

2018 BOAT of the YEAR

A Most Unusual Year

From a truly eclectic fleet of 22 cruising boats ranging in size from 18 to 74 feet, the 2017 Boat of the Year contest produced a roster of eight winners in dedicated size- and purpose-related categories. At the top of the list was a surprising, rangy, all-oceans aluminum yacht from France, the Boreal 47, *Cruising World's* 2018 Boat of the Year.

Story by Herb McCormick, Photos by Jon Whittle

There were big boats (the Oyster 745) and small boats (the Malbec 18) and everything in between. Now in its 23rd year of competition, this latest edition of our annual Boat of the Year contest had a little something for everyone. It was also a year that defied easy categorization. In fact, in the entire history of the event, it may well have been our most eclectic fleet ever.

Continuing a trend that has been on the rise in recent years, the lion's share of entries were from overseas, with boats from China, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain and even Slovenia among the nominees. And there was a handful of U.S. entrants as well, including the aforementioned Malbec, a pocket monohull, and a pair of catamarans, the Maine Cat 38 and the Stiletto Xc.

Overall, however, there were fewer cats in the 2018 field, just a year after half of the overall entry list sported two hulls. But what they lacked in quantity was offset by the quality of the nominees, which included two otherworldly cats from China, the Morrelli & Melvin-designed HH 55 and HH 66; the wholesome Fountaine Pajot Saona 47; and

the two U.S. boats previously noted.

The big production builders were aptly represented. Jeanneau led the pack with two offerings: a 51-footer that was an extension of its line and the truly innovative Sun Odyssey 440, with a deck layout that just may be revolutionary. Beneteau's Oceanis 51 was a natural rival to the bigger Jeanneau, as was yet a third boat built in France, the Dufour 520. A slightly larger entrant came from Germany: the impressive Hanse 588.

There were lots of dedicated cruising boats, particularly in the midsize range. These included the rugged Hallberg-Rassy 412, from the Swedish builder that consistently enters a leading contender. The Elan GT5, from the Slovenian builder that's making continuous strides in the U.S. marketplace, also scored high marks from the independent judging team. So too did a pair of metal boats from France, the Allures 45.9 and the Boreal 47, both of which drew big crowds at the U.S. Sailboat Show in Annapolis, Maryland, where they made their debuts.

The full-size class was particularly stacked, and represented the most competitive division in the entire field. Along with the Hanse already mentioned, the roster included the Discovery 58 and the Southerly 540, both from England; the Moody 54 DS, now built in Germany under the Hanse umbrella; and the Swan 54, from the highly regarded Finnish yard.

As always, the judging consisted of separate dockside inspections and sea trials, and took place during and after the U.S. Sailboat Show last fall. Over the next 14 pages, we'll delve deep into the individual classes, announce the winners and list what separated them from their competition. Then, on pages 84 and 85, you'll find specs and stats on the entire fleet, contact information for the respective manufacturers, judges' credentials and more.

Like every Boat of the Year competition, the 2018 edition took on a life of its own. And while the fleet defied easy characterizations, when all was said and done, a worthy group of winners emerged that represented a diverse collection of well-found cruising boats. Flip the pages to check them out.

CIRCLE OF WINNERS

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This year's winning fleet of sailboats includes (clockwise from top left) the Boreal 47, Bavaria 34, Dufour 520, HH 55, Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 440, Oyster 745, Southerly 540 and Elan GT5.



Full Metal



A tightly knit division of three yachts, including a pair of aluminum boats from France (the *Allures 45.9* and the *Boreal 47*) and a center-cockpit design from the United Kingdom (the *Gunfleet 43*), the **Best Midsize Cruiser 44 to 47 Feet** class not only delivered a worthy category winner, it also produced the top overall boat for 2018.

Launched in 2012 by Richard Matthews, formerly the head of Oyster Yachts, and named for a set of shoals near Norfolk

in the United Kingdom, the Gunfleet yard exemplifies the highest standards of British boatbuilding. Designed by Tony Castro, the *Gunfleet 43* (which actually measures in at 44 feet 1 inch) sports twin rudders and was, in the words of judge Bill Bolin, “interesting and impressive.”

“It was one of the first boats we tested that was Intracoastal friendly, with an air draft (mast height) that would permit you to go up and down the ICW, which is what an awful lot of cruisers want to do,” he said.

Technical judge Ed Sherman elaborated on the boat. “They did a lot in 43 feet,” he said. “Systems-wise, they did a fine job of executing most things at a level of expected British quality, which is fairly high. I rate the wiring and systems as



The French-built *Allures 45.9* sports a solent rig and dual rudders (left). Also constructed in France, the *Boreal 47* proved to be an outstanding performer in windy sea trials (above). With its centerboard, it also can be tucked into the shallows to dry out on its own bottom. The British-built *Gunfleet 43* was designed by Tony Castro and includes a set of twin rudders among other interesting features (right).

quite good. They were a little bit innovative with a CZone digital switching and monitoring network. The design brief was for maximum comfort for a couple, and I can certainly see a couple being able to run this boat without any extra bodies aboard. It’s got a retractable side-power bow thruster, which seems to be a trend. There’s not only the advantage of presenting a little better hydrodynamic shape and form up front on the boat, you actually get a bow thruster

that will be quite effective.”

Regarding the *Allures 45.9*, which features a solent rig, twin rudders and a centerboard, Bolin said, “It’s an aluminum-hull boat with a fiberglass deck, so there’s a little bit of a hybrid there. I think the boat was well-done. Once the aluminum was in, they sprayed it with cork for sound insulation and added neoprene between the stringers. During our sea trials I went down below, expecting to hear the bow wave, but

there was very little, if any, noise down there. It was just very quiet, which kind of surprised me.

“One of the clever features I hadn’t seen before was the dedicated outboard-engine storage locker,” he added. “It had a big, heavy engine that you store vertically, with a stern transom door that opened up to allow you to get that in and out pretty easily. I thought that was very nice. So were the line bins, where all the sheets and halyards — all the clutter from the deck and the winches — disappeared below the cockpit sole or into the coamings. They also had probably the nicest anchoring system I saw, with a self-launching Rocna anchor.”

“This was an interesting boat in that it had a mixture of elements that I don’t think we’ve seen blended together before,” said the third BOTY judge, Tim Murphy. “It’s sort of a hybrid between a general cruising boat with an interior like a Jeanneau or Beneteau and an expedition boat. And the centerboard gives you windward performance in the ocean but also shallow draft.”

That left the *Boreal 47*, yet another aluminum French offering with a centerboard. Test-sailing the cutter-rigged

boat, with its self-tending staysail, in nearly 30 knots of breeze was nothing short of a revelation. “The boat lit right up and you got the immediate impression that you were on an ocean-going yacht and you were going to be OK,” said Sherman. “It was just as tight and noise-free as could be.”

“The *Boreal* was an outstanding boat in every way,” said Bolin. “The shape, manner, looks, build quality, sailing performance — it was very well-thought-out and executed. We tested an awful lot of boats that were going to be great tied up at the dock with a cocktail party going on. This boat is going to be great offshore and going sailing.”

With the centerboard, it was also a versatile boat that can tuck into the shallows and rest and dry out on its own bottom. “You don’t have to put any poles out or anything to hold the boat upright. She’s designed to sit on her own bottom as the water comes out from under you,” said Murphy. “And then if for some reason you come down on a hard spot and the boat rolls, the first chine is at the right angle for the boat to settle at that angle and then she’ll float back. It’s a really interesting feature.

“The *Boreal* answers a mission that I think is really an important one,” he continued. “It’s a very tricky thing having a boat that has to be good in the deep ocean and is stable, safe, performs well and gives you the miles you want in a sea-kindly way that keeps you rested and going and happy. At the same time, when you get to where you’re going, it’s designed to go into shallow water, where it also thrives. I think the fundamental mission is a very, very good one for our readership, and I think this boat satisfies it very well.”

Murphy’s fellow judges concurred, and when the deliberations were over, they named the *Boreal 47* not only the **Best Midsize Cruiser 44 to 47 Feet** but also *Cruising World’s* 2018 Boat of the Year.



Big Little Boat



Talk about three different vessels. The **Best Pocket Cruiser** class for 2018 was a study in diversity. It included the smallest boat in this year's contest, the tidy **Malbec 18**. It was home to a blisteringly fast catamaran with accommodations for happy weekend forays, the **Stiletto Xc**. And it even contained a more traditional German-built cruising boat, the **Bavaria Cruiser 34**.

"The **Malbec 18** is interesting," said Tim Murphy. "It's an 18-foot, light displacement (1,500 pounds) boat with sleeping accommodations inside it. It's based on a model that was created in 1966 called the West Wight Potter, and there were about 4,000 of those built. The builder set himself a goal of bringing a boat to market that you could sleep and cook on at around the \$20,000 mark. We've seen lots of builders in the past who have entry-level ideas, and it sounds like a great idea until it turns out their entry-level boat costs more than my house. So I think that's a strong point. To see something priced more like

a car than a home was a very good thing."

Ed Sherman agreed. "I say hats off to the builder because I think the idea of getting a boat to market at that price point is something our industry as a whole is lacking," he said. "They've created a small boat that a couple could enjoy in relatively sheltered water. In a nice, steady 10-knot breeze you could really have a blast sailing it. So,

THIS CLASS INCLUDED A TIDY DAY-SAILER, A BLISTERING CAT AND A TRADITIONAL MONOHULL.

to sum up, it's an intriguing little boat that's priced for newbie sailors that just want to begin experimenting with sailing, maybe sleeping out on a mooring, or exploring little islands off the coast."

Like the **Malbec**, the **Stiletto Xc** was another boat that fit the description of a "camper cruiser." Built of high-tech materials, including Nomex, Kevlar, carbon and foam coring, it has minimalist sleeping accommodations in



A true entry-level boat, the **Malbec 18** (far left) will be ideal for newbie sailors looking to break into sailing on a dedicated camper cruiser, one judge said. The **Bavaria Cruiser 34** excelled during sea trials (left). She answered her helm beautifully and also contains all the elements of a true cruising boat. Built in the United States, the **Stiletto Xc** is a cool concept boat that can be folded up and trailered to distant cruising grounds (above).

each hull as well as a compact head and galley. "But I think camping on the beach or under a boom tent would be the way most people used this boat," said Bill Bolin.

"It's a neat concept boat," he continued. "There's a way to fold it up and trailer it, which was one of their goals." The current owners purchased licensing rights to the name **Stiletto** from a previous builder of 27-foot cats. The boat has been lengthened to 30 feet to eliminate hobbyhorsing from the earlier iteration. The "c" in **Xc** stands for cruising; the company also has plans for an **Xf** model that would incorporate foils in the hulls to produce a foiling cat.

"We went out and had a nice sail with the boat," added Bolin. "It's kind of like sailing a big **Hobie cat**; it has a very similar sheeting system, an adjustable traveler that was almost full-beam width and a multipurchase mainsail

sheeting system. It sailed and tacked like a cat — you needed to release the main and backwind the jib a bit to help get the bows around. We sailed in a dying breeze that started out at 10 to 12 knots and threw the chute up, and it was real fun."

In every **Boat of the Year** contest, it seems, a boat rises up after sea trials to make a lasting impression on the judges. For 2018, that boat was the **Bavaria Cruiser 34**.

"I found this category the trickiest of them all because the boats were so different from each other," said Murphy. "But the **Bavaria** was a lovely boat to sail. It has a single rudder, and she answered her helm just beautifully in the conditions we had today. We started off with around 10 knots of breeze that built to 13 to 15 knots. As a sailboat, it was just a pleasurable sailing experience, among the best we had during

our judging. It was among the boats that felt like a really happy sailing experience.

"It's the one with real accommodations," he added. "You really can cook a meal on it, you can sleep comfortably, you can travel to places, there's a head with closed-door privacy, there's a shower. ..."

"The boat was just rigged right. It had great sails on it. It sailed really well," said Sherman. "It felt wonderful. The steering controls and everything just felt good. I was comfortable at the helm. So high marks and kudos to the sailing performance. This is a nice couple's boat. I think two people could have a blast on it, or maybe a family with one or two small children. I think it definitely has a place in this class as a solid contender."

In fact, when the votes were tallied, the **Bavaria Cruiser 34** did even better than that, earning the title of 2018's **Best Pocket Cruiser**.



A Certain Elan



This is going to be a tough category," said Bill Bolin of the **Best Midsize Cruiser 40 to 44 Feet** division. "We have three very different but very good boats in this class — the **Elan GT5**, the **Hallberg-Rassy 412** and the **Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 440**."

To begin, Bolin said of the **Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 440**, "It's the best Jeanneau I've ever seen." The judging panel agreed, crowning the boat the fleet's Most Innovative design for 2018 (page 83).

And what, exactly, led to that designation? "One big reason is the side decks," said Tim Murphy. "One of the design features is wide-open side decks all the way aft" that permit easy egress going forward without the need to scramble over cockpit coamings. "It's a clean path ahead," he noted. Imitation being the sincerest form of flattery, it's something we expect to see on more boats, including a scaled-up Jeanneau 490, in the very near future.

"You go down below and, maybe for the first time, Jeanneau has separated the mast compression post from the main bulkhead," he added. "Now there's just a compression post that runs down into the main saloon, and the main bulkhead that would've come to that position is now several feet forward. So they've opened up more space in the main cabin and taken it away from the forward cabin, where they're arguing you don't need it quite as much. I think that's also a fine change. It has twin rudders, and under

sail, I thought the helm was beautiful. It's a solid boat."

So, too, thought Bolin, was the **Hallberg-Rassy 412**. "This is the largest aft-cockpit model Hallberg-Rassy has built," he said. "There is a 40-foot center-cockpit model, but this is a different hull entirely, optimized for upwind performance, with a code zero sail for downwind work. There's a retractable bow thruster — we saw a lot of those this year — to reduce drag and get the thruster deeper in the water and farther forward as well. The boat we inspected had upgraded sails, and when we went sailing, they were spectacular.

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There was a beautiful full-battened sail and the boat sailed very well.

"It had a slippery hull and moved nicely," he added. "We sailed it in 12 to 14 knots of breeze, so there was decent wind. Most of the time we were making 6.5 to 7 knots. As we fell off on a beam and then a broad reach, I think this was the first boat where we didn't see a drastic drop in speed. It performed well on all points of sail. It had a nice big wheel and great visibility forward. It would be an easy boat to singlehand. I really like it."

"This is a mainsail-driven boat, and I think that might explain why it's so peppy off the wind," said Murphy. "So the sail plan is a small



The Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 440 features wide-open side decks that are carried all the way aft to permit easy passage going forward (above). Built in Slovenia, the Elan GT5 is a hybrid design that carries elements of both racing boats and dedicated cruisers (top right). The full-battened sail on the Hallberg-Rassy 412 helped deliver stellar sailing performance to the Swedish-built cruising boat (bottom right).

jib with a big main. They're one of the few remaining builders that are giving us a true traveler but also genoa sheet-lead controls from the cockpit, showing that they're concerned about sail shape, and rightly so. Going down below, it's the classic Hallberg-Rassy mahogany interior, and it's just lovely, as

lovely as it ever was. We've talked about good handholds, but on this boat, they weren't just good, they were also beautiful. The fiddles are these beautiful rounded shapes that are perfect for your hand. They look great and feel great. Very nice."

That left the Slovenian-built, 43-foot-4-inch **Elan**



GT5. The company builds dedicated lines of racing and cruising boats, but, said Murphy, "The GT5 is sort of a hybrid between those two lines. It has a high-performance hull and a very comfortable cruising interior.

"Sailing it was pretty joyful," he continued. "We sailed in very light air and it was still moving very nicely. It looked really good on the water. It really seemed to have answered the performance side of Elan's DNA."

"The company is doing some progressive things in terms of systems," said Ed Sherman. "The electrical system on the boat has a nice, graphically designed power distribution panel with push buttons that light up things to let you know, for instance, that the running lights are on and that sort of thing."

"I was really taken with

this boat," said Bolin. "It looks like a race boat from a distance, and as Tim mentioned, its DNA is rooted in that. But you go below and it's very unique, with lots of special features. I like the galley-forward arrangement a lot. You come down into the main cabin and you've got max beam where the living quarters are, you have a great sense of entry. Figuratively speaking, you're not walking through the back door and the kitchen to get into the house. I think this layout makes very good use of space. And there's lots of storage. Finally, I'd say it's a high-tech boat, vacuum-bagged with 100 percent vinylester. There's a lot to like about it."

At the end of the day, Bolin's colleagues agreed, which is why they chose the **Elan GT5** as the **Best Midsize Cruiser 40 to 44 Feet**.

French Connected



Three French boats of similar size and price points came together to form the **Best Full-Size Cruiser 50 to 54 Feet** class. The **Beneteau Oceanis 51.1**, **Dufour 520** and **Jeanneau 51** were built from three of the world's most established and well-known high-volume production boatyards.

The **Beneteau 51.1** was a fresh, new design, not a scaled-up add-on to a previous line of yachts. Its hull form includes a hard chine, something that Tim Murphy immediately noticed. "Beneteau was one of the first companies to add chines, they were in the first wave," he said. "The chines were always aft of the beam, and you'd hear three things about why they were putting them there. Some would say it's for styling, some for performance, some for interior volume. It does give you a structural bump in the hull form.

"This boat, according to a company representative, was inspired by *Rambler*, an 88-foot maxi racing boat that has a very, very fine entry forward and then the chine right up near the bow, so it gets some flare and volume straightaway. This Beneteau is also carrying the chine forward, which gives you low wetted surface below the waterline and then large interior volume outside of that. So this is a new thing we're seeing."

"I thought the boat sailed very nicely," said Bill Bolin. "The code zero sail was fabulous, it really lit the boat up. It had a big bimini, but it wasn't a problem getting out of the cockpit from the

steering stations, which were in the aft corners."

"On the motoring side of things, this boat has plenty of power," said Ed Sherman when discussing the **Jeanneau 51**. "At 2,800 rpm, we were getting 8.5 knots, and the sound levels were very low."

"One of the things I hadn't seen on a boat this size was the aluminum stringer system down below," said Bolin. "During sea trials, we had light air, maybe 6 to 8 knots of breeze, and the boat was making 4.8 to 5 knots. And when the wind picked up a little, we actually registered 6.6 knots. It tacked through about 95 degrees, so from a

THE TRIO OF YACHTS IN THIS CLASS WERE BUILT BY THREE OF THE WORLD'S TOP PRODUCTION BOATYARDS.

performance standpoint the boat was pretty good."

"The Jeanneau 51 is the smallest boat in Jeanneau's Yacht series, which also includes a 54, 58 and 64," said Murphy. "They call the transformer transom, which folds down to make a swimming and boarding platform, the 'terrace.' So they're able to use the same part for the 51's terrace as they do for the 54. It's the same for the cockpit table. So that's one of the reasons they're able to bring in the smaller boat at a competitive price point."

At \$420,000 for the base boat, the least expensive yacht in this grouping was the **Dufour 520**. "In terms of motoring capability, it's quite good," said Sherman. "We got

9.2 knots at high speed, which was excellent."

"The Dufour offered the most pleasurable sailing experience in this class," said Murphy. "It starts with the helm, which answered beautifully and I didn't feel like I was fighting it. It was a very smooth feeling. We did not sail it in a lot of breeze, maybe 7 to 8 knots, but we were making close to 6 knots. I wrote down, 'The helm feels good,' and underlined it."

The creature comforts were also outstanding on the Dufour. "There's a lot of flexibility in the cockpit," added Murphy. "When sailing, you use it in the traditional way. But once you're at anchor you have sun pads that come out and a transom that folds down to reveal a sink, grill

and fridge. So it becomes kind of a party platform with the outdoor galley.

"Down below, you have the [real] galley forward, so all of the social space is gathered right at the base of the companionway stairs when you come down. The navigation station slides forward, so you can use it as an aft-facing nav station or a forward-facing table for socializing. There were all these things that adapt to the different ways people use their boats, and that boat was also the best to go sailing on. The helm felt the best, there was a traveler on the main so you could shape your mainsail leech, and it had a good suit of sails, so it also gave you the most options there."

"It has a lot of unique features, and they delivered them well," said Bolin. "I feel the **Dufour 520** was the winner of the **Best Full-Size Cruiser 50 to 54 Feet** class." And so did his fellow panelists.



The **Jeanneau 51** is part of the company's Yacht series (left). It employs parts from some of the larger boats in the line. The **Dufour 520** provided the most pleasurable sailing experience in its class (above). With a hard chine that is carried all the way forward, promoting some flare and volume straightaway, the long-legged **Beneteau 51.1** was inspired by a maxi racing yacht called *Rambler* (right).



Head South



With five nominees, the single largest class in the 2018 BOTY competition also comprised some of the biggest boats in the fleet. Given those numbers, it's little surprise that the **Best Full-Size Cruiser 54 to 58 Feet** was also one of the most competitive divisions in the entire contest. Sorting out a winner from this quintet of closely matched yachts proved to be a challenging exercise for our panel of judges.

Designed by Germán Frers and built by the venerable Finnish boatyard, the **Swan 54** is a bluewater performance cruiser with long-range aspirations that also could be raced in events like the St. Maarten Heineken Regatta. "It has a nice layout on deck," said Bill Bolin. "There were no cabin-top winches, a trend we're seeing this year that we haven't seen before. All the lines come back to coamings along the cockpit, which keeps the cabin top clean. It's easy to sail and trim this boat. The anchor was self-launching and beautifully executed."

"Under sail, I thought they did a really nice job of hitting that sweet spot between giving you some control over the rig and keeping it simple," said Tim Murphy. "We've sailed other boats with strings all over the place. It's clear that a very focused design mind was involved in that deck layout."

Now in business for around two decades, Discovery Yachts is a British builder that has recently undergone an ownership change. "They've definitely been in the blue-water cruising space," said

Murphy when discussing the Ron Holland-designed **Discovery 58**. "I think there's a lot of promise in this company. They've been around awhile anyway, but I think they're in growth mode and we're going to see some fresh things from them."

"This yacht has a deck saloon with a raised cabin," he continued. "It has one of the biggest navigation stations in the entire fleet, forward facing and at eye level with the cabin ports. There are no engine controls at that helm station below, but it's a boat where there could be. You've got very good visibility, and you could make that a pilothouse situation if you brought your engine controls down there."

Interestingly, the hull of the **Moody 54** is the same one employed in the Hanse 575 and 588. "Moody's are now built by the Hanse Group, and what we discovered when we got aboard the 54 is that they're doing some of the great things Hanse's doing in terms of their production-line efficiencies and manufacturing processes that have helped them put a lot of value into some pretty sophisticated boats," said Ed Sherman. "It's there on the Moody in spades. There are also top-quality component installations. Systems-wise, they use name brands from around the world. But it's all stuff that most folks that work within the industry are going to be familiar with, which makes it easy to deal with."

Murphy said, "We've seen a trend this year of opening up the side decks, but the Moody was just exemplary. Because it's a deck-saloon layout, there was a rail inboard that was just beautiful and took you up to the mast. You couldn't ask for better, smoother hand-holds with no sharp edges. And then outboard, you have a true stainless-steel rail that goes all the way around the boat. I was



Clockwise from above: Designed by Germán Frers, the Swan 54 is a true bluewater cruiser. The distinguishing feature of the Southerly 540 is its swing keel. The Moody 54 was praised for its outstanding ergonomics. The Ron Holland-designed Discovery 58 is a British-built beauty. The high-volume Hanse 588 is a good-looking cruiser.

really impressed with it."

In speaking about the **Hanse 588**, Sherman expanded his thoughts on production building. "This is a high-volume boat, comparatively speaking, and in recent years Hanse has really begun to employ some streamlined manufacturing processes that are now raising the bar," he said. "The goal is to make the boats as easy to put together for the factory workers as possible, and yet still achieve a high level of quality. Hanse is a company that we've had the pleasure of watching evolve in that direction between maintaining a price point and still building a better product that is at a higher degree of fit and finish. This boat did it for me."

"Dockside, it's an attractive boat," said Bolin. "I like the

lines, especially the long, straight, sloping sheer line. The freeboard is quite high, but it gets you that volume inside, for living spaces and tankage and all the other things people want in a big boat like this. Our experience handling the boat was surprising; it snapped-to and did what it needed to do. The 110 hp Volvo pushed the boat along nicely. And when we were motoring, it was very quiet down below. It really struck me as being a solid boat."

The final boat in this group was the **Southerly 540**, the signature feature of which is a variable-draft cast-iron swing keel that draws nearly 11 feet when in the full down position and a mere 3 feet 1 inch when raised. "It delivers the best of both worlds," said Murphy.



"When you're out in the ocean, you want a boat that can handle waves and big seas. But the best part of the cruising life is at the edges where water meets land. The Southerly will take you to both of those places. With the keel down, you've got 11 feet under you and all the pointing ability that goes with that. So it's a deepwater boat but also one you can dry out. It can go places most cruising boats can't ever go. So the world is very, very opened up."

"The swinging keel system is very robust," said Bolin. "It looked foolproof, with a hydraulic ram driving a block-and-tackle system with Spectra

line on it. You push a couple of buttons and it goes down to your pre-punched-in level. It takes a few seconds. Under sail, I was amazed that we were under load, closehauled, and [the owner] changed the keel configuration. With all the forces acting on it I didn't think it would move, but it came right up."

"The build quality was outstanding," said Sherman. "It sailed beautifully. It's a true global cruiser." For the judges, that combination of traits was irresistible. Which is why they named the **Southerly 540 the Best Full-Size Cruiser 54 to 58 Feet**.



China Gold



In this unusual Boat of the Year fleet, the **Best Cruising Catamaran** class was yet another category made up of three boats that were very different in terms of size and execution: the 38-foot **Maine Cat 38**, the 47-foot **Fountaine Pajot Saona 47** and the 55-foot **HH 55**. All three addressed their respective stated purposes very well, once again leaving the judges a challenging task in sorting out a winner. “We’ve got small, medium and large in this class,” said Bill Bolin.

Starting with the smallest of the three, the **Maine Cat 38** was, according to its entry form, “a performance cruising multihull designed to be fast, comfortable and easy to singlehand from a central weather-protected helm with excellent 360-degree visibility.” Built of thermoformed Corecell-infused polyester resin, it was one of the highest of high-tech boats in the entire contest.

“The builder, Dick Vermeulen, has said, ‘If I’m not building the fastest boat out there [for its size], I’ve failed at everything I’ve done,’” said Tim Murphy. “So his whole goal is to get weight out of there and have the speediest cat around.

“I really like what he’s doing with the thermal forming of the Corecell,” continued Murphy, summarizing how the Maine Cat achieves that weight savings. “The only other option beyond that is having cuts in a flat panel that you curve, and all those cuts fill with resin, which adds weight, and they’re

brittle, and there are different mechanical properties in all that. So I think the quality of the basic structure in itself is quite high.”

Of the **Fountaine Pajot Saona 47**, Murphy said, “In terms of living space, they’re working with a fairly traditional layout. They’ve got a modified helm station between a bulkhead helm and a fly-bridge. It’s on the starboard side over the top of the coach-roof, which clears the area in the cockpit under the hard dodger for a social area that’s completely separate from the working of the boat. We inspected the three-cabin version that dedicates the entire portside hull to one berth with an office and a head. It’s got the best shower in the fleet, I think. They had the space to burn to do it, and it was a lovely space down there.”

“I think this would be a really fun charter boat or party boat,” said Bolin. “Like Tim, I think the owners cabin and the interior worked very well. I’d love to spend some time on the boat in a nice anchorage

someplace. I think it’d be a lot of fun. They really maximized the storage. It’s a very flexible layout, with a great cockpit aft and a sun deck next to the helmsman that would be a terrific place to sit and watch the

world go by. The anchoring system was very well-done. The windlass was fairly far aft, there was a beautiful anchor well that was deep enough that all the chain went down, and there was a big anchor and



PHOTO COURTESY OF FOUNTAINE PAJOT (LEFT)



Of the high-performance Maine Cat 38, its builder says if he’s not creating the fastest boat in its size range, he’s failed at his mission (top left). The Fountaine Pajot Saona 47 is a more traditional catamaran with an excellent layout inside and out (bottom left). Designed by Morrelli & Melvin, the HH 55 owes much of its DNA to the Gunboat brand (above).

bridle ready to go.”

The final boat in the class, built in China, was the **HH 55**. Designed by Morrelli & Melvin, who previously were involved designing Gunboat cats — some of which were built in the same yard in a

previous incarnation of that company — the HH owes some of its fundamental DNA to the Gunboat brand, a point of which Murphy expanded on during deliberations.

“We had two boats from HH in the contest,” he said,

“this 55 and also the 66, which we reviewed in the Best Luxury Cruiser class (see page 82). The two boats have fundamentally different design purposes. This 55 is designed to be sailed by an owner-operator couple; we had such

a couple aboard their boat for the test sail. This boat is stretching the market and is part of a trend that Gunboat started. I would credit Gunboat for pushing the trend into a performance side that hadn’t existed before, of boats with high-quality interiors and accommodations.”

“And then,” he continued, “it’s going to give them performance that, before recently, had not been available. So I think what HH is doing is iterating on a model Gunboat had created before. Gunboat opened the door, but I think HH is implementing it better. I think the HH is a very, very strong boat in this category.”

ALL THREE CRUISING CAT NOMINEES EXPRESSED THEIR STATED PURPOSES VERY WELL INDEED.

I think it’s a very, very strong boat in the whole market of cruising sailboats. I believe something new is, if not being invented here, is being developed and pushed further than ever before.”

“This boat hits its target,” said Ed Sherman. “I do believe there are couples who are looking for a boat like this who’ll have a blast with it. I think it would be criminal to ignore this whole category of new-age sailing yachts.”

“These guys deserve recognition,” said Bolin. “They’ve done a fabulous job with this boat. It truly is a couples boat, as proven by the owners who were aboard. The construction is as high-rate as we saw on any other entry this year. To me, I think it’s the class winner.”

Bolin needed to employ no arm-twisting to make his case with the other judges. Collectively, they handed the prize of **Best Cruising Catamaran** to the **HH 55**.

The World's Its Oyster



It's a rare year indeed that the Boat of the Year contest boasts not one but a pair of yachts with price tags north of \$4 million. And in many ways, the two boats that fit that bill for 2018 could hardly be more different, one being an exquisite monohull and the other a no-holds-barred catamaran. But they both shared some similarities, including being set up to be run and operated by a professional crew. In fit and finish, they are both examples of state-of-the-art boatbuilding and technology, which is why the HH 66 and the Oyster 745 vied for the title of Best Luxury Cruiser.

Perhaps the most intimidating — yet cool — yacht in the competition was the amazing all-carbon HH 66 cruising catamaran. Judge Tim Murphy said, "It displaces less than 40,000 pounds and, with the exception of the Stiletto, had the lowest displacement-to-length ratio in the whole fleet, at 61. It's a boat where

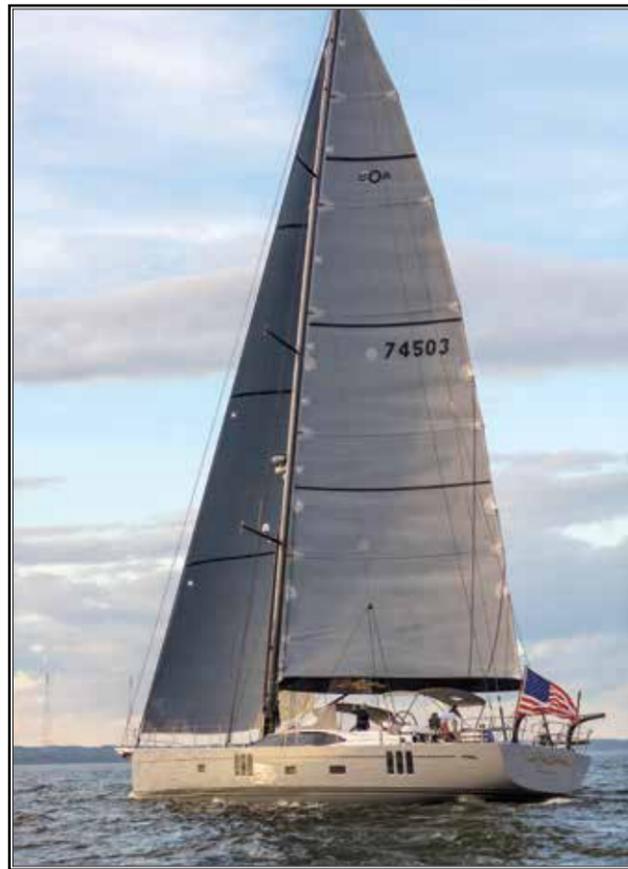
they talk upfront about flying hulls on a cruise-worthy catamaran. Along with foiling, that's a rather new thing — to go out there and fly a hull on purpose — in the way we sail our boats. And the build quality was just gorgeous."

In around 10 to 12 knots of breeze during sea trials, the HH 66 trucked upwind at 12 knots. "I didn't know that sailing a 66-foot performance cat with a tiller was on my bucket list, but I've now added it to my list and checked it off," said Bill Bolin. "It's a very impressive boat, very high tech." Among the features in the molded helmsman seats are push-button controls for the mainsheet, traveler and daggerboards. To have instant access to critical sailhandling and boathandling tools at one's fingertips is truly remarkable.

"The tiller is light and easy. It really responds to every move you make," said Ed Sherman. "That was a treat.

This is a systems-rich boat, and the systems work great. It's truly a boat for a pro crew — and one that knows what it's doing and has a lot of experience. But without a doubt, it was the boat I had the most fun sailing in the entire fleet."

The HH 66, however, had a worthy adversary in the Oyster 745.



The HH 66 blew the judges away with its superb sailing performance (bottom). The Oyster 745 was beautifully built and engineered, with good, accessible systems (above).

"This boat absolutely blew me away for a lot of reasons," said Sherman. "It was an extremely complex boat. It's got a day generator and a night generator. It's a big shaft-drive engine setup with a lot of systems. But when you climb down into the engine room, all the primary systems are located around the perimeter of the space, with really great access. So there are no problems with that."

"This boat is beautifully built, nicely engineered, and the systems were good and accessible," said Bolin. "I think you do need a pro crew. It's not a couples cruising boat. You need someone to take care of it, maintain it and even sail it for you as well. That being said, the crew's going to be pampered. There's a beautiful crew cabin forward. I also made a note that this was the first boat with a real companionway

that wasn't a ladder. It was a stairway to heaven. Plus, the speed and maneuverability surprised me. It felt good. It was easy to move around on deck and below, and very comfortable. I'd like to spend more time on it."

"It's a fundamental piece of the boat's DNA to have professional crew," added Murphy. "With the quarters the boat provides, they'll attract top talent. We've seen a lot of Oysters over the years, and I think we've found the boat where the company really knows where its feet are and hits the sweet spot. It's a little bit out of *Cruising World's* target, it's the extreme top end of what we're looking at, but I think they've done a spectacular job."

Murphy's mates agreed, and they unanimously named the Oyster 745 the Best Luxury Cruiser for 2018.

A Deck Like No Other



The Boat of the Year judges do not award a Most Innovative prize every year. It takes something particularly inventive and original that catches their collective eye. For 2018, there was such a boat, which is why they pinned the title on the Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 440, a pioneering, groundbreaking design.

"This boat impressed me both at the dock and under way," said Tim Murphy. "When a high-production boatbuilder brings a new model to market, and because we're considering this boat for an innovation award, we should ask two questions: Which features are

IT TAKES A BOAT THAT IS ESPECIALLY INVENTIVE AND ORIGINAL TO WIN THIS PRIZE.

innovative in the context of previous Jeanneaus, and which features are innovative in the entire market where this boat competes?

"Compared to previous Jeanneaus," Murphy continued, "the 440 introduces the innovation of separating the mast compression post from the cabin's main bulkhead, which is moved forward in this boat, trading more interior volume in the main saloon for less volume in the master cabin forward. That's a major change from previous Jeanneaus in this size range, and provides for



What set the Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 440 apart was its innovative side decks and outstanding ergonomics at the helm, along with cockpit coamings that converted into sun beds.

a much more spacious main saloon, but this change alone wouldn't merit a BOTY award for Most Innovative."

Murphy noted the portable 12-volt Isotherm cooler and portable grill as interesting features, but also not enough to warrant special recognition.

"What sets the Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 440 apart in the market is all in the aft quarters: innovative side decks and outstanding ergonomics at the helm, together with winged transformable coamings that convert to sun beds," he said.

"From forward of the mast, the side decks are kept clear, first with lower shrouds set inboard and upper shrouds outboard for easy passage. Most innovative in this market, the side decks slope downward as you move aft. To give an idea of the slope, forward of the cockpit, the lifelines are 24 inches high, typical of this class. But as you move aft, the lifelines and then the pushpit are 38 inches high. This makes for an eminently secure transition from the cockpit to the

side decks — one of the most vulnerable places on any boat in terms of safety under way. On the 440, that transition feels uncommonly secure, not just compared to boats in this class but compared to the entire fleet.

"The helm seats are comfortable," he added. "The rig's split backstays terminate slightly inboard on the transom; instead of conflicting with comfortable seating at the helm, they provide a secure, comfortable handhold. Most importantly of all, the engine controls, gauges, and chart plotter are all laid out for exemplary visibility. The large-face engine tachometer was arguably the most visible in the fleet, and the navigation screens were set outboard from the helm so that you didn't have to reach through the wheel's spokes to engage them and you didn't have to contort your body to see them. Also, the 440's designers gave priority to foot traffic through the cockpit from the swim step to the

companionway by making the cockpit asymmetrical. Flow-through on this boat on deck truly is exemplary."

Bill Bolin also chimed in: "We did test several models that push the steering stations aft and outboard to snuggle the helmsman into the stern railings, but no one executed it as well as Jeanneau did with the 440. Eliminating stepping over the coamings to go forward by making the aft side decks on the same level as the cockpit sole also made for wonderful security sitting or standing at a wheel. Combined with the lower shrouds moved inboard and the asymmetrical cockpit layout, the boat was among the easiest monohulls to get around on deck. The flip-down coamings were also superbly executed, converting the cockpit from an offshore haven to an anchorage sun deck in just a couple of quick moves, with no redundant cushion issues."

Herb McCormick is CW's executive editor.



BOAT	LOA LWL	BEAM SAIL AREA ¹	DISPLACEMENT ² DRAFT (SHOAL / DEEP)	D/L SA/D ³	PRICE ⁴	WEBSITE PHONE
Allures 45.9	48'5" 44'11"	14'6" 1,076 sq. ft.	25,200 lb. 3'6"-9'6"	124 20	\$550,000	allures.fr (206) 378-1110
Bavaria Cruiser 34	32'9" 30'1"	11'2" 549 sq. ft.	11,684 lb. 5'2"/6'6"	192 17.1	\$145,000	bavariayachts.com (305) 504-8714
Beneteau Oceanis 51.5	52'4" 47'8"	15'9" 1,257 sq. ft.	30,702 lb. 6'1"/7'7"	127 20.5	\$630,000	beneteau.com (410) 990-0270
Boreal 47	45'3" 41'1"	14'1" 1,067 sq. ft.	25,000 lb. 3'4"-8'2"	193 17.7	\$650,000	boreal-yachts.com +33 2 96 92 44 37
Discovery 58	58'8" 51'10"	16'8" 1,629 sq. ft.	55,000 lb. 6'5"/7'8"	176 18	\$1,800,000	discoveryyachts.com (410) 639-2777
Dufour 520	50'10" 45'2"	15'6" 1,076 sq. ft.	33,609 lb. 6'4"/7'6"	163 16.5	\$420,000	dufour-yachts.com (352) 871-0362
Elan GT5	43'4" 38'	12'10" 842 sq. ft.	19,339 lb. 6'3"/8'	157 18.7	\$350,000	elan-yachts.com (352) 328-4560
Fountaine Pajot Saona 47	46' 45'7"	25'3" 1,313 sq. ft.	32,928 lb. 3'11"	155 20.4	\$680,000	fountaine-pajot.com +33 5 46 35 70 40
Gunfleet 43	44'1" 38'2"	13'4" 937 sq. ft.	27,900 lb. 4'6"-8'10"	224 16.3	\$750,000	gunfleetmarine.com +44 1473 694747
Hallberg-Rassy 412	41'5" 37'9"	13'6" 970 sq. ft.	24,400 lb. 6'7"	202 18.4	\$550,000	hallberg-rassy.com (410) 867-9022
Hanse 588	56'5" 49'8"	17'1" 1,689 sq. ft.	50,706 lb. 8'8"	185 19.7	\$800,000	hanseyachts.com (978) 239-6568
HH 55	54'6" 54'6"	27'2" 1,516 sq. ft.	30,864 lb. 4'11"-10'8"	85 33.1	\$2,700,000	hhcatamarans.com +86 186 5929 2492
HH 66	65'11" 65'11"	28'6" 2,333 sq. ft.	39,022 lb. 6'2"-13'1"	61 32.4	\$4,100,000	hhcatamarans.com +86 186 5929 2492
Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 440	43'11" 41'5"	14' 972 sq. ft.	18,874 lb. 7'2"	119 21.9	\$360,000	jeanneau.com (410) 280-9400
Jeanneau 51	50'5" 45'9"	15'5" 1,638 sq. ft.	31,747 lb. 7'5"	148 26.1	\$550,000	jeanneau.com (410) 280-9400
Maine Cat 38	38' 36'5"	21' 802 sq. ft.	8,200 lb. 2'5"-6'6"	76 31.6	\$400,000	mecat.com (207) 529-6500
Malbec 18	18' 16'	7'2" 140 sq. ft.	1,500 lb. 4'	163 17.1	\$22,000	venturasportboats.com (646) 533-7166
Moody 54 DS	56'1" 51'	17' 1,739 sq. ft.	53,550 lb. 7'4"/8'5"	180 19.6	\$1,100,000	yachts.group/moody.gb (978) 239-6568
Oyster 745	74'7" 65'10"	19'5" 3,001 sq. ft.	115,960 lb. 10'2"	181 20.2	\$5,000,000	oysteryachts.com (401) 846-7400
Southerly 540	54'7" 48'11"	15'9" 1,937 sq. ft.	51,478 lb. 3'1"-10'11"	196 22.4	\$1,600,000	southerly.com (410) 639-2777
Stiletto Xc	32'10" 30'	18'9" 545 sq. ft.	2,000 lb. 1'	33 54.9	\$120,000	sailstiletto.com (855) 410-7245
Swan 54	54'1" 47'3"	15'7" 1,538 sq. ft.	48,500 lb. 8'1"	205 18.5	\$1,500,000	nautorswan.com (401) 846-1090

(1) Sail area is working sail area. (2) Displacement values are for light ship; D/L=(D/2,240)(lw/100)³. (3) SA/D = SA/(D/64)^{2/3}. (4) Prices are quoted by builder with standard Boat of the Year equipment inventory; prices reflect currency values as of Oct. 31, 2017. For draft figures " / " denotes alternative options; " - " denotes variable draft on one boat.

BOAT	MOTORING			FAST MOTORING			SAILING	
	RPM	SPEED (KNOTS)	NOISE (DECIBELS)	RPM	SPEED (KNOTS)	NOISE (DECIBELS)	WIND SPEED (KNOTS)	BOAT SPEED (UPWIND/REACHING)
Allures 45.9	2,000	6	68	2,400	6.7	70	6-7	3.3/2.8
Bavaria Cruiser 34	2,200	5.1	58	2,800	6.4	61	9-13	5.2/6.7
Beneteau Oceanis 51.5	2,100	7.9	61	2,800	8.6	65	11-13	7.4/7.4
Boreal 47	1,800	6	60	2,400	7.4	65	16-22	7.2/8.5
Discovery 58	no tach	7.5	47	no tach	8.3	50	0	n/a
Dufour 520	2,400	8.2	61	2,800	9.2	62	8-10	6/5.5
Elan GT5	1,850	6.5	63	2,400	8	65	3-6	3.5/2
Fountaine Pajot Saona 47	2,000	5.8	48	2,500	8.7	49	13-15	6.2/8.4
Gunfleet 43	1,900	6.5	58	2,200	7.6	60	6-7	4.8/3.7
Hallberg-Rassy 412	1,800	6.8	57	2,400	8	63	10-11	7.3/6.3
Hanse 588	1,800	7.6	58	2,150	9.1	66	0	n/a
HH 55	1,800	6.7	46	2,450	9.3	54	9-12	7.7/8.3
HH 66	1,800	6.8	46	2,400	10	54	10-14	9/12.5
Jeanneau S.O. 440	2,800	7.9	60	3,150	8.5	65	20-22	8.3/6.3
Jeanneau 51	2,800	8.5	63	3,200	8.8	68	6-8	6.6/4.8
Maine Cat 38*	1,800	5.8	58	2,200	7.1	68	0	n/a
Malbec 18**	no tach	5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1-5	1.3/1.8
Moody 54 DS	1,750	7.5	60	2,000	8.4	64	3-4	3.5/2.7
Oyster 745	1,500	7.3	57	2,200	10.1	60	10	7.5/5.6
Southerly 540	1,900	6.8	51	2,200	8.4	64	10-12	7/6
Stiletto Xc***	no tach	5.7	64	no tach	5.7	64	11-13	7.3/7.1
Swan 54	1,600	6.5	51	2,500	8.6	57	3-4	2.9/2

*Equipped with twin Honda outboards. **Equipped with Lehr propane outboard. ***Equipped with 9.9 Honda outboard. All others equipped with an inboard diesel engine.



The BOTY judging team included (from left to right) Tim Murphy, Bill Bolin and Ed Sherman.

WALTER COOPER

Ed Sherman is the vice president of educational programming for the American Boat and Yacht Council and is the former chairman of the marine technology department at the New England Institute of Technology in Warwick, Rhode Island. An experienced racer and cruiser and BOTY judge, Sherman is the author of four technical marine books, a frequent contributor to *CW* and other boating publications, and often works with boatbuilders, marine surveyors, field-service staff personnel and engineering staffs in the United States, Canada, Europe and Australia.

Cruising World editor-at-large **Tim Murphy** grew up living aboard a 41-foot ketch and sailing along the U.S. East Coast and the Bahamas. At age 18, he earned a 100-ton U.S.

Coast Guard license and has worked around boats ever since, delivering them, writing about them and teaching people how to use them. An independent writer and editor based in Rhode Island, he is the co-author of *Fundamentals of Marine Service Technology* (ABYC, 2012) as well as hundreds of articles. He recently purchased a 1988 Passport 40, *Billy Pilgrim*, aboard which he plans to embark on an extended voyage.

Bill Bolin has been a marine patrol officer, a boating safety instructor, the owner of a sailing school and for nearly three decades was on the team of Traditional Watercraft Inc. (TWI), the builders of Island Packet Yachts. There, his duties encompassed customer service, sales, marketing, branding, dealer development and training, market research and design/features input to the TWI design team.