

Cream of the crop

Over the past few years the Italians have honed the fast cruiser into an almost trademark package. **Sam Jefferson** tests the ICE 52, the latest take on this genre

A couple of years back I was testing one of the latest generations of fast cruisers built by a popular Italian manufacturer. She was one of the first yachts to sport a Dreadnought bow – whereby the stem is raked aft. The effect was dramatic and I asked the broker who was showing me over the yacht what the practical purpose was ‘wave piercing’, he said with great confidence. Now, I am not a yacht designer, but I do know that while a Dreadnought bow may have wave piercing benefits on a multihull

smashing through big seas at 30kn, it is highly unlikely to do much on a yacht that will mostly cruise at around 7kn. It’s a classic case of form over function. In the case of the Dreadnought bow it gives the impression that a yacht is going at about 100mph even when stationary. It’s a statement and I’m fine with that – just don’t try to kid me that a cruising yacht – albeit a fast cruising yacht – is anything but that. In recent years the arch proponents of this theory of essentially dressing up a cruising yacht in uber stylish garb has been Solaris Yachts. In many ways these new yachts are sheep →

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in wolf's clothing. They look great, they sail well but they are ultimately extremely comfortable down below and hugely effective cruising yachts capable of giving you a bit of a thrill downwind with the Code 0 up.

Personally, I like this concept and I'm not alone, because demand for yachts in this genre is on the up and it has led to a plethora of new yachts. The Italians have led the way which is only right and proper given their excellent tradition of producing effortlessly stylish.. cars,

1 Decks and lounging areas aboard the ICE 52 are wonderfully uncluttered and the cockpit is a clear and agreeable place to be

2 Sporty touches such as the carbon fibre fascia to the engine control panel give the ICE an air of purpose and style

clothes, boats – take your pick. The ICE 52 is another addition to this growing fleet. ICE Yachts is a small yard based in landlocked Salvirola near Milan. Their 52 fits the modern template of the fast cruiser perfectly. Designed by Umberto Felci – probably best known in the cruising world for his work with Dufour and Beneteau – the 52 is a purposeful looking boat, featuring not a Dreadnought but a scimitar bow which is an inverted curve. This is combined with relatively low freeboard, broad aft sections and a soft turn to the bilge aft.

Below the waterline, Felci has taken his 'champagne glass' hull form whereby a narrow base below the waterline swells out rapidly, keeping wetted surface area to a minimum when the boat is sailed upright – hinting at decent light air performance despite her broad aft sections. She has a deep single rudder and the steel keel has a narrow chord width with a lead bulb. There is the option of a lift keel version. Weight has been kept low thanks to extensive use of carbon fibre and the hull uses carbon fibre with epoxy resin and a PVC foam core. Interior panels are also generally foam cored to keep weight down and the result is a yacht that displaces 12,000kg – some 2,000kg lighter than the Solaris 50. The mast and boom is carbon with rod rigging and a hydraulically adjustable backstay. She sets 157m² of upwind sail and 457m² off the wind.

Cruising comfort

Now, if all of that sounds a bit racy, fear not. I can assure you that this yacht offers all the comforts you'd expect of any normal cruising yacht.



● COCKPIT
The twin helms are set a bit further forward than on many yachts of this type

In fact, she is in essence a yacht you primarily cruise but occasionally enter into a regatta. One glance down below confirms this. She is definitely not a stripped out racer. Indeed, she offers a higher level of comfort – and space for that matter – than my own home. This is also evident on deck where there is a distinct lack of any sort of cat's cradle of lines and rope. The running rigging is uber simple and the yacht could easily be managed singlehanded or two up. In common with all boats these days,





● **SAIL CONTROLS**
The running rigging is kept as simple as possible, making this an easy yacht to handle

● **HULL**
Freeboard is relatively low by today's standards, but wide aft sections ensure high volume

● **SAILS**
Our test yacht came with a beautiful set of Millenniumtech sails from Marco Holm's loft

the decks are beautifully clear and uncluttered while the cockpit is so spacious that it really is a wonderful place to be. The traveller running across the cockpit sole is really the only indication that this is a yacht with racing pretensions. The twin helms are set slightly further forward than on many yachts of this type and this allows for excellent lines of sight for the helmsman. Storage has not been overlooked either and there is a huge lazarette aft that can be accessed either from a large

3 The flip up foot chocks are extremely important for the helmsman when powered up to windward in a stiff breeze

4 In cruising mode the cockpit is transformed into a very comfortable space, making the yacht ideal for Mediterranean cruising

'The handling was poised and responsive, with the feel of a big dinghy'

opening in the cockpit sole or via the huge drop down bathing platform. There's masses of room in here for a decent sized dinghy if required. Up forward there is also a cavernous storage locker, which could be fitted out as crew quarters, but ICE has wisely left it bare meaning you can cram all the fenders, sails or any other paraphernalia in here with little effort.

All in all, the feeling on deck is one of space. This massive amount of space means that all the deck hardware is well placed both for short handed sailing or racing. There is also a sensible mix of electric and manual winches.

In common with many of these sportier cruiser/racers, there is a certain feeling of openness and exposure in big seas, but this has been meted somewhat by shifting the steering wheels forward.

Keep it simple

Head down below and the theme of extreme simplicity remains. There is something rather manly and minimalist about many modern yachts' interiors and the ICE is certainly no exception. Think lots of hard lines and a total lack of clutter, every bit the precise opposite of the sort of slightly bohemian, cluttered, comforting yet ultimately damp and smelly interior of any cruising yacht circa 1985. At times I thought it all very modern and metrosexual but there were moments where it also felt bland and I found myself strangely nostalgic for a nice set of floral curtains. You know, just to set the whole thing off somehow. Still, life moves relentlessly on. The quality was generally excellent and even the lack of bare plywood edges in hidden nooks and crannies was impressive. There were also plenty →



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'All in all, the interior was smart and businesslike with masses of space and a good level of comfort'

of nice little bespoke touches that spoke of time, thought and the extra mile being put into the finish too. ICE is a relatively small company, so they are happy to add in a few custom touches here and there. You have the choice of two different interior layouts, one with the galley towards the bow and a second, more conventional layout with an L-shaped galley situated in the aft section of the saloon to starboard.

All in all, the interior was smart and businesslike with masses of space and a good level of comfort. A giant fridge, air conditioning and dishwasher, two heads with one ensuite all point very clearly to the fact this is most definitely a cruising yacht at heart. You may not be cosseted in here in the manner you are on board an Amel a Najad or a Hallberg Rassy, but it really is a case of horses for courses and, certainly for a summer of med cruising, this is a really good space to spend some time.

Under sail

I was fortunate to sail the ICE in its natural domain off the coast of

Tuscany where a gentle September breeze wafted down from the mountains and seemed to urge us to head offshore to the distant island of Elba. The breeze probably maxed out at 15kn but most of the time it blew 10kn. The ICE was in its element here with her light displacement and beautiful sails from Marco Holm's Milleniumtech sail loft ensuring that we sailed upwind at between 6.5 and 7kn. Boatspeed upwind in a displacement monohull always makes me smile as it's rather like competing to be the tallest pygmy. Hull speed is hull speed – Theresa May would doubtless agree. Anyway, she (the yacht, not the PM) pointed beautifully and the handling was wonderfully poised and responsive, with something of the feel of a big dinghy.

This is clearly a boat that will make you smile upwind, but you will still only be doing 8- 10kn or so. Now, that maybe sounds a bit negative, but the place where these lightweight cruiser/racers pay you back is off the wind. Crack out that Code 0 in anything of a breeze, go play in the waves and

ABOVE
(left) The forward cabin is the master bedroom and features ensuite bathroom (right). The standard layout features the galley just aft of the forecabin, our test yacht had been customised for the owner

BELOW
A decent nav station is a useful asset

you'll suddenly find you're not only smiling, but grinning from ear to ear.

Even in these very modest conditions we were reeling off 10kn and you could feel the big boat was just itching to get surfing. And that is ultimately it – I've written 1500 words but the previous sentence is the key. An ICE 52 will surf off the wind in 15kn – and that is what you are buying. Just a small extra slice of exhilaration to go with all those cruising comforts. The other key fact is that, as you lift off down the face of the wave, the hull starts to thrum and you get that wonderful 'here we go' lurch as you take off, you're going to be doing it in style. There's a lot to be said for that. →



SAM'S VERDICT

This is an Italian yacht so I have deliberately steered clear of the terms 'passion' and 'flair'. Until now when, in some sort of form of journalistic tourettes, I've blurted both out. This is a yacht that does have a certain intangible quality that you just don't get from a production yacht. Don't be fooled in any way into thinking this is a racing yacht either. The owner of the yacht I tested was an ex dinghy racer who needed a comfortable yacht to cruise with his family and (very) occasionally race. I suspect he is typical of ICE

Yachts' clientele. The ICE is stylish, fast and she looks the part. She's also comfortable, practical and well behaved. All this comes at a price – particularly compared to a standard production yacht – yet the reward is simple: unfurl the gennaker and you might just end up flying. I would favour a heavier yacht on an ocean crossing, but for a week's cruising in style in the med, this is hard to beat.

PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★

COMFORT: ★★★★★

BLUEWATER: ★★★★★

THE SPEC

LOA 51ft 8in (15.8m)

LWL 48ft 5in (14.8m)

Beam 15ft 3in (4.65m)

Draught 8ft (2.45m); 9ft 3in (2.85m)

Displacement 12,500kg (27,500lb)

Engine Yanmar/Volvo CV 75 Saildrive

Water capacity 500lt

Fuel capacity 360lt

Main sail 90m² (968sq ft)

Jib 67m² (721sq ft)

Gennaker 300m² (3,229sq ft);
SA/Disp: 29.6

Base price £460,000

What you get Traveller, jib furler, epoxy carbon-glass hybrid construction

As sailed £646,000, incl:

Teak decking £26,000

Carbon mast £64,000

Instruments £17,000

Electric winches: £16,000

Electric toilets: £1,770



For a fuller explanation of stability and performance figures see sailingtoday.co.uk

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ALTERNATIVE YACHTS



SOLARIS 50

PRICE: £430,000

Arguably the natural competitor for this yacht and one boasting similarly striking lines. This Soto Acebal design is considerably heavier than the ICE but remains a relatively light displacement.

craftinsure quote: from £?????

solarisyachts.com



ITALIA 15.98

PRICE: £680,000

Another beautiful Italian design that errs more to the cruising end of this spectrum. The styling is still very striking, but the lines are more conservative, with more moderate beam and somewhat more taper aft.

craftinsure quote: from £?????

italiyachts.com



X-YACHTS X4(9)

PRICE: CE423,000

The Scandinavian take on the stylish cruiser is every bit as alluring as her Italian counterpart. The X4(9) is a tad smaller at 49ft and is the brand new big sister of the X4 which was extremely well received. Niels Jeppesen in a return to his roots.

craftinsure quote: from £?????