**HOW TO DIMENSION A SAILING CATAMARAN?**

This article is to help start a catamaran design process. At the end of the day, the performance of a sailing catamaran is dependent on three main dimensions: length, sail area and weight. More waterline length means a faster boat, more sail area means a faster boat and less weight means a faster boat.

Then there are some limits: Too much sail area capsizes the boat in the breeze, a too light boat will not stand in one piece; too slim hulls can not accommodate you and your friends; too long and big a boat is out of financing...Then there are lot of small but important factors like underwater hull shape, aspect ratios of boards and sails, wet deck clearance, rotating or fixed rigging and so on.

The next description is based on basic equations and parameters of naval architecture. There are also some pick ups from ISO boat standards. In the beginning we decide the length of the boat and the nature of her. Then we"ll try to optimize other dimensions, to give her a decent performance. All dimensions in the article are metric, linear dimensions are in meters (m), areas are in square meters (m²), displacement volumes in cubic meters (m³), masses (displacement, weight) are in kilograms (kg), forces in Newton's (N), powers in kilowatts (kW) and speeds in knots.

Catamarans are different, but they all live in the water and they all breathe the air, so these equations should fit to every catamaran from a heavy floating home to an ocean racer, from a beach cat to a performance cruiser.

* A word of warning still: This is for preliminary design only, every dimension should be checked by a naval architect, or by an other capable person before building a boat.

**Hull dimensioning**

**Length, Draft and Beam**

Length, draft, beam and mass are in fully loaded condition at this stage of dimensioning. There can be found two major lengths in a boat: length of hull $L_H$ and length of waterline $L_{WL}$.

Let's put in some values to get a calculated example.

\[
L_H := 12.20 \quad L_{WL} := 12.00
\]
Next we make a decision of length/beam ratio of the hull, LBR. This is somehow overrated ratio in many debates. Simply heavy boats have low value and light racers high value. LBR well below eight leads to increased wave making and this should be avoided. Lower values increase loading capacity. Normal LBR for a cruiser is somewhere between 9 and 12. LBR has a definitive effect on boat displacement estimate.

In this example $LBR := 11.0$ and beam waterline $B_{WL}$ will be:

$$B_{WL} := \frac{LWL}{LBR}$$

$$B_{WL} = 1.09$$

Too narrow beam waterline, well under 1 m, will cause difficulties to build accommodation in a hull.

**Figure 2**

Beam/draft ratio BTR effects on the resistance of boat. $BTR := \frac{B_{WL}}{T_c}$

A value near two minimizes friction resistance and slightly lower values minimize wave making. Reasonable values are from 1.5 to 2.8. Higher values increase load capacity. The deep-V bottomed boats have typically BTR between 1.1 and 1.4. BTR has also effect on boat displacement estimation.

Here we put $BTR := 1.9$ to minimize boat resistance (as her size) and get draft canoe body $T_c$ (Figure 1) as follows:

$$T_c := \frac{B_{WL}}{BTR}$$

$$T_c = 0.57$$

**Coefficients**

To go on, we need to estimate a few coefficients of the canoe body. **Midship coefficient** is defined: $C_m := \frac{A_m}{T_c \cdot B_{WL}}$, where $A_m$ is the maximum section area of the hull (Figure 3).

$C_m$ depends on the shape of the midship section: a deep-V-section has $C_m = 0.5$ while an ellipse section has $C_m = 0.785$. Midship coefficient has a linear relation to displacement.

In this example we use ellipse hull shape to minimize wetted surface, so $C_m := 0.785$

**Figure 3**
**Prismatic coefficient** is defined \( C_p := \frac{\Delta}{A_m L_{WL}} \), where \( \Delta \) is the displacement volume \((m^3)\) of the boat. Prismatic coefficient has an influence on boat resistance. \( C_p \) is typically between 0.55 and 0.64. Lower values (< 0.57) are optimized to displacement speeds, and higher values (> 0.60) to speeds over the hull speed \((v := 2.44 \sqrt{L_{WL}})\).

In this example we are seeking for an all round performance cat and set \( C_p := 0.59 \).

**Water plane coefficient** is defined: \( C_w := \frac{A_w}{B_W L_{WL}} \), where \( A_w \) is water plane (horizontal) area.

Typical value for water plane coefficient is \( C_w = 0.69 - 0.72 \). In our example \( C_w := 0.71 \).

**Fully loaded displacement**

At last we can do our displacement estimation. In the next formula, 2 is for two hulls and 1025 is the density of sea water \((kg/m^3)\). Loaded displacement mass in kg's is:

\[
m_{LDC} := 2 B_W L_{WL} T_c C_p C_m 1025 \]

\( m_{LDC} = 7136 \)

Length/displacement -ratio, LDR, is a tool to evaluate our loaded displacement value.

\[
LDR := \frac{L_{WL}^{3} \frac{1025}{m_{LDC}}}{L} \quad LDR = 6.3
\]

LDR near five, the catamaran is a heavy one and made from solid laminate. Near six, the catamaran has a modern sandwich construction. In a performance cruiser LDR is usually between 6.0 and 7.0. Higher values than seven are reserved for big racers and super high tech beasts.

Use 6.0 to 6.5 as a target for LDR in a glass-sandwich built cruising catamaran.

To adjust LDR and fully loaded displacement \( m_{LDC} \), change the length/beam ratio of hull, LBR.

We can now estimate our empty boat displacement (kg):

\[
m_{LCC} := 0.7 m_{LDC} \]

\( m_{LCC} = 4995 \)

This value must be checked after weight calculation or prototype building of the boat.

The light loaded displacement mass (kg); this is the mass we will use in stability and performance prediction:

\[
m_{MOC} := 0.8 m_{LDC} \]

\( m_{MOC} = 5709 \)
Beam of sailing catamaran

The beam of a sailing catamaran is a fundamental thing. Make it too narrow, and she can't carry sails enough to be a decent sailboat. Make it too wide and you end up pitch-poling with too much sails on. The commonly accepted way is to design longitudinal and transversal metacenter heights equal. Here we use the height from buoyancy to metacenter (commonly named BM).

The beam between hull centers is named $B_{CB}$ (Figure 2). Length/beam ratio of the catamaran, $LBRC$, is defined as follows: $LBRC := \frac{L_H}{B_{CB}}$. If we set $LBRC := 2.2$, the longitudinal and transversal stability will come very near to the same value. You can design a sailing catamaran wider or narrower, if you like. Wider construction makes her heavier, narrower makes her carry less sail. So we can calculate the beam between hull centers (m):

$$B_{CB} := \frac{L_H}{LBRC} \quad B_{CB} = 5.55$$

Transversal height from the center of buoyancy to metacenter, $BM_T$ can be estimated as follows:

$$BM_T := \left[ 2 \cdot \frac{B_{WL} \cdot L_{WL} \cdot C_w}{12} + L_{WL} \cdot B_{WL} \cdot C_w \cdot (0.5B_{CB}) \right] \frac{1025 \cdot m_{LDC}}{2} \quad BM_T = 20.7$$

Longitudinal height from the center of buoyancy to metacenter, $BM_L$ can be estimated as follows:

$$BM_L := \left[ 2 \cdot 0.92 \cdot \frac{B_{WL} \cdot L_{WL} \cdot C_w}{12} \right] \frac{1025 \cdot m_{LDC}}{2} \quad BM_L = 20.9$$
Too low value of BM_L (well under 10) will make her sensitive to hobby-horsing.

We still need to determine the beam of one hull B_{H1} (Figure 4). If the hulls are asymmetric above waterline this is a sum of outer hull halves. B_{H1} must be bigger than B_{WL} of the hull. We’ll put here in our example: $B_{H1} := 1.4 B_{WL}$

Now we can calculate the beam of our catamaran B_H (Figure 4):

$$B_H := B_{H1} + B_{CB} \quad B_H = 7.07$$

**Wet deck clearance**

Minimum wet deck clearance at fully loaded condition is defined here to be 6% of L_{WL}:

$$Z_{WD} := 0.06 \cdot L_{WL} \quad Z_{WD} = 0.72$$

**EU Size factor**

The size factor of the catamaran is defined as follows:

$$SF := 1.75 \cdot m_{MOC} \sqrt{L_H B_{CB}} \quad SF = 82 \times 10^3$$

While the length/beam ratio of catamaran, LBRC, is between 2.2 and 3.2, a catamaran can be certified to A category if SF > 40 000 and to B category if SF > 15 000.

**Powering**

The engine power needed for the catamaran is typically 4 kW/tonne and the motoring speed is near the hull speed, so:

$$P_m := 4 \cdot \frac{m_{LDC}}{1025} \quad P_m = 28 \quad \text{Installed power total (kW)}$$

$$V_m := 2.44 \cdot \sqrt{\frac{L_{WL}}{L_H}} \quad V_m = 8.5 \quad \text{Motoring speed (knots)}$$

Wanted motoring range in nautical miles $R_m := 300$

A diesel engine consume on half throttle approximately: $\text{con := 0.15kg/kWh}$. The fuel tank of diesel with 20% of reserve is then:

$$Vol := 1.2 \frac{R_m}{V_m} \cdot \text{con} \cdot P_m \quad Vol = 178$$
Sails

A handy way to do the sail dimensioning is to use proportional ratios for dimensions. Sail dimensions are then in relation to length waterline $L_{WL} = 100\%$. For example:

Mainsail luff P ratio: $k_P := 125\%$

Mainsail base E ratio: $k_E := 50\%$

Fore triangle base J ratio $k_J := 36\%$

Other dimensions are from the catamaran structure:

Freeboard at mast $F_{BI} := 1.63$

Mainsail above mast foot $B_{AS} := 1.1$
Sail dimensions

\[ P := k_P L_{WL} \quad P = 15.00 \quad \text{Mainsail luff (m)} \]

\[ E := k_E L_{WL} \quad E = 6.00 \quad \text{Mainsail base (m)} \]

\[ I := 0.85 \left( P + B_{AS} \right) \quad I = 13.69 \quad \text{Fore triangle height (m)} \]

\[ J := k_J L_{WL} \quad J = 4.32 \quad \text{Fore triangle base (m)} \]

\[ A_M := \frac{P}{E} \quad A_M = 2.50 \quad \text{Mainsail aspect ratio} \]

\[ A_F := \frac{I}{J} \quad A_F = 3.17 \quad \text{Fore triangle aspect ratio, change the value of } k_J, \text{ to get } A_F \text{ between } 2.8 \text{ and } 3.5 \text{ (better 3.0 - 3.2)} \]

\[ A_{MS} := 0.7 \cdot P \cdot E \quad A_{MS} = 63.0 \quad \text{Mainsail area (m}^2\text{), 0.7 has chosen for high roach, 0.5 is a standard}\]

\[ A_{FT} := 0.5 \cdot I \cdot J \quad A_{FT} = 29.6 \quad \text{Fore triangle area (m}^2\text{)} \]

\[ A_S := A_{MS} + A_{FT} \quad A_S = 92.6 \quad \text{Sail area (m}^2\text{)} \]

\[ A_G := 1.65 \cdot I \cdot J \quad A_G = 97.5 \quad \text{Gennaker area (m}^2\text{)} \]

\[ H_d := 1.01 \cdot P + B_{AS} + F_{BI} \quad H_d = 17.88 \quad \text{Air draft (m)} \]

\[ H_{LP} := 0.04 \cdot \sqrt{m_{LDC}} \quad H_{LP} = 0.77 \quad \text{Height of underwater lateral center (m)} \]

\[ H_{MS} := F_{BI} + B_{AS} + 0.4 \cdot P \quad H_{MS} = 8.73 \quad \text{Height of mainsail center (m)} \]

\[ H_{FS} := F_{BI} + 0.4 \cdot I \quad H_{FS} = 7.10 \quad \text{Height of fore triangle center (m)} \]

\[ H_{CE} := \frac{A_{MS}H_{MS} + A_{FT}H_{FS}}{A_S} \quad H_{CE} = 8.21 \quad \text{Height of center of effort (m)} \]

Righting / heeling moment (ISO 12215-9)

Righting moment

The most important thing for the catamaran is to carry the sails in the design conditions.

The righting moment of catamaran (Nm) caused by the boat size is:

\[ RM_D := 10 \cdot m_{LDC} \cdot \frac{B_{CB}}{2} \quad RM_D = 197.9 \times 10^3 \]
Heeling moment

The design wind speed of cruising catamaran is typically $V_{AWK} := 32$ knots. With the big catamarans, $L_{WL} > 18$ m, the design wind speed can be lower. Also in category B, the design wind speed is lower, 25 knots. The heeling moment caused by the design wind speed is:

$$HM_D := 0.16 \cdot A_S \cdot V_{AWK}^2 \left( H_{CE} + H_{LP} \right) \quad HM_D = 136.2 \times 10^3$$

Design moment of mast

On small catamarans the righting moment $RM_D$ is bigger than the heeling moment $HM_D$ and then the design moment is the righting moment. On bigger catamarans the opposite is true and so their design moment is the heeling moment. In general the smaller moment will be chosen.

$$M_D := \min(RM_D, HM_D) \quad M_D = 136.2 \times 10^3$$

Racing catamarans will fly their windward hull, which is why their design moment must always be the righting moment.

Stability on sailing (ISO 12217-2)

For the safety sake a sailor need to know when it is the time to reef. In a catamaran this is indicated with the reefing wind speed $V_W$ (apparent wind).

At first we estimate the heel angle of maximum righting arm:

$$\Phi_{GZmax} := \arctan \left( \frac{m_{MOC}}{254 \cdot L_{WL} \cdot 2B_{WL} \cdot B_{CB}} \right) \quad \Phi_{GZmax} \frac{180}{\pi} = 8.8$$

Heel angle

Limiting moment in roll (Nm) for a catamaran is:

$$LM_R := 9.4 \cdot m_{MOC} \left( 0.5B_{CB} \cos(\Phi_{GZmax}) - F_B \sin(\Phi_{GZmax}) \right) \quad LM_R = 133.7 \times 10^3$$

For the limiting moment in pitch we need the water plane area ($m^2$) of the boat:

$$A_{WP} := 2 \cdot C_w \cdot L_{WL} \cdot B_{WL} \quad A_{WP} = 18.6$$

Limiting moment in pitch (Nm) for a catamaran is:

$$LM_P := 2.45 \cdot m_{MOC} \cdot \frac{A_{WP}}{2B_{WL}} \quad LM_P = 119.2 \times 10^3$$

The limiting moment to be used for our catamaran is:

$$LM := \left[ \frac{(L_H + L_{WL})}{B_{CB}} \geq 4, LM_R, \min(LM_R, LM_P) \right] \quad LM = 133.7 \times 10^3$$
Reefing wind speed (apparent wind) in knots is:

\[ V_W := 1.6 \frac{LM}{\sqrt{A_S(H_{CE} + H_{LP})}} \quad V_W = 20.3 \]

If the reefing wind speed is unnecessarily high, simply increase the mainsail luff ratio \( k_p \), and if reefing wind speed is too low, decrease the mainsail luff ratio.

**Appendages**

The hulls and boards need to create lift enough to have acceptable leeway. First we'll estimate the maximum side force in N of the catamaran:

\[ F_S := \frac{LM_R}{H_{CE} + H_{LP}} \quad F_S = 14.9 \times 10^3 \]

The maximum boat speed in m/s, using nominal sail area in fully loaded condition is calculated by simplified Texel rating system as follows:

\[ V_{uw} := \frac{1.64 V_W 0.66 L_{WL} 0.3 A_S 0.4}{m_{LDC} 0.3} \frac{1852}{3600} \quad V_{uw} = 5.5 \]

Next we'll estimate how much side force is taken by the hulls. Leeway angle is set \( \alpha_L := 5.0 \)

\[ C_{LH} := \frac{0.1 \cdot \alpha_L}{\left(1 + 2 \frac{L_{WL}}{T_c}\right)} \quad C_{LH} = 0.012 \quad \text{Lift coefficient of the hull.} \]

\[ C_{pl} := \frac{C_p C_m}{C_w} \quad C_{pl} = 0.65 \quad \text{Longitudinal prismatic coefficient of the hull} \]

\[ A_{LP} := C_{pl} T_c L_{WL} \quad A_{LP} = 4.5 \quad \text{Lateral area of the hull (m²)} \]

Lateral force of the hulls can then be calculated as follows:

\[ F_H := 2 \cdot C_{LH} \cdot 0.5 \cdot 1025 \cdot A_{LP} V_{uw}^2 \quad F_H = 1.65 \times 10^3 \]

The rest of the side force must be handled by the boards.

Next we decide the geometric aspect ratio of our boards: \( A_A := 2.5 \)

\[ F_{SB} := 0.5 (F_S - F_H) \quad F_{SB} = 6.62 \times 10^3 \quad \text{Side force of one board (N)} \]

\[ C_L := \frac{0.1 \cdot \alpha_L}{1 + 2 \frac{A_A}{A_A}} \quad C_L = 0.278 \quad \text{Lift coefficient of boards} \]
At last we can solve the area of the boards in one hull:

\[ A_B := \frac{F_{SB}}{C_L \cdot 0.5 \cdot 1025 \cdot V_{aw}^2} \]

\[ A_B = 1.52 \]

**Centerboard**

The centerboard area is preset to 75% of the board area:

\[ A_d := 0.75 \cdot A_B \]

\[ A_d = 1.14 \]

Area of centerboard \( (m^2) \)

\[ T_d := \sqrt{\frac{A_A}{A_d}} \]

\[ T_d = 1.69 \]

Draft of centerboard \( (m) \)

\[ C_d := \frac{A_d}{T_d} \]

\[ C_d = 0.67 \]

Chord of centerboard \( (m) \)

**Rudder**

And the rest of the board area is a rudder:

\[ A_r := 0.25 \cdot A_B \]

\[ A_r = 0.38 \]

Area of rudder \( (m^2) \)

\[ T_r := \sqrt{\frac{A_A}{A_r}} \]

\[ T_r = 0.97 \]

Draft of rudder \( (m) \)

\[ C_r := \frac{A_r}{T_r} \]

\[ C_r = 0.39 \]

Chord of rudder \( (m) \)

**Performance**

Wetted surface of catamaran can be estimated as follows:

\[ A_{WS} := \sqrt{\frac{BWL^2 + \left(2T_c\right)^2}{BWL}} \cdot \left(1.2434 \cdot C_m^3 - 1.4545 \cdot C_m^2 + 0.6935 \cdot C_m + 0.8614\right) \cdot A_{WP} \]

\[ A_{WS} = 30.0 \]

Sail area/wetted surface ratio is calculated as follows: (note the boards are included)

\[ SWR := \frac{A_S}{A_{WS} + 4A_B} \]

\[ SWR = 2.6 \]

Sail area/wetted surface ratio should be more than 2.5 to show a fast boat in light wind.

The next one is commonly used sail area/displacement ratio:

\[ SDR := \frac{A_S}{\left(\frac{m_{LDC}}{1025}\right)^{0.667}} \]

\[ SDR = 25.4 \]

\[ SDR > 20 \text{ in general means good performance} \]
Bruce number in imperial units:

\[
BN := \sqrt[3]{\frac{10.764 \cdot AS}{2.2046 \cdot mLDC}}
\]

\[
BN = 1.26
\]

**Boat speed**

These boat speed formulas are modified from Texel rating to show the speed potential of catamaran at the reefing wind speed. The boat is in light loaded condition \(m_{MOC}\).

The first result is the average boat speed potential with jib or genoa (in knots):

\[
V_{uw1} := \frac{1.64 \cdot VW^{0.66} \cdot LWL^{0.3} \cdot AS^{0.4}}{m_{MOC}^{0.3}}
\]

\[
V_{uw1} = 11.5
\]

The second result is the average speed potential with gennaker (in knots):

\[
V_{uw2} := \frac{1.64 \cdot VW^{0.66} \cdot LWL^{0.3} \cdot (A_{MS} + A_{G})^{0.4}}{m_{MOC}^{0.3}}
\]

\[
V_{uw2} = 14.3
\]

**Cost estimation**

Euros are material cost of catamaran and hours are work of one off boat.

\[
\text{Euros} := 4 \cdot \text{LDR} \cdot mL_{LCC}
\]

\[
\text{Euros} = 125.6 \times 10^3
\]

\[
\text{Hours} := \frac{\text{LDR}}{6} \cdot mL_{LCC}
\]

\[
\text{Hours} = 5.2 \times 10^3
\]

LDR is included in estimation, because building a lighter boat needs more time and the materials are more expensive. In general the building time and cost are proportional to the mass of the boat \(m_{LCC}\).