



Helia 44

RIDING THE WAVE

THE MARKET FOR MULTI-HULLS HAS GROWN TREMENDOUSLY OVER THE LAST THREE DECADES, BUT IN 1981 IT WAS A BIG GAMBLE TO BUILD A PRODUCTION CRUISING CAT.

By Kristopher Moa



Fountaine Pajot Saba 50

1976 WAS A WHIRLWIND of a year for Frenchman Jean-François Fountaine, who had dedicated himself to representing his country in Montreal, Canada at the first International 470 Class regatta sailed in the Olympic Games. Going to this level of competition takes an immense effort – and for most people that would have been enough – but Fountaine also created a partnership between himself, Yves Pajot and two others to form Fountaine Pajot.

Starting Very Small

The new yard's initial mission was to build high-performance sailing skiffs, in particular the International 505, so called because it is 5.05m. With the two marquee partners so intricately connected to the world of small-boat racing at the time – in addition to Fountaine's Olympic experience, Pajot was the 505 world champion in 1975 – the yard quickly gained orders for the International 420 and also the 470 boats.

Fountaine Pajot set-up shop in La Rochelle, France and quickly gained a reputation for the build quality of these very light boats. Due to class restrictions, the weight had to be within a very narrow range. Yet small vessels sailed as hard as these in intense competition often leave many areas prone to failure. The Fountaine Pajot boats were known for being fast and durable, and were being used by many of the elite French sailors.

Only two years into production, the yard expanded to its current location in Aigrefeuille where it soon got involved heavily in the IOR ocean racing box rule. Fountaine Pajot built several sophisticated

mono-hulls to fit the IOR rule and several of its boats took home championships. One was for Le Figaro, a race that was about to become the showcase event for solo sailors.

In one short leap, the new builder had gone from small, high-performance skiffs to bona fide ocean-racing kings, and it was not about to take a break.

New, Multifaceted Existence

Pioneering a new production method termed injection moulding, Fountaine Pajot was keeping the weight of hull, deck, and superstructure to a minimum – yet the parts remained very strong. Coupled with all-foam cores, this method ensures complete bonding throughout the product and results in light boats that still carry great strength with them.

This construction method lends itself well to multi-hulls. In the past, sailors had always been concerned about the strength of the deck/hull bond on multi-hulled vessels. Fountaine Pajot coupled its experience with injection moulding and its influences on ocean racing to produce its first multi-hull in 1981 with the launch of *Royale*, an 18m trimaran designed for blue-water racing.

Next up that year was the 21m catamaran *Charente Maritime*. Both race boats were built entirely of foam-core sandwich, which was highly innovative for the time. They both did well on their circuits and Fountaine Pajot found itself at the head of the class in this new universe of high-tech multis.



Taiti 80



Fountaine Pajot New 40

New models were being introduced every year and the Taiti line was designed for the day charter market. The Taiti models have been produced up to 80ft and take passengers out every day in many of the world's best cruising grounds.

Revvig It Up

With all this success selling cruising catamarans, Fountaine Pajot was the undisputed champ in this field throughout the 1990's – and it was time for the company to make another leap.

This time it introduced a new concept, the Trawler Cat – a power catamaran designed to operate at trawler speeds, with commensurate range and safety offered by traditional trawlers. The new boats provided all the seaworthiness, stability and living space of the sailing boats, but incorporated a fuel-efficient package to get owners to their destinations regardless of fickle winds.

Dropping the Trawler tag and giving the power line the more accurate label of Motoryacht (MY) reflects how the line has been refined over the years. The contemporary design of the current four models in the MY range cater well to the increasing demands of sophisticated modern clientele.

Bringing It To The Masses

Once considered novelties in cruising anchorages, today the world knows how the market for multi-hulls has grown over the last three decades. It is easy to see when looking backwards, but in 1981 it was a big gamble to build a production cruising cat.

Fountaine Pajot saw that there were few competitors in this developing sector. The group also knew that technology developed in the racing world eventually bleeds over into production vessels. They were in a position to make a go at buyers interested in more room and better stability aboard without having to sacrifice safety or performance.

The twin hulls of the first Louisiane 37 splashed in 1983. Designed by Michel Joubert and built with injection-moulded PVC foam core, which the yard was likely the world's leading expert on at the time, the new design was quickly a sales success. Louisiane 37s can still be found for sale today.

It is not inconceivable to think that Fountaine Pajot had a great influence on the early market for cruising cats – at pretty well the exact moment that momentum began to increase for these boats. But there were still some improvements to make.

Substituting long, fixed fins for the retractable dagger boards of the 37 was one major change to make the boats easier to handle for crews. Another was increasing the volume of the hulls and the bridge deck between them to increase interior living space to a size never seen before. These improvements led to the unveiling in 1985 of the Casamance 43 at the yard's recently expanded production facility.

The focus on catamarans grew through the 1980's with 32ft and 39ft models drawing heavily on the lessons of the 43. A 26ft day boat catamaran gained a nomination for Boat of the Year from *Bateaux* magazine. The market was growing fast and Fountaine Pajot was riding the crest of the wave.

Designer Olivier Flahault was commissioned in 1991 to bring the builder's models more in line with current aesthetics and to build up the creature comforts inside. Even today, almost all Fountaine Pajot boats show Flahault's touch.



Fountaine Pajot MY 37



Driving Two Trains

In every succeeding year, Fountaine Pajot has continued developing power and sail lines, even introducing six new models in one year – all the while improving production methods and building bigger and better boats.

CEO Fountaine believes that quality equates to safety on the sea, and he instills that idea into his company at every level. He knows that his company's current construction techniques optimise hull thickness and strength to obtain maximum sailing results. The yard seeks out the very best suppliers and he points out the relationships with Volvo and Yanmar as highlights. Volvo is the main engine supplier, while Yanmar's vast support network is made available to those wanting to range far abroad.

Fountaine Pajot is still one of the top builders in its sector with offerings from the entry-level Mahe 36 to this year's flagship Ipanema 58, while the MY37 adds to the power line-up.

The MY37 is making waves on the show circuit. This new model, while still a catamaran providing all the benefits of two hulls, feels much more like a traditional mono-hull motoryacht. The covered flybridge and large superstructure give the vessel the feel of being aboard a much larger mono, as do the cockpit and full-width swim step on this beautiful and well-built yacht.

The Flagship Ipanema 58 showcases a truly immense 25sqm cockpit coupled with a huge fly bridge outdoors. Inside you may find a 5-cabin owner's version or a 6-cabin variation. Also offered is a galley down layout targeted for the Asian market.

In the Asia-Pacific region Fountaine Pajot has representatives in Busan, Taipei, Phuket, Shenzhen and elsewhere. The builder also has a strong presence below the equator in Australia and New Zealand through Multihull Solutions.

www.fountaine-pajot.com
www.multihullsolutions.com.au