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KESTREL 106

Kestrel in full flight

David Glenn spent a couple of days aboard the new Kestrel 106, a compact, comfortable and enjoyable yacht to sail, which eschews the modern trend for light displacement

Some superyachts of late have become positively anorexic as carbon fibre construction, light displacement and the latest sailcloth seduces those who want to take their large cruising yachts racing.

So it is refreshing to see a vessel like the Kestrel 106 take to the water. She is a yacht with an unfashionable amount of volume, a sailplan that could be regarded as a throwback, but with a standard of finish and

degree of performance that matches modern trends. And how about that clipper bow? Not many of those around these days, but it suits this yacht.

Designed by Ron Holland and the brainchild of Northern Ireland businessman Peter Cooke and his wife Jenny, the first Kestrel 106 was built in aluminium by up and coming Turkish builders Aganlar of Bodrum. For a first stab at a yacht of this size and calibre the Turks have done a more than

acceptable job, although understandably there's a snagging list. Aganlar take pride in building almost everything in-house, from the aluminium hull (their first) to all the polished stainless steel fittings, of which there are many.

Peter Cooke attracted 28 shareholders, businessmen and women from Ireland and Scotland, to invest in the Kestrel project, persuading them that there was a gap in the market for a yacht that would serve as a

genuinely comfortable and easy to handle cruiser providing a luxury platform for entertaining.

An immense amount of thinking went into the concept – the idea has taken six years to come to fruition – and I was intrigued to hear that the shareholders, 40 per cent of whom are women, were canvassed on many points of design.

Kestrel had to combine volume and comfort with performance and

DIMENSIONS

LOA	32.4m	106ft 0in
LWL	21.7m	71ft 0in
Beam	6.4m	22ft 0in
Draught	2.9m	9ft 0in
Sail area	512m ²	5,511ft ²
Displacement	101.5 tonnes	





there was a keenness for the yacht not to exceed a heel angle somewhere in the mid-teens. It would seem Ron Holland and the interior designers (principally the Cookes) have delivered.

Not super-complex

It is interesting to listen to skipper Ian Heseltine and his young crew talk about how relieved they are to be working on a yacht that has so much space for a 106-footer. There's bags of stowage in the deep bilge, the crew quarters for four are smart and relatively well off for space and the yacht is not super-complex. Some of the yachts they have been working on, while pleasing to sail, are virtually bereft of stowage space owing

“ Despite her traditional looks, she is no slouch and when you look at the vessel's underwater lines you can see why ”

to exceptionally shallow bilges. There was, however, a question mark over the Kestrel's galley design, of which more later.

Despite the ketch's traditional looks – the Cookes own a Turkish gulet and the Kestrel concept was partly inspired by the gulet experience – she is definitely no slouch and when you look at the vessel's underwater lines you can see why. A long-chord fin keel and a separate rudder hung on a short skeg doesn't say 'extreme', but it does suggest that combined with her considerable sail area – look at the height of her rig (31.5m) – she has pace.

On a fresh and sunny spring day in the Baie de Cannes we started with full sail in barely ten knots of breeze and soon had the



Kestrel's 100 tons or so up to seven knots. This is not a close-winded yacht, but as the breeze built into the low teens, furling away that enormous genoa, which is big enough to serve as an asymmetric, and hardening up with a reef in the main, a full mizzen and just a staysail, made her more upright, faster and closer.

Murmurs about fitting a centreboard to give extra bite on subsequent yachts seem somewhat premature. Nonetheless, this yacht draws only 2.9m, less than 10ft which, as intended by the Cooke cadre, allows her access to a good range of anchorages.

With the wind in the high teens and full sail demanded by the photographers shooting through the open door of a very

▲ Top: deck saloon. The tables to port convert to one large diner. Above: cockpit in dining mode

▼ Below: Left to right: the author, Kestrel founder Peter Cooke, designer Ron Holland, builder Erdem Agan and Adrian McCourt of Watkins Superyachts



low-flying helicopter, we gave ourselves some searoom, unleashed the entire 512m² of plain sail and shot off downwind like a scalded cat.

Enjoyable to steer

This is where the Kestrel really came into her own. At speeds of well over 11 knots in 18 knots of true breeze over the quarter, she was totally controllable – in fact, at times sailed herself via the Whitlock direct steering system. She was most enjoyable to steer and stood up to full sail with ease.

Both the main and mizzen are relatively small so they are not a handful in a gybe and, with swept spreaders and no runners, manoeuvres like these would soon be within the grasp of the less experienced. This yacht certainly brings the sailing experience alive for anyone on the wheel.

Ron Holland suggested that a mizzen staysail would be cool for lighter offwind work, but with that giant genoa there would hardly be a need for an asymmetric, although as the crew get used to the yacht this would surely join the inventory in time.

Most of the deck geometry seemed well thought out, although there was a sheet lead issue with the self-tacking staysail and it was a pity that the mainsheet trimming winch was so far from the helmsman on the opposite side of the yacht.

Serene deck saloon

After a rigorous sail we retired to the serenity of the large deck saloon which, like the rest of the yacht, is finished in a moderately dark afromosia hardwood with contrasting fabric panels, which are particularly effective in the enormous full-beam after cabin.

One criticism was the linear galley, tucked under the saloon, which didn't have an opening portlight – thus limited effective ventilation – and also doubled as the passage to the engine room access door, which at times could make the chef's job awkward. Room for improvement here.

The Kestrel can comfortably sleep eight in four cabins, two of them good doubles, and the mirror-image twins also have Pullmans. All are en-suite.

Over two days aboard I really warmed to this yacht. She is a go-anywhere cruiser, pleasant to sail and immensely comfortable below. And there are some ingenious details, including a convertible after deck to satisfy the Cookes' passion for partying, which I will describe in more detail in a longer feature on the yacht in an upcoming issue.

The Kestrel is currently for sale at €7.5 million and can be chartered from €49,000 a week. There was keen interest in both options at the recent Antibes yacht show. Some potential clients are also looking at smaller (75ft) and larger (140ft) versions. www.kestrelsuperyachts.com