



PHOTOS: ALL JEREMY EVANS



# Topaz 12

Why not give youngsters the chance to sail catamarans as early as possible? **Jeremy Evans** assesses the Topaz 12 – a high performance cat for pre-teenage children

## Specifications

- Design:** Yves Loday and Rob White in 2009
- Length:** 3.65m
- Beam:** 1.78m
- Weight:** 85kg rigged
- Mainsail:** 7.8sq m
- Jib:** 1.2sq m
- Gennaker:** 7sq m
- Producer:** Topper International, UK
- Construction:** Trilam rotomoulded sandwich hulls with aluminium beams and spars
- Price (incl VAT):** Topaz 12C – £3,995  
(with mainsail, jib and trapeze)  
Topaz CX – £4,495  
(including gennaker)
- Options (incl VAT):** Road trailer £795  
Launching trolley £295  
Top cover £200

The French understand why catamarans provide young children with a great introduction to sailing. They can learn to sail quickly while looking cool on a stable platform that won't tip over, with plenty of space to have fun on the trampoline. French sailing clubs often have rows of small catamarans in the boat park for this purpose, offering a more sociable and exciting pathway than the more traditional process of learning to sail an Oppie.

That explains why Topper International launched the Topaz 12 as the third and smallest member of its modern, stylish, rotomoulded cat range. As with the Topaz 16 and Topaz 14, the Topaz 12 has been designed and developed by the French-British alliance of Yves Loday and Rob White. Having won a gold medal helming a Tornado (built by Reg White in

Brightlingsea) at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, Yves built a career as a prolific designer of catamarans ranging from the 16-foot Spitfire to the Extreme 40, as well as being an elite cat-racing coach from junior to Olympic level. Rob White is also a former Tornado world-champion helmsman who has been intimately involved with the development and construction of high performance catamarans for more than 30 years.

### Little sister...

The Topaz 12 looks very much like a scaled-down version of the Topaz 16 and 14, with the same non-slip 'blisters' adding a touch of style to the rotomoulded polyethylene hulls. This construction system produces the toughest hulls at the cheapest cost. It's also progressively more difficult to make hulls that are stiff and light as size and volume increases, which makes the



“Seven square metres of rip-stop nylon was enough to make the Topaz 12CX rocket away on gusts”

small hulls of the Topaz 12 particularly well suited to the triple-layer Trilam polyethylene sandwich used by Topper International. Lifting one bow of the Topaz 12 on the slipway demonstrated that it certainly feels stiff and light for a budget catamaran, though still quite a big package for a couple of small children to wheel down to the water on its trolley.

Rigging should be straightforward for all ages. Non-stretch halyards are cleated at the base of the mast, with no requirement for a fiddly masthead locking system, but as with any cat it's important to make sure the rotating elliptical mast is aligned with the fully battened mainsail for a smooth hoist. Halyards can be tucked neatly away in a bag next to the all-important righting line, ensuring the trampoline is uncluttered and easy

for the crew to move around on. For launching, both rudders must be locked in the 'up' position with the downhaul let right off to ensure there is no power in the mainsail – it may also be wise to postpone hooking the mainsheet onto the clew until the cat is safely afloat and free to weathercock downwind.

We sailed the Topaz 12 at Datchet Water, home to Datchet Water Sailing Club ([www.dwsc.co.uk](http://www.dwsc.co.uk)) and the Topper International Test Centre. It's a huge stretch of reservoir near Heathrow with Windsor Castle providing an impressive backdrop, and it's a great location for sailing cats. At the end of summer, the water level was low at Datchet, which meant that a fresh, clean breeze became gusty and unpredictable in the lee of the concrete reservoir walls. This

**ABOVE** The main and jib are easily manageable for small crew but the gennaker in CX mode demands experience

**ABOVE LEFT** The Topaz 12 is straightforward to rig but at 85kg may be a handful for very small crews on slipways

**LEFT** The two-sail 12C is easily handled even by very light crews

**RIGHT** In CX mode a seven square metre gennaker doubles the sail area and the acceleration in the gusts



ANOTHER INNOVATION - THE FIRST ROPE MANUFACTURER TO LAUNCH A FREE APP FOR YOUR iPhone.



# INNOVATORS NOT IMITATORS



"Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower" – Steve Jobs. That's why Marlow's innovative ropes are chosen by Oracle Racing AC45, Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing V70, Rambler 100, Quantum Racing TP52 & Skandia Team GBR to name a few.

Don't choose poor imitations, choose the ropes used by the world's best yachtsmen!

NEVER SETTLE FOR LESS, ALWAYS LOOK FOR THE GENUINE MARLOW BLACK MARKER™

# Marlow®

[www.marlowropes.com](http://www.marlowropes.com)





**ABOVE** Halyards can be tucked away neatly at the foot of the mast leaving the trampoline uncluttered

**ABOVE MIDDLE** Lowering the rudders after launch

**ABOVE RIGHT** The trapeze is fitted on both the 12C two-sail version and the three-sail CX

**RIGHT** Light and stiff with high volume bows and a high aspect rig, the 12CX is quick to respond to gusts



tacking easily and providing good windward performance in a light, moderate and occasionally strong breeze. The Topper 12CX is exactly the same boat fitted with an asymmetric spinnaker launched from a chute, that almost doubles the sail area and transforms the boat's behaviour. Adding a very powerful seven square metres of rip-stop nylon was enough to make the relatively light and stiff Topaz 12CX rocket away on gusts. The power switch was so immediate that Dan managed to capsize the Topaz twice. You clearly need quick reactions and some experience with the boat to pick the right instant to bear away and keep the windward hull down, judging by the two surprisingly fast flips to leeward enjoyed by our young test team.

The production boats now feature a sealed mast and mast float as standard to ensure the Topaz 12 floats on its side, which is an excellent addition as our pre-production boat, inverted both times we capsized and proved quite tricky to pull back upright (partly due to a righting line that was a tad too short – which is easily fixed). As with any cat,

it's vital that sailors are taught not to hang onto the upper hull, which will inevitably invert the boat. It's also vital that the crew master the technique required to pull a cat back upright, so they can sail with confidence.

### Tiger or pussycat?

The Topaz 12 is a mini high performance cat designed specifically for sub-teenage sailors, which might also be good as an occasional hiking singlehander for lightweights up to about 50kg, although the larger Topaz 14CX is probably better suited to young teenagers. For a low-cost catamaran, the Topaz 12 is tough, light and stiff with a totally modern design that combines high volume bows with a high-aspect rig, helping to make it look a great little performer on the water. In light or moderate winds, kids should enjoy sailing a perfectly behaved pussycat in Topaz 12C mode, but they may face the challenge of riding a tiger with the spinnaker hoisted in CX mode. Thanks to Dan, Hattie and William for their help with our test session. ■

provided the Topaz 12 with some Jekyll-and-Hyde moments, depending on whether it was sailed in 12C or 12CX mode.

The standard Topper 12C has a fairly small, easily handled mainsail and jib, plus the luxury of a trapeze for the crew. All of our test sailors found the boat handled well and was undemanding in this mode,



### Topaz 14

The mid-size Topaz 14 provides twin-wire performance for young sailors and is the UK's official junior training catamaran. The Xtreme (pictured) is a single-handed version suitable for medium-weight teenagers and adults.

**LOA:** 4.25m  
**Beam:** 2.05m  
**Sail area:** 11.5sq m mainsail and jib (14C) + 10sq m gennaker (14CX)  
 10.32sq m mainsail + 10sq m gennaker (14Xtreme)



### Hobie Cats or Twixxy

The two smallest rotomoulded catamarans in the Hobicat Europe range are the 3.1-metre Catsy designed for children to sail off the beach and 4.38-metre Twixxy (pictured) for family or teenage use.

**LOA:** 3.1m (Catsy); 4.38m (Twixxy)  
**Beam:** 1.66m (Catsy); 2.3m (Twixxy)  
**Sail area:** Catsy: 3.75 or 5sq m mainsail + 0.85sq m jib  
 Twixxy: 10.26sq m mainsail + 2.26sq m jib + optional 8.8sq m spinnaker

## Answer Back

### From Rick Reading at Topper International

The Topaz 12 is the third catamaran we designed to complete the Topaz Cat line up of Topaz 12, Topaz 14 and Topaz 16. There are standard boats to suit schools and performance boats for keen sailors and racers. The range has been heralded in France winning the prestigious Coup de Coeur Award in Paris.

We are sure the catamaran will be included in the next Olympic lineup and the catamaran is well established as a World Youth boat. It is therefore important to have a curriculum of good cats for our budding Youth and Olympic sailors. The Topaz 12 is the first step on the ladder of this curriculum and has a wide range of performance levels as the test and the young sailors discovered. Make no mistake the Topaz 12 is a pedigree cat designed by the cream of Cat experts.

**Topper International Ltd, Kingsnorth Technology Park, Ashford, Kent TN23 6LN. Tel: +44 (0)1233 629186**  
**info@toppersailboats.com | www.toppersailboats.com**