

BOAT REVIEW BY CHUCK ALLEN

An Affordable, Versatile Performance Dinghy



THE LASER BAHIA IS FLAT OUT FUN and easy to sail, and you'd be surprised how versatile this 15-foot rotomolded dinghy really is. I can see it as a great doublehanded boat for club racing, or preferably, loaded with as many as five kids having a good time. It can be rowed, powered, and turbocharged with a bigger sail, and somehow the boat is inherently simple.

There are two models available from LaserPerformance, the company that

was the merge of Vanguard Sailboats and Performance Sailcraft Europe, which manufactures the Bahia hulls at its rotomolding plant in England. The Bahia Race model has Mylar sails with extra roach in the main, and trapezes. The mast and boom on both models are aluminum.

The base boat can be used as a trainer for beginner to intermediate sailors, and then when the kids (or adults) advance

SAILING WITH TWO adults is fun, but the Bahia is big and stable enough to sail with four or more kids, making it a great platform for yacht clubs and sailing schools. The Bahia's aluminum mast (far left, below) is mounted on a crossbar, which adds rigidity to the hull and also makes the mast a cinch to step. A "roll bar" (right below) placed just forward of the mainsheet makes for a great handhold, and a comfortable place to lean between races.



BAHIA RACE

LOA	15'1"
Beam	5'10"
Hull weight	286 lbs.
Draft	3'7"
SA (u/d)	153/304 sq. ft.
www.laserperformance.com	

into high intermediate to racer levels, the sailplan can be powered up accordingly. Our experience when test sailing the boat doublehanded in 8 to 12 knots was that it was very stable and easy to depower, which accommodates a wide user platform. The optimum crewweight, we're told, is 650 pounds, and I can't think of many similar-sized dinghies that can sail as well with that sort of load.

In the winds we had, and with a light chop, we got the feeling right away that the boat has some pep. Upwind, it had great tacking angles and an excellent groove while skipping through and over waves. You know exactly when you're sailing too high because the boat stalls out quickly and gives a slight heel to weather. To recover, you simply bear off a few degrees and the boat takes right off again, finding the groove almost instantaneously. Once a crewmember is on the wire the Bahia lights up as you'd expect of a trapeze dinghy.

Launching the asymmetric spinnaker is easy. There's a "one-pull" system that simultaneously launches the pole and sucks the spinnaker halyard up the rig. To douse, reverse the process. The boat really gets humming along with the kite up, and the high-clew spinnaker provides great visibility. Jibing is simple, and we found that even if we missed pulling in the new sheet right away, there was ample time to pull it through without disaster.

The boat is set up nice and clean with not too many control lines, and with everything about where you would expect it to be. The Gnav Vang System (the compression strut runs from the top of the boom to the mast) is an absolute must on a boat like this, and this smart choice makes passing under the high boom all that much more easier and fluid. The cockpit also features a "roll bar," to which the mainsheet block is attached. It makes a great handhold for youngsters to grab onto in the event of a puff or a knockdown.

The Bahia's stability is a big plus, which should make the Bahia attractive to yacht clubs looking for an easily handled trainer. The stability really is remarkable; when you set foot on most small boats, they heel, but not the Bahia. It felt as stable as

the floating dock from which we stepped.

In the eventuality of a capsize, its stability also makes it slow to turtle. With a float pad at the mainsail head patch, the boat will not turtle. It will just lay on its side, allowing even the smallest sailors to right it. I tried to flip the boat during our downwind portion of the test, and it took a lot of effort to even get close. I had to stand on the leeward side and nudge the boat to capsize. In the event of a broach, once the spinnaker sheet is blown the wide platform takes over.

What we also liked about the Bahia (and this was our kick-back and go for a daysail side talking for us) was the comfortable sit-in cockpit, sufficient leg room, and useful features like the ability to row it (a feat we never tried) or power it along with a four-horsepower outboard. A storage box can be placed below the tiller at the stern to store an engine or whatever else you may need—why not even some camping equipment . . . remember those good times as a kid sailing to and pitching a tent on a secluded piece of shoreline? It's this kind of versatility that you expect from boats twice or four times its size, but why let all the racer/cruisers and expensive daysailers have all the fun. For \$9,450, which includes a dolly (a trailer that the dolly rides on adds \$964), or \$9,600 for the Bahia Sport, you and the kids can discover (or re-discover) the good ole' days of messing around in a boat in which you can do virtually anything. ♦

THE BOW'S ROUNDED lip, and a dedicated bag, makes deploying and retrieving the Bahia's asymmetric spinnaker simple maneuvers.



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