

Power catamarans are the fastest growing sector, for some very reasons such as frugality, comfort and in the case of the adventure variety like this ILIAD 53S (Sport), long-range capabilities. Lifestyle is the other main driver for the surge in demand for these vessels, and their inherent features, such as shallow draft and, in the case of this ILIAD 53S, beach-ability, means they are also ideal explorer boats.

Iliad 53S
AN ADVENTUROUS BOAT
READY TO SETTLE
ON THE BEACH

TEST
Iliad Catamarans is a young brand, with the first 35 arriving in Australia in 2019, joined in 2020 by a 70 model in a range that now includes the 13, 62 and 74 models. The 62 premiered at the 2022 Sydney Boat Show, where I boarded it after the event. For 2023, the major milestones are this 53Sport which is the first model without a flybridge and made its Australian debut at the Sanctuary Cove Boat Show this year (May 21-28), followed by the 53 Flybridge that debuts at the Sydney Show (August 3-6).

Explorer credentials
These semi-displacement boats can achieve double-digit cruising speeds with long ranges. The key to these capabilities is a wide array of engine choices, all shaft-driven, tailored to a customer's needs. Shaft drives, protected by mini keels minimize grounding damage, should any dramas occur. The popularity of explorer-style yachts continues to grow as people seek to escape the crowds and embrace technologies that liberate them from onshore services. For motor yachts, fuel efficiency is a key feature, and this is where catamarans, with their low-drag hulls are very attractive. Wanting something custom but feeling something suitable on the market, Iliad Catamarans boss Mark Elkington formed a consortium that included designer Riccardo Bulgarelli, who worked with Admiral before establishing his own design office, and a leading South-Aussie rigging. Along with Australian expertise from well-known marine expert and General Manager Michael 'Yacht' Crook, with his finance and administration team, the result is Iliad Catamarans.

Shark Solution
This first Sport before the brand was heavily visited during the Sanctuary Cove boat show, helped by four days of gale-force weather in Southern Queensland, the gateway to thousands of tropical sun-seekers along the Great Barrier Reef. The first haul of 25Sport is an all-weather boat, with a fully covered aft cockpit and enclosed in plastic rain-up covers. And there was plenty more to see, as I discovered during my walk-through with GM Michael 'Yacht' Crook. "The can-do attitude of the Chinese part has been an important for us, especially when configuring the custom parts of these boats," explained Crook. "That attitude is a key market differentiator," he said. "The anti-collision hull and exceptionally high level of stability." Another selling point is offering fully optional hull boats, rather than charring, beaches of abrasion afterwards, which has been successfully proven for quality builders such as Havelock. For example, on this first haul of the 53S the only major areas were the watermaker, upgraded avionics and the 10 long-lead platform upgrade from standard. Given this boat's maiden voyage will be a three-month season in the remote tropical north with its West Australian owners and finally based in Fremantle, good air conditioning and self-sufficiency are prerequisites. Compared to the range's Flybridge models, the 53S has much less windage and greater stability so looks much sleeker, something the owner Mark was keen on, having migrated from a single Flybridge model. On the main deck, the aft part will be a strong selling point for prospective buyers, especially for those coming from the narrower beam of the Riviera because the Iliad 53S

Power catamarans are the fastest growing sector, for some very good reasons such as frugality, comfort and in the case of the adventure variety like this Iliad 53Sport, long-range capabilities. Lifestyle is the other main driver for the surge in demand for these vessels and their inherent features, such as shallow draft and in the case of this 53S, beach-ability, mean they are also ideal explorer boats.

The Iliad 53 Sport can cruise in shallow water or in semi-displacement mode, making a maximum of 27 knots and making a maximum of 270 miles continuously using sea water.

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Explorer Credentials

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The popularity of explorer-style yachts continues to grow as people seek to escape the crowds and embrace technologies that liberate them from onshore services. For

motor yachts, fuel efficiency is a key feature, and this is where sedan catamarans with their low-drag hulls are very attractive.

Wanting something special but finding nothing suitable on the market, ILIAD Catamarans boss Mark Elkington formed a consortium that included designer Riccardo Bulgarelli, who worked with Azimut before establishing his own design office, and a leading South Asia shipyard. Along with Australian expertise from well-known marine expert and General Manager Michael 'Nod' Crook, with his finance and administration team. The result is ILIAD Catamarans.



Sleek Sedan

This first Sport sedan from the brand was heavily visited during the Sanctuary Cove Boat Show, helped by four days of glorious weather in Southern Queensland, the gateway to thousands of tropical northern islands along the Great Barrier Reef. This first hull of the ILIAD 53S is an all-weather boat, with a fully covered aft cockpit and enclosed in plastic roll-up clears. And there was plenty more to see, as I discovered during my walk-through with GM Michael 'Nod' Crook. "The can-do attitude of the Chinese yard has been so important for us, especially when configuring the custom parts of these boats," explained Nod. "That in fact, is a key market differentiator," he said, "The semi-custom build and exceptionally high level of detailed finish."

Another selling point is offering fully optioned base boats, rather than creating swathes of add-ons afterwards, which has been successfully proven by quality builders such as Nautor-Swan. For example, on this first hull of the 53S the only major extras were the watermaker, upgraded aircon and the lifting swim platform upgrade from standard.

Given this boat's maiden voyage will be a three-month sojourn in the remote tropical north with its West Australian owners and finally based in Fremantle, good air conditioning and self-sufficiency are prerequisites. Compared to the range's flybridge models, this 53S has much less windage and greater stability so looks much sleeker, something new owner Marc was keen on, having migrated from a thirsty flybridge Riviera.

On the main deck, the aft part will be a strong selling point for prospective buyers, especially for those coming from the narrower beam of the Riviera because the ILIAD 53S has a vast area of unimpeded relaxing space that only a catamaran can offer. A wet bar, electric barbecue, icemaker and table for eight means the aft deck is an

alfresco extension of the saloon, especially as the galley is just inside. The entire area is shaded by the flybridge extension with opening electric sunroof which is strongly supported by large diameter stainless struts and seamlessly flows into the saloon while being protected by sturdy sliding doors.

Voluminous Saloon

Inside the open-plan saloon, the galley is to port, dinette conveniently placed opposite and lounge on the forward port quarter. On starboard is the steering console and double electronically controlled Besenconi helm seats. A bench seat is standard. This forepart of the saloon is elevated, which ensures good visibility, as I found when at sea later in the day. Garmin was the chosen smart by the owner with two large screens plus autopilot unit. In addition, the Yanmar engine screen and throttles plus the standard single bow thruster control (for a single tunnel thruster on the port hull).



Another option fitted was vertical interceptor tabs – to help trim and fuel efficiency under load. The other key system is the main power board which is near the galley. It had neatly laid out 12V and 24V switches and all essential controls including the Sea-Fire system for the engine room, air conditioner and Cummins generator management.

Saloon volume is vast, thanks to the openplan layout and low-slung cabinetry, finished in a mix of Elm joinery – a medium-coloured wood the nicely matches the immaculate two-pack white painted bulkheads and cupboards. Underfoot is carpet overlaid on Spotted Gum wood. Vertical side bulkheads throughout give lots of

volume and natural light, while a man-sized front opening window allows airflow at anchor or even an agile adult (me!) to use as an exit to the foredeck.



In the galley, a U-shaped arrangement was chosen over the optional enclosed return bench version with household sized fridge. “We want the whole family to enjoy this area and use the back part for serving the cockpit,” explained new owner Marc. Appliances installed are comprehensive and include a four plate Fisher&Paykel electric hob with separate microwave and a dishwasher, while an array of interchangeable drawer fridges-freezers ensure the perishables remain cool or frozen. Other white goods include a washing machine installed in the guest’s hull. There’s also spacious Himacs composite worktops and a deep stainless sink. Large cupboards overhead and under the worktops are ideal for victualling long-term, plus there’s watertight storage in the nacelle – ideal for maintaining the temperature of your wine.

My only real gripe was the lack of fiddles throughout, but optional ones can be fitted. The level of detailing and quality of finish is remarkable, illustrated in the large dining tabletop with integrated soft seating around its base to accommodate more guests. The joinery is hand-finished in most places and includes rounded ends, curved cocktail tabletops and immaculate stitching in the Ultraleather sofas.

A true Owner's Suite

Moving down into the starboard hull, from gently sloping steps just in front of the dinette-galley area, brings me to the owner’s suite. Closed-off by a sliding door, the entire hull is dedicated to the owner, with a large island bed in the stern where the

motion is kindest at sea, and ablutions in the bow with vanity/desk midships. Cleverly, a walk-in closet aft (which could be optioned as ablutions), acts as sound buffer from the adjoining engine room. The athwartships queen bed, faces the large rectangular portlights and sumptuous Elm panelling with carpet clad flooring gives a cozy feel throughout. The attention to detail again is subtle with quality metal door/cupboard fittings and a sumptuously padded sofa along with strategically placed handrails.

In the bathroom, the tall topsides ensure volume is good and opening portlights give that essential airflow for the tropics to reduce the reliance on the fitted air conditioning unit. Comfortable teak underfoot with practical (if rather glaring) gelcoat finish throughout; so easily wiped down. A quality electric freshwater head finishes off the area nicely.

Over in the port hull, this is clearly designed as a family boat, for the large number of young members in the owner's entourage. So, in the stern there's two large single berths including memory-foam mattresses and surrounding bookshelves with tasteful mood-lights, with a queen bed option here. The adjoining bathrooms – one for each cabin – are fully featured just like the owner's. The ablutions include spacious shower units. Also good throughout is natural aeration from skylights and portlights. The forward berth is a standard double with another single bunk slightly elevated beside it (under the coachroof).





Beachable hull

Usable deck space is important for tropical voyaging, and is generous on the ILIAD 53S, thanks to large fore and aft cockpits. Wide side-decks with deep bulwarks and tall safety rails guided me to the bows. Here, twin sunbeds (in quality Sunbrella fabric) elevate and lockers between them house the essential anchor arrangement and a large storage locker for all of the cushions. Two vast bow lockers with ladders gave yet more storage here; or can be optioned as crew berth.

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The rode (40kg stainless Lewmar anchor) runs under the nacelle, safely away from bare feet and is controlled by a Quick 2,000W vertical windlass. Ideally, a second roller should be fitted (and is available on new builds) but good points included double sets of oversize cleats and large fairleads that also allow water displacement.

Moving back aft, each hull has moulded steps into the water and the hydraulic swim platform can house a tender. The aft cockpit also has the hatches to each engine. Twin Yanmar 440 HP were fitted, with either them or Volvo 440 HP standard. Upgrades include Yanmar 480HP's and Cummins 110, but any custom engine brand choices can be considered. All benefit from being housed in a hull that can dry out as it protects their shafts with moulded skegs. "Our slogan is Freedom of Choice, which includes most of the systems, such as engines and electronics, which the buyer can preference and we are happy to advise of course," said Nod.

Looking inside the engine room revealed a spacious and well-organised area with electrics and AGM starting batteries elevated above the Yanmar 440s. Interestingly, their exhausts now run through the transom to reduce fumes (as opposed to the side on earlier models). Only leading industry standard components are used such as Victron a 1000W inverter/charger and Racor f filters with a Sea-Fire automatic fire suppression system. House electrics are totally Victron, arranged in a special locker in the nacelle with another locker of lithium house batteries nearby, which allowed the Victron company to actually approve this entire installation.

Excellent renewable energy levels come from the 3,200W of solar panels on the roof – that was outputting about 10 amps during my visit. Service access to the oilways and belts is also adequate, as is the quadrant and steering linkages. Other key systems here include the 13.1KW Cummins Onan generator and hot water system. This is all housed in a sturdily built CE A category hull that has solid fiberglass base and mini keels to allow a grounding (or hull scrub on a tidal beach).

Yet another feature is the tall bridgedeck clearance, I estimated to be nearly a meter; an impressive height that minimizes wave impact on the nacelle. Watertight bulkheads are used throughout – in the engine room, the central hull and in case of collision, on the bows. Construction is a full vinylester hull, below the waterline and above as well, with monolithic or solid glass around the keel line and key parts. Elsewhere, PVC closed-cell infusion has been used by the experienced ILIAD yard, who were subject to visits by independent European CE inspectors at key stages of the build.

Gold Coast Sea Trial

The sheltered waters of the Gold Coast, hidden behind barrier islands is ideal catamaran country, if somewhat lacking in swells, but that was our lot for the day on the ILIAD 53S. Nudging our way from the marina after the Sanctuary Cove Boat Show was tricky, requiring full use of the twin engines while I gave gentle nudge to the lever for the bow thruster to move us sideways, then backwards; under the watchful eye of skipper Jason Norton, before he eased the electronic throttles to power down the meandering Coomera River. Most catamarans respond to judicious use of the throttles – in a fore and aft movement to spin the hulls but given the windage from the tall hulls a thruster on one hull is welcome for the amateur skipper.

Surrounded by riverside mansions and premium cars such as Bentleys, the ILIAD 53S looked at home here. At the estuary, on the busy Gold Coast Broadwater I took control of the ILIAD. Leaning against the bolster seat with steering wheel at waist height the views were superb, nearly all around. Steering was instantaneous because of the electric/ hydraulic steering system and twin rudders, wide apart. Pushing down the electronic throttles brought a faint roar from the twin 440HPs before planing. Prior to that we'd been in trawler mode at 8 knots which is the long-range speed, giving a superb range of 1,710 miles. Increasing speed – to outrun a tropical storm for example, reduces this range significantly but the speed (maximum 21 knots reached on test) is there if you need it; and noise levels allow talking without hindrance (about 60db).



Crossing the wakes of the many large powerboats on this busy waterway didn't upset the ILIAD 53S, with no groans from any parts as we broached a few tall wakes. The open-plan layout allowed clear views aft; always essential in narrow waterways and when I did some slow handling to demonstrate to new owner Marc, by spinning his yacht on its axis then going astern in a predictable manner. And the comfortable bucket seat supported me well as we cruised back to the marina.

I envied the family starting out on their 3,000-mile odyssey across the tropical north of Australia, something this ILIAD 53S is ideally suited for.