

# POWERED CATS OF AUSTRALIA

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Book 4.5 2014



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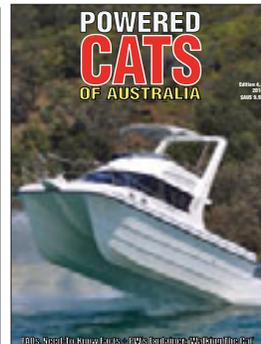


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ABM

### MESSAGE STICKS . . .

As we are such a small team, we are often tied up on the 'phone, or on the water - but please don't waste the opportunity to communicate. Send us an email, and we'll get back to you ASAP - usually with 24hrs.

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One of the most contentious issues facing today's boating consumer is trying to figure out the difference between the big range of power catamarans now available in Australia compared to an even bigger range of monohulls - the mixture of which has just exponentially increased with the flood of monohull imports from America. Never has the consumer been offered such a diverse and high quality range of craft - both in cats and in monos. In this special report, Editor Peter Webster, a man who's been driving cats and monos for the last 35 years, explores the differences - both subtle and obvious - between the two basically opposed configurations.

One of the issues constantly raised over the last 35 years of my boating journalism, is the debate surrounding the difference between catamarans and monohulls.

boats on trailers started to travel the highways, the first 4WD's were invented, and all of a sudden, the horizons opened up for the sportfisherman.

Although it's funny to think back on it now, it was often terrifying at the time. The writer well remembers going to the aid of a crew of a Haines V17C off Bermagui in 1975, where the fish (a

# Cats Vs Monos: The Ride & Handling Debate



Always the question is asked "Is it worth paying the extra for a catamaran?" And, "Will I get sufficient advantage or benefit to justify the extra expense?"

Or specifically, "Is a catamaran such as a SharkCat or a Kevlacat, Dominator (etc), that much better than a Signature, Deep Vee or Wellcraft?"

Of course, the answer is subjective as hell because there are no really comparable benchmarks or performance "gates" to use when making the comparisons. Further, it is virtually impossible to create a testing environment where (for example) we could test a suitably fitted 23' Noosacat against a comparable 23' Haines Signature 702.

## A Little History. . .

In order to understand the primary role of the catamaran, and the principle difference it offers to most monohulls, it's necessary to step back 25-30 years when Australian fishermen first discovered the world of offshore sportfishing.

The ANSA movement was born,

In just over a decade, the world of the Australian sportfisherman matured from the 15'6" Swiftcraft Seagull, the 5.2m Pongrass Waverider and Haines Hunter 16C, to an altogether different world where Bertram 25's burst onto the scene to really underpin the fledgling gamefishing movement, alongside the big trailerboats that came onto the market in the late 1970's.

These included boats such as the Savage 21 Bluefin (and Mako), Haines Hunter 213C, the magnificent Formula 233 (in its original and proper guise with 2 x 165hp MerCruiser 6 cylinder sterndrives) the Swiftcraft Viscount, Sonnair 21 and so on.

All of these craft were suddenly working up and down the eastern and western seaboard in pursuit of bigger and bigger fish, on lighter and lighter line.

It was an exciting period, but it didn't take very long for the better fishermen to realise that some of these boats had some really major drawbacks - and the further offshore they travelled, the more apparent those drawbacks became.

small, 'green' and very upset mako on steroids!) had kicked two of the anglers out of the boat into the water, leaving the third bloke 'trapped' in the cabin! When everybody stopped laughing around the place (we were all sitting on the 12 Mile Reef, and close enough to watch the 'action') it dawned on us that two of these anglers were about to drown, and the mako was going to take the boat home with the third crewmember huddled terrified in the cabin . . .

The point was that most of the offshore boats at that point in time (the 1970's and early 1980's) had bugger-all freeboard at the transom or along the topsides, and it only took 2 or 3 blokes to go to one side and then heave on a big shark, yellowfin or billfish, and that freeboard virtually disappeared.

If a big enough sloop was running, the gunwale was virtually at water level - hence either the fish (or commonly, the waves) actually came over the gunwale and into the boat.

Needless to say, after enough people scared themselves witless, some of these fishermen started to think in

*Honda's bigger V6 engines are fast becoming legend in the SAR field, as their reliability, economy and prodigious power for their weight, makes them nigh on perfect in cat applications.*

# Choosing The Best 4-Stroke Outboard For Your Cat

Since the introduction of 4-stroke outboards, interest in powered cats of all shapes and sizes has been revitalised. Four strokes have given cats the economy today's boatowners and fishermen require. Choosing the best 4-stroke is not an easy task, especially when new 4-strokes are continually being released to tempt the dollars right out of your back pocket. In this special report, Editor Peter Webster looks at what is happening in the marketplace this year . . .

**I**t certainly seems a long time since the writer carried out the first ever Australian performance trials of the Honda 90 4-stroke outboard on Moreton Bay in 1996. Bolted onto a Haines Hunter GRP half cab, the engine was unbelievably economical, smooth, and vibration free. Within minutes of leaving the launch ramp at Cleveland, everybody onboard knew we were about to log a very significant piece of outboard history. Seventeen years later, the 4-stroke world has just about completed the revolution, with sales of 4-strokes around the world on a par with 2-strokes.

Today, all the major manufacturers make 4-strokes. Honda only make 4-stroke outboards, Suzuki are about

95% 4-stroke and trying hard to phase out the last of their old 2-strokes, whilst Yamaha has engaged on a deliberate policy of product matching 2-stroke and 4-stroke outboards, with one of the biggest ranges of outboard engines ever seen in the world.

Even Mercury, the last bastion of traditional American 2-stroke technology, has now joined the fray,

4-stroke outboards in the 140hp -175hp class are the mainstay of a wide range of both GRP and ally cats. This is the brand new (mid-2013) Noosacat 2400 Hardtop with the integrated transom tooling. This beautifully finished new model was actually designed around 150hp 4-strokes, to deliver a stunning combo of performance and economy.





Part of the outstanding Burkhart facility in Ward, New Zealand.



Trevor Burkhart and his family fish off the rugged East Coast of New Zealand's South Island, where even launching the boat is an adventure.

Harvesting the lucrative lobster seabed of the east coast of New Zealand's South Island, has inspired an extraordinary response from some of the most innovative fishermen in the world - and some of the best seamen. Using a unique breed of beach-launched Kiwi ally cats, they are fishing some of the roughest, toughest waters in the world with absolutely state of the art, WASSP sonar equipment.

# Down To The Sea In Cats . . and Bulldozers!



*Right: The Noosacat 3000 coming in through the break on the Noosa Bar. It takes a lot to ruffle the feathers on this big rig, as it is one of Australia's foremost rough water craft. Below Left: Almost as important as how they handle the rough stuff - a boat's stance when it is OFF PLANE and/or at rest, or just poking along, can be critical in really bad conditions (or just trolling, for that matter) and as you can see, the Nooscat 3000 has an ideal stance.*



# Noosacat 3000

We've been scheduled to test this new Noosacat 3000 now for several months but through a combination of unusual circumstances it has been repeatedly postponed.

The exercise of getting The Boat Mag's team together with the Noosacat people, a camera boat, and high tide on the Noosa Bar at approximately late morning on a nice sunny day in a boat with engines, proved something of a challenge. We do apologise to the readers who thought we were testing the boat last month, and a couple of months before that and so on. The wait has been worthwhile. There are very few boats in Australia that can turn the lights on like this one, as once again we rediscover why Noosacat is easily the biggest powered cat builder in Australia – and has been for many years.

Editor Peter Webster has the story, with pics by Ruth Cunningham.

**T**he Noosacat story is really the story about Wayne Hennig and his ever patient wife Debbie and the stoic, level-headed growth they've administered in one of the most unstable industries on the planet.

To Wayne and Debbie's eternal credit they have charted a steady course through the vagaries of recessions, downturns, change in regulations, ever-changing Survey requirements and so on, that would have left lesser companies gasping

for air – but they have steadily moved on, overcome the many obstacles bureaucracy (especially) has put in their path over the years and matured a multi-million dollar business that is the envy of most boat builders in Australia.

It's easy to say it was simply because they had the old "SharkCat" franchise and therefore they were on a winner from the outset. Obviously, this has a degree of truth in it, but what they purchased nigh on 22 years ago

has almost no relationship to the product they are producing today, nor does it acknowledge the management skills they brought to the table to enhance this iconic brand's position in a highly competitive market place.

Today, Noosacat produce a very sophisticated, well finished, high performance cat range with models spread from 5.0m through to 15.0m, and just about every metre step in between.

Noosacats are now in use all over





West Aussie Les Davidson:

# How I Built My Own 8.5m Alloy Cat

Just a few words on my background. I was born in 1942 into a farming background, driving and using machinery from the age of 12. I finished school at 16, and went for a mix of farming and contracting for 2-3 years. As there was no money in farming, I went driving bulldozers for the next 12 years.

After that, I went into the service station game for 5 years, before starting my own earth moving business with bobcats, trucks, loaders,

**It is widely acknowledged that an aluminium powered cat project involves up to 50% work, about 30% more in materials, and invariably, twin engines - so the question has to be asked: Is it worth it? For WA cat enthusiast, and die-hard fisho Les Davidson, it was a no-brainer: he wanted the cat's soft ride, the massive stability and the inherent safety of having two of everything.**

**In WA, it goes with the territory, okay?**



sandpit compactors, sand screens, (etc) for the next 30 years, during which time I did all the mechanical repairs, welding and general maintenance as well as driving and working along with 10-12 employees.

Retiring in 2005, it wasn't long before I needed a project to get my head and body into gear. I'd already had a lovely 7.0m Leisurecat for 5 years but decided to sell that, which we did, and then made the call to go ahead with this 8.0m ally cat.

Despite having done a considerable amount of welding through my life, I hadn't done very much on aluminium. I contacted a marine engineer in Perth, Mr Denis Walsh, and after several meetings and much discussion, we decided to build an 8.0 metre by 3.10 metre beam plate aluminium cat.

The boat is 8.0 metres down the centreline, plus a 0.45m bow sprit and a 0.750m Walk-out between the motors, so call it what you will for length.

As Editor PW has mentioned in previous publications, Denis sent a CAD disc over to One Steel, and they cut the patterns out for the project. Eleven sheets of ally arrived 9.0m long by 2.20m wide, along with the extra ally required for the ally trailer I designed and subsequently built.

Like other blokes who have taken on projects like this, I also had a friend, John Robinson, who was very experienced in this field, and he was good enough to give me some basic instruction and advice at various times through the construction of the boat. It was great, because when I'm doing something like this, given my experience using, driving and operating big equipment, I'm very conscious of the various forces and weights that can be applied at various times in difficult situations.

For example, think about the inertia weight on fuel tank mountings when tanks, maybe 2/3rds full in very rough seas, with a capacity of anywhere from 250 litres up to 1,000 litres, moving about in the hulls. One thing is as sure as hell, if I'm 30 odd miles offshore, and it gets nasty out there, the last thing I want to hear is something clicking and clacking under my feet.

John was tremendous to call on for advice and comment about such matters, usually discussed over a quiet phone call at night. I'm a bit of a terror at over-building; I think it's better to have a few percent extra on your side, rather than



make much difference. Rear deck line port side, through both sponsons and over the tunnel to deck line starboard side, we have 50mm x 6mm flat bar stringers every 160mm with 60mm intermittent welds to both sides of these stringers.

The rear deck and forward deck have 25mm box floor stringers welded through frames at 150mm centres. Both the forward and rear decks are fully welded in situ using the technique of cutting 19mm openings (with a very hard working hole saw) over the top of the 25mm x 25mm stringers. These holes are then welded up, fusing the ally deck to the stringers - and ground back level. And yes, I did count every one of them - all 338 of them!

On fitting the 2 large outer side plates and inner side tunnel plates, and the outer upper smaller outside plates (where they come together on the bows) I didn't like just welding them together from chine line upwards to the top deck line, as it throws a very sharp pointed bow edge with not much strength in the join.

So I picked up 2 pieces of 22mm rod, each 1.4m long. I tapered 2 sides of each piece of rod from where they sit on the join of the chines at the front, running upwards and out to the 22mm rod width, 750mm up. We positioned them so the side plates met onto the rod section just short of the centre of same, so it left a good weld gap on the 5mm plates to fill and then grind off, forming a great looking, rounded, upper bow edge(s) that has saved a lot of welding and has the strength where needed. (see pics)

Then I backed up on the inside with a piece of 6m x 75mm x 75mm angle, bridging both sheets and fully welding both side plates to it.

All seams - all 22 of them - are fully welded inside and out, the latter by turning boat, milling out the seams, then re-welding and cleaning up.

**Interesting point here:** When you have sanded the welds back on the unpainted sections of the hulls that are not painted, a great idea to hide the markings from the welding of the inside of the hull, is by orbital sanding with 80grit paper. This leaves a "hammer-tech" appearance, which removes the visual appearance of the swollen internal welding marks and leaves the area with a smooth finish that looks tremendous.

I was a bit worried about the strength of this ally in some parts, including the

the other way around.

I won't bore readers with all the fit-up on various pieces and the tacking process, as the Boatmags team have covered these items in previous publications, but I would like to mention a few items about the construction that readers tackling a DIY project (or one with a pro plate boat builder, for that matter) may find helpful and interesting.

## Design & Build Issues.

The boat is made up of 6mm plate on hull bottom and up to the chines, with 5mm sides and 4mm on all the rest.

The rear deck is 500mm above water level depending on load, and load doesn't

# The Hookham Cat Principle

Very few designers and boatbuilders can actually claim to have created a unique design, but the recently retired Port Macquarie NSW based boatbuilder, designer and shipwright Mark Hookham is one of the handful that can. Creator of the ubiquitous Markham Whalers, and later, his family of Dominator powered cats, Hookham has had a profound impact on Australian recreational boatbuilding standards. In this special look back at how it all began, in his own words, he explains the history and motivation behind his exceptional 50 year boatbuilding career.

by Mark Hookham

**I**n the beginning there was a very serious 16 year old surfer / board rider / Newport Surf Club lifesaver, who hated school, could not wait to finish the Intermediate and had no plans for any future career.

Fresh out of Manly Boys High School (of which we were in the very first intake of the then brand new school opened in 1958) and looking for pocket money for the holidays, I talked Bruce Steber, a local boat builder, clinker dinghy specialist and one man business, into giving me a part time job over the Christmas - New Year period. Bruce operated from a shed at the rear of his house in Ocean St Narrabeen. At that stage of my life, I had absolutely no knowledge of boats or any interest in becoming a boat builder.

During my short initial period with Bruce, witnessing a truly talented craftsman and the sheer beauty of watching a boat, plank by plank, being created by an outstanding



wooden boat builder, I became infatuated with the whole process.

After the top plank went on, we would fit steamed ribs, stringers, seats, tea tree knees and finally, prepare for the painting or finishing process.

Within two weeks, we had a finished, traditional, beautiful looking dinghy. I was hooked.

I talked Bruce into a full time apprenticeship and became his first employee.

Bruce was a master craftsman and an expert in his field. I never tired of the work and I have never regretted the decision to become a Shipwright / Boat Builder. I still get an adrenaline rush when I think back to those early days in the back yard of

**Left:** This is the production GRP version of the unique 3.8m multi-purpose family cat Hookham designed, which won the 1976 Chrysler Outboards design competition in *Australian Boating* magazine. Heaps of fun, stable, safe and sailed surprisingly well.

**Right:** So near, yet so far. The single engined Whaler promised much but never delivered, despite the Chrysler 90 being rigged on the transom every way possible with every prop available. At this point, Hookham was ready to give the whole project away, as weeks had been spent on three versions trying to get it sorted.

Ocean St. Narrabeen.

A bit of trivia that may appeal to those who know us. Allan, Bruce's son, and now head honcho of the famous Steber International boat building company, was two years old in those early days. He would sit, (with runny nose and all) in his nappy, under our feet playing in the wood shavings whilst we were



## Powered Cats FAQs

### Why Is One Cat Better Than Another?

**What makes one cat better than another?**

All cats are not created equal and as this Directory shows, they are many and varied in their construction, power requirements and design.

Having established the best size for your needs, the next major issue to resolve (if you haven't already) is to decide whether you'd prefer the cat in fibreglass or aluminium.

For many buyers, this is an easy decision because there is still wide spread resistance to plate aluminium cats, especially on the recreational side of the market.

On the commercial side, it's almost the opposite - plate aluminium construction is easily the dominant material.

However, both mediums cross over in the so-called "middle-ground" so just as it's possible to find many examples of working commercial fibreglass cats, there is an increasing number of beautifully finished recreational (not to say luxury) plate aluminium cats coming onto the market too.

Nevertheless, as a rule of thumb one could observe that the fibreglass sector is working harder to build better finished boats than ever before, and beautifully finished fibreglass cats from Noosacat, King Cat, Voyager, etc are all actively pursuing the recreational market and with a very high level of finish too.

But there are many other issues that make the difference between one manufacturer and another.

Fundamentally, hull shapes are critical, and it stands to reason that a manufacturer who has been working in the marketplace for 20 or 30 years with a wide range of

boats (such as Noosacat, Kevlacad and Dominator), these GRP manufacturers are going to have a vast wealth of experience building cats for countless

situations, and over the years have earned their reputations for building a quality product. That's not to say that newcomers to the field won't quickly move up to their standard, and in some cases exceed them because technology and design is moving so quickly, more often than not some of the later designs are leaving some of the models from traditional builders behind.

Today's powered catamaran buyer has a wide choice of craft to consider but essentially, the decision making process should begin with the size, then identify the preferred power options (inboard or outboard, for example) before deciding on your preferred type of construction, and with these three major elements nailed, the most interesting process then begins. Who makes the best and most suitable model for your specific requirements? Once again, it's time to drag out a sheet of paper and write down the advantages of each of the models on the table - and then put opposite that list, all the disadvantages.

It's a corny old technique, but it is still one of the best ways of deciding what makes one cat more suitable for you than another.

PCA-4

**Ah - you've gotta luv it, eh? Noosacat 2300 Walkaround owner Phil Reed is deservedly proud of his bull dolphinfish (mahimahi), one of many fine captures he's made in his cat in the warm ocean waters around Brisbane in SEQ.**



## Powered Cats FAQs

### High Tunnel Or Low - What's The Difference?

**High tunnel or low tunnel?**

This is a real can of worms because it is so utterly subjective - and no matter what we say in the following paragraphs, there will be plenty of people who will not only disagree, but do so very strongly.

The Great Tunnel Debate has been going on since the Hinkley Sea Sleds were built in America in the 1920's. Should the tunnel be high enough to allow free passage of the water, wake and compressed air through the tunnel? Or should it be so low as to intentionally ride upon the compression of air and wake forced through a smaller opening at the transom?

With the high tunnel technique (in theory, at least) the passage of the water and the air through the tunnel between the sponsons does not create any lift - indeed, the high tunnel fraternity are adamant that in order to get a friction-free, super efficient hydro-dynamic flow of water around their hulls, the top of the tunnel shouldn't be anywhere near the water - much less be compressing the water flow, and the air mixed with it.

On the other hand, the opposite view prevails. There are many boat builders (most production craft, in fact) who subscribe to the principle that whilst the cat's tunnel should be well clear of the water when the boat is at rest (300mm is a commonly used figure) this design school believes the tunnel forms an integral part of the hydro-dynamics. Because, with the right

design, the water peeling off the two sponsons inside the tunnel is literally compressed and mixed with the air flowing in through the cat's "mouth" which in turn is compressed as it travels down through the smaller and smaller tunnel opening as it nears the transom.

This design school argues there are two substantial advantages of this strategy. The first and most obvious is that in the smaller craft especially, and we're talking

here to about 10.0m, but more commonly in the 7.0m-9.0m range, there is a very marked and obvious lift provided by this compression of the air and the water as the cat goes faster and faster - more so when it's running straight into the wind.

This is where those near legendary tales about the awesome riding abilities of some cats is given traction. It's quite true that in some circumstances, especially in quite common bay chop



**There are as many schools of thought about high tunnels, medium tunnels and low tunnels as there are cat designers and builders, and each claim they are dead-set . . . right!**



situations such as you'll find on Port Phillip, Sydney Harbour, Moreton Bay etc, with 20 knots of breeze, a well set-up cat will quite literally fly across the chop with the air and wave action so compressed through the tunnel the boat is lifted up onto a cushion of air.

This is not bullshit or sales talk - it is a hydro-dynamic fact, and one the author has experienced on many, many occasions.

There is another element to this low tunnel design strategy which is important to consider. Severally cat designers believe very strongly that should a cat be overloaded or at least, be loaded to the gunwales with (say) dive bottles and divers, or perhaps charter fishing parties, etc, then by virtue of the boat "sinking" down lower on its marks, the tunnel height is virtually reduced to next to nothing. Then, this is a considerable boost to the inherent safety of the craft as in fact, what's happened is the displacement of the boat has

## Powered Cats FAQs

Most people who know cats realise that 'walking a cat' is no big deal - but for many newcomers, and people who are on the verge of purchasing a cat, it does remain a worry. In this report, we explain just how easy it is to start . . .

### 'WALKING' . . The Cat!

**“Walking the cat”** is a technique of driving power catamarans in the ocean to maximise the benefit of having two hulls instead of one, and to promote an even softer ride than even cat owners have come to expect.

Recently, the writer mentioned the subject in an answer to a letter from a reader to F&B – and the emails, phone and faxes haven't stopped since. “What are you talking about” they asked, “when you say cats must be driven differently to monos?” or “I've had a cat for years, am I doing something wrong. . .?”

Whoa back – let's start at the beginning.

“Walking the cat” is something many cat owners come to do without even realising they are doing it.

It is a technique of driving a cat that requires certain prerequisites, including

- A nicely balanced craft.
- A cat with a highish power to weight ratio so it's not dragging its bum through the water.
- Excellent, accurate, fingertip steering - preferably a quality hydraulic system like Australia's own Hydrive steering from Adelaide.
- Excellent forward vision, and in particular, at the ocean right in front of the bows.
- The right frame of mind i.e., good company, a great day, sparkling water, frisky live baits in the tank and the

Travelling at high speed (here at about 40 knots) planing cats get right 'up' on the water, leaving very little planing surface in the drink - so they all tend to be quite sensitive to trim, windage and wave pressure, and like to 'walk' around from one side to the other. The top skippers leave them be, as it is a perfectly normal and natural response, especially when travelling very fast.

smell of fish in the air . . . *Okay, we're set to go!*

Leaving harbour or the ramp, we accelerate up onto plane, bringing the cat up to its sweet cruising speed, usually around 4,000-4,500 on the tachos. Relax. Look around you – take a deep breath and thank your lucky stars you live and get to fish in Australia. Check out where the birds are working; look for the ruffles on the water that could suggest live bait or pelagics working; find the day's current lines; enjoy.

Standing there, cruising at perhaps 24-28 knots, the air is clean and warm in your face, the boat is singing. *Man, you feel good!*

Leaning against the side of the windscreen, you feel the helm; feel the boat moving, slicing through the water. Just work the wheel gently with your wrists, moving the rig slightly from side to side. Start to feel each hull slicing through the water, one side slightly ahead of the other. Gently, ever so slightly, working from one side; one hull across to the other.

It feels good, because it is good – there's nothing quite like a really good cat in a seaway, and today, you're both working as one.

As the cat heads out to sea, you start to settle in, really getting off on the day. Watching the sea ahead, watching it rush back under the bows, you start to notice the smaller wavelets, the little pyramids, the hills and even the smaller valleys rushing towards you as the cat makes its way out to sea. Beautiful, isn't it?

Within a little while, sometimes 5 minutes, sometimes 10, maybe even 15 minutes, you pick up the rhythm of the sea, the wave sets and patterns.

You can feel the cat working underneath you, rising and falling gently, working from one side to the other. You consciously start moving the helm to drop into that little gully ahead; to work over that swell, falling down intentionally on the starboard hull, before 'picking it up' and placing it down in the small valley to port; maybe leaving it there, letting that next wave pick it up, before you gently override the wave push – and put the cat back down gently to starboard – into the valley of your choosing.

It's subtle, gentle and consists of just tiny movements of the helm.

Talking with your mates, it becomes a subconscious act; a union of man and machine; reflecting an understanding of both the sea and the cat. Without conscious thought, the cat is working from side to side, very gently mostly, but sometimes in the rougher stuff, it can be quite physical, as the skipper

Milliseconds after this shot was taken, the starboard hull 'landed' gently first, with port landing an almost indiscernable moment behind. Cat hulls follow more closely to the wave patterns as they are so much finer than monos - and of course, there's two of them.

Experienced Cat skippers quickly realise this is the Cat's natural gait - and instead of correcting the helm all the time - they just go with the flow and let the boat sort itself out - or they'll become so attuned to the hulls working in the seaway, they'll start working with the hulls, recognising these modern cats do 'work' gently from one side to the other in rough conditions - or even in very good conditions on a sparkling summer's day. It's what they do - and smart skippers use this trait to their advantage, to promote an even softer, faster and more comfortable ride. It's why we love 'em !



