

## TEST

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The NEEL 43 is capable of averaging over 10 knots in a Force 4.



# NEEL 43

## TWO HULLS GOOD, THREE HULLS BETTER?

For 10 years now, NEEL have been building their own vision of the cruising multihull, namely a trimaran topped by a large nacelle. The concept developed by Eric Bruneel has been well-received by performance-loving blue water cruisers and is now a permanent fixture in the world of multihulls. The latest model in their sailing range to be launched is the NEEL 43, replacing the 45. We had the opportunity to try one out in La Rochelle, in excellent weather conditions.



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Blue skies and a steady offshore breeze: what more could you ask for on a test sail? Aboard this trimaran, there is only one engine to fire up - a 50 HP Volvo. There's a bowthruster in the central hull, but this wasn't required for our maneuver leaving an empty dock. Note that the relatively low dihedral form of the floats means that the 43 does not wobble from one side to the other and will remain flat at anchor. The floats are significantly angled. They are narrow at the waterline, but their volume is increased by very rounded outer topsides. As for the appendages, there's a monolithic keel below the central hull and a single rudder. Though the hulls and deck are made of traditional and largely

reliable materials) foam/glass sandwich with quadriaxial cloth/polyester and vinylester and carbon reinforcements) many non-structural parts in the fittings, such as the counter-molds, are made of a sandwich that integrates a 9 oz (300 gsm) glass/flax cloth and a cork core. At NEEL, the heading is clearly one towards the use of environmentally friendly materials. The 43 displaces just 19,850 lbs (9 tonnes) lightship, 2 to 3 tons less than most of its twin-hulled competitors of the same size.

#### **An ultra-simple deck plan**

Despite the wide nacelle, the side-decks still measure at least 16 inches (40 cm) in width.

With the shrouds secured to the coachroof, and the channel that serves as a handrail, moving around is safe. At the front, the hulls are narrow, but the two trampolines are vast. A sturdy bowsprit extends the central hull, supporting the bow roller and the anchor, but also the tack point for the downwind sails. The cockpit takes advantage of the full width of the platform. The outside table measures 4½ feet by 3 (136 cm by 90) and is accompanied by an L-shaped bench seat that can be completed with additional stools. Aft of the helm station, there's a large seat measuring 6'7" (2 meters) in length. Multiple accesses - two to the helm station, one to each side-deck, one to each transom - are

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provided; they are mostly accompanied by one or more steps and/or unexpected slopes, but these don't cause any problems. A cradle allows the dinghy to be stored on the back of the central hull. The sail maneuvering station merges with the helm station. An impressive battery of clutches sits in conjunction with an electric winch, from where almost all maneuvers are controlled. There is a twin mainsheet system, and the boom seems to pass very close to the helmsman's bimini but the reinforced lazyjacks are perfectly adjusted. The jib sheets go through a fixed block, are led back to a dedicated winch. A track would allow you to fine-tune the trim and a pair of clutches would avoid having to release the sheet when tacking. The manufacturer defends these "free" genoa sheets as a safety feature in the event of heavy gusts. Our test NEEL 43 featured an asymmetric spinnaker and two additional winches at the back of each float. The genoa furling line had been moved to the starboard winch.

### **This boat performs!**

The mainsail was quickly hoisted thanks to the electric winch. We had good sea-room (the

whole of the Pertuis d'Antioch channel off La Rochelle) and an east-north-easterly wind, so the asymmetric spinnaker was hoisted in its sock to be released immediately. Inshore, the true wind was already showing 15 knots and the GPS 10: we were off to a good start! The NEEL 43 leans on its leeward float, lifts the windward one and extends two wakes behind. As we gybed, La Rochelle began to disappear in the distance. The red spinnaker was snuffed back into its sock, and the slightly overlapping genoa unfurled in the process. For this return leg to windward, the breeze dropped a little to 12 knots, but our upwind speed (at 50° to the true wind) remained flattering, at 9 to 10 knots. With the help of a gust, I steered to the telltales on the jib by bearing away a little: we effortlessly reached 12 knots. The Performance rig with its carbon mast some 2 feet (60 cm) taller and mainsail with XXL-sized square top should give even more horsepower!

The only drawback was that the occasional sea caught the aft beam when the wind was blowing harder, sometimes spraying the rear of the cockpit. A small sheet stretched across the small gaps between each hull would solve this issue.

1- In a good breeze, the windward float eventually rises completely from the water. The leeward float goes down a little, giving a maximum heel of 10°.

2- The liferaft is located at the back of the central hull. On the sugarscoop, a cradle is fitted for stowing the RIB.

3- The central part of the cockpit is protected by the rigid bimini.

4- The side-decks, at their narrowest, are 16" (40 cm) wide. The shrouds terminate on the coachroof and the channel that serves as a handrail makes moving around the boat safe.

5- The two trampolines allow you to move between the three bows. In good weather or at anchor, they make for excellent sunbathing spots.



### Newfound pleasure at the helm

Wearing the colors of his shipyard - white and red - Eric Bruneel took obvious delight when handing over the helm - he waited for me to savor the sensations before giving more details about his latest creation. I must admit that the time I spent at the helm was what stood out the most during this test. The wheel is in direct contact with the only rudder, on the central hull. The feeling is both a frankly surprising smoothness of the helm and an irreproachable control of course-keeping. Added to an 8 to 10° heel in a good breeze from close-hauled to a beam reach, the feeling is almost that of a monohull: you don't want to press "AUTO" on the autopilot control, but rather to sail to telltales on the genoa, to accelerate even more... This means we're a long way from the somewhat "woolly" helms of many cruising catamarans. Until now, exacting helmsmen who have long raced aboard sharp monohulls such as J-Boats or X-Yachts or similar have had to just forget about this type of sailing - but now it's the family's turn to enjoy real cruising, aboard a multihull of course! The NEEL 43 will delight former owners - especially the most demanding - of fine-helmed monohulls. And so no-one misses out, the 4-foot bench seat can comfortably seat three people.

### XXL-sized nacelle

Over the years, the design of the NEEL's accommodation has evolved. This is particularly obvious on board the 43, where the impression of volume is striking when you enter



the saloon - we'll come back to that later. The manufacturer has of course retained its "Cockloot" concept - a mixture of the terms cockpit and saloon - to erase the boundary between exterior and interior. In fact, the large glass door measuring 6'2" by 3'1" (1.87 m by 0.95) is accompanied by a second sliding side opening measuring 3'1" by 2'4" (95 cm by 70 cm). The two tables - the one outside and the 3'7" by 3' (110 cm by 90 cm) one in the

saloon - are very precisely aligned, as are the seats. This gives the impression of being inside and outside at the same time. The headroom inside the saloon is 6'5" (1.97 m). The impression of volume and the panoramic view are ensured by the absence of a bulkhead on port side and the large windows to starboard. Of course, the cabins have less privacy compared to those of a conventional 43-foot catamaran, which are tucked away in each corner. But



this is a choice that corresponds to family use or to friends who know each other well. Using the same logic, there is only one toilet/shower compartment. The finish is very simple, a bit in the spirit of the early Fontaine Pajots, but more colorful. This is not surprising when you know that Eric Bruneel spent most of his career with the great French boatbuilder - he even designed models that also bear his name, the Corneels... Except for a few details, such as the slightly loose covering on the mast strut and a few sharp corners, you see the advantages such as good aging and easy maintenance rather than any discomfort. This is just my opinion of course - others may be sensitive to beautiful woodwork, obviously absent here. The relatively compact galley is located on the starboard side, and there's a forward-facing watch-keeper's seat. There is plenty of storage space. The owner's cabin is the only one with a traditional door, which is relatively narrow - 16" (40 cm) - but the bed is large - 6'7" x 4'11" (1.50 m x 2m). The view over the water is striking. To isolate yourself from the saloon, just draw the curtains. Ventilation is provided by an opening hatch.

The second "closed-off" cabin is the one in the central hull, the closing being taken care of by a complete cover on sliders. Staggered steps lead to a bed 6'7" (2 m) long, 4'3" (1.30 m) wide at the head and 2'4" (0.70 m) at the feet. An opening hatch is provided. The third cabin, on the port side, is completely open to the saloon. This can be closed off simply with curtains. The 6'7" (2 m) by 4'7" (1.40 m) bed, like a Japanese tatami, will be the ideal place for younger children. Although the NEEL 43 has three double berths, its total capacity can be increased to 10 people, as the manufacturer offers, as an option, to convert the forepeaks of the floats into a single berth and to have a dinette that can be converted into a double berth.

### Conclusion

With production planned for 22 units per year and already 30 on order, the NEEL 43 isn't hiding its ambitions: this model could become the most widely distributed trimaran over 40 feet in the world in a few years... A future best-seller whose destiny would be well deserved if we judge by its potential under sail, its pleasant helm and its comfort.

These three pictures explain the "cockloot" concept dear to the manufacturer: inside, outside, or both!

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CRUISING CATAMARANS.  
THE NEEL 43 WILL DELIGHT  
FORMER MONOHULL OWNERS -  
ESPECIALLY THE DEMANDING ONES.

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6- Dining area in the center, watch-keeping station forward and galley to starboard.

7- The owner's cabin occupies the starboard side of the nacelle.

8 & 9- The forward cabin is isolated from the saloon by a sliding cover. Access is via staggered steps.

10- Le couchage bâbord est complètement ouvert sur le carré.



The competition	Astrea 42	Leopard 42	Lagoon 42	Bali 4.2	Aventura 44
Length	41'3"(12.58 m)	41'7"(12.67 m)	42'(12.80 m)	42'2"(12.85 m)	43'4"(13.20 m)
Beam	23'7"(7.20 m)	23'1"(7.04 m)	25'3"(7.70 m)	23'3"(7.08 m)	23'(7 m)
Displacement	28,000 lbs (12.7 t)	26,100 lbs (11.84 t)	26,675 lbs (12.1 t)	25,350 lbs (11.5 t)	20,950 lbs (9.5 t)
Sail area	1,195 sq ft (111 m <sup>2</sup> )	1,255 sq ft (116.6 m <sup>2</sup> )	969/1,012 sq ft(90/94 m <sup>2</sup> )	915 sq ft (85 m <sup>2</sup> )	1,238 sq ft (115 m <sup>2</sup> )
Price ex-tax	€ 371,568	€ 389,000	€ 348,000	€ 363,800	€ 299,608
On test in	MW161	MW177	MW148	In this issue	MW170



Excellent performance  
 Incomparable pleasure at the helm  
 Very well positioned starting price

8 to 10° heel in stronger breezes when sailing from  
 close-hauled to beam reach



Less privacy in the cabins - compared to a "traditional"  
 catamaran

Following seas likely to get the back of the cockpit wet

### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Builder: NEEL Trimarans
Architects: Marc Lombard Yacht Design Group
Material: foam/quadriaxial glass/polyester and vinylster sandwich with carbon reinforcements
Length: 42'4" (12.90 m)
Beam: 24'3" (7.40 m)
Draft: 4'11" (1.50 m)
Air draft: 62'4" (19 m)
Light displacement: 19,850 lbs (9 t)
Fully-battened mainsail: 630 sq ft (58.60 m²)
Genoa: 467 sq ft (43.40 m²)
Water tank: 132 US gal (500 l)
Fuel tank: 79 US gal (300 l)
Engine: 50 HP Volvo
CE ICNN certification
Prices excluding tax:
From € 329,800 in 3-cabin version
Premium Pack: € 36,150
Cockpit and aft steps in synthetic teak: € 12,300
Saloon, galley, chart table area in synthetic teak: € 3,400
Cockpit tent (removable): € 6,200
Bimini over the helm station: € 2,225
Convertible saloon table with double bunk and curtains: € 3,850
Fisher Panda 6.8 kVA generator: € 12,000
Air conditioning: € 13,000
Heating: € 9,150
12V 26 US gal (100 L)/h watermaker: € 13,354
2 x solar panels on forward coachroof total 312 W: € 5,650
Electronics pack: € 11,970
Complete performance rig: € 37,980
Asymmetric spinnaker: € 5,900/6,900
Deck hardware for spinnaker + 2 winches: € 2,200
Electric winch in place of the external manual winch: € 2,700
Removable staysail on furler with storage bag: € 4,950
10' (3.1m) Highfield tender with 6 HP Honda outboard: € 6,450

