

Catalina 355

*This handy cruiser from
Catalina just keeps getting better*





BY PETER A. ROBSON

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Despite the 20-knot forecast, the waters of English Bay were barely rippled. The light westerly topped out at a mere six knots. Sailing the Catalina 355 to weather in just over four knots of true wind speed at an angle of 45 degrees apparent, our speed through the water ranged between 3.5 and four knots. Those kind of speeds in a light breeze are almost impossibly good. I doubted the accuracy of our wind instruments, but when I checked the numbers against our GPS on the chart plotter, they matched. It was clear that even in light winds, the sailing performance of the 355—which is billed as a cruiser, not a racer—was an unexpected bonus.

Since the late Frank Butler founded Catalina Yachts in 1970, his company has become the largest boat builder in the United States. The once California-based company (now in Florida) has built more than 60,000 sailboats. Wow! As I have mentioned before, well-known local builder, the late Forbes Cooper, reportedly produced more than 6,500 Catalina 27s right here in the Lower Mainland, starting in 1974 and through to the 1980s.

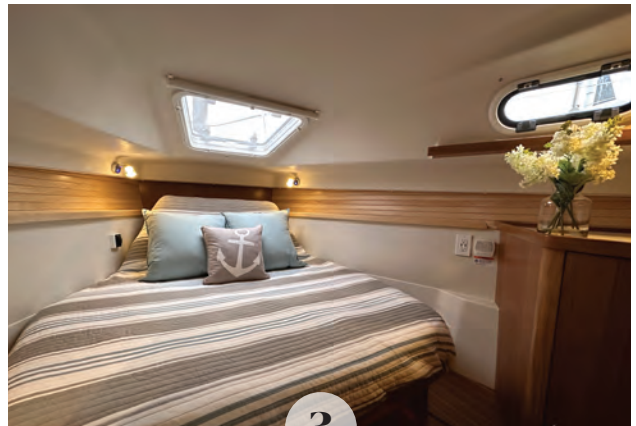
The Catalina 355 is the larger of two models in the company's Cruiser Series. It was first introduced in 2010. While it incorporates the original hull and deck design, and therefore is not a genuinely new model, the materials, construction techniques, ›



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mechanicals and so on have all evolved significantly over the years to greatly improve the structural integrity and quality of the build.

CONSTRUCTION The hull is solid fibreglass below the waterline with end-grain balsa coring above and in the cabin/deck mold. The inside of the

1. The saloon boasts 6'3" (1.9 metres) of headroom. Light is ample with cabin windows and an overhead hatch. 2. Galley storage abounds in drawers and lockers above and below the counters. 3. The bow master is highlighted by an island berth with easy side access.

hull is strengthened by a full structural grid with stringers and frames glassed into place. A single-piece hull liner is then bonded on top of the grid using both fibreglass and plexus. The deck/cabin mold is made in two parts (top and underside). Materials such as uni-directional, biaxial, triaxial and quad axial E glass, Penske/Coosa reinforced

urethane board, Aquasteel and aluminum are used where appropriate. These materials represent Catalina's best material choices for strength and longevity. Both lead fin and wing keel versions are offered, though there is no real need for the shallow wing keel version in our waters and the deeper keel helps stiffen the rig against heeling.

THE RIG The double-spreader, deck-stepped Seldén mast is equipped with a furling mainsail using Seldén's unique rack-and-pinion furler—much more efficient than standard worm drive. A second parallel groove runs up the mast should it be necessary to hoist a storm jib or main should the furler fail. The mid-boom mainsheet sheeting system slides easily on a five-foot traveller. The standard furling genoa is 135 percent. A tack fitting on the bowsprit roller is designed for an asymmetrical spinnaker. The inboard shrouds allow for easier egress to and from the bow (a very nice feature) and make for tighter upwind sheeting angles on long genoa tracks that can handle a variety of headsails. Two cabin-top winches and two primaries on the cockpit coaming placed close to the helm should be adequate for all sail handling.

ON DECK Boarding is via the scooped swim step and walk-through transom (with hinged seat) and good room to skirt around the 40-inch folding wheel. The stern rails are notable, not only for their outboard raised seats, but also because they run forward past the cockpit and thus offer significantly more strength and security compared to the standard short stern railing with wire lifelines.

The transom locker to starboard offers good, deep storage while the port locker is dedicated propane storage. Cushions provide added comfort for the helmsperson and those on the raised transom seats.

The helm pod is topped by a Garmin 8612 chartplotter (including radar display) with the compass and engine instruments below. Two Garmin GMI 20 multifunction units/wind instruments

are mounted at the aft end of the portside cockpit bulwark while the autopilot controls are at the aft end of the starboard cockpit bulwark.

The test boat was fitted with an optional, finely crafted and gloss varnished solid teak folding cockpit table, with drink holders and a cooler space underneath—another quality touch.

The aft end of the starboard cockpit locker lifts to reveal an escape hatch for the aft cabin. The portside seat, hinged at the top of the cockpit coaming, opens wide to provide good storage for large items.

Moving forward, I was especially impressed by the solid feel of the decks. There was no flex or movement, despite my jumping up and down. In addition to their other benefits, the inboard shrouds make it easy to move fore and aft without having to duck or swing around them.

The foredeck was clean and uncluttered with a double anchor roller and recessed windlass. The control lines and halyards from the mast were neatly arrayed, passing under the traveller and back to the sheet stoppers and winches.

INTERIOR The interior is a really cosy space with rich teak woodwork and light coloured horizontal maple slats that contrast tastefully with the engineered teak and holly-look flooring and beige Ultra-leather seating.

The head, immediately to port, can also do good service as a wet gear locker. It includes a shower compartment with a molded seat separated by a heavy spinnaker cloth curtain. This is unusual though likely more expensive than a regular curtain. Presumably it works well. Corian countertops, a vessel sink and electric head round out the amenities here. ▶

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Just forward of the head is a nifty navigation station built of gloss teak with VHF, a hinged lid and room for guidebooks, loose gear and even some folded paper charts. Above is the switch panel for onboard electronics.

To starboard, the guest cabin offers an ample athwartship berth and a bit of storage on shelves and in a pseudo hanging locker. Headroom at its entrance is adequate, but as could be expected, it's much less over the berth (don't forget to mind your noggin).

Just ahead is the L-shaped galley, a well-thought-out space with double sinks is smartly placed close to the centreline. An unusually large refrigerator compartment (with small ice cube tray freezer) is accessed from the countertop or via an undercounter door. The gimballed Force 10 stove and two burner cook-top (with opening port for ventilation) should serve the needs of any chef, while a 120-volt microwave above adds to the options. I liked the door under the sink with its attached trash bin and hanging racks, perfect for neatly storing all those cleaning supplies instead of piling them on the floor. Galley storage abounds in drawers and lockers above and below the counters. Another smart

move are the raised fiddles that surround all the countertops to stop things from sliding off. A well-placed smoked plexiglas splash guard separates the galley counter and the dining area.

The saloon boasts 6' 3" (1.9 metres) of headroom. Light is ample with cabin windows and an overhead hatch. Stainless handrails—too often neglected—run along either side of the saloon, and these, as well as a vertical grabrail amidships, pretty well guarantee safe passage inside, regardless of motion. Other highlights include a U-shaped dining area with quad-leaf table facing a linear settee. When lowered, the dinette doubles as a third berth. I like that all the doors are framed with aluminum for added structural strength and a really solid feel. There's plenty of storage in lockers above the seating areas, making it possible to store gear for extended cruising. Ball and socket type chainplates pass the rig loads down to the hull, grid and liner; an excellent setup.

The portside settee has a clever design. The cushions for the centre portion lift off revealing a well-designed gloss teak seat that can be raised to become a side table (with small drawer) for those on either side. Cool idea!



SPECS

LOA 11.13 m / 36' 6"

LWL 9.19 m / 30' 2"

Beam 3.66 m / 12'

Draft (fin keel) 2 m / 6' 8"

Ballast (fin keel) 2,359 kg / 5,200 lbs

Basic Weight (fin keel)
6,260 kg / 13,800 lbs

Draft (wing keel) 1.37 m / 4' 6"

Water 364 L / 96 USG

Fuel 114 L / 30 USG

Holding 103 L / 27 USG

Sail area (w/standard 135% genoa)
62.15 sq m / 669 sq ft

Std power Yanmar 29 hp diesel
with shaft drive

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Florida
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The bow master is highlighted by an island berth with easy side access. One slick feature is the forward half of the berth that articulates electrically to become a settee. Handy shelf storage runs along the length. An overhead hatch and opening ports bring in light. A hanging locker, under berth drawers and a nifty vanity complete the picture. Lastly, a collision bulkhead ahead of the berth assures that even in a head-on crash, the boat won't sink.


ENGINE AND SYSTEMS Access to the latest generation 29-horsepower Tier 3 3YM30AE Yanmar diesel with shaft drive and fixed three-blade propeller is under the companionway stairs. However, instead of the normal hinged companionway stair access, the entire engine cover and stairs slide forward to provide easy access to the dipsticks, filters and such. The test boat will be equipped with a diesel heating system

(hydraulic or forced air) that the new owner will choose. One unexpected but excellent piece of equipment is the 80-amp Victron Energy inverter, usually only found on much larger and more expensive yachts. This means owners should be able to stay on the hook for many days without worry, thanks also to the two high-end Lifeline house batteries. It is readily apparent after taking a good look around that Catalina has gone with top quality hardware, construction and attention to detail throughout—a far cry from the more utilitarian Catalinas of years gone by.

UNDERWAY The 355 is small and manoeuvrable enough that the optional bow thruster isn't necessary. Broker Gabriel George and I motored out of False Creek on what was turning out

to be a beautiful early spring day with the sun shining brightly, though in easterly winds. At 2,700 rpm (80 percent of wide-open-throttle) we were cruising along and tracking well at a healthy 7.5 knots. At that speed, engine noise below was a very quiet 65 dB. The mainsail and 135 percent genoa unfurled properly and we were soon under full sail. Despite the light air, we moved along smoothly with no trouble steering or tacking and gybing. We were never at the point of losing steerage, even when the winds dropped to three knots. As noted earlier, close hauled our speed through the water was just slightly under the true wind speed. When we eased off to 60 degrees apparent the difference was slightly greater. With wind speeds of four knots, our speed averaged 3.4 knots. At 90 degrees apparent and 5.9

knots of wind, our speed dropped to about 2.6 knots. Clearly, our best angle was 45 degrees apparent. We would have liked a bit more wind, but that's normal for English Bay. The 355 was such a pleasure to sail that we could have been out all day—if I didn't have a ferry to catch.

CONCLUDING REMARKS Not only is the Catalina 355 an easy boat to sail—it is tons of fun and its performance is surprisingly good, at least during our sea trials. For those looking for a comfortable family cruiser with all the amenities anyone could wish for—whether day sailing or going for that Alaska bucket list trip—it would be hard to find fault with the 355. I'd certainly be happy to own one, or to at least enjoy some extended time cruising. At press time, the stock price was US \$368,730. 



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