



Our video

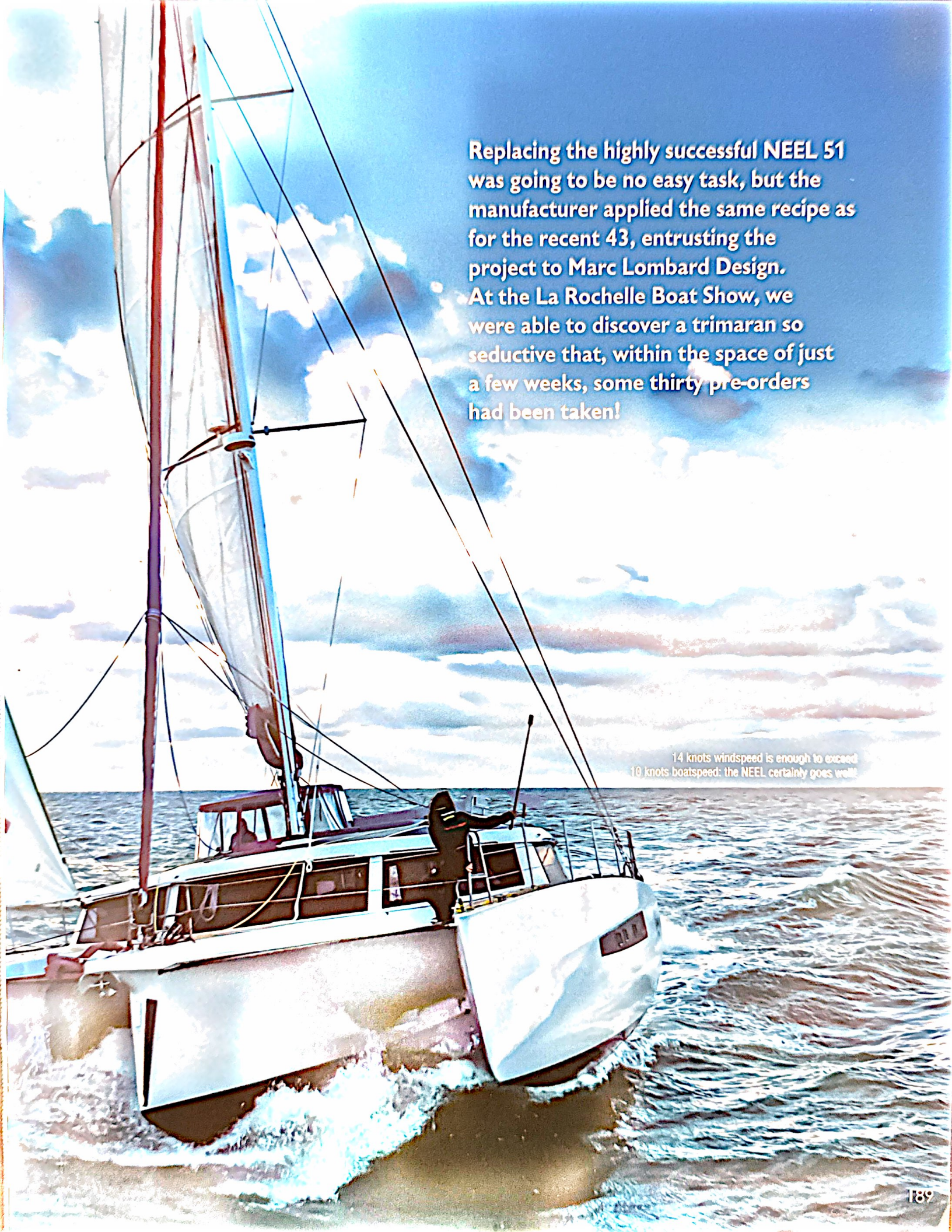
TEST

Text: Emmanuel van Deth - Photos: Addictive Sailing & by the author

NEEL 52

ARE THREE HULLS BETTER THAN TWO?





Replacing the highly successful NEEL 51 was going to be no easy task, but the manufacturer applied the same recipe as for the recent 43, entrusting the project to Marc Lombard Design. At the La Rochelle Boat Show, we were able to discover a trimaran so seductive that, within the space of just a few weeks, some thirty pre-orders had been taken!

14 knots windspeed is enough to exceed 10 knots boatspeed: the NEEL certainly goes well!



This aft view of the NEEL 52 #2 shows the tender in place on its integrated cradle (inset) and the cockpit canvas and helm station options installed.

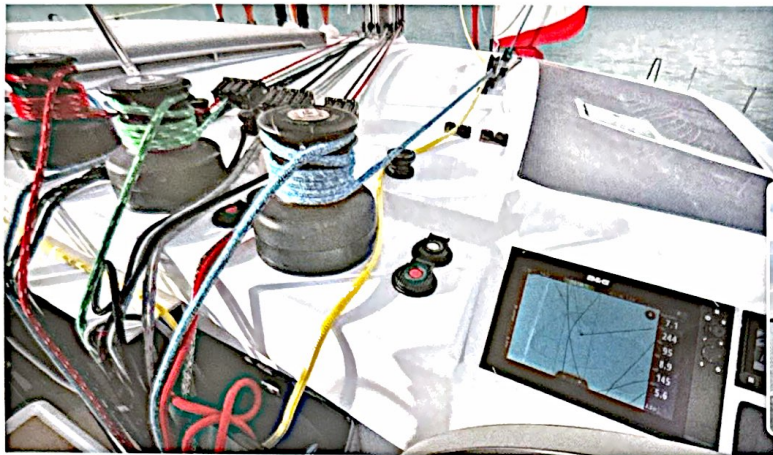
The NEEL 52's roadmap was not to orchestrate a new revolution on three hulls - the NEEL concept with its wide platform and possibility of a flush-decked owner's cabin already provides for this, and even seems to be emulated by the Rapido 53XS - but to bring a more modest touch of modernity to the design, more light to the interior, improved cockpit ergonomics and a small boost, seemingly out of nothing, in terms of performance.

A streamlined deck layout

As soon as you step aboard, you'll notice that every attention has been paid to the access from the dock or pontoon, especially on the outer hulls, which provide a vast, unobstructed area with no gunwales to step over. The after end of the central hull

Custom solar panels installed on the coachroof.





The raised helm station is complemented by these three powerful winches and ad hoc clutches to manage all sailing maneuvers. At the helm, fun guaranteed!



features an integrated dinghy cradle capable of accommodating an 11-foot (3.4 m) tender and its 20 HP outboard. Of course, the dinghy is fitted with a bridle for hoisting out of the water. One step is all it takes to reach THE level, i.e. the one that connects the cockpit to the nacelle - and thus to the famous Owner's cabin, as we'll see later. On the port side, there's a 43 x 45" (108 x 115 cm) table and an L-shaped bench seat with a reversible backrest. On the starboard side, there's a large all-purpose area under the

helm station - accessed by five steps. Three more steps and you're on the sun lounger - I prefer to call it that rather than flybridge, as the boom remains relatively close. The coachroof can be fitted with solar panels - up to 1,846 Wp. As for the side decks, they are accessed via four steps from the cockpit. To starboard, one more step gives access to the helm station. The side-decks are wide - 22½" (57 cm) at their narrowest - and are safe thanks to the guardwires being fairly high. Like most multihulls on the market,

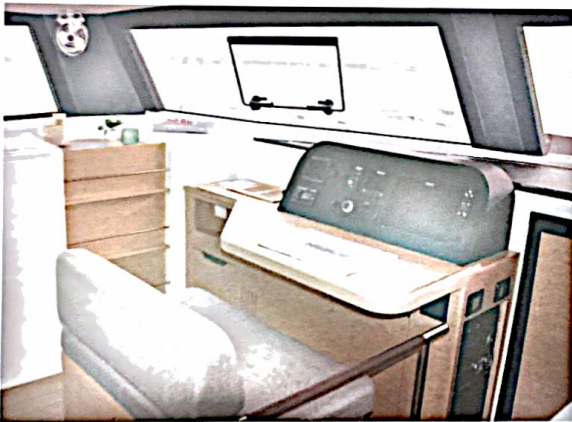
the NEEL 52 boasts a copious list of options, enabling you to customize your trimaran almost to your own specifications. One regret: the coachroof handrails are among these options. Personally, I'd prefer to see these basic safety features, even if they're not compulsory, as part of the standard inventory. The deck hatches are all flush, which would be perfect if they were a little less flexible. The foredeck is a reminder that we're aboard a trimaran, since the rigid part is only covering the central hull,



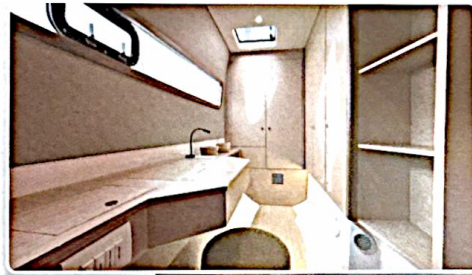
The dining area extends to the outside saloon - the cockpit concept!



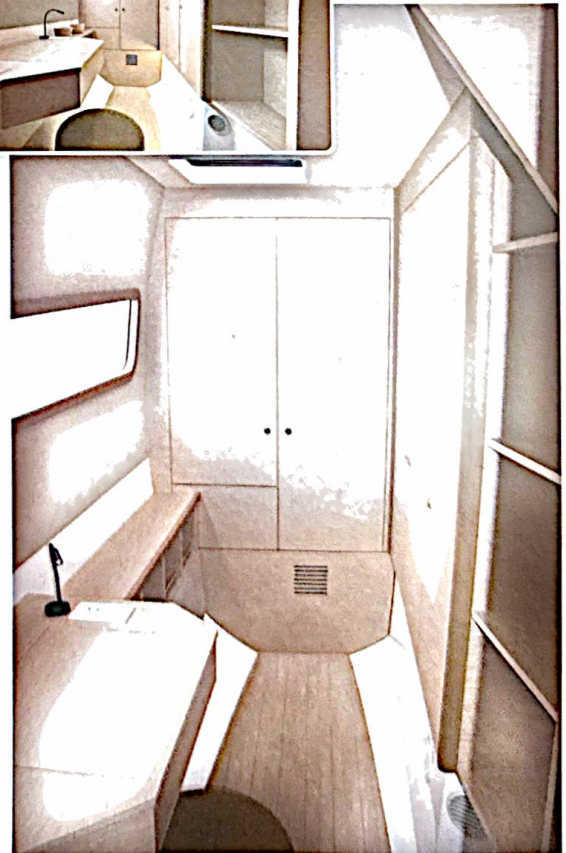
The U-shaped galley offers an extraordinary amount of worktop surface. ■



■ A large, forward-facing chart table: we love it!



■ Desk, vanity and heads are installed in the starboard hull.



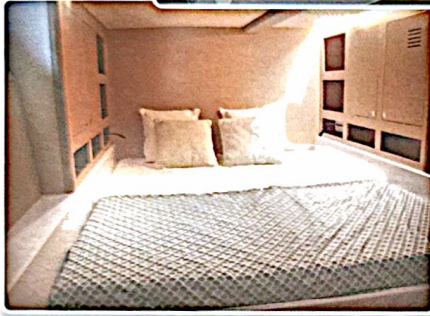
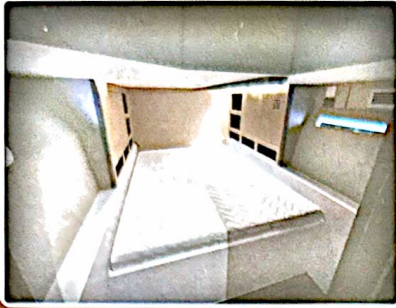
making the trampolines therefore relatively large. A deck hatch on the bow forms the lid of the chain locker. A 1,700-W windlass guides the anchor and anchor chain, and the large composite bowsprit platform effectively offsets the tack of the downwind sails while also accommodating the anchor.

A trimaran with plenty beneath the hull!

Port maneuvers may seem more arduous than aboard a catamaran with two engines, but in the end, 110 HP under the throttle and a bow thruster guarantee easy handling.

The whole crew on board was eager to gauge the 52's performance, as this new model is intended to be a little faster than the 51. The hulls are a bit narrower, and the forefoot protrudes well out of the water. The infused foam/glass/epoxy sandwich construction has enabled the yard to keep to a tight weight specification - the displacement is increased by 1,100 lbs (500 kg) - and the square-topped mainsail option results in 54 square feet (5 m²) more sail area upwind. Without adopting the equivalent of a twin turbo, the 52 nevertheless offers the advantage of doing better, starting on pa-

NEEL 52 layout plans offer 4 to 6 cabins.



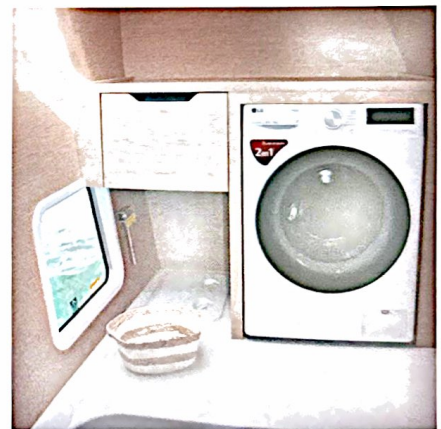
per, than its predecessor. Its sail-to-weight ratio stands at 12.81 m²/t, where most of its twin-hulled rivals struggle to exceed 10. Sails are quickly set. Maneuvers are performed from the elevated starboard helm station, using three winches. From up there, the helmsman has a good view of the sails and the water. This is all the more true as our NEEL 52 hull #1 has no helm station protection, as there is on hull #2. Our Captain for the day, Brieuc Maisonneuve, the brand's Sales Director, is an ocean racing man: there's no question of sticking to approximate adjustments of the genoa tracks or the tensioning the mainsheet (which is rigged in a bridle fashion, noticeably increasing the spread between the blocks). These fine-tunings revealed that the winches were missing some lines upstream to avoid over-powering certain sail maneuvers - details which were immediately corrected by the manufacturer. Tacking is easy, and the central skeg is deep enough to act as an effective anti-leeway device.

In fact, we're sailing upwind at 50° to the true wind - established at barely 10 knots - at a constant 5.5 knots on the GPS. The feel of the helm is both direct on the trajectory and supple in terms of feel. The slight heel further enhances overall enjoyment. Old monohull addicts will appreciate this, even if you remain to windward or leeward, depending which tack you're on, with no possibility of repositioning yourself as you only have one helm station. The

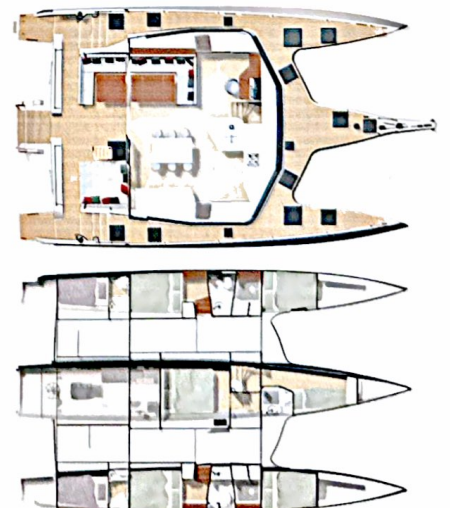
day's conditions were not very rough, but the care taken with the centering of the weight augurs well for very seaworthy behavior in heavy seas. Under asymmetrical spinnaker, we easily reached 8 knots. The polars promise to exceed 10 knots from 14 knots of wind (100 to 110° from the wind), 16 knots from 25 knots of wind and even 19 with 30 knots. We're talking about flat seas: Brieuc reached 17 knots with a gust of 20 knots and a ground swell during a test sail this winter.

The cockloot? We can't get enough of it ...

For several years now, the manufacturer has been touting its "cockloot" concept - a contraction of cockpit and saloon. The idea is to merge the exterior space and the nacelle through two devices: firstly, a bay window that really opens up wide (here, 6½ feet high by 12 wide / 1.97 m x 3.03 m), and secondly, continuous furniture. In fact, the starboard bench seat is interrupted only by the aft upright of the coachroof, and the two tables can be hinged together to form one large table. In the saloon, the headroom is 6'7" (2.02 m). As soon as you enter, it's clear that the overall standard of finish is superior to that of the 51. On board this #1, there are a few minor niggles to report - an adjustment to the woodwork here, a door that doesn't close properly there, but these are trifling matters that will be rectified in a



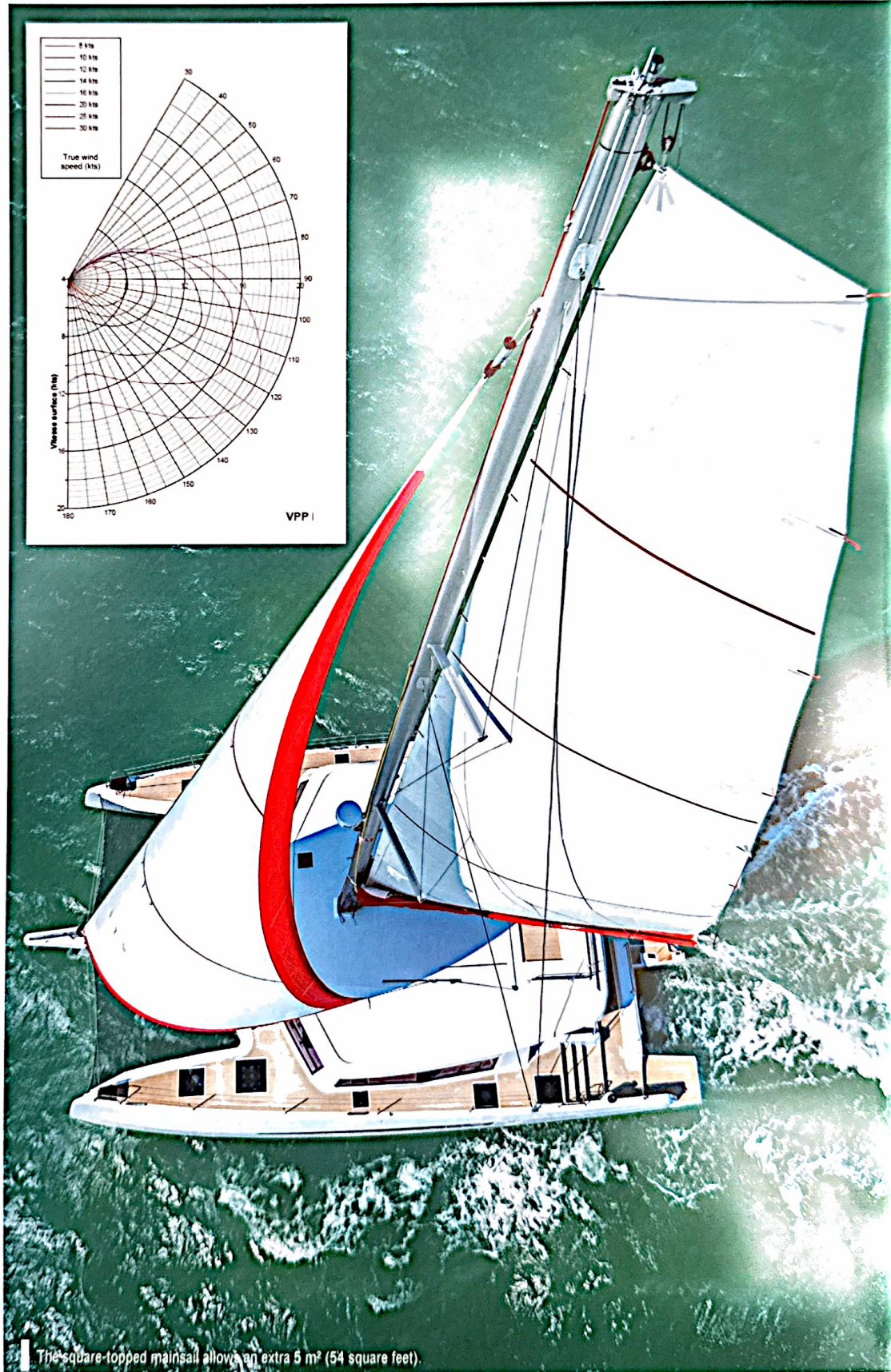
Options cover every need in terms of equipment and comfort.



few hours of after-sales service - and, above all, will be non-existent on later 52s. We also appreciated the large, glazed area of the nacelle - and, of course, the panoramic view that goes with it. To port, the saloon leaves the way clear for a vast chart table facing forward - a proper desk, just as I like it! To starboard, there's a gigantic "split-U-shaped" galley. This configuration will be particularly appreciated offshore, where the cook will always be perfectly wedged in. Closer to the cockpit, a door leads to the owner's suite with a 6'7" x 5'3" (2 x 1.6 m) bed. A desk, dressing room and the heads are located a little lower down in the hull. Two further cabins are fitted in the port hull, while the fourth nestles forward in the central hull, seven steps below, though lacks ventilation. On the other hand, any hull porthole left open in this area so close to the bow when under way would result in one hell of an ingress of water... Don't laugh, it's happened to some very good people... Our hull #1 therefore has 4 cabins, but it's possible to review the whole organization, including doing without the walk-in cabin to recover an XXL-sized nacelle space.

Conclusion

With its sleek design, instant pleasure when helming, varied and attractive layout options, and low price compared to its competitors (at least before options), the NEEL 52 is an undeniable success. It even confirms the appeal of its original concept - three hulls topped by a wide platform - to the point that a future owner looking to buy a 50 to 55-foot multihull will inevitably be looking at this model when researching. It would seem that the NEEL brand, even though only 13 years old, has reached a level of maturity with this 52.



The square-topped mainsail allows an extra 5 m² (54 square feet).

