

Volume 35, Number 5  
September/October 2009

# MULTIHULLS

USPS 093-150

THE LARGEST AND MOST INFORMATIVE MULTIHULL MAGAZINE READ WORLDWIDE  
DISTRIBUTED IN OVER 100 COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD • US \$5.95 / CAD 8.50 / £ 4.95 / €9,00

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# David vs. Goliath... at a boat show?

*OK, now that I caught your attention with this corny headline, yes, there is a David. David Halladay and he builds the superb – new to our readers – Wharram Tiki 30 catamarans. He goes to boat shows and displays them.*

*No, there is no boat builder by the name of Goliath, but there is a huge catamaran, 90 feet long, built by Catana and is available in France. It is not seen at boat shows. The following are the stories of these multihulls.*

## David: A New Perspective on Wharram Catamarans

*By Scott B. Williams*

Most multihull enthusiasts are familiar with the Polynesian-influenced plywood catamarans of British designer and multihull pioneer, James Wharram.

Wharram catamarans have been built and sailed in just about every conceivable part of the world, and examples can be spotted in most popular cruising grounds at any given time. Most of the Wharram cats in existence have been homebuilt, and not always to the highest standards of outfitting and aesthetics. As a result, they tend to have a less than stellar reputation among sailors of more conventional production catamarans and trimarans. But, despite the disdain of the elite, high-tech multihull crowd, Wharram catamarans continue to be popular, and a few are now being built in the U.S. to a standard never seen before.

James Wharram has built his design business on the premise that anyone, even those with no experience at boat building or sailing, can build themselves an ocean-going “double canoe” in the backyard or in a rented shed or barn, and then sail away

to the South Seas. It was a promise that has lured many, and a large number of buyers of his plans have been successful at attaining their dreams. The appeal of Wharram catamarans has always been simplicity, relatively low cost to build, and safety/seaworthiness. Many of these homebuilt boats have crossed oceans and even circumnavigated.

While amateur plan sales have been James Wharram’s primary focus, he has also long recognized the fact that not everyone wants to build his own boat, especially if he is short on time and has the funds to pay someone else to do it. Over the years, there have been several professional builders offering finished Wharram cats,

both in the standard ply-epoxy construction and in GRP. Some of these builders have offered both completed boats and kits. As well as professionally built versions of his standard designs, Wharram has also drawn some designs available only to the pros, with no plans available to homebuilders. Most of the fiberglass versions of the Tiki 21, Tiki 26, and Tiki 28 that were built by such companies as Imagine Multihulls in the 1980s are still sailing today, due to quality materials and construction.

Because of prohibitively high taxes, labor costs and government regulations, it has become increasingly difficult for small production builders to function in



*Designer James Wharram and builder David Halladay*



most European countries. As a result, Wharram's two major professional builders in recent years have been Andy Smith Boatworks, operating in the Philippines, and Guenther Nutt's Seascope yard in Phuket, Thailand. Both have produced many high-quality Wharram catamarans in a variety of sizes, and have sold to customers worldwide. But because of their exotic location halfway around the world, these yards have little appeal to most American buyers who might want a production Wharram if they could see finished examples and more easily meet with the builder and even become involved in the process.

It takes a healthy dose of optimism for a busy marine carpentry firm in the U.S. to invest in building a top-quality 30-foot catamaran on speculation, but that's exactly what David Halladay of Boatsmith, Inc. decided to do last year. A long-time Wharram enthusiast myself, I met Halladay eight years ago when I was cruising and living aboard a monohull in south Florida, looking for work as a boat carpenter. Over the years we talked about Wharram's designs at length, and after I lost my monohull cruiser in Hurricane Katrina, I started building my own Tiki 26 in my spare time.

As my hulls began coming together bit-by-bit, I made several trips from my home in Mississippi to work on various projects with Halladay's Boatsmith shop in Jupiter, Florida. We continued our discussions about boat design and especially shoal-draft, simple boats that could negotiate Florida's waters and handle crossings to the nearby Bahamas. Seeing the worldwide interest generated on my blog about my own build, Halladay realized that the appeal of Wharram catamarans was still strong and that there might be a market for professionally built boats in this country. With a capable crew of skilled craftsmen and the tools and space to work with, he figured he could put a Tiki 30 together in record time, and that's just what he did.



Boatsmith chose the Tiki 30 as the demo boat to build because of a combination of factors that make it an ideal size. With enough deck space and basic camping-style accommodations in the hulls, it can serve as a family cruiser or day-charter boat. Fixed mini-keels with no retractable appendages allow it to go to weather while keeping it rugged enough for beaching with a fixed two-foot draft. While not an easy task, the boat can be disassembled and trailered to different locations, if desired; yet the design incorporates the seaworthiness to go most anywhere on its own hulls.

The building of the Boatsmith Tiki 30 was documented step-by-step with photos and text in Halladay's *Pro-Built Tiki 30* blog. All materials and components that went into the vessel were highest quality, and fit and finish was to modern yacht-building standards. The result was a far cry from the typical home-built Wharram catamaran, and upon inspecting it at the 2008 Mystic Seaport Wooden Boat Show; the designer himself said that he'd like to

see more boats built like this.

With many backyard boatbuilders focusing on "cheap" as their primary consideration, it's not surprising that Wharram cats have the reputation they do. Homebuilders frequently run low on funds near the end and tend to skimp on sails, rigging and other systems. The Boatsmith Tiki 30 however is fitted out with state-of-the-art gear, from the Harken self-tailing winches to the Dynex synthetic standing rigging. The working rig consists of the signature short gaff main with a zipper luff pocket around the mast for clean airflow, a 130 percent genoa on a Harken roller furler, and an asymmetrical spinnaker. All sails are made by Jeckells of England, the designer's recommended sail loft. Needless to say, the boat sails better than most Wharrams and at a recent gathering of enthusiasts at the Spring Wharram Rendezvous in Islamorada, Florida, owners of the other cats in attendance were treated to rides on the Tiki 30 and were shocked at the difference proper setup can make.

Before last summer, it would have been impossible to find a brand-new, custom-built Wharram catamaran docked alongside production offerings at major U.S. boat shows. With her gleaming red-and-white Awlgrip paint, teak decks and trim, red Sunbrella bimini and cockpit cushions, Boatsmith's Tiki 30 was a big hit at the Strictly Sail Boat Show in St. Petersburg, and at the Miami Boat Show. The rakish lines of her strong, upswept sheers and her low-slung, close-to-the-water stance was a sharp contrast to modern

design trends, but proved a draw to both seasoned sailors and newbies alike. One only has to take a quick look to see that the design parameters just seem right and that this is a boat meant for the sea.

But the one comment that was heard time and again, both at the boat shows and everywhere the Tiki 30 has made an appearance is: "That looks like fun." Fun indeed, and isn't that the whole point of this sailing stuff to begin with? What could be more fun than a big, seagoing platform that can take you safely to the islands, slung low and in touch

with the water you are sailing on, and when you get there, allow you to poke your way into every little shallow cove and even land on the beach? The simplicity of these boats makes them quite forgiving to beginners and less experienced sailors. Wharram's conservative approach to rigging makes them practically immune to wind capsize, and it would take a determined effort to sail hard enough to be even near the limits of stability.

Kids and adults alike love the spacious, shaded cockpit, the forward decks and the trampolines aft. A drop-down swim ladder makes getting in and out of the water an inviting prospect, and all that deck space allows you to carry a sizeable dinghy or other boats such as sit-on-top kayaks.

I recently had the pleasure of going along with a Boatsmith employee on a delivery of the Tiki 30 from West Palm Beach to Nassau, Bahamas. During our time in the Bahamas, the same comment was heard from practically everyone who saw the boat: "That looks like fun." And it was. Even on a hurried delivery schedule, we took the time to sail in close to rocky bluffs along the Berry Island chain, and skimmed over coral reefs we would not have dared approach in a deeper draft vessel. The boat was comfortable, the motion easy, and the accommodations quite functional, basic as they are. In Nassau, we handed it over to yacht photographer, Onne van der Waal who, along with his two young sons and a nephew, took it to play in the Exumas for a week. The boys were ecstatic as they clambered all over the decks and stowed their bags in the long tunnel-like interiors down below. What could be better than the prospect of a week of living on this boat in the islands, swimming, diving and exploring?

Halladay's gamble with America's first professional-built Wharram catamaran has paid off. Boatsmith, Inc. is now James Wharram's first and only licensed builder in the U.S. and in partnership with the designer will be offering the standard design range as well as boats unavailable to amateur builders. One example of these pro-only designs is the relatively new Tiki





8-meter, which is a GRP version of the older Tiki 26. The Tiki 8-meter was offered in kit form in the U.K., but BoatSmith has now acquired the molds and will be building finished boats and boats in various stages of completion in the shop in Florida. Two of these improved fiberglass 26-foot cats have been ordered by a Florida resort hotel to use in their day-charter business. Halladay expects this design to be quite popular for sailors in shallow water areas such as his home state. Drawing only 18-inches with no boards or rudders to worry about, the Tiki 8-meter can go even more places than the larger Tiki 30. The boat can also be more readily set up for trailering, with smaller components and lighter overall weight.

Although modern epoxy-wood composite construction as used in the standard Tiki range can be just as strong and durable, offering the boats in GRP will open up a whole new customer base among those who may not consider a wooden boat. Those that are built in wood, like the Tiki 30 demo boat, will be constructed using only top quality BS-1088 marine plywood and Xynole polyester sheathing. BoatSmith is equipped and able to build any size Wharram catamaran, all the way up the 65-foot Islander, although most of the interest seems to be in boats from about 26-feet to the Tiki 38 and Tiki 46.



In times of high fuel prices and general economic downturn, these easily-driven, slim-hulled catamarans make perfect sense. They open up the world of cruising to many who would not otherwise be able to afford it. Not everyone has the time to devote thousands of hours of hard work into building the boat of his or her dreams. But, with the option to buy a U.S. built complete or partially-complete custom catamaran at a competitive price, Wharram's designs are definitely worth a closer look. The savings go much farther than just the relatively low cost of obtaining one. As all multihull cruisers know, shallow draft allows you to explore a world of places off the beaten path, where

crowds of keel boaters have not driven prices up by overcrowding mooring and docking facilities. Maintenance can often be done on some out-of-the-way beach, avoiding haulout fees for simple repairs, and the boats can also be disassembled and brought home for off-season storage or to avoid hurricanes.

David Halladay and the entire BoatSmith crew are dedicated to bringing the designs of James Wharram into the consciousness of the American multihull community and American sailors in general. He is sponsoring a new Wharram U.S.A. web site: [www.wharramusa.com](http://www.wharramusa.com) that will be a go-to reference site for all things Wharram and will feature ongoing blogs about the Wharram projects under construction in the shop. Halladay plans to attend many more boat shows as well, both with the Tiki 30 demo boat and the new Tiki 8-meter. The result of all this new attention to Wharram's proven designs and the dedication to quality construction will likely be a surge in the number of Polynesian inspired cats seen sailing on this side of the Atlantic.



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