

review: powercat 2600 sports cabriolet



# CATEGORICAL

■ text by BARRY TYLER



**The Powercat catamaran range has enjoyed somewhat of a renaissance since its revitalisation in the late 90's, and the range reaches yet another milestone with the introduction into the range for the first time, of a trailerable version in the form of the Powercat 2600 Sports Cabriolet.**

**T**he history of the Powercat name goes way back beyond the last few years since current owner Steve Shaw bought the moulds, revived the name and rejuvenated the product. Way back in fact to the late 70's, when the very first Powercat was designed by ex-pat Kiwi Bob Wellesley and built by Wellesley and Peter Fraser, in a small shed on the Gold Coast. Few realise that this first Powercat design then in fact went on to become the basis of the legendary 'Sharkies Cat' 28.8ft offshore powerboat that Wellesley, these days known as Robert Lee, re-designed for then local offshore racing identity Bruce Harris.

So far ahead of its time was this original Wellesley Powercat catamaran design, that it remained virtually intact as a design, for over two decades. Throughout the ensuing years the marque endured several owners, including the last owner before Shaw, the high-profile Fastlane Marine. History shows the doors closed on that operation, and Shaw, a then sub-contractor to Fastlane, jumped at the chance in 1996 to acquire the Powercat moulds and assets. From there, Shaw set about a systematic re-vamp and modernisation of the moulds, albeit resisting the temptation to tamper with the legendary underhull shape and general concept of the design.

A quick look through the Sunshine Coast operation today reveals Shaw is not resting on his laurels, for having re-developed the earlier models, satisfying client demand he has since designed and developed from scratch this trailerable 26-footer version, plus a Party Cat version of its older brother, the 30-foot Powercat hull. Very latterly, work is now visibly close to completion on his latest model, a most futuristic-looking new 30-footer version again derived from the original Powercat hull, that follows the same idealistic lifestyle theme of his other 'new' models.

Throughout all the modifications and development of each model, Shaw has been at pains to retain the original intent of the design, retaining the basis of an underhull shape that he unreservedly describes as 'the best handling catamaran hull in the world - still'. The changes have come in the form of raised topsides to allow for the self-draining floor system he has introduced, and the 'softening' of lines both inside and out, to appropriately address today's styling expectations.



### A Mini-Cruiser

One could well be forgiven for looking upon the 2600 Powercat as a mini cruiser, for look inside the cockpit and there is everything there that you would expect to find on a larger cruiser alternative. The secret is simple, more volume in a catamaran-style hull, for complementing the (26ft) 7.9m length is the generous beam of 2.5m, right on the maximum allowable by our 'buddies' from the Transport Authorities. Despite its size and volume though, its modest 3200kg towing weight means it can still be towed very easily by your average large-capacity 4 x 4. More than easily in fact, as we found out on our trip down to the Bribie Island Boat ramp. Shaw confirmed

The ultimate offshore rig, at home in any conditions. (above)

Fit the centre insert, and the rear lounge doubles as another accommodation berth, or as in this case, a sun-lounger. (below)

he had spent a fair amount of time with his trailer manufacturer, Sea Link Trailers, and had come up with a rig that towed better than a lot of boats half the weight.

From the moment you step aboard the 2600 you are immediately conscious of the fact this boat is something very different, something very special. And so it should be at the all-up price of this example, of \$168K, but the whole point is this boat is not aimed at the first-time buyer, this boat is for the potential or former cruiser owner who wants the same home comforts, without the hassles of mooring, maintenance and all the other 'fringe benefits' typically associated with a cruiser. So many people in this day and age are down-grading, for the above reasons of sheer convenience.

The convenience aspect of this rig starts from your very first step onto the boat, whether it be on land before launching, or once in the water. With the ladder down, the 'stepped-level' pod

between the two engines, complete with pull-pit height handrails, provides absolutely brilliant access up to and through the transom door, through into the cockpit. Never ever, have I experienced such a user-friendly entry onto a boat. It is equally as good at sea too, in the deeper water, for the pod extends down virtually to sea level. And, in a real first, the shallow draft of the 2600 coupled with the low pod end, affords you the ability, with engines trimmed slightly, to reverse the cat virtually right up to the beach, for decidedly convenient entry or alighting. This pod also acts as the storage point for the batteries and the oil reservoirs (if you are running 2-strokes)

If there is such a thing on a trailerboat as an 'entertainer cockpit', then the 2600 would graduate with honours. A U-shaped fully-removable (if you are going fishing for the day) and deeply padded lounge surrounds what is a generously-large cockpit table. The table of course drops down to form a second double berth, but when up it is surely the perfect meeting place for up to six adults - comfortably and in a most ambient way.

Back a step though - for importantly you are able to also sleep out here in the cockpit, as the 2600 came complete with full 'clears and curtains camping package' that completely seals the boat off, from the elements. Two people on the rear berth, and if you were really desperate a couple more on the floor on pump-ups, complements the accommodation up for'ard.

Adjacent to this seating area is a 'servery' module. The helm side of course supports the skippers bolster seat and two-person guest's chair alongside,



but the cockpit side features a granite-top bench, sink with hot (direct from the engines) and cold water, a portable single-burner stove, and in the face of the module a generous-size 55-litre 12/240 volt refrigerator. A very pleasant area, and functional as well, for both seat bases and indeed both side panels are well utilised as storage providers also.

### **Appropriate Features and Equipment**

The Targa that supports the overhead hardtop, is a very rigid, sturdy structure, and is styled to complement very much, the deck lines of the 2600. From a practicality point of view, I did like the grab handles provided right around the back of the hardtop, in the hard-top roof, and around the substantially-built wrap-around windscreen frame. Because a cat handles so well in rough water, and therefore goes a lot faster than most, as such you needed good strong, supportive handles like these, to preserve your health.

The helm station is a veritable skipper's delight, and again every bit as substantial as that which you would find on a larger cruiser. A well laid out arrangement, the offshore powerboat racing influence of this configuration shone through for this area was seemingly designed purposely to have the skipper standing at the bolster seat, with the mind on the job. Everything is at the fingertips, with the Seastar hydraulic steering, the (ease-of-movement) Yamaha binnacle controls, and the switch panel and ignition switches all on the lower level, and above them in the face of the dash, two sets of Yamaha 'Smart' gauges, an AM/FM/CD stereo, and a Navman electronics package you would kill for.

The front bulkhead is finished off with to the right of the helm station a nicely moulded, shaped door. What could be behind this we wondered, as the door slid very easily off to the left to secret itself inside the bulkhead wall? With so much of the hull volume seemingly devoured by the generous cockpit, servery and helm station facets, whatever was below would not be of too much consequence.

How wrong I was, for stepping down into the for'ard cabin we discovered a room that boasted a huge berth, full stand-up head-room, and even a concealed macerator-type head (plumbed to a holding tank). While we are on the subject of berths, the room-dominating king/king berth was so large it would have, if you had a crowd or were in a two-family situation, coped with the whole



The ultimate offshore rig, at home in any conditions. (above)

A comprehensive helm station ñ just like the full-blown cruisers have! (below)

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family - who could top and tail. Although there was plenty of lighting in here, the room was still well lit and ventilated courtesy of the large overhead hatch that gave access to the fore-deck.

Finally, if you still wanted to get even further away from the other guests, or simply if you just have a penchant for sun-bathing, then this expansive and uncluttered (apart from a Maxwell rope/chain winch virtually at the bow) foredeck, accessed up through the deck-hatch, would be a great place to relax. And safe too, surrounded by the low-profile bow-rail.

### What seas?

Power for this particular Powercat example was a pair of 1741cc 4-in-line 115hp 4-stroke F115AETX Yamaha outboards - the ideal engines Shaw suggests, for this rig. 'You could run up to twin 150's if you like, its rated that high, but there is no point. These engines are the perfect all-round package - quietness, economy, performance, weight, even resale,' Shaw explained. 'And, with the 240-litre fuel tanks in each side, the range with 4-strokes is just that much greater. At 4000rpm for instance, the engines are only burning 33 litres per hour in total.' Twin installation for added security, the mechanical peripherals are a dual system - completely separate fuel, battery, wiring, everything.

'I think I just might take you out and have a play in the surf around the reef (off Bribie Island),' Shaw explained, after earlier describing the 4 to 5-metre seas that were breaking there the previous day. I couldn't wait!!!!, and I have to say I was more than a little pleased to find only a 1+-metre sea. In a rather character-building exercise he really put the hull to the test by then running directly over the top of obviously his favourite boat-testing sand-bar, at full speed. I in what turned out to be only about 3-400mm deep of turbulent white water under us. There are not many boats you would even contemplate this with, but the beam/weight/handling prowess of the 2600 hull kept it an entirely safe exercise.

Okay, I was convinced, their shallow draft gave them access to equally shallow water, but I was still however most pleased to get out into some genuine blue water. 'Hang on,' he yelled, and we were then off at full speed, 41.1 mph (35.9 Knots) at the maximum 5800rpm, over a significantly 'wider' wave pattern! It sounds suspiciously like I was riding with



a man with a death-wish, but you had to actually be there to appreciate the fact Shaw is no cowboy; he was just oh so passionate about a hull that he unashamedly says is the best in the world, and he was expounding its virtues, in the most graphic and effective way possible.

Whether or not it is in fact 'the best handling boat in the world', you could debate til the cows come home, but he was sure right about one thing - this was a sublimely soft-riding, obscenely good handling hull, at maximum speed over a metre and a half of sea. It was just brilliant, directional stability was good and no matter what you did, throwing it into a corner, up hill, down hill, three-quarters and abeam, in the surf - it just did it like it was on rails, and couldn't be faulted in any scenario. We even got serious air a couple of times, landing perfectly, and I must say the old 'offshore racer' in me was really enjoying the sensation - give me the helm.

A great place to get away from people, the foredeck is also the perfect sunbathing platform. (top)

The galley module even features an adequate sized refrigerator. (above)

### Conclusion

Needless to say, my time behind the wheel was a memorable experience, it really was that good. The combination did everything the manufacturer claimed, and more. Quite different from other catamaran underhull shapes, both hulls utilise a deep vee shape, which is then counteracted with the inclusion into the equation, of lifting strakes and reverse chines each side of each hull. The higher tunnel shape is different too, and I have to agree with Shaw that original designer Bob Wellesley was a real visionary who quite frankly should be around our marine industry today.

As a weekender and as an entertainer, the boat finish, layout and presentation was as good as you would expect from



A most ambient setting for dinner for two, four or even six people. (top)

Arguably the only trailerable catamaran available, that offers a king-size berth, and full headroom when standing. (above)

the likes of a dedicated cruiser. It really was almost to a 'luxury' specification, for fittings and equipment were all of the highest quality. Matching the presentation was a definite feeling of solidarity about the hull when underway. It was indeed a very well built boat - strong, rigid, and definitely built to stand the test of time - in bluewater conditions. The price is not for the faint-hearted, \$168K is a lot of money, but you can sure as hell see where the money has been spent - it definitely is value for money!

#### Notable Standard Equipment

Permanently-mounted anchor, moulded anchor locker, bow sprit, winch, bow rail,

deck hatch, open hardtop, camper covers, carpeted floor, 80-litre water tank, 30-litre holding tank, twin batteries, extra house battery, deck shower, Clarion AM/FM/CD stereo, rod holders, grab rails, rear lounge, dining table, galley module, 12/240V 55-litre refrigerator, rear stepped entry pod, king-size berth, motor upgrade, large macerator head, hydraulic steering, .

#### Notable Options On Test Boat

Single-burner stove, engine upgrade, twin 240-litre underfloor fuel tank upgrade, underfloor storage, live-bait tank, Navman Tracker 5600 GPS, Navman 450 Fishfinder, 20-litre exchange hot-water system, marine BBQ, Sea Link Ezy-launch tandem trailer.

Boat Package Supplied by:

Powercat Marine, Ph (07) 5428 0043, Fax (07) 5428 1444.

Email: admin@powercatmarine.com.au

## SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Model:</b>	2600 Powercat Sports Cabriolet
<b>Price As Tested:</b>	\$168,897
<b>Price Std BMT:</b>	\$139,500
<b>Designer:</b>	Bob Wellesley/Steve Shaw
<b>Material:</b>	GRP Composite
<b>Type:</b>	Hardtop Sports Cruiser
<b>LOA:</b>	7.9m
<b>Beam:</b>	2.5m
<b>Deadrise:</b>	28 degrees
<b>Hull Configuration:</b>	Deep Vee catamaran
<b>Trailerable Weight:</b>	3200kg approx
<b>Engine Capacity:</b>	Twin 115hp to 150hp
<b>Power Options:</b>	Outboard only
<b>Fuel Capacity:</b>	Twin 240-litre underfloor

## PERFORMANCE

<b>600 rpm</b>	3.3mph
<b>1000 rpm</b>	5.1mph
<b>1500 rpm</b>	6.3mph
<b>2000 rpm</b>	8.2mph
<b>2500 rpm</b>	10.1mph
<b>3000 rpm</b>	16.3mph
<b>3500 rpm</b>	22.1mph
<b>4000 rpm</b>	27.5mph
<b>4500 rpm</b>	32.1mph
<b>5000 rpm</b>	36.6mph
<b>5500 rpm</b>	39.1mph
<b>5800 rpm</b>	41.3mph

Note: (The above are average 2-way Speeds - recorded on a hand-held Lowrance GlobalNav 12 GPS, and presented in the internationally recognisable 'miles per hour' format)

#### Engine

<b>Make:</b>	Yamaha
<b>Model:</b>	F115 AETX C/R
<b>Type:</b>	4-stroke
<b>Horsepower:</b>	2 x 115hp
<b>Cyl Type:</b>	Inline 4-cylinder
<b>Max RPM:</b>	6000rpm
<b>Propeller:</b>	17" pitch 3-blade Yamaha Stainless Steel

#### Trailer

<b>Make:</b>	Sea Link (Special Trailers)
<b>Model:</b>	Ezy-launch Custom
<b>Axles:</b>	Tandem
<b>Suspension:</b>	Alko (Duro-torque style)
<b>Braked:</b>	SensaBrake Electric over hydraulic
<b>Rollers:</b>	keel, side
<b>Std Equipment:</b>	submersible lights, winch, jockey wheel