

LIGHT WEIGHT, BIG NUMBERS

THE ALL-NEW MC²60 CATAMARAN OFFERS FAST CRUISING LIKE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE, IT IS A YACHT THAT LOOKS AND PERFORMS LIKE A RACER, YET WAS ACTUALLY MEANT FOR SHORT-HANDED SAILING WITH A FAMILY. *By Ryan Swift; Photos by Henry Chiu and Ryan Swift*





LEFT TO KEEP THE BOAT POINTED NOSE TO WIND, THE MAIN SAIL WAS UP AND MY "CREW" WERE GETTING READY TO UNFURL THE HEADSAIL. I didn't want to wait – the temptation was strong to bear away and start building speed, even on the main alone. We were lucky on our test sail day. The conditions were nearly perfect – about ten knots of breeze in Hong Kong's Shelter Cove, with sun and crystal clear summer skies – and I was ready to get going on the very first MC²60 out of McConaghy's in Zhuhai.

I have followed the development and the build of this boat like few others. I first met Raphael Blot (one of our two crew members and the man behind the yacht) at about the same time two years ago, when his beloved catamaran was still in the planning stages. Raphael is a well-known sailor in Asia and having since retired from a banking career in Hong Kong, he has devoted his considerable energies toward building his dream – a truly fast cruising yacht.

When most yacht builders speak of a fast cruising yacht, they probably don't have in mind what Blot had in mind some years ago, which is part of the reason why Raphael set about to build his own boat first, and then wound up in the boat business, selling his concept of fast cruising to a select list of clientele who appreciate what the MC²60 is really all about.

Raphael is also a man of numbers. When he gets started on the discussion of weight, he gets competitive, describing the ways in which weight has been kept to a minimum on his 60-foot catamaran, and how it compares to other cruising catamarans in its class. "The Outremer 5X is probably the closest in terms of lightness, and we are way under them," says the ebullient Raphael. And why shouldn't he be happy? His new catamaran is at last in the water, with a second hull to be delivered to an Australian owner shortly. And he is right about weight: the Outremer 5X, at 59 feet, is 13.1 tonnes lightship. The MC²60 comes in at 9.3 tonnes. The MC²60 is the lightest cruising catamaran in its size range, and the performance that comes with that is remarkable.

This is not a cruising yacht for everyone. To keep to its lightweight promise, the MC²60 first hull has been kept a very stripped down affair.

The hulls are built in epoxy resin with Corcell foam for a combination of durability and lightness of construction. The choice of building such a project at McConaghy's, which has built multitudes of racing yachts, is a natural one. But more importantly, a lot of the luxuries one might find on catamarans these days are absent. For instance, there are four cabins, but only two heads. This was done in part to keep weight down, but also because, as Blot says, there's no need for so many washrooms and all the extra weight that goes into it. Four heads are available if a buyer wishes.

The boat takes a couple of people to get ready, but once the sails are up, cruising is a one-man job. This is by design. Raphael wanted a yacht with which to tour Asia with his family, so all the lines for traveller, headsail and mainsheet come right to the helmsman and are easy to reach, and the jib is self-tacking. The second hull for an Australian client will have different arrangements, with a helm station set higher up and more space for crew to work the lines. This owner plans on racing his MC²60 in the Asian regatta circuit, and it will certainly be interesting to see what happens. Raphael points out that within the framework of the MC²60 design, there is room to add some features or make some changes, allowing for a semi-custom series.

For my part, some changes I'd consider would be a lengthening of the aft decks on the hulls, to make entry and exits at the dock easier. The sloping roof can also impinge on the scope of your vision to the leeward side. A wheel up version would offer easier viewing for the helmsman.

The MC²60 also comes with dagger boards that have been designed as wings with lift exerted towards the centre of the yacht. As the yacht heels, it provides stabilization and some upward lift. Built in carbon fibre, these weigh just 80 kilogrammes, which makes deploying or retrieving them easy.

The main bridge deck on our test boat was devoid of the kind of luxuries you'd expect on most cruising cats. The galley, which would

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normally be positioned on the bridge deck at or near the doorway to the aft deck, has been placed in the main passageway of the starboard hull. Raphael explains that this space is largely wasted in most cats, as during passages or even at anchor, it's unused. On the port side hull, this area has been used for a small TV lounge. Our test yacht was missing the aft deck table, but it was clear to see that the comfort areas are more about function rather than aesthetic. Teak decking is an option for instance, but not needed.

The floors in both hulls at the mid section are raised up, as the 53-horsepower Yanmar diesels have been placed quite far forward in the hull, almost at the midway mark. Most engines would be placed under the rear cabins, but Raphael wanted them further forward to keep them close to the mast, in order to reduce pitching motion.

Raphael and his chosen naval architect on the project, Renaud Banuls, seem to have considered a lot of details. Banuls, who worked with VPLP on projects ranging from the America's Cup trimaran winner in 2010 to the Groupama trimaran trans-oceanic racing yachts, is one part of a team that would be the envy of most racing syndicates. Thomas Coville, one of the world's most accomplished single-handed racing sailors, had a say on the development of this cat, as did



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structural designers HDS, which have worked on racing projects that include structural engineering for the Hydroptere, the world’s fastest sailing yacht.

The rigging is to the highest standard, with High Modulus carbon fibre mast by Lorima and just two shrouds and the stay in Kevlar. The sail inventory is much larger than most cruising yachts, and the package on board our yacht was impressive, though not oversized.

Sailing is the key

But after all, the real deal is sailing the MC²60. With a steady ten knots of breeze, we had enough to get a typical catamaran moving, but most would switch on the motor if they were heading upwind. Not so with this yacht, which accelerates very quickly. Once our sails were up and just sailing upwind on an easterly out of Shelter Cove, we were running at nearly nine knots with little trimming effort. The fine entry on the hulls contributed to a very smooth ride in what were, admittedly, very light seas.

Sailing the MC²60 is a dream. The rig and sail plan are smaller than you might expect from a cat this size, but thanks to the lightweight construction, less sail is required.

That Raphael has chosen to make his boat suited for single-handed sailing is clear. A self-tacking jib arrangement on the furlled headsail means a tack simply involves a gentle turn at the wheel. Sailing almost directly into the wind and tacking back and forth out of Shelter Cove, we managed a good three nautical miles, course made good, in an hour – not bad at all. Had we continued farther out of Shelter Cove into the open South China Sea, I felt as though we’d have made the Philippines in no time, with a spinnaker up and the boat trimmed for its full potential.

Though Raphael will likely be the sole sailor aboard his yacht, there are two bunks available for crew in a forward compartment of the portside hull, with aircon and toilet. He reckons these could be for divemasters in the various locations he wants to cruise. Other buyers could choose different layouts.

Given the big sail inventory and options, there were a lot of features that we didn’t run through on our test. There is the Code Zero, which would have been fun to try, and of course, the rotating mast, which we didn’t get into. But even without involving these elements, we were able to travel at a very good pace. The acceleration out of a tack was extremely fast. From a speed of about eight knots SOG, we’d drop to about four, and then be back to eight knots in a matter of seconds.

At first, I thought I was doing a great job of sailing the MC²60, until Raphael informed me that his eight-year-old son could also easily



Technical Specifications – MC260

LOA	18.28m
LWL	18.28m
Beam	8.6m
Draught	1.4-3.2m
Light displacement	9.3t
Main sail	118m ²
Solent	35 m ²
Code 0	120 m ²
Gennaker	165 m ²
Mast	25.1m
Engines	2 x 53hp Yanmar Diesels

get the boat up to 10 knots and have a great time – so much for my expertise. But it shows one thing for sure – if you want to get a thrill out of catamaran sailing, the MC²60 is a very compelling choice. From the helm station, you feel very in-command and you want to push the boat for more.

Price-wise, the MC²60 is up there, at a rough estimate of US\$2.5 million. But that, according to both Raphael and McConaghy’s GM Mark Evans, comes with a lot of specifications and items that would normally be considered optional.

Raphael Blot originally designed his yacht for use by himself, letting his family relax and enjoy the cruising. But his plan may backfire. After all, if his eight-year-old son can also have such a good time with such a powerful yacht, how long will Blot have left at the wheel?

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