

boat review : Prowler 10.4 powercat



FORMULA CRUISERS HAVE DEVELOPED AN ENVIABLE REPUTATION AS A BUILDER OF LUXURY MONOHULL CRUISERS; NOW THEY HAVE SPREAD THEIR WINGS FURTHER AND DEVELOPED THE PROWLER 10.4 POWER CATAMARAN THAT WHILE MORE OF AN ENTRY LEVEL VESSEL, VERY MUCH STILL OFFERS THE SAME HIGH STANDARD OF PRESENTATION AND SPECIFICATION WE HAVE COME TO EXPECT FROM THIS BUILDER.



prowler 10.4



It's a unique shape which grows and grows on you.

DESIGNED BY A gentleman with the highest reputation in catamaran design, Jeff Schionning, the Prowler for me was one of those boats that made a definite statement, a definite first impression! Okay, the sort of more upright cabin design profile might not be everyone's cup of tea but be warned here and now, one, it grows on you, and two, the styling is very purpose-designed so as to maximise every aspect in what in effect is an entry-level cruising catamaran – so in other words there is a very good reason for this design styling!

This catamaran was to me one of those boats that begged you to 'step aboard and see why I am different'. Schionning is a very clever designer who is not afraid to express himself in his designs, but more importantly he is a designer who is not afraid to step outside the rank and file parameters of traditional catamaran design and go where no man has dared to venture before, in terms of layout configuration and features.

Ostensibly a two-couple boat this package does however offer all the home comforts and user-ability of a much larger 12-13m monohull-style vessel. How many 10m cruisers for instance, provide accommodation for six, how many have two ensuite bathrooms, how many have electric flush heads, how many have a four-burner stove and an oven, how many are as economical and perform as well as the Prowler, with just 120hp – very, very, few!

Walking towards the Prowler the first aspect to catch my eyes was the power mode – outboards; in this instance two 996cc 60hp FT60DETX Yamaha 4-stroke high-thrust outboards. The first break with tradition I was to find but one I must confess, I was very pleased to see for I can't for the life of me work out why

more manufacturers, especially with the smaller models, don't opt for outboard power. Less weight at 125kg per side, arguably more economical and certainly easier to maintain, even more impacting is the extra space you accrue in a smaller boat, when you don't need to fill the hulls up with engines and peripherals. In their place on the Prowler were huge storage cavities each side, integral fuel tanks built into the bottom of the boat, and of course these aft bathrooms.

Even with the Yamahas 'clipped' on the transoms there was still good access to the boarding platforms that came complete with a recessed dive ladder and a deck-wash terminal – each side. Easy steps led you up onto what was a generous sized cockpit which sensibly, was devoid of teak flooring; that is surely a bit of an overkill on a smaller cat where weight is a major consideration. And speaking of weight, rather astonishing was this weight factor for this full 'production' vacuum-bagged GRP and foam composite hull with its 32 separate mouldings, weighed in at a miserly 4000kg!

The cockpit was dominated if you could call it that, by the Sunbrella lounges against the saloon bulkhead and each side

of the saloon door, and aft of these by a transom beam of significant proportions. Included in this beam were several forward-facing storage locker doors which provided access to amongst other items, the (stored) stainless steel barbecue and the gas caliphont. On the top of this transom beam was a sink with hot and cold water; a remote shower; mounting points for the barbecue, and yes, even an electric winch for the tender davits that were mounted on the aft outside of this beam. Nice touch, not only davits for the tender, but an electric capstan-style yachting winch to take the pain out of the lift.

Two cruising-orientated features had already become very obvious to me. The first was the 'energy' supply, for 'gas' powered the hot water; the galley stove and all the refrigeration. The second was storage – without the intrusion of engines storage was a real biggie in the Prowler 10.4 for you had the lazaretto capability then on top of it there were lockers/cupboards in the galley, under the dining lounge, under the berths, in the hull pods and in cockpit lounges – with gas bottle storage under the starboard side lounge and the refrigeration locker under the portside lounge.

In another nice touch from an entertaining perspective this cockpit was virtually encapsulated by the cabin overhang above, and side coamings which extended aft to the boarding platforms. Did this impede access to the walkways forward to the bow; yes and no. Yes it was unlike the traditional catamaran configuration where steps virtually continue from boarding platform level

The meticulous attention to detail was nowhere more obvious than in the anchor winch locker. (below)

Big-boat features – on an entry-level catamaran. (bottom)





The onboard power requirements were easily handled by this most inconspicuous 20-Amp solar system. (top left)

The cockpit was generous-sized, and well presented. (top right)

Accommodation was provided for a third adult or child in the single 'voids' in each bow. (above)

right up to the walkway, but no your access was not impeded simply because a substantial bow rail assembly plus well placed grab rails assisted your step up onto the walkway, and on down the cabin side towards the foredeck.

So simple yet so effective – grab rails are (relatively) cheap yet it never ceases to amaze me how many manufacturers overlook this most important safety aspect. Also so simple yet so effective was the solar panels for the onboard power, which were attached to the roof of the cabin. Every solar panel system I have ever seen looks like the proverbial window shutter off a Swiss Chalet but in this case the four Alphasatron 5.1-Amp (each) slimline solar panels attached direct to the roof top and offered the appearance – of a simple roof-top lining. Interestingly, other than the two 12-V / 17-Amp Yamaha alternators, these solar panels either in the standard guise of two panels or in this instance four panels, provided more than enough power to feed the four 12-Volt 150Ah Toya AGM (2 x house, 2 x engine) onboard batteries.

Up on the foredeck, you could be forgiven for thinking you were on a much larger vessel. The bow-rail was of a sensible height and certainly sensible strength, the Cule hatches appeared larger in dimension than was traditional and certainly the sun worshippers and those with a penchant for the wind in your face would love the 'tramps' (either side of the central beam) rather than the traditional sealed-off powercat style of foredeck.

To most this would be 'just another foredeck' but I went a bit further than most perhaps and lifted the hatches in

this central beam – just to see what was in them. While Formula's efforts around the anchor mounting point were impressive, they paled into insignificance alongside the workmanship and attention to detail in the aft of the two hatches, where the Lofrans Kobra windlass was located. This gave me a definite insight into just how well this boat had been designed, and built.

I was pleased to see in this instance that Formula had resisted the temptation for a great palatial entry into the saloon, opting instead for a single saloon door then either side of this door, large (opening) bulkhead windows which provided good visibility, light and of course ventilation. Ventilation that I learned upon stepping into the saloon, which was further enhanced by small opening 'ports' above the front windows, and an overhead hatch; great for creating cross drafts that adequately supplant air conditioning which in this case, was not fitted.

While from the outside this was seemingly just another 10m production catamaran, on the inside it was another (more opulent) 'wow-world'. The reason for the larger and more upright cabin profile became most obvious too, for the 'trade-off' factor was the generous space allocation to each feature area, and of course the equally generous head-room. Décor quite frankly, was as good as you would expect to find on a far more 'luxurious' cruiser and again it was this 'Formula Icon Cruisers' methodology and mentality instilled into this boat, which shone through. The 'classy' little touches like the fabric-covered padded panels embedded into the front bulkhead, the impressive windscreen mullions, the plush padded ceiling panels, the solid

cherrywood dining table, the Corian style bench-top in the galley, the polished cherry flooring – not only looked good but more importantly were entirely functional and practical regardless of whether there was one or two couples, or indeed two complete families aboard.

The dining setting was to port and easily handled a complement of four to five adults, and opposite this the galley was again appropriate for this number of people. Sure to appeal to the ladies there was good Corian-style bench space, plenty of cupboard storage provision, a generous sized refrigerator and nice little wooden 'corner cupboard' for glasses and mugs. In my mind the crowning glory though, was the four-burner stove and oven combo. Most manufacturers offer a small microwave and maybe a two-burner stove, but this combo raised 'entry-level' galley idealogy to dizzy new heights. It's the little things that matter; in a cruising boat!

Completing the saloon picture was the forward helm station, neatly recessed into the front bulkhead. From an elevated 'skippers' chair I had a great view of each corner of the boat, plus I was close to the action when it came to the controls and instrumentation. First appraisal of the helm would suggest it was on the 'basic' side, but closer scrutiny revealed the reason why. The Yamaha outboards of course only require a set of binnacle controls and a multi-gauge for each engine; the rest of the mechanicals and electronic peripherals were handled by the BEP Marine CZone networked control and monitoring system, through a dedicated LCD screen.

The only other helm features were in this instance the Lowrance 10-inch HDS GPS/plotter/sounder combo unit and the Coursemaster CM80i auto-pilot. "We have gone to a lot of trouble with this our first foray into catamaran production," Sales and Marketing Manager

These aft windows provided good saloon lighting and ventilation – the 'cross-draft' effect! (below left)

A nice tidy and multi-functional transom beam feature. (bottom left)

Hot water was provided by the gas caliphont that was outside the confines of the saloon. (below right)





Troy Woods explained, "to provide buyers with an affordable yet still very practical cruising-capable family or two-couple style of boat. We've spec'd it to a turn-key level, then you can add purely 'discretionary' items such as the electronics upgrade, the auto pilot, the additional two solar panels, the electric davit winch, retractable saloon blinds, dimmer lights, the Southern Pacific 2.8m inflatable tender and a folding television."

Below decks, the choice of configuration was simple; there was just the one two-bedroom two-bathroom layout available. Makes sense in a boat of this size and sure you could perhaps have squeezed (being the operative word) a third bedroom in, in place of one of the bathrooms, but what is the point. This was a two bedroom boat and fortunately Formula were astute enough to resist the temptation to pretend otherwise!

What I found then were two surprisingly spacious bedrooms; both light, bright and homely and in both instances, with a third single berth up in the bow peak. A good storage area for suitcases, even fishing rods when not in use, none-the-less an adult could still have got a good night's sleep in this forward berth. Innovation abounded with the main sleeping arrangements for the fore and aft identical queen-size berths each side were cleverly designed so the foot end of the bed was in under the actual deck height. At one-third distance back from the foot of the berth the lower level of front windows came into play, angling up from deck level and providing very good head-room when sitting up in bed. Cleverly they had overcome the relatively low profile of the hulls, and the relatively high level of the central bridgedeck or tunnel.

Décor in these surprisingly non-claustrophobic forward cabins was more of the same as in the saloon, with fabric side panels, a tasteful upholstery package, a side porthole and overhead hatch, good lighting, a fan and of course generous storage potential. These were two very open, warm and yes contemporary cabins, but also the openness of them belied the fact we were aboard just a 10m vessel.

The ride

Power as stated was a pair of 60hp Yamaha outboards, admittedly high-thrust four-stroke outboards, but I do admit to initially having grave reservations as to whether or not this was enough power for a boat this size. I remember thinking that diesels might have been a better option, but my thoughts were soon dispelled once we were underway. The designer and the



left from top:

The perfect power solution for a boat this size; light too, at just 125kg per side.

A light, bright and surprisingly spacious saloon.

Classy, well spec'd and well presented – indicative of a top-class boat manufacturer!

Provision for five people, at the elevated dining setting.



builder had both got it right for these 60hp outboards were quite sufficient power: I wouldn't say they 'rocketed' the boat to its maximum speed but considering the size, weight and drag of the boat, the Yamahas were doing a damned good job. At the full speed of 20kts yes they were probably as noisy as inboard power but drop the throttles back to 4500rpm at the cruising speed of around 15kts, and they were whisper quiet.

Obviating the fact that Formula are more than happy with this package just the way it is, diesels are not an option at this stage. "Slightly larger outboards might be an option, for example the new-generation 70hp 4-stroke Yamahas" Woods confirmed, "as are smaller engines for the number of charter operators who have enquired about the vessel thus far, but as far as our company is concerned we feel this is the most balanced package to address this sector of the market." That's sensible I feel, define/identify your market, then address it accordingly!

Underway, I was suitably impressed with the handling capabilities. The boat

was quiet through the water which of course makes it feel like it is handling better anyway, but it was the Prowler's ability through the slop of the Gold Coast Broadwater that impressed. Without may I add, any tunnel slap whatsoever. The smile got wider as we departed the Gold Coast Seaway too, for out in genuine bluewater conditions the real attributes of a Schionning hull became apparent. All the factors such as weight, buoyancy, lift, stability and tracking appeared totally in 'sync' – without the characteristic sometimes prevailing in a cat or a mono for that matter, when the hull drops into the next wave and momentarily slows. This hull had all the attributes of a displacement style hull, ironing the bumps out whilst still maintaining momentum! Whatever Schionning has done with this hull, sure as hell works!

Conclusion

Hoooooray, someone has finally come up with a 10m boating package that legitimately addresses the ideal of entry-level cruising – it can be done! Simplicity with solar power and outboards, sensible features that make a house a home, it

This came as a very pleasant surprise, a four-burner gas stove with oven below. (top left)

The helm station was a typical example of the designer's 'efficient' use of space. (top right)

Plenty of ventilation at the front of the saloon; the mullions were works of art too! (above left)

Practical – every modicum of available space was well utilised. (above right)

SPECIFICATIONS:

Boat Design Name	Prowler 10.4
Year Launched	2010
Designer	Jeff Schionning
Interior Designer	Formula Cruisers
Builder	Formula Cruisers
LOA	10.8m
LWL	10.6m
Beam	4.8m
Draft	0.4m
Displacement	4000 kg
Max Speed	20kts
Cruise Speed	15-17kts (4500rpm at 17kts)
Construction	Hand-laid multiaxial cloths and foam core GRP composite
Fuel Cap	500 litres
Water Cap	250 litres
Engines Make	2 x 60hp Yamaha FT60DETX 4-stroke Outboard
Propellers	Yamaha 3-blade Alloy, 13 5/8"D x 13"P
Generator	2 x 12Volt / 17Amp Yamaha Outboard Alternators 4 x 5.1-Amp Alphanon Solar Panels (with integral rectifier and charging system)
Anchor Winch	Lofrans Kobra 1000W Windlass
Anchors	Manson Plough 35 lbs
Steering	Seastar Hydraulic
Engine Controls	Yamaha
Lighting	Cantalupi LED
Paint (Topsides)	Gelcoat
Paint (Antifouling)	Altex Coatings
Hatches	Cule
Wipers	Xalto
Windscreens/windows	Metro Glasstech
Porthole Hatches	Metro Glasstech
Heads	TMC Electric-flush
Veneer/Plywood	Cherrywood
Davit Crane/Passarella	Formula Cruisers
Tender	2.8m Southern Pacific Inflatable
Stainless Steel Fabrication	Formula Cruisers
Saloon Door(s)	Aluminium – Metro Glasstech
Helm Chair	Raeline
Batteries	2 x 150 Ah Toyo AGM house, 2 x 150 Ah Toyo AGM Engine
Upholstery	Formula Cruisers / Titan Furniture

Electronics

Autopilot	Coursemaster CM80i
GPS/Plotter/Depth Sounder	Lowrance 10-inch HDS Combo
VHF	Uniden DSC
Entertainment Systems	Fusion Marine
Engine Instruments	Yamaha
Software System	Lowrance
Switch Panel	BEP Marine CZone
Onboard Systems Management	BEP Marine CZone
Base Price of Boat	\$335,000
Price As Tested	\$362,000

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from top:

The two identical for'ard cabins were surprisingly light, bright, spacious – and certainly non-claustrophobic!

The concertina blinds maximised privacy.

Each for'ard cabin had a surprisingly well-spec'd aft ensuite attached.

was a bonafide turn-key bluewater cruising boat for four to six people. Consider the as-standard equipment, add the economy and convenience of outboards and you surely have a 'well rounded' package. What I especially liked about the Prowler 10.4 powercat though, was its inbred credentials. Formula is a manufacturing entity with credibility; they are a well funded company who have the knowledge and expertise, the build capacity and 'horsepower' (funding, staff and infrastructure) – to do their new catamaran range justice! The price tag of \$362,000 as tested? Compare apples with apples, volume with volume, performance and economy with ... and it is hard to imagine there would be much that would surpass it!