

SUPERSAIL

WORLD



ST BARTHS BUCKET PREVIEW

BALTIC'S NEW SUPER-CRUISER NIKATA

CRUISING OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

3D PRINTING – A GAME CHANGER?

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NEW AGE CRUISER RACERS





NIKATA IS THE LATEST OF A BREED OF 100-120FT MULTI-ROLE YACHTS. SHE IS PERHAPS THE PUREST VERSION YET, SAYS **TOBY HODGES**

his 35m/115ft carbon bullet launched from Baltic Yachts in Finland in the autumn. She sailed down to the Canaries, swiftly, where one day was made available to get some of these spectacular shots, before her crew made the 3,000-mile crossing to Antigua in December.

During an exhilarating transat she clocked 28.8 knots. "We were getting on for 400-mile days," her skipper reports. She then went straight into her first regatta, the Superyacht Challenge, in January as a means of gearing up for the RORC Caribbean 600.

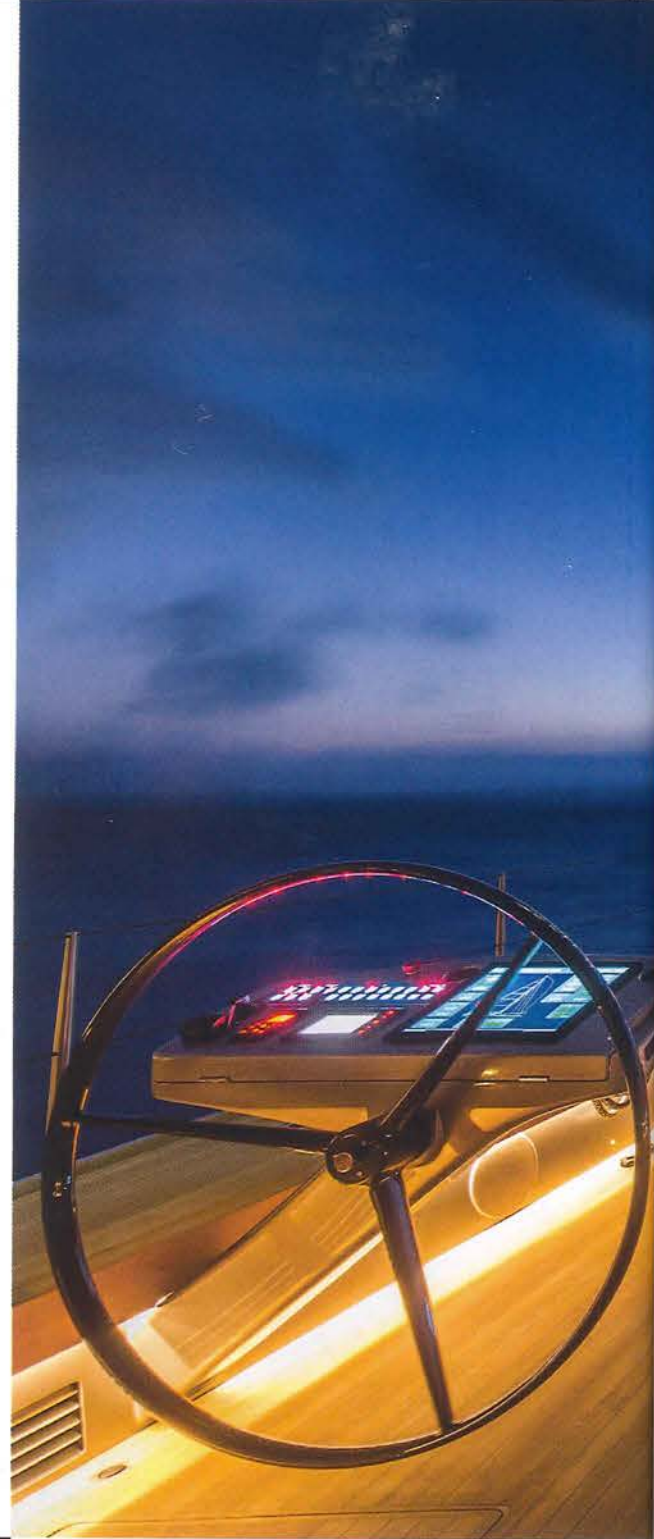
THE 100-120FT CLUB

If you think of cruiser-racers, generally more modest-sized yachts such as the Xs and Swans of recent decades come to mind. What we are now seeing in this latest breed of performance superyachts is the larger equivalent – a real trend of 30-36m/100-120ft composite builds that include some of the most performance-oriented super-cruisers yet. From what we have seen so far, *Nikata* strikes the dual-purpose balance perfectly.

In her first event, the Antigua Superyacht Challenge at the end of January, *Nikata* faced seasoned campaigner *Nilaya*. Filip Balcaen's 34m/112ft *Nilaya* is seen very much as an inspiration for this new cruiser-racer movement.

In between his cruising excursions, Balcaen has consistently won at the various big yacht events he has entered since the yacht's launch six years ago. This achievement can be attributed to her slippery Reichel-Pugh/Nauta design and Baltic build, plus a race crew that includes Bouwe Bekking and some of his Dutch Volvo Ocean Race crew.

"*Nilaya* was a mould-breaker in that respect," says MCM's Nigel Ingram,



All photos: Guido Carlini (except where indicated)

There is a particular enjoyment in proving that the boat you cruise can also race as fast as it can be pushed



The business end of the boat, the aft deck is where *Nikata* can be handled easily by minimal crew, who have separate access to their own accommodation aft, while guests have the substantial, uncluttered leisure cockpits

project manager for both *Nilaya* and *Nikata*. She is the role model that proves an owner can enjoy both sailing disciplines without too much compromise. In the past few years there has been no shortage of new super-cruiser style carbon builds of similar size following suit.

Composite specialists like Baltic, Vitters/Green Marine, Swan, Southern Wind and Wally have since produced some spectacular cruiser-racers – *Inukshuk*, *Inoui* and *WinWin*. “These are genuine dual-purpose boats,” says Ingram. “Not all of them race and not all cruise like *Nikata* will. But the owners share a common love of the excitement of sailing a boat of this size.”

THE COMPETITIVE DRIVE

What is driving this new trend? Mario Pedol, the founder of Nauta Yachts, the Italian firm responsible for the styling of the majority of new yachts built at Baltic, uses Pier Luigi Loro Piana as an example of the evolution of cruiser-racer owners.

Loro Piana’s various yachts called *My Song* over the past few decades range from 15m/50ft to 27m/90ft, and his latest, largest model yet is

rumoured to be in build. “He didn’t come from a racing background, but he liked the aspect of both cruising with family and racing,” says Pedol. “Now if you look at the owners of this 100-120ft fleet, some are from racing backgrounds, but mainly they like performance cruising.”

Nigel Ingram points to their modest size (for superyachts) as a key factor of the popularity of these yachts.

“I do think that this is a very healthy development and these are the right size of boats. They are relatively easy to handle and not extravagantly budgeted. They are not in the captive winch range, but driven by hand and exciting to sail.”

“Also there are so many nice events for big boats now, which are good fun socially,” Pedol adds.

The biggest single incentive, however, is that these owners “are successful businessmen and competitive by definition,” he says.

Quite why an owner would want to thrash his prized superyacht round a racecourse will puzzle many. But, as Ingram says, there is a particular enjoyment in proving that the boat you cruise can also race as fast as it can be pushed.

TUNING UP NIKATA

Nauta's Mario Pedol explains that the performance level of *Nikata* increased as the project developed. Once Judel/Vrolijk was selected for the naval architecture, CFD calculations were performed on nine different hull shapes – "a good level of research for a cruiser-racer," says Pedol.

"They [Judel/Vrolijk] very much planted the seed for a performance-oriented yacht," Nigel Ingram agrees. Rolf Vrolijk compares *Nikata's* hull shape to the new generation of 22m/72ft mini maxis. By this he means her relatively narrow wetted surface area and a low centre of gravity, bought by a 33-tonne bulb that draws almost 6m/20ft in its lowered state. The result is that *Nikata* has a stiff hull with the ability to set very generous sail area.

The owner's excitement then grew with his awareness of how much the yacht could be optimised for racing. "Later in the build stages, he was pushing to make sure race crew wouldn't turn round and blame the boat or gear [for lack of performance]," says Ingram.

Pedol explains the attraction of building at Baltic Yachts: "Not only because they are very good at composite construction, but at being light at every single component of the boat – that's where these guys really stand out." He cites an example on the new Baltic 130 currently in build (due for launch this May), where the yard went to the lengths of making the cable trays out of carbon fibre, resulting in a 500kg saving.

Henry Hawkins, CEO of Baltic Yachts, admits that keeping weight down



Claire Matches

Nikata, with race crew aboard and sporting square-top race main for the Antigua SY Challenge

on *Nikata* was a real test. "*Nikata's* interior to length ratio is very high," he explains, "so to come in at 88 tonnes was a real challenge for us." Where more race-oriented yachts such as *Visione* and *WinWin* have retractable props, the initial brief for *Nikata* was more cruising-oriented, says Hawkins, hence she has a fixed titanium prop shaft to ensure reliability.

Nikata has a pre-preg carbon/corecell hull and deck, with foam-cored bulkheads and joiner work. Bulkheads and cabin modules are also mounted on insulators to protect against noise and vibration. Much research and development was invested in sound-deadening, with vibration reduced at source by redesigning machinery mounts.

Hawkins also points to the variable-speed Fischer Panda gensets fitted: "It goes back to our constant desire to keep the boats quiet. Lots of cork is also used in the floorboards and non-structural bulkheads."

MODE-CHANGING FEATURES

A dual-purpose yacht needs intelligent design, lightweight build and innovative deck features. Southern Spars designed a mast with a new type of removable masthead crane so that *Nikata's* sailplan can be adapted to suit cruising or racing (see the Supersail Technology feature on page 66 for more detail). The pictures clearly show her sailing in both modes: short-handed cruising and flat-out regatta racing in Antigua.

The detachable carbon crane can be fitted to the masthead for use of a single backstay with a traditional 'pin-head' style mainsail for cruising/deliveries. Prior to a regatta the crane is removed and running backstays are rigged in conjunction with a powerful square-top main. "The objective



Southern Spars designed an innovative masthead crane to allow for a pinhead cruising main (as here), plus twin deflectors for a racing square-top main with runners. "The deflector system gives you more opportunity to have a very safe mast," says Nigel Ingram, "plenty of support, but flexible too for racing"



“The objective for *Nikata* was for a maximum one-day change from cruising to racing mode”





Left: clean lines: note the tight headsail sheeting angle thanks to a three-line barber system. Below: a key feature on deck is the stern platform, designed by Nauta Yachts as a way to welcome guests in a grand manner. The teak-laid after deck hinges over to become the bathing platform, revealing a shallow staircase



was for a maximum one-day change-out [from one mode to the other] and we worked very hard on that," says Ingram.

Nikata's deck profile is kept meticulously clean. Just forward of the decidedly low-profile coachroof is a three-line barber system, designed to maintain efficient headsail trim. This hydraulically controlled set-up provides both fore and aft and inboard/outboard jib trimming. It's a solution that instantly makes jib tracks look cumbersome and out-dated.

The yacht also has furling headsail systems with torsional stays rather than foils, reports Ingram, so the forestay doesn't need to be changed out for racing. "For racing we lose the inner jib, hank on the race genoa, lose the masthead crane and use two deflectors for the backstays," her skipper explains, adding "plus we use the bowsprit."

IN THE FLESH

"She is a powerful boat in all configurations," he reports, "pretty alive in the light stuff – we made 13 knots in 11 knots of breeze. And she loves a lot of heel. Judel/Vrolijk designed her with cranking her over in mind." *Nikata's* formidable aft beam provides a thrilling ride for the helmsman – "she's 8m wide at the wheel, so it's very high up!"

During the Atlantic passage, she was pushed hard. When she hit 28.8 knots surfing, it was under full main and the A3 in 25 knots of wind – a hearty shakedown cruise then.

The skipper says she doesn't require much in the way of swell to help her plane, even when laden with cruising gear. "We hit 16-17 knots early on in our trip down from Finland... and 24-25 knots with one reef and the jib. The combination of a powerful traveller and a cruising jib on an inner stay helps make *Nikata* a manageable boat."

"We hit 16-17 knots early on in our trip down from Finland ... and 24-25 knots with one reef and the jib. But she's a manageable boat"



Claire Matchès





“She is a powerful boat in all configurations. And she loves a lot of heel”

Reliability is also crucial to the boat’s demanding schedule. “We have already done around 8,000 miles without any issues – including a regatta – with no major failures,” says the skipper. “It’s a testament to her build.” He also mentions another aspect that I must agree with – her knockout looks – which “turn pretty much every head” they pass.

Nikata’s interior remains private. Consider the long glass panels each side of the companionway, and the coachroof and large hull ports, and you can begin to imagine the amount of natural light inside. Nauta has once again emphasised this aspect by using a light trim that includes bleached oak veneers and linen panels.

The owner’s accommodation and a VIP guest cabin are located forward of the deck saloon, with two more guest cabins aft, along with quarters for five crew, a mess and large galley. Despite the strict attention to her build weight, room was found for six fridges, two freezers and a 200-bottle wine cellar – *Nikata* is a cruising yacht too, after all.

A PROMISING FUTURE

“At the end of the [Antigua Superyacht Challenge] we were all absolutely thrilled with the boat and performance,” Nigel Ingram reports. “Obviously we were very much at the early end of the learning curve and up against the highly experienced *Nilaya*. So we were very pleased to be going faster than her by the last day.”

As we went to press *Nikata* could well be the first yacht to prove that the RORC Caribbean 600 can be completed rapidly yet in relative comfort. Pro navigator Mike Broughton will be aboard as part of the race crew trying to ensure the deep-keeled sloop gets round the twisty track quickly and safely.

When you consider that she is a potential monohull line-honours winner, yet one that can offer luxurious comfort for downtime cruising afterwards, it is no wonder this new breed of super cruiser-racers is the most exciting development to happen in the superyacht scene.

DIMENSIONS

LOA	35.00m	114ft 10in
LWL	32.60m	106ft 12in
Beam	8.07m	26ft 6in
Draught	3.65/5.85m	11ft 12in/19ft 2in
Displacement	88,000kg	194,005lb
Mainsail	395m ²	4,252ft ²
Genoa	280m ²	3,014ft ²
Gennaker	940m ²	10,118ft ²

