World's largest ketch gets her rig

Bill Tripp discusses *Aquijo*, a massive sailing yacht designed to go the distance.

PHOTOGRAPHS: JUSTIN RATCLIFFE (CIRCLE TOP), INGIMAGE/IVAN SMUK (RUBBER BOAT), INGIMAGE (SOUTH OF FRANCE)

As anyone who recalls *Steinlager 2*'s unequaled victory in the 1989-90 Whitbread Round the World Race knows, a big ketch is a wonderfully fast conveyance for sailing around the globe. A ketch rig with two masts of nearly equal height is almost as fast as a sloop upwind, the easiest rig type to balance and off the wind, well, maybe the only thing equal to its ability to fly over the waves is an albatross.

When the yacht built as P85 and now called *Aquijo* laces up her gear and heads out of the North Sea this summer, she'll be the third largest sailing yacht (displacing *Eos*) and largest ketch in operation. She is the result of a unique cooperation between Dutch builders Vitters and Oceanco. While the project's scale – 282 feet long, 47 feet, six inches wide and 1,538 gross tons – is staggering, this yacht's lasting impact may well be in her ability to perform and behave like a sailing yacht: sleek, swift and smooth.

"The yacht is not designed to impress but to be used for long-distance cruising, much of that in the Pacific region [therein lies a reference to the swimming elephant on her bow]," says her U.S. naval architect, Bill Tripp. And while she's not ice classed, she is designed and equipped to sail the high latitudes. Considering that her 299-foot carbon fiber main mast and 297-foot mizzen make her unable to transit the Panama Canal, it made sense to create a yacht that would be comfortable exploring the perimeters of the Antarctic.

"We have a number of clients who come to us with the directive that the boat should sail as much as possible. That's the first, best way to reduce environmental impact," says Tripp. He says the calculations predict the yacht will easily sail at 12 to 18 knots and "twenty if you push it." The yacht has a length to displacement ratio of 88, close to that of some of Tripp's 40-foot racers.

As a designer whose forte has long been racing yachts, Tripp is derisive of things that create drag, thus bow and stern thrusters retract into the hull. Nor are there any anchor pockets: two massive anchors deploy from submarine doors on centerline. Twin canted rudders are muscled by hydraulic rams, but a unique Vitters system uses electronic sensors to provide feedback to the helm. The twin propellers are fully articulating to minimize drag when the yacht is under sail.

The aesthetics of a sailing yacht, even a very large sailing yacht, should be the easy part, but when the directive also calls for a modern exterior styling approach, this is all uncharted territory. The high bulwarks at the bow meet ILO requirements, of course, but also create safety for the passengers and space for tender bays. To flow the correct proportion at the bow with the need for views from the salon aft, Tripp dropped the sheer aft of the wheelhouse, which is at a half deck level above main.

"We absolutely want a side deck around the salon area so that the entire deck has a flow to it and is in use – something that makes a sailboat interactive. The boat has much more outside space in proportion to her gross tonnage, and the change in sheer height was an integral part of making this work," he says.

At anchor, harbor doors open fore and aft on the main and upper deck to let breezes flow through and enhance connections with nature while the scoop-shaped stern opens onto a large lower-level beach club and an articulating platform drops to water level for sea access. The general arrangement for 12 guests and 18 crew was a collaborative effort between Tripp and the German design firm Dölker + Voges, which was also responsible for the interior design. *www.trippdesign.net*

– ***Marilyn Mower***