



NEEL 47

Feels like a monohull, with the space of a cat—must be a trimaran! **By Charles J. Doane**

When first introduced nearly a decade ago, Neel trimarans seemed little more than an oddity, an intriguing variation in an ever-burgeoning menu of cruising multihulls. Since then these unique, fixed-ama tris, with their immense solid bridgedecks reminiscent of the first plywood tris of the last century, have proven themselves a worthy alternative to their more-common catamaran brethren. The new Neel 47 not only slots neatly in between the original Neel 45 and larger Neel 51, filling out what now amounts to a full range of offerings, it also introduces an interesting innovation in multihull accommodations.

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

As with previous Neels, all drawn by designers Michel Joubert and Bernard Nivelt, the 47's main hull carries pronounced rocker, which combined with a

concentration of weight low and amidships, produces a softer and smoother motion than found aboard many conventional catamarans. The goal for Neel is to create "a living boat" that is more organically responsive and provides more feedback than your typical cruising cat.

Construction consists of a sandwich laminate throughout the hulls and deck, with a core of Airex PVC foam vacuum-infused with polyester resin between skins of quadraxial fiberglass. An outer layer of vinylester helps stave off osmosis. To save weight, the interior bulkheads and much of the furniture are also foam cored. The main hull and amas are built as a single piece in a three-part mold, which makes for a very stiff structure. The deck is bonded to the hulls with tenacious aircraft-quality adhesive.

Directional stability is provided by the toed-out amas and a fixed foam-cored unballasted keel under the main hull. This keel is not tied into the structure of the hull, but bonded in place and designed to break away in the event of a hard collision.

ON DECK

The center of action is the raised helm station to starboard, which is easily accessed

from either the central social cockpit aft or the starboard ama deck. The mainsail sheets to a large fiber bridle spanning the aft bridgedeck, so there is no traveler to control. All working lines are led to the helm and a pair of Antal XT48 winches serving a battery of Antal clutches. Line leads are fair and carefully thought out, making it easy for a solo helmsman or a helmsman and one crew. A screecher or A-sail can be flown from the fixed bowsprit, with sheets led to a pair of outboard blocks and Antal XT44 winches mounted on the aft bridgedeck corners.

When it comes to just hanging out, the place to be is in the large lounging cockpit aft under the hard-top. There are plenty of comfy bench seats here, as well as a generous dinette table. Slide open the expansive glass door between the cockpit and saloon, and you have an enormous indoor/outdoor social space that Neel creatively refers to as the "cockloot."

ACCOMMODATIONS

This is where Neel trimarans typically shine, and the 47 is no exception. As on previous boats, the galley, to port, and the nav station, to starboard, are all the way forward, with an array of forward-facing windows offering near-wraparound views of the outside world. Access to the double-berth stateroom is through a very wide doorway that opens directly onto the walkway between the galley and saloon

aft. A large window forward looks out onto the nav space and the wide world beyond. This, combined with a long side window running the length of the berth, creates an immense sensation of open space. To achieve privacy, all you need do is pull shut the sliding door and draw the curtains.

Twin guest staterooms are located in the amas, each with its own companionway leading out on deck. Side windows provide oodles of light and fine views, and there's plenty of space under the wide double berths for stashing luggage and kit. Each stateroom comes equipped with its own vanity sink. They can also be fitted out with a pair of toilets hidden behind the fold-away companionway stairs. Otherwise, guests have to trek over to the spacious head and shower in the bow of the main hull.

As on previous Neels, the 47 boasts a large "basement" area under the cabin sole in the main hull where the engine and all systems are stashed. Access for maintenance purposes is outstanding. There's also a wealth of room for stowing larger, heavier items, which helps maintain the boat's low center of gravity.

UNDER SAIL

Our test boat, hull #5, came equipped with an optional carbon-fiber Z Spars rig. As on a catamaran, the wide spreader base obviates the need for a backstay, allowing you to hoist a powerful square-headed main. Up in the foretriangle, you can fly either a genoa that sheets to a pair of tracks to either side of the wide coachroof, or a self-tacking staysail with single-line sheeting led up the mast. The staysail on our boat, not used during our test, was designed to hoist and furl on its own luff. Conditions for our test on the Chesapeake Bay were light, with the true wind blowing between 5 and 10 knots, so I was happy we had an asymmetric spinnaker to fly from the bowsprit.

As advertised, helm feel during our sail was superb, enhanced by a gorgeous Goiot wheel that was a joy to lay hands on and silky-smooth fiber steering cables. Though not as responsive as a performance monohull, the Neel 47 certainly compares favorably to many cruising monohulls in terms of its seat-of-the-pants sailability. Unlike a cat, it also comes about smartly through the eye of the wind, even in light conditions. Indeed, at one point during our test I succeeded in tacking the boat under main alone, an impossible feat aboard many catamarans.

Our speed and sailing angles were equally impressive. With the main and jib flying, I found I could pinch the boat as

high as 35 degrees off the apparent wind. Bearing away another 7 degrees or so, the boat was fully powered up, making 6.5 knots in 10 knots of apparent wind. To sail even deeper angles, we unleashed our A-sail and still managed to keep the boat moving at 4 to 5 knots, matching the apparent windspeed.

UNDER POWER

Under power I found the Neel 47 to be more of a mixed bag. On the plus side, we made good speed, about 6.5 knots, with our 60hp turbocharged Yanmar diesel pushing us at a conservative cruise setting of 2,100 rpm. Flat out, at 3,000 rpm, we made 8.4 knots. The boat also turned readily, spinning through a 360-degree circle in about 1.5 boatlengths, quite respectable for a multihull with a single engine. Backing down, however, the boat was not as maneuverable as a twin-screw cat, and we needed to gather some speed before gaining control. Even then, the boat remained sensitive to conditions, as the wind found not one but three bows to push around. For peace of mind when handling this boat in close quarters, I'd certainly recommend springing for the optional bow thruster.

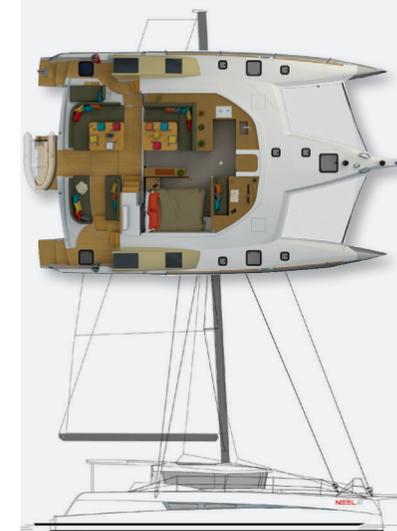
CONCLUSION

If you want the best of both worlds in a cruising platform—the responsive feel and closewinded performance of a monohull with the living space of a catamaran—this is the boat for you. The unique open layout of the master stateroom will be an added plus for cruising couples who sail on their own. ♦

The Details: Looking forward along the port side of the saloon toward the galley



Specifications



LOA 47ft

LWL 44ft 10in

BEAM 27ft 2in

DRAFT 5ft 3in

DISPLACEMENT 23,369lb

SAIL AREA 1,291ft² (main and genoa)

FUEL/WATER (GAL) 80/158

ENGINE Yanmar 60hp w/saildrive

SA/D 25

D/L 116

DESIGNER Marc Lombard Yacht Design Group

BUILDER Neel Trimarans, La Rochelle, France, neel-trimarans.com

PRICE \$500,000 (sailaway)

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