

NEEL

TRIMARANS

“Three years as a family onboard a trimaran

The NEEL 45 is put to the family test

From Montpellier to Tahiti

We had already travelled the world by land as a family and backpacking. We needed to check it out by sea. The ultimate way. Like the big explorers who from the 15th to the 19th century upended man’s geographic vision. It’s now our turn to upend our own!

Our objective, Polynesia, epitomises the worldwide dream of paradise. We wanted to live this dream.

We planned 3 years for the trip. A couple and 2 children, aged 2 and 11 years old. The sale of the house, the preparations for the children’s on-board education, the travel arrangements and above all... finding our ideal boat.

A boat as a friend

Three years later. Moored in the intense blue of Fakarava lagoon, it’s the conclusion of the adventure. It’s 5.30 am, Aude, Fanny and Lancelot are still sleeping. I doze on the nets of my trimaran and scroll through the memories of our journey, all the scenery and the sunsets, the friends met, the beauty of the underwater flora and fauna. The joy, the pain, the fatigue, the fear but every morning a brand new start. The fast sails between the islands and the lazy boat life. After three years of sailing, the sea is part of who we are. This big ‘unknown’ is now familiar to us. But thinking about it, the main character, the real hero of this story, is our boat! Over the miles, the boat became an integral member of the expedition and our family. Emotionally, there’s no denying it, the boat now has an important place in our hearts.

Materially it’s certain, we have enjoyed its comfort. It’s a cocoon! Technically, the captain can only bow in admiration. This boat handles like a motorbike. Everything is simple and clear. The mainsail can be hoisted without a winch. The load on the rigging and lines is minor in comparison to a catamaran of the same size. This trimaran satisfies all demands. As simple as the press of a button, you go from an easy cruise under autopilot, fishing, watching the sunset to a sporty sail, lively, precise and fun at the helm. At 12 years old, Lancelot does his night watches well set up at the chart table. Wind, speed, angle, AIS, radar. I can sleep soundly.

Even Fanny at just 5 years old is able to observe the wind and the AIS during 15 or 20 minutes, the time for the captain to have a little siesta. The choice of the NEEL 45 has been the right one. Certainly

En route towards paradise

With my partner Aude and our children, we had, to our credit, done a round the world trip by land and decided to do the next by sea. A training course at Glénans, 2 years of deliveries in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, 7000 nautical miles sailing later, I am no longer a novice but ... I still have much to learn. And above all, the boat is still to be found. A blue water cruising boat for a family, a sailing boat, reliable, simple and functional, fast and responsive ... the boat that has it all. It is at La Grande Motte boat show that we see it for the first time, on the NEEL Trimarans' stand. The NEEL 45 that corresponds to our budget is off plan. But the deal is done. What impatience during the construction and how wonderful this first trip to deliver our NEEL from La Rochelle to La Grande Motte! A little work on the interior at La Grande Motte: removal of the sink in the head to become a large shower, a modular cabin for Lancelot (single or double bed), the bow cabin on one level for Fanny, single beds in one of the floats. A few on board jobs and taking the boat out on Sundays with friends to learn how to handle the beast. Departure announced for the start of winter 2013. No weather window for the Balearics. Too bad! After three weeks of waiting, we've got to go. For this first crossing, we are battered more than we will experience again in the next three years of sailing. Next, everything goes very well even through the tough conditions of the Mediterranean. Then upon arrival in the Canaries, the verdict is in : I'll be alone aboard to cross the Atlantic.

It is my first transat and my first solo sail. Of course, I'm apprehensive. A shore based router guides me thanks to my Iridium. The crossing is long and challenging with constantly changing conditions. And even a 24-hour storm: 50 knots of wind in the wrong direction and waves more than 4 m high. The waves break all around with deafening sound. I run downwind until it dies down. The boat rolls down the waves peacefully at 7 knots without any sails up. After an uneventful first few hours, I leave the autopilot to work for me and fall asleep in a raincoat and harness on the floor. A great experience and a triumphant arrival in St Martin to see my family again and visit the Canary Islands.

When Noé, one of the two big brothers in the family, comes to join us, Fanny and Lancelot share a cabin. We are comfortable, even with 5 on board. When the conditions are perfect, everyone wants to be at the helm. A memorable moment off of Colombia. What a pleasure, what emotions. 2 reefs with the staysail, beam reach, wind and waves ... The dyneema steering lines are wonderful and we do more than 17 knots on every other wave. We sometimes glide for 20 seconds on the same wave. Noé achieved the boat record pushing 25 knots in epic waves. What a pleasure to see the fine bows seamlessly cut through the waves unencumbered. Of course the 'carving' of the downwind float at high speed is very powerful and generates rather strong lateral acceleration. But when we reduce the sail, everything is back to calm in a couple of seconds. Crossing the Pacific from Panama to the Marquesas, passing the Galapagos is a real treat. With constant wind between 12 and 20 knots in the right direction, the sails need only be touched three times. After 15 days sailing at an average of 9 knots, we are proud of our boat. We sailed a lot and quickly to arrive in Polynesia,

20,000 nm and one year to the day since our departure. And here we keep our 3 hulls in paradise for 2 years. The Marquesas, the Tuamotu islands, the Society Islands... We really made the most of it and it will be really hard to leave. Because yes, definitely, it's the ideal place to sail and live fully without limits. A vast area of water the size of Europe that makes you forget the rest of the world. The journey comes to an end. The boat is for sale, as planned. The final leg will be short and fast. New Caledonia then New Zealand where the boat will wait for its new and lucky buyers. Buyers to who I strongly advise to return to Polynesia where the three bows of the NEEL 45 know by heart the turquoise blue waters of the lagoons of paradise.

The thoughts of the captain

The NEEL has a big default: it pleases everyone. In the Caribbean, it was rare to find an anchorage where we would not be surrounded by dinghies upon our arrival. I showed our boat off countless times. One often has a false idea of this boat. Certainly the NEEL is fast, but above all it really is a comfortable cruiser. Yes it's a trimaran, from conception through to sailing, but there is no need to be a professional mariner to sail it. I would even say that it is more simple to use than many catamarans. There are no violent movements and it is almost never slapped under the wings. My review of the boat is more than positive: safe, fast, simple, comfortable at sea... If I were to do my journey again, I would do it on the same boat. A small improvement would be welcome, however. A better anti-centreboard plan. Despite the very good central weight distribution, I'd make it bigger for a better ride. For the rest, I'd keep it as it is."