder down to the outer part, which has the battery bank near the keel aiding stability, while the hot water, water maker and other systems are also lowset here as well. Also good is the placement for the optional generator set in the central forward part of this room, and all electrics are elevated to avoid water incursion.

Further aft via a watertight door is the engine, a 60hp Volvo saildrive, which is dwarfed by the free space around it so is easy to work on for servicing.

The NEEL 47 looks an ideal boat for our shoal waters and beyond, so perhaps an ex-factory handover and Mediterranean cruise is in order before shipping your own one back to Oz? 🇺🇸

MORE INFORMATION

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