



The development of motor catamarans is gathering pace, and all the big shipyards are getting interested...When you've tried one it's easy to see why.

Aquila 44

it's got the lot!

We've been talking about it for some time now, but is the motorized catamaran market finally going to take off? Judging by the way the three leaders in the sailing sector, (Fountaine, Lagoon and Leopard) are getting ready for battle, it would appear to be the case. And as Dumas wrote, the Three Musketeers were really four, and there could be a surprise coming out of the Far East. Having produced fifteen Aquila 48s over the last two years, the team responsible for the concept decided to ride the wave of success and offer the 48's little brother, the Aquila 44. We had a chance to have a first look around at the Miami Show.

Text : François Tréguët - Photos DR

side, there are three other major players who have key roles. In charge of design and conception: Seaway. Never short of innovations and good ideas, the research department of the Slovenian architect firm J&J Design wasn't going to miss out on the chance to get involved in a new chapter in sailing history. To develop and establish the brand they needed a big name. They chose the American MarineMax. Not only is it one of the leaders

The Aquila 44 looks right at home, moored between superyachts and trawlers alongside Collins Avenue, a few yards north of the legendary Ocean Drive. In fact the American market is its number one target, and the team have concentrated their efforts on analyzing the habits of its amateur sailors. At the heart of the Dream Team that has been assembled around the Aquila project is Lex Raas, the man who popularized sailing catamarans in the charter fleets. He's now determined to do the same thing with their motorized cousins. By his

in boat distribution in the States, but its "Vacations" division is the ideal way to shift large volumes quickly, and to promote the boat to renters, and hopefully, future owners. In between these two, they needed a serious industrial player. They found one in Sino Eagle Group. Founded by John Xiong in 1985, and based in Hangzhou, south of Shanghai, the company has seen meteoric growth, and didn't hesitate to invest in a brand new 110 000m² factory where they can build boats up to 75 feet in length. These days in China, you can have big dreams!

ON BOARD

Despite being surrounded by some big boats, including its 48 foot big brother, from the quayside the Aquila 44 seems bigger than its name would suggest. Wide (6.56m) and high (5.70m air draught) meaning that all the dimensions have been clearly designed to offer as much volume and comfort as possible. Stepping on board only confirms this impression. There are three levels: a flybridge/terrace on the upper deck, an indoor living area on the main deck and a sleeping zone in the hulls forward of the salon.

With its rigid bimini, the upper deck isn't just the navigation or view point, it's the hub of life on the boat with several benches around the helm, an aft salon and an outdoor kitchen which includes a barbecue and a fridge! It really is a place where you'll just want to chill out, with a 360° sea view. You access this area from the aft platform by a perfectly acceptable stairway, although there is also the possibility of accessing the forward deck, which will facilitate getting around particularly when maneuvering in a port or mooring. As it is

possible to take the air and get some sun on the flybridge, the main deck has been used mainly to house the salon and the kitchen. This space, completely air-conditioned of course, is therefore very spacious. A double bay window opens onto the L-shaped kitchen and the high rear side doubles up as a bar in the cockpit. Inbetween swims from the (very wide) steps it will be nice and easy to grab a cold beer without getting the floor wet! And from the inside you can make the most of the view of the...outside! Whether you're in the forward salon or the aft kitchen, you can always keep an eye on what's going on outside, which means that it's pleasant when you are moored and reassuring when you are sailing. The kitchen area, which is at a kind of crossroads, will require a certain amount of civility from the crew to maintain free-flowing traffic. It's a small drawback, but one that's quickly overcome by the ultra-comprehensive fittings, as American standards demand: large fridges, microwaves, a double sink and cooking area just like at home, a very hard-wearing Corian worktop, storage space everywhere... We give it top marks! Full marks too for the electric box to starboard, which will please all those who appreciate neat systems. Further forward, the salon, which is U-shaped on the port-side, also is fitted with two club seats which form an everyday seating area on the starboard side for the six crew members but not many more.

One of the (many) interesting things about catamarans is that they can offer several different zones where everyone can be together, whilst also giving you the possibility of having some quiet time alone. In this respect, the Aquila 44 design team's decision to offer three cabins, one in each hull and one forward cabin across the width of the boat, is a real success. Each one has its own private bathroom with a sink and a toilet of course, but also a shower separated by a glass partition which works really well: very classy! As we would have expected, the beds are wide and accessible from two or three sides. Although the forward cabin is the largest, it has the slight drawback of having the toilet area at a slightly lower level, in the port hull. And we're not sure what purpose is served by the bench in the starboard hull. It's almost like a kind of boudoir, which might have been more useful as a back-up kid's bed for example.

It's probably just an old sailor talking, but I do have reservations about the lack of height below the main deck, particularly towards the front of the boat. Even though the architects have designed it as though there is a third hull, no doubt to slice through the waves and avoid the worst impacts, I would still like to see how it performs out on a lively sea. In calm water, the two 225 horsepower Volvo D4s will easily take you to 22 knots, although the ideal cruising speed is around 15 knots. For those

of you who want to go a bit further, it's worth noting that the two 550 liter fuel tanks will allow you to cover 672 nautical miles at 7 knots. The V-drive transmission helps to avoid overloading the motors. The presence of rudder blades with protective skegs as well as propeller tunnels will reassure the anxious amongst you when coming alongside. You will like the four enormous hatches which allow easy access to the technical areas forward (tanks, desalinator) and aft (motors, generator) without disturbing the meal time of the rest of the crew. We really liked the general impression of robustness of the construction (solid watertight compartments and stratifications) visible in other details too: the perfect finish of the gelcoat, the stainless steel fittings, the mooring cleats which are large and have a meticulous finish and the tubular, stainless steel guard rail which doubles up as reassuring handrails.

If the concept sounds good, it would need a good week of sailing around Tortola...More a dream than a real trial! This is the advantage of boats which have a very clearly defined specification. They are perfectly suited to their job because they have been precision-designed and planned and then put together in a workshop by a bunch of experienced and motivated people. We often say that there are no bad boats, but that each one has a clearly defined role. On this score, the Aquila 44 is a success which manages to fulfill everything that is expected of it. Commercial success too is no doubt assured. Watch this space.



1- 22 knots at full speed, 15 in cruising mode. The Aquila 44 will quickly get you where you want to go.

2- The flybridge and the helm. One of the essentials for all motor catamarans!

3- There's an impressive amount of space on this 44 footer, and the fittings are very comfortable.

- ◆ A coherent design and build
- ◆ Three ensuite cabins
- ◆ The view to the outside from everywhere...
- ◆ Getting around at the aft of the boat
- ◆ The plastic exterior
- ◆ Needs to be tried out in windy conditions

SPECIFICATIONS	
Shipyard :	Sino Eagle Yachts
Length :	13.32 m / 43' 8"
Width :	6.56 m / 21' 6"
Draft :	0.82 m / 2' 8"
Displacement :	15.8 t
Diesel Tanks :	2 x 550 l
Water Tanks :	2 x 390 l
Engines :	2 x 225 hp Volvo
Range (builder's information) :	672 nautical miles at 7 knots
	242 nautical miles at 15 knots
	199 nautical miles at 22 knots
Price :	US\$ 535,000 ex VAT - ex works (396 000 euros)