

FONTAINE PAJOT BAHIA 46

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By Bill Lee [More articles by this author](#)

I like multihulls. Years ago, I owned a 20-foot Shark catamaran and a 25-foot C-Class cat. In 1972, I sailed a Transpac for multihulls on a Brown 37 trimaran Bachannal, winning on corrected time and completing the 2,225-mile course in 10 days, 10 hours, aboard what was, by today's standards, a pretty unsophisticated boat.

Aboard the decidedly sophisticated Fountaine Pajot Bahia 46, the quality workmanship, layout and use of space are impressive. I like the separation of cabins by widely spaced hulls. The engines are well isolated, reducing noise and smell. If one engine fails, a "spare" stands by.

The Bahia 46 is big enough to maintain reasonable underwing clearance. In smaller cats, designers often skimp on wing clearance to reduce profile height; in addition to that, 2,000 pounds of cruising gear on a smaller boat pushes the wing down proportionally more. The hulls of the 46 are broader than those of many cats, allowing a wider passageway, facilitating passing by the heads. Also, each pound of cruising gear will immerse the hulls less.

I like the minikeels attached to the Bahia's hulls. Centerboards or dagger boards may increase performance, but cruisers may not require that last tenth of a knot or that added pointing ability, and the open cases of deployed centerboards also cause drag. Centerboards or daggers reduce minimum draft, but reliability is inversely proportional to the number of parts. Also, minikeels allow generous bilge sumps and help protect the propellers and rudders.

More performance-oriented sailors might prefer dual wheels located aft on each hull, however the more protected central steering position behind the bridge-deck cabin on this boat better suits a cruiser.

The Bahia 46's rig, common on cats today, combines a simple fractional headsail on a roller furler with a large, high-roach, full-batten mainsail fit with slides and lazy jacks. The deck-stepped mast is supported by the forestay, two swept-back side shrouds, two sets of diamond shrouds and struts between the gooseneck and the hounds. A larger, stiffer mast might not need diamonds, but they reduce weight and windage. A monohull's narrow beam requires multiple shrouds, but a cat's wide beam allows use of a single, strong shroud to each side. Set well aft, the shroud and mainsheet tension the headstay and are an adequate option to runners on a cruising boat.

Racing multihulls need to maintain lightning speed even in four knots of breeze; that's when multihull cruisers will turn on the engine. A full crew of hot, attentive racers can usually sail a powered-up multihull safely, but few cruisers want a full crew, or to pay attention all the time. Therefore, to maximize security against capsize, cruising multihulls should be underpowered enough so that, even in the hands of the most average sailor who is paying a minimum of attention, a capsize remains very unlikely. The accommodations, inboard power and adequate structure of boats like the Bahia makes them heavier and harder to drive (negative) but also harder to capsize (positive).

The Bahia 46 is big enough for serious offshore cruising. Catamarans under, say, 35 or 40 feet are less suitable because, to maintain headroom, small catamarans become disproportionately high with a corresponding high center of gravity for their beam and length. Also, when the biggest wave of the day comes through, the bigger boat will be bigger relative to that wave.

Cruising-cat aficionados should put the Bahia 46 on their "must-see" list. The rig is more generous than on most cruising cats, giving reasonable performance. The six-post Bimini is clean in appearance yet strong. The dinghy davit arrangement is excellent. Finally, sculpted hull and deck lines add a touch of elegance. I would go cruising on her anytime.

Fountaine Pajot Bahia 46 Specifications:

- * LOA: 46'0" (14.0 m.)
- * LWL: 44'9" (13.7 m.)
- * Beam (max): 24'1" (7.35 m.); 52% LOA
- * Draft: 4'3" (1.30 m.)
- * Disp (light): 21,280 lbs. (9,652 kgs.)
- * Sail area: 1,330 sq.ft. (124 sq.m.)
- * Mast above water: 66'6" (20.3 m.)
- * Length/Beam (hulls): N/A
- * Underwing clearance: N/A
- * Cabin Headroom: N/A
- * Disp/Length: 106
- * SA/Disp: 27.7; Bruce #: 1.32
- * Fuel: 100 gal. (378 ltr.)
- * Water: 220 gal. (833 ltr.)



- * Holding: 20 gal. (76 ltr.)
- * Auxiliary: 2 x 38-hp Yanmar
- * Designer: Joubert-Nivelt
- * Base price: \$450,000 (9/96)

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