

## A Closer Look At The Sydney GTS43

texts and pictures by Crosbie Lorimer



'Definitely more racer/cruiser than cruiser/racer - Sydney Yachts GTS43'

'How do you beat that?' might be a fair question when contemplating the next generation successors to the hugely popular range of Sydney Yachts, best epitomised in the Sydney 38 (some 50 yachts race in Australia), the Sydney 32, and more recently to the CR range of custom and production cruiser racers.

As with any success story, repeating the formula is a serious challenge and often as not, next generation successes are based on similar values and principles but a shift in design thinking that responds to an evolving market.

So it's no great surprise that Darren Williams, Director of Sydney Yachts should have looked to British yacht designer Jason Ker for some new thinking in the design of the GTS43, the first of which was launched in October this year; not that Sydney Yachts plan to stop there either, the GTS43 is the first of three designs proposed from Ker's office, the GTS37 following very shortly.

Australia is familiar with Ker's successes; indeed he has an enviable record in the Rolex Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race with an overall IRC win by Ker 55 Aera in 2004 and two first in Divisions for Tow Truck in 2008 and 2009. In the UK Peter Vroone's IRC 46 was named RORC Yacht of the Year in 2010 and the first Ker 40, Keronimo took first in class in her first three offshore outings in 2011. Small wonder then that Ed Psaltis and Bob Thomas should also have opted for the Ker 40 as the new AFR Midnight Rambler

So, there's ample pedigree in the design, but who is the GTS 43 pitched at?

In Sydney Yachts' own words their latest creation 'serves as a comfortable cruiser, short-handed family weekender and competitive IRC racer.'

That's quite a reach and one that might infer the need for a fair few compromises.

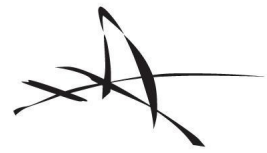
But the reality seems to suggest that while the boat will inevitably appeal more to the racing types than the cruising weekenders (Sydney Yachts' Jason Rowed describes it as 75% racer, 25% cruiser), it offers plenty of creature comforts and its sea manner and ease of handling inclines one to believe that it would not bite too hard if a cruising crew was caught shorthanded with a bit on.



The sportscar style coachroof and the burnt orange colour in the logo give some hint to the origins of the GTS43's name - Sydney Yachts GTS43

Warwick Sherman, the owner of the first boat, Occasional Coarse Language II, very much exemplifies the market pitch for this boat, someone who wants to be competitive on the race course inshore and offshore, but not at the cost of some reasonable amenity and not if it means needing a gun crew to get him around the buoys on a pleasant evening twilight with family and friends. And that's precisely what Warwick's been enjoying with his new boat.

It's early days to know yet how the GTS43 will go against its competition in all race formats because the boat is still quite fresh out of the shed, but the early signs are promising with some consistent top three results for Warwick and some straight line testing against a DK46 and the Ker 40 AFR Midnight Rambler both coming out well for the GTS43, which seems to be meeting her design polars.



The deck layout viewed from the second spreader - Sydney Yachts GTS43

We will certainly know more soon, as Warwick plans to race the full Blue Water Points score in 2012 and the second boat onto the water, *Walawala II*, owned by Hong Kong based Steve Manning is about to race in next week's King's Cup, lining up against a wide spectrum of designs of similar size including a Ker 40, a Soto 40, a GP42 (IRC optimised) and the ex Humphries 42 Oyster Catcher XXVI.

So much for the future, what of the boat itself; a few facts and figures to start with.

### Facts and Figures

The GTS43 is of E glass foam sandwich construction to Category A classification, is 13.10 metres (43 ft) long (excluding a 2.1m liftable carbon fibre bowsprit), 11.7 at LWL and 4.2m (13.78 ft) wide at maximum beam, drawing 2.75m (9.02 ft) to the base of her bulb keel and weighing 6,950 kg (15,320 lbs) with almost half of that in the hull. The anodised alloy grid below the floor panels is linked to carbon chainplates and secures a cast keel and led T bulb below. The rudder and stock are carbon fibre with independent quadrants to each wheel.

The long and the short of those statistics is that this is a surprisingly light boat with good form stability for a production cruiser racer of her length; a major goal for Ker quite clearly.

The hull forms of Ker designs are highly distinctive, featuring plumb bows and flared aft sections, a configuration that has proved successful under IRC – and more recently ORCi (the replacement for the former IMS) - in a range of yacht regattas and offshore races around the world over the last five to ten years.

If you wanted to get a three dimensional feel for modern racing or cruising hull shapes (the two are

progressively converging) simply take a piece of A4 paper, fold the shortest end together and stand that upright (there's your bow) then hold the middle of the other end flat (and there's your stern).

Where the Ker designs differ from this basic shape and thus the hull forms of many others is the transition from deck plan form to waterline and this is most evident in the trapezoidal shape of the stern.

Indeed a swift look at the plan of the boat shows maximum beam hits at a little over 60% of waterline length and carries virtually all the way to the stern where it's still 95% of B Max; not that unusual these days perhaps, but what's different here is how little of this plan form corresponds to wetted area when the boat is at rest; and that corresponds to less volume, less weight and more rating advantage.

The stern quarters of the GTS43 really do feel suspended in air when you're on the boat and one can readily envisage the wahooing from a close stacked crew cantilevered over a fizzing wake as the boat power reaches under asymmetrical in a good blow.



The build quality is as you'd expect from Sydney Yachts and with some deft touches too - Sydney Yachts GTS43

Whether the advantage of this extra leverage will encourage the crew to remain endlessly glued to the rail on long hauls offshore will probably have as much to do with the ruthlessness of the skipper as the stamina of his team. But the boat is certainly not tender, with 4,400 kgs in the keel and bulb (60% of the all-up weight), some 2.75 meters below the waterline.

### On Deck

The quality of build is very evident all through the boat and the pride taken in the job can be best seen on the finishing touches such as trimming calibration numbers



formed in the deck finish itself and logos moulded subtly into the lazarette cover and companionway steps.

Thanks to the influences of Luca Brenta and his Wally Yacht innovations, clean and uncluttered decks are considered de rigeur on yachts of every size these days and Ker has clearly worked hard with Sydney Yachts to keep sheets clear of the decks and working area to reduce the potential for the 'bum cleat' hazards that beset most racing crews perched on the rail.

The suggestion of racing pedigree is evident not only in the GTS43's powerful hull but in various aspects of the yacht's design above the topsides too. Sportscar coachroofs with go fast windows are two-a-penny in the Superyacht domain these days, but in a forty something footer the potential to lose valuable headroom and volume in the cabin from such a must-have feature means the designer needs a deft hand if compromise is not to win the day.



The cockpit layout is simple and effective - Sydney Yachts GTS43

Not only does the Ker design adroitly side-step this trap, maintaining ample headroom below, but the addition of eye catching chamfers on the coachroof sides provide some very practical solutions to the common problem with clean barber hauler leads from the side deck. This set up also achieves a very close sheeting angle for the non-overlapping headsail.

The sloped shoulders of the aft end of the coachroof also make life a deal easier moving between mast and cockpit or side deck as the even transition requires no jump to the cockpit benches – a very pleasant surprise for a former mastman with dodgy knees!



The quarter berth is generous in height and size, with none of those awkward shapes in the deckhead that leave you with unexpected bruises on the head! - Sydney Yachts GTS43

The stepped coamings are intriguing. My two outings on the boat did not allow me to see how they might work in a bit of seaway but one imagines that at speed, with water running down the side deck, the steps discourage the on-rush from discharging straight into the cockpit and thus help keep helm and mainsheet trimmer's trousers that bit drier; and who wouldn't approve of that?

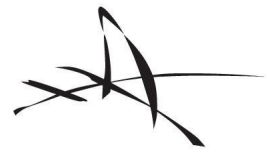
If there was a minor quibble with this design it would be an aesthetic one; to my eye, the small stepped shapes in the counter where the coaming detail hits the stern seem to work against the otherwise very clean lines of the boat from this angle.

For those more concerned with the functional than the visual there is however one balancing act between what's on deck and what's below that does come to the fore at this end of the boat.

Most crew dislike the quarter berth, for good reasons; more often than not it's a claustrophobic tunnel that requires a head-first entry that strongly suggests a difficult exit if things were to go pear shaped. Worse it's the noisiest berth, usually right under the winches and it's invariably associated with a series of weird shapes in the deck head formed by the cockpit that result in an inevitable blow to the head as you extract yourself, half asleep, to go on watch.

The GTS43 addresses this issue well, providing a genuine double berth with good head height and reasonable light from the cabin and cockpit port.

The inevitable consequence is the absence of any cockpit locker space, the accommodation for warps, fenders and the like being consigned to a lazarette behind the helmsman; probably not a major



inconvenience and Warwick Sherman certainly has had no issue with this thus far.

There are numerous other small design features on deck that hint at the racing aspirations of this boat; there's hardly a shackle in sight (Kevlar strops for blocks), simple fairleads need no turning blocks and the deck finish out of the mould would give enough grip for Usain Bolt to start a record 100m dash.



The shallow coachroof design permits close sheeting of the jib and clean leads for the barber haulers - Sydney Yachts GTS43

### Rig and Sails

The boat sports a simple two spreader rig (Hall Spars have supplied the carbon mast for the first two boats) and the sails supplied were supplied by North Sails.

According to Jason Rowed, a basic sail package would include mainsail, headsails (including a Light Medium 105%, Medium Heavy and No 4) and two asymmetricals (a light VMG and an all-purpose for breezes above 13-14 knots).

A quick look up from the deck and it's evident that the degree of roach on the mainsail is quite modest by comparison with that of many recent counterparts. Jason Rowed explains that the conditions in which a deep roach or square head would confer any significant edge for the GTS43 are relatively limited,

'...and more importantly, any such advantage is offset by the ease of handling in club racing, especially when shorthanded' he adds.

There is something counter-intuitive about a mainsheet lead that runs from the aft end of a boom at anything other than a tangent to the cockpit, but as may be imagined there is method in the thinking behind the aft angled mainsheet on the GTS43,

'It's too easy not to pay attention to the mainsheet in a gybe and if it's too close to the wheel and not being overhauled as the boom crosses the centerline it's easy to loop the sheet over the wheel pedestal on the gybe; in a good blow the consequences of that are obvious.'

'So we've kept the mainsheet track immediately forward of the wheels – which optimizes cockpit space - and then angled the mainsheet forward to the boom from the track to keep it clear of the wheels. There really isn't any noticeable fall off when the main is sheeted closehaunched' adds Rowed.

And therein lies the balancing act at which Sydney Yachts have demonstrated a strong track record; any successor to the unquestionably successful Sydney 38 has a hard act to follow when it comes to offering as much to the family cruise or the twilight race as it does to the regatta or the bash south to Hobart.

### Below Deck

Heading below and your first impression is that if this boat is intended as '75% racer and 25% cruiser', then you're getting a lot of value for your 25%.

The interior is not luxurious, you wouldn't expect it to be, but the impression is of crisply designed, comfortable and functional space that would really not be out of place in an all-out cruiser.



The dark colours of timber and soft furnishings work surprisingly well, largely because there is ample light in the cabin. - Sydney Yachts GTS43

A curved dark green bench seat wraps around the dining table to port on either side of the cabin can be replaced with pipecots in racing mode, a small but adequate navigation station to starboard stands opposite a smart galley with all the essentials in place and a few that some racing yachtsmen would long for.



A vee berth forward in the foc's'le adjoins a head with shower on the port side; all neat and simple stuff.

Head height is excellent at over 1.8 ms and stowage is generous too, while the dark colors of soft furnishings and the 'tiled' timber floor panels opted for on the first boat work well, given the ample light in the cabin.

### Under Sail

My own experience of the boat has been limited to two brief sails, the first when the boat was launched in light airs and more recently in a twilight race out of the CYCA (one of the forms of racing for which Warwick Sherman selected the boat).

In a steady nor'easter the boat was easily handled by a small crew of seven, lining up to take the inside slot for an excellent boat end start and keeping much bigger competition at bay as we beat up to the top mark, going boat for boat with the her racy new cousin, AFR Midnight Rambler.



Warwick Sherman keeping the big guns at bay. - Sydney Yachts GTS43

The boat felt comfortable upwind doing an easy 8.5-9 knots in 12 to 15 knots of breeze and sailing high

angles, easily matching its mixed competition of racers and cruisers.

Hiking out from the rear most slot behind the helmsman I got a clear impression of the degree to which the hull dives away from under you. You can swing your feet well underneath you before they make contact with the hull.

As the occasional increases in pressure came through the boat tracked cleanly with our mainsheet trimmer Adrian simply working the backstay to open up the top of mainsail leach and minimise any extra load on the helm, needing only to ease the traveller for the bigger gusts.



Taking the boat end slot - Sydney Yachts GTS43

As we bore away at the mark, Midnight Rambler tucked her bowsprit round the buoy and with the nose down as she bore away sharply, she took an inside slot at the mark that was probably not hers to occupy; Warwick simply waved his beer at Psaltis with a jovial shout that suggested this would be discussed further at the bar (it was!).

A quiet downwind run, no spinnakers on this twilight – saw us winging the headsail before rounding Shark Island, heading for a mark off Clark Island and a brief beat back to Shark Island. On the last reach to the finish line Warwick generously handed me the wheel and I did my best to hold a couple of stern-snappers behind us to stay at heel on our leeward quarter.

It was a brief stint at the helm, but fun nonetheless, as the occasional puffs off Shark Island accelerated us to the finish, a firm feel on the wheel too, no slack as I leant gently into the new breezes and better still, non-one got through us.



Heading up the beat - Sydney Yachts GTS43

As I thanked Warwick and his team for a great evening on the water – where else would you rather race twilights – Adrian's parting words suggested I should really give the boat a go in a bit of breeze,

'it's a lot of fun with the kite up and 20 knots on the instruments' he said, invitingly.

Ready when you are Warwick!

#### Specifications

LOA	13.10 m	43 ft
LWL	11.70 m	38.4 ft
Beam (Max)	4.20 m	13.78 ft
Draft	2.75 m	9.02 ft
Displacement (standard boat)	6.950kg	15,320 lbs

Main	60 sq m
Jib	47 sq m
Spin	195 sq m

Mast height 21.1m 69ft  
(above waterline)

Berths 6

Engine Yanmar	29.9 kW	40 SHP
Water	200 lts	52.8 US galls
Fuel Tank	90 lts	23.8 US galls

Designer Jason Ker  
Price on request

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