



# The cruiser that looks

She's long, light, water-ballasted and built of aluminium – so does that make Alubat's Cigale 14 an impractical speed machine, or a sensible cruising yacht?

**David Harding** reports

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hether a cruising boat should be light or heavy is a question that has been aired many times in the pages of PBO.

And like plenty of others, it will undoubtedly continue to arouse strong feelings on both sides.

Many dyed-in-the-wool cruising sailors maintain that heavy is best, but the achievements of short-handed ocean racers such as the Open 60s (Ellen MacArthur's *Kingfisher*, for example) have given those in the 'we like 'em light' camp plenty of ammunition. These shallow-hulled ocean greyhounds – whose displacement/length ratios are so low and sail area/displacement ratios so high that the

numbers almost converge – have shown themselves capable of sailing far and fast. Covering 27,000 miles at an average of 12 knots, as has Miss MacArthur, isn't bad going.

'Ah', say some of the sceptics – 'but what about load-carrying? They argue that light-displacement boats will fly only if you keep them light, and will inevitably struggle when laden with stores. Their contention is simple: if you want to carry heavy loads, you need a heavy boat. Logical, isn't it?'

Well, as Andrew Simpson explained last month (PBO 451), it doesn't work like that. Pile lots of weight on a light boat,

**PRICE: £235,790**

(ex-factory inc VAT\*)

\* Based on an exchange rate of £1 = €1.49. North Sea Maritime quote the price in Euros (€351,327) and will confirm the sterling equivalent when the first payment is made.

and it won't be as fast as it was when empty. All things being equal, though, it will still be faster than an equally well-laden boat that was

heavy to start with. That's not to dismiss the benefits of heavy displacement – for they do indeed exist – merely to correct a widespread misconception.

While we're discussing contentious issues, we should address another that will be featuring in this article, because it's an integral feature of the Cigale 14: water ballast. The Open 50s and 60s have used movable ballast in the form of water or canting keels for years – water being easier to shift than keels are to cant – and it has served them well. Fully-crewed racing



**ABOVE:** the Cigale should be a potent performer downwind  
**BELOW:** windward ability is good, too – aided by the water ballast



# like a racer...

yachts pile their crew on the weather rail to maximise righting moment – so, if you don't have any human ballast either willing or available, why not use some other form of weight? Providing you have a reasonable amount of permanent ballast in the keel so you can sail efficiently with no extra help, it sounds a sensible idea to supplement it with ballast you can shift from side to side when you tack.

The light, water-ballasted approach was adopted successfully by Australian Mike Sabin (see PBO 417), who designed and built his own 42-footer that weighed just over 12,000lb (5,500kg). He then set off on a world cruise with his wife and two toddlers, regularly covering up to 240 miles a day. A boat like that might not be everyone's idea of an offshore cruiser for a young family, but Mike proved its worth.

Someone else prepared to try the lightweight alternative is Jack Rouy, a Frenchman who has recently taken delivery of a Cigale. Jack, who is in his 70s, plans to keep the boat in Antibes and to

cruise the Mediterranean with friends and family. He has no interest or background in racing, having previously owned another aluminium boat from the Alubat stable, an Ovni 385.

## Open minds

The Cigale bears more than a passing resemblance on paper to the Open class offshore racers. And she's an immensely powerful-looking boat in the flesh, with her long hull, fine entry, short overhangs, flared topsides and narrow waterline.

Yet, as befits a cruising boat with a fixed keel, she's shallower in the draught – the tip of her bulbed fin is a relatively modest 7ft 3in (2.20m) below the waterline – and she also sports a single rudder. There are plenty of other features to reinforce her cruising credentials, too: granny bars at the mast, a liberal sprinkling of cowl vents around the deck, ports in the topsides, plenty of opening hatches, and a deck layout and sail-handling systems that unmistakably belong to a fast cruiser

rather than a racing machine.

The word 'fast' should be emphasised here, because the Cigale boasts some notable statistics. Consider her weight, for a start – it's just 15,500lb (7,000kg), giving her a displacement/length ratio of 79 and a sail area/displacement ratio of 36. In cruising circles, figures below 150 and above 25 for the two ratios respectively are normally considered indicative of potent performance potential, so there's no doubt that the Cigale has been conceived as a seriously quick boat.

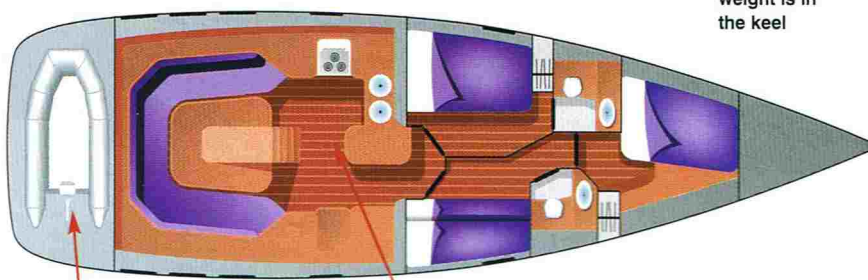
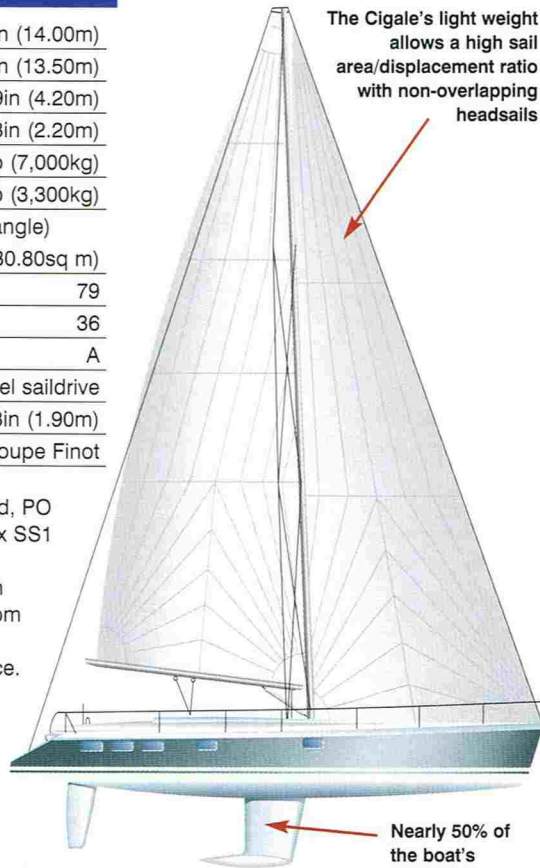
Whether or not you're convinced by the notion of a water-ballasted ultra-light-displacement boat (ULDB) for cruising, there's another element to consider before you can allow yourself to be seduced by the Cigale: her aluminium construction. Given the material's excellent strength-to-weight ratio, it's a good choice for a boat that needs to be light yet tough, and it

### CIGALE 14 SPECIFICATION

LOA	46ft 0in (14.00m)
LWL	44ft 4in (13.50m)
Beam	13ft 9in (4.20m)
Draft	7ft 3in (2.20m)
Displacement	15,432lb (7,000kg)
Ballast	7,275lb (3,300kg)
Sail area (mainsail & 100% foretriangle)	1,408 sq ft (130.80sq m)
Displacement/length ratio	79
Sail area/displacement ratio	36
RCD category	A
Engine	Volvo 55hp diesel saildrive
Headroom	6ft 3in (1.90m)
Designer	Groupe Finot

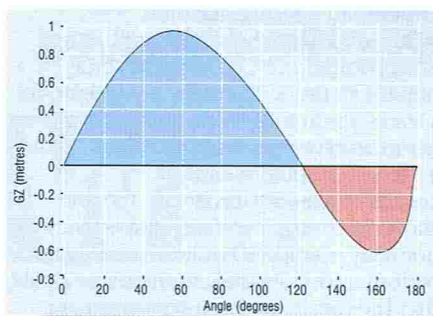
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A dinghy can be stowed on the stern platform

The engine is mounted almost amidships, over the keel's trailing edge



The GZ curve shows the maximum righting arm at 55° and the angle of vanishing stability at 122°



The electrical system is neat and accessible. This battery-switch arrangement was designed specifically for the test boat and will now become standard

gives you the reassurance of being able to bounce off solid objects that would quickly penetrate most FRP (fibre-reinforced plastic) laminates.

The drawbacks, of course, are equally well known: you can't use copper antifouling or leave loose change rolling around in the bilges, any signs of electrolysis from electrical currents need to be dealt with promptly, and you will probably have to budget for more anodes in a year than most boat owners get through in a decade.

Aluminium is also notoriously difficult (and expensive) to paint, which is one reason why Alubat leave the topsides coated only by a clear finish rather like varnish. Especially around the gunwales and toerail, the paint is inevitably prone to chipping, and while it can be touched up, it's not uncommon to see aluminium boats that have been around for a few seasons looking slightly worn around the edges.

In exchange for a few chips and the need to be aware of electrolytic and galvanic activity, you have a light, easily driven boat that's capable of maintaining high daily averages without the need for lots of muscle power – and one that should leave you more relaxed about the prospect of meeting submerged containers.

The Cigale won't appeal to everyone, nonetheless – with or without the odd £300,000 to spend on a fully equipped boat – but what's she like to sail and live aboard?

### Long and smooth

Under sail, she's surprisingly smooth, with a long-legged feel that promises to make her a comfortable passage-maker despite her light weight. Jack Rouy's *Vanille* – being sailed for only the second time – made nothing of the short chop on top of the Atlantic swell outside Alubat's home port of Les Sables d'Olonne, her 44ft 4in (13.5m) waterline helping her to glide along unperturbed by all but the largest waves.

Under full sail, with 22 knots of wind across the deck, we logged just over 7 knots on the wind before pumping any water up to windward: the 47% ballast ratio with the tanks empty gives the Cigale plenty of power. Increasing it to 51.4% with the help of 66 gallons (300lt) on the high side inevitably made an appreciable difference – our speed increased from 7.15 to 7.7 knots and our heel reduced by several degrees. When the breeze picked up so the anemometer was recording 24 knots, we were still heeling less than 25° and had plenty of scope to de-power the rig.

Interestingly, our upwind speed was slightly greater than that we had recorded a few weeks earlier on the shorter but racier Bénéteau First 44.7. Sailing out of St Gilles, a few miles further north, we had encountered slightly fresher conditions and, instead of full sail and water ballast, had a blade headsail and five crew on the rail.

Significantly, nothing alarming



Developed from long-distance racing boats, the Cigale was conceived by Groupe Finot as a fast cruiser suitable for short-handed sailing

happened on the Cigale when we let the water flow into the leeward tank before tacking. The transfer took 90 seconds, our heel increased by less than 10°, and we slowed to 6.5 knots.

Our tacking angle, incidentally, was about 80°, giving us a VMG (when fully ballasted) of 5.9 knots. My only concern as we made our way upwind was the slight lee helm on port tack, which turned into appreciable weather helm on starboard tack. Time prevented a thorough investigation of all the possible causes, but the effect was so marked that I suspect some imbalance in the steering system.

By the time we came to turn downwind, the breeze had eased and we lolloped along at a leisurely 8-9 knots. A good blow would have been more fun, because theoretically there's nothing to stop the Cigale taking off in impressive fashion.

Since I was unable to verify the accuracy of the designers' polar diagram in fresh conditions (it shows speeds of 17 knots in 32 knots of wind) I turned my attention to other matters, like noting that the 54in wheel allowed the helmsman to adopt a comfortable position on either side of the cockpit. If you choose the leeward side, the primary winch (a self-tailing 54 as standard, upgraded to 58 on our test boat and with power in reserve) doubles as a handy leaning post.

The traveller is conveniently to hand on its track immediately abaft the helm seat, though the mainsheet leads forward along the boom and then aft to a winch on the starboard side of the coachroof. Should you prefer a split system, with the sheet

coming aft to a winch each side on the cockpit coaming, Alubat would oblige; a degree of customisation is normal on the Cigale. M Rouy's boat, in fact, had a non-standard inner forestay carrying a staysail on a second Profurl roller-reefing system, with the loading on the mast being countered by running backstays that could be ignored unless the sail was set.

While the boat is being sailed as a sloop, the mast seems adequately supported by two sets of well-swept spreaders whose length and angle, combined with the intermediate rigging, are close to B & R proportions. It's not quite a fully blown B & R rig – as used on another ULDB, the

American-built Hunter HC 50 – because the Cigale sports a backstay (two on our test boat). Another option on *Vanille* was the fully battened mainsail. With its cars running on an external track, it went up easily and, on the way down, dropped into the lazyjacks and integral sail cover without any tugging or persuasion.

Even if you don't have lazyjacks, you'll have no need to rummage down below for sail ties because the Cigale has cubby lockers along the full length of the cockpit coamings each side. There you can keep everything from sail ties to binoculars and sunglasses to cans of beer.

There are no large lockers in the cockpit ▶

## CONSTRUCTION

■ Unlike many aluminium boats, the Cigale is a round-bilge design. Her hull is built of 5083 H 111 alloy plate, 10mm thick in way of the keel bolts and 8mm elsewhere, over a framework of 6mm T-section frames and L-section stringers. Welding is carried out in an argon/helium atmosphere, before the welds are ground down and the joints filled and faired.

Painted areas are treated with a coat of epoxy, followed by a finishing filler to ensure a smooth surface. Two coats of

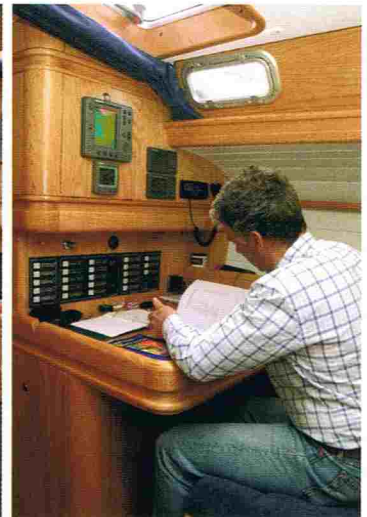


The hull and deck structurally complete, ready for fit-out

polyurethane paint are then applied over a second coat of epoxy.

Since the hull and deck are joined before the boat enters the fit-out shop, the

engine and joinery units are dropped in through the companionway. This way, everything can, in theory, come out again should it ever need to.



itself, so the one in the bow is best used for warps and fenders. Two more are found in the stern platform, but bear in mind that you won't be able to get anything out of them quickly if you keep an inflated or rigid dinghy back there – the platform is an ideal place to stow a tender up to 12ft (3.56m) long. A liferaft can be fitted above it, on the vestigial after-deck.

### Alternative accommodation

The reason for the absence of cockpit lockers is not the usual one, for there are no double after cabins beneath the sole. Instead, on reaching the foot of the companionway and turning to face aft, you find yet another feature that sets the Cigale apart from the crowd – an enormous saloon, with a table around which a dozen people could comfortably sit. Ports in the hull each side and in the transom afford views in every direction except forward.

If you want sleeping accommodation back there, Alubat offer the *Lévrier* version with twin double after cabins, but every boat they've produced since taking over the design from the original builder in the early 1990s has been with the Cigale layout. It's easy to see why, because the after saloon uses the broad stern to best advantage. Besides, stowage in the cabins would be limited by the ballast tanks in each quarter.

Forward of the companionway steps, on the port side, is the vast galley. Its work top extends over the Volvo 55hp saildrive engine, whose well-insulated case can be opened to provide excellent all-round access. With all the doors closed, the engine purrs away quietly as it drives the boat to a maximum of around 8 knots.

The chart table occupies the corner opposite the galley, giving the navigator a

**ABOVE:** the layout is unconventional, with the large saloon in the stern beneath the cockpit sole  
**TOP RIGHT:** plenty of space for charts and instrumentation at the nav table  
**RIGHT:** the interior can be fitted out in oak – as on this boat – or cherry

3ft x 2ft 5in (0.91 x 0.75m) flat working space and a switch panel that hinges down to reveal reassuringly tidy electrical installation work. Bulkhead space for instruments is ample, as is stowage outboard for pilot books. Natural light is provided by an overhead hatch and a port in the coachroof; a hullside port is optional.

Moving forward to the area traditionally occupied by the main saloon, you find two single berths to starboard – both with adequate stowage for occasional crew – and, on the other side of the fore-and-aft bulkhead, the master double cabin. Despite the presence of the water tank, calorifier and the nerve-centre of the plumbing system beneath the bunk, stowage in every form, from fiddled shelves to drawers and a hanging locker, is exceptional.

Ahead of these central sleeping quarters is a heads compartment each side – finished in white laminate, because there are no glassfibre mouldings in the entire boat – and another sleeping cabin in the bow.

If you didn't know the Cigale was built of aluminium, you would find it hard to tell without lifting a floorboard or peering beneath a bunk. Any areas of the hullside or deckhead that don't have joinery units against them are covered in a lightweight tongue-and-groove-style plastic lining, which looks smarter than it sounds. Most

of the headlining is in vinyl-covered plywood panels that can readily be removed, while the method of mounting the joinery on the frames and stringers that's implicit in the construction of aluminium boats helps to make skin fittings, plumbing and electrical systems readily accessible.

The woodwork itself is in oak or cherry and, on *Vanille*, was neatly finished, with chunky fiddles, plenty of curves and nicely radiused corners.

### Considering the options

Some boats make it abundantly clear that their designers and builders know what they're doing, and the Cigale is one of them. Groupe Finot, in fact, designed the 14 for their own use, taking advantage of experience gained with long-distance, short-handed racers.

The result is a yacht that's fast, responsive, easy to handle, well-mannered (notwithstanding the anomaly with the steering system on our test boat), sensibly equipped in terms of systems and hardware, and attractively presented down below with a layout that's both different and practical. Even if you stepped aboard with no intention of buying an aluminium, water-ballasted ULDB, you might find yourself seriously tempted. **PBO**