Quest 31

Careful and expert tooling up has ensured beautiful mouldings and a degree of finish that we are proud of.

As mentioned previously, she has the now well established Prout nacelle running the full length of the bridge deck, dramatically reducing any bridge deck slam, providing ample headroom in the main saloon and allowing a very neat engine installation.

She has clear uncluttered decks with flush hatches for sail and anchor stowage making sail handling and working the boat a dream.

The cockpit is comfortably sculptured and spacious with large self drain holes creating a safe sheltered environment when at sea and sheltered sunbathing when anchored.

Below decks, as you would expect from Prouts, she is extremely roomy for a 31 footer with 2/3 single berths, two double berths, all with ample stowage.

The saloon can seat 6 in comfort and the table can be fitted either in the forward or aft saloon allowing flexibility of use. She has a beautifully appointed galley which would put many household kitchens to shame.

The Navigator is provided with full sized **chart table** wtih ample stowage for all your charts. A cocktail cabinet is fitted behind the chart table to steady the navigators' hand!

Whilst forward in the port hull we have a **luxury toilet/shower** compartment with plenty of space for oilskins etc.

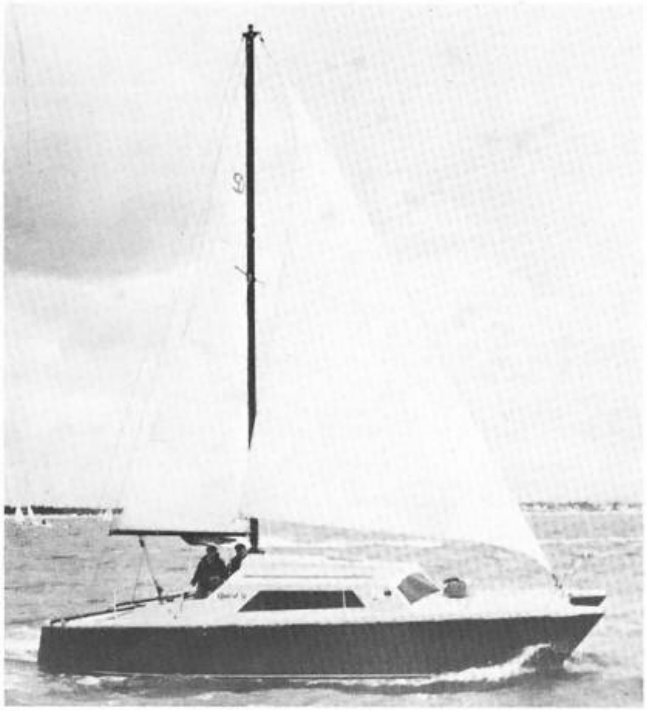
Finally we have the "box room" aft of the galley providing space for bicycles, generators, rubber dinghy and all those other essential items required on a cruising yacht.

With water tanks built into each keel and integral fuel tank, she makes the ideal cruising home.


Quest 31
LOA 31 ft. 0 ins.
LWL 28 ft. 6 ins.
Beam 14 ft. 3 ins.
Draught 2 ft. 7 ins.
SAIL AREAS
Main 128 sq. ft.
Genoa 315 sq. ft.
Prout Catamarans
The Point, Canvey Island,
Essex SS8 7TL, England.
Telephone (03743) 67462

Quest 31

PROUT CATAMARANS, THE POINT, CANVEY ISLAND, ESSEX, SS8 7TL ENGLAND. TEL: CANVEY ISLAND (037 43) 67462



The search for a stable ship

QUEST

LOA	31ft
LWL	28ft
Beam	14·25ft
Draft	2·5ft
Displacement	7000lb
Sail area	443 sq ft
Designer	Prouts
Builders	Prout Catamarans, The Point, Canvey Island, Essex

THAT ROLAND and Francis Prout have plenty of experience in designing big catamarans goes without saying—they pioneered the type in Europe. It was therefore no surprise that our first view of their new 31 foot Quest revealed clean lines, and the last word in modern outlook—her 'minsail' rig, with the mast stepped way aft, and the subsequent enormous fore-triangle being all of a piece aesthetically with the angular superstructure and deep cockpit coamings.

As we slid away down Smallgains Creek with the Hydro-Marin 12 hp diesel chuntering very quietly indeed behind us, the speedometer climbed to an easy $5\frac{1}{2}$ knots even as we began to punch into the short Estuary chop outside. A 17 hp version is available, and some owners who like motoring may well consider the extra cost worthwhile, but the 12 makes an adequate auxiliary.

For manoeuvring purposes, the central outdrive leg with its big three-bladed propeller can be steered to a certain extent by means of a lever in the cockpit, and this undoubtedly was valuable on the boat Judy and I sailed, as her rudders did not turn as far as we understand those of the standard Quest will.

When reversing, I found a reluctance, even with the 'drive leg' and both rudders hard over, to turn to starboard, but given time she obeyed in the end. One must remember that not only has this catamaran got long, shallow keels under each hull, but she also has skeg-mounted, rather shallow rudders, so turns were not tight compared to some other cats we have sailed.

Visibility from the helm is excellent under power, which makes coming up to a mooring easy and trouble-free, and I found that the main shrouds, which come down near the forward end of the cockpit, made ideally placed and most useful hand-holes when climbing out onto the side-decks to go forward.

Being able to set, reef or stow the tiny, very high-aspect-ratio mainsail (if one can really call it that) without having to leave the cockpit, is another very good safety point, and as the vast 'spiderweb-cut' headsail is also unrolled on its Rotostay from the same position, one felt that the family man should have everything very much under his personal control. The only drawback seemed to be that with the headsail set fully, in the form of a mighty 315 square foot genoa, much of the view forward was badly obscured. To be fair to Prouts, the boat we were given to test for some reason had a mast two feet shorter than standard, yet retained the full luff-length in her headsail. Even so, a later look at a standard version of the boat gives us to think that forward visibility to leeward when under full sail will still be somewhat, if not as badly, restricted. Not being a racing man, I would have preferred the foot of the headsail much higher, and to hell with the last quarter knot of performance. Just my preference, of course.

The boat we tried was, like all the first few Quests, tiller steered, but now I'm glad to say that wheel steering will be optional. Although more costly, and meaning that one must always steer from the one area of the cockpit, that will undoubtedly make this particular cat much more manageable for a single-hander (or father with young family demanding Mum's full-time attention). The wheel will tend, by friction of the linkage, to hold the helm 'in the position last thought of' when tacking. By contrast, I found it a tricky business to hold the free-moving tiller-bar firmly over throughout the whole of a tacking manoeuvre (as one must), while at the same time attempting to winch in the miles of genoa sheet.

As experienced catamariners will know, it is essential to get the headsail trimmed home as quickly as possible on a new tack to prevent her weather-cocking—and I'm afraid I muffed one or two tacks before I got the hang of holding the helm steady with a knee, so as to have both hands free for the sheets. As I say, the optional wheel-steering, apart from being much easier on the arms where linked twin rudders are concerned in

anything of a sea, will make short-handed manoeuvring much less complicated.

As to the rig itself, while the fact that the driving sail in any catamaran is undoubtedly its headsail is well known (and therefore the more of the boat's area is in the fore-triangle the better), 300 square foot is a lot of sail. If one of these boats were to be very lightly crewed, a small staysail on the inner forestay, as in Prout's bigger Snowgoose, and a high-clew yankee jib in place of the genoa, would make a more easily managed combination even with more strings to pull. The stays'l and small jib has proved a perfect arrangement in the bigger boat when set without the mainsail in heavy weather, and I see no reason why Quest would not respond to this equally well.

But enough of theorising—once we got her going under sail and beat out into clear water, with the wind not above force two, 'our' Quest showed definite lee helm under full sail, and as the breeze freshened, though balance improved, sheeting the big headsail became more of an effort. Indeed when trying it single-handed I found that the winches, mounted on a kind of console (which formed the one and only cockpit locker) at the middle of the back of the cockpit, seemed to be sited where I felt their cleats should be, and vice versa. To complicate matters, the winch handles tended to get foul of the mainsheet with its multiple parts, which ran on a slide just behind them.

Things were generally much better as we rolled up part of the jib, brought it to a more manageable size, could see under it, and improved the boat's balance still further, all by pulling on the furling line. In the process, we seemed to lose nothing from our steady 5-5½ knots close-hauled. The only disadvantage now was that associated with every headsail roller system I have tried (including that on my own boat), namely that due to having rolled the initial luff curvature of the sail round the spar, the remaining canvas set badly, with the 'body' and flow coming further aft than is best; so we ended up not pointing as high as might otherwise have been possible. Leeway, on the other hand, appeared minimal, due to Quest's underwater design, so perhaps the combination is a good one on this boat after all. There is no doubt that the ability to reduce sail rapidly is a real asset in any catamaran, especially one so obviously stable as this, because the loading imposed on the rig in a squall can become otherwise quite phenomenal.

As far as actual sea-going is concerned, my impression was of an immensely stable craft; a most able seaboat—but both Judy and I thought one might find the shortage of lockers both on deck and below somewhat frustrating if bound away on a long cruise.

The headroom over the central nacelle makes a big difference to the bridgedeck accommodation, but the main entrance to the saloon from the cockpit is sited off-centre, over one sloping side of the nacelle's 'V', with the result that one can easily miss one's footing when coming below. However, a step 'can be provided'. We both thought it *ought* to be; as standard.

The navigator has the entire centre part of the port hull to himself, so that a full-sized chart table (oh rare, sweet bliss indeed) can be slid out from the space beneath the saloon seat, and there is ample room for instruments, pilot books and so on. The fact that the drinks locker is just at his elbow is not perhaps the most ideal juxtaposition should he become fraught with worry, but as the boat draws only 2½ feet (0·8m), his problems should not be too great! And should another crew member wish to 'leave the room', or have a shower, in the heads compartment beyond him, our intrepid pilot has only to give his chart-table a shove, and chart and all vanishes neatly from sight to give a clear gangway forward.

Not all is perfect, though—while admittedly one could use a part of the 'box-room' for oilskins, there may also be a temptation to stow wet clothing up in the extensive bow forward of the loo itself, which would mean trailing dampness through much of the accommodation. In view of a definite shortage (in *my* humble opinion) of locker-space on deck, I think I would have preferred to have this very far forward bow space (the same ahead of the bunk on the starboard side) fully partitioned off with a watertight crash bulkhead, and the space thus enclosed accessible for fender and warp stowage via a clamped hatch let into the deck moulding.

Quest has a very reassuring and 'confidence-giving' feel to her, she stands up to her canvas most impressively, and with a better-cut headsail than the one we were using, she will no doubt work to windward extremely well indeed in any normal cruising conditions of wind or sea.

Ocean-going (given that extra stowage) should pose no problems, and although the low bridgedeck does make contact with wave-tops, the 'V' of Prout's new-style nacelle reduces slamming very effectively, so that even a long haul to windward (upright sailing, of course) should be acceptable as just a part of the very happy boating we both felt this extremely good-looking, medium/large catamaran should certainly provide.

Around £22,000 will see Quest afloat complete with engine, and fitted out for cruising, but four other available stages of completion would cut the cost appreciably for those who want to spend hours doing-it-themselves, in order to go a-questing on the cheap. There is no doubt that this design has retained all that one has come to expect from the best of Prout catamarans.

Below: tillers have to hinge up to clear the winch handles.
Bottom Right: Quest's long, luxurious saloon lets in lots of light but stowage could be better.

Reprinted from 'Practical Boat Owner', May 1978.