

Sea Trial



Aspen Power Catamaran C90 Larry Graf Reinvents the Boat

It was a miserable day for a boat ride: The dark grey waters of Elliott Bay heaved and frothed intemperately, the wind rose as fast as the rain receded, and what is normally a playground for recreational boaters assumed an ominous and foreboding countenance. The moans and wails of cold winds screamed through shrouds as taut as the strings of a Steinway, singing a dull monotonous dirge of dread and danger. Owners of some of the largest and heaviest yachts in the harbor surveyed the maelstrom and canceled plans to leave the dock. Yes, it was surely a miserable day for a boat ride, but a fabulous day for a sea trial!

Larry Graf is properly considered one of the leading boat designers in the Pacific Northwest, and one could make a compelling case that he ranks among the most innovative on the planet. He has already achieved more success and acclaim than most people ever will, yet he is constantly returning to the drawing board to adjust, fine tune, redesign and refine his boats, never content to rest upon his laurels. “Almost perfect” has never been good enough for Larry, and power catamarans have advanced substantially due to his influence.

Larry has never been afraid to design outside the box. However, one day when

SPECIFICATIONS AND DIMENSIONS:

LOA: 28' 2"

Beam: 10'

Draft: 2'9"

Displacement: 7,900 lb

Fuel: 80 gallons

Water: 48 gallons



Viewed from directly abeam, the Aspen C90 appears to be a smartly styled, attractive sedan cruiser.

Larry was contemplating design improvements, upgrades and refinements, something rather unusual and remarkable (even by Larry Graf standards) occurred — he reinvented the boat. Larry founded a new company to develop and market his idea: Aspen Power Catamarans.

The 28-foot Aspen C90 Power Catamaran is radically different from what we traditionally understand a catamaran to be. Many catamaran designers really build a pair of matching mono-hulls, and join them together with a common deck. While the assumption may not be entirely and technically accurate, it's easy to develop the impression that either hull of a standard catamaran could operate as an independent entity. Power catamarans traditionally have

two engines, one for each “ama” or hull. Aspen Power Catamarans take a different approach.

As Larry Graf explained, “We’re technically building a modified power proa. The port and starboard hulls are entirely different. The starboard hull displaces 35 percent more than the port hull, and carries 35 percent more of the load. It’s a concept that might be easy to imagine by visualizing some of the ‘outrigger’ boats used by native islanders in the Pacific. We use only one engine, rather than the twins expected on a power catamaran. The inboard engine is on the starboard side. Running on one engine rather than two improves range and fuel economy substantially, and reduces maintenance costs as well. The bows of each hull



The helm is thoughtfully laid out, with a complete suite of electronics. (Photo courtesy of Aspen Power Catamarans)



The dinette will seat a small family, and converts to a double bunk. (Photo courtesy of Aspen Power Catamarans)

are curved just slightly like an airplane wing, only tipped up. This creates a directional lifting force to starboard and exactly balances the thrust to port that we naturally experience with a single engine on the starboard side."

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Larry gave us a tour of the boat before leaving the dock. We were very pleased with virtually everything we saw, and no less than astonished by a couple of bold and innovative ideas.

Viewed from directly abeam, the Aspen C90 appears to be a smartly

styled sedan cruiser, adroitly incorporating the usually successful formula of traditional hull and superstructure proportions

enhanced with some carefully applied contemporary styling cues. It's an attractive boat by almost any standard.

"The Aspen C90 Power Catamaran is radically different from what we traditionally understand a catamaran to be."

Larry Graf has taken a "green" approach to the construction and design of the C90. One of the first things he mentioned was the design's reduced use of materials: "By eliminating the second engine we reduce the boat's weight and subsequent structure weights, the overall affect throughout the boat significantly reduces the release of fumes and other pollutants during the construction process."



The fully-appointed galley is located on the port side of the main cabin. (Photo courtesy of Aspen Power Catamarans)



Drawers under the dinette stow more than would an open locker.



There's more than full-standing "head" room in the starboard hull.



The main stateroom features a bunk larger than king size. (Photo courtesy of Aspen Power Catamarans)

Larry directed our attention to the cabin top, much of which was covered by an array of solar panels. "There's no need for a generator on this boat," remarked Larry. "With a propane galley stove, inverter, and diesel heat, the solar panels will prove capable of recharging the batteries while at the dock or at anchor as fast or faster than the boat would draw the batteries down."

Combining the solar power and the "green" manufacturing process with the obvious energy savings and efficiency facilitated by a single-engine application, we would struggle to think of a more environmentally friendly power boat available anywhere else.

The cockpit is large enough for easy access to the main cabin. Some casual fishing would easily seem possible as well. There would be room for a couple of folding chairs and perhaps a small portable table on which to enjoy a sunset refreshment while swinging lazily at anchor in a secluded island cove. Three adult men stood in the cockpit and still enjoyed plenty of "elbow room," but boaters placing the highest possible priority on a huge cockpit would likely make a choice other than the Aspen Power Catamaran C90.

We discovered stowage absolutely everywhere in the cockpit area. Access to the 150-horsepower Cummins common-rail diesel engine is through a hatch on the starboard side. (A transom panel is easily moved to improve service access, and there is also a hatch in the main cabin ideally located for servicing the forward portion of the engine.) The propane locker is in the transom. The port hull — with no engine — is available to stow lines, fenders, folding crab pots, dinghy motors, barbecues and other essential but sometimes awkwardly-stowed deck items.

It was easy to notice the use of some unique windows in the superstructure. Two "cornering" windows, with nearly 90-degree angles, eliminate the traditional blind spots at the outer edges of the aft bulkhead. An angled, single-piece forward cabin window is installed without multiple mullions to needlessly block the view, and is serviced by two huge windshield wipers. "We import that windshield from a manufacturer in Ireland," said Larry. "Nobody makes anything like that in the US, but we find that it's both super strong and provides better visibility."

The main cabin is efficiently designed, providing enough room and amenities for extended cruising. Boaters who don't think they'd



The Cummins MerCruiser common-rail diesel engine is installed in the starboard hull.



The uniquely-shaped windshield is imported from Europe.



An array of solar panels on the cabin top eliminate the need for a generator.

be able to cruise comfortably in anything as compact as a 28-foot boat should take a look at an Aspen C-90! Access to a quarter berth is immediately inside the aft bulkhead door, to port. The quarter berth would comfortably sleep a single adult, or can be used for additional stowage by a cruising couple. The galley is also on the port side, immediately forward of the quarter berth access. A deep and functional sink with single lever faucet, a dual-voltage refrigerator freezer, and a propane cookstove will facilitate cooking tasty meals aboard.

A dinette that will easily seat four (maybe six with some kids in the mix) is in the aft starboard quarter of the main cabin. Stowage is available almost everywhere there is a form or a fixture, and a series of drawers (rather than a less efficient single locker) is built into the aft portion of the dinette. Of course the dinette will convert to a bunk for kids or overnight guests, sleeping a realistic two adults or perhaps three kids.

The helm is in the port forequarter of the main cabin. A port helm is slightly unusual, but certainly not unheard of, and in the Aspen C90 it is really the only logical location. The starboard forequarter of the main cabin allows access to the generously proportioned head and no less than enormous (at least king size) berth in the forward stateroom.

Fit? Finish? Furnishings? Fixtures? All appear to be first class on the Aspen C90.

UNDERWAY

The wind picked up as we rounded the end of the Elliott Bay Marina breakwater. It seemed almost as if some Greek god of the winds looked down and declared, "Aha! Here come some folks without the good

"As we throttled up and turned into the roiling mess we were almost immediately amazed."

sense to stay in port! What fun I'll have, tossing them around like a cork!" The churning waves were an anemic green, and we noted large chunks of semi-submerged drift tumbling in the surge.

"We'll need to be careful not to hit any of that," remarked Larry. "Although there is a sand shoe protecting the prop and we probably could motor right over the top without any damage, it isn't an experiment I look forward to conducting."

We noticed an inbound Washington State ferry near Duwamish Head, on the opposite side of Elliott Bay. "Let's run over and catch that ferry wake," suggested Larry. With the bay snotted up so badly, it seemed like an improbable idea. From the paradigm of a single-hull trawler boater, these were 7-knot conditions at best and likely to produce an aggravating amount of bow slamming. We wouldn't be surprised to see a standard catamaran run pretty well in those same

conditions, but as we throttled up and turned into the roiling mess we were almost immediately amazed.

We could imagine how Alice must have felt after falling down that rabbit hole and winding up in Wonderland. Nothing seemed to be as we expected — it was better! At 2,500 rpm we were logging 12 miles per hour, while burning less than three gallons of diesel per hour. The ride was more than acceptable, given the conditions. Larry said, "We're experiencing a slightly rougher ride than we need to. In most boats you slow down to improve the ride when the water is rough, but in this one you speed up instead."

As our speed climbed over 15, over 16 and approached 18 mph, the ride got progressively smoother! Larry demonstrated how adjusting the trim tabs ever so slightly improved the running attitude, but with or without tabs we were slicing through four footers — and worse — as if they were merely overachieving ripples. We kept a sharp eye out for drift, and it's a good thing we did. We encountered a number of half-submerged logs and branches on our sprint across Elliott Bay, and in every case the Aspen C90 responded quickly to the helm. It was like driving a seagoing sports car. At close to 20 mph, our fuel consumption was just over six gallons per hour. Top speed was about 23 mph, a pace that few boats would ever have considered attempting in those conditions but one which the Aspen C90 took with an easy stride. Fuel consumption



An optional aft station allows control from the cockpit when docking or fishing.

digm doesn't apply to catamarans in general and definitely not to the Aspen C90. The two hulls "stepped over" each wave, one after the other, and the amount of rolling proved to be a fraction of that which one could reasonably anticipate. There is a sense of balance that pervades every experience aboard the Aspen C-90.

Motoring back to the marina, we realized that we had the opposite problem than typically faced by most boating writers after a sea trial. "You know Larry, these sea trials so often turn out to be conducted in almost dead flat water, and we have to sort of speculate how a boat will handle when conditions go south. Will we be safe to assure our readers that this boat will handle as well on a calm day, when sane people actually venture out, as it does in these miserable seas?"

Larry laughed, "Yes, you will be absolutely safe in doing so."

Coming from a boat builder and

designer as renown as Larry Graf, it's easy to find that assurance completely believable. How could anybody doubt the opinion of a man who has successfully re-invented the boat?

CONCLUSIONS

Anyone looking for a sturdy cruising boat around 28-feet (and a fair number of people who think they actually need something bigger) should take a close look at the Aspen Power Catamaran C90. This "green" boat delivers fabulous fuel economy (less than two gallons per hour at traditional trawler speeds) and can tackle some seriously grumpy conditions in comfort and style.

The retail price of a new, well-equipped Aspen C90 is about \$180,000 — a bargain that seems almost as impressive as the build and performance of the boat itself. For additional information, please contact Aspen Power Catamarans at 360-608-4347 or visit the web site www.aspenpowercatamarans.com. ■

was about 8.5 gallons per hour at wide open throttle.

We had no trouble closing in to the minimum permissible distance from the ferry, but despite our best efforts we never really identified the ferry wake. No matter, there was enough drama in the general sea state that a ferry wake would have more likely flattened things out just a bit.

The Greek god of the winds was frustrated, no doubt, by our sporty little craft's ability to handle everything he could dish out that morning. We motored around the bay, taking the waves at a variety of angles. We had to rate every possible position in the waves somewhere between extremely good and superb. Even in these near ridiculous conditions, it was possible to run the boat without any hands on the wheel; the asymmetrical and dissimilar hulls, in combination, track absolutely straight at any speed.

We shifted into neutral and sat beam to the waves in the middle of the bay. A glance out the port window at the approaching walls of water inspired us to anticipate being heeled over rather severely by the beam seas. Once again, the monohull para-



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