

More IS MORE

Atalante is the biggest Truly Classic yacht yet launched. We went to Antibes for a brief taste of the superyacht life

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The idea of ordering a unique, bespoke yacht from a naval architect, then seeing it come to fruition in the hands of a skilled team of artisans is the stuff of dreams, representing as it does – or can – the chance to make an imaginative and grand personal statement. But any naval architect will tell you that there are very few yachtsmen who have the sort of knowledge necessary to make it a reality.

So what generally happens is that the peccadillos of the initial brief are leavened by the experience and expertise of the architect to create the end design. This is partly because the owner will have more interest in specifying elements like rig, layout and furnishings than he will in wrestling with the heavy physics of hydrodynamics, loads, centres of effort and so on. Such a



collaboration should result in a sensible and pleasing end product for those with the means and experience to pursue it, but for many, it arguably makes sense for much of the work to be done beforehand in the design office and, in the case of Hoek, in the test tank and wind tunnel, leaving the owner to specify pretty much everything but the hull. Give the concept a bit of branding by naming it, and you have a very accessible way into high-end, semi-custom yacht ownership.

TRULY CLASSIC

It has certainly worked well for Andre Hoek who has, since 1994, built nearly three dozen yachts in the Truly Classic range at 12 sizes, ranging from the most popular TC51 up to the giant that we were in Antibes to sail this summer – the 127-footer (38.7m) *Atalante*.

Atalante is a Spirit of Tradition yacht designed by Andre Hoek and built by Claasen Shipyards in aluminium for a repeat customer who previously owned a Truly Classic 90. Like all the Truly Classic range – and, in fact, most SoT yachts the world over – it harks back to one of yacht design's golden eras – the 1930s. Sitting dockside among equally illustrious vessels in the sweltering heat of Antibes, the gently spooned bow, moderate sheer, sawn-off counter stern and low cabin trunks create a shape that is so timeless, it has come almost to define the word 'yacht'.

Atalante could never be mistaken for a real vintage yacht; the rig, lay-out and accoutrements are unapologetically modern, from the quadruple-spreader carbon mast with its slim Dyneema backstay and Park Avenue boom, to the twin cockpit, twin-cabin trunk



layout that has become something of a trademark on the TC series. The deck is laid in teak, although to a more modern pattern than the traditional sweep or straight patterns. Two hard sun awnings (one for each cockpit) rather detract from her charm in the way these things inevitably do, but they make for luxury living under the punishing sun and are easily removable.

Waiting for us on board is Cornish skipper James, as well as Joachim Kieft (MD of Claasen), Anco Kok, also of Claasen and Pieter van der Wiede from Hoek Brokerage. It rapidly becomes clear that *Atalante* has been built with a virtually blank chequebook, unusually pleasing taste (the settees in the saloon are a triumph of style over comfort and would grace the most stylish house, never mind boat) and the sort of quality of workmanship and meticulous design that you might never see in a lifetime.

A fellow journalist who is something of an authority on superyachts, after listing a few niggles, pronounced it to be among the best he'd ever seen. Your rather humbler

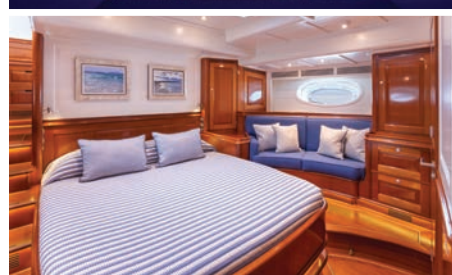
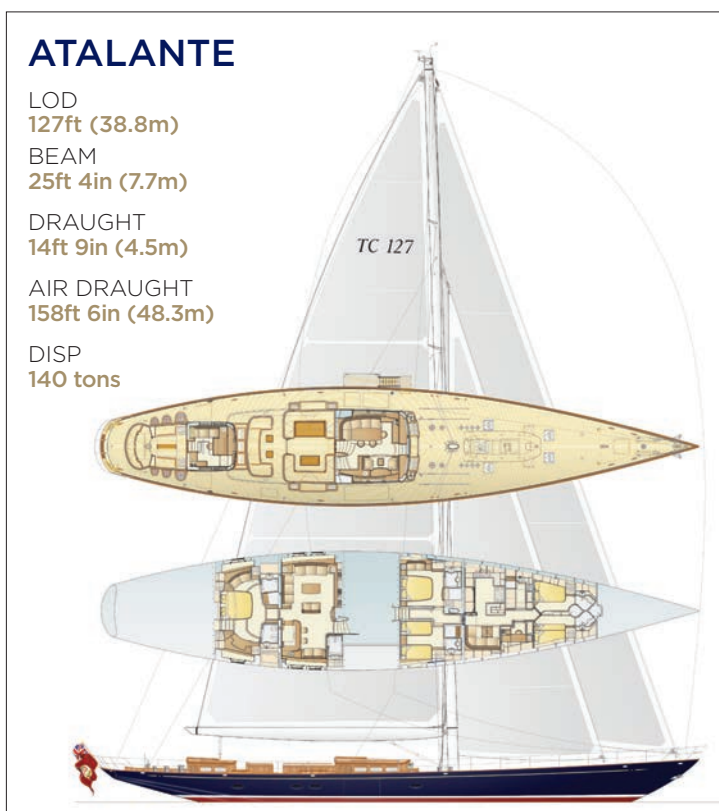
Top: The cockpit, although very technical, still feels like the helm station of a sailing yacht

Above l-r: Foot-operated door button set into the sole; jibsheets come back above decks; handrail detail; foredeck winches and car; one of the boat's huge variety of perches

correspondent at least managed to stop himself asking if the boat had air-con. Subtly innovative design, like the bolted-down dining room chairs that swivel under the table out of the way when not in use, and the bar that features neat stowage for each individual glass, are a joy.

The quality is really staggering. In the owners' cabin, a flat writing tableau in solid wood slides out of a housing and when you press down on the edge it doesn't budge a millimetre. Set into the holly and teak sole are circles of light that, when touched with a toe, operate gently sighing hydraulic doors. A tap dispenses clean, filtered water cold or hot, or slightly fizzy or very fizzy.

The galley and under-sole freezer would serve a small restaurant and the crew quarters in the forward part of a ship are considerably more luxurious than the owners' cabins on most yachts. Traditional touches include lemon squeezer deck prisms, the half-Admiralty sized chart table in the rear deckhouse and the flag locker that opens out to reveal a cupboard behind. The superyacht journalist noted that the sofa backs are a little too



perpendicular for comfort and I noted that there was not enough to hold on to below. Other than that, the interior seems perfect, which is perhaps unsurprising in a boat designed by a master at the top of his game and built by a top yard for a customer with deep pockets.

The engine room is controlled by a nerve centre that features a bank of sensors and CCTV screens and the two watermakers can produce up to 400 litres per hour between them. This huge capacity ensures that there is plenty of water for hosing down the boat and keeping it looking pristine. The boat, explains skipper James, is simple enough that even “idiots like him” can look after it without needing an engineer.

Among the ‘big yacht’ accoutrements on offer here are a private owners’ deckhouse, bar, numerous heads and even a separate laundry room. The TC127 is not the most commodious boat for its length, and that’s because, more than anything else, it is a real sailing yacht.

On deck, the simplicity that James talks about is more evident. Here is a rig that any sailor can understand and handle, thanks to the magic of hydraulic assist. The headsail sheets run not under the deck, but along the side decks just as they would on any normal sailing yacht. The crew complement is four, but the feeling is so confidence-inspiring that you can easily imagine sailing the boat alone.

Taking the wheel in five knots of wind, things on deck are supremely relaxed. We head into the wind matching wind speed with boat speed – “as a rule of thumb, she’ll go as fast as the wind on most points of sail” James adds as we ghost out to sea.

Right, top to bottom: Clever design in the dining seats that swivel and lock under the table when not in use; the forward guest area is the yacht’s best feature; the master cabin

So far, James hasn’t tried to eke out the maximum, but he’s already seen 17 knots come up on the log, a fairly exceptional speed when you consider that so many yachts in the 80-130ft range hit a brick wall at about 12 knots.

This helming station, protected as it is by that well-placed sun awning, is a very pleasant place to be, with generous inclines on each side so you can stand straight while she heels, good forward visibility under the jib and the huge wheel that sinks under the sole moving easily and smoothly through the hands. The headsails and running backstays lead to three huge winches on each side, with foot pedals to tap into the boat’s hydraulic muscle. Dials read out the pressure on these – in four knots of wind, the mainsail exerts 3.5 tonnes on the Dyneema standing backstay, which feels like an iron rod.

The Hoek-trademark double-cockpit deck layout is the boat’s greatest asset. It offers two large, distinct seating areas, each easily accommodating a dozen souls, giving the boat a generous outdoor feel.

There are also many other spots from which to enjoy life on deck, for instance on the outward-facing sidedeck settees or among the acres of foredeck space. It will come as no surprise that the overall feeling is supremely comfortable and pleasant. What Hoek and Claasen have created here is probably superlative if this is what you are after. They refused to be drawn on price, but I can’t imagine you would get much change out of £20 million. It is a pleasure to think at least a few of these huge yachts that line the marinas of places like Antibes and Saint-Tropez are real sailing yachts – and very nice ones at that.