



BY ADAM CORT

XCAT

A beach cat that really can do it all

If ever there was a Swiss army knife of a boat, it's the Xcat, winner of a *SAIL* 2017 Best Boats award in the daysailer category. Not only is this a sailboat that doubles as a twin-hulled rowing shell, it also breaks down easily for car-topping or storage, and is available with a variety of add-ons—ranging from hiking seats and a nifty little dry bag with dedicated attachments for keeping valuables safe to a small four-stroke or Torqeedo electric outboard. Extra-long paddles are even available that allow you to use the boat as a kind of two-person SUP. How cool is that?

Best of all, every inch of this fun little boat is carefully engineered, so that for all its seeming complexity it is dead simple to assemble, disassemble, launch and sail. All-up weight for the boat is 120lb (165lb including the sailing rig) and no tools are required to clamp together the hulls and anodized frame in as little as 10 minutes. In sailboat mode, the Xcat carries a modern square-head mainsail (with built-in flotation up top in case of a capsized) and a sizable jib set on a full-length bowsprit: an arrangement that provides plenty of power even in the lightest breezes.

The hulls are constructed of High-density polyethylene (HDPE) molded around an EPP particle foam core and then joined on an outward-turning

flange that serves as a kind of long sharp keel (think of the sharp bottoms on the hulls of the original Hobie cats) that also protects the rest of the hull when beaching. The resulting structure is easy to clean, virtually indestructible and tracks well under sail. According to the manufacturer, the boat can even be steered without the rudder by moving crew weight fore and aft, as per the old sailing canoes of the late 1800s.

As for those oars, they don't just keep the boat going in a drifter, they keep it going pretty darn fast. Not only that, they include an exquisitely engineered linkage that allows you to row the boat while facing forward as opposed to staring at your own wake. The action of this unique "Row Motion Pro" system, as it's called, engenders no energy loss and even allows you to feather the oars between



LOA 16ft 5in BEAM 6ft 10in WEIGHT 165lb
SAIL AREA 90ft² ENGINE TORQEEEDO 1003
Travel Electric Outboard SA/D RATIO 31
(with 150lb crew) D/L RATIO 32 (with 150lb
crew) DESIGNER Jochum Bierma BUILDER
Row&Sail GMBH, Lichtenberg/Linz, Austria,
rowandsail.com U.S. DISTRIBUTOR Red Beard
Sailing, 410-925-7701, redbeardsailing.com
PRICE \$7,700 (base sailboat)

strokes, the same as you would with conventional oars (which are also available for those who prefer rowing "backward" the old fashioned way).

Of course, the question with boats as cutting-edge and outside the norm as this one naturally becomes whether or not they can actually sail: and I'm happy to report that the Xcat's performance on the water in no way takes a back seat to its novel design brief.

Launching from the beach at Jonas Green State Park in Annapolis, the boat immediately shot out onto the placid waters of the Severn River in around 10 knots of breeze. Even with my 200lb bulk on board (not to mention that of Alex Caslow, owner of Red Beard Sailing, which markets the boat in the States) the boat proved to be nimble when coming about, and the single rudder was easy and responsive.

Hardening up through the occasional powerboat chop, I was especially pleased to see how the boat's narrow hulls sliced through the waves while losing little way. Be warned: this boat is going to be wet when it's blowing. But then again, isn't that half the fun when you're doing this kind of sailing?

Both assembling the boat and breaking it down afterward were as easy as advertised. As a result, not only will storage back home be little, if any problem, but you can car-top, launch and sail the Xcat pretty much anywhere you please, thereby opening up a whole new world of gunkholing possibilities. Not for nothing did this boat snag a *SAIL* Best Boats award. *