



■ by BARRY TRANTER

WHEN, in the dim and distant future, the definitive history of yachting is written, the chapter on multihulls will record that in the 1960s the British virtually invented the modern production multihull, both cats and trimarans. And then, for various reasons, they left the field and the French wasted no time in filling the vacuum.

PERHAPS because the French had the Mediterranean on their southern doorstep, and they also had resorts in other warm climates, they understood that boats could be aimed at the charter market and that the same boats could also suit private owners. And no boat works better in the charter market than the modern catamaran. They are roomy, easy to drive, they don't frighten anyone by heeling over. They are great for families, and they are great for parties.

Fountaine-Pajot started building cats in 1983. The Pajot part of the name belongs

to Yves Pajot, one of the early greats of European short-handed sailing, the pressure-cooker sport which helped promote sailing in general (and the multihull in particular) into mainstream French thinking. Which the Brits failed to do.

The Orana 44 is typical of the French style – boldly styled, very roomy – but defines its own niche by being less of a caravan-on-the-water than many French boats. Designers Joubert-Nivelt have given her good bridgedeck clearance (78cm) and also gave her reasonable amount of sail and displacement figures.



Steering position is high; you can't complain about visibility. Headsail sheeting angles are quite narrow so the Orana can point quite high. (main pic left)

Conference around the helm position. All the winches are here so short-handed sailing is easy. (above)

The result is that she accelerates in a gust, rather than merely increase speed in the manner of some of her compatriots. She's a strikingly simple boat but it is the simplicity which comes from integrated design and she lacks nothing.

The Orana comes in two versions, the standard boat (four double cabins, four heads) or the owner version which the brochure describes as including one owner's suite, two guest suites and three bathrooms. That is the boat we sailed, the one shown here.

The designers have been very clever in their use of interior space. To create more

room in the hulls the engines (30hp Volvo Pentas with Saildrives) are mounted right in the sterns, so the drives are behind the rudders.

Except for engine position, Joubert-Nivelt have done their best to concentrate weight amidships. Importer Mark Elkington reckons 65% of the mass is in the centre third of the hull. The anchor is stowed in a locker near the mast base and is deployed from the leading edge of the bridgedeck, aft of the trampoline. The front two metres of each bow is empty, though the accommodation drawings show there is room for a single berth in each.

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Owner's cabin is in the starboard hull, the bed is set athwartships. Open-fronted storage makes great sense in a cat. (above left)

Saloon table can be lifted out and set up in the cockpit if needed. Chairs (not shown) add to saloon seating. Electronics centre is on the right of pic, that's the galley worktop in right foreground. (above right)



The Maestro (owner) layout has the owner's cabin aft in the starboard hull (with the bed athwartships) and two double cabins to port, with the beds mounted fore and aft. The owner's bunk to starboard is given headroom by the moulding for the steering platform. Forward in the starboard hull is a single berth space, plus heaps of cupboards, open-fronted so you can see what's there, logical in a non-heeling multi. The

owners of this boat had wet weather gear hanging here, various bits of boat stuff, and a pantry to take overflow food from the galley.

On this boat the bunk base will be used as a work area; Mark tells me one owner, a shipwright who wants to earn while cruising, put a full workbench here. Each bow is rendered watertight, to a point above waterline level at least, by a sealed half bulkhead and floor, to cope with

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unplanned and unwanted intrusion by rock, whale or shipping container. On our boat, this is where the owners stowed the double mattress which can be used on top of the dinette table to accommodate extra bodies.

Each cabin has an opening port and circular opening hatch overhead, the latter fitted with an insect screen and blinds.

Amidships in each hull is the escape hatch. On the Orana these are toggled closed by levers which are wedged shut by a locking bar.

The saloon is just right with plenty of windows at the ideal height. The galley is set against the main bulkhead so food, coffee and insults can be traded easily with the bodies in the cockpit. The 180L fridge is a good one – top-loading but with a piano-style lipped lid for easy access. Inside are sliding mesh trays which makes the food easy to reach. There's a 30L integral freezer, but you can order extra fridges and freezers or install them later. Louise and Gordon, the owners of this boat, plan to use their Orana for a few years before they head for the wild blue and will add refrigeration (and other ancillaries) as experience dictates.

There's a dedicated navigation area forward in the saloon.

The coachroof is resin-infused, made in a closed mould which saves weight and leaves a good interior finish. The timber trim is sycamore, which is not over-used, so the prevailing impression is a sort of modern minimalist style without the usual severity, so it looks easy to live with.

The furniture is not bonded to the structure and Mark shows me, in the owner's suite, the access panel for easy access to the helm electronics. The 44 will be easy to service, he says.

Appearance is a subjective thing but I like the look of this boat. The French are



Cockpit and saloon floors are on the same level. Symmetrical cockpit layout makes great party area. (top right)

Full-width mainsheet traveller is on coachroof. Full-length coachroof is a good platform for the crew to tidy the lowered main in the boom bag. (right)

A clear sliding hatch to the helmsman's left (top of pic) provides weather protection. You can't see it because here it is stowed. (below left)

Moulded strut accepts tack for the asymmetric. Anchor is stored in the bridgedeck to keep weight out of the ends. (below centre)

Strut davits work well. (below right)

Windows in hull sides provide light for all cabins. (bottom)

happy to let function dominate form if they think it's appropriate, and to that end they created vertical faces to cat superstructures to maximise useable floor area in the saloon and reduce direct sun inside. Joubert and Nivelt have been clever as the 44 coachroof is not as severe as other French boats and that uptilted

trailing edge to the coachroof, and the cutaway stern profile to the hulls, give the 44 a cheeky, appealing look.

This is a simple boat all-round, simple in the sense that the designers have organised everything very well. That upturned coachroof lip carries a full-width traveller. Mainsheet and headsail



winch are grouped on the coachroof immediately ahead of the helmsman, who can do all the work if needed. The dinghy davits are simple beams projecting from the aft bulkhead.

The helmsman sits high, on a two- or three-seat bench, head projecting above the coachroof. There's a sliding hatch to his or her left which provides more protection for the cockpit. Behind the seat is a double sun lounge, an option, unusual to Aussie eyes (we've learned to avoid the sun) but common on European boats. Louise reports that her 20 something daughters love the lounge. Despite appearances to the contrary, sunbathing is not dead yet.

How does she sail? This fixed-keel boat points quite high, up to 38°, and she tacks every time. The builder's polar diagrams give her a top speed of six and a half knots hard on the wind (about 40°) increasing rapidly as she frees up – eight knots at 50° to a maximum of just under 12kts at 100°. These are maximum figures; windspeed was not specified and the polar had no numbers for spinnaker sailing.

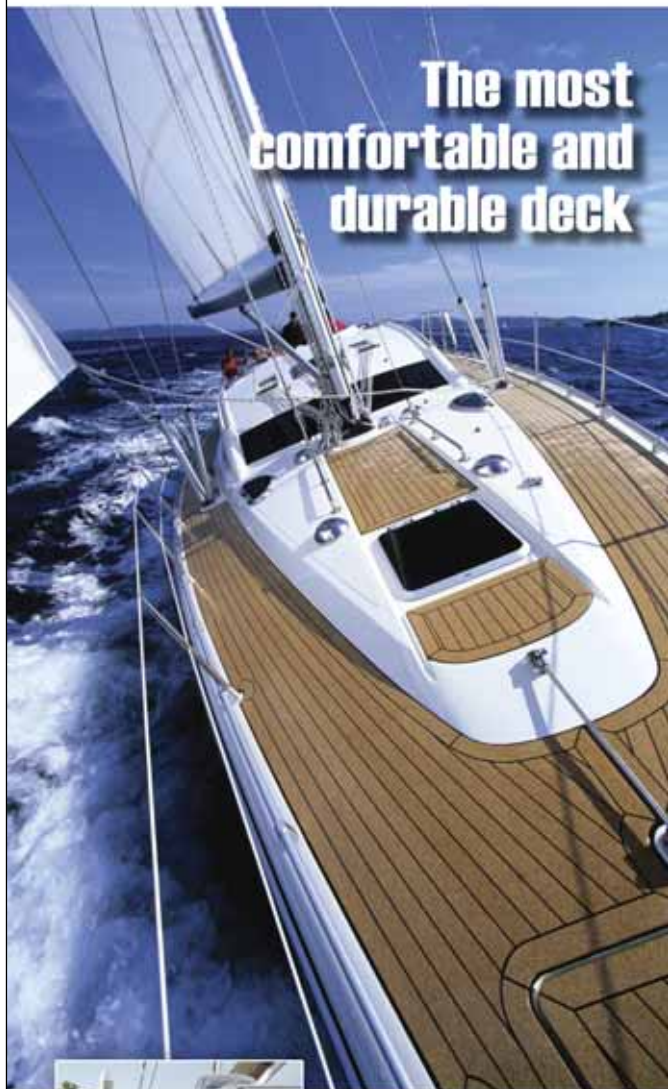
On Port Hacking immediately south of Sydney, one of Australia's most beautiful waterways, we saw seven and a half knots at 60° in 14kts Apparent, but it was a thin 14kts which fluctuated and had no real guts and the wind was too unstable to record reliable figures. I handed over the wheel to better sailors when we were lifted 80° as the south-westerly breeze, blowing off the shore, split around a small headland.

Steve Fitzmaurice, our skipper for the day, helped deliver the boat from EC Marine headquarters at Mooloolaba to its home in Sydney, and reckoned in a day of 25-35kts, with gusts



Helm seat and sunlounge are on raised moulding which provides headroom for owner's bunk below.

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Galley has three-burner stove with oven, easy access to the cockpit. (above left)



Aft cabin in the port hull. Owner reports that queen-sized sheets fitted perfectly. (above centre)



180-litre fridge is top-opener, but piano-style lid eases access. (above right)

Trim is in honey-coloured sycamore wood which contributes to light and airy atmosphere in the saloon. (far right)



Why cats are boats for sociable people; saloon, cockpit, galley form large entertaining area. (right)

up to 40kts apparent, the Orana 44 was comfortable beating with two reefs in the main, dropped right down the traveller and sheeted tight so the main didn't bounce, about 30% of jib unrolled, and no slamming from the bridgedeck.

Some boats are instantly likeable and some, no matter how good they may be, take a bit of time to get used to. The

Orana 44 was easy to like for its bright and breezy appearance, the light and unfussy interior, and ease of sailing. The French have got their formula pretty well worked out but the different manufacturers have evolved their own variations on the theme. This boat has plenty of interior space, a good cockpit and a decent amount of sail area. This

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gives the Orana 44 a lively feel which is an important part of her distinctive character.

Gordon and Louise's plan is a good one, to learn their boat and learn their skills before the commit to a long-distance cruise. Louise had recently taken the boat out by herself for the first time. There are other ways to enjoy boats. When Gordon is away, Louise and her three daughters have a girls' night out. They row out to the boat, have a picnic dinner, and spend the night. "Our boat is our weekender", she says.

For the less experienced

Fontaine-Pajot importers EC Marine organise instructors to help new owners come to grips with their craft. Managing Director Mark Elkington says the company uses as instructors well-known cat sailors like Philippe Peche, the WA-based French sailor whose CV includes sailing on the maxi-cat *Team Adventure* in The Race, then *Orange* and *Orange 2* when she took the Jules Verne trophy for the fastest circumnavigation. At the time we sailed the Orana 44, Philippe was in France working on the rig of the French America's Cup contender for the next America's Cup, which will be sailed in 90ft multihulls.

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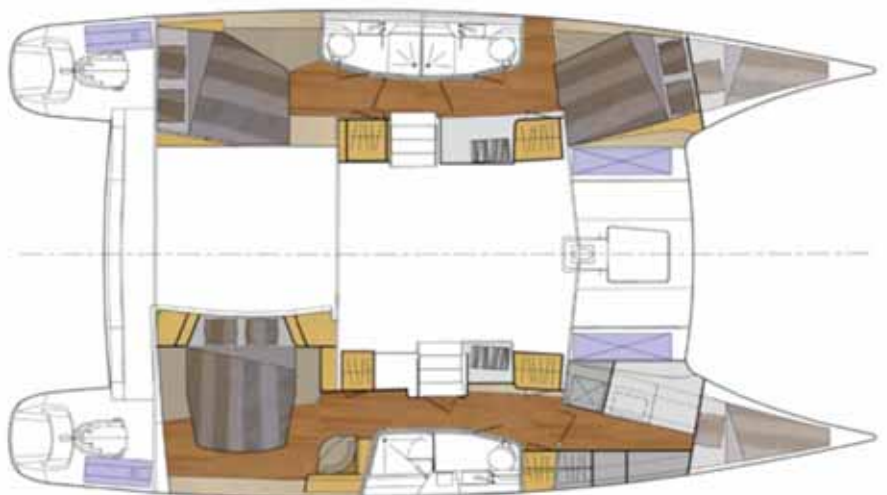
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SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	13.1m
Beam	7.35m
Draught	1.20m
Displacement (light)	9800kg
Bridgedeck clearance	780mm
Mainsail	64 sq m
Genoa	45.5 sq m
Fuel	400 litres
Water	530 litres
Power:	2 x 30hp Volvo Pentra saildrives

Price:

Base boat is **\$780,000**

Specped for coastal cruising like this boat, with solar panels, bowsprit for an asymmetric headsail, TV, sound system, plotter, tender and outboard (inflatable with Honda) around **\$820,000**

For World cruising (with watermaker, radar, satnav, HF) around **\$870,000**