

The architects' task - optimizing the hulls and the sail plan - translates into good performance under sail



Saba 50

An Atlantic circuit and beyond

Fountaine Pajot have just launched a much-awaited boat in the 50 foot sector: the Saba 50. A new model fulfilling the wishes of yachtsmen looking for comfort, as much on deck as below. However, performance has not been neglected, and that's even better!

Text: Emmanuel van Deth - Photos by the author and DR

A REPLACEMENT FOR THE SALINA

The Salina 48, first launched in 2009 and with over 100 models built over the last five years, is bowing out. Acknowledged as being an excellent boat, as much for charter as for extended family cruising, it is being replaced by a larger model: 68cm longer and 29cm wider as well, but certainly with much greater volume. In effect, the hulls of the Saba 50 are wider and taller, and also the same is true of the nacelle. In short, when viewed from the dock, this brand new catamaran looks much larger than the 48... It's true that today's owners are always looking for greater comfort and

more equipment, on board boats which really are designed for living on board. But the yard isn't going to change everything however. It was established by two offshore racing and Olympic sailing champions of the highest level, Jean-François Fountaine, now Mayor of La Rochelle, France, and Yves Pajot, who has just come ashore... from a trip round the world on a Salina 48. With this in mind, it is easy to understand why performance is one of the main factors for the designers. So the challenge is to seduce the sailors who are looking more for comfort, while maintaining seaworthiness and speed.



WATERLINE LENGTH

The Berret / Racoupeau naval architect team, already the designers of the Salina 48, was called upon for the design of the Saba 50. The hull lines are relatively close, giving the maximum waterline length, thanks to shallow aft steps and near-vertical bows, U-sections to minimize the wetted area, a large volume forward to counteract any tendency the bows might have to bury with a strong wind and big following seas. As for the fixed skegs, they have increased by 15cm: the draft, however, remains small - 1.25 meters - but enough for upwind work. The difference between the two models is more noticeable when you look at the weight difference: from 11 tonnes, it has increased to 15.7 tonnes. An increase of about 50%. And even if the rig is more streamlined, so optimized for going upwind and capable of pointing higher (and faster), the sail area has gone from 131m² for the Salina 48 and 141m² for the Saba 50, an increase of less than 8%. On paper, clearly, the 50 will be disadvantaged in light airs. We'll see later on, though, that Fountaine-Pajot's latest does rather well. The sail area / weight ratio of the Saba is 8.98 m²/tonne as opposed to 11.9 for its predecessor. However, the 50 is

1 - The gennaker can be sheeted in relatively tight: in less than 10 knots of wind, you can hold it up to the beam, or even close reaching, at good speed.

2 - Virtually straight bows, a hallmark of the Berret/Racoupeau team, give modern lines to this pretty catamaran.

3 - When hard on the wind nothing can beat deep daggerboards of course, but the well-designed keels of the Saba 50 allow a perfectly acceptable angle of sail for a cruising catamaran.

4 - The mainsail, in line with the current trend, is square-topped. It is made easier to manage thanks to an integrated hook system.

well placed when compared to the Lagoon 52 at 6.81 m²/tonne. While the trend is clearly increasing the weight of cruising catamarans, the architects and sailmakers are keeping an eye on this: the polar diagrams show 12 knots in 20 knots of wind, and even speeds of 18 to 20 in a strong wind. If you bear in mind that you should sail light, and opt for folding propellers, today's catamarans are still good for swallowing up the miles...

UNDER SAIL

Before describing in detail how the Saba 50 behaves under sail, let's take a look at the mechanical aspects: our test boat is equipped with two 55hp motors. These seemed to us to be the right size - no problems getting into a narrow marina slip: a 50 foot catamaran remains incredibly maneuverable with its two motors. More powerful motors (75hp) are available as an option, for those who might want a little more power in reserve. One thing to note before going back to the dock, make sure you haven't hung the fenders over the portlights - these have kept the same cat's eye shape as previously, but are now much bigger.

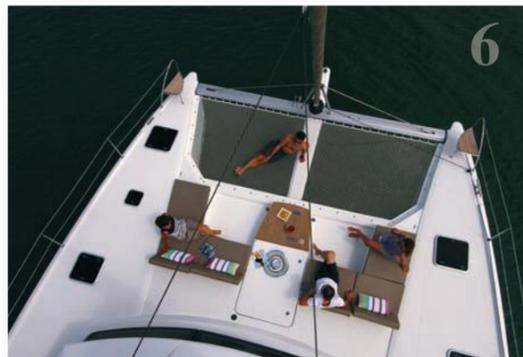
So here we are out of the harbor. We hoist the 83.5m² square-topped mainsail - thanks to the indispensable electric winch. The square-topped head of the sail, which on so many catamarans has become a nuisance to keep off the mast (it really has to slide in the lazy bag!), is here cleverly kept in place using a hook system. It's simple and efficient. The slightly overlapping solent allows you to come up close to 60°



to the wind. This is fairly good for catamarans with keels. The day of our test, we weren't spoiled by the weather, with a wind so light you wouldn't bother taking a cat out. 5 to 6 knots is really light, and we could have been tempted (as is so often the case on cruising catamarans) to abandon the sails, and resort to the motors. However, the magic of the new hulls overcame this sufficiently for us to get the gennaker out. The boat began to pick up, and at the helm even felt like we had been kick-started. The Saba went from 4 to 6 knots. And as the helm is sensitive and always light, it wasn't a surprise that I didn't want to give it up, but carried on as if we were racing. Cool! We tacked, we gybed, we played in the ripples. And not once on our test sail did we miss a tack, which is something to be proud of. Even under mainsail alone, we went through the wind. You could say that the Saba 50 qualifies as a well-developed cruising catamaran.

DECK LAYOUT

The yard's trademark overhanging coachroof remains: this choice is as much aesthetic as it is aerodynamic, but also offers protection from the sun when it is overhead, and so at its hottest when in the tropics. Leaving the cockpit, which is enclosed by a substantial bulwark, using a few steps, you are on the large and clear side decks. The access from one hull to the other, whether via the coachroof or the cockpit, is very easy, with no obstacles. Just one small concern: there is a slight difference in level between the hulls proper and the deck which links them, which can be quite irritating when you are getting to know the boat. But after a day on board you get used to it. To starboard at half coachroof-height, is the control center for the lines, with three winches and the clutches. Lines which come from the port side make use of clever leads, so as to avoid passing over the roof. All the lines are controlled from here, with the exception of the second and third reefs, which are taken in at the foot of the mast. As an



option, they can also be led back to the cockpit, along with the others. Just aft of this area is the helm station, with a comfortable three-seater bench seat. There is a very good view over the water, and only the genoa or the gennaker freed right off, will interrupt slightly the field of vision. This detail apart, the position is very agreeable, being at the same time close to the sail control area, yet sheltered from the wind and spray. Powerful solar panels are fitted at the aft end of the bimini. This area could have done with being a bit stiffer, even if it's not going to be used more. The aft steps are large and immediately accessible from the cockpit. Just above, the davits are worth checking out - their upper side is designed to be able to support kayaks or other boards. Clever, eh?

RELAXATION

If the Saba sails well, even in light airs, her real strongpoint lies in her living spaces. While the Salina provided a large cockpit, trampoline and sunbathing area right aft, the Saba



pulls out all the stops. First off, the cockpit offers an area sheltered by the immense hard-top bimini: the table, at 1.72 meters x 1.21 meters, and offset to port, is large enough to seat ten. On the Quintet version (aimed at the charter market) there is even a one meter extension available for the table, so as to seat two more guests. To starboard, a lounge is fitted, topped off by an imposing 3.75 meter long bench seat, aft. It's good, but conventional. Then again, would you complain? It's forward of the mast that things are a bit more original: without having really fitted a second cockpit, the yard has designed a deck salon with slightly hollowed seats and adjustable cushions. With carbon support posts, an optional awning can be fitted when required to protect this second relaxation area from the sun. But the "must" really is the lounge deck on top of the bimini: with a 360° view, you can be sitting down or stretched out, to make the most of sailing or of an anchorage. Mattresses forward, bench seats aft... so this is the spot for entertaining guests! The only hitch is the boom, which, while being low enough to reach the zipper of the lazy-bag, can be in the way when tacking or gybing. So anyone up here must take care when sailing. The final advantage of this upper-level salon is its proximity to the helm and sail control stations.

INTERIOR LAYOUT

There's no step between the cockpit and the nacelle, allowing easy access, and large sliding windows add to the effect of

this interior/exterior space. This makes the entrance very welcoming, as does the large volume and up to 2.25 meter headroom. With an all-round panoramic view, but also overhead windows (which can be covered over of course), light is everywhere! But what's most striking is the overall impression of quality. The yard has succeeded, thanks to great attention to detail, in providing a higher standard of finish than that of the Salina 48. Two things which I particularly liked, among many others, were the headlining under the bimini, which until now had only been for the interior, and structural supports trimmed with a bi-color PVC, with black blending in perfectly with the hatches. The galley extends to port around a vast L-shaped worktop and a central island. Storage everywhere, electrical appliances, industrial-sized fridges - you want for nothing. The proximity to the cockpit is also really good. On the other hand, the chart table is fitted diagonally, which allows increased space, but really with a catamaran of this size, it would be better to be facing forwards. Finally, to starboard, a low table (61 cm x 103 cm) is very useful, and it's even possible to have a bigger one. In the hulls, the cabins give the same impression as elsewhere: more light - the large portlights in the hull help a lot - as does the high standard of finish. All the bunks are wide, and easy to climb into, thanks to the "island bed" design, where both sides are accessible, rather than being up against the hull. Here, too, there is plenty of storage: the Saba 50 really is a cruising boat capable of accommodating the family for a year, or longer, on the water without having to worry about storage space. It's up to

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Architects:	Berret/Racoupeau
Interior designer:	Isabelle Racoupeau
Builder:	Fontaine-Pajot
Length:	14.98 meters
Beam:	7.99 meters
Draft:	1.25 meters
Displacement:	15.7 tonnes
Upwind sail area:	141 m ²
Mainsail:	83.5 m ²
Genoa:	57.5 m ²
Motors:	2 x 55 hp
Diesel:	940 liters
Fresh water:	700 liters
Cabins:	4/6
Maestro version:	1 private suite + 1 bathroom / 3 guest cabins + 3 bathrooms
Quintet version:	5 double cabins + 1 skipper's cabin + 6 bathrooms
Basic price Maestro version:	€ 585,000 excluding tax
Options:	
Quintet version:	€ 619,000
Offshore pack:	€ 18,000
Ocean pack:	€ 40,500
Solar panels:	€ 4,043
Watermaker:	€ 9,905
Fixed bimini at the helm station:	€ 2,318
Sunshades forward salon:	€ 1,918
Carbon passerelle:	€ 3,916
High table in the salon:	€ 1,642
Upgrade to 2 x 75 hp motors:	€ 6,760
Three-bladed folding propellers:	€ 2,301
Gennaker:	€ 5,955
Gennaker fittings and pole:	€ 7,235
Electric winch for davits:	€ 3,191

5 - The Saba 50 is as much at ease under way as at anchor.

6 - Fontaine-Pajot's forward cockpit: real extra living space making the most of the boat

7 - The lounge deck is truly vast, and designed solely for relaxation.

8 - The helm station is very comfortable, with a three-seater bench and a separate area for handling the sheets and halyards.

9 - The cockpit is really spacious and easy to get around.

10 - The cockpit table can seat up to 12 people: All your friends in the anchorage will be coming over to the Saba to party...

11 - Panoramic view; 2.25 meter headroom; no step between the cockpit and the floor - the salon is very welcoming.

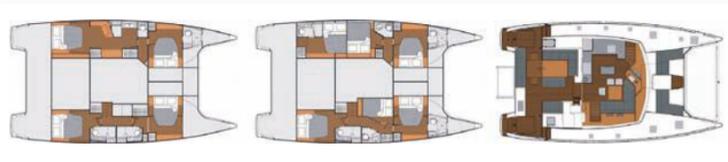
THE COMPETITORS

Model:	Leopard 48	Privilège Serie 4.9	Nautitech 482	Lagoon 52
Builder:	LEOPARD CATAMARANS	PRIVILÈGE MARINE	NAUTITECH	LAGOON
Sail area in m ² :	144,5	132	116	177
Displacement in tonnes:	14,46	11,3	11,2	26
Price in Euros excluding tax:	439 000	620 000	545 550	656 000

you whether to go for the Maestro version with four cabins, or the Quintet, more aimed at the charter market, with five cabins as well as accommodation for the skipper - making 12 bunks in all.

CONCLUSION

Even before being presented to the public, 15 examples of the Saba 50 had been sold. A fact which amply demonstrates Fountaine Pajot's enviable image with fans of big catamarans, and above all, this new model achieves a very successful balance between comfort and performance has got them convinced, even before her maiden voyage. On the test sail, we found the boat to be particularly appealing, with three outdoor living spaces and a light and harmonious interior. Under sail, the Saba managed to win us over, even in very light airs, but left us with no doubt that on an ocean passage she would keep up good average speeds. A catamaran whose ease of handling and great finish will appeal as much to the charter market as to long term cruisers.



A WORD FROM THE BUILDER

FIVE QUESTIONS PUT TO STEVEN GUEUDEU, COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR AT FOUNTAINE PAJOT



• *How long has the yard been working on the Saba 50 project?*

A project like the 50 represents two years' work, made up of 8,000 hours for the yard and 3,000 for the architects' design team.

• *What were the main aspects of the project?*

In Fountaine Pajot's DNA there is performance... at less than 16 tonnes, the Saba is relatively light, and certainly well-canvassed. Moreover, the boat meets all the comfort requirements demanded by our clients, including options such as air-conditioning, watermaker, generator, etc.

• *What's new on deck?*

The Saba provides three areas which are 100% dedicated to relaxation: the cockpit with its huge aft bench seat, the forward salon and finally the 12m² lounge deck, next to the helm station.

• *And inside?*

There is much more light in the cabins! In effect we have gone for bigger hatches, but with the original "cat's eye" shape we have used previously.

• *Who is the Saba 50 for?*

Both private owners, with the Maestro version and its four cabins, and at the charter market in the six cabin version.



12 - Close to the cockpit, the galley is equipped with two 2.20 meter worktops and a central island. With storage everywhere, loads of equipment and easy to move around, it's faultless!

13 - The cabins are particularly comfortable, with plenty of storage and easy access to the bunks.

14 - The davits are cleverly designed to stow kayaks or windsurfers on top.

Davits for dropping your dinghy in the water at an anchorage are great... but when they are also designed to accommodate kayaks, surf boards and paddle boards, they're even better!

The solar panels are fitted right aft on the bimini. An area particularly well exposed to the sun for maximum efficiency.

The famous lounge deck... it's going to be the crew's favorite spot for sunbathing, having a drink or relaxing with a book. And the helm station and sail controls are right at hand.

The trademark overhanging coachroof of all the yard's models offers real comfort in a tropical climate! It's the perfect balance between aerodynamics, aesthetics and protection against the "greenhouse effect".

The forward cockpit is really an outdoor salon at the foot of the mast, made comfortable by adjustable cushions.



If you sail in cooler climes, you can still eat in the salon... but it would be a real shame not to make the most of the huge ten-seater table - even twelve with the extension on the Quintet version!

All the yard's models are equipped with fixed keels - easier and more substantial than daggerboards: the Saba 50 is no exception, though her draft is 15cm deeper than that of the Salina 48

The Saba's hull portlights maintain the cat's eye design... but are much bigger than those on the Salina 48

One spot for helming, another for sail handling. Both stations are to starboard at the half-height of the coachroof.

- ◆ Ease of handling
- ◆ Very nice lounge deck
- ◆ Great performance, even in a Force 2

- ◆ Flexibility of the aft bimini
- ◆ Could do better upwind
- ◆ A little too heavy for great performance under solent in light airs