

Coastal Cruising Cat

Dave Greenwell sails Prout's fast twenty-six footer

SCAMPER, Prout's new open bridge-deck, twenty-six foot cat was primarily intended for those who had previously sailed smaller multihulls like their Shearwater or Tornado and now want a boat comfortable enough for family cruising, yet still able to race.

She is not a completely new design. Her hulls are those of the Sirocco 26 cruising cat, lightened and simplified for improved performance and economy. They have also given her a bigger sail area. Indeed, she has a rather sophisticated rig with a rotating mast and fully battened mainsail. She also complies with the MOCRA micro-multihull rules which will doubtless gladden the hearts of those who are into racing.

But I saw her in a different light. Her simple accommodation, her shoal draft of only 20 inches, her spacious bridge deck all echo the ideas put forward a couple of years ago by James Wharram when he introduced his Tiki 21 design. James coined the phrase coastal trekking by which he envisaged cruising close to the shoreline, exploring the creeks and more isolated areas barred to those who sail fixed keel mono-hulls. Landfalls would be made on sheltered beaches and creeks rather than crowded, expensive marinas.

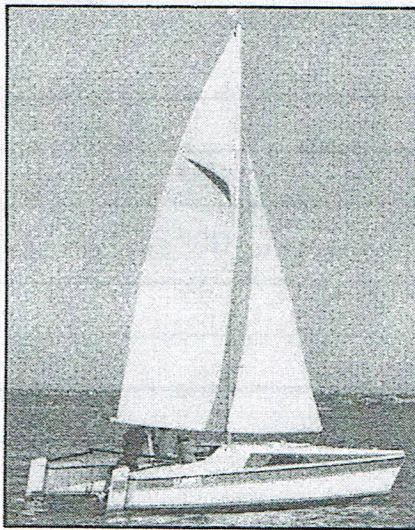
An integral part of James Wharram's coastal trekking idea is to start by building your own boat and the Tiki 21 and later, the Tiki 26 were designed for that specific purpose. But, whilst I can understand the virtues of his approach, I can also see that not everyone wants to build their own craft. The Scamper, on the other hand, comes ready to sail away. But, of course, the comparison must not be taken too far because the Scamper is far more expensive than the Tiki 21 or 26, yet the concept holds good.

But can a catamaran designed to race make a safe family cruiser? The simple answer is yes, but it needed careful design based on wide experience to make it so. When Prouts first announced their Scamper concept, they calculated that a capsize was conceivable when the boat is sailed hard in competition against others. For this reason, they designed a self-righting system that revolved around a masthead float and a mast filled with foam. They also

built foam-filled buoyancy chambers into each hull so she will not sink if holed.

In the event, early test sails showed that the designer's prediction that Scamper would start to fly a hull at about Force 6 under full sail proved to be over cautious. She showed no signs of lifting a hull from the water under those conditions so they now offer the system as an optional extra for those who feel that they may press the boat to her limits or beyond in an attempt to win.

As is normal on catamarans, the mast is stepped amidships, resulting in a comparatively short boom.



She has a fully battened main with slab reefing plus the rotating wing mast, all of which looks rather 'high performance' to the average cruising man. It would, however, be wrong to dismiss the rig out of hand. The competitive look of the rig does not mean that it's at all complicated. I found the rig very to handle and a far cry from the complicated. I found the rig easy to and adjusters that are now a common feature of many modern racing dinghies.

Prouts were very keen to create a catamaran that would appeal to those who race but they did not lose sight of those who want a fast coastal cruiser. They have come up with a comfortable, easy to sail craft, which despite her simple accommodation and lack of bridge-deck cabin, provides an unexpected amount of space — far more than is usual on a catamaran of her type and length. Add to this a boom tent rigged over the bridge

deck and she would be able to accommodate a large family with a good measure of creature comfort.

My first introduction to the Scamper was to spend a night aboard, and very snug I was too. Her accommodation is divided into chart table, Port-a-Potti toilet plus two berths in the port hull, and a galley with folding table, sink unit, portable tank, gas cooker with grill, and two berths in the starboard hull. Companionways face inwards which mean that the climb down into the hulls is rather steep. But she's a very stable platform to climb around.

Once below, the feeling is one of volume reinforced by the fact that she almost gives full standing headroom with five feet between sole and deckhead. At their widest, her hulls have three-and-a-half feet beam and because she is relatively 'round' bottomed, the cabin soles are also relatively wide.

The berths are in the ends of the hulls and are a good 40 inches at their widest by a generous 6ft. 6in. long. The after berths, in particular, are very spacious due to slightly less taper as a result of the small transoms. I suspected that these after berths could easily serve as intimate doubles. Also, at a pinch, two extra child's berths could be made within the hulls by adding lee cloths to the seats adjacent to the chart table and galley. These bench seats, in fact, make the Scamper rather different from other 'camper' catamarans. They are long enough to seat four so you don't have to sit on the floor to eat your meals, and also provide the crew with somewhere to go below without having to perch on the ends of the bunks.

Yes, I spent a very comfortable night aboard Scamper and was completely oblivious to the fact that she took the ground during the night settling quietly into her mud berth without fuss.

Next morning I awoke to a good breeze and the promise of more wind to come. As it turned out, the clouds brought with them a good healthy squall. But by then I was gripped by the adventure and a bit of rain in the offing was certainly not going to stop me.

Waiting for the water to return, I had time to look at the deck layout. Between the amidships main beam and the after beam is a rigid cockpit moulding that provides a working platform of around 7ft. by 8ft.

Forward of the main beam is a webbing trampoline. Right in the centre of this cockpit is a single winch mounted on a pedestal. All ropes and halyards that need hauling can be brought back to this winch and indeed, we were able to use it to haul the boat from her mud berth to make the most of the tide.

Two large lockers are positioned at either side of the cockpit, forming comfortable seating for helmsman and crew. They give lots of useful stowage space for fuel tanks, gas bottles and all the usual collection of warps and fenders that need to be kept close to hand. A pod type outboard engine mounting bracket is slung below the cockpit sole.

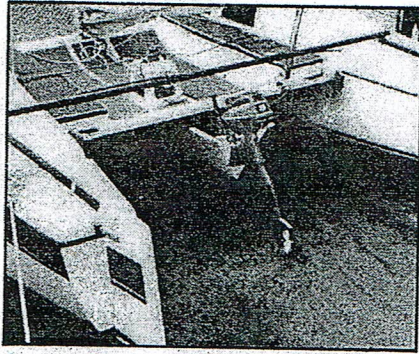
We mounted the outboard on its bracket and winched ourselves clear of the mud and motored out into the channel leading to open water. She motored well and was easy to steer. And for really tight turns, steering on the outboard could make her spin almost around her own mast.

Once out into clear water, we furled the 120sq. ft. jib from its reefing gear — an optional extra — and set the main which, despite its relatively short foot, accounts for 200sq. ft. of canvas. Stopping the engine and tilting it showed up a small problem. The Mariner, which had behaved perfectly, could not be tilted enough to clear its prop from the water. This was solved by taking the engine from its bracket and stowing it below. This boat was, however, the prototype that I was sailing and I understand that this problem has been rectified on production boats.

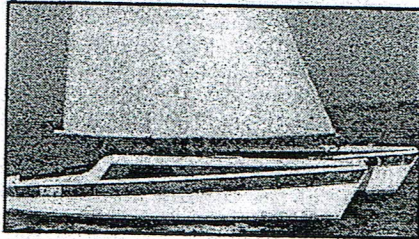
Who said that a cat cannot sail to windward? Well, it may have been true once but Prouts' Scamper certainly proves otherwise. Despite her rather curved headsail spar, a common enough sight on

boats equipped with furling headsail gear, she pointed up as well as many of today's mono-hulled cruisers and because of her speed, she makes jolly quick progress upwind.

Ease the sheets a little and bear away onto a broad reach and she



Above: Single winch can haul halyards, sheets and anchor warps. Vee section engine bracket cuts through bow waves. Below: Scamper showing lots of lift forward.



SCAMPER 26

Length on deck	26ft.
LWL	24ft.
Beam: Overall	14ft. 3in.
Each hull	3ft. 6in.
Draft	1ft. 8in.
Weight (approx.): All up	1984lb.
Each hull	770lb.
Cockpit	120lb.
Headroom	5ft.
Auxiliary	8hp LS
Mast height	31ft.
Sail area: Mainsail	200sq. ft.
Genoa	120sq. ft.
Spinnaker	600sq. ft.
Price: Basic	£9950 plus VAT
Trailer	£1500 plus VAT
Designer and Builder:	Prout
Catamarans, The Point, Canvey Island,	Essex SS8 7TL.
Tel: (0268) 697462	

really shows what she can do. Slicing along at well over 10 knots, it's difficult to judge the wind strength but there were times when it felt to be a good six, and although I could feel the boat flexing under the strain, she never felt unsteady or showed the slightest inclination to lift her weather hull. Indeed, at one point I went below in the lee hull and my twelve plus stone made no difference whatsoever to her trim.

Her downwind performance is also impressive with no sign of burying her bow. There's plenty of buoyancy forward and her underwater shape also helps by providing plenty of lift. My only criticism was that the shrouds sweep back rather a long way and restrict boom angle. Even so, she was still very slippery down wind and, of course, as all catamaran helmsmen know, cats are best tacked down wind — apart from anything else, they go faster that way.

After an exhilarating sail during which time Scamper demonstrated that although she is a very racy lady, she is well mannered, obedient and easy to sail. Obviously she is not for the complete novice, but neither do you have to be an expert cat helmsman to relax into the enjoyment of sailing this very versatile craft.

After sailing the Scamper, I was even more convinced that she has a great potential for fast coastal cruising. She can be taken apart for trailing behind a car of around 2 litres, and Prouts offer a trailer designed to make assembly easy. They say that it takes about two hours to put her together which means that she's rather beyond the day trailer-sailer concept but nevertheless allows you take her to new cruising grounds and home for the winter. Above all, she is a boat that brings fun and exhilaration back into sailing.

