

The perfect cruising boat does not exist

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Without a boat you cannot cruise, one can say. All future cruisers struggle with one big dilemma: how do you pick the right boat without the years of cruising experience that you'd like to have to make the right choice? For every aspiring cruiser the big question is: which boat fits with my plans and needs? How do I pick the most optimal boat? We look at some key factors and ask 15 very experienced cruisers about their boat.

Research

In Zeilen 5-2018 and Zeilen 5-2019 you can find articles about boat gear and about safety; both based on extensive research among experienced cruisers. Every time we undertook such research, we also asked the participants about their boat. This gives a relatively clear picture: the 89 participants were underway for an average of three years, with in general a couple as core crew. Monohulls are the vast majority with 90% of participants. Almost 75% of boats is over 40 feet and more than half is 15 years or older. GRP is most popular, but steel is a good second if we look at the construction of the hull.

In the past years we have looked around many anchorages and we see these figures confirmed all the time. In each region we see differences though: in the tropics catamarans are popular, while we hardly saw them in high latitudes.

Every advantage has a disadvantage

Selecting a cruising boat that fits with your plans is more than ticking a list of options. It is the boat you fall for and which makes you feel really good. But still: it is wise to keep both feet on the ground and look at some key aspects. Let's look at a few, focusing on the basics: hull, construction material, keel and rig. The choices when it comes to layout and equipment we ignore for now.

Cruising area

Are you going to high latitudes and cold coasts, then shelter is crucial. A centre cockpit with a hard dodger and an easy to handle rig fit that picture. Another aspect is the strength of the hull: what happens when you hit something hard? In a lot of those areas the charts are far from accurate. When you take that same boat to the tropics, she'll be very warm inside. If you aim for the tropics, a catamaran or a monohull with aft cockpit is much more practical.

Budget

Buying a boat and maintaining it during the inevitable wear and tear of a circumnavigation, is in the end always about money. Can you afford a young boat with good equipment for a long

voyage? Or do you go for a project that you can fix up according to your plans and budget? How much money do you have available for maintenance underway? A more expensive boat whose teakdecks get destroyed in the scorching tropical sun, is faced with unexpected high costs. The length of the boat has a direct relation to cost too: the bigger the boat, the faster the costs rise: insurance, rigging, sails, harbour fees to name a few.

Knowledge and experience of the crew

How much experience do you have with ocean sailing? When you have only a little experience, it is important to pick a forgiving boat. You may not be sailing very fast, but it is in control to learn. Just as an important question is how handy you are with maintenance and repairs. A complex yacht with a lot of equipment demands a lot more knowledge or a fatter wallet to keep it going.

Number of crew

This is simply a consideration with regards to the space everybody needs and the amount of stuff per person. A family with small children or a family with a teenagers will reply different to that question. A solo sailor will prefer to look at other aspects than space: easy of manoeuvring and docking the boat may be a factor.

Ambition

Where do you want to go? What do you plan to do there? Visiting beautiful anchoring spots in front of tropical beaches or sailing around all the great capes of the world? Sailing as fast as possible or pottering around? The answer to these questions imply the strain on the boat and the hull, draft, construction material and rig that fits best.

Full time or part time

More and more cruisers visit their homeland for longer periods of time and often have a house there. The equipment and load on the boat is different compared to people who cruise year round and for whom the boat is their house. The full-timers often load the boat more and will need the space to do that and the boat that can handle that load. With catamarans or lightweight cruiser/racers this can be an issue.

All together there are a lot of variables. How much weight you attach to each variable, is a very personal choice. If we only focus on hull, construction material, rig and shape of the keel the replies of experienced cruisers vary widely. One couple sails around the world in a large composite ocean racer and the other couple has just as much fun in a small steel long keeled boat. In every anchorage you see a wide range of boats who all have covered thousands of miles. We asked 15 very experienced cruisers what the best cruising boat is. Without exception they said: "Mine!" We asked them for the most important plusses of their boat. And about the inevitable compromises. It gives a very broad picture of cruising boats. Fact is that they all have a marvellous voyage.

“Enough is enough: at one point you just have to start and leave. The perfect prepared boat doesn’t exist.” (Anna Caroline)

“We bought a new boat, because we don’t want to sail around in another persons misery.” (A Capella)

“Choose a 40-50 foot, functional, technically simple, strong but not heavy, fast sailing yacht.” (Red Max)



“With a catamaran you use a totally different storm tactic than a monohull”

Impi

Lagoon catamaran (GRP) 2009. 45 feet/1,3 meter draft. 12,5 tonnes. 2 crew, every now and then guests.

Plusses:

- Cruising catamaran that can carry a lot of weight and still maintain speed
- Lots of safety features: elevated steering position, suspended middle hull, large high Cockpit, short spreaders, sails well upwind
- Larger dinghy, so bigger range from the boat
- Large tanks, watermaker, washing machine: independent during longer periods of time
- Worldwide network of dealers, so easy to get spare parts
- A lot of space

Compromises:

- Elevated steering position doesn’t offer shelter against sun, rain, spray
- Catamaran is expensive to park in a marina



“It pays to invest in a good anchor”

Bella Ciao

Composite bridge deck catamaran (design and build: Du Bois, 2009), 46 feet, 0,8/2,8 meter draft, 8 tonnes. 2 crew

Plusses:

- Easy to repair and maintain
- Can dry out easy
- Fast and comfortable, even with very little wind
- Sails well upwind, but with winds aft of the beam Bella Ciao is especially very comfortable
- From the cockpit you have a free view all around
- As a cruiser you are more at anchor than that your sail: a catamaran is ideal for this
- A lot of space inside, very handy, also when we have guests

Compromises:

- Relatively expensive in marinas. But with a good anchor you don't miss that



“What you don't have, can't break”

Anna Caroline

Steel Bruce Roberts, 1989, 44 feet, 2,1 meter draft. Semi-long keel, cutter rig, 14 tonnes. 2 crew

Plusses:

- Steel is strong, easy to maintain and to repair
- Semi-long keel makes for comfortable cruising
- Cutter rig is very versatile, with every wind angle and wind speed we have a lot of options

- Hard dodger is very comfortable when sailing in high latitudes
- Small centre cockpit near the centre of least motion of the boat: safe and dry
- Relatively cheap to buy, so a lot of budget for extras

Compromises:

- Higher displacement, so you motorsail more than lighter boats
- Going backwards with a long keel is a challenge
- Draft of 2,1 meter is only just not a hindrance



“Our boat is large enough to be able to live comfortably and small enough to sail with the two of us”

Acapella

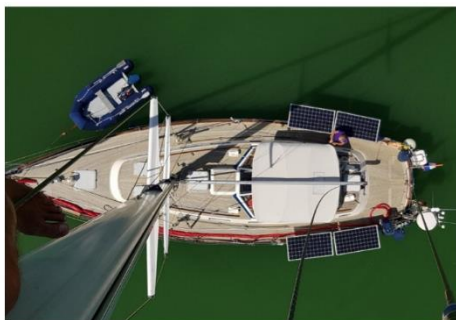
Bavaria Cruiser (GRP) from 2006, 46 feet, 2,25 meter draft. Fin keel, 12 tonnes. 2 crew.

Plusses:

- GRP is easy to maintain and relatively strong
- Furling mainsail and electric controls of the headsail
- With a Bavaria you get a lot of boat for your money
- We bought her new and fitted her out to our specs. We know this boat through and through

Compromises:

- Bavaria, (had) a bad name/reputation
- A deep keel gives stability at sea, but limits your cruising area



“Our boat is a strong and comfortable ship, also in big seas and therefore very suitable for cruising the world”

Bounty

Hallberg Rassy (GRP) from 1996, 46 feet, 1,95 meter draft. Fin keel, cutter rig, 18,5 tonnes. 2 crew, occasionally guests.

Plusses:

- Stable, heavy and sturdy: because of her length and weight comfortable to sail
- Furling mainsail and furling headsail on electric winches: everything is controlled from the cockpit for extra security
- Large water tank (1000 litres) plus watermaker
- Because of a large diesel tank (860 litres) a large range in light winds
- Centre cockpit: in heavy weather a safe spot to steer and control the boat
- Double autopilot directly on the rudder quadrant, so there is always a back up

Compromises:

- GRP demands a lot of maintenance, especially in the tropics
- Teakdeck: we need to replace it after 23 years: high costs, but beautiful looks
- High cost of purchase, but this boat gives us a safe and secure feeling. Lower cost of maintenance because a lot of equipment is over dimensioned and thus gets less wear and tear
- High cost of insurance because of high value



“Functionality = comfort and safety”

Red Max

Ocean Cruiser, design Simonis/Voogd (composite) from 1999, 63 feet with retractable bulb keel. 1,70/3,60 meter draft. Cutter rig, 19 tonnes. Double rudders. 2 crew, regularly guests on board for passages

Plusses:

- Composite epoxy 40mm foam sandwich construction: very strong, stiff and light, good insulation and free of corrosion
- Very spacious and functional cockpit where all lines come together. A lot of outside space and extra space inside
- A large bimini with six flexible solar panels
- Double rudders are ideal for stability at sea and safety
- Because of the speed potential of our boat we can sail around fronts and we save weight because we don't need to carry a lot of fuel and water
- The cutter rig with the furling headsails and an easy to reef fully battened mainsail give a lot of options. Besides that it is safer when a forestay breaks

Compromises:

- Expensive to build, higher cost of parking or haulout
- With the double rudders it is harder to park the boat because they are out of the propwash



“We cannot imagine a more suitable yacht to cruise the world and haven’t come across one either”

Kind of Blue

Van der Stadt Madeira (aluminium) from 1998, 44 feet, 2 meter draft. Finkeel, kutter rig, 15 tonnes. 2 crew

Plusses:

- Beautiful, very sturdy and reliable boat with a lot of room and comfort
- Very safe in bad weather because of the shelter of the hard dodger
- Fairly quick in winds aft of the beam
- Lots of storage space
- Easy to handle or to park with two crew
- Can handle some impact

Compromises:

- Not a fast upwind sailor
- High purchase price and therefore expensive to insure



“A boat that looks very easy is often very complicated”

Ultimo

Amel (GRP) from 2010, 54 feet, 2,1 meter draft. Long finkeel with integrated propeller. Ketch, 17,5 tonnes. 2 crew, sometimes guests

Plusses:

- The Amel is designed for world cruises: all necessary equipment has been integrated in the design
- The comfort of a home
- Large tank capacity
- Ketch: the lateral point is lower, you can have more sail up in stronger winds
- Centre cockpit: safe and dry
- Watertight bulkheads and doors: safe in case of collision

Compromises:

- When motoring backwards, in some angles there is less visibility
- Larger boat means higher costs for maintenance, replacement of parts and insurance
- Lots of comfort means a higher use of energy

“When you sail a boat as a couple it is vital to organize everything in such a way that you can sail the boat alone. You both get more rest. Besides that: if one of you can do nothing for whatever reason you will not be in danger because you can sail the boat alone”

**Morgane**

Charpentier Trireme (steel) from 1984. 35 feet, 2 meter draft. Low aspect fin keel, sloop rig. 10 tonnes. 2 crew and a toddler.

Plusses:

- She was for sale where we were at that moment: we avoided travel costs and had more money to spare for improvements
- Steel is easy and you can repair it everywhere without very specialized tools which you can bring with you
- The design of our boat is aimed at speed
- She is remarkably spacious for a 35-footer
- Small enough to make spare parts affordable
- Good insulation: works in cold and warm areas
- Hard dodger
- Simple systems: helm, windvane et cetera

Compromises:

- An old boat which requires regular maintenance
- Relatively small engine (28 hp) but large range because of 500 litre tank capacity
- No fridge
- Sails with hanks
- 2 meters draft is the maximum for a cruising boat



“No ocean is too big for Jonas”

Jonas

Frans Maas (GRP) from 1981, 43 feet, 1,5 meter draft. Long keel, ketch. 13 tonnes. 2 crew

Plusses:

- With a ketch you have a lot of options for sail configurations in all sorts of weather
- With the long keel and 13 tonnes weight Jonas is very stable in a rough sea

The deep centre cockpit under a hard dodger gives lots of protection in bad weather

Compromises:

- Because of the shape of the hull and the weight Jonas is not able to point very well into the wind. For trade winds tracks this is not a problem



“Never try to fix something yourself if there is nobody around who is more competent than yourself”

Zingaro

Ovni (aluminium) from 1994, 36 feet. Draft 2,05/0,55 meter because of lifting keel. Cutter rig, 5,6 tonnes. 2 crew

Plusses:

- Aluminium hull: strong, light and simple in maintenance
- Lifting keel: easy to get closer to a coast, lots of options to dry the boat out
- Cutter rig: very versatile, especially in bad weather
- Well built ship, easy to maintain, even in remote areas

Compromises:

- Not great in upwind conditions because of the liftkeel
- Open cockpit: in higher latitudes you need a different dodger
- No insulation of the hull and insufficient heating
- Expensive, but maintains value



“You can only cruise with a lot of good tools, technical knowledge and skill and for all important parts a spare, because this is a yacht with a lot of complex equipment”

Blue Roger

Aluminium Trintella from 1993, 49 feet, 2,20 meter draft. Fin keel, sloop rig. 17 tonnes. 2 crew, every now and then guests.

Plusses:

- Two cockpits: a ‘social cockpit’ under the hard dodger, where you are very protected. There is a ‘sailing cockpit’ further back
- Hydraulic winches, furling systems and anchor winch
- Everything is lead back to the cockpits, so we hardly ever have to go forward on deck
- A great and fast sailboat
- Separate gas- and oiltight engine room
- Galley with two fridges and a freezer
- Cooking on induction: no more gas bottles on the boat
- Very dry boat; during our circumnavigation we only once had a wave in the aft cockpit
- Aluminium is strong and easy to maintain. You have to be keen to spot corrosion though

Compromises:

- No solar panels, only a generator
- Sometimes it is not handy to step from one cockpit in the other
- When there is ice on the water, aluminium can dent
- We have central heating, but no air-conditioning



“In the end leaving and arriving are the two best things; passages shouldn’t take too long”

Xirene

X-482 (GRP) from 2005, 48 feet, 2,6 meter draft. Vinkeel, sloop rig. 15 tonnes. The owner sails yearly in 2-months legs with different teams.

Plusses:

- Very fast, from 6 knots of wind speed we don't need the engine. Daily averages of 180-200 miles, so we have a large range
- Sporty and comfortable
- It pays to actively trim the boat
- Thanks to two furling headsails and several light wind sails we have a lot of options

Compromises:

- Because of the deeper draft not all harbours or anchorages are feasible
- The large wheel makes the passage from the cockpit to the aft deck less easy
- When it starts blowing we need to reef earlier



"Small boat, small problems"

L'Envol

Django 770 (GRP) from 2013. 25 feet, 1,2 meter draft. Bilge keel. Sloop rig, 3 tonnes. 2 crew.

Plusses:

- New boat allowed a quick departure and in six years of travels repairs have been minimal
- Everything needing to be replaced costs less on a smaller boat
- Small and light makes it possible to sail with little wind, an outboard motor is there for security, but it seldom touches water
- Overall length is the same as waterline, this together with a 3 metre beam give plenty of living space
- Two keels are great to have in areas with big tide ranges. Cleaning the hull is much easier when the boat can be beached
- The shallow draft expands the exploration possibilities and allows anchoring in more sheltered spots

Compromises:

- Not as sea kindly on the open ocean as a bigger boat
- No shower, toilet, fridge, heating, table and oven to keep the boat light
- For her size she was an expensive boat to buy, cut the travel budget short



“Anastasia was the perfect boat for us and our sailing plans. But our plans have changed (Antarctica and NW Passage), so we have decided to put her up for sale here in French Polynesia”

Anastasia

RM1050 (multiplex epoxy kevlar) from 2001, 35 feet, 1,65 meter draft. Bilge keel, cutter rig.
4,7 tonnes. 2 crew.

Plusses:

- Light, stiff, strong and fast
- Large volume (4 meter wide), very autonomous
- Easy to handle with a small crew
- Shallow draft, so more access to good anchoring spots

Compromises:

- Open plan interior: less privacy
- Not suitable for sailing in the ice (areas with glaciers, Antarctica and NW Passage)