



# Manta Catamarans

## *Evolution of the Great American Brand*

By Brent Hermann

The history of the Manta brand can be traced to outside of the US. But, like all true Americans, this brand has evolved throughout each generation and calls the United States - *home*.

Manta Catamarans has been an exclusive USA manufacturer since 1993. However, the original molds for Manta's first catamaran, the Manta 38, were developed in Canada in the early nineties. The manufacturer started two boats but quickly went out of business in 1991. US investors stepped in and purchased the molds out of bankruptcy, along with the two unfinished catamarans and approached Pat Reischmann to help them put together the manufacturing and marketing in the US.

The original intention was to headquarter Manta Catamarans in Homestead, Florida but Hurricane Andrew laid waste to that plan the same way as it laid waste to the city of Homestead. The new investors had moved the molds to Homestead and the two unfinished hulls to nearby Miami soon after the purchase but, when Andrew arrived, it literally blew the molds away and the only option available was to take one of the finished cats and use it as a plug to make a new set of tooling. This was subcontracted with a company in Fort Lauderdale, FL. before hiring Endeavour Catamarans to take on the manufacturing of the product itself.

Pat developed all the rigging, hardtop, interior layout, all specifications for the boat (including the "Pac Systems" for optional outfitting) and produced the preliminary brochures. With only the brochures in tow, Pat headed to the Annapolis Boat Show and sold five Manta 38s!

The Manta 38 was the first production catamaran in her size range designed to be sailed single-handed by incorporating a self-tacking jib and with all sail-handling accomplished at the helm with the aid of an electric winch, meaning that you never had to leave the cockpit to raise or reef a sail. It was designed as a serious offshore cruiser, which later evolved to the Manta 40 in 1997 by extending the hull length for better performance and handling, with added headroom and other improvements.

"I personally sold every boat, oversaw the manufacturing, continually developed the product, produced the brochures videos, etc, handled all customer service and warranty, and organized and manned all major boat shows through the year 2000 with seventy four Mantas eventually produced," Pat boasts. It's no wonder Pat can smile when he says that aside





from the enthusiastic feedback from owners, in 2001 the Manta 42 won the prestigious Cruising World magazine's 'Boat of the Year' competition for Best Value Overall of all sailing yachts produced in the world that year. It also enjoys international CE certification and was both ABYC and NMMA certified.

Some of the special features of the Manta included:

- Solar panels (no more running your engine at anchor to recharge your batteries)
- A unique hard top and bimini (lots of shade protection).
- The view from its unique Swing Seat behind the helm allows crews to relax and enjoy the same visibility as the skipper.
- A great and easy electrical panel accessible via a swing door under the Nav station.
- Dinghy davits that hold the dinghy in place well above the waterline and great boarding and loading area for dinghy and people.
- The design includes the Portside as an Owner's cabin with queen bed and private head, complete with a beautiful fit and finish huge master shower. The starboard quarters feature a private cabin with queen bed, a head with separate shower and forward has a twin bed.
- Engine access, reputed to be the best in the industry, is accessed under each

bunk with hydraulic lifts that easily lift to reveal the entire engine compartment.

- The vessel comes standard with a PuraTec fuel polisher, fresh water wash-down at stern, hot and cold shower at stern.
- The wraparound galley layout is beautiful and enjoys a top loading refrigerator and freezer.

In 2001 Manta Catamarans seemed to be heading forward with full force when an abrupt change in management occurred, ousting Endeavour catamarans from the manufacturing process to a different builder in Bradenton, FL. Pat did not agree with the change so he exited as well. The new builder began the construction of three additional cats but, unfortunately, none of them were actually completed. Manta Catamarans was then sold to Chesapeake Catamarans, managed by John Farrow and a financial backer. Even though John had lots of experience selling catamarans, he had no prior experience building them, so he approached someone who did, a guy by the name of Pat Reischmann!

This time the headquarters were moved to Sarasota, FL and Pat agreed to help start their own corporate factory there. Pat worked on the development of the Manta Mark II to offer some differentiation from the previous product. It was at this time

that he met Dan and Sarah Even who were potential buyers for a new Manta. The impressive list of cruiser features as standard convinced Dan and Sarah to purchase Manta 42 MKII, hull #82, "Evensong." Dan has been quoted to say, "When I saw the quality of the Manta 42, I knew this was my dream boat."

Unfortunately, the new ownership group did not work out but Pat recalled that Dan had expressed interest in the company so when the inevitable end came he contacted Dan. Dan loved the boat and all that Manta represented, so he agreed to buy the company in November of 2003, another example of that famous phrase "I liked the product so much that I bought the company!"

Sarah Even adds, "Dan and I did years of research and chartering, experimenting with many different cats before we purchased one. Once we saw the Manta at the Miami Boat Show in 2003, it was love at first sight. Dan loved the rigging, which is easy for single-handing the boat. He also liked that we could tack without leaving the helm station or moving to the other side of the boat (like on other cats). I loved the galley (level with the helm station and not down in the hull) and the swing seat. One of my pet peeves with other cats was that I always had to stand or lean over the hull to see whom we were racing. With the swing seat, I had a front

row seat and could take it all in. As our excitement grew while our boat was being built, we learned more about Manta and were so impressed that, within the year, we bought the company. We have had 3 Mantas since that time, and each one was better than the one before. The MK IV included many upgrades that were our personal ideas that came from the practical experience we had gained from being on our boat as well as many ideas from other Manta owners who regularly kept in touch with us while they were cruising.”

Under Dan’s management Manta updated the cat to the MK III version and in mid 2007 they introduced the MK IV. Some unique upgrades to the MK IV include:

- 6’4” of headroom
- Charles Isolation Transformers
- Dual anchor system with horizontal windlass, with the second anchor dropping through the fore/aft beam; SS chain
- Maxwell 1500 double horizontal windlass
- Improved elliptical rudders
- Upgraded helm seat with offset post
- New forward step integrated into the hull for ease of getting on/off at the bow

Dan also developed a 44’ power cat in mid-2007 with both cats being built side by side in Sarasota, Florida.

Dan loved the Manta Cat and loved being a part of the brand. He embraced the Manta family of owners and considered each a personal friend. He often said it was impossible not to become friends when you are custom-building a boat for someone. There is such interaction with the buyer that you can’t help but end up being friends! Dan also sponsored an annual Manta Migration. Manta owners would gather for a weeklong event of parties, races, and camaraderie. He would always bring a technician or mechanic along to help cruising Mantas with last minute fixes. Customers would say they bought their Manta because they believed in Dan. He always lived up to that reputation and most importantly, he believed in Manta.

But, Dan was not alone in his belief. While writing this article, every owner whom I’ve had the pleasure to speak with has chimed in with nothing but positive comments about their Manta, the level of quality and the quality of service they received:

“We spent years looking for the right catamaran for us and we found absolutely nothing better than our Manta. Now, after five years of full-time living aboard, our opinion of the boat is unchanged.”  
*Harriet Eisen*

“While we liked many aspects of the French and South African boats, we finally came to realize that our favorite candidate was American – a Manta Catamaran. The boat was and is simply built to be the IDEAL boat for a cruising couple, with or without kids. It’s fun, fast, strong, and better thought-out than anything one could find then, or now.”  
*Phill and MaryAnn von Stade*

Dan was saddened to sell Manta Catamarans in 2008 to undertake a new challenge, namely that of fighting for his life. It was one challenge too many and cancer won that awful battle in early 2009, but throughout it all Dan remained “a friend” to Manta owners and answered their questions and sought to help them in any way he could. Dan kept ownership of “Manta One” throughout his fight as it was his fondest hope to go cruising on “Manta One.” Repeatedly, he quoted Buffet’s song “...I’d rather die while I am living, than live while I am dead.” Dan’s personal cat “Manta One” is presently being offered for sale. She was finished by Dan personally and was used as a demo boat and primarily at boat shows.

Since Manta Catamaran’s inception, what has remained consistent is the dedication to offering serious live-aboard and extended cruisers the highest standard of quality coupled with excellent value and the comforts of home. Manta Catamarans is currently in sleeping mode since Dan’s passing but talks of reviving

this ‘Great American Brand’ are in the works. There is no doubt in my mind that with their dedicated following and quality, and renowned catamaran surveyor, Charles Kanter, quotes in his recent book *Catamaran Communique* “No question, it is the industry leader for rugged strength and fine materials” so I do not expect this brand will be allowed to fade away.

For now, any cruiser wanting one of the most practical cats for the cruising couple will have to go the pre-owned route. In 2009 alone, I had the privilege of uniting sellers and buyers in the change of ownership of the 1999 Manta 40 “*Options*” (SOLD 03/09), the 2004 Manta MK II “*MT NEST*” (SOLD 04/09), the 2004 Manta MK II “*Allergic to Cities*” (SOLD 04/09), and the 2008 Manta MK IV “*Long Reach*” (SOLD 08/09). You may be intrigued as to why I gave you the dates of the sales but when you realize that 2009 was the worst year for catamaran sales in the last decade and yet you see that all of these Manta’s bucked the trend and sold quickly in a down market, it is a testament to Dan’s legacy.

Having spent many long hours of research on Mantas and finding the right ones for clients and conducting many interviews with numerous Manta owners who were considering selling their pride and joy, I feel that I can accurately state that this is more than just a production cat and that each sale is a personal transaction. ■■■

