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Nauti Lady



The author discovers the delights of the SunChaser pontoon boat. PHOTO: JJ MARINE SUPPLIES PLEASE!

IT WILL NEVER WORK

● So why the big success story? The answer, quite simply, is a change in law.

“IT will never work. It’s ugly and no one will want to buy or charter it.” This is the gloomy feedback Jürg and Jasmina (JJ Marine Supplies) received at the Palma Boat Show in April/May 2015 when they debuted their SunChaser pontoon boat freshly imported from Indiana, USA.

Funnily enough J K Rowling was also told it will never work - there’s “no money in children’s books” said *Bloomsbury* editor Barry Cunningham. The Beatles received a similar critique - “guitar groups are on the way out” said Decca Records A&R man Dick Rowe. Thank heavens people are brave enough to follow their dreams.

With no option but to ‘suck it and see’ (you can’t post a 600kg boat back to the States and ask for a refund) Jürg and Jasmina berthed the ‘ugly’ SunChaser in Port

Adriano straight after the Show in June. It was immediately out for charter, sometimes twice a day.

By July last year they’d supplied two more to serve Puerto Portals, and in August added a second to the Port Adriano fleet. A year on and the fleet has doubled again, with some sporty Bayliner Element 160s also appearing in the line-up. They’re booked up day in day out.

So why the big success story? The answer, quite simply, is a change in law.

Up until mid-January 2015, you could only take charge of motor boats up to four metres in length and 11kW of power, and sailing boats up to five metres in length, without the need for any kind of licence. But, thanks to Real Decreto 875/2014, this licence-free window was extended to five metre motor boats and six metre sailing boats (excluding personal watercraft (jetskis) which always need a licence). The only caveats were that the boats should stay within two nautical miles of the coastline and could only be sailed daytime by over 18s.

“Before this law change, there were only a handful of sub-four-metre licence-free RIBs available for charter in Mallorca,” says Jasmina of JJ Marine Supplies, “but suddenly the market was opened up. Chartering SunChasers was never our intention; we set out to be a distributor of the unique pontoon boat product and nothing

more. We do still sell them but it’s the charter business that has soared and taken us completely by surprise.”

Yacht charter is predominantly viewed as something for the fortunate few. Even an entry-level day boat, a 20-something-foot bowrider, will set you back 500 euros a day, plus fuel, plus IVA, perhaps plus a captain, and before you know it you’ve blown a grand. Step into the 50-foot market and make it double.

Not so many people have a grand or two to throw at a day afloat. The SunChaser eliminates the need for a captain, fuel consumption is negligible and you can be on the water for a full eight-hour day for 250 euros ALL IN (cleaning, fuel, tax, insurance) or just 90 euros for a two-hour rental. All of a sudden yacht charter is for everyone.

“As soon as the realisation dawns that you can charter a proper boat, drive it without a licence, and invite five pals on board paying just a handful of euros each the game is changed,” says Jasmina. “With high side railings, a completely flat 11-square-metre deck, a proper swim ladder to get in and out of the sea with, a head-height bimini shade and incredible stability afforded by catamaran-style floats, the SunChasers have become much loved by families with young and elderly members. They’re just so safe and easy to manoeuvre.”

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We should address the elephant in the room; at first glance SunChasers do look like a floating rectangle with railings. I had to double take the first time I strolled past one in Port Adriano, just to check I wasn't seeing things.

But after a quick whizz around the Malgrat Islands (I say "quick", the top top speed is nine knots, but you're better off bringing the revs down to a steady four or five knots to keep engine noise to a minimum - the engine being an 11kW Mercury fourstroke outboard) I was genuinely converted.

Jürg continues, "This pontoon boat has everything you would expect from a posh yacht: stereo system with USB and Bluetooth, depth gauge, swim ladder, shower, cool box, sink, cup holders...you name it. She can reach the same bays, share the same turquoise seas, escape the same tourist-packed beaches and admire the same friendly dolphins as the superyachts. In fact a 40 metre motor yacht sent her tender over to a SunChaser in Cala Fornells the other week just to admire her and ask a few questions. They do turn heads and clients often feed back that they had the best day of their holiday onboard the pontoon boat."

If rectangular doesn't float your boat, the licence-free Bayliner Element 160 has a more conventional sport boat look. Available for the same price, they have more

lie-flat sunbathing space but accommodate five instead of six guests. Jürg let me into a little secret: they may look sportier, but with more hull surface in contact with the water, they fall just behind the SunChaser in terms of top speed.

I had to ask (it seemed foolish not to), "Is it not a bit dangerous letting people who have never captained a boat in their lives take to the high seas without so much as a by your leave?"

"We do offer a quick ten to 15 minute training session," reassures Jürg.

"I teach them how to use the shower, the anchor, show them a quick map of where they're allowed to navigate, and we disembark at the fuel quay so they don't have to worry about berthing. They're all brand new boats, in superb condition, and virtually unsinkable. Each of the tubes keeping her afloat is divided into three compartments so you can suffer a puncture without fear. Not that any of our clients, touch wood, have ever bashed any of the boats - take a look at them, they're bump free. Everyone is provided with a life-jacket, including those specially made for children. Probably the biggest danger is reckless behaviour from other boats on the water - we tell clients to evade and avoid as much as they can."

Now with partner companies operating in Port Adri-

ano, Cala D'Or and Puerto Portals, the licence-free craze is really hotting up. Max and business partner Mattias run a pair of SunChasers in Puerto Portals. Both brought up and educated in Majorca, the youngsters are also enjoying a great season, "The boats are a great hit with tourists and residents alike," says Max, "with lots of repeat customers and positive feedback. We keep prices low so that everyone can afford it and add a new experience to their holiday."

www.jjmarinesupplies.es, www.licence-freecharters.es





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