

A cat on a cat

How well can a pet cat travel on a yacht, in an exclusive interview, Bengie from **Christine Danger's** yacht gives us insight into how he spends his time and what keeps him on board his catamaran *Take it easy*.

Ahoy sailors! My name is Bengie. I am a female Bengal, a spotty leopard looking cat with bright green eyes. I am rather good looking if I say so myself.

I was destined to become a ship's cat. I am seven now, but my first ever sea voyage was a circumnavigation of Bass Strait when I was a four month-old kitten. I loved it and haven't looked back since.

I sail on *Take it easy*, a beautiful Easy 11.6 metre catamaran that lives up to its name. Life is pretty cruisy on it. It is spacious, fast and stable, just as a cat should be.

It was designed and built by Peter Snell, the designer of Easy catamarans

and launched in 2003. In fact it is a rather special one, since it was the first 11.6 built by Peter and he used it as his demonstration model.

My humans, Christine and Wade, bought it in May 2011 then did a whole lot of maintenance and cosmetic work to make it truly theirs. It had belonged to a couple of other owners since Peter and it needed a fair bit of TLC.

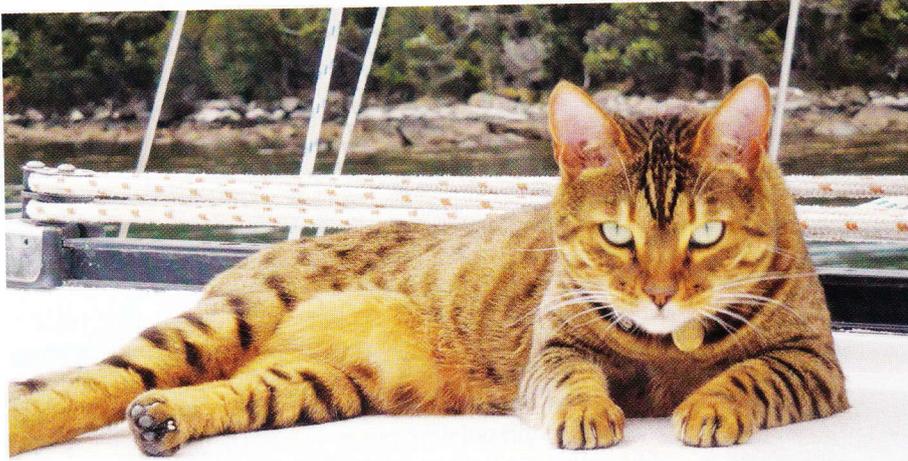
I reckon it looks quite distinctive now in its Bass Strait inspired colours. It attracts a few looks when we arrive in an anchorage, especially when I am sitting on the boom, keeping an eye on things!

The deck on *Take it easy* is really broad and good for a wander or inspection of our surroundings. I am not sure about the nets at the front of the boat, too tricky to walk on, but the pointy bow is a rather cool spot to look at dolphins who often join us. I particularly enjoy peaceful anchorages, when we sit quietly and I can get up on deck, run around, hop on the cabin roof, try and climb the mast - slippery sucker that thing!

I also love cat naps. I need my beauty sleep, which is just as well because sometimes cruising gets a bit boring.

I am pretty adaptable and well-travelled. Currently we commute from





Melbourne to the boat on weekends or holidays. It is moored in Paynesville in the Gippsland Lakes during winter and spring and in Port Albert during summer and autumn. But I think our days on terra firma are numbered. We are spending more and more time on the boat and I reckon it will not be long till my humans stop working in town and we live aboard permanently to go cruising. What an adventure that will be!

I love nothing better than a salty sea breeze in the through my fur. I quite like being in the cockpit, preferably on the helm seat when we are sailing along. But if things get a bit lively I sit inside on the settee where I can still keep an eye on Mum and Dad while snuggling in the cushions. If the motion gets too bad, then I just retreat on to their bed; in fact under the doona is the best option. It is warm, I can't hear, see or feel the chaotic motion, puurfect!

My humans think I am a sticky beak, but I just like to get involved with what they do on board. I particularly like anything involving repairs and maintenance. Screws, bits of wire or strings are fun to play with and hatches, I just adore hatches. And bags too!

My absolute favourite thing is when Dad takes the cushions off the settee and opens up the hidey holes to get to his tools. Did you know that is where the water tanks and battery bank lurk? What a buzz! The other super spot to explore is behind the toilet. The rare times Dad unscrews the panel to get to the holding tank, I have to try and get past him and sneak in. It is dark and

goes a long way back. But that is a no-go zone as far as he is concerned. I suppose my sharp claws on the old poo bag could create a frightful mess!

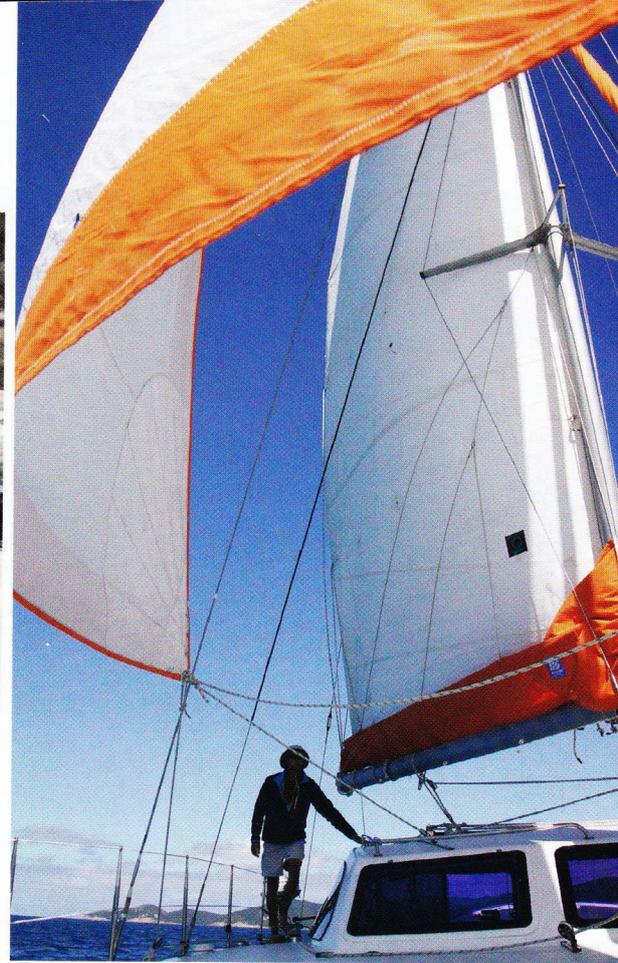
Another fun thing to do is fishing, again I like to help. Dad and I set ourselves up on the sugar scoops and from time to time we catch a lury. I especially like playing with the lures. There is something irresistible about the bright colourful and the feathery ones. I have learnt to watch the barbs though, they could inflict a nasty injury.

Now one thing that is important to mention is that being a Bengal, I am quite chatty. I have had to develop a special language so my humans understand my needs. I vary the intensity, length, volume and pitch of my miaows depending on how I feel; short little miaows mean I am a happy little Vegemite, long "woohs" mean I am waiting, "mooaah" means I am inconvenienced. For instance, if someone coughs or sneezes loudly, that deserves an indignant mooaah.

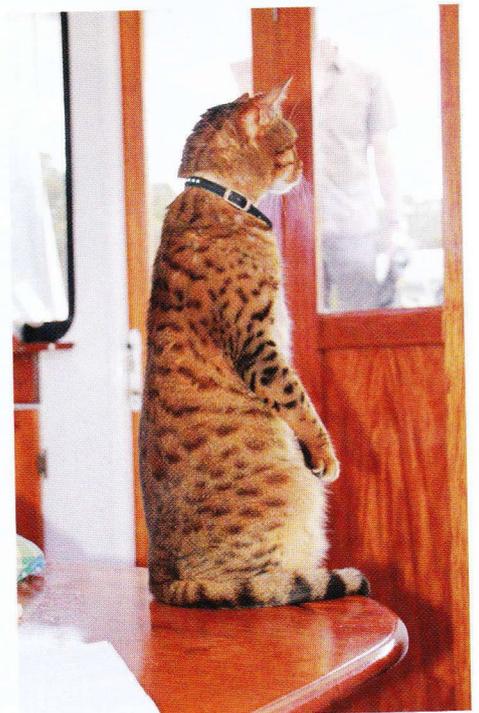
A long growwwl means there's something dodgy going on out there. A loud and insistent "waaa" is come on, pay attention.

In the main, they get what I am talking about, but I struggle to get them to understand the "I am starving" bit, particularly when I ask for second breakfast, you know, the 5pm refuel. I am training, but they are a bit slow.

We have had amazing cruises on *Take It Easy* to Tasmania, the Bass Strait Islands and even to Lord Howe last summer.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: One of my humans: Skipper Wade checking things out while we are underway; Sticky beak Bengie, impersonating a meerkat; On guard, duty on top of the boom; On deck, keeping an eye on things!





At the helm seat, I am in charge!

"I love nothing better than a salty sea breeze ruffling through my fur. I quite like being in the cockpit, preferably on the helm seat when we are sailing along."

Frequently asked questions

Have you ever fallen in?

Errm yes, very embarrassing. I have fallen in twice now!

Once I was watching those pesky little welcome swallows swooping under the jetty. I over balanced and ploof, head first in the drink. I was not swimming too well and sinking, fortunately Mum jumped in and rescued me. I managed to paw my way onto one of the beams under the jetty and I was not letting go!

She called me Barney for a while, you know, for barnacle.

The other time, it was at the Cruiser Club. I was walking along the edge of *Medina* our old boat, minding my own business, when my Dad saw a big mozzie on the clears and bashed it just as I was slinking past. It gave me such a fright that I jumped up in the air and misjudged the landing, slid down the edge of the hull and in the drink I went!

But I was able to climb back on board quick smart and howled at Dad in total disgust.

Do you ever get seasick?

I don't seem to suffer from it. I will give you a hint: if you start feeling a bit green, go to bed and sleep through it, works for me!

How and where do you hunt?

Well I am proud to say we have no mice problem on *Take It Easy*. I chase mozzies and flies and the odd dragon fly, to keep myself fit. Cable ties are great fun to play with, as are feathers. So I get hunting practice several times a day.

How do you manage with the toilet business?

It is all mod cons for me on *Take It Easy*. Dad made me a great litter box. He calls it the shit box. How rude, but it is excellent. Made to measure so it fits between the human toilet and the side of the hull. Now I have my own cat door so I can get in and out of the bathroom and do my business in private.

Do you ever get off the boat when you are cruising?

Rarely. You see if we are anchored, it means going in *Peasy*, the dinghy. It is not easy peasy for me I can tell you, just too scary. Sometimes if we are moored at a jetty I like to hop off and take a look at other boats or stalk the terns. I crouch down low and move around stealthily. I'll tell you a little secret though, I am a bit scared of falling in again, so I don't do it often. But in the main, Mum and Dad don't let me go ashore.

They are too worried I'd do a runner.

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cruisinghelmsman Christine Danger



Chris and her partner Wade Bishop have been sailing on catamarans of various sizes for the last 15 years. Their favourite cruising grounds are the Bass Strait Islands and Tasmanian waters. They live for the day when they can give up work, cruise full-time on *Take It Easy*, and explore further afield. Follow their adventures on www.sv-takeiteasy.com.