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The SuperYacht Times

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(L-R) Seahawk - Unfurled - Perseus 3

Gemma Fottles

It's easy to imagine that the sailing yacht market has always accounted for a relatively small number of the global superyacht fleet, but just a few decades ago in 1940, sailing yachts actually comprised 49% of the total fleet. Today, that percentage has dropped dramatically, coming in at only 16%. With the exponential development of new technologies and engineering, it's unsurprising that these original figures have decreased as motor yachts became increasingly sophisticated and transformed into the refined superyachts dominating the likes of Cannes and Monaco today. What is perhaps surprising is just how much of a hit the sailing market has taken over the years.

The reasons for this are multifaceted; from the rise in clients from Russia and eastern Europe who are not traditionally interested in sailing yachts; client driven innovation leading to limited innovation from shipyards and designers; less investors interested in the sailing yacht market, especially after the Financial Crisis; limitations to the development of standardisation within the market; and a very small number of new sailing yacht designers entering the industry - to name but a few.

Amongst the many consequences of these dwindling numbers of new sailing superyachts is that innovation has all but ground to a halt. This is problematic, as innovation could certainly lead to a substantial boost to the sector. Here we ask some of the most important names in sailing their thoughts on improving the sailing yacht market for everybody.

What is the single biggest stumbling block for innovation within the sailing yacht industry?

Germán Frers - In my opinion the biggest stumbling block for innovation is a combination of tradition, routine, lack of interest on the part of the parties normally involved in developing new projects, cost, and possible risks. It is the responsibility of the creative group to present all innovations

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The racing yacht market has been, at times, a good cautionary tale of what not to do

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with well proven documentation of potential practical and aesthetic consequences to builders, owners, and project managers.

Malcolm McKeon - I don't feel there is one single biggest stumbling block; performance has become more of a priority with sailing superyachts, and as a result they have become increasingly more complicated in recent years with hi-tech sail plans and sailing systems. This has caused the building and running costs to increase significantly. Re-sale has also been hit, and with a number of yachts on the second-hand market, owners are understandably more cautious when it comes to building a new superyacht.

Ron Holland - The yachting industry's tendency to overvalue tradition. For example, if a builder has been successful building steel yachts, there is an understandable preference to not pioneer aluminium or composite construction systems.

Many of the world's sailing yacht designers have been established for a number of years, with the number of new sailing yacht designers limited. How can the industry encourage more designers to come to the fore?

Philippe Briand - The market for sailing yachts is at a very low point at this time... Designers tend to go where there are owners that purchase boats!

Matt Bridge, Doyle Sails - Owners, whilst

willing to take some risks with progressive designs that feature high performance sailing features and modern, sometimes polarising, aesthetics, are less willing to do so with untried designers. In their defence, the stalwarts of the design industry are very talented so it's hard for a new player to make an impression in what is a relatively small market. I also think the industry needs to do far more to encourage women into its ranks. In this day and age, it's an anachronism that I can't think of a single female sailing yacht designer.

Stéphane Levee, Perini Navi

- Historically, designers cut their teeth and made a name for themselves on the racing circuit. Unfortunately, due to the preponderance of one-design racing and a professionalisation of elite sailing, very few new designers have been able to build a high-profile international reputation. This leaves them at a disadvantage when competing against established firms. This state of affair is compounded by the current sluggishness of the market where well established firms are competing hard for the few active owners.

Ron Holland - I see a problem with the trend towards academic learning rather than a more 'hands on' traditional approach. Just qualifying from school as a yacht designer misses the benefit of practical

boatyard or design studio learning. This is critical to gaining the best experience.

To kickstart interest and innovation in the sailing yacht market, do you think the creation of a new semi-custom platform or class in the 35 to 60 metre range could work, offering a level of standardisation?

Malcolm McKeon - I think Perini have done this very successfully over many years, however I believe clients spending a large amount of money on a sailing yacht are looking for total customisation. Sailing yacht owners are generally very passionate about the product and are looking for individuality.

Germán Frers - Standardisation via semi custom platforms have been somewhat successful in the power yacht market as a way to reduce costs and in vessels where the deficit in performance has been overcome by more cheap fossil fuel consumption. But standardisation would stop development where it is needed; hull performance. Definitely not a good idea on sailing yachts!

Matt Bridge, Doyle Sails - Southern Wind Shipyard have had phenomenal success with their range of 100' models, as have Nautor with their new Swan 115 line, (they sold four before the first one even hit the water) so there is clearly a market for this concept. Having said that, for every owner who finds this appealing there is one who wants a fully custom offering and even those who do opt for a more standardised platform are rarely content with the base package and often upgrade where they can. I think the yards who are catering to this part of the market are probably already fulfilling the demand.

What do you see as the most important innovations in the sailing yacht market over the last 10 years, and what do you envision being introduced in the foreseeable future?

Stéphane Levee, Perini Navi - The two key areas specific to superyacht sailing that have seen

16%
of the superyacht
fleet28,476ft
total LOA of all 732
sailing yachts in the
superyacht fleet



superyacht innovation?



the most development are sail handling and keel solutions. We are now capable of pushing the boats harder and faster whilst improving the safety on board and reducing failures. Sail furling has improved dramatically, including the capacity to furl spin-nakers. Captive winches and furlers are stronger, faster, and quieter. Whilst there are still improvements on sail handling to come, we as an industry should be mindful of the escalation in price and should be looking for solutions to propose more efficient and economic yachts. Whilst this doesn't sound exciting, it is paramount to the survival of our industry. The racing yacht market has been, at times, a good cautionary tale of what not to do.

Malcolm McKeon - Carbon fibre has been one of the most beneficial introductions to the superyacht industry allowing for ever increasing size of yachts as the rig and rigging has been significantly reduced in weight, allowing for increased performance and safety.

39m
average LOA

Philippe Briand - I see the future in hydrofoils technology. The primary underlying issue with the development of this was the shape, which needs to be strong enough to support tremendous dynamic forces and light enough to avoid penalising the performance. The new America's Cup catamarans performed an impressive show of what can now be done. Such technologies simplify many issues and open new horizons.

What's your opinion on improving the sailing yacht market? Let us know at news@superyachttimes.com.

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