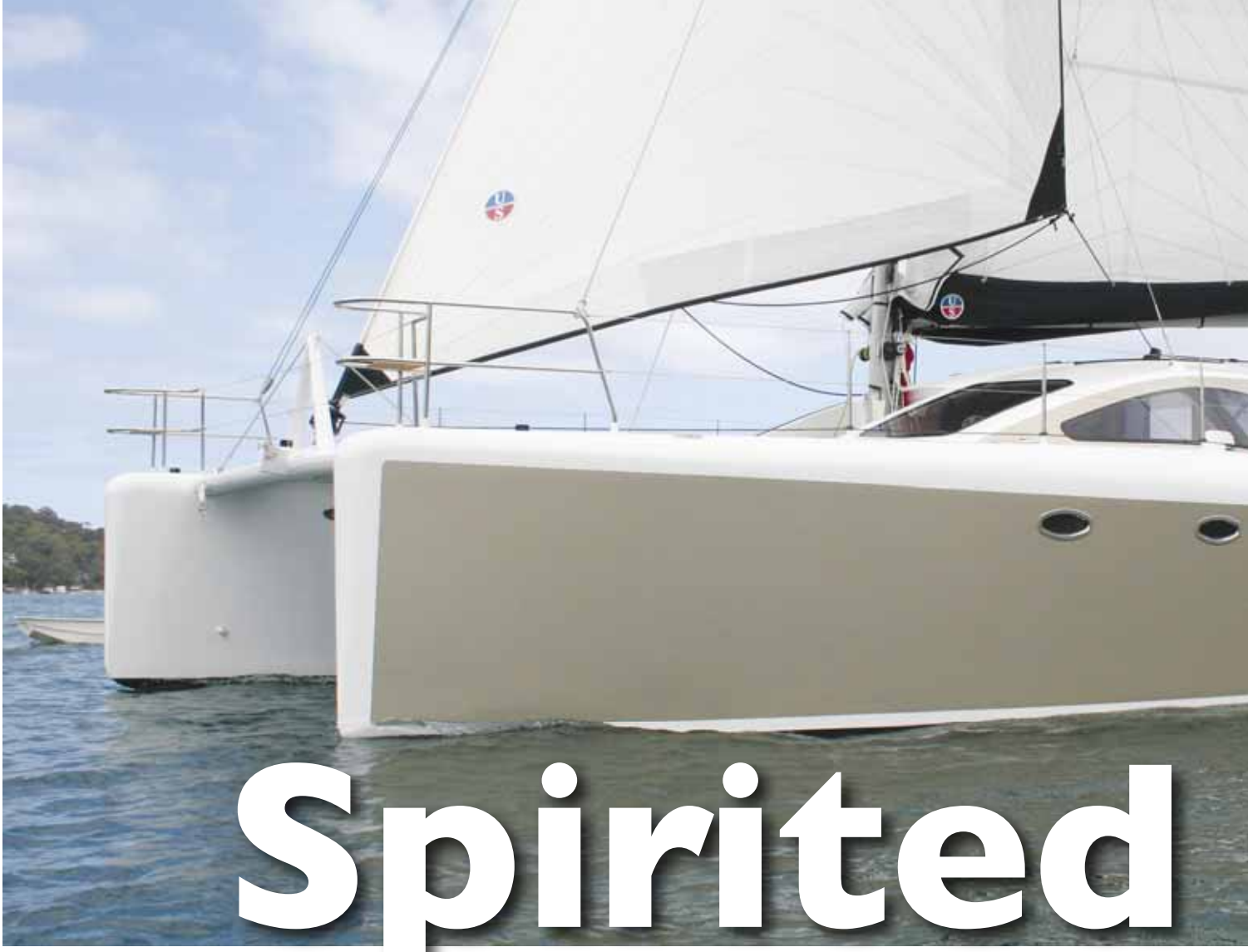


Spirited

by BARRY TRANTER

This may seem like a statement of the obvious but after I had seen this boat it struck me that the concept of home construction has come a long way. It seems such a very short time since I actually helped Jim Wharram fasten ply sheeting to his 53ft Tehini catamaran. At that time cored fibreglass construction was regarded as a black art practised by wizards with a lot of money.

CUTTING-EDGE composite construction is still a black art practised by wizards using a lot of money, magic ingredients and large ovens for cooking. But medium-tech composites have been refined to the point where, if the design is clever enough, you can build your own boat without much more specialist knowledge than Jim Wharram applied to his sheet-ply cruisers.

Craig Schionning designed the Spirited 380 to be built from a kit. The kit includes the keel and gunwale areas, which are compound curves. These are resin-infused – balsa and foam core and 'glass skins subjected to a considerable vacuum when the resin is admitted in from several points.

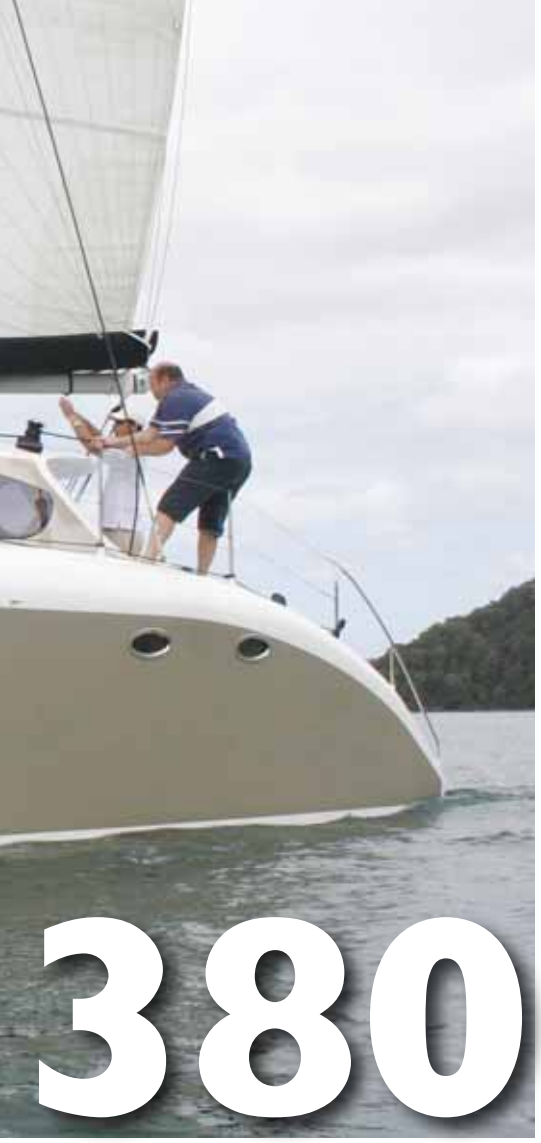
The builder works with flat router-cut panels of Duflex Featherlight end-grain balsa. The result is a very pretty boat which looks fully-moulded.

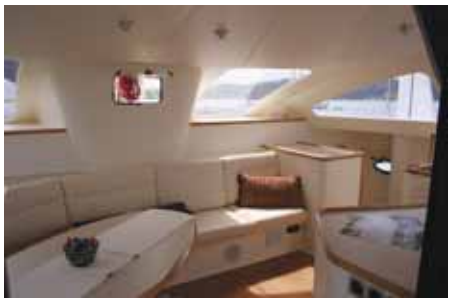
Craig settled on 38ft as the size of his performance cruiser because it represented an ideal compromise between internal volume, cost, speed and suitability for kit construction.

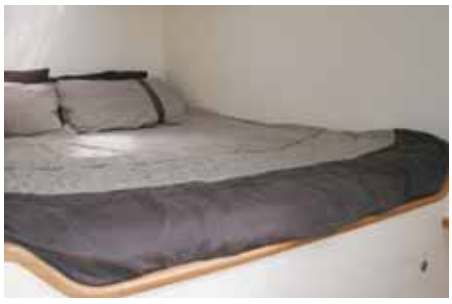
But he has not confined the boat to the do-it-yourselfer. If you want the boat built by professionals he can suggest a list of excellent professional building yards. He will modify the kit if required to suit owners' requirements, so a degree of customisation is available. "Every time I order a new set of hull panels I put in a few days to make detail changes", he says. He even offers to keep his ear to the ground to find building sheds and runs builders' seminars.

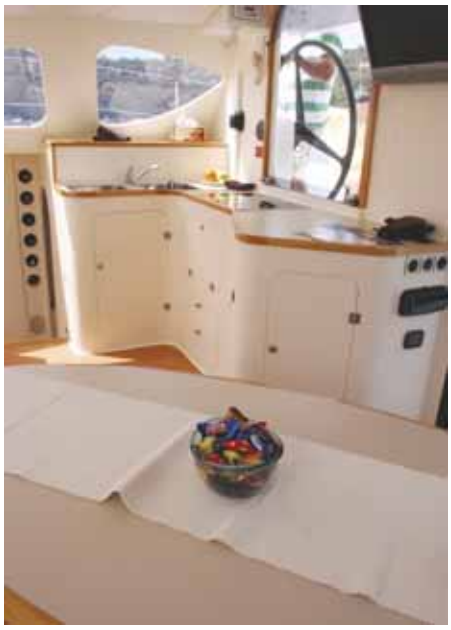
The boat shown here is the second to hit the water. Built by Craig and a team at his base on Port Stephens north of Newcastle, this 380 is finished to a very high standard of style and finish, near the quality of the better European production monos which currently set the pace in style and execution. The internal finish is beyond competent, it is closer to high style. An example is the saloon ceiling, which is covered by a panel of soft vinyl ringed by hidden string lights.

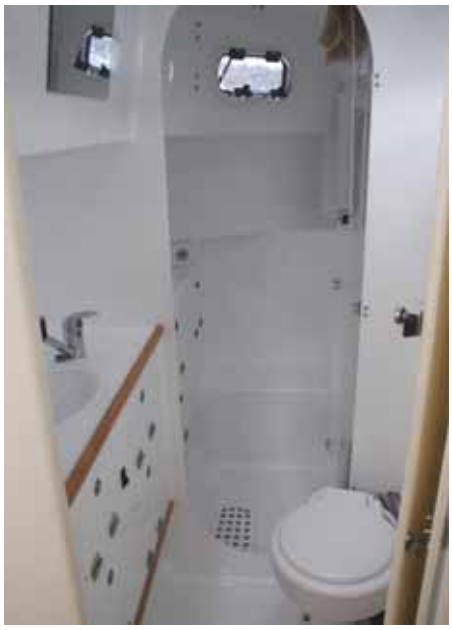
The construction method is straightforward. The boat is built right-way up. The keel mouldings are set up and











Our test sail was in light airs; boat never hesitated to tack, was easily driven. (main pic left)

Saloon is a fine room, finished in high style. (top left)

Master cabin is to starboard, with en-suite head. (top right)

Galley is on starboard side of the saloon; window slides down into the main bulkhead for access to the cockpit. (above left)

Portside head is aft, serves as the day head and includes separate shower recess. (above right)

the Duflex bulkheads attached. On go the inner hull skins and the bridgedeck skin, followed by sidedecks, cabin sides, cabin top. The latter is pre-cut from 25mm foam, the rest of the boat is flat Duflex panels from ATL Composites which emerge from the kit pre-cut and fibreglassed. They use what ATL call a Z joint to link each panel to its neighbour. High-density epoxy glue does the bonding and temporary timber battens clamped each side of the joint minimise fairing.

Craig suggests leaving off the outer hull skins until fit-out is complete. It's not all that different from putting together Jim Wharram's flat-panel ply hulls. A bit more sophisticated, perhaps.

The 380 weighs 5200kg which is carried on hulls with a beam/length ratio of 13:1. Leeway is resisted by foam-cored daggerboards operated by up/down lines. The bottom 300mm of the boards is sacrificial in case of grounding or whacking a whale.

The alloy mast (210 x 120mm) is properly stayed, with a fixed inner forestay which can carry the storm jib. A carbon spar is available. In the extremely light breezes on our day out, the genoa did not hesitate to blow through the gap between inner and outer forestays.

The 21hp Nanni diesel auxiliaries are mounted in the extreme sterns, turned around so they drive forward to the saildrive legs which are reversed. They are in sealed lockers which banish fumes and noise from the interior.

The anchor is carried below the forward beam, the chain hidden by the catwalk.

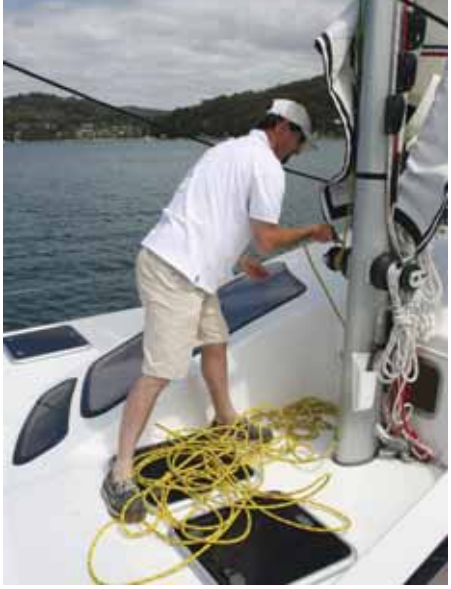
Strong points are built into the swim platform to which you can shackle drogues. The dinghy davits are hinged, so that when the boat is anchored and the dinghy in the water they fold flat with the bulkhead. When the dinghy is hoisted you have to duck under the davits. Perhaps you climb over the bulkhead.

There are no tramps forward on this boat. Craig decided instead to use rope – six coils of it – to make an attractive and resilient surface. Doesn't trap water, says Craig, and it looks good.

There are three cabins, two transverse amidships, both with queen-sized beds and more than sitting headroom, and one double bed in the starboard stern. There are two heads, one en-suite with the owner's cabin (starboard), and the ship's head is aft on the portside, a full-sized bathroom with separate shower recess behind a clear screen.

There is stowage room everywhere. Portside forward is what Craig calls a walk-in wardrobe, but it is a small room with heaps of general stowage space. Moulded into the starboard side centrecase is a stack of PVC pipe which forms the wine rack.

The galley is up in the saloon, an arrangement that everyone liked on our test sail (on board were three couples plus one part-owner and me, the hanger-on).



Fridge and freezer are top-opening, there's a three-burner stove and a microwave to go in later. The inverter takes care of the nuke and the computer. Behind the galley, in the main bulkhead, is a vertically-sliding window so you can pass out the coffee to the crew, or shout at them if they're misbehaving. This saloon has one smallish table; the plans show a second, more formal dining table near the galley. But when lunchtime rolled around, the eight of us had a fine salad in the cockpit.

In the port hull amidships is an area which could be the navigation table, but Craig prefers to set up his laptop in the saloon.

For our sail we had a feeble wind, a flickering, swinging sea breeze which reached maybe seven knots tops, certainly didn't go as far as 10. All we could discover on such a day was that the 380 did not stick to the water, accelerated well and never even thought about hesitating through a tack.

The boat is easy to handle. Tallish people can work the headsail sheets from the cockpit but for people my height and age the sidedeck is the natural spot. Those coachroof-mounted winches are at perfect angles and heights.

The mainsheet winches are mounted at each end of the traveller. Both the mainsheet and traveller lines are clutched each end before the winch. In gusty weather Craig recommends leaving the clutch off and cleating the line in the self-tailer jaws for easy release/dumping.

The steering was a bit slack resulting in a slight directional wander. Craig said that adjustment would fix it (the system is Edson chain and Morse cables).

More about performance. David Biggar from Stallion Marine measured a cruise of 15kts and a spurt of 22 on an 18kt day.

One of Craig's clients came up with a set of figures. On a day with an average wind speed of 9.9kts, and a gust average of 14.7kts between 24 and 30% of the time, the 380's boatspeed averaged at 12.23kts. With an 11.1kt average, and gusts of 16.7, the boat averaged 14.66kts.

Those two 21hp Nanni diesels are good for eight knots but you get 7.5kts with only one and use about half the fuel. So when motoring long distances Craig alternates the engines to share the wear.

"We used to prefer outboards, but the Nannis weigh about 120kg per side and when you consider the penalty of a flooded outboard well the weight is about the same. A bit of a win, really".

Who will buy this boat? Anybody. Craig says that a couple of young blokes in Port Stephens are building one to live on for up to a year at a time. "And blokes your age and older", he says, "retired with time on their hands".

Given that there is so much money around these days (though, as ever, not everyone can get their hands on it) I reckon many interested parties will look for a ready-built boat. I would, and so would one of the other blokes on board who reckons he is too old to commit to 4000-4500 hours of work.

This is a light, likeable craft. Craig has drawn a smaller rig for cruising, as he said that "people of my age" (grey-haired but this side of total infirmity) may find the standard rig "a bit flighty". But even older sailors, he added, respond to a craft that is easily-driven. He is right; an easily-driven craft is irresistible, and I would choose the bigger rig.

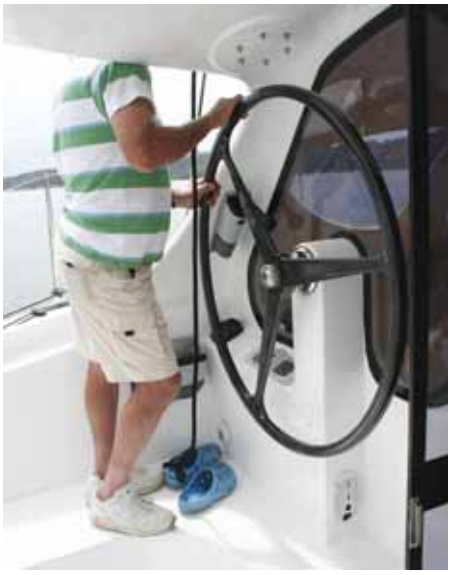
The 380 has a lot of freeboard. Craig reports that when this boat was pushed into short seas crossing the Port Stephens bar, in up to 25kts of breeze, he went down to the bow and saw there was plenty of freeboard in reserve.

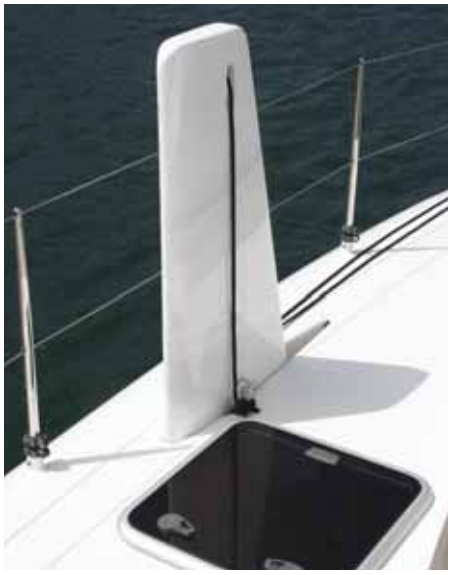
Designer says you can wedge yourself in when working the mast at sea. (above)

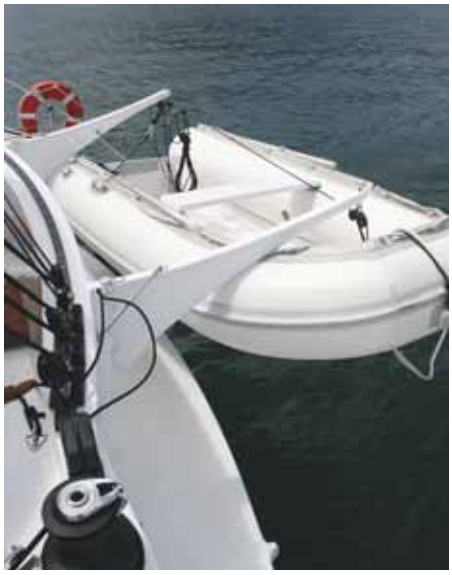
There's a big carbon wheel each side. Helmsman can stick the head out, as shown, but visibility through the coachroof windows is good. (below left)

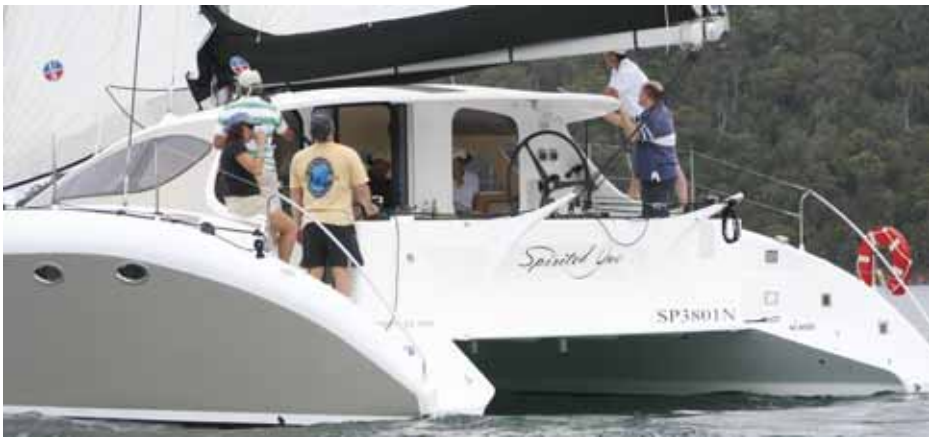
Daggerboards are foam-cored. The bottom 300mm is sacrificial. (below centre)

Davits fold flat against bulkhead when not in use. (below right)









Normally you wouldn't ask a designer to summarise his boat as it's a bit like asking a mum to write an impartial reference for her favourite son.

But Craig said, "This is a nice blend of sports boat and a bit of luxury. Big fridge freezer, inverter, reasonable fuel and water, good amp hours, H&C, flat- screen TV, and diesels, which are almost a luxury on a sports boat. "I can't argue with any of that."

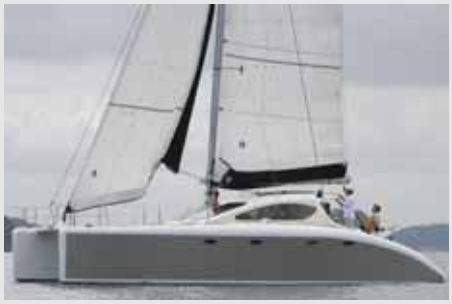
This boat encompasses a rare range of possibilities. Build it yourself, or have someone else build it to the level of sophistication you desire, with customised details provided by the designer and incorporated into the kit and at a price roughly comparable with a production boat of similar size.

Headsail sheet winches are mounted on the coachroof, are operated easily from the sidedecks or, with a bit of a stretch, from the cockpit. Bridgedeck clearance is 700mm, fully loaded.

The Spirited 380 is a very attractive boat and is a fully-realised design. Often with one-off or early production boats or even early semi-production boats, designer or builder asks you to excuse a few small problems which will be rectified later.

No need in this case. ❖

SPIRITED 380



LOA	11.7m
Beam	6.53m
Draught	500mm
Displacement	5200kg
Bridgedeck clearance	700mm
Sail area	96sqm
Mast height	16.45m
Bridgedeck clearance	700mm (fully loaded at 5200kg)
Fuel	200 litres
Water	400 litres
Berths	3 doubles
Power	2 x 21hp Nanni diesels
Kit price	$106,480
Estimated materials cost	$185,000

Information from Spirited Designs
www.spiriteddesigns.com.au