

# FELIX HERRIN THE CATMAN

**W**hen it comes to custom multi-hull vessels, Felix Herrin, a.k.a. “The Catman,” and his boat-building crew at Catman Cats in Urbanna, Virginia have found themselves a niche market. Herrin and his crew have gained national attention recently by turning out some extremely unique custom multi-hull sail and power luxury vessels.

The first boat Herrin launched at his facility in Urbanna was a 55-foot “rather exotic sailboat.” It was a lightweight, big tall rig, and a very masculine ocean boat. It attracted some attention when it raced in the Southern Ocean Racing Challenge off Florida and did very well. The boat gave the firm a good start, but there was more to come as more sailboats were built. And then one day someone walked into his shop looking for a mono-hull yacht.

“He asked me if I would build him a mono-hull fiberglass trawler,” says Herrin. “I told him, ‘Why have me build a mono-hull trawler when you can go out and buy one off the shelf? It would certainly be more cost effective.’ I looked at him and

***Mare Bello* has a comfortable, spacious stateroom and galley that offer a luxury environment for relaxation and entertaining.**



by Larry Chowning ~ Photos courtesy of Felix Herrin



***Mare Bello* is a 54-foot luxury multi-hull, catamaran trawler built by Catman Cats.**

asked, ‘Have you ever thought about a power Cat?’ He looked at me as if I was crazy and walked out of the office. About a week later, he had done some research and came back and placed an order,” says

Herrin. It was the first of four power cats the firm has built. Three have been launched and a fourth is currently under construction.

Like a lot of Chesapeake Bay boatbuilders, Herrin learned the trade in a roundabout way. His father was in the military and moved here and there while Herrin was growing up. Then the family settled in Mathews County, an area with deep roots in the boatbuilding trade. There he met the late Dave Dana, a noted designer of commercial and recreational boats. Herrin and Dana worked together on a test project for an aluminum power cat. “He was quite a character and helped me a lot in understanding boat design,” he says. “I learned an incredible amount from that guy.”

Herrin worked at several boatyards and managed one for several years.



*Hippocampus*, above, is a 55-foot multi-hull Cat whose home port is in the Florida Keys.

He also took math classes at Rappahannock Community College in Glens, Virginia, which aided him in developing technical skills used daily in his business. His experience around the yards working with multi-hull vessels made him aware of the many benefits of the hull style. “I have strong feeling towards catamarans,” he says; “They handle the waves better. They handle conditions better and are more efficient. They make better live-aboard boats too.”

Herrin also appreciates the versatility of the multi-hull. “Some of my boats are racing boats and some are not. All the sailboats have been performance or cruising oriented, but the power cats have all been luxury,” he adds.

“People come to me for two reasons. They usually want a power cat, or they

come for something totally off the wall like an insanely fast sailboat. That’s pretty much the two areas we operate in,” he says. Herrin’s has boats in Sarasota, Fort Myers, the Florida Keys, the Bahamas, Cape Cod, Canada, Italy and the Virgin Islands. “The word has gotten around that we build some great boats, and we have customers calling from all over,” he says.

With customers showing an interest in the power cats, Herrin and a partner started a marketing company selling and promoting the boats. The new company was named Crosswater. John R. Marples of St. Augustine, Florida designed the first Crosswater power cat for the company. The 54-footer named *Hippocampus* was highly customized to meet some special needs of the owner. He wanted a fast boat that could range 2,500 miles, and he wanted it to be

extremely comfortable.

In the firm’s marketing video, Marples gives a brief tour of *Hippocampus*. The boat is boarded near the stern by stepping on the boarding platform and walking up stairs onto an aft deck. The aft deck has a large dining table, sometimes surrounded by a clear enclosure with large windows that can be zipped open. There is also a settee with chairs, and all of the dining is done on the aft deck.

From there, he moved into a main saloon through a pair of curved sliding doors. The main saloon has a sitting area, galley and access to all the cabins on that deck. The galley area is on the port side and has a long U-shaped finger counter with a sink and stove. Even with a freezer and refrigerator, there is plenty of room for two people to operate quite comfortably. On the



The main helmsman station on *Hippocampus* provides easy access to controls and electronics.

The large, spacious engine room allows plenty of space for inspection and maintenance.



starboard side of the saloon is a settee that can be converted into a sofa. On the forward end of the saloon there is cabinetry with a large TV screen inside that can be seen from the aft deck. The floor is a very large parquet made of teak and holly flooring. Halogen lights are recessed into the headliners overhead. All windows are tinted and have shades for privacy.

Forward in the main saloon are two cabins. The guest cabin is on the port side with a large queen size berth and a full bath with tub and shower. The countertop in the bathroom is made of an imported tile with real sparkle to it. On the starboard side

there is a stateroom that is also an office. It has a large couch, desk and chair and computer hookups.

Upstairs there is a dingy on the boat deck with a crane to lift the dingy over the side. The pilothouse affords excellent visibility with windows that tilt open for ventilation. Interestingly, there is no steering wheel. Steering is done with a jog lever. It is electronically rotor controlled with a very small handle.

The pilothouse has a nice sitting area for guests to socialize and enjoy the atmosphere. Aft of the pilothouse is the main stateroom with a bathroom, a Jacuzzi

tub and a queen size berth. There is another steering console station on the roof of the pilothouse that has minimal instrumentation and engine controls and is used for maneuvering the boat through shallow or crowded waters.

The two six-cylinder 315 h.p. diesel engines are turbocharged and will push the power cat upward of 16 knots. Engine rooms are quite large and provide plenty of room to work. The air-conditioning, batteries and electrical system are all neatly mounted in the engine rooms. An unusual feature on the *Hippocampus* is a high-powered underwater halogen light system mounted on the stern that lights up the water below. The owner likes to watch fish during the evening time, and the light attracts fish.

Whatever a customer wants, Herrin and his Catman crew seem to find a solution. "We've got a unique combination of interior volume combined with a boat that's got considerable range and speed," says Herrin. "It's cutting new ground in the trawler business. Trawlers are the hottest portion of the boating market today," he says. "With the large population growing out of sailboats and into powerboats and wanting a more comfortable lifestyle, our Crosswater power cats speak to those people who want a comfortable lifestyle combined with performance."

"We've been able to attract a segment of the population who know what they want and can afford to get it, and that's contributed to our success." Also, let us not forget that Felix Herrin and his Catman crew are darn good boatbuilders.

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Larry Chowning is author of six books on Chesapeake Bay. He has had numerous articles published in national and regional boating magazines. He is a full-time reporter for the Urbanna *Southside Sentinel* where he has won numerous Virginia Press Association awards.