



Under sail, the Aikane shows its mettle...

Aikane56

TEXT BY GILLES RUFFET

THE WILL TO CREATE THE 'STRADIVARIUS' OF BOATS

THE WORD AIKANE (PRONOUNCED 'AKANÉ') IS TAKE FROM A WONDERFUL BOOK BY RICHARD HENRY DANA, 'TWO YEARS ON THE FORECASTLE'. AIKANE MEANS THE FRIEND, THE CONFIDENT, THE SIBLING. AIKANE IS ALSO THE NAME OF A SPLENDID 56-FOOTER BUILT IN TRINIDAD. THIS BOAT USES THE LATEST FOR MAKING SAILBOATS. WE TESTED FOR YOU.

Tobago, November 2000. In the morning light, the Aikane 56 pulls on her mooring rope. A short roof, transoms running far back, the line is pure, the proportions perfect. Her designer - and the initiator of the project, Frédéric Lagache, was trained at the École Boulle. The Aikane is his brainchild. Of his 25 years in advertising, he has retained his love for lovely beautiful things that run smoothly. 'My parents were artists,' he says. He participated in the project for the Titouan Lamazou's big schooner. After a year with the yacht designers Van Peteghem-Lauriot-Prevost, in 1996, work

began in Trinidad. Everything had to be created from scratch. At the end of several years of labor, the result is here. Except for the French team supervising the work, this boat was built entirely by craftsmen from Trinidad and they are proud of it. Here is a guided tour of an exceptional boat.

The access via the transoms is easy; the tender is easily raised on its davits. We cast off right away; we weigh anchor. The contactors are arranged on deck, the chain slides on the trampoline through a sailcloth sheath, down to a large trunk in front of the mast with the windlass as well as the secondary anchorage.

A single crewmember alone can hoist the mainsail (with loose foot on an aluminum boom), without too much effort, by hand up to 3/4. It ends at the winch, before striking the halyards on the mast clamps (they are positioned a little too high, but that will be adjusted later). The graphite-coated centerboards are easily lowered using the lines concealed in the roof.

First outing

We approach the tip of Tobago, escorted by a swarm of flying fish. At 8 knots, with barely less wind, we had the unpleasant feeling of dragging, of driving at 80 km/h in a BMW. You want more. But a threatening squall in front of us tells us not to hoist the gennaker. The boat advances with disconcerting ease: 9 knots. The bows sharpened like knife blades cut through the water, take off: we are light and pass comfortably in the choppy sea. From the 'tractor' seat in the helm station, the visibility is perfect; but the base is a little too high, and there is no footrest. Moreover, the jib sheet winches, placed on the roof, are also too high, so you desperately seek the right position for winching. Another minor problem: the helmsman must move back to read the instruments because they are concealed by the molding of their protection.

Ready to tack. To maneuver one or the other centerboard, you have to luff round, to reduce pressure from the side.

The first reef is not taken under 20-knot winds (we're far from that...), but the exercise is well worth dwelling on. To reduce the number of ropes, the reefing lines return to the boom end; they are releasable, and a single rope return to the mastfoot. At each reefing they must be struck one by one using a snapshackle, thereby saving on the ropes.

Second outing

We leave Tobago for Trinidad. At broad reach, we are accompanied by a small residual swell creating slight rolling (no pitching). We tend to exceed the speed of the wind. With the spinnaker at 4 or 5 knots. The fun and joy of the bubble. With 2 or 3 knot more of wind, there is frank acceleration, pushed by a warm gentle zephyr. The surface of the water is barely striated, yet we are moving! The helm is gentle. The boat seems to be sailing on a rail. Perfectly balanced. The entire afternoon, at

150° of the wind, our speed keeps up with the breeze: between 6 and 8 knots.

The sun sets, sumptuous; around us, there is a riot of fabulous colors, the reddish hues of fire. Inside one hull, at nearly 10 knots, a slight rustling, the sound is comparable to that of the wind in the leaves of a tree. We are reaching Trinidad.

Third outing

We start off upwind, with the jib and mainsail, again with a relatively light wind. The distance between the two sides is on the order of 85°. On a flat sea, we still have those ambiguous feelings of comfort and frustration. We would like a few more knots of wind. Usually, you're happy at 9 knots on a cruising boat. Here, we expect more, with so little wind. We tack again: we furl the jib and tack with the mainsail alone; it is powerful enough. The gennaker is hoisted, then unfurled. It catches the wind: there is frank acceleration and we're back on the way to Trinidad at 11, 12, 13 knots, faster than the true wind, which hasn't exceeded 12 knots. The joy of steering such a unit is great; this is a truly exceptional boat, light and lively, yet perfectly balanced. The water escapes behind the hulls in a powerful wake.

At the end of this sailing, we would mostly have preferred stronger winds, which would have enabled us to explore the boat's true potential (everything is relative). That's why I asked the owner to described a previous outing:

'The wind wasn't at 20 knots. We hoisted the gennaker. The boat leaped forward; we really felt her accelerate. Each of us was at the sheets, refining the adjustments. We stayed at 16 knots, with peaks at 18, 18 1/2 knots. Gilles (Carmagnani) didn't want to push too hard, letting the sails find their place. For me, there was still some potential left, some margin before slowing down.'

With the motor, an adjustment problem kept us from measuring the speed. But the shipyard gives the figure of 8.5 knots at 2,400 rpm, at cruising speed. Pushing it a little should increase that by one knot.

Life onboard

What's it like to live aboard a 56-foot cat? On such a size, it's hard to answer otherwise than



With the spinnaker, at 12 knots between Tobago and Trinidad



The lightness of the whole, the slimness of the hulls and the well-centered weight are all determinant factors in performance.



The powerful carbon rostrum supports the gennaker furler.



On the Aikane, no added-on trampoline rail: it is built-in!

Pros

- the boat's very attractive line, reinforced by the impressive mast
- respect of the constraints of displacement.
- finishing on a par with her ambitions
- good performance
- no generator but a converter
- comfort of the cockpit

Cons

- trunk buoys hard to open (very attractive built-in fastener, but hard to grasp!). A simple teak handle would be welcome.
- helm seat too high
- hard to winch the jib sheet
- head: no ventilation; the lockers may fill with water



A practical and attractive chart table with all the necessary equipment



The vast owners' cabin, with its queen-size bed.



The saloon is very comfortable to live in.

'well'. There's real space. The very large cockpit is completely open, girdled in a pretty white, pleasantly topped with teak strake. At each end of the cockpit, there is a table and an extension can transform them into a single huge table. The doorframe is made of the same teak, like the strakes on deck and along the hulls. And that's all. Sobriety above all else. A delight. Above the cockpit there is a rigid bimini top made of Airex sandwich on an aluminum frame supporting six solar panels. Under the cockpit, the owner, who loves windsurfing, has installed trunks for the sailboards. The saloon. For this first realization, all the features, of sandwich on Airex foam, are made of ash wood, and the linings of white vinyl. The chart table is located just across from the door, and there is seating on a small piano-style bench that can be positioned around the saloon table. This is a pleasant work area with a breathtaking view on the sea. To port, there is a bar along the galley, which facilitates communication between the food store and saloon. It results from the suggestions of true sailors. The stovetop may be a little too much, with no less than five burners... and there is a gas oven. Four hatches provide effective ventilation of the saloon (need we remind you that this test was conducted in the Tropics!).

Let's have a look inside the hulls. There is an ash railing in the galleries. The port hull is the owner's. This is the 'Royal' cabin, with an extra-large custom-made mattress in two parts to facilitate access to the motor compartments, located under the berth. The cabin is well ventilated by three hatches. To starboard, there is a small study. A practical detail: a repeater in

a corner makes it possible to follow the boat's course while lying in bed! That the owner's choice: there is no door to the cabin. In the front, there is a true 'dressing room', with a wardrobe and shelves.

Let's move to the front of the hull. The chain-plate reinforcement is visible (you either like it or you don't). The gallery is penalized by the frames in which your feet tend to get caught; but that the price of performance (tapered hulls)! The size of the head, with a pleasant rounded door, is a little small for a boat this size. It is equipped with a tiny shower stall and a Lilliputian washbasin, too small even to wash your hands! If it had been 20 cm further back, the security hatch would have offered a breathtaking view on the water! Now to the bathroom. It requires major improvements (to be made in the next realization). There is no hatch for light or air. Small open lockers are built into the counter-mould, perfect for filling with water when you take a shower. There's a simple curtain to close the compartment. The well ventilated, well lit fore area is dedicated to storage and repairs.

The starboard cabin, except for the presence of a door, is similar to the owner's. In the place of the dressing room there is a head, ventilated by a porthole. The toilet is at the same place. In the fore cabin, the toilet has the same problem: no ventilation or lighting. The size of the fore berth, with a 'box bed', is very pleasant.

But we haven't yet explored all the Aikane's 56 feet. For an overall length of 17 meters, 10 are devoted to the features; the living space begins 5 meters from the bows!

There remains the machine room, and the forepeaks, with access from the outside. There's plenty of room for storing bikes, fenders, etc. Do beware, however, of not overloading the bows.

Machine rooms: on the one hand the technical area, with the (carbon) helm sectors and where we can see the (Vectran) tiller ropes with (Spectran) braiding. The desalinator is in the starboard room. These rooms are connected with the motor rooms (for their regular maintenance, access is from above the berths); there is just enough room to work

The owner wanted an 'attractive, well finished, light fast' boat. He first thought of a Freydis, but found it too small. So he decided to have an Aikane built and, so far, the boat has met all his expectations.

We tested the first unit of this exceptional



The sheer joy of sailing on the water!

boat, which does have a few problems of fine-tuning, which will doubtless be corrected in the next units.

As for the features, they are not fixed. In its very essence, being a small shipyard, the technicians of Aikane Trinidad Ltd will be able to adapt the boat at their customers' request. This boat will be theirs in part.

Technologically, Aikane combines the very best available. The know-how of a 60' open adapted to cruising. Mast, transverse and longitudinal beams, carbon helm quadrants. The lines are of Vectran. The partitions entirely made of Airex foam sandwich, closed to avoid any delamination. The stratification are completed with delamination fabric. The construction of this boat is like that of a jewel, down to the slightest details (see for example the fixation of the trampoline). So far, there were few shipyards to have pushed the quality of finishing to such extremes.



An extension for the two tables in the cockpit makes it possible to invite all your neighbors at anchorage...

Quelques vitesses relevées

	Wind speed	Angle of true wind	Speed of boat
Spinnaker	5 knots	150°	3.5 knots
Spinnaker	7 knots	140°	7.5 knots
Spinnaker	9 knots	140°	9.9 knots
Spinnaker	8 knots	120°	8 knots
Mainsail-jib	7 knots	60°	7.8 knots
Mainsail-jib	8 knots	45°	7.5 knots
Mainsail-jib	6 knots	40°	8.8 knots
Mainsail-jib	7.5 knots	40°	9 knots
Gennaker	10 knots	55°	11 knots
Gennaker	12 knots	55°	13 knots

Comparatif

	PETTER 55	OUTREMER 55 LIGHT	OCEAN 55	AIKANE 56
Overall length	16.50 m	16.50 m	16.85 m	17.10 m
Beam	8.90 m	7.80m	8.70 m	8.10 m
Light displ.	11 metric tons	11 metric tons	12 metric tons	9.5 metric tons
Upwind sail area	167 m2	169 m2	176 m2	153.2 m2
Upwind sail area / displ. ratio	15.18 m2/ton	15.36 m2/ton	14.7 m2/ton	16.13 m2/ton

Some figures

Headroom under the net: 90 cm
 Saloon
 Galley: 220 cm X 265 cm
 Height of bar: 115 cm
 Length of bar: 230 cm
 Saloon table: 165 cm X 100 cm
 Companionways: 70 cm wide
 Port hull
 Aft cabin: bed 165 cm X 205 cm, mattress thickness 14 cm
 Height over the berth: 106 cm
 Galleries: min. height 200 cm
 Heads: 90 cm X 83 cm
 Washbasins: 14 cm X 17 cm
 Bathrooms: 84 cm X 115 cm
 Workshop: 200 cm X 176 cm (max.), X 130 cm (min.)
 Starboard hull
 Fore cabin, box bed: 200 cm X 135 cm, X 120 cm
 Height over the berth: 107 cm
 Forepeaks: 215 cm X 130 cm, X 93 cm, h=150 cm

Characteristics:

Designers: Marc Van Peteghem & Vincent Lauriot-Prevost.
 Builder: Aikane Trinidad Ltd
 Length: 17.10 m
 Beam: 8.10 m
 Mainsail: 92.6 m2
 Genoa jib: 56.6 m2
 Staysail: 30.5 m2
 TMT: 12 m2
 Asymmetric spinnaker: 183 m2
 Gennaker: 107 m2
 Windage of mast: 9 m2
 Mast height: 21m
 Draft: 1,20 m / 2,60 m
 Displacement: 9 metric tons
 Electric power: 12 V 880 W