



UNCOMPROMISING CAT

AQUILA MAKES A BOLD STEP TOWARDS
THE FUTURE WITH THEIR 50 YACHT.
BY DANIEL HARDING JR.

It feels like we live in an era when technology and design are evolving at breakneck speed. And no category of yacht, in my opinion, has evolved faster in recent years than the power-cat segment. About 8 years ago, I was with colleagues aboard an Aquila 44 and a Leopard 40 that cruised through the BVI in the wake of Hurricane Irma. Neither vessel was a thing of beauty, but they were perfect for our purposes: stable, efficient, with enough privacy for colleagues to not get squirmy. Functional to the highest degree, we spent more of our time aboard the boat looking out at the scenery; it was the other boaters, we joked, that had to look at us, as the almost synonymous saying goes.

Power cats in general have come an awful long way in terms of aesthetics but none more-so in recent years than Aquila. No longer sailing cats with their masts trimmed off, hullside windows now fill cavernous cabins with natural light and offer vast vistas. Fit and finish, while once utilitarian, are now worthy of the motoryacht moniker.

As I took in the profile of the Aquila 50 Yacht on a warm morning at Key Largo's Ocean Reef Club, I met Global Brand Director Alain Raas. Son of Aquila Founder Lex Raas (profiled on page 92), I was mistaken thinking Alain had spent his entire adult life in the marine industry. Tan, with slight raccoon eyes from days spent sporting Costas, he jumps behind the helm of a center-console chase boat he's never been on with the same cavaliness others might feel when borrowing a golf cart. Born into boating, he spent much of his professional career working in transportation technology and then running a commercial masonry company before "doing some inner searching and deciding to follow my passion," he says. "So I made a call, got a foot in the door with MarineMax and went through a very lengthy interview process with them, numerous rounds, and then they hired me as the Aquila Brand Manager in the U.S."



Huge panes of glass, along with Aquila's trademark—and wildly popular—flip-up bar/galley window makes the 50 Yacht feel like an open boat in the salon. Below: Substantial stainless handrails are everywhere you need them to be.



LOA: 52'6"
 Beam: 25'6"
 Draft: 4'2"
 Displ.: 71,167 lb.
 Fuel: 518 gal.
 Water: 212 gal.
 Standard Power:
 2/380-hp Volvo Penta D6
 Optional Power: 2/480-hp Volvo Penta
 D6; 2/550-hp Yanmar

RPM	KNOTS	GPH	RANGE
600	2.3	.6	1,986
1000	4.6	1.7	1,401
1500	7.0	4.3	843
2000	8.6	9.7	459
2500	9.5	19	259
3000	11.8	31	197
3700	20.6	48	222



Today, the company is looking to set out from beyond MarineMax in the Americas and expand as a true international brand. Raas sees especially great potential for the brand in Europe and the Middle East. The international aspirations were a big reason for the radical new styling that is the calling card of the 50 Yacht.

"If you look at the evolution of cats, they've changed a lot in the past decade—they were just big boxes or rectangles on the water and were not very attractive," admits Raas. "And so, what we on the Aquila side have really focused on is making them look a lot better; more yachty, sportier. And then, in addition to that, our focus is on private ownership versus charter."

Besides evolving the boat's aesthetics, Raas says that they had to be mindful of their somewhat aging demographic. "Our demographic for boats in the 50-foot range is between 50 and 70 years old. So sadly, as we all get older, mobility becomes a little bit more of an issue. Our knees hurt; our hips hurt. So we wanted to focus on eliminating as many stairs inside the boat as possible. The only way to do that is to bring your freeboard up. So, I often tell people it's not like building a house. You want more space, you've got to rob Peter to pay Paul on a boat. What we did by raising the freeboard was gain the ability to do a single-level master cabin forward. And then that's really allowed us to change the aesthetic of the boat. Now if you're looking

at the boat, the appearance is very sporty, aggressive. She's got just a very good stance about her when you see her out on the water."

While the more aggressive exterior styling is appealing to many male buyers, Aquila is ever mindful that they can't forget the fairer sex decision makers on boats like this. Whether it's via large hanging closets that are ideal for hanging a dress or vanities designed for women, there are features that seem designed for the whole family at every turn. This comes as a result of listening to both private owners and the thousands that charter Aquila's boats annually. One detail in the staterooms hits close to home: My wife and I had long debated the necessity of having a full-length mirror in our room at home. I said no way. The thought of having a large standing piece of glass was ridiculous, especially with little kids and a dog running rabid. Later that day I mounted the mirror. Aquila was smarter than me and incorporated said mirrors without objection. What's the expression about a happy wife?

There are several layout options available on the 50 Yacht. One is to incorporate a captain's cabin forward. There's also the option for three or four staterooms. The model I was on was the three-stateroom version, which had a lot going for it, including another comfort of home not to be overlooked: a full-sized laundry room. Boasting a residential-scale washer and vented dryer, there is an enormous amount of counter space for folding clothes in a civilized manner. Anyone who has spent



Large windows forward, along with huge hull-side windows make the master stateroom one of the brightest in this size range of cat. Below: Alain Raas is part of the executive team that is looking to grow Aquila on the world stage.

time cruising and playing in the Caribbean will appreciate how much laundry a family goes through in the heat; this option seems like a winner to me, especially when you consider that the settee in the salon can be easily converted to a bed for guests. Still, if you travel with a posse of family and friends, this laundry room can come with bunks instead. Besides well-appointed staterooms and thoughtful social spaces,

there are innovations that are expected to be rolled out later this summer, including the ability to affix an underwater foil or hybrid propulsion. "All the 50s coming off the line are able to be equipped with a fixed foil. When you choose the foil option, you have to go with 550-hp Yanmars," Raas notes. "This offers even more efficiency and improves the performance and handling. It's a great option. We'll also have a forthcoming hybrid-engine package."

After a long day spent largely lounging aboard the 50 as she was photographed inside and out, we finally got to sneak out to open water to stretch her legs. Smooth, was the word the came to mind as the 50 ran though slight chop and carved turns. A sportster she is not. Comfort and efficiency are the focus on the 50 and that she delivers in spades. Gliding through waves, it's hard to imagine how smooth the ride would be with the fixed foil. At her 20-knot top end she was burning a respectable 48 gph; slowing things down to 8.6 knots, she sips 9.7 gph and offers up an impressive 460-mile range.

For the longest time, catamarans were something of a compromise. Cat people were happy to trade aesthetics, speed and even build quality in exchange for volume, stability and efficiency. After spending a day on the 50 Yacht, I came away with the feeling that this boat will make traditional monohull builders nervous. She is, in many ways, uncompromising. □

