

# Gas-guzzlers yield to sail at the top end

The most breathtaking new superyachts run on wind power, says **Chris Partridge**

In the good times, superyachts were symbols of confidence and success. Now they are looking more like signs of greed and arrogance that burn fossil fuels in huge quantities and spread pollution in sensitive marine habitats. So it's not surprising that the industry is looking at ways of changing this image, even though many buyers still want what they always have wanted: a floating palace that will knock the socks off their friends, business associates and people they want to influence.

Far-sighted owners and designers are seeking to change the image of superyachts by less ostentatious styling, relying more on elegance than pure size and power, and on innovative hull designs and propulsion systems to minimise environmental impact. Surprisingly, the result is a new interest in sail.

Several spectacular sailing vessels have transformed their image from a minority interest based on competition to billionaire's plaything. The Maltese Falcon, originally commissioned by the American venture capitalist Tom Perkins, revived the square sails used in Nelson's navy but was updated with new technology to create a formidable vessel that Perkins could sail from his desk via the internet. It was sold last year for a reported £60m. Athena, which cost internet billionaire James Clark a reported £18m to build, similarly updated the three-masted gaff-rigged schooner.

It became clear that sailing yachts are not only less harmful to the environment than motor craft — when they enter a harbour under a full spread of sail, they grab all the attention too.

"Boats like the Maltese Falcon and Mirabella V [the largest single-masted yacht in the world] have shown that sail is a great way to enjoy yachting, and owners tend to be very passionate about it," says Paul Cook, former captain of HMS Ark Royal, superyacht skipper and a director of Advanced New Technologies, a company that installs electronic gadgetry in yachts. "Being green is coming in because owners are trying to reduce their carbon footprint, primarily in boats designed for long ranges — sailing boats are more seaworthy than powerboats."

The first generation of sailing mega-yachts was constructed before the credit crunch, which caused many projects to be cancelled or postponed. Now, however, construction is starting again and some very innovative, not to say startling, sailing rigs are being proposed. Alexander Isaac, of naval architects Lila-Lou, is promoting a design concept called Ankida that incorporates a four-legged mast and two booms, one on each side of the boat. The top of the mast supports a turbine that could power all the boat's electrical and electronic systems.

The mast structure is very strong and the booms would not be able to sweep across the decks, making it much safer, Isaac says, but the boat would not sail in a conventional manner. "We would need an open-minded, very excited client to get this boat built," he adds.

The move towards sail is benefiting builders of more production-orientated boats, according to David Tydeman, chief executive of Oyster Marine. It will be launching its first superyacht at the London International Boat Show, a 100ft sloop built in Turkey using the latest technology. Prices will start at £7m.

"We are pushing new boundaries in technology with our hull, which is made using a combination of a vacuum infusion process and foam core for light hulls," says Tydeman.

Sailing is still a much smaller sector than motor yachts, he concedes, though technology is reducing the need for large crews that are a significant extra cost: "Electronics and hydraulics allow you to go sailing with a smaller crew, but the market is still 10 to one power to sail." Some of the technological advances that are making sailing yachts lighter and stronger are also being used in the latest powered superyachts. Princess Yachts, famous for its high-speed planing vessels, will be exhibiting a 95ft model at this year's show (starting price £4.5m) and has two vessels, at 35 metres and 40 metres long, under construction in Plymouth.

Simon Clare, head of marketing at Princess Yachts, says: "Resin vacuum infusion with carbon fibre is being used to make the hull lighter and more torsionally rigid for performance and economy." Lightweight hulls are needed in superyachts because of the increasing weight of the kit inside, partly what the boat-builders call "toys", such as jet skis and helicopters, and luxury items such as cinema rooms, air conditioning, gourmet kitchens and so on.

According to Cook: "Everything is operated by IT. People want all the gadgets they have at home, including being able to draw the curtains using their iPhone. It is assumed that the internet, audio, TV, Blu-ray and everything else will be piped round the vessel."

Security has also moved to the top of the design brief. "Superyachts bristle with cameras with day and night vision, radars that detect movement and track potential threats, and sonars to detect divers and submarines," says Cook. "Guests and crew are identified with systems using iris recognition, and the vessel will be divided into zones, each accessible only to authorised people."



Ankida, Lila-Lou's concept for an eco-friendly superyacht