

Ocean Star 51.2 Exclusive tested by Yachting World

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Ocean Yachts were launched seven years ago by brothers Emmanuel and Costas Anargyrou. After running a successful yard in Brazil building powerboats, the brothers returned to Greece and set up Ocean Yachts in premises just outside Athens.

The company now build 14 yachts a year, many for the domestic charter market. Recently they have been looking at the owner market and the Ocean Star 51.2 Exclusive is the result. Based on the existing 51.2 model, she features a new layout, a souped-up three-spreader rig and a new keel and spade rudder.



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The building process is in stark contrast to the mechanized efficiency of the German or French mass production yards. There is a maximum of five boats in production at any one time - it takes 5,800 man hours to build a 51.2 Exclusive. All boats are built to order, which means semi-custom requests can easily be accommodated.

The boats are laid up in a split mould allowing a large internal flange to be formed for the hull to deck join. The hulls are a solid laminate below the waterline with Coremat used above while the decks use balsa core. But laminated into the hulls while still in the mould is the most elaborate stiffening grid I've ever seen. It stretches from the forward watertight bulkhead to a metre or two short of the transom and is almost 2ft deep in places. Overkill? Maybe, but the hull is certainly stronger for it.

Deck details

The 51.2 is not a particularly sleek boat. The high coachroof running all the way forward to the chain locker gives her a bulky appearance, and a raised section ahead of the cockpit, while improving shelter and providing stowage for the dodger, does little to reduce this. But her appearance is hardly offensive and there's not a lot to set her apart from many other European production cruising boats.

The Exclusive version of the 51.2 sports a triple-spreader mast, cutter-rigged with a self-tacking staysail. Genoa and staysail are both roller-furled while the main is fully battened with single-line reefing.

The mainsheet track spans the whole coachroof giving plenty of control over the boom, but its position well ahead of the companionway puts it very far forward. Apart from the considerable stress this must place on the boom, it also has the inevitable result of taking the sheet out of reach of the helmsman. One solution would be to move the traveller controls aft, something that could very easily be done.

By contrast, the primary winches, mounted well inboard on 'buttresses', are within easy reach and in a good position for grinding. Not that we had to do much of that: the test boat had electric primaries and one electric halyard winch too. Two large electric motors within inches of the wheels would play havoc with the steering compasses so a centrally mounted compass sits at the aft end of the cockpit table with fluxgate displays at each wheel.

This boat has loads of space for all the necessities of cruising. You could graze a small herd of goats in the lazarette, which has access via a hatch in the cockpit sole and another under one of the helmsman's seats. Another 51.2 has an occasional bunk for extra crew fitted here, right alongside the generator. Nice. There are another two large lockers on the swim platform and a huge forward locker too. This is usually fitted out as a crew cabin but would make a fantastic workshop for long-distance cruising. Ahead of this is the chain locker.



(Photos Yachting World)

Impressive interior

Although the 51.2 had few surprises on deck, the interior impressed us. There's nothing in particular that stands out as daringly different, but somehow you know this boat wasn't built by machines. Descending a very secure companionway, flanked by strong handholds above and below deck, you enter a spacious saloon. The test boat was finished with a cherry veneer and satin varnish with a pale headlining broken up by strips of dark trim. Ocean Yachts also offer a beautiful teak interior, seen on another 51.2.

The woodwork is solid and nicely finished all round, the odd uneven gap being the only qualm. The doors in particular are beautifully made and feature quality fittings with a heavy, solid action. There are magnetic catches on all doors to hold them open, and extra catches so they can be left slightly ajar. That immense under-floor grid seems to work too; there are no creaks or groans anywhere.

Unusually, the saloon table is mounted athwart ships, making room for the chart table to tuck in abaft it. This in turn allows the longitudinal galley to extend the full length of the saloon. It has plenty of workspace with a neat Corian-style counter top and high wooden fiddles, and a large chest freezer, front-opening fridge and separate icemaker should keep the supply " if refreshment (lowing, but with no saloon island there's nothing to keep the cook in place on starboard tack I found the chart table short of legroom but then not everyone is 6ft 4in and it did make it easy to stay wedged in. The table is a reasonable size if a little shallow, but there's the option of having a wider table with an extended instrument binnacle. Hinged switchboard panels here makes access to the electrics simple and gave me a glimpse of very neat wiring looms inside.

The layout features a large owner's cabin up forward and two double guest cabins aft. The owner's cabin is particularly comfortable, with a large island bed and spacious dressing table/desk. Leecloths would be essential if this bunk is to be used at sea, though. All cabins are ensuite with separate shower stalls in all but the port aft head. The aft cabins are comfortable enough, with room to stand up and get dressed, but a little stark and short on natural light. Hull ports, available as an option, were fitted to another boat we saw and make a big difference.

Huge removable panels on either side give excellent access to the 100hp Yanmar. With these removed and the companionway lifted, the engine is easy to get at. Under way it was a blustery day off Athens when we sailed the Exclusive, with an icy breeze reaching 30 knots at times. We set off under full sail on a broad reach and were soon doing over nine knots, hitting a high for the day of 9.5 knots in 22 knots apparent. She felt stable and controllable even when flirting with a gybe dead downwind.

The Jefa rod-linked mechanical steering system, with self-aligning bearings, gives the helm a beautifully light and direct feel, with none of that slack 'sogginess' often associated with twin wheels. I thought the wheels felt a bit low initially, but they just took a bit of getting used to and were a good height if you tend to do most of your driving sitting down - not a bad thing for a cruising boat. The position is comfortable with lots of things to brace against and it's great having the genoa sheet an arm's length away, but a wider coaming outboard for the helmsman to sit out on would be good. Hardening up onto a beat, it quickly became apparent that we were over-canvassed. With the mainsheet and traveller controls far away from me, not to mention the language problems with the Greek crew, it was too late to do anything about it when we started rounding up. The helm remained light so there wasn't much warning either, but fortunately the boat came back on course without much fuss.

We eventually settled down under single-reefed main and staysail. The helm remained light and responsive and the log quickly crept up to over 7 knots, staying there with little attention. Under this sail plan the boat felt secure and the self-tacking staysail, rather than an inefficient half-furled genoa, meant I could tack when and where I wanted with no help from the crew. This was a good thing, because with the staysail sheet on the coach roof, along with the main, I was left with no control of the sails. Still, the boat went through a series of quick luffs very smartly.

Heading back to the marina, the grumpy 100hp Yanmar made quick work of motoring into 30 knots of breeze. Not surprisingly, with that deep spade rudder she was quick to turn under power too but a bowthruster is a popular option.



(Photos Yachting World)

Conclusion

Ocean Yachts are a good example of how a small yard can build production boats the old-fashioned way and still be competitive. She's a big, safe, dependable cruising boat that seems to be built with great care. Overall the boat's performance was impressive too and with a decent set of sails should be a lot better. But the Ocean Star is not cheap and mass-produced boats are getting better - their builders have been at it for a long time and know what they're doing. You could save money by being less of an individual, but then again it's difficult to put a cost on having something slightly different.