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WOW

WHAT A WALLY!



Esense is the first of a new generation of supercruisers from Wally, who have once again redefined the way we go sailing. David Glenn sailed the 143ft 'Wally with attitude' out of Ancona in Italy



Sunset on the Adriatic. A dramatic shot of *Esense* highlights the aft-facing windows leading from the 'terrace on the sea' to the main saloon

Gilles Martin Page

Just when I thought I'd seen it all for 2006 – I mean, how could you top a 14-knot day out aboard the 288ft *Maltese Falcon* – along came the Wally 143 *Esense*. Wow, what a yacht and what a Wally! This is, by some margin, the most exciting large sailing yacht I have been aboard for some time. She manages to combine a potentially explosive performance and a revolutionary deck design with an interior that could pass as a Tate Modern exhibit.

A little more on that performance. The sensation we sometimes experience sailing yachts over 120ft can be akin to driving through mud, but this yacht delivers something very different. She is an extraordinarily responsive sailing yacht with a silky 60-footer feel, uncanny aboard a yacht measuring 3ft more than *Mari-Cha IV*. In short this is one impressive yacht.

It's a result: only someone like Wally's Luca Bassani could have achieved. Together with forward-thinking American naval architect Bill Tripp, he has stepped seamlessly from mere superyacht to megayacht proportions, the largest previous Wally being *Kenora* at 107ft and *Wally B* at 106ft.

Wally have excelled in the 88ft to 100ft

bracket, with some rocket ships like *Tiketitan* and *Magic Carpet*, the Javier Soto Acebal-designed *Alexia* and the German Frers-drawn *Y3K*, so why the need for such an enormous, and some might say risky, leap to 140ft plus?

It's simply the way the market is heading, with owners hungry for bigger, faster, altogether sexier yachts. And Wally are masters of combining trend setting and brilliant ideas with an understanding of what clients want.

As we dined in Ancona after our sail on *Esense*, Luca Bassani revealed that the



Luca Bassani in reflective mood on the bow of *Esense*

company have "at least six clients looking for something in excess of 100ft, some closer to 150ft". It seems there is a growing number who want seriously high-speed sailing – 'anything the America's Cup can do, we can do better' is the mantra being adopted.

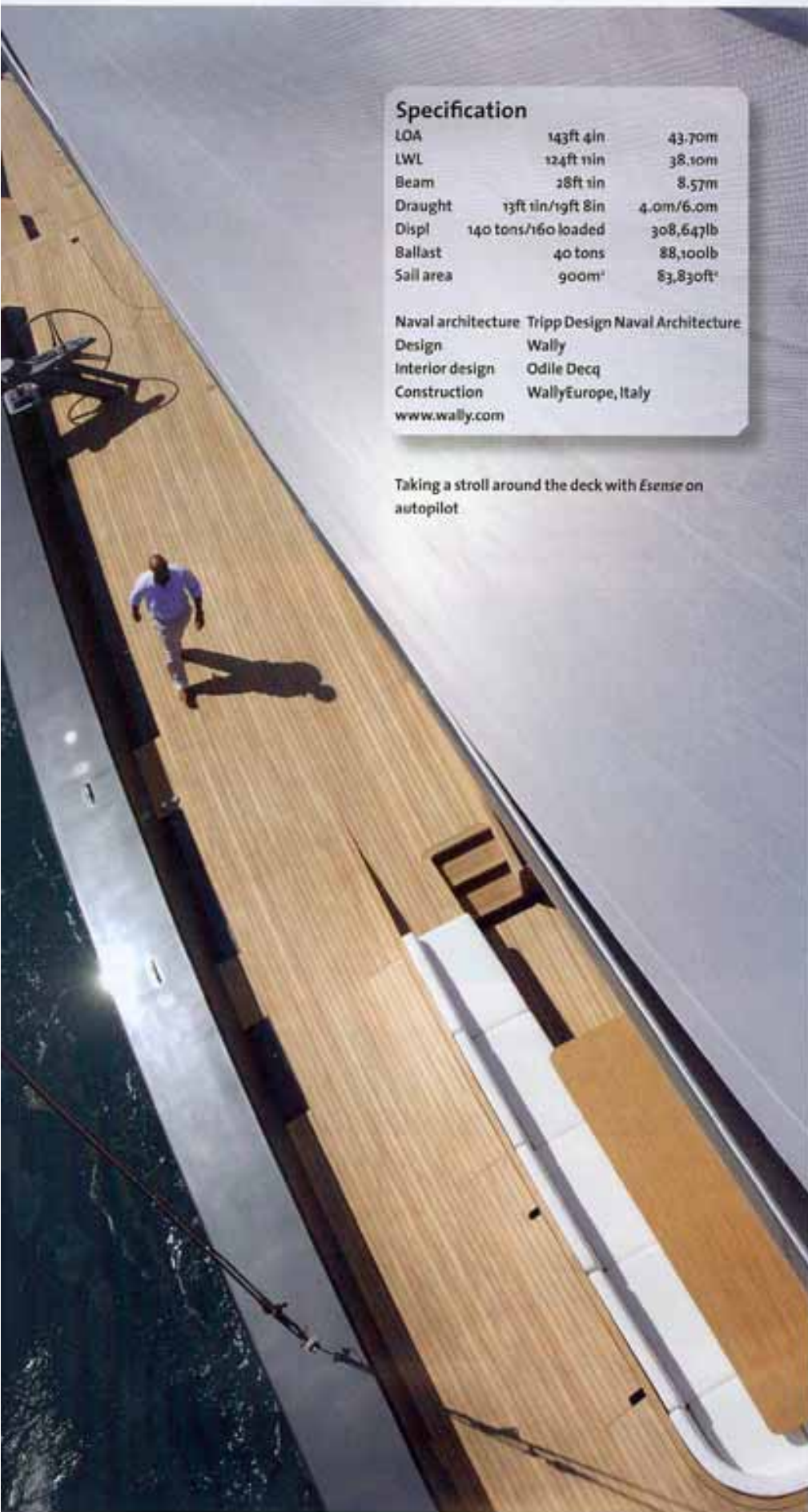
Esense is the first of a batch of new-generation supercruisers being rolled out of the WallyEurope yard in Fano on Italy's Adriatic coast. The two others in build are the Tripp-designed 148-footer *Saudade* for Albert Bull, the legendary German Admiral's Cup maestro turned high-speed cruising fanatic who wanted something a bit different, and a 130-footer by Javier Soto Acebal, a high-tech speedster predicted to be the fastest upwind sailing yacht in the world. Sadly, her Japanese owner recently died but his family have asked that the project be completed. Both yachts are due to launch in 2008.

Current benchmark

All three yachts have either lift keels (*Esense* and *Saudade*) or a canting system (the 130) and the latter's performance will be further enhanced with 11 tons of water ballast. When you consider *Esense* displaces around 160 tons with her tanks full and *Saudade* is predicted to be around the 195-ton mark, one has to wonder what the 130 will be capable of, tipping the scales at just 84 tons! It's a figure 'helped' by an ultra high-modulus, custom-tooled Hall Spars mast.

But *Esense* is the current benchmark and we could only marvel at the beautiful beast. ▶▶

It's the way the market is heading, with owners hungry for bigger, faster, sexier yachts



Specification

LOA	143ft 4in	43.70m
LWL	124ft 11in	38.10m
Beam	28ft 1in	8.57m
Draught	13ft 11in/19ft 8in	4.0m/6.0m
Displ	140 tons/160 loaded	308,647lb
Ballast	40 tons	88,100lb
Sail area	900m ²	83,830ft ²

Naval architecture Tripp Design Naval Architecture
 Design Wally
 Interior design Odile Decq
 Construction WallyEurope, Italy
www.wally.com

Taking a stroll around the deck with Esense on autopilot



She may be 143ft, but this is a genuine single-hander with touch-screen control



Twin wheels flank a control console and on-screen navigation station



Deck lights inboard of the bulwark illuminate the cabin by day and the deck by night

Photos: Oliva Martin Project

as she lay serenely alongside her trials berth, an unseemly length of dock in Ancona.

Esense might be big – she's 13ft longer than the biggest J Class – may weigh 160tons and spread almost 84,000ft² of plain sail, but I'm not exaggerating when I say one person can get her off the dock, set her main and jib and be sailing in something approaching five minutes. Tacking? No problem, another one-man operation with the self-tacking blade... and there's not a captive winch in sight.

Stunning deck

It's all made possible by Max Power bow and stern thrusters, Cariboni roller headsail gear and Marten in-boom furling, Magic Trim sheet controls and handling which defies logic for a yacht of this size.

On first sight it's not her towering Hall Spars carbon rig, the promise of her performance or even her sheer size which grabs you – it's her deck. To be precise, it is the combination of her deck and bulwarks that stun the first-time observer.

The concept, Luca Bassani tells us, was developed directly from conversations with the owner (a first-time owner incidentally) who was keen not to be constrained by the ergonomics seen in conventional deck layout. "If she wanted the dining table and chairs on the foredeck on one day, she could have them there and then move them all to the terrace on the sea or amidships the following day," explained Bassani as he led us over the vast expanse of laid teak.

Thigh-high bulwarks

But more extraordinary to my eye were the bulwarks which enclose the deck forward of the so-called terrace on the sea, the lower aft deck which remains a strong Wally trademark. The bulwarks are formed of a thigh-high coaming which is an extension of the pre-preg carbon hull moulding. This provides the upstand which then returns inboard creating a handy flat surface upon which one can sit. This can be achieved because the 123 was built using a two-part 'split' mould with the two halves of the hull bonded together on the centreline.

The bulwark does, of course, perform many more tasks, the most important, but least obvious, being a crucial engineering role. "Its angled form provides a very effective longitudinal girder carrying the compression from the rig and sailing loads," said Bill Tripp.

It also creates a lot of useful stowage for hardware and chunky bits of service machinery which would normally take up precious space below decks, fortuitous as there's very little yacht beneath the water – in other words, minimal bilge space. The large



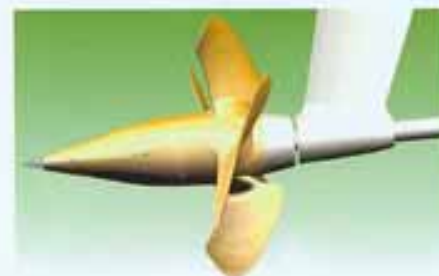
Above: cleats, anchor windlass, warping drum all located below decks. Right: not bad going – 11 knots in 8.4 knots of true wind. And it's early days...



Left: simple controls for mainsheet and blade jib trim on the steering console. Above: Hall Spars have mounted all their turning blocks on a mast collar rather than on the deck

Cariboni Magic Trim rams for the mainsheet system, one each side of the yacht, are mounted in lockers built into the bulwarks.

When *Esense* is getting close to optimum heel angle, the big deck starts to look 'interesting' for anyone contemplating a traverse. One stumble and there's a long way to go to the scuppers. But for some reason



Servogear's four-bladed VP propeller with its unusual glassfibre tapered hub

there's a great feeling of safety, of being contained in one enormous cockpit. You can't 'slip through the lifelines' because that big bulwark is there to protect you.

Working on the foredeck is a breeze. The crew can work within a completely enclosed space with little fear of sails being washed overboard during a change.

Finally, there's the privacy and wind protection factor. Even on a hot sunny day in the Med, if *Esense* is sailing upwind at 28° apparent with a true wind speed of, say, ten knots, the apparent wind speed across the deck is going to be 20 knots plus, close to 25. This can play havoc with your hair, seriously dehydrate the skin and rip the pages from your new copy of *Tatler*. But with those bulwarks you don't have to confine yourself to the 'terrace'. Instead pick your spot almost anywhere on deck and the chances are you'll find some pretty effective shelter.

View to the 'terrace on the sea' and beyond. The distinctive styling is by Odile Decq



Absolute symmetry looking forward in the main saloon



Eye-level storage in the saloon, just below the bulwark. Left: forward corner of the saloon, which converts to a sleeping cabin in a matter of minutes

The apparent wind can play havoc with your hair and rip the pages from your copy of *Tatler*

I tasked Graham Pickering, Wally's long-standing delivery and commissioning skipper, what it would be like if you took one green over the bow – there's not a lot to stop a big chunk of water thundering aft. Precisely – it just disappears over the 'terrace', said Graham. There is little to carry away and if things got really serious, dodgers, which can be deployed over the companionways, could be stowed flush. One has to say that *Esense's* freeboard forward is so enormous the chances of taking it green must be minimal.

But for our day's sail there was very little chance of any of the Adriatic darkening the deck. Clearing the dock was interesting

because it revealed the warping drums, cleats and fairleads hidden below the deck in lockers fore and aft. These wells contain all mooring equipment, keeping the deck clean when not in use.

We thundered out of Ancona harbour with the 550hp Caterpillar driving the yacht's four-bladed Servogear variable-pitch propeller. The latter is an interesting design with high-skewed blades, the pitch of which is altered by a push rod running inside the prop shaft. There's also a tapered propeller cap running off the end of the hub, which improves efficiency and reduces noise and vibration. *Esense* can easily reach 14 knots

under power with very little propeller 'rumble' although the main engine itself seemed a little noisy while we were below.

Faster than the wind

Within minutes we were sailing under full main (North/Wally 3DL) and blade self-tacker and as the catspaws of wind merged to something more steady, *Esense* leant into it and was immediately sailing at between two and three knots faster than the true wind. At this stage the yacht's 40-ton lift keel was fully deployed, providing us with 19ft 8in of draught, a big torpedo bulb suspended on a short-chord fin.

This is a yacht that has to be steered on instruments because, in the light, the apparent breeze is pulled forward so quickly it can easily disorientate you. Even in 8.4 knots of true breeze *Esense* was showing boat speed on the B&G of 11 knots and in 8.8 knots



Photo: Getty Images/Alamy



Above: that's one big Hall Spars rig. Right: Graham Pickering is Wally's commissioning skipper. Far right: Davide Legati of Wally's technical department and 'Stew' Sanderson from Wally USA.



Photo: D. Clemens/Alamy

An eighth of a turn on the wheel would have the 143-footer's nose twitching left or right

we were up to 11.2. Sailing her at 28° to 30° off the breeze seemed perfectly possible without the numbers suffering – and it's early days. With code sails and a racing main – there's quite a lot of margin for additional roach – the numbers could be significantly improved upon. Mind-boggling stuff.

I think we cracked 12 knots that day but suffice it to say her performance in the light to moderate airs was astounding. A point worth noting – *Esense* is 143ft LOA but her waterline length is almost 20ft shorter. It doesn't take much heel angle to increase her sailing waterline length hugely.

When I took *Esense's* wheel Luca Bassani said: "I've switched it to electronic mode – it's the one I like!" I could see what he meant. Just an eighth of a turn of the wheel would have the 143-footer's nose twitching left or right against the Marche countryside. The yacht responded almost immediately to the helm, something one could feel through the system and, as the wind built steadily, there was a corresponding increase in feedback.

There are three steering modes, which designer Bill Tripp describes like this:

- Manual with power assist. The boat can be steered by a hydraulic power assist system like a car. Turning the wheel manually moves hydraulic fluid through cylinders, turning the rudder and transmitting rudder pressure directly back to the helmsman. A load-sensing rotary pump, activated by turning the wheel, adds pressure to the system in addition to that being applied by the helmsman. This power assist means that slight turns of wheel really move the boat around. It also means the wheel will centre normally unlike a standard hydraulic system.
- Using the wheel as a joystick. The system can be switched so that the wheel can be moved half a turn to move the rudder 70° (full lock to full lock). So a quarter of a turn will put the helm hard over, spinning the boat like a dinghy.
- Hydraulic steering. The boat can be steered hydraulically using a separate back-up system which incorporates the autopilot.

One of the reasons for not having a direct cable system would be the unacceptably high number of turns needed on the wheel to reach full lock. *Esense* clearly has the

potential to be a brilliant sailing yacht.

In a way, the owner, who likes entertaining, has continued the 'open space' policy below decks with French interior designer Odile Decq creating a modern, clean feel with neutral colours occasionally interrupted by a shock of orange. It's all very Wally, although there are some awfully sharp corners.

The entire after section of the accommodation can metamorphose in moments from one enormous space to a separate saloon and two guest cabins, one a single, the other with twin berths. The way in which the cabins convert is ingenious, although some of the finishing, particularly in the sliding doors, needs attention.

Convertibility

The same 'convertibility' can change part of the galley into a bar and reception area for guests entering the accommodation from the amidships companionway.

The owner's accommodation is forward and has an ensuite music-mixing and editing suite (one of the family is a composer, we were told) plus an enormous carbon fibre shower stall which, by pressing a button, converts into a bath – the well lowers into the bilge. Except we couldn't find the switch – "Ah yes, all switches have to be hidden," came the explanation. "So you have to phone Wally to take a bath?" The press were having a field day...!

One can easily see how Odile Decq, while not doing it for me, is able to satisfy the Wally ethos and at the same time provide her client with something practical to live in.

There was one element of this yacht that did disappoint, though – the finish in the engine compartment. While the machinery space in this yacht is reasonable and the layout efficient, there were some rough edges mainly where the compartment's extensive insulation material had been fitted. This seemed out of kilter with normal Wally finish until it was explained to us that it was only after the yacht had been in build for some time that the decision to meet RINA Charter Class specification was made. This is a nightmare for any builder and Davide Legati, head of Wally's technical department, said that it set the project back five months.

But we shouldn't finish on a sour note. This yacht is clearly another breakthrough for the inventive Wally team, which continues to be driven with considerable passion by Luca Bassani. And his passion for performance has clearly done the trick with *Esense*. She should be quite a sight in the Mediterranean next year and in 2008 we'll be waiting with baited breath for the launch of the turbo-charged 130-footer – hold onto your hats...!