new boat: Fountaine-Pajot Salina 48

Big and bold

Roger Priest checks out the latest arrival from France – Fountaine-Pajot’s Salina 48 luxury catamaran.

This big 14.3m cruising cat comes from French boatbuilder Fountaine-Pajot’s volume production line, which brings many advantages and a few constraints. Being a big producer, funds were able to be spent in tank testing to optimise the 2007 design, so it’s state of the art in terms of hull dimensions, construction, load carrying, performance and seakindness for a cat destined primarily for the owner-cruiser market. This meant 200nm daily passage-making, positive flotation, plus hull volumes on the high side to cater for liveability, and no dagger boards.

The weight (10.5 tonnes light – 14.8 max loaded) is pretty low-displacement for this size boat. Combine that with a 21m-tall rig and roached main, and you have a sail-area-to-displacement ratio providing a quick cruising boat. To achieve the weight savings, the boat carries its foam sandwich construction well below the waterline before changing to solid glass for the central hull bottoms – the bits you might expect to contact the bottom in a grounding.

The few constraints? The boats have a fixed layout and largely fixed factory fit-out options. At the factory stage you can delete standard items to your heart’s content, and get your local dealer to custom-fit alternatives. You can also add at the factory stage from a fixed list of options, or get your dealer to custom-fit those same options or alternatives. The more complex the option, the more it will cost you to have it from the factory. Variation from standard slows the production line down for more boats than yours, so you pay. As a result, these boats are often extensively customised at the dealer delivery stage, and the constraints are turned to advantage in many buyers’ minds.

Private and charter

Most Fountaine-Pajot cats sold in Australia are going into owner hands but also a few into the charter market. I saw one of each at EC Marine’s Mooloolaba fit-out yard. You can’t order to Australian charter survey standard from the factory, so the dealer has become expert at bringing the cats into survey. For instance, some three weeks’ labour and about an extra $70,000 were bringing a Lavezzi 40 I saw up to charter survey standard.

Good breeze

Test day at Mooloolaba saw an offshore breeze and relatively low swells. Motoring out to sea from the
Fountaine-Pajot Salina 48

Breakwaters we recorded 7.7 knots at 2000rpm and 10 knots neat at the maximum 3050rpm. An economical compromise was 8.7 knots at 2400rpm. Fast motoring, hey? This was with fixed two-blade props and the optional twin 55hp Volvo saildrives. Count on a bit less with the standard twin 40s. You can have Yanmar 40 or 50s if you want.

Sail handling
Motoring slowly upwind, the main was hoisted. This went nearly hitch-free, one full-length batten needing some encouragement to clear the lazyjacks. And effortless. Simply ease the mainsheet, place halyard turns onto the self-tailing power winch at the helm, press the button until fully hoisted, close the jammer and free up the winch for other duties. The standard headsail was unrolled from its Facnor furler using the power winch and then the sheet was transferred to one of the two manual sheet winches. And we were sailing. The standard Furuno anemometer had a technical hitch, but four of us agreed the wind to be 13-16 knots. We proved the polar diagram correct by recording 6.1 knots at 40° apparent and 7.3 knots at 45°. Then a broad reach at 100-110° apparent produced speeds of 9-11 knots. Check the bow wave in the main pic for proof. A prodder-screecher kit is optional. She should really fly with that. And cats are well set up with multiple forward attachment points to deploy an asymmetric spinnaker should you be intent on lots of downwind sailing. I tried furling and unfurling the headsail manually. Not a problem, but why not use power if it’s there? Unlike many cats, the traveller in the Salina 48 is atop the cockpit hard cover, so its control lines go to the helm – where you can use power if feeling lazy.

Shortening main
We shortened the main to the second reefing point – just to witness the process. Best with two people but possible single-handed, with the autopilot steering. You luff up, ease the main halyard, then go forward to the mast, where you find three separate attachment points to shorten the luff to the selected reef. Back at the helm, using the power winch, you apply tension to the halyard then heave in the appropriate slab reefing line, and that’s it. It all went like clockwork. Shaking out was just as easy. Aside from reefing, the only other sail handling away from the helm is screecher sheeting. There is a manual self-tailing

Under way or at anchor the back cockpit is a great place. Lots of seats, a large table, plenty of shelter, and always something to hang onto

ABOVE The large bridgedeck galley features a high-set gas oven and front-opening fridge.

LEFT Seated at the bridgedeck saloon table you have panoramic views. The galley benchtop is to left.

BELOW The starboard aft owner’s suite in the three-cabin layout is huge and meant for long-term living aboard.

ABOVE The large bridgedeck galley features a high-set gas oven and front-opening fridge.
Three people can sit comfortably at the open helm station with just a step forward to the sail controls or steps below.

Steering
I found the Solimar mechanical steering light but a little too direct for my liking. No doubt I would get rapidly used to it. Emergency steering has been catered for. You need to hop down into the starboard engine compartment to set it up on the cross-bar joining the two rudders. The standard Furuno autopilot works via a 12V hydraulic reversing pump with its ram on the starboard quadrant. This is good, heavy-duty engineering.

On deck
There are wide side decks. These slope gently down forward of the bridgedeck to give the boat graceful lines without compromising internal headroom. On deck there are plenty of things to grab unless you venture to the centre of the trampoline. The anchor locker is voluminous. So much so that you can fit a lot more in there than the winch plus main and spare anchors. For instance, an extra gas bottle locker, fender stowage, water tank, etc. Anchor-wise, most owners will upgrade to a new-generation brand of their choice with 100m or so of all-chain rode, and maybe keep the standard-fit under-size 45lb CQR with 60m chain as a spare. This boat is big and has a fair bit of windage, so will need a big pick for security in poor conditions.

likes
- The designer’s choice of compromise between performance and cruisability. The boat is quick even without the optional screecher, and exceptionally liveable.
- Wow! A 4.3-tonne payload right from design stage – with only 5cm loss of bridgedeck clearance.
- Excellent near-360° visibility seated in the saloon, for comfortable sociable watch-keeping on autopilot in open waters.
- Engines positioned well forward of rudder posts and totally isolated from accommodation.
- Extreme ease of sailing. Power winch plus most sail controls, including traveller, are at the helm.
- Anchor hawsepipe caters for most anchor types, including roll-bar styles.
- Several dinghy stowage options.
- I liked the large trampoline. There has been no attempt to extend the bridgedeck structure too far forward as you see on some cats. Good for seaworthiness.

dislikes
- No standard shelter from sun, rain or spray at the helm. Others (especially Australian cats) do this better. The dealer is working on an Australian-designed add-on because the factory option is only a sun shelter.
- Stern berthing cleats need re-locating. You have to stand on one to enter the boat from an alongside berth. EC Marine is shifting this cleat, pending a factory change.
- Lack of a dedicated start battery for the starboard engine, allowing current and voltage surges through electronics. Easily fixed, but why fit that way?
- Two of the three heads in the standard boat are manual, thus having no maceration for legal discharge in some Australian waters. Easily fixed.
- Small standard sewage-holding tanks. With three couples on board, the standard boat will only last between 1 and 1.5 days before needing to discharge or pumpout the three 45L tanks. EC Marine is currently fitting 2 x 220L tanks and four electric heads into a charter cat.
- Lifelines are not standard across the bow (they are an option).
With the anchor locker closed access to atop the bridgedeck saloon is facilitated by a folding step on the front of the mast. And from there you can go safely right back to the end of the boom. You need to hop up there once finished sailing to draw the zip on the lazyjacks-supported sail cover. This big cat is so stable I felt OK up there at sea even without hanging on to the boom.

The helm station is super-comfortable for no less than three but a little controversial. It’s been optimised for European summers, where apparently one wants to soak up the sun, not escape the skin-cancer-causing rays. In the standard boat you are totally exposed. Great for watch-keeping and boat manoeuvring and perhaps acceptable for long-distance cruisers who might spend most of their time on autopilot keeping watch from the comfort of the bridgedeck saloon. But not OK for cruising in tropical reef waters. EC Marine is coming to the rescue with a custom solution.

The high sides (about 1.8m) make it difficult to raft up with monos or smaller cats or to board anywhere except the transoms, so EC Marine has designed a custom fold-up side ladder for one owner.

**Cockpit**

Under way or at anchor the back cockpit is a great place. Lots of seats, a large table, plenty of shelter, and always something to hang onto. A dealer option will allow it to be enclosed with clears for colder climates. At the forward end is hatch covering a shallow sump, which gets rid of water. And should it get really rough – like greenies boarding via the stern – the sliding door to the saloon has several stops, allowing it to be left safely ajar for a person to just squeeze through – thus limiting water entry to the saloon.

**Bridgedeck saloon**

This is the biggest bridgedeck saloon I’ve experienced. Seated, you have near 360° vision, and by moving just a bit you can check any blind spots. There are two big opening windows each side of the mast to provide tropics ventilation in good weather. The nav station is right forward. The galley is up on this bridgedeck and is large enough to be “walk-in” with four “sides”. It features a high-set gas oven with separate bench-top burner range.

Then there’s the front-opening fridge and a second lift-top fridge/freezer. The person on galley duty can talk freely to people lounging round the main saloon table.

Sycamore timber abounds and the lighting is up-market for night navigation or entertaining – a truly great place to live. An extended party can include people in both saloon and cockpit. The large windows are in super-strong Lexan polycarbonate (rather than Perspex/acrylic).

**Below**

In this owner’s version there are three double-bed cabins plus a pilot berth. The owner’s cabin starboard aft is huge. In that same hull there is a storeroom forward and bathroom with electric head midships. The port hull has two smaller cabins, each with ensuite, plus a pilot berth in the passageway. The port aft cabin is the larger and the forward one, for obvious reasons, is smaller.
All three cabins have lots of light, ventilation and a Goiot circular escape hatch. All feature attractive sycamore timber panelling and loads of storage, including under-bunk drawers.

**Technical**

You can hop down into both engine compartments with ease and access all items without becoming a contortionist. This size of cat overcomes the usual space restrictions of its smaller sisters. The house bank is 4 x 135 amp hour low maintenance. Well done. With the addition of solar panels and alternator voltage regulators, these will be easily charged and ample for house duty. Some, but not too much, of the engine room space will get taken up if you fit the highly desirable extra sewage holding tanks each side as offered by the Australian dealer.

**Transom area**

You can secure a dinghy to unload heavy items – like fuel drums at a remote location – alongside the inside of each transom. Good thinking. Then there is the sundeck – positioned where you would expect to find the dinghy, so a light dinghy goes underneath. Or a heavy dinghy goes on top (with an electric crane). Or you can get the dealer to cut off the sundeck and fit regular davits. Plenty of options there. Each transom features a locker that could take a liferaft, gas bottle, small outboard or swim gear. And there’s the now obligatory hot/cold shower.

**Summary**

You’ll want around $1m to buy a Salina 48 new. Yes, a lot, but if you can afford it, it’s excellent value for money. You are getting a big, comfortable, fast, safe boat, state-of-the-art tank-tested design and a fine world-wide reputation to hold resale value up. The boat’s sheer size will limit your berthing options when you go cruising. Anchoring off and going ashore in the tender might be necessary from time to time.