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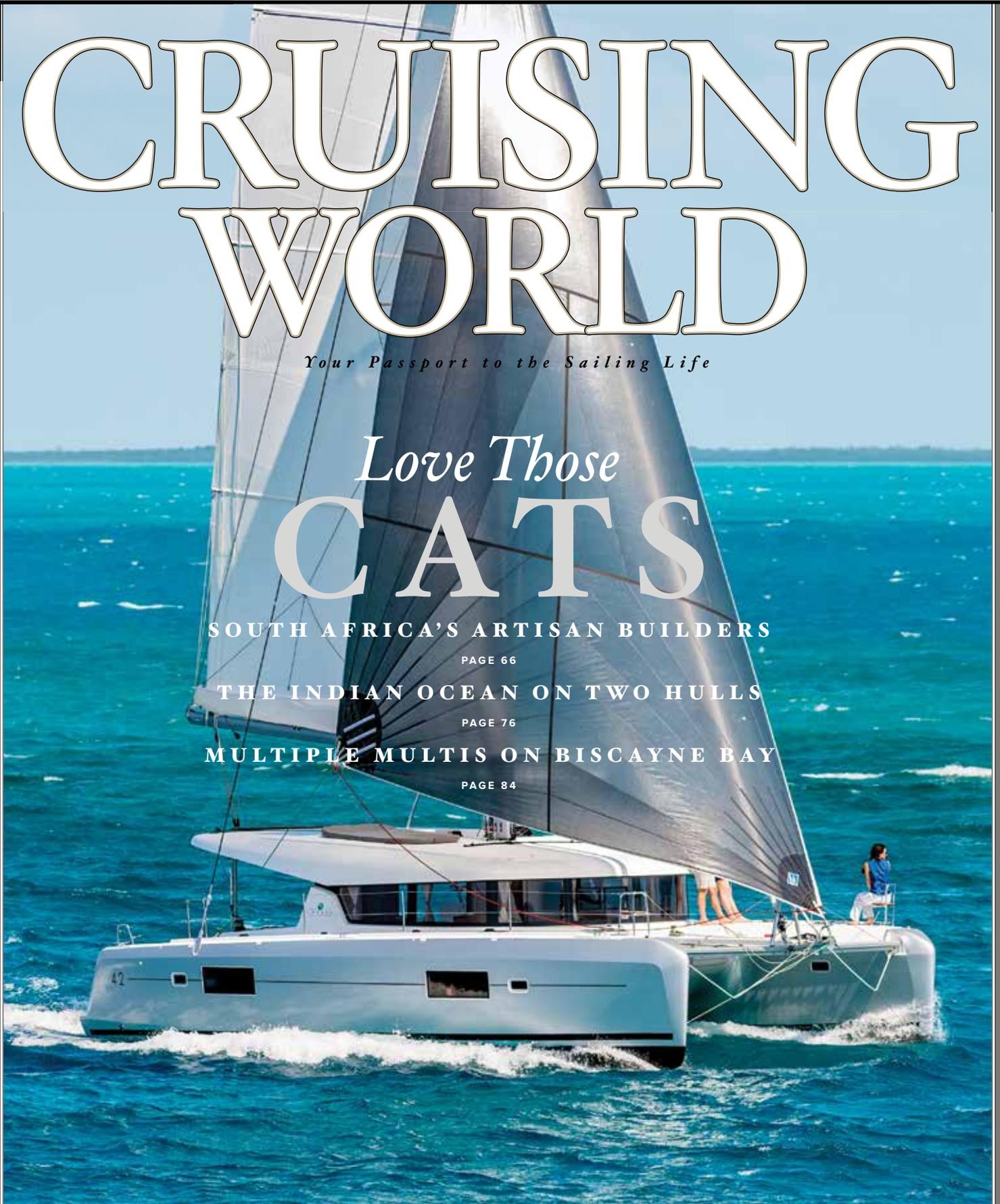
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THE RADAR APP ON MY SMARTPHONE CONFIRMED THAT THE STORMS WERE MOVING OFF THE COAST. WHAT THE WIND WOULD DO WAS ANOTHER MATTER.

A stormy morning on Biscayne Bay turned into an absolutely beautiful afternoon to put the new Lagoon 42 through her paces.

CATEGORICALLY COOL

YES, TAKING A BRAND-NEW, FAST AND FINE FRENCH CATAMARAN — THE LAGOON 42 — FOR A TEST SAIL IN MIAMI DURING THE DEAD OF WINTER IS TOUGH DUTY. BUT SOMEONE HAS TO DO IT.

BY HERB McCORMICK

The day began inauspiciously. Cracking the curtain of my hotel window in downtown Miami — directly across the street from Miamarina at Bayside, the site of last winter's Strictly Sail Miami Boat Show, which had concluded the evening before — I had a fine view of the sideways rain pelting the rush-hour traffic on Biscayne

Boulevard, the leaden skies hanging low and ominously over the neighboring high-rises, and the occasional flash of distant lightning.

It was a perfect morning for pulling up the covers, ordering room service and renting a movie, none of which was on my agenda. Nope, I had different plans. I was going sailing.

Over the years, I've lost

track of the number of boats I've tested and reviewed, though I'm certain I put the hundredth in my wake many moons ago. Most of the time, the boats are neat and it's a blast. In some instances, the vessels are ill-prepared and not ready for prime time, and the breeze fails to materialize, and it's either boring or an ordeal (and sometimes both). Rarely

does the weather devolve to the point where the whole exercise becomes dodgy and dangerous, but it does happen. Even at the worst moments, however, I count myself lucky: Not everyone gets paid to put flashy new boats through their paces.

In any event, as I stuffed my backpack with notepads, cameras and foul-weather gear, on this morning I had no clue

BILLY BLACK

a full-on test of a complete sail inventory in punchy breeze with a couple of professional rock-star French sailors.

I'd had the distinct pleasure of sailing with Lagoon's director, Yann Masselot, on several earlier occasions, but this was my first outing with Olivier d'Enquin, a bundle of kinetic energy who works in France handing over new Lagoons from the boatyard to their eager new owners. Obviously, the job requires a talented, supportive sailor. Apparently, neither Yann nor Olivier had yet sailed the 42, which had been rushed to Miami on a freighter just in time for the boat show. And they were very anxious to put her through her paces. (Quick aside: It takes confident builders to share their inaugural sail on a new design with an inquisitive sailing journalist just dying for something calamitous, or rather, *interesting* to happen.) They also had a couple of crisp new reaching and running sails they hoped to check out. Would I mind?

Why, not at all, *mon amis*. Let's get this party started.

I'd had a thorough tour of the Lagoon during the show and come away impressed. Perhaps more than any other cat builder, Lagoon has achieved a consistent look across the brand with its distinctive coachroof treatments — specifically the tinted, wrap-around, turretlike windows and overhanging eyebrow. You know a Lagoon when you see one.

Yet with the 42, the yard has also pulled off a pretty difficult achievement by producing a yacht that looks reassuringly familiar but is in fact brimming with fresh, innovative ideas. For example, there's been a concerted effort by naval architect Patrick Le Quément, in collaboration with VPLP design, to create spaces that flow naturally from one to the next, making the simple act of moving about the boat

effortless and intuitive. From the low, suspended teak transom steps; to the two series of steps up from the cockpit to either the raised helm station, to port, or the wide, clear side decks; to the three steps that lead from the "winch station," adjacent to the wheel, to the coachroof platform, which is home to both a daybed and a trio of flat solar panels, the 42 is a boat that practically invites you to roam around.

As with other recent Lagoons, the entire sail plan and rig have been shifted aft, which opens up the fore-triangle and the option to set any number of down-wind sails. This translates to a shorter boom, but that's compensated for with the full-battened square-top main. Combined with the standard self-tacking jib, the working sails have plenty of drive yet are easily managed.

In the accommodation plan, the builder's major theme was maximizing living space by utilizing the full beam and pushing things outward as much as possible, including in the main cabin and the staterooms in the hulls. That trend is especially noticeable in the spacious main cabin, where the settees, cabinets and counter space are all maxed out to the picture windows; in the five gradual steps that lead to the owner's stateroom, to starboard; in the stateroom itself, where the extra space is utilized for access to the large double berth; and in the lockers, seat and shelves in the stateroom's centralized desk and settee.

When I arrived at the Lagoon in midafternoon, Yann was noticeably antsy. Let's just say that the show workers charged with breaking down the docks and finger piers had not been in any particular hurry, and Yann and Olivier were extremely ready to break out of the corral and gallop into the open range. About a nanosecond after the last offending pier was moved, we were

underway, with dispatch. It felt like a jailbreak.

"Where to?" Yann asked. We had two choices: motor out of Government Cut and into the open Atlantic, or head under the Rickenbacker Causeway and into Biscayne Bay. I had no idea if there was wind in the ocean but was sure about the bay, so suggested the latter. There was only one problem: The mast on the Lagoon is 68 feet tall, we weren't entirely sure about the causeway clearance, and the chart plotter was not yet loaded. So I hailed photographer Billy Black on the VHF, and after double-checking his charts, he reported that the bridge was 78 feet high. No worries.

Except that, as we made our approach, the distance between the top of our stick and the bottom of the causeway sure didn't look like 10 feet. Yann shot me a glance, and I shrugged in return. At which point he put the dual throttles down. "If something happens, we can always blame Billy," he said.

Luckily, we made it under unscathed.

And there was more good news: The breeze had built a bit more and was locked in at 10 knots — still a little light, but pretty darn good. After powering into clear water, making 7.4 knots with the twin 57-horsepower Yanmars at 2,000 rpm and 8.7 knots at 2,400 rpm, in seconds flat my talented, capable crew hoisted the main and unfurled the self-tacking jib, and we shut down the engines. The silence was golden.

Tacking through about 100 degrees, closehauled on starboard tack, we easily clocked along at better than 6 knots. Oddly, on port tack, we couldn't quite register the same speed, making 5.7 knots. I'm guessing the rig still required a little tweaking on this inaugural sail.

Cracking off, in went the jib and out came the code zero,

a sweet, perfectly cut Mylar sail set off a dedicated sprit that immediately gave us a nice burst of speed, with the 42 skimming across the bay at just under 8 knots. Hard on the breeze, you wouldn't want to fly the code zero in any more wind (though you could certainly crack off with it), but it was just

perfect for the fine conditions.

But Yann and Olivier weren't finished. After our trials, they were planning on sailing to Bimini for a photo shoot (they'd have the same boisterous conditions, and at one point had the 42 scooting along at better than 16 knots), and they had one more sail they'd

like to set, a whopper of an asymmetric kite. Did I want to check it out? Gentlemen, knock yourselves out.

It went up without a hitch, and after a couple of jibes, we were soon joined by a big group of Lagoon personnel and prospective clients enjoying an outing on the Lagoon 630 MY

power cat. By this time we'd spun around and were heading back to the marina by way of the Rickenbacker Causeway. I was quite enjoying my time at the helm when Yann gave me a nod. I understood exactly what he meant. Did I want to sail under it?

Now, I had a general sense that this might not be an entirely legal maneuver. And the fact that there was a large audience in a huge cat right on our hip was kind of daunting. So too was the perception that the beam of the 42 was not appreciably smaller than the span between the bridge's central piers. For this test, a writer from another magazine had joined us. She seized the moment to helpfully interject a vote of confidence: "OK, pressure's on."

I'll credit the Lagoon 42's effortless tracking and pinpoint steering for permitting us to pass through uneventfully. Once safely clear, the power cat sidled alongside and passed over a few ice-cold beers. Their timing was wonderful; in all the excitement, my mouth had become very dry.

We'll be revisiting the Lagoon 42 this fall, during our 2017 Boat of the Year tests. I have a strong sense it will be a solid contender. As I gathered my things and headed back to the hotel, I couldn't recall conducting a test where the weather and venue had been so similar but the actual experiences so different. If only every day at the office, I thought, were just like this one.

Herb McCormick is Cruising World's executive editor.

My mouth was dry and palms sweaty as we approached the Rickenbacker Causeway under the Lagoon 42's big asymmetric spinnaker (above). One of the design's themes was maximizing living space, as in the owner's stateroom (left).

