

Quintessence

De Vries's first SL39

It is widely believed that Feadship first contemplated a semi-production series in 2005. In fact they cooperated in the '60s with Carlo Riva on a range called the Caravelle. Only four of these extremely pretty raised-pilot-house motor yachts were built and three are still sailing today. However, even the 21st-century semi-series concept was mooted before 2005. In fact the yard tasked Paul Manting with looking into the concept some years before; that led to a design of around 60 metres, Henk de Vries told me. That, though, was not to be the final product and planning continued culminating with the concept being presented to captains at the Feadship rendezvous in Amsterdam on 27th April, 2005.



That meeting revealed the SL36, the F45 and the XL (giga yacht) concept. The F45, the first of which we covered in issue 86, was not just announced but afterwards we actually attended the keel laying. The XL has yet to materialise (though there are today near-100-metre projects on at least one of the group's yard order books). The SL36 concept was explained and then we all sat down with drawings, paper and scissors (p210 bottom) to create our very own custom SL36. As indicated by the keel laying, Royal van Lent started their first F45 on spec. Koninklijke de Vries, though, decided to be more conservative and delayed starting until they had a client – although of course they went ahead with pre engineering and during the wait the LOA increased and stabilised at 39 metres.

While the two yachts share a common semi-custom (or, as the yard calls it, semi series) designation they are really quite different. The 45 has a fixed profile and layout and customisation restricted theoretically to a number of set interior styles. (Ironically the first F45 had a near custom Don Starkey interior.) The SL39 is a different concept and one that really is semi custom. The key to this is a carefully engineered platform. The analogy the builder uses is to a classic Rolls-Royce which was built on a chassis and whose bodywork could be Cabriolet, Brougham or whatever the owner desires. For the SL39 this means an immutable hull form, fixed engineering casings and a central area with services within and an equipment package that does not change. Crew accommodations are semi fixed,

although there is some room to add one more cabin down (with, for example, the captain's cabin on the bridge) or even have four cabins only down. Beyond this the profile can be widely variable and each yacht unique in profile as the two other SL39 profiles shown below. I was even shown an explorer version and a totally radical even outrageous design concept that despite a look as unusual as M/Y A's was still at base an SL39.

There are three SL39 yachts in build: *Ocean Mercury*, just delivered, which is a De Voogt /Disdale design; the second from Guido de Groot/Dickie Bannenberg, which is due later in '08; and the third a De Voogt/Fokkema coming next year. These are all radically different and, as can be seen from the renderings, which also illustrate proposals from Adam Lay (p209 top), Bannenberg (p209 middle top), Remi Tessier (p209 middle bottom) and Terence Disdale (p209 bottom). Fokkema were the winners of the Dutch design competition sponsored by Feadship and awarded at the MYS 06. On Synfo there is a 110-page PDF illustrating the entries, and their concepts including Fokkema who have not previously designed a yacht interior. The second yacht has a client, while the third was as, of my visit in May, still a spec build.

The sales department at Feadship refined the paper-and-scissors technique and produced a series of cabin model/modules (top of p210) and these can be slotted into the platform, to experiment with a variety of layouts from the classic upper captain cabin on the enclosed bridge to an opened Med style skylounge running straight through to the bridge.

I visited *Ocean Mercury* a few times in build and finally in late May just pre-handover. Unfortunately shots of the yacht are few since I was treated to an excess of Dutch liquid sunshine, then the owner's understandable desire to get on board has prevented an interior photo shoot to date. The reality, though, closely follows Disdale's renderings. Feadship will not reveal gross tonnages of their yachts, but eyeballing it I'd say *Ocean Mercury* is a high-volume 39-metre, though not as relatively voluminous as the F45 which surely pushes hard against its self-imposed 500-gt limit.



One key element to the engineering systems of the yacht is the central air-conditioning system which lies behind the master suite on the main deck. In this first SL39 it's separated by a service corridor which also offers the advantage of a noise-damping air gap. The air handler is the sole one for the whole yacht and connects via refrigerant gas (not chill water) to the compressors directly below in the engine room. It's a tight squeeze but one can access the air handler space and all vent and ducting controls may be adjusted there rather than in-cabin.

This, like the F45, is a true turnkey yacht – I was given the provisional spec of the third yacht and from that its clear all loose deck furniture and a host of other items inside and outside the yacht are supplied including an AV hybrid Kaleidescape/Linn AV system all subject to a PC sum of €780,000. I also saw in the spec an ominous caveat in the section on deck joinery (such caveat, I am sure, is not restricted to Feadship). Regarding teak decking amongst other definitions and specifications it used the phrase: "Teak subject to future availability"!

A significant aspect of the build is careful pre engineering; it's there that the expected savings will be made. To accommodate that (though not at all obvious in the profile) the headroom is enormous – some 2.5 metres – offering vast space above overheads for services and ducting. Like the F45, the engine room is quite small and I doubt the size would have been practical had they not specified 2 MTU 12V2000 M70s with their large power density and very small footprint. The hull design is very slippy indeed and though full testing had not been carried out Feadship engineers were well pleased with the fuel economy; expected fuel burn figures were massively less than predicted. Generators are equipped with a Hamann regenerating catalysing soot reduction system. The 150 kVA Kohler generator exhausts run to dry stacks aloft. There is even an – albeit fairly tiny – control room. Small the machinery space may be but it is heavily equipped; there is even a biomass sewage system by Holland Marine Service Amsterdam. A bioreactor is something generally considered impossible under 60 metres; this one is, though, not Miami Dade approved and of a lower spec than the RoChem units Feadship fit to the larger yachts, Bas Nederpelt told me.

The accommodation is as classic in layout as the yacht is in her exterior look. Captain's cabin is on the bridge and there is a full-beam skylounge. Main salon and dining and galley are on the main deck with three crew cabins and their mess down and forward. There is a central guest stairway of unusual open design (stylistically mirroring those on deck) leading down to two twins and two doubles. These are versatile and can be converted to large suites by opening sliding, interconnecting doors. In this mode the twin beds are rearranged into an L-shaped sofa. This profile is very much that of a classic Feadship with





vague deco hints. These latter are found in the fan motif aft on the bridge deck, the air intake/output grilles and the large radius features (see below) aft of the bridge wings. Main and bridge deck superstructures are in a very light dove grey, an effective and more subtle contrast than the more conventional black. In a similar manner to the F45 the Novurania tenders and jet ski in the lazarette are launched and recovered by inclining the swim platform down rather than by cranes. A further jet ski is stored and launched from the foredeck; it's stored aft for ocean-crossing placing voyages. This area also has a dive compress or technical and storage lockers. There is here a transformer but no shore power system. The Firefighting fog system is located here and engine-room fire suppression is by Novec.

owner who doesn't want to wait, doesn't want to customise the yacht and would rather buy one as one would a luxury car. The owners, too, it was thought might be relatively inexperienced. In that, oddly, I think the concept has failed – though failed in a good way. In fact, neither yacht has attracted solely that demographic of client and the type of buyer has turned out to be as diverse as it is for their custom yachts. Yes, there are young relatively inexperienced clients but there are also much older and highly experienced ones too. The first F45 went to an experienced owner as will the second SL39, and the owner of *Ocean Mercury* is also already a yachtsman. The SL39 has also attracted the attention of clients who are interested in buying a yacht for very-high-end fractional ownership schemes or to be used in an again high-end resort and charter package. It would also, I'd say, be ideally suited to the multiple-yacht owner such as the Russian gentlemen who had Burger build him two *Aretis*.

De Vries are preparing to start a second run of SL39s; the first will be delivered in 2010 with the others following at nine-month intervals. The third SL is anticipated to sell soon; after all, as Bas pointed out, "We sold two of them from the drawing board and now we have the first one in the water." Finally I asked Bas if Feadship generally and de Vries specifically intended to apply the SL concept at larger sizes and the answer was, for now, no. They feel as a group with the 39 and 45 the semi series demand is adequately served and see no reason to create, for example, a 60-metre. That may be wise as an SL60 would risk stealing custom clients away from themselves.

The SL and F series are new, yet in many ways not. Talk to any old Feadship engineer and they will say that under the skin most 50-metre Feadships of a similar age had very similar technical platforms and indeed what Oceanco



This first SL39 is uncompromisingly Feadship. This applies to build quality both in front of and behind the scenes. This was seen as key by the yard. The only things that set her apart from her custom sisters are the cost savings and efficiency of the engineering design and the restricted opportunity to customise. Does the concept work? Obviously it's hard to say definitively as we don't know the savings that the yard has made, but if these are as they expected then given sales to date it is a success for Koninklijke de Vries.

In the market place these semi-custom Feadships were designed to appeal to the new

Thus SL39 and F45 are failures that are in fact a market-broadening success. However, for me the SL39 is particularly successful given that the yacht that can be genuinely individualised – truly the Rolls-Royce with its individual coachwork. In this the SL39 may best its Royal van Lent F45 semi-series sister. If a client doesn't like the exterior of the F45 then the sale is lost. If they don't like *Ocean Mercury* then no problem, let's have a profile by Guido de Groot, or whomever the client chooses; all this while still offering the yard and client respectively increased profits and a relatively reduced cost.

are doing with their 70-series, Amels with Limited Editions and indeed Benetti and CRN's 50-metre plus yachts are not different from the SL concept in broad brush. However, in a detail sense, the SL platform is very rigidly controlled and I must assume very successful for the de Vries P & L sheets.

Tork Buckley

Photos: Tork Buckley and Feadship Renderings kindly supplied by Bannenberg, Terence Disdale Design, Adam Lay and Rémi Tessier

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