So what about a trailable trimaran?

Dragonfly 25 vs. Astus 24: the match!

The first is French, basic, stripped out and not without spirit... the second is Danish, designed down to the minutest detail and super sharp. Which one to choose? Multihulls World has tested them both for you.

Text and Photos: Emmanuel van Deth

Their characteristics are similar - even if they both have a few tricks up their sleeves - and so are their intended programs. It's a question of two folding trimarans (note the idea is that in just a few minutes they are able to slide into the same slip as a monohull, or onto a trailer under the maximum width allowed on the road), designed for fast coastal cruising, short-handed or with the family. And why not try out your racing skills? All that remains to be said is that Astus 24 is the flagship of the Astus fleet, whereas the Dragonfly 25 is the smallest boat in the range! So there's a difference in the concept of each one: the Astus is a big little trimaran, while the Dragonfly is a little big trimaran… do you follow? You'll get it: The 24 uses the same formula as its smaller brothers, involving simplicity and ease of handling, while the Dragonfly, with its rotating mast and streamlined beams is playing in a different league. Out on the water you might think the latter much bigger than the former, yet there is only 25cm between them.

FOLDING TRIMARANS

The first thing common to both our trimarans is that they are folding. But not in the same way! The Astus uses the time-

← *Two folding and trailable trimarans, for great sailing and weekends away from the crowds. Brilliant!* ↓

honored technique of telescopic arms. Slightly offset - port forward, starboard aft - they slot into their brackets. The skill of the architect lies in making these big transverse structures disappear, or almost. Eric Henseval has managed this very well: forward, the arms are well camouflaged - visually - by the front face of the coachroof. They don't encroach too much on the usable height of the forward bunk. Aft, it serves as the support for the mainsheet traveler. The advantage of this system: it is mechanically very simple - when folded, they are the same length, and … it's not expensive! In contrast, the arms are simple straight tubes, set lower than "real" beams would be. As a result, it can get a bit wet in windy conditions. However, we're no longer talking about the narrow floats of the esteemed Speed 770, but 165% of the volume in each hull… so neither of them can really bury themselves in: in fact it would be capable of supporting the whole displacement of the entire boat. So it would be possible, though not recommended, to sail on just one hull. To bring the arms in, you slacken off the trampoline, withdraw the pins and haul in on the folding line which goes round a turning block. A job which can easily be done in less than five minutes. As for the mast, it either stays in place or can be lowered and laid on the deck thanks to a system using the spinnaker pole as a lever. As for our Danish steed, first unveiled to the world at the Düsseldorf Boat Show back in January, the bar is set a little higher. Here, the arms are made of composites. They are streamlined and curved upwards, so as to be clear of the waves. They then fold towards the stern of the boat. This is also a perfectly slick operation: retract the bowsprit, the purchase (which is hidden

↑ *Dragonfly: At first glance, you notice the inverted bows of the floats and the crossed beams… classy!*

↑ *Astus: A more attractive design - in particular the coachroof - and fine hulls at the waterline: the 24 bears no resemblance to the early Astuses launched nearly ten years ago already!*

Astus: The helmsman is aft of the bracket for the beams. Forward of this are the seats and locker lids. →

↑ *Dragonfly: On board the Dragonfly: no beams, but a discrete mainsheet traveler set all the way aft. Three helm stations, no less: one on each float and an amazing vertical one in the middle of the cockpit.*

behind a hatch cover) is released, and the arms fold aft, bringing them in. One minute for each side, no more. Once folded, the Dragonfly is only 2.30 meters in beam, which allows it to fit inside a 40 foot shipping container - very practical if you wanted to change continent! However, the length increases to 8.80 meters. In harbor, that can make a big difference… The floats - 160% of the volume - have a modern design, with inverted bows and volume aft. By contrast, the central hull's bow has a traditional angle, which doesn't quite match…

DECK LAYOUT: LIKE A MONOHULL... BUT WITH TRAMPOLINES

Our two contenders are pretty similar on deck. The narrowness of the central hull below the waterline is much less noticeable immediately below our feet. But the coachroofs do impinge on the sidedecks. So going forward, you go across the coachroof or on the trampolines. And here there is a difference: the trampolines on the Astus are reminiscent of those on beach cats.

↑ *Astus: Eric Henseval, the architect, has favored two marked chines. The first keeps the wakes relatively narrow. The second provides for good seating in the cockpit and for the floats to come up against the hull.*

↑ *Dragonfly: On the Danish tri, they have adopted a bilge line which increases towards the back and a noticeable tulip-shape making the cockpit wider. Note the section of the floats, which is wider at the waterline than at the deck.*

← *Astus: The very beamy coachroof impinges on the sidedecks. To go forward you either have to climb over the superstructure or go across the trampolines.*

↓ *Dragonfly: The sidedecks are a little wider than on the Astus, and the trampolines more rigid and almost waterproof.*

They are flexible nets which let the water pass through. There's none of that on the 25, where they are much stiffer and are set into the hulls, meaning you can practically stay dry. On the foredeck, no locker or anchor well on the Dragonfly: the anchor needs to be lightweight and stowed in a bag below the cockpit. As for the Astus, the whole of the forward section of the coachroof lifts up to reveal the guides for the forward beams, and enough space to store the ground tackle - you're better off with everything here than forward as you would have with a standard anchor locker. As for the deck hardware, both manufacturers have opted for sail-handling from the cockpit. But this is where things start to differ between the two boats: the arrangement on the Astus could be compared with that of a monohull, which may ease the transition to a trimaran for mono owners. The tiller is located behind the big compartment which houses the arms. The yard has fitted two comfortable seats, one either side. The rig is a self-supporting standard aluminum tube, which facilitates the folding process in complete safety. A carbon mast is an option. There is also a large locker and various other storage spaces. As for the Dragonfly, no fewer than three helm positions! One tiller on each float and another, vertical one, in the central hull. This configuration allows the helmsman to position himself for the best view of the sails and the water. So you truly are aboard a multihull, or even a mini offshore racer! The rig is in keeping with this, with a rotating mast (aluminum or optionally in carbon). The system for adjusting this allows you to refine the laminar flow over the sails. Even though this is not terribly high-tech, it points to "multihull" origins. The self-tacking jib simplifies maneuvers, particularly tacking. On both boats, the motor is easy to access. Important when in harbor: you turn by turning the outboard and using the throttle, but you don't have to be a contortionist! Ahead of the motor is a locker for the fuel tank.

OFF TO THE BEACH?

It would be a real shame to have a cruising trimaran and not take advantage of its shallow draft! Both our boats are equipped with a centerboard offset in the central hull. In case of it hitting anything, it releases and comes up without damaging anything, contrary to what would be the case for a daggerboard. The same goes for the rudder blades. There is one on the central hull of both trimarans. But on the Sport version of the Dragonfly, there is a rudder at the back of each float. They can be set to three different heights, and will pivot upwards in case of striking something. Not having a centerboard slot gasket,

Astus: The rough finish has now been improved and the seats are lower on production models. As on the Dragonfly, the centerboard casing cannot be seen.

Dragonfly: The yard offers several "comfort" options - berth cushions, galley, chemical toilet - all of which turn the 25 into a real little coastal cruising trimaran.

Dragonfly: Folding trimarans which, once in port, slide into a monohull slip, or fit onto a road trailer. Clever!

taking the ground poses no difficulty, as the board has no risk of jamming. So the boat can easily be beached. Under way, the Dragonfly's board doesn't move at all, whereas the one on the Astus has a bit of movement in its slot. But remember, the Astus that we are testing is a prototype… The open cockpits and bathing ladders allow easy descent to "shore". A bucket of seawater would serve for washing your feet off. With both these trimarans it would really be a shame not to make the most of the beach!

ON BOARD, AND WE'RE OFF...

Even though the feel at the helm of our two models and the handling of the sails is evocative of a monohull, you'll see immediately that these trimarans hardly heel at all, even when sailing much faster! The Astus, in

Astus 24

+
- Attractive price
- Easy to set up
- Same length when folded

–
- Relatively beamy at the waterline
- Aluminum beams a bit low for a choppy sea
- Rustic finish

Dragonfly 25

+
- Fits in a 40 foot shipping container
- More modern, high-performance hulls
- Stiffness of the structure

–
- Higher price
- Traditional bow on the central hull
- 8.80 meter overall length when folded

standard version, bowls along at 7 knots upwind, at 50° to the 13 knots of true wind. Under gennaker, at a little over a beam reach, we hit 10 knots. The head of the yard, Jean-Hubert Pommois, was clocked at more than 15 knots under gennaker during the first sea trials. But there was more wind than we have for our test. There's no doubt that the Sport version, with a sail-area to weight ratio of 45.53m²/tonne will achieve even more spectacular performances. So our advice would be to go for carbon mast and beams: firstly to guarantee maximum rigidity under load, and secondly, to limit pitching on this very light model, which offers little inertia going into a chop. As for the Dragonfly, the displacement is quite a bit higher. Remember the idea of a "little big" boat as opposed to a "big little" one… And in reality, the 25 (Dragonfly) is a bit longer, but particularly beamier than the Astus 24. The Dragonfly sets off very quickly in the slightest breeze - true, though, we are testing the Sport version with its carbon mast and so on. With a ratio of 39m²/tonne, it felt just as quick in light airs as the Astus: in 10 knots of wind we were marching along at more than 8 knots with the gennaker. The yard's first seatrials show the real potential of achieving 15 knots in 15 knots of wind. The hulls being narrow at the waterline must be having some effect. And Jean-Marc Le Goff, the French agent for the company, ensures us that this baby is perfectly capable of sailing on one hull. Runs of more than 20 knots are guaranteed. Wow! We can't wait to try this little Danish rocket out in a bit more wind!

DOWN BELOW

The layout inside our two trimarans is very similar: two bunks either side which form the salon seats, or by night the beds. They are fitted with a few locker lids and a little movable galley. Both have the same clever idea of neatly offsetting the centerboard casing, which is then hidden by the side of the bunk. Forward, a double berth nestles in the bow. So with a tape in hand, we measure the difference between the concept of the Astus and the Dragonfly. The former will appeal to monohull sailors with its relatively roomy central hull, whereas the latter is performance-driven. The result: 1.64m of headroom , and a lifting hatch, against 1.47m for the Dragonfly, whose bunks are only 35cm wide at the forward end. As for the forepeak, it is separated by a half-height bulkhead and a curtain on the Astus - 2 meters by 1.3 at the head, and 40 cm at the foot. On the Dragonfly, Quorning have gone for a little less, with 1.90 by a meter at the head, and 25cm at the foot. These figures really demonstrate the difference in volume between the two central hulls. There's no salon table on the 25 - a simple folding camping table would do. The one on the 24 measures 76 cm x 51, and can also be used in the cockpit on a separate leg. On both models the ventilation is not great, but opening thehatches is an option. The Astus we are testing is the prototype model - unveiled to the public at last year's Paris Boat Show. On the production models, the seats will be lowered by 4cm and the mattresses reduced from 8cm to 6. The sliding galley with its 35 by 82cm worktop is molded, as are the seats. The underside of the coachroof has a rough finish, but there are no bolts sticking through, thanks to inserts in the plywood beneath the polyester. The finish of the Dragonfly is a little more refined, following on from the yard's larger models.

It would be a real shame to have a cruising trimaran and not take advantage of its shallow draft!

CONCLUSION

The Astus gives you a lot for a set price, and will be reassuring for new multihull converts. Easy to transport, to set up and to put away, it's a carefree and fun boat. The Dragonfly, on the other hand, is much more sophisticated, both technically and in terms of design style. Particularly swift in just 10 knots of wind, it will become really exhilarating in a good blow. Less internal volume, it is aimed at a discerning buyer. All that remains to be said is that on both boats, sailing is fast, easy… and on the level!

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

	Astus 24	Dragonfly 25
Hull length	7.40 m	7.65 m
Length when folded	7.40 m	8.95 m
Waterline length	7.3 m	7.50 m
Beam in sailing mode	5.25 m	5.80 m
Beam when folded	2.54 m	2.30 m
Draft	0.35/1.45 m	0.35/1.50 m
Weight	760 kg	1,050 kg
Upwind sail area	34.6/40 m2	34/41 m2
Mainsail	22/25.5 m2	24/29 m2
Jib	12.6/14.5 m2	10/12 m2
Gennaker	28 m2	28/30 m2
Spi	40 m2	45/55 m2
Motor	6 to 9 hp outboard	6 hp outboard
Architect	Eric Henseval	Jens Quorning and Steen Olsen
Builder	Astus Boats	Quorning Boats
Year launched	2013	2015
Price in € ex-tax	46,042	69,900

Principal options Astus 24 :

- Extra coast of square-topped sail: €467
- Extra cost of Sport sails: €742
- Gennaker and furler on bowsprit: €1,750
- Dacron storm jib: €375
- Headsail furler: €750
- Galley with water tank and hob: €1,125
- Berth cushions forepeak: €600
- Berth cushions salon: €633
- Bow nets: €500

Principal options Dragonfly 25 :

- Paint finish to central hull and floats: €3,980
- Cockpit cover and tent: €1,690
- Road trailer: €3,690
- Asymmetric spinnaker: €1,885
- Gennaker and furler: €1,990
- Retractable bowsprit : €995
- Hardware and sheets for spi: €325
- Berth cushions for salon and forepeak: €1,280
- Galley with water tank and hob: €1,140