



**I**f you're looking for a boat to set Junior down the path toward an America's Cup multihull career, the judges recommend looking no further than the Topaz 14CX, easily the most exciting rotomolded catamaran to come along since the Hobie Wave. But parents be warned: you may end up "borrowing" it more often than you think.

The "CX" model is actually one of three that make up the Topaz 14 line, which was introduced in Europe in 2008. Using the same platform, the English builder (Topper International) offers three packages: the "C," the "CX," and the "Xtreme." The C has a basic Dacron sail combination: main and jib. The CX upgrades that with a 107-square-foot gennaker. The Xtreme model (meant for singlehanders) has a bigger Mylar mainsail and gennaker (no jib).

Topaz Sailing, of Annapolis, Md., now imports the 14CX exclusively, it being the most versatile of the three. The 14CX is designated for two lighter sailors. With our judges being on the heavier side, they jumped into the boat individually on a blustery 15- to 20-knot day. While they did don trap harnesses, they found handling all three sails kept them too busy to even think about getting on the wire.

Allen got first licks and tucked under the hiking straps to go upwind. It was

easy to see there was excellent floatation in the hulls; the boat cruised over the short chop with some slight pitching, but a lightweight crew on the wire would have really helped balance fore-and-aft trim.

Turning the boat downwind required a calculated three-step process: sit on the tiller extension to hold a steady course, take up on the single-line spinnaker halyard, and then trim the sheet straight from the ratchet block, which is mounted near the leeward shroud. After Allen set and trimmed the kite, he shot off with the first big puff, with his weight well aft. Each time he stuffed the leeward bow, the boat only paused before accelerating again. At the end of a high-speed run, he was huffing and puffing, with a big smile. The kite doused simply with three pulls of the halyard, which sucked the sail into its sock.

Stewart had a similar run, handling the boat with ease. When he conducted the "mandatory" capsizing test—pitchpoling in the wake of our photo boat—he had no trouble righting the boat from turtle. There's a capsizing line, and weight placed aft on the hull helped it pivot into the wind and come upright.

Rotomolded manufacturing has progressed over the past decade, and Topper's technique uses what they call a "Trilam polyethylene." This is essentially a three-layer material with a core, which, we're told, is stiffer than most rotomolded builds, and repairable. It also

## BEST MULTIHULL

### Topaz 14CX

**Purpose:** Youth racing and recreational sailing

**Recommended crew:** 1 or 2

**Pros:** Excellent buoyancy; three-year hull warranty

**Cons:** Stock rope package needs upgrades

**Price as sailed:** \$10,000  
[www.toppersailboats.com](http://www.toppersailboats.com)

contributes to keeping the boat light.

The beauty of a durable plastic boat, of course, is that you can drag the thing up and down the beach or onto the dock without fear of gouging the hulls. There are no daggerboards, so feel free, as did Stewart at the conclusion of his test sail, to point the bows at the beach, approach at full speed, let the rudders kick up, and step off onto dry sand—a move sure to impress.

In terms of rigging, the systems are foolproof-simple: twin or single trapeze wires, a roller-furling jib led to a cam cleat on the forward beam, jib sheets, cunningham, mainsheet off the aft beam, a spin halyard and retrieval led to cam cleats, and spinnaker sheets led to ratchet blocks. There's not a whole lot of setup, which means you'll be sailing off the trailer in 20 minutes or less.