A *Very* Different Breed of Cat

At the most recent Miami boat show, I walked right by the Aspen booth and stopped 10 feet past it, realizing that I'd just caught sight of something unusual.

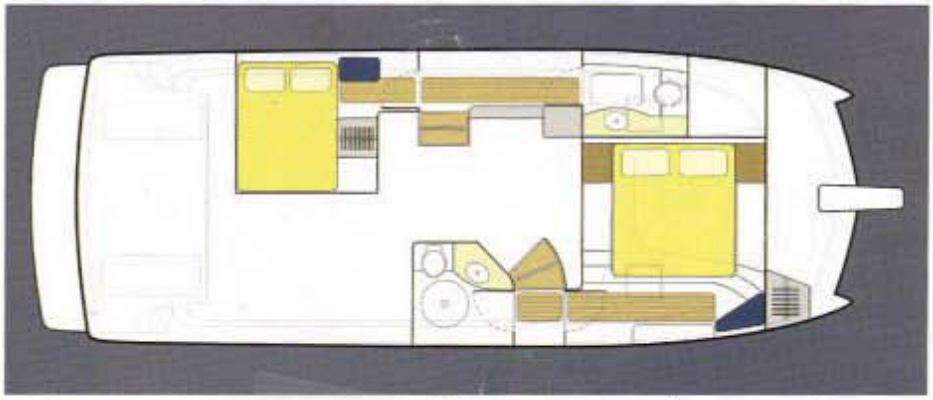
I immediately backtracked, and there was a smiling Larry Graf, arguably the best-known name in American powercat design and construction. Larry was the driving force behind groundbreaking Glacier Bay Catamarans, which quickly grew from a garage-built prototype to a multimillion-dollar boat company. Larry and Glacier Bay parted company not long ago, but in Miami I was pleased to discover that the creative juices never stopped flowing.

Once again, Larry has developed something *truly* different: a handsome 39-foot, *single-engine* powercat designed specifically for fuel-efficient cruising at mid-range speeds.

In essence, Aspen Power Catamarans has adopted and completely modernized a boat design well-proven over thousands of years of coastal and ocean navigation by the native peoples of the South Pacific: the proa, which features a main hull balanced by a narrower outrigger. Since translating this ancient configuration into a modern powercat is a tricky engineering feat, I'm going to paraphrase Larry's description:

The Aspen 39 design begins with an efficient semi-displacement, high-speed starboard "drive" hull that has significantly more beam than the hulls of a "standard" powercat. This extra beam allows for a spacious engine and machinery room, and it provides easy access for service. The wider hull also accommodates two staterooms.

The Aspen's port hull is 35 percent "finer" (narrower) than the drive hull and has no underwater running gear (prop, shaft, rudder, or skeg) that would otherwise create drag. Both hull shapes are tailored to efficiently balance the thrust of the starboard engine, allowing for straight tracking and a balanced helm in a variety of sea conditions.



Larry is projecting a cruising speed of 17-19 knots and a top speed of 22 knots. Fuel consumption is expected to be 10 gallons per hour at 18 knots. He says that in full-displacement mode, the Aspen 39 will run at nine knots and three gph, which will give this powercat a range of some 950 miles on its 350 gallons of fuel. Nice.

As of late July, Larry and a small crew are finishing the hull of a 26-foot (two-thirds scale) powered, working model of the 39's hull. This prototype should be in the water by Labor Day and will be extensively tested in the waters of the Pacific Northwest to fully confirm (or deny) Larry's performance projections. The design will be modified as needed before actual molds are built.

The Aspen 39 (and eventually a 48-foot model) will be built by a well-established Chinese boat company in Zhuhai. Each of a given vessel's two hulls—complete with all machinery, hardware, and wiring—will then go into a 40-foot sealed container for transport.

Once the hull modules arrive in the port nearest the customer's cruising grounds, he explains, a rigging team flies in and spends three days assembling the two hulls and the 39's superstructure/interior module, which will be molded in the United States. When all of the boat's systems have been connected and are up and running, he says, "The two-man, rigging team stays on sight to familiarize the owner with ship's systems and completes the process of delivery and owner checkout."

At a projected price of under $600,000, the Aspen 39 is priced competitively for today's market.

—Chris Cornell, Editor

SPECIFICATIONS

LOA: 38' 9"
Beam: 14' 6"
Draft (half load): 3' 9"
Displacement (dry): 20,800 lbs.
Fuel capacity: 350 gals.
Power: Single 380-hp Cummins
Information: 425-508-7005
www.aspenpowercatamarans.com