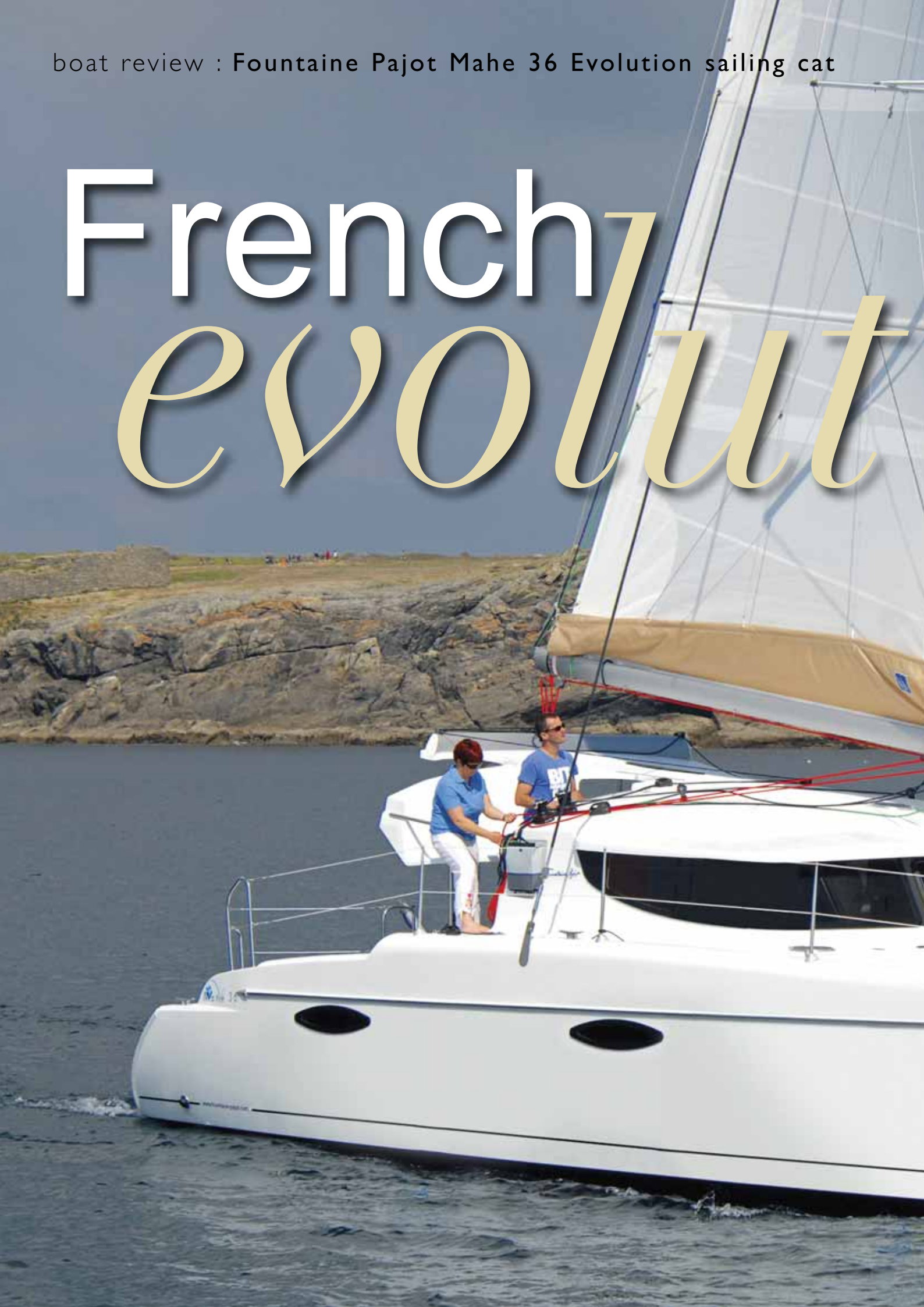


boat review : Fountaine Pajot Mahe 36 Evolution sailing cat

French *evolut*





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The name said it all for while – the Fountaine Pajot Mahe 36 was a culmination of all that went before it, it was the ‘evolution’ in terms of up-to-the-moment and certainly state-of-the-art technology and innovation – which demands you take a second look.



by BARRY TYLER pics by BARRY TYLER / FOUNTAINE PAJOT

THAT THE FRENCH manufacturer chose the recent Sydney International Boat Show for its worldwide debut of this model was most relevant also, for it was a mark of respect not only for the pulling power of the Sydney show, but also for the buying power of our region. Obviated by the fact Fountaine Pajot's (FP) founder and CEO, Jean-Francois Fountaine, was on hand for the launching of the model, the company obviously thought this was the best stage in the world from whence to launch the first model of the next generation of FP sailing catamarans.

Having only recently celebrated its 30th anniversary this company, that to date has built in excess of 2200 boats over those years, has seen fit to start at the lower end of their scale, the entry level for sailing cats in fact, to present to the buying public a model range unsurpassed in terms of a good wholesome practical, efficient and user-friendly and most importantly affordable, cruising catamaran.

Based on an Olivier Flahault design concept and with a Michel Joubert/Bernard Nivelt underhull shape providing the necessary handling and performance characteristics and general prowess, the other notable aspect of this



new Evolution range was the fact this was no once over lightly with a change of decals and interior colours, the old Mahe 36 model designed back in 2006 had received a genuine re-vamp from top to bottom, with new underhull design, a raised helm station, a now rigid cockpit bimini, a better protected open-plan 'entertainer's' cockpit, a cleaner and less cluttered foredeck, a re-designed galley, more refrigeration provision, and a biggie from a cruiser's perspective, improved ventilation.

A practical user-friendly package for one or two couples – or the perfect family all-rounder. (top)
The elevated helm position ensured you were completely in control. (above)

The company's philosophy with this catamaran was to provide boaters with an affordable boating package which would appeal to a wider audience of boaters, than merely sailors; which offered features and performance and construction qualities typically found in larger and more prestigious catamarans. It had to be affordable, it had to be practical, ergonomic and comfortable, it had to be a one-person sailing boating with all controls and sheets at the skipper's fingertips, and lastly of course, simply it had to perform well.

The other prerequisite, and it dove-tails with the performance of this Mahe, was the weight factor; or lack of it really for FP are acutely conscious with all their models, of the ramifications involved with this impacting phenomenon. As we all appreciate, weight equates to friction, which ultimately equates to performance and you can have the best design in the world – but if it is overweight it just won't perform to design expectations.

Which I would venture to suggest was precisely the reason then that the interior was modulated and 'panelled' with foam-cored, wood-laminated panels, and the hull was constructed of a resin-infused GRP and PVC Foam composite. Not to save money or anything sinister like that – merely to save weight. The end result then of the displacement of in this instance, 7300kg at 'heavy-ships', was commendable and indeed quite remarkable for an 11m, fully rigged sailing catamaran!

Space maximisation

From the outset it was obvious to me that the FP team had gone to great lengths to maximise interior space for the topsides were visibly higher than the average 11m or thereabouts, catamaran. The more upright steps up from the marina level boarding platforms and onto the cockpit level gave it away also, yet despite this the cockpit still boasted all the usual 'catamaran' features nestled in under this new overhead bimini structure.

There were the usual goodies such a barbecue on the central transom beam pulpit rail, a simple yet rather effective davit system which ensured the tender was solidly mounted against the transom beam, and a unique 'conversation pit' setting which included a U-shaped bench

seat lounge around a suitable-sized removable cockpit table.

Undeniably though, the centre of attention in this cockpit was surely the helm station. Well elevated so as to provide 360° visibility, innovatively the two-person rather novel bucket seat arrangement was in fact an integral part of the overhead bimini structure. In effect all but free-standing, below this seat was a module which sensibly could have been used for further storage and/or an icemaker or indeed more refrigeration capacity.

“From the outset it was obvious to me that the FP team had gone to great lengths to maximise interior space”



This is what it is all about for this couple, getting away from it all – and enjoying the moment. (top)

A simple, secure and out of the way davit mounting system for the tender. (above left)

Everything was at your fingertips, at the busy helm station. (top right)

Simple, practical and up to the task! (bottom right)



The Mahe can be easily sailed from the confines of the helm station. (above)

The tiny Volvo Sail-drive packages were dwarfed in what were most spacious engine rooms. (above right)



Again with FP's 'user-friendly' philosophy and commitment in mind I was certainly impressed with the fact the skipper could very easily either power or sail this boat, without ever leaving the comfort of his/her seat. Remote controls, instrumentation, the FP helm wheel, the generous Furuno electronics package and for the sailors the winches, the jam cleats and even the rope bag were all strategically placed about and off to the side of, the upright dash.

Another endearing aspect we were to establish during the course of the actual test, was the clear view of what was happening with the main-sheet and the traveller assembly which was sited across the aft extremity of the overhang. All in all it was a simplistic yet deliberately systematic approach to what was a most comfortable, ergonomic, practical and functional operations area – perfect for long passages, whether under sail or power!

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The foredeck was approached in the same fashion; uncluttered, virtually flush deck hatches, concealed anchoring features, a robust trampoline, and an equally robust front beam for the furling head-sail and optional extra screecher bowsprit. But there was one other minor detail on this frontal area which caught my eye also, that being the short length of garden hose (complete with garden fitting on the end) which appeared from under the windscreen overhang.

“The saloon very much adhered to this Fountaine Pajot philosophy of simple, practical and user-friendly”

Seemingly a little agricultural in the context of the well presented catamaran I had experienced thus far, none the less it intrigued me. Down on my knees I got and I soon discovered this hose was attached to an outlet immediately below a recessed 'gutter' on the cabin top – presumably designed specifically to catch water and top up your water tanks while you were at sea. With a water capacity of just 540 litres and with no desalinator aboard, this was surely a simple yet most proactive way of supplementing your water supply.

Simple, practical, user-friendly

The saloon very much adhered to this Fountaine Pajot philosophy of simple, practical and user-friendly before it was flashy, with the modular layout specifically designed to accommodate one or two couples (or a family) in an extended-stay situation. I say extended stay for the central dining setting for instance would seat six people if need be, but with four you spread out in comfort, you have your own 'space'. Décor was predominantly (cherrywood) wood finish, with gelcoat

finish above the waistline, vinyl-protected flooring and chocolate-flavoured bench-tops and U-shaped dining lounge. It all contrasted well sure, but I have to say the chocolate look would not have been my number one colour choice.

That aside, the room was certainly a light and bright setting with plenty of cross-draft ventilation (important when there is no air-conditioning fitted) courtesy of a large saloon door, a sliding aft bulkhead window, front windscreen hatches and an overhead hatch. There were some very good ideas in this saloon, little things that made the difference; features such as the fixed bench-seat for the fourth person at the dining table,

servery, glass storage, open storage compartments in the wall, and good under-bench cupboard storage also – perfectly adequate for a family or two couples away for a week or a month.

Accommodation for four

Wow I thought to myself, as I learned the accommodation below was for two couples in 'double' accommodation – in two aft cabins! There is of course another three-cabin option available which features two double cabins to portside and an exclusive owner's suite in the starboard hull, but in this instance our owners had chosen the two-cabin, two bathroom configuration.



bulkhead tops with a nice fiddle around them (a great storage area for loose gear), the cutlery compartment secreted into this front bulkhead, the generous storage, and the 'nerve centre' to the left as you entered the saloon. Multifaceted, this module was 'home' to the communications, the entertainment, the bar essentials, the galley fridge – and in between times it also doubled as the chart table.

The galley was off to starboard and while at first glance one could easily conclude that its compactness might suggest a certain ineptness, the reality was this particular version was still more than capable in an extended-stay situation. There was a three-burner gas stove with a convection microwave oven above that, plus there were twin sinks, a

All designed with one-person sailing in mind.



Saloon space was utilised well; presentation plus functionality! (top left)

Dining for seven, at a most congenial setting. (top centre)

Sure the galley was compact, but look at the big-boat features! (top right)

Clever use of typically-wasted space on the front bulkhead. (above left)

Unusual to find this much volume in the aft cabin of a catamaran! (above centre)

Each aft cabin had its own ensuite, forward in the bow section of each hull. (above right)

Two aft cabins in a catamaran; how was that going to work I thought to myself? But I needn't have worried though for in true Fountaine Pajot innovative fashion it did work and in fact it worked very well, courtesy of the afore-mentioned volume of the hull and the more upright boarding steps which allowed engines and peripherals to be moved further aft, in turn providing more internal space.

Down the steps from the saloon level then I found two aft cabins, near identical in layout and specification and nicely privatised by way of a door to each. Again presented predominantly in the modulated 'wood' and gelcoat look, there was an open-front clothes storage facility, a wardrobe, plenty of light, opening wall and overhead hatches, wall lights, vinyl flooring and a generous 'double' berth complete with under-mattress storage.

In the portside example this under-berth void was sensibly utilised for additional refrigeration capacity; in this instance it was a Waeco portable example.

Each cabin had its own bathroom, albeit once removed but none the less their own large bathroom with a shower at one end and the Jabsco head at the other. Features included a vanity, a most contemporary sink, an extractor fan, overhead cupboards (away from the shower water), a secreted toilet-roll holder and even an opening wall hatch just above water level, which provided a unique perspective on proceedings, whilst underway.

Best of both worlds

As any sailing protagonist will gladly attest to, the beauty of a sailing cat is you have two power sources; one you pay for, the other you don't! In this case the expensive option if you could describe it as that, was a miserly pair of three-cylinder, 1130cc, 30hp D1-30 Volvo Penta Sail-drive diesel engines that ran through the S-drive 130S drive train, to the S-drive propellers.

Speeds of course aren't as important in a sailing catamaran situation so the top speed of 11 kts and the cruise speed of

around seven to eight knots was more than acceptable. What these engines did supply though was self-sufficiency, both in fuel economy and of course when the winds deserted you. Self-sufficiency in fact permeated right through the mechanical specification of the Mahe 36 for it boasted two 50 litre holding tanks, a 220 litre fuel capacity that would figuratively take you half way around the world, there was this water-catching method I alluded to earlier, and the electrical system was 12-Volt throughout.

There wasn't a genset aboard this particular example and in reality neither did this boat need one for without all the big-ticket items like for instance air-conditioning, the 12-volt system was capably 'fed' by the two 115-Amp engine alternators and the four 85-Amp Solar panels mounted on what FP described as the bimini structure. This power input was managed and distributed to the three house and two engine (100Ah AGM) batteries, through the Mastervolt 2500W/100A/24V inverter/charger combo.



During the 'under power' side of our test evaluation of the Mahe 36, we were graphically reminded of the idyllic pleasures of sailing for with the wind reasonable, we turned the engines off, set the sails and ... This was power source number two, infinitely quieter (not that the Volvo Sail-drives hidden away in the aft engine compartments were noisy anyway) and certainly more fuel efficient.

The set-up for this rig as mentioned earlier, was designed to be as uncomplicated as possible, because predominantly it would be a one-couple or one-couple and guests situation which would necessitate the man of the house virtually sailing the boat single-handed. Just kidding, for more often than not a cruising wife is as accomplished as her

Plenty of power, courtesy of the engine alternators and these four 85-Amp solar panels.

man, but the bottom line is this boat was designed to be sailed without all the hassles typically associated with the sailing conundrum.

As such, everything was handled from the helm station. The roller-furled jib was small enough in the foot so as to in effect be self-tacking, the main conveniently raised and lowered from/into an appropriate-sized boom bag, and there were no fittings, winches or cleats at the mast; all the sheets extended aft though guides and ultimately jam cleats and two

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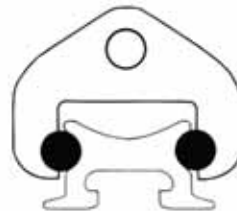
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deck winches – back at the helm. With the boom in such close contact to the bimini structure, going about when you were into the wind or reaching slightly, was effortless and without the typical 'swinging boom' scenario associated with 'long' mains.

It really was very easy to sail, but more importantly as I discovered during the course of our sail, it was a lot of fun too for the Mahe 36 performed exceptionally well. Susceptible/responsive to the slightest change in wind speed, where it responded and leaped into action almost instantaneously, it really was quite exhilarating to be sailing along at 10-12kts – for an hour or two at least, without a care in the world!

Conclusion

I certainly don't want to appear derogatory towards the Fountaine Pajot Mahe 36 Evolution, but it definitely was not one of your flashy, glitzy, glamorous, pretentious, precocious sort of a boat, merely it was a practical, user-friendly, dependable, well priced example of a good honest boat. And that is just the way Fountaine Pajot seemingly intended it for they have quite obviously attended to the house-keeping matters, before they worried about the over the top stuff that so often is surplus to requirements – in the context of a user-friendly boat.

A standard boat other than the bimini over the helm station, the screecher, bowsprit and rigging for that screecher,

the cockpit cushions or the solar panels, television, holding tanks, and engine upgrade, it was interestingly to note that the owners of this 'boat #1' of the new Fountain Pajot Evolution range would change absolutely nothing, so practical and convenient have they found this boat. Was it affordable as per FP's claims – you betcha, when you compare apples with apples!

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SPECIFICATIONS

Boat design name	Mahe 36 Evolution
Year launched	2010
Designer	Joubert-Nivelt
Interior designer	Coste & Partners
Builder	Fountaine Pajot Catamarans
LOA	11m
LWL	10.7m
Beam	5.9m
Draft	1.1m
Displacement	5000kg
Max speed	11kts
Cruise speed	7-8kts
Construction	Resin-infused GRP and PVC Foam Composite
Fuel cap	200 litres
Water cap	540 litres
Engines make	2 x 30 hp D1-30 Volvo Penta Sail-drives
Drive train	Volvo Penta S-drive 130S
Propellers	Volvo Penta Sail-drive
Inverter / charger	Mastervolt 2500W / 100A 24V
Anchor winch	Lofrans 1000
Anchors	Manson Plough 35 lbs
Steering	Cable (Spectra & chain)
Engine controls	Volvo Penta Electronic
Lighting	Geneico Halogen
Paint (topsides)	White Gelcoat
Paint (antifouling)	International Micron
Hatches	Goiot
Windscreens/windows	Lexcan & Plexiglass by Fountaine Pajot Catamarans
Porthole hatches	Goiot
Heads	Jabsco Electric
Veneer/plywood	Cherrywood Veneers
Tender	Caribe 3.1 RIB / 9hp Yamaha 4-stroke
Stainless steel fabrication	Fountaine Pajot Catamarans
Saloon doors	Fountaine Pajot Catamarans
Helm chair	Fountaine Pajot Catamarans
Batteries House	3 x 100Ah AGM
Engine	2 x 100Ah AGM

Upholstery	Chocolate Leatherette by Fountaine Pajot Catamarans
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Electronics

Autopilot	Furuno NavPilot
GPS	Furuno GP-37
Plotter	Furuno GP7000
Depth sounder	Furuno FI-50
VHF	Icom IC-304
Radar	Furuno M-171S 2.2kW 24-NM
Entertainment systems	Panasonic / Clarion
Engine instruments	Volvo Penta
Wind instruments	Furuno FI-50
Software system	Furuno / Navico
Switch panel	Fountaine Pajot Catamarans
Onboard systems management	NA

Sailing equipment

Winches	Harken
Other deck gear	Harken
Keel – design	Joubert – Nivelt (sacrificial)
Rudder – design	Joubert – Nivelt (spade)
Spar designer	Z-Spars
Spar manufacturer	Z-Spars
Rope / sheets	Spectra / Double Braid

Sail wardrobe

Sail designer	Incidences
Sail maker	Incidences
Main area	47sqm
Fore-sail area	30 sqm
Spinnaker area	NA
Gennaker area	NA
Screecher area	49sqm

Base price of boat	\$395,000
Price as tested	\$447,000