

The complete cruiser

Having sailed the Catalina 375 last year, **Kevin Green** was keen to check out the new 355.

A scaled-down version of the Catalina 445, the Catalina 355 has modest beam and topsides combined with a low profile coachroof. Designer Gerry Douglas describes it as a “more traditionally shaped cruiser” and slightly more performance orientated than older ranges of Catalinas.

A brief walkthrough at the Sydney International Boat Show revealed the brand’s trademark features: sheltered cockpit, wide side decks and low maintenance, hardwearing deck surfaces. However, improvements were there to be seen such as instrument readouts nestled either side of the helm and winches nearer to hand for the steerer as well.

Easy boarding

Cockpit entry should suit all ages thanks to the transom-stepped opening, aided by the optional folding Lewmar steering wheel which increases access. The binnacle is functional, perhaps at the expense of aesthetics, with engine controls all to hand and a stainless chartplotter frame (lower than previous boats to give unobstructed views

for’ard for smaller sailors) that housed a Garmin plotter on the test boat. Other instrumentation is outboard, with Raymarine ST60 readouts housed in the cockpit coamings and angled upward for easing viewing. Nearby, the primary Lewmar winches are big enough for one-handed use while you steer with the other. Ideal. The only problem with the binnacle setup is the danger of jamming your hands in the wheel spokes when operating the throttle. Alternatively, you can stretch your hand over the wheel top to access the throttle.

Just in front of the binnacle is the table, strongly made from stainless with GRP finish (a solid teak version is optional), with esky inbuilt and even a small LED nightlight above. A deck-level toe support also works when bracing on the wide cockpit seats which sit nice and deep below the coamings. Here also is a cavernous port locker with gull-wing lid which can easily swallow a deflated dinghy or folding bicycle.

Behind the wheel a removable transom bulkhead doubles as a safety aid (that meets US Coastguard standards requiring every vessel to

have a throwable flotation device). Removing it gives access to the small swim platform and fold-down ladder, once the lifelines are slid inside the pulpit rails; yet another neat idea.

Weather protection, a key point in any serious cruising boat, is one of the best examples I’ve seen in a long time (perhaps since the last Catalina, the 375 I looked at!) thanks to the tall optional dodger and wide gauge stainless strutted bimini. Stainless rails also adorn the cockpit jammer area where a pair of oversized Lewmars deal with all the halyards and in-mast mainsail lines. I also liked the halyard holder hooks (rather than bags that cause mildew) and a simple but effective mainsheet quick-release jammer.

Moving forward is helped by the wide decks and grippy non-slip underfoot. Reflecting the 355’s traditional approach, a good old-fashioned aluminium toerail is fitted which may look dated but is a safe place for your feet when wrestling with a foredeck sailchange in a blow. Also good in a blow are the high lifelines located slightly inboard that allow the average sailor to reach them without stooping, while the other hand has a heavy stainless cabin top grabrail. Lifeline gates are fitted on either side as well.

Another essential on a serious cruising boat is a good anchor setup and again the 355 comes up trumps with double rollers leading down into a deep anchor locker. A Maxwell RC10 vertical windlass is foot controlled with the 8mm chain running through a hawse pipe to ensure no snags. Bow cleats are perhaps slightly undersized but warps can run easily thanks to rollers on the fairleads, a useful fixing that reduces chafe as well as helping with warp handling.

Looking at the deck-stepped Selden alloy rig, the relatively tall mast comes standard now with in-mast furling and our review boat had the optional bowsprit fitted. It retracts back into the anchor well and when extended it deploys an asymmetric spinnaker or cruising chute (from a mini roller furler). Long car tracks located

The Catalina 355 is an excellent no-compromise cruising boat yet has pretty raked lines.



The in-mast furling mainsail from Doyle set well and deployed easily.

RIGHT: Saloon features berths either side while having a comfortable dinette and lounge area.



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“Cockpit entry should suit all ages thanks to the transom-stepped opening, aided by the optional folding Lewmar steering wheel which increases access”

galley fire. Other good details include wide bookshelf space and LED spotlights to help you enjoy a night read.

The saloon will appeal to traditionalists thanks to a pleasant mix of polished solid teak and matched-grain cabinetry with sliding screens coming out of the midships ones to cover the portholes. The cabin is also fitted with blinds for port and starboard windows, adding privacy at the marina. In the dinette a solid teak quad folding table rotates and lowers to become a bunk, as does the portside coffee table lounge area with movable headrests which give good ergonomics to the single seats. Adjoining this area, the chart table has an inset laptop moulding with cable ports and a vertical sliding lid to secure it while also opening up to reveal a traditional chart table space beneath. A smoked glass door shades the electrical panel while allowing viewing, thanks to bright digital readouts for key statistics such as battery current. For'ard of it is another panel for auxiliary systems such as air conditioning and watermakers while also housing the holding tank monitor.

inboard means plenty of adjustment for different headsail options, as you'd want on a cruiser.

Below decks

Entering the saloon is via a non-traditional affair due to saloon-style doors, something I'm not a fan of; choose Catalina's optional washboards for offshore work. The Catalina's two-cabin layout has the owner's double berth up front and a starboard-side double at the stern. The for'ard cabin is comfortably proportioned with a unique articulating bed that is raised by an electrical motor, so handy for watching a bulkhead-mounted flat-screen television. Like the rest of the boat the area has

excellent storage space, including a cedar-lined and ventilated hanging locker plus underfloor storage as well — a good nook to stash some wine to keep at a stable temperature. Ventilation should also be good, thanks to the forward-facing bow hatch venting air into this cabin, and through the rest of the boat.

The stern cabin door protrudes into the galley, which is not ideal. Inside a sprung mattress with 6'6" legroom stretches across the boat's beam so should ensure a comfortable rest. Natural light looked better than normally found in this layout thanks to three windows, including an escape hatch leading into the cockpit in case of a

new boat: Catalina 355



ABOVE: Navigation station is rear-facing with glass-panelled instrument covers.

LEFT: Large spray dodger with sturdy mainsheet track and friction-free run for all lines is a practical setup on the 355.

BELOW: Effective non-slip, forward-facing hatch and high lifelines all go to make the Catalina 355 a very sensible cruiser.

The galley has a roomy chest fridge with separate internal freezer unit and even a light. This L-shaped unit encroaches below the sink to eke out extra cold space and cleverly also has a bottom door. For cooking a double-burner stove and oven looks adequate, along with the factory-fitted microwave (which can be replaced with another matching-grain cabin door). Lockers are well thought out with a mix of ample vertical height for bottles and guided support legs for all crockery. Sensibly, there are twin sinks, with plenty of depth and with an extendable tap hose. Water supply won't be a problem as there is a whopping 404 litres in the tank.

Ablutions are also practically taken care of in the port quarter head which adjoins the companionway steps for easy off-watch crew undressing. Dubbed a "spa-style" head by designer Douglas it has the latest fashion item increasingly used on boats: a hardened glass bowl instead of a sink. But the benefits are practical with a lot of counter and under-locker space saved with this simple layout. The shower drains to a grey-water collection box in the bilges which contain the obligatory bilge pump. A single button operates the electric macerating head, so no dramas with hand pumps and seacock taps.

Engine noise was acceptable below decks during our motor out thanks to the thick teak cabinetry, insulated with foam and foil. It houses the Yanmar

3YM 30hp shaft-drive engine which sits high up on raised mounts. Servicing essentials – including impellor, oil and water – are prominently placed while the filters are in a separate cabinet in the head. One downside is the onerous job of accessing the engine though, which requires unclipping the steps, unclipping the rather cumbersome box then finding somewhere to move it while you work on the engine. European builders simply fit gas struts, so the companionway cants to instantly reveal the donk. However, for oil checks a small top hatch is fitted. Other practical touches down below include substantial handrails and a roof support post – all good for crew safety in a seaway.

Hull

Forward raked lines and a fine bow entry combined with lightly flared topsides give the 355 an overall pleasing shape, very much in the classic tradition. Construction is the company's well proven GRP with balsa core for both hull above the waterline and deck (below the waterline is traditional solid fibreglass) and all fittings have backing plates.

The bow section is well padded with a foam-filled anchor locker base and behind the actual anchor well there is a high-density foam collision bulkhead (in case of those bingles on the Intercoastal Waterway, no doubt!). Also, I believe a topside rubbing strip is available –

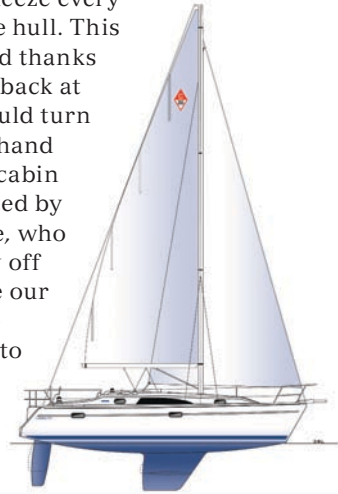
another good feature of this well thought out boat.

Below the waterline a flattened stern section reduces drag and, a big differentiator from its European competitors, is the lead keel fitted as standard which both aids stability and stiffness when going to windward. The review boat came with the shallower wing keel, one reason why Catalinas are popular in the Gippsland Lakes, which is 453kg heavier than the deeper fin. The wing model fitted to the review boat gives the 355 impressive stability, with a ballast ratio of 42 percent and a very sober 17.76 SAD (sail to displacement ratio), so she should hold her sail plan well in a blow.



On the water

Light airs are not generally welcomed by sailboat testers, but they do tell us one important thing – how efficient a boat really is because every nuance is magnified, from the crispness of a tack to the efficiency of the rig, and I must confess here and now that the 355 really did surprise me. A variable six knots of wind, mixed with zephyrs of slightly more pressure, had me tacking the 355 sporadically to maximise every shift and squeeze every ounce of boat speed out of the hull. This was easily done single-handed thanks to the primary winches right back at the stern quarters where I could turn the wheel and with my other hand trim the genoa sheet. On the cabin top the mainsheet was operated by distributor Norman Ambrose, who clearly was enjoying showing off the first Catalina 355 to grace our Australian waters. Earlier we had easily pulled the outhaul to draw the Doyle mainsail out of the Selden mast. I noted a lot of shroud support at

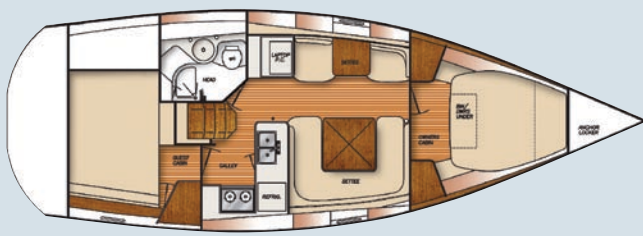


SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	10.76m
Hull length	10.49m
LOW	9.17m
Beam	3.65m
Draught	2.2m (fin), 1.37m (wing keel)
Ballast (fin)	2355kg
Ballast (wing)	2808kg
Displacement (fin)	6251kg
Displacement (wing)	6704kg
Sail area/displacement (SAD) ratio	17.76
Mast height	16.54m above waterline
Sail area	62 sqm (genoa & mainsail)
Engine	Yanmar 3YM30 29hp
Fuel	113L
Water	404L
Holding tank	102L
Design	Douglas
Price	\$215,000 (std boat)
Price	\$220,000 (review boat special price)

Distributor:

Ausail Marine Group, Sanctuary Cove, QLD 4212,
ph (07) 5514 8541 and Holmeport Marina, Church Point,
 NSW, 2105, **ph** (02) 9979 7217,
 email catalina@catalina.com.au and www.catalina.com.au





ABOVE: Double bow rollers, Maxwell RC10 windlass and a deep locker should ensure stress-free anchoring with the Catalina 355.

ABOVE RIGHT: Galley has a large fridge-freezer, deep sinks and two-burner hob/oven.



the mast which is intended to minimise mast distortion, something that has been known to hamper furling under heavy conditions in this style of rig. Also ball and socket chain plates are a quality addition for maintaining the deck's integrity.

Off Middle Head in Sydney Harbour I continued coaxing the 355 to windward and thankfully there was little chop so seated comfortably out on the gunwale with the Raymarine ST60 showing 40

degrees on the wind we glided speedily at 4.4 knots with barely five knots of wind. Impressive. The Edson cable steering with fairly large-diameter wheel felt comfortable and with enough feel to keep you in touch. Throwing in a few gybes showed that the sheets ran easily and despite the wing keel's greater friction the boat turned nimbly. The cabin-wide mainsheet track, like most fixtures on the 355, was oversize so easily worked by one hand. As thoughts began to turn towards deploying a UPS spinnaker from the bowsprit, the weather gods decided to call a halt unfortunately. So I quickly furled the genoa and motorsailed back towards the Catalina Anchorage at

Middle Harbour with the Yanmar 30hp and its fixed three-bladed propeller pushing us along at seven knots with the revs showing 3650RPM. Under full power the steering wheel remained neutral, didn't vibrate and the boat generally handled well, so again no complaints.

Clearly, an impressive amount of thought has gone into the Catalina 355, undoubtedly reflective of the hands-on approach the company management is known for. This translates into an incredibly practical cruising boat, rather than a compromise cruiser often seen nowadays, so I congratulate Catalina.

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cruisinghelmsman Kevin Green



Kevin is a freelance yachting journalist and former editor of *Australia Yachting* magazine, which was recently amalgamated with *Australian Sailing* magazine. The Sydney-based sailor enjoys cruising on the harbour when not on the pointy end of a racing boat, with his most recent regatta July's Phuket Race Week.

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Further information is available by emailing:
Dr Alan Profke
adprofke@bigpond.com
Yacht "Divine Wind"
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