



In Excess

Cruising multihulls have been one of the big successes stories of the boatbuilding industry recently. So what next? Excess catamarans believes it has seen the future, as Sam Jefferson discovers



The term 'focus groups' is not the most fascinating way to open a review of a new yacht, but it's too late... I've gone and done it. Focus groups are, essentially, gatherings – groups of people thrown together in a meeting room, slowly losing the will to live and finding their thoughts turning to the bigger questions, such as the futility of human existence and whether they left the iron on when they went out to work that morning. Will they return home to the charred wreckage of what was all they had to show for a life of toil? Along the way there are generally more abstruse thoughts, such as whatever happened to Kellogg's Pop Tarts and the like.

Of course, the original intention of the focus group is different. It's all about what to do next – setting out a vision, if you will. Boatbuilders by and large aren't very good at using focus groups. There remains something vaguely amateurish about this noble breed. Not in the manner they build their boats but more in the forward planning. This generally seems to be a case of building a boat and then building another one, perhaps a bit bigger this time. Hell, maybe stick a deck saloon on it this time around.

Anyway, that's pretty much how the boatbuilding industry used to roll – but things are changing, and that is particularly true of

PHOTOS: LAGOON

the Beneteau Group. I'm always intrigued by what this organisation comes up with next. It is the biggest manufacturer in the leisure marine sector and not underwritten by some horrible venture capitalist, looking only to strip assets and then flog the company a couple of years down the line for vast profit. In other words, in order to thrive, it needs to have a long-term vision so its focus groups doubtless consist of somewhat more than just a group of bored middle management sitting in a meeting room scratching

ABOVE
Snazzy hull decals and an extended bowsprit are both departures from the Excess 12's more staid Lagoon 40 half - sister

BELOW
A shot that shows the clever sliding bimini to good effect

their heads and wondering what on earth happened to their lives.

The latest demonstration of this vision comes in the form of the new Excess brand of multihulls. I reckon these are the result of more than a modicum of serious thought from the marketing boffins at CNB (part of the Beneteau Group). CNB hit the big time with its Lagoon line of multihulls, surely the biggest success story of recent times in the marine industry. Around 20 years ago, multihulls made up about 5 per cent of yacht sales – now that figure is around 50 per cent. A lot of that is down to the Lagoon and its derivatives, which were comfortable cruising yachts that rapidly gained huge popularity in the charter market. They weren't terribly fast or fun, but they were solid and comfortable with passable performance.

Wilde times

The problem is, Lagoon has done that, so where next? Well, much head scratching by focus groups has come up with the Excess brand. It's a slickly packaged new range that makes much of youth in its marketing – images of bright young things surfing, windsurfing and diving into crystalline waters are prominent in the promotional videos. Oscar Wilde gets wheeled out for his hedonistic





'Moderation is a fatal thing. Nothing succeeds like excess', quote.

So what is this wild new line? Well, it's not quite as exciting as it seems because it is essentially the existing Lagoon range repackaged with a bigger rig, slightly more stylish decals and a flashier interior. You could describe it as a 're-imagining'. Thankfully, Lagoon hasn't been to glib about any of this. They are open about what they've done so really, I'm fine with that.

But the question is, what's actually different here? If it's barely anything, then this probably is one of the most expensive rebranding exercises in the history of the marine industry. I tested the Excess 12. Its Lagoon equivalent is the 40, launched back in 2017, which I was fortunate to test back then, so I could do a pretty decent compare and contrast job. Visually, the boats aren't massively different. The hull is the same, although a sort of chine has been added along the bow, well above the waterline, which makes it look a little different. In addition, all the Excess line will be a sort of gun metal grey. The cabin top looks the same, but there is a bit of a contrast as you get closer because the Excess has twin helms well aft on the sponsons. This is in contrast with the 40, which has a slightly raised single helming position. This may sound

insignificant, but it means that the linkage between helm and rudder is far more direct and the helm is also much closer to the water and closer to the action. This is significant as, with the best will in the world, handling some of these multihulls can be like driving a truck – steering is vague and you feel utterly divorced from the action. This change has also meant that the cockpit space is larger and the helm is, perforce, more involved with everyone else aboard. The Excess also has a bimini with a rather clever slide-back centre section, which means you can get a bit of sunshine in when you fancy it. The main cockpit space incorporates a huge seating area and a big table offset to port. The sail controls are all led to two pairs of decent-sized winches just in front of the twin helming positions. You

ABOVE

The rig is powerful with the square topped mainsail adding sail area where it's really needed

BELOW

An extremely roomy cockpit area

can therefore handle everything while still at the helm, which is important. Step forward and you might as well be on a Lagoon 40, as nothing has changed; the side decks are wide with well placed handholds.

Up at the bow there is the anchor locker plus storage set into the bows, while further forward there is a trampoline and a short sprit to set the Code 0. There is good storage here for fenders and ground tackle and all of the fittings were of a good specification. So far, then, a few changes and some flashy styling touches. Let's be straight, the main difference is the rig. This is essentially a whole lot bigger than it was on the Lagoon 40 and, although the boom has been shortened, the mast is longer and the mainsail is square topped, adding masses more power where it's most useful. Excess →





also offer a souped-up 'Pulse' version, which offers still more sail area. I guess the concept is not dissimilar to the old hot-hatch concept in cars, where a manufacturer selected a rather bland hatchback in its range and then put a rocket up its backside with a very powerful engine. The proof of whether this strategy would pay off would soon become evident.

Inside

To state that you head 'down below' on a catamaran truly is a misnomer, as you simply head through a set of patio doors and you're in an area that resembles a very comfortable and modern apartment. This is the real beauty of cruising catamarans. The interior has been designed by Nauta, which collaborates with Beneteau on its yacht interiors, and the Italian designer has clearly worked hard to make this feel very modern and slick – not exactly flashier than the Lagoon 40 but, nevertheless, it feels youthful. There are three different trim options, all with snappy titles like 'grab life by the balls' and, to be fair, I rather liked it. Maybe I'm just

the sort of jaded fortysomething they are trying to appeal to. The layout itself is pretty simple; there is a large U-shaped seating area with dining table forward and a small chart table offset to port. Aft of this is the galley, which is well placed for passing things out to the cockpit table, with the fridges and freezers set to starboard of the entrance and the L-shaped work surface area, including cooker and sink, set to port. It's a sea of smart laminates, light Corian, neutral fabric colours and faux leather that is 100 per cent contemporary. I think in this case it will also age pretty well as it gave the feeling of being hard-wearing. All that light helps to make this interior space feel relentlessly pleasant.

There is an option of three or four cabins, the yacht I tested being the three-cabin version, with a larger owners suite to port having its own en suite. There was loads of headroom and also a vast amount of light down there. The owner's suite in particular was a really nice place to be. The en suite had a decent amount of space and lovely views

ABOVE
(left) The saloon is not huge but it is extremely comfortable; (right) the owner's suite is a very large and pleasant place to be

BELOW
The trampoline up forward

of the sea from the shower, which is always a boon. To starboard, the pair of doubles nestled at bow and stern with a shared heads in between. Again, there was plenty of space – doubtless aided by the masses of natural light. In essence, not much has changed layout-wise compared with the Lagoon 40, but I have to say that I rather prefer the design job Nauta has done on the Excess.

Under sail

This was really going to be the key part of the test. It's all very well the Excess looking a little more flashy, but to make this repackaging work, the new boat has to perform a noticeably better. We had a good day for it; 15-20kt of wind and a modest chop made for an absolutely ideal test bed. Getting the sails up was nice and easy, and we were soon rollicking along at a brisk 7kt. The big difference was the steering; no question, this was more direct and much more enjoyable. There was very genuine 'feel' with a spot of weather helm I definitely felt involved in the action in a way I hadn't on a multihull since I tested the Nautitech N40 some years back. Speed was good without being blistering and, although we didn't hit double figures with the Code 0 up, there was no question that this is a livelier boat than it's half sister, the Lagoon 40. Tacking was also a pleasant surprise as this is definitely a boat that can take some throwing about in a moderately playful way – there was nothing glacial or stately about it and none of the horrible delay you often get with multihulls, where you end up overcompensating massively because it feels like nothing is happening to start with.



ALTERNATIVE YACHTS



NAUTITECH N40 OPEN

The Nautitech N40 is getting on now, but the concept here was definitely a cruising cat with something of a performance edge to it. Like the Excess, she features twin helms on the sponsons for greater involvement with the elements.

nautitechcatamarans.com



LAGOON 40

It might seem a bit obvious, but this probably is the closest thing to the Excess 12 – given that the hull is identical. It's slightly cheaper, but the trade-off is a smaller rig, less feel on the helm and a slightly less snazzy interior. If, however, you're more of a pure cruiser it's still a great product.

cata-lagoon.com



DRAGONFLY 40

Something rather different here, but if you are going to take the fun, performance theme to its ultimate conclusion, here it is. The Dragonfly has a reputation for blistering performance and reasonable accommodation – although it all comes at a price.

dragonfly.dk



SAM'S VERDICT

Let's get this straight, the Excess remains first and foremost a comfortable cruiser, albeit one with enhanced performance. Lagoon should be applauded for trying to move its brand back to its roots – a manufacturer of fast, fun boats. There is also nothing wrong with trying to appeal to a younger audience. That said, it's an idea that is constrained somewhat by the fact that the base for the design remains the original Lagoon 40.

Nevertheless, the performance gains are significant compared with the original Lagoon 40. The greatest for me was that the steering on the 12 had greatly improved feel and, when it comes to cruising multihulls, the more feel you can get, the better. So while the benefits are incremental, they are also significant.

COMFORT: ★★★★★

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

LOOKS: ★★★★★

THE SPEC

Overall length: 11.7m (38ft 6in)

Length: 11.46m (38ft)

Beam: 6.7m (22ft 1in)

Draft: 1.35m (4ft 5in)

Displacement: 10,300kg (22,712lb)

Upwind sail area: 82m² (882sq ft)
(Pulse Line) 87m² (936sq ft)

Contact: excess-catamarans.com

Price (base): €311,000