



The Mighty and Graceful Alajuela 38

CLASSIC PLASTIC BY MICHEL SAVAGE

This Colin Archer descendant is fast, slender, and pretty

FOLLOWING THE LINES OF William Atkin's Ingrid and built in 1976 by Mike Riding and later by Betty and Don Chapman, the Alajuela 38 was conceived as a no-nonsense world cruiser capable of crossing any ocean in safety and in comfort. This double-ender

resembles an elemental Westsail 32, but it's deeper and heavier and has a finer entry and lower freeboard. In the 1970s, while Westsail Corporation was putting out hundreds of units, the Alajuela Yacht Corporation was painstakingly crafting one boat at a time toward a grand total of about 100 hulls.

Although the Alajuela, at over 27,000 pounds, is a heavy-displacement boat by any measure, it finished second in

the 1976 Newport to Ensenada race, well ahead of the Downeaster 38 and Westsail 42. When the wind is very generous, the Alajuela shows its power by slicing through seas and waves, easily averaging

7.5 knots on long passages.

Under sail, this mastodon moves like a gazelle whether on or off the wind. In fact, the long tiller never requires the grasp of a strong arm because the boat shows little or no

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Belowdecks, the Alajuuela is wholly traditional: center drop-leaf table, berths on both sides, huge chart table with plenty of chart storage, efficient galley, and immense forward cabin, all made of teak, teak, and more teak.

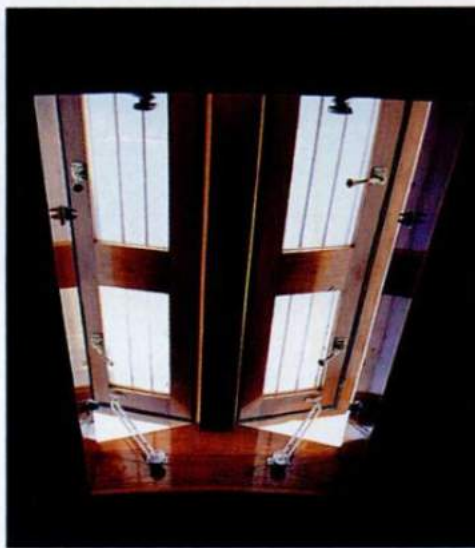
weather helm. A child could steer the Alajuuela in 40 knots of wind. The outboard rudder and the tiller lend themselves naturally to self-steering arrangements. Despite its displacement, the boat draws only 5 feet 7 inches. Its 10,000 pounds of encapsulated-lead ballast makes the Alajuuela stiffer than the Ingrid and less prone to burying the lee rail.

The Alajuuela was designed for speed, power, and seaworthiness, with no compromise made in favor of such marketing considerations as the number of berths, apparent cabin size, or shorelike amenities. It's a true oceangoing sailboat in the purest of traditions. For a 38-foot boat, the Alajuuela appears small. In fact,

if the Westsail 32 is a big small boat, the Alajuuela is a small big boat. While many 38-footers can accommodate six or even eight people, the Alajuuela was intended for a couple with occasional guests.

There's enough storage capacity to hold more than a year's worth of cruising supplies without affecting the stability of the boat. This also means that the Alajuuela's clean lines are seldom obscured by the clutter that customarily accumulates on the decks of cruising boats.

The Mark II introduced a second generation of Alajuelas, with some visible differences on deck: molded dorade vents, molded cockpit coamings and winch bases, and a



A period skylight and chrome-plated dorade vents identify the early Alajuuela as a traditionalist's boat.



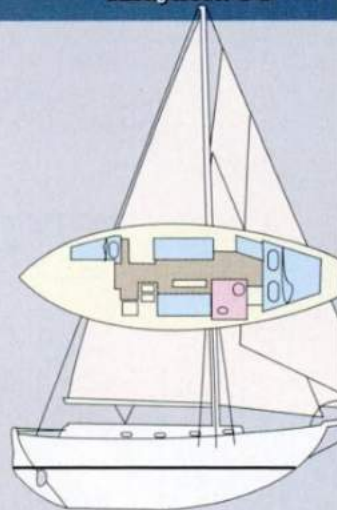
stainless-steel bowsprit. Traditionalists maintain that the Mark I looks better and is more faithful to its heritage.

Many 38s have completed circumnavigations. They rarely appear on the market because their owners keep

them for a lifetime. When they do, they sell quickly at prices that range from \$65,000 to \$120,000 depending on the state of the boat and whether it was built by the factory or from a kit.

As with any older boat,

Alajuela 38



LOA	38' 0" (11.6 m.)
LWL	32' 7" (9.9 m.)
Beam	11' 6" (3.5 m.)
Draft	5' 7" (1.7 m.)
Ballast	10,000 lb. (4,536 kg.)
Displacement	27,000 lb. (12,247 kg.)
Sail area	880 sq. ft. (81.8 sq. m.)
Ballast/Disp	0.37
Disp/Length	348
SA/Disp	15.6
Mast above water	54' (16.5 m.)
Fuel	65 gallons (246 l.)
Water	120 gallons (454 l.)
Designer	William Atkin

There's no plastic liner anywhere. All of the Alajuela's bulkheads and cabinetry are glassed directly to the hull, bolted, and reinforced.

replacement. A good solution here is to remove the teak and cover the deck with epoxy. Also, the earlier boats had no cockpit locker, but there is ample space in the engine room to build one. The rigging and sails may need to be replaced because of age.

Potential Alajuela buyers will never have to worry about such things as delamination in the hull, flimsy bulkheads, or the like because simplicity and strength were primary design factors in the boat. The hull was joined to the deck at the bulwark. The cavity between the outboard part, on the hull molding, and the inboard part, on the deck molding, was filled with mishmash.



problems do arise. Some Alajuelas have been neglected. However, these boats are so well built and so strong that any problem is cured easily. Prospective buyers should check for gudgeons and pintles that may have suffered

wear over 20 years. If the wooden bowsprit on an older boat has developed rot, it may be repairable with a few coats of epoxy, or it may need more drastic intervention. After years of use, some of the teak in the cockpit area may need



Michel's boat shows the Alajuela's classic interior to its best advantage. White-painted bulkheads bring in light, and the cabin heater adds a cozy touch.

The joint will never leak. The hull is solid mat and roving; the deck is plywood cored. The cutter rigging and the spars are oversized. Although the original Alajuelas came with Isuzu and Pisces engines, many have been repowered

with the Perkins 4-108. Space abounds in the engine compartment, and everything is easily accessible.

The Alajuela was designed for the rigors of the sea and will retain its structural integrity even if it's been ne-



The full-size chart table is a luxury rarely found in the electronics age. It also offers a backup level surface for the cook once the passage charts have been stowed away.

glected. In all, this boat is beautiful, easy to maintain, and an absolute charm even in the worst of weather.

We commissioned Michel Savage to write this piece for *CW* back in the spring of 1998.

Since then, we managed to hire him away from the cruising life ("For the time being, anyway," he says). He and his wife, Germaine, have just moved to Newport; they have just parted with their Alajuela 38. At *CW*, Michel now edits *Hands-On Sailor*.