

Like Brookes's early boats, the new 70-footer is designed to sail fast, but she's also built for simplicity of operation. For instance, instead of



Eagle's helm station with its seven winches is isolated aft of the main passenger area. The new cat will have just four winches on the entire boat.

daggerboards, each hull has a fixed skeg that will break away in a grounding but keep the hull intact. Brooks can tell harrowing stories of the damage caused by multihull daggerboards tearing up the surrounding hull when boats have gone aground, or even while sailing in heavy weather.

In his sail plan, the jib doesn't overlap the mast. Pointing to the deck layout, Brookes explained how this allows the boat's bartender, with the aid of one winch at his workstation, to tack the jib. Similarly, there's one winch on the mainsheet, and it's handy to the helmsman and out of the way of passengers. Brookes proudly counted just four winches he's planned for the entire boat—in contrast to *Eagle's* seven winches in the cockpit alone. It's that sort of refinement that suggests a Brookes day-charter cat has evolved into a simpler model: not necessarily faster, but more efficient at the task it's intended to perform. Here is a workboat that will carry 100 passengers, compared to *Eagle's* 30, and yet

either boat can be sailed with a crew of two.

Brookes's cats may be direct descendants of Spronk's speed machines, but they had to be more than fast and beautiful; they had to make money. Brookes's reputation as a designer and builder in the Caribbean is as dependent on the financial success of his boats as it is on their sailing abilities.

Generically speaking, the Caribbean day-charter cat has developed to perform no less effectively than other types of working craft—Chesapeake skipjacks, Bristol pilot cutters, Carolina sportfishermen—evolved to excel at their respective functions.

Compared to cruising catamarans, Brookes's boats have less accommodations space, lower freeboard, and lighter displacement. But, they have generous deck and trampoline area, require only modest auxiliary power, and are set up to unload on the beach. Brookes's eye is attuned to efficiencies—or lack thereof—in the day-charter trade. At the dock



Protected by its blue bag, Eagle's boarding ladder deploys from between the trampolines on the foredeck, allowing passengers easy access when the cat is nudged onto a beach.

Brookes nodded in the direction of a high-sided cat in the Basseterre fleet. "She's not one of my children," he said.

Beyond their role as specialized working sail in a contemporary world, Brookes's cats contain lessons about

the potential resilience and longevity of wood/epoxy composite construction. I've heard plenty of wooden-boat purists predict the doom of any vessel built of plywood covered in glass. In fairness to such criticism, numerous wood/epoxy boats do in

fact suffer from water intrusion and extensive rot. But Brookes's cats serve as a rebuttal to those voices: his big cats demonstrate that if well built and maintained, wood/epoxy boats can last, and last.

Brooke's boats have not been babied, or kept in mild environments. Baked in the Caribbean sun, bashed upwind in steep seas, and occasionally tossed ashore or strained through the pilings of a pier by hurricanes, most of Brookes's cats have sailed for upward of 25 years without hogging, rotting, or falling to bits.

And they're still making enough money to generate demand for him to build more. **PBB**

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