

Crossing to the Dark Side



Owner Ken French, comments on "Crossing to the Dark Side" after being a keen mono sailor all his life, and also recounts his experiences with buying an ex-charter Lightwave 38' Sailing Catamaran...

I think a lot of our family, friends and sailing mates were shocked when we told them we were going to buy a cat.

My partner, Megan, and I had been confirmed keelboat sailors all our lives but a move to Queensland and a charter on a Seawind 1000 in Moreton Bay made us realize that the lift keel 56ft monohull that we were planning to have built was still going to be a liability in the very shallow waters of our home base.

The decision is made

We had many experiences running aground in Queensland many years ago returning our 50ft Ocean racer from Osaka to Sydney. With a draft of over 10ft there weren't too many places on the Queensland coast that we had not touched the bottom.

After neatly popping our charter cat on the mud at Canaipa on our first night out (we know boats) and my partner saying to me in the morning how still it was (it was definitely still as we were well and truly hard aground) our minds were made up.

After floating free without a drama we started the serious looking and after a few false starts had our offer accepted on a 5 year old Lightwave 38 on the Gold Coast that was in survey and had been a Charter yacht in the Whitsundays for a good proportion of its life.

Charterboat to Private Yacht

After taking delivery of the boat at the Gold Coast City Marina where the Lightwave factory is located we then started the task of turning a charter workhorse into an ocean going yacht with the long range capability that we intended for it. There was work to be done but surprisingly the boat showed negligible lack of wear for having been in a Charter fleet and came with a surprising list of extras not included in a basic production yacht.

The most pleasing aspect of the boat was the interior. The glass work showed absolutely no wear and tear from being in the charter market and the items that did need attention were probably from a lack of maintenance from the previous owner rather than from hard work in the charter fleet.

And so to work

Our plan was to take the boat on an extended shakedown cruise to Melbourne and back over Christmas and the weeks were counting down. From a fairly sparsely equipped boat cruising around the Whitsundays to a boat capable of punching its way around Bass Strait there was a list of tasks to complete before we would be happy to go to sea.

After many years ocean racing we have a healthy respect for the sea and we don't leave anything to chance. By choice we prefer ocean passages with just the two of us so the boat had to be able to be handled by a couple.

Autopilot



Our first addition was an autopilot. We have had Coursemaster autopilots in our previous boats so that is what we chose. With a hydraulic ram connected to the tiller arm the installation was fairly straightforward but time consuming with the usual custom modifications to attend to. The detail provided by Coursemaster for the installation was excellent and the wiring diagram was very straightforward. However retrofitting any piece of equipment at a later stage is far more time consuming than doing it at the build stage. If you are contemplating a new build always try to have the extras done at the start, however tempting it is to economise. If you have to add them later it will cost you a lot more than having them factory fitted.

The Chartplotter

The next addition was the godsend to sailors - the Chartplotter. We chose the Navman with the big screen and what a gem it has been. Easy to install, the only real problem was the custom arm to make it swivel to the helm station and get it in behind the flatscreen TV when it is put to bed. With some lovely work from the stainless guys at Royal Queensland Yacht Squadron, where we are berthed, we solved quite a complex problem.



Liferaft Location

Next on the list was the liferaft. Various positions for stowage of this critical item were discussed but the final solution we believe to be the best and the safest. We have mounted the liferaft vertically on the stern next to the dinghy. The reason for this is twofold. We did not want it on the foredeck which was the other choice for two reasons. 1. We thought it would be more vulnerable to a wave over the bow and 2. In the unlikely event of a capsize the liferaft would then be under water and virtually impossible to get at. From the photos you will also notice that the liferaft is only lashed on with a knife permanently in a sheath next to the raft to cut it free. I resisted the temptation to have mechanical fastenings as they might not be able to

be opened at the critical time. You never have to abandon ship in a nice 5-10 knot breeze with the sun shining.

The shopping List

The next items were a general upgrade of our safety equipment.

1. 406 Epirb
2. New lifering and M.O.B Light.
3. Flares upgrade to Ocean Racing Standards
4. Extensive toolkit and spares list.
5. Handheld VHF
6. Backup handheld VHF
7. Inflatable lifejackets with built in harness attachments
8. New Bulkhead Compass

Survival Gear

We also decided to add a drogue and parachute anchor from Alby McCracken at Para Anchors Australia. These were an expensive item but I believe a necessary safety item for a modern catamaran especially in Southern Latitudes and offshore.

Inverter

The list kept going. We added a Xantrex Inverter primarily to power the computer and I have to say a very worthwhile addition as we were using our laptop constantly to monitor the weather situation and keep up with business, our other 240 volt needs being at a minimum.

The Loo

And finally to everyone's favorite topic > The toilet. After seeing the Dubois Superyacht "Kokomo" in Sydney once my daughters have a benchmark by which they believe every other yacht fitting or modification should be based. The toilet fits well and truly into this category. Can't we just have a toilet like home? Why can't we just flush it like home? Our toilet at home doesn't smell like that. I bet they have nice toilets on Kokomo.

After dealing with a very smelly holding tank we decided to bite the bullet and install a treatment plant. We chose a "Saniloo" as this is fully approved for Queensland waters. It was time consuming and expensive to install but means we will be fully compliant with the added advantage that the waste going into the holding tank is treated. We were advised to increase the diameter of the holding tank vent pipe to 40mm and this seems to have done the trick.

The fun stuff

Our last additions were purely cosmetic. We reupholstered the cockpit cushions and had a new boom cover made. Instant colour and it was starting to look like a new boat. It took 6 weeks of hard work to get the boat back up to scratch but it was well worth the effort. On any secondhand boat there is always work to do and equipment to upgrade. We got a good deal when we purchased the boat and we now have a boat with a substantial amount of the electronics being the latest available and brand new. We had previously put in an offer on another cat which was better equipped but some of the equipment was not really suitable for the size boat that it was.

Electronics don't last forever so we are pleased that we now have a brand new set of electronics to last us into the future.

By the time we left on our first maiden voyage down to Melbourne we both felt confident of the boat and its systems even though we hadn't had much time to actually go sailing in her, but we had been over every inch of the boat and were confident that she was ready to put to sea.

A tip for new owners.

Even though Megan and myself have had many previous yachts and many years experience, the sheer bulk of a Catamaran can be daunting at first. One of the first things we did when we got the boat back to Manly was to spend a full morning going in and out of our marina berth to get used to handling the boat in confined spaces. Once you have a system worked out and know how to use them, the twin motors make life easy. By the time we got to Sydney we were able to park it in "the pond" at the Cruising Yacht Club in front of a packed bar and look like we had done it forever. Scepticism turned to admiring glances as Megan neatly stepped off the stern, tied off the stern line and casually walked to the bow as it neatly came into the pontoon and took the bow line. The practice had more than paid off.

Conclusion

So are we converted? You betcha. After 2 months on board we love the boat and it has more than lived up to our expectations. The layout and execution of the boat is hard to fault with the helm station and visibility being fantastic. We look forward to the Lightwave regatta and meeting other Lightwave owners and to the many places we want to visit in our Lightwave.