

71% of boats sold in the U.S. are bought used. Many of these have an enduring appeal, having withstood the test of time. In each issue, we'll feature a review of one powerboat and one sailboat by noted naval architect and surveyor Jack Hornor.

Catalina 36 www.catalinayachts.com

Some might say Catalina Yachts builds Ford's for cruising sailors; their boats are relatively well built and contemporarily styled and economically priced. While some compromises are necessary to build affordable boats in this size and price range, the fact is many of today's cruising sailors are fulfilling lifelong dreams because of Catalina's efforts to make cruising sailboats affordable to most sailors.

With nearly 3,000 boats sold over the last 26 years, the Catalina 36 is arguably the most popular sailboat of this size ever built. Designed by in-house naval architect Gerry Douglas, the Catalina 36 measures 36' 4" length overall with a beam of 11' 11". Draft ranges between 4' 5" and 5' 10" depending on year and keel configuration and designed displacement ranges from 13,500 lbs to 14,100 lbs.

The original Catalina 36, sometimes called the MK I, was introduced with the 1982 model year. The MK II replaced the original model in 1995 and remains in production for the 2007 model year. The MK II shares the same principal dimensions as the original, although the beam is carried further aft resulting in a significantly larger cockpit and a more comfortable and roomy quarter berth cabin.

The Catalina 36 hull is built of a laminate with fiberglass and plastic resin. In 1995, Catalina began using vinyl ester rather than polyester resins in outer layers to mitigate osmotic blisters. The decks and cabin are a cored composite with either balsa wood and plywood core sandwiched between fiberglass laminates. The deck-to-hull joint is a shoebox style which is less expensive to build and more vulnerable to damage from minor docking incidents than a more substantial flanged joint with a heavy-duty rub rail. Fiberglass liners are used extensively for interior components which are tabbed in place with fiberglass and resin or set in adhesives. The result is a sound structure but one that is sometimes difficult to access for inspection or service. The most common problems on

aging Catalina 36 models are damaged and leaking deck-to-hull joints, leaking windows and hatches and perhaps some degree of osmotic blistering.

The most serious problem I have seen is severe corrosion of the stainless steel steamhead fitting, to which the forestay attaches. A periodic thorough inspection of this fitting is advised and if any corrosion or cracks are noted contact Catalina for recommended action.

On deck the Catalina 36 features wide side decks, double lifelines and a molded toe rail for safety.

There is an anchor locker and stainless steel roller at the bow for easy handling and storage

of ground tackle. All halyards are led to winches at the companionway and the mainsheet traveler is mounted forward of the companionway to keep controls out of the cockpit. The cockpit of the MK II model is certainly roomier than earlier models but both have long and comfortable seating and wheel steering is at the stern. The original 36 had a solid transom with a stainless steel boarding ladder that folded up to the stern rail. In the early 1990s a swim step was added to the transom and the current MK II has a walkthrough transom with swim platform and stainless steel boarding ladder.

Although there have been several minor refinements over the years, the interior arrangement of today's Catalina 36 MK II is pretty much the same as it was in 1982. There is a V-berth forward followed by a head with shower to port and hanging locker and storage to starboard.

In the main saloon there is U-shaped dinette to port and two seats separated by a small table to starboard. The galley is aft to port and is complete with a double stainless steel sink, two burner stove and oven,

top loading icebox and adequate storage. There is a small navigation station opposite the galley followed by a quarter berth cabin with an athwartship double berth. The size and access to the quarter berth cabin is the most notable improvement, made possible by the extended beam of the MK II model.

Auxiliary power is provided by Universal/Westerbeke marine diesel engines, and depending on the year, power may be three- or four-cylinder models ranging from 21 to 30 hp. These are usually reliable engines with a good network of service dealers. However, in the fall of 2002, Universal/Westerbeke issued a service bulletin warning of possible camshaft failure on their X25 and M35 model engines. Both models were used for the Catalina 36s.

The Catalina 36 is rigged as a mast-head sloop with a single spreader mast and fore and aft lower shrouds. Two sail plans are offered; a standard rig with 555 square feet of sail area and a tall rig with 601 square feet. The mast of the tall rig is two feet taller and the boom a foot longer to account for the extra sail area. The sail area-to-displacement ratio in either case is very modest at 15.2 and 16.5 respectively.

The Catalina 36 has been in production for more than 20 years and finding used models, almost anywhere in the world, is not difficult. In January 2007 I found more than 100 boats offered for sale in the U.S., Mexico and Europe with asking prices ranging from \$34,000 for a 1984 model to \$149,000 for a 2006 model. I found records of 75 boats sold within the last six months ranging from \$30,000 for a 1983 model to \$135,000 for a 2005 model.

It is always nice when there is a strong support network for used boat buyers and the Catalina 36 has one of the best. The Catalina 36 owners association has 10 fleets nationwide and a Web site at catalina36.org which is the most impressive and helpful I have seen. All things considered, the pros certainly outweigh the cons for anyone looking for an affordable cruising boat in the 36-foot size range. ■

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