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Best bilge keel yachts and twin keel yachts for drying out ashore

 **Peter Poland**
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Peter Poland reveals how bilge keel yachts and twin-keel designs won his respect – those that could sail well and stand on their own two feet...



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French bilge keel yachts

In the past there were economical marina moorings aplenty available in France, so twin keels did not feature high on the French agenda. But now things are changing. The cost of a marina berth in France is still reasonable compared to the UK: but only if you can find one.

The French Nautical Federation reckons there is now a shortage of around 50,000 marina berths. As a result, twin keels (or bi-quilles as they're called over there) began to appear in greater numbers.

Now, with the exception of the traditional and long running Biloup Range, French twin keels are expanding the design envelope. Archambault, the builders of the Surprise range, decided that their hugely successful One Design (7.65m) cruiser-racer would have an increased market if they also offered a two-legged version.

Designer Michel Joubert went for deep (1m) twin keels with narrow chord foils and race boat bulbs on their bases. The roots are well inboard and the performance is said to be exceptional.

RM-Fora Marine specialises in multi chine plywood-epoxy hulled cruisers, invariably with twin keels. The latest models, from the pen of leading French designer Marc Lombard, are anything but conventional.



A new RM890 ready to hit the road. The twin keels draw 1.5m. Photo: RM Yachts

Draught is generous (for example the twin keel RM890 draws 1.5m) with keels that are as fine as you'll find on a top-level racer. And the bulbs on their bases are just as sophisticated.

These RMs are exciting and versatile boats, although I wonder whether their futuristic looks and multi chine wooden hull construction will find favour with many British buyers. I hope so, because the combination of a plywood-epoxy hull with a GRP deck offers excellent insulation and a substantial strength to weight ratio.

The Django 7.70 designed by Pierre Roland and built by Marée Haute in France has also proved to be a speedy twin keel 25-footer capable of crossing many oceans. Christophe Mora and Carina Juhhova are currently in South Africa after sailing *L'Envol* across the Pacific and Indian oceans. Their progress reports on intothewind.fr are fascinating.



Django 7.70 *L'Envol* has a scrub in Brazil on her round the world cruise. An aft strut supports the stern. Photo: Christophe Mora

So far Django 7.70 *L'Envol* has crossed the Atlantic, cruised down the East coast of South America to Patagonia, [across the Pacific](#) and sailed the Australian coastline before moving on to South Africa.

The Django range comprises the 6.70 (lifting keel only), the 7.70 (fin or twin keel), 9.80 (fin or twin keel) and 12.70 (fin or lifting keel). The twin keel Django 7.70 that I tested was a total delight.

The future of bilge keel yachts?

So what lies ahead? With only a handful of French yards offering new twin keel boats, there is a dearth of choice in the new boat market. Of course, sailors can always buy second-hand while they await new arrivals. But be sure to get those keel roots surveyed and check rudder and keel bases for grounding damage.

I can't help thinking that as designers come up with ever improved twin keel designs, something will soon have to give. As British marina costs move beyond the means of many boat owners and French marinas reach maximum capacity, maybe there's a new twin keel dawn just over the horizon?

Exciting new twin keel designs might even persuade production boat builders to market new [boats under 30ft](#) again? Some may even sprout foils and try to fly!