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# CONSIDER THE FAST CRUISING CAT

You can't get any simpler than one sail, and there's a primal pleasure that comes with one boat, one sail and one person. (The world's most popular sailboats are Cat Boats—as attested to by the success of Windsurfers, Lasers, Sunfish and Hobie 14s.) Yet most people are conditioned not to consider the Cat rig for seagoing yachts. Part of this prejudice is justifiable, because the old style Cat Boats—with the mast way forward and long boom—were really unmanageable offshore. That big mast way forward accentuated the boat's pitching moment, and tried to stuff the bow into each wave. And when you reefed down the sail area went too far forward, creating dangerous lee helm. You can't heave to with old style Cats—and when you let the sail out on a reach or downwind the center of effort moves way out to the side, creating an unbalanced rig with horrendous weather helm. Then that long boom dips dangerously into surrounding swells every time the boat rolls. Not a happy scenario when the wind pipes up and the big green ones start rolling.

## ENTER THE MODERN CAT RIG

The first thing we did was to move the mast out of the bow—closer to the center of the boat—to reduce the pitching. Then we shortened the boom, concentrating the sail area in the middle of the boat to avoid the helm problem and the boom dipping. To make up for the sail area lost by moving the mast aft and the boom in we went for the large roach supported by full-length battens. This adds up to 25% more sail area to a given mast and boom, and is also a more efficient shape than the conventional triangle. So instead of a cantankerous beast the Modern Cat is an extremely manageable craft where sail reductions can easily be made without throwing the boat out of balance. It was gusting over 40 mph at Newport when we took this photo, but the Freedom 21 shown—with one man aboard—just cranked in 2 reefs and took it in stride. We have a special reefing system (Pat. Pending) that allows you to reef in less than 30 seconds without ever leaving the cockpit. So you've got one sail—amazingly quiet and well behaved because of the full-length battens—with the center of effort nice and low when reefed. The sail area is concentrated well in the middle of the boat and one person can drive her hard to windward under complete control. There is no way one man could get this speed/ease ratio with a conventional sloop.

## LIGHT WIND TO WINDWARD?

Well that's a soft spot. When it's really honking the Cat rig is very competitive, and in the survival stuff it's actually better than a sloop for the reasons mentioned above. But there's no denying the efficiency of the slot effect—particularly

*Freedom 21:  
\$12,850 with sails and fully equipped*



*Freedom 25:  
\$20,975 fully equipped without sails*

in light to medium winds, and because of that there is no way a Cat Boat, however efficient, will beat a sloop of equal design upwind. Since most race courses are planned with two-thirds of the time spent to windward, sloops generally beat Cat Boats around the course. But hold on—it's not as bad as you might think. We've designed a special staysail that hoists on the spinnaker halyard, and with it you'll point and foot right close to those candy-ass race boats in the light stuff. This sail is good for winds up to about 12 mph and then the boat starts to get overpowered. But here is where the Cat rig starts to purr on its own, and the harder it blows the better we like it. Since Freedoms are cruising boats we opted to make heavy winds our strong suit. I'd like to tell you you can have it both ways, but it just isn't in the cards.

## WHAT ABOUT OFFWIND?

I thought you'd never ask. This is where the Freedom Cats really come into their own. One person in our F/21 or F/25 can go right with fully crewed racing boats of similar size. Because we've got the patented Hoyt Gun Mount, a breakthrough device that allows one person to hoist, jibe, and douse the chute, all from the cockpit. This, for the first time, makes the spinnaker a practical shorthanded sail. There is no way the sail can wrap, and the system is so simple that I can hoist the chute by myself in 30 mph of breeze. With this added balance on the bow, Freedoms do not suffer the weather helm that plagues other Cat Boats, and we readily plane in breezes over 20 mph with fingertip steering control. The F/21 has a one-design class based on 2-person crew, and you'd be surprised how much fun it is to race in comfort, with spinnaker—all from the cockpit.

## CAN CATS HANDLE BIG SEAS?

This summer Michael Bohmann singlehanded a Freedom 25 (the big sister to the 21 shown) across the Atlantic, encountering Force 11 winds for several days. He arrived safely with no problems, and reported the boat to be very well behaved in these extreme conditions. Previous to that a Freedom 25 had also been singlehanded to Hawaii, and there have been several long singlehanded passages in the Caribbean. Like all good things the Modern Cat Rig has its limitations. In my view this is about 25 feet—after that the one sail gets too big to handle easily. At that point we go to the Cat Sloop rig (F/28-F/32), or the Cat Ketch or Cat Schooner (F/39-F/44) in order to divide the loads into manageable units. More than anyone else on the market, we have designed to make shorthanded sailing safe, swift and simple. So when you get tired of lining up crew for those labor-intensive sloops—you might consider getting a little Freedom.

*Garry Hoyt*

## FREEDOM YACHTS INTERNATIONAL, INC.

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