



BY TOM DOVE

XQUISITE X5 PLUS

A major update makes a past *SAIL* Best Boat's winner even better

The Xquisite X5 Plus is a major update of the boat that *SAIL* awarded Best Large Multihull and Best Systems titles in 2017. The changes were not just cosmetic, but genuine improvements to an already fine boat, making it lighter, faster and less dependent on fuel. The builder's weight loss program dropped the D/L from 144 on the original boat to 126, while modifying the rig increased the sail area and yielded a significant performance boost in light air. An electrical system redesign means the Xquisite X5 Plus is also capable of supporting a luxurious lifestyle with minimal use of a genset to pump out the electrons. Lighter and greener: what's not to like?

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

Phoenix Marine, the South African builder, went through a meticulous engineering study of the entire boat to shave weight. The hull and deck are now completely vacuum infused and cored with Divinycell both above and below the waterline. Newly redesigned composite bulkheads, different window design and re-engineered mast supports shaved off yet more weight. The combined program brought the weight down to where the boat floats nearly three inches higher than before. This in turn makes it able to carry more equipment provisions without degrading the boat's sailing ability. This is perfect for the mission of the Xquisite X5 Plus, i.e., long-range cruising. More payload means you can load up more food, water and supplies, not to mention the parts

and tools to handle anything you might run into off the grid.

Design-wise, the bow profile was also reshaped with a finer entry, although that's scarcely noticeable in the overall appearance of the boat. The X5 lines are about as far from traditional as a vessel can be, but the design is functional. This includes the unique window configuration, which illuminates the cabins, and the curved stern arch, which also contains running rigging. Although an unconventional look, its personality will undoubtedly win you over with time.

Another big change was to a 24-volt electrical system fed by a solar array nearly triple the size of the original, with 2.3 kW of generating power. Upping the storage capacity with 22 kWh of lithium-ion batteries makes it possible to run the air conditioning and other electrical system components all night without running the generator—a Holy Grail of tropical cruisers.

Either at the marina or while out on a cruise, each Xquisite X5 Plus reports its condition in detail back to the "Mother Ship" at the company whenever it is within Internet coverage with updates on the systems and any maintenance performed. The builder can then reply with a list of maintenance items due along with directions for doing them. This optional support plan includes worldwide consultation and even help contacting equipment manufacturers as needed, so owners don't have to do it themselves—perhaps as important a feature as anything on the boat itself.

As an added benefit, this constant contact also serves to create a cohesive group of owners, which increases pride of ownership and sustains the resale value of the boats.

ON DECK

The aforementioned increased sail area with a sprit to carry bigger foresails adds to the motive power side of the new design. The standard boat includes a square-top mainsail, a working jib,

LOA 53ft LWL 50ft BEAM 26ft 2in DRAFT 4ft 5in DISPLACEMENT 35,274lb
SAIL AREA 1,550ft² FUEL/WATER (GAL) 208/227 ENGINES 2 x 80hp
Yanmar SA/D RATIO 23 D/L RATIO 126 DESIGNER Tamas Hamor BUILDER
Xquisite Yachts/Phoenix Marine Manufacturing, Cape Town, South Africa,
xquisiteyachts.com PRICE \$1.7 million (fully equipped)

a genoa and a Code 0 light-air foresail from North Sails, all on electric furlers. In bad weather, you can reduce sail, fly the self-tacking jib and run the entire vessel from inside.

The rest of the deck layout is similar to the original. That's good, because the Xquisite X5 designers got it right the first time. I especially liked the functional helm station with all lines falling to hand in a logical manner near a set of foot-operated electric winches. There are good handholds for safely moving around throughout the boat and even a rain catchment system to back up the watermaker and storage tanks. Experienced cruisers like a belt and suspenders approach to systems, with backups for everything.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Our test boat was equipped with the three-cabin layout, with the entire starboard hull dedicated to an owner's suite and the port hull divided between another pair of staterooms. All these spaces are bright and inviting, with comfortable berths, plenty of stowage and ensuite heads with showers.

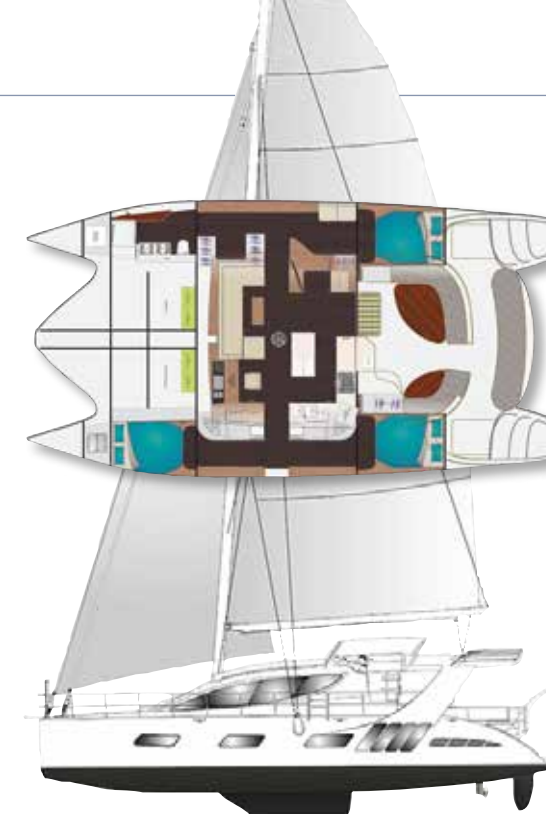
The bridgedeck offers a comfortable expanse with areas dedicated to food preparation, dining, socializing and navigation. The galley is wonderfully apportioned, with all the appliances, spaces and storage a cruising family might need.

In typical catamaran fashion, the outdoor spaces are large and comfortable. Unlike charter cats, the emphasis is on easy living aboard for extended times, not just a week of lounging among the islands.

UNDER SAIL

Our test sail showed that the weight reduction and rig changes worked. On a gorgeous autumn day at Annapolis with 8 to 12-knot winds, the X5 Plus returned more than 60 percent of the breeze as boat speed. While there is no helm feedback, typical of a catamaran with a hydraulic steering system, the boat tacked easily

Looking forward through the saloon



under any sail combination and accelerated rapidly in the puffs.

Especially impressive was the fact the boat sailed this well with no less than 10 people aboard, plus a large German Shepherd. The boat was also chock full of stores for cruising, due to the owners and a delivery skipper having just provisioned and sailed it offshore to Annapolis from Fort Lauderdale. Apparently, they'd had to press on close-hauled in gale conditions much of the time and had barely met their docking deadline for the recent boat show. Nonetheless, the crew (and dog) had all still managed to arrive safe and happy.

It will take some practice to become accustomed to all the controls aboard the Xquisite X5 Plus, but the lines are arranged in a logical manner at the helm station to minimize wrapping and unwrapping the winches, and it will be worth the effort doing so. The company's standard two-week training session for all new owners should shorten the learning curve and produce an able crew with confidence in its ability to go offshore.

UNDER POWER

The motoring performance is the same as in the original boat and that's just fine. Twin 80hp Yanmars drive the Xquisite X5 Plus to 9.8 knots at a 2,500 rpm or a standard cruise pace of 8.5 knots at 1,900 rpm. The sound level at cruise was the same as normal conversation, 56dBA. Maneuvering is typical of a modern cat: simple and precise. The turning circle is about 1.5 boatlengths if you don't use differential power to the two engines to spin about in your own length. The boat stops and backs predictably.

CONCLUSION

It may seem strange to consider a \$1.7 million yacht with a \$14,000 annual maintenance fee a good deal, but the Xquisite X5 Plus seems to be just that. For the money, you get a luxurious, well-built, extensively equipped voyager with full factory support anywhere. A house of similar price can easily cost that in upkeep, and it won't take you around the world! *