

# Nothing Succeeds Like ...



**E**xcess. Or does it? That was the primary question to be answered when determining the top boat among this trio of nominees in the Midsize Cruising Catamaran division. The Excess 12 was the first highly anticipated model to debut in the United States from a new brand recently created by the French boatbuilding giant Groupe Beneteau. It was up against stiff competition from a pair of long-established, well-entrenched French cat builders: Fountaine Pajot, with its new Elba 45, and Lagoon Catamarans—also part of the Groupe Beneteau colossus—with a fresh 46-footer. Who would emerge victorious in this rousing cat fight?

Judge Ed Sherman was impressed with the Elba 45 right from the get-go. “During our motoring test, it was immediately evident that this was one of the quietest boats in the fleet,” he said. “At 70 decibels in cruising mode, that was extremely low. And even when we kicked it up to high speed, at 2,800 rpm, it was still recording just 72 dB in the main cabin area while doing 9.2 knots, which is excellent. And the entire boat—the deckhouse, the interior layout—the way it was structurally engineered, was solid. It indicated to me that this was a strong boat that’s going to last for a while.”

As it turned out, the judges weren’t finished grading or discussing the Elba 45 (see “A Trip to Elba,” page 84).

The panelists then turned their attention to the two Groupe Beneteau contenders,

which perhaps significantly, were sea-trialed in some of the most extreme conditions in the long history of Boat of the Year (see “A Little Bit of Everything,” page 67).

The Lagoon 46 is laid out with the steering station and sail controls situated well aloft in a raised, flybridge-type configuration, which for judge Ralph Naranjo, took a little getting used to. “If you’re down below and the boat’s on autopilot, and something happens where you need to blow the traveler because a thunderstorm’s coming, you’re going to have to hurry,” he said. But Naranjo’s opinion of

the boat also changed for the better during the stiff sail tests, which the 46 handled with aplomb. “I came away liking the boat more after sailing and motoring it than I did during the dockside inspections,” Naranjo said. “Under power, she was lovely to maneuver. Even in the big breeze, you could hold station using forward and reverse.”

Of course, both the Lagoon and the Fountaine Pajot will be used both by private owners and in charter fleets, and needs to satisfy the requirements of each. Whereas the judges considered the 38-foot-6-inch Excess 12 a purer sailboat,

**Both the Fountaine Pajot Elba 45 (below) and the Lagoon 46 (bottom) shared one overall objective, and that’s to be a viable offering for sale and use in the charter-yacht fleets. The judges took that point into consideration when evaluating the Excess 12 (opposite). A no-compromise performance cruiser, it won over the judging panel.**



one that could be operated by a couple and serve as a fine, fast cruiser, which is why they ultimately named it the **Best Midsize Cruising Catamaran**.

“I like having the sail controls and the main living space on the vessel all on the same level,” Naranjo said. “You have that nice continuity between the main saloon and the cockpit, so the off watch is only a few steps away from the helm and all the action. And I liked the overall workmanship. It really performed in the heavy air. I think she’s a great boat.”

**“WE GAVE THE EXCESS 12 A STRUCTURAL WORKOUT, AND IT DID VERY WELL. IT FELT VERY SOLID.”**

“One of the strongest features is the removable Bimini over the cockpit,” judge Dan Spurr said. “When it’s retracted, you have really good visibility of the sails. When you don’t need that visibility, when it’s raining or you’re motoring, you can pull it back and have some shade and sun protection. The kind of convertible option is nice. On a lot of cats with a fixed hardtop, you can’t see anything and have to go to one side or the other to check sail trim.”

“I really liked her as well,” judge Ed Sherman said. “At one point sailing, we saw 43 knots of apparent wind. And it just remained relatively quiet and in control. So we certainly gave it quite a structural workout, and it just did very well. It felt quite solid. I like the helms aft. I think they’re really onto something here. I was very impressed.”

So, to once again pose the question from the top of this write-up, does nothing succeed like this Excess? Aw, c’mon. You know the answer.

