

company review : **MEC Yachts**



luxury *in*  
ALLOY



by BARRY TYLER

Mention the name Marine Engineering Consultants and if you are involved in the superyacht industry, anywhere in the world, you would almost certainly be aware of that company's name, and its enviable reputation. If however you are an intending buyer of a good quality aluminium catamaran there is a good chance MEC Yachts would not appear on your 'radar' at all; a realisation CEO Murray Owen is most keen to reverse, following the release of his first MEC Yachts 12.5m luxury catamaran.



**MEC FULL PAGE ADVERT**

A company owner on a mission, Murray Owen has long held a desire to branch out into bonafide catamaran manufacturing in of course, aluminium. For Owen the story began way back with an initial apprenticeship as a fitter and turner in a company known as Rogers Industries. Graduating with honours as the saying goes his next step was to consolidate his experience by branching out into another slightly different field.

“Twelve months overseas was more than enough time away and so home he came, armed with the game plan of setting up his own engineering consultancy business”

With an avid interest in boating due to his family owning timber trawlers, the natural progression as far as he was concerned was into a company building boats, and where better to start than to knock on the door of arguably the number one boat-builder of that time. Brisbane-based Lloyd Ships, owned by Keith Lloyd and managed by John Hardie, was one of the absolute pioneers and leaders of superyacht construction in Australia, if not the world. Murray eventually became their Engineering Manager.

Having completed the project they were working on at the time, the next phase of Owen career saw him accept a 'Production/Operations Manager' position in a company John Hardie had subsequently created, which ran under the name of Australian Yacht Builders. Their first 'job' was the 192ft ketch-rigged *The Other Woman*, a massive project on what at the time was the largest all-aluminium superyacht of that era, anywhere in the world.

Upon fruition of that project it was time for Owen to set off on his big 'OE' and using his contacts already made within the superyacht industry, he quickly found a job in a US-based yacht building company, as an engineering manager. Twelve months overseas was more than enough time away and so home he came, armed with

the game plan of setting up his own engineering consultancy business – which would be known as Marine Engineering Consultants.

That was in 1992 and even back then his prime desire was to secure not only a future for himself, but also for his three children. With the superyacht industry in the doldrums at that time however, not surprisingly orders all but dried up and he was literally forced into honing his skills contract-engineering commercial catamaran ferries for a company called Cougar Catamarans.

The MEC 18m was a big boat, when you looked up from ground zero. (below)

Evident from the intricate features, was the accuracy and general level of expertise instilled in the project (bottom)





After being involved with 'engineering' as well as constructing several 25, 32 and 35m 'Cougar' catamarans for China and Hong Kong, the market slowly returned and more and more the emphasis for Owen centred around the engineering of clients 'larger' vessels not only in Australia, but worldwide. His reputation for engineering reliable packages meant his services were ever-increasingly in demand and he set up a permanent facility at Hope Harbour, on the northern Gold Coast!

Out-growing that workshop very quickly he relocated his operation to the Gold Coast City Marine Precinct ostensibly to construct a 144ft aluminium superyacht

for Australian Motor Yachts. It is history that that project stumbled disastrously, but he could see enough potential in the burgeoning Gold Coast City Marina complex to convince him to set up shop there and continue plying his trade – on his terms! The superstructure of the superyacht *Ulysses* was one of his first projects, his company was involved in the refit of *My Way* after its disastrous fire, he has done a lot of work for Azzura Marine and Norman Wright Boatbuilders over the years, plus he had his regular superyacht refit clients like Keith Williams and Lane Walker to look after also.



The kids will enjoy the aft hideaway. (above left)  
 Eloquent dining in style, for five adults. (left)  
 below clockwise from top left:  
 This table shot gives some idea of the 'depth' of the magnificent timberwork.  
 This type of feature wouldn't be out of place on a superyacht!  
 As the MEC 12.5 clearly illustrates, the workmanship and attention to detail was superb.  
 The way it should be on a cruising boat, non-intrusive yet comprehensive and generally 'capable'.  
 Eloquently comfortable was how you would describe this version of the skipper's queen-size abode.  
 Generous 'double' accommodation for the guests.



As the saying goes, he has never looked back; 10 years ago he became an MSQ-accredited (recipient number #131) boat-builder as well as engineer and his business along with his reputation, flourished. His three children, whose welfare he was so conscious of in those early years, had joined him in the company and despite a looming down-turn the extent of which took everyone by surprise, his business remained surprisingly stable and unaffected.

One would naturally have assumed then that with all this happening within his company, any 'stupid notion' of addressing his long-held desire to build his idea of a luxury catamaran for the pleasure market, would have long since faded away. Not for him though for following the construction of a 55ft Crowther catamaran the passion returned in earnest. Most keen to have a brand name of his own rather than contract-building for other manufacturers; and with his company now ticking along nicely with further branches in Brisbane, Mackay and Cairns – a chance sighting of 'the perfect boat; became the final catalyst for action.

**The search was over**

There before him, at rest on a marina finger at his local marina was a design of a similar dimension to what he perceived would be his first eventual foray into the catamaran market. A little detective work soon revealed the vessel's owner and after much bribing and cajoling a sea trial was arranged. So impressed was he with the sea-keeping abilities and general performance of the hull that the very next day he was banging on the door of the designer, one Andrew McDonald-Smith.

One thing eventually led to another with the end result McDonald-Smith designed an initial six boat range of 'MEC Yachts', from 12.5m up to the flagship 22m model. He made a deliberate move however to keep the range below the recognised minimum bench-mark for a superyacht, of 25m. That in his words, was a different level of vessel entirely, far removed from the style of vessel he wanted to produce.

In a nutshell his intention was to present to market an aluminium cruising catamaran built to a luxury level of specification. He liked the catamaran concept, believing that was the way the world was moving, and building in



aluminium would allow him the freedom to expand the concept and therefore remain outside the parameters of the traditional rank and file moulded GRP catamaran. Every boat is custom built to the respective owner's requirements for he realises that at this end of the market people are still very discerning – if it is not exactly what they want, then they won't buy it!

Interestingly unlike most manufacturers who build a boat then worry about trying to sell it to recoup their not inconsiderate R&D and initial set-up expenses, Owen enjoys the luxury of his first two models produced, the 12.5m model and this next 18m design – being pre-sold. Obviously these two owners saw and appreciated the potential in this style of vessel and

Plenty of room to entertain; note the efficient yet practical way access to the flybridge was addressed. (top)

The aft boarding platforms were a huge area for all manner of pursuits – including outdoor cooking! (above)

some judicious research as to the standard of work which emanated from the MEC Yachts production facility – obviously tipped the scales MEC's way!

### **Doesn't look like aluminium!**

To the uninitiated it would be very easy indeed to overlook the fact this first MEC 12.5 Yachts Flybridge Cruiser was indeed of aluminium construction. Accuracy was the key word for the hull was as straight as a die and all the corners and edges were 'radiused' to sublime extremes. It really was only when you looked at items such as the cleats which were welded to the raised plates on the decks, that it became palpable.

I must say I walked around the exterior of the 12.5 tapping away like an excitable car salesman looking for evidence of panel filler (bog) – in total belief that it was indeed alloy and not a top-class GRP finish. "The hull has very little fairing, other than welds here and there that are covered for cosmetic reasons," Owen explained. "The

whole boat is built to a very high standard, survey standard in fact, for while the design may not necessarily be to survey, the standard of workmanship, the specification and the attention to detail – most certainly is."

Try as he might to persuade me otherwise, this 12.5m flybridge design still exuded all the hallmarks of a superyacht standard of construction, which I guess was only natural given his background. It was all the little things like the bulwark side-entry doors, the vertical elongated port-holes, the boarding platforms, the walkways to the bow, the outside cockpit loo, the teak coaming capping, the staircase to the flybridge level and of course the sumptuous entertainer flybridge level itself, were to name but a few of the more obvious features – a very definite cut above the average 'rank and file' catamaran specification and level of presentation.

All Owen's efforts to dress this model down appeared to have been in vain, and that was on the outside; the interior was even more impressive! The saloon was your typical plush dining setting opposite an entirely capable cruising-orientated galley. The 'depth' of the (solid and veneer) teak timber

finish was superb but for me the crowning glory was the entertainment module across the forward saloon bulkhead. With computer equipment either side of this so you can control the operations of the MEC 12.5 from this lower level, this full height module featured television, 'cocktail-cabinet' glass and bottle storage and below all this, a secreted AC/DC switch panel.

Accommodation will always differ according to the owners' particular preferences but in this instance it was a three bedroom version. The owner/skipper enjoyed an athwartship spacious room forward and to portside, with aft of the companionway the main house bathroom. The main guest accommodation was a fore and aft double berth arrangement on the starboard side

of the 'Berlin Wall'. For additional guests there was another double room aft of the starboard side companionway, in effect in under the dining module sole.

From a mechanical and engineering perspective



The flybridge level of the MEC 12.5 was a most ambient area – hard to imagine it was all crafted from a sheet of alloy! (below)

Again presentation was superb; the ladies especially will appreciate the convenience of the bulwark side-entry door. (right)



again the 12.5 was to superyacht standard. Power was courtesy of a pair of what could only be described as most conservative 230hp Yanmar diesels which powered the vessel to its design speed of 18kts at cruise and 20kts at full throttles. Its hull efficiency was most evident by the way it rose seemingly instantaneously to its cruise speed. She carried a 1200-litre payload of fuel along with 600 litres of water. Peripheral equipment included a desalinator and an 11kVA genset.

### **18 x 6.5m of sheer volume**

Apart from the durability, economy and performance facets of the MEC Yachts range of catamarans, the other obvious feature of the design was its inherent internal volume; nowhere was this realisation more obvious than in the instance of the MEC Yachts 18m option which was under construction at their Gold Coast facility. Yes the completely-in-proportion hull topsides were perhaps higher than a lot of other comparable-sized makes available but more than anything this volume accrued courtesy of a



most generous beam – five metres in the 12.5m MEC and in the case of the 18m, a massive beam of 6.5m.

It is well known fact that when a vessel increases in length and beam it is nowhere near commensurate with the increase in volume that is seemingly increased 10-fold. Still however nothing could have prepared me for the sheer size of MEC's latest 18m creation. In reality it was a completely in-proportion veritable block of flats, spread over three levels of accommodation, saloon and pilot-house bridge.

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The safety aspect was especially well addressed.

In this rather stark 'warts and all' stage of production I was perhaps even more overawed than when I took my first glimpse of the 12.5m model. In this instance I could appreciate even more the standard of workmanship for it was all bare aluminium and I was able to ascertain exactly how the craftsmen who were building this boat, had been able to produce the various shapes and angles they had. I was also able to confirm for myself Owen's claim there was very little filling/faring in the hull.

The more I searched the more 'marvels' I discovered; items such as the stairs down the peak in front of the Portuguese Bridge, the aft bollard mounts, the aft cockpit level, the boarding feature, the equally large area aft of the enclosed bridge and of special significance, the skeg assemblies which categorically enhanced Owen's claim you could park on the 'bricks' without fear of damage.

While the 18m was in the relatively early stages of construction, still most evident was the focus this owner was placing on appropriate creature comforts; the size of the three staterooms, the size of the saloon, the upstairs bridge level with its array of day-to-day living enhancements and the saloon with its attached galley, dining feature and entertainment facility, were all equally large in dimension.

This new model is destined for a private Australian client who intends using it for extensive cruising around the entire Australian coastline. Power will be courtesy of a pair of again relatively meagre 500hp Cummins Mercruiser engines which will give this particular example a top speed of 20kts but more importantly and economical cruising speed of 18kts. It will carry 6000 litres of fuel (for a range of 1000nm at that 18kts), 800 litres of water, a desalinator, two gensets, a dive compressor, a 5.5m aluminium dinghy (he apparently loves his Barra fishing), a 3.8m RIB inflatable tender and all the usual fishing necessities such as live-bait tank, kill tanks and tackle boxes.

The superyacht industry is well and truly aware of the capabilities of Murray Owen and his team at Marine Engineering Consultants, and I am sure it will not be long at all before discerning boaters from the pleasure sector cotton on to the MEC Yachts range of Flybridge Cruisers has to offer.

## SPECIFICATIONS

	<b>MEC 12.5m</b>	<b>MEC 18m</b>
<b>Boat Design Name</b>	MEC Yachts 12.5m	MEC Yachts 18m
<b>Year Launched</b>	2009	2010
<b>Designer</b>	Andrew McDonald-Smith	Andrew McDonald-Smith
<b>Builder</b>	MEC Yachts	MEC Yachts
<b>LOA</b>	12.5m	18m
<b>Beam</b>	5.0m	6.5m
<b>Draft</b>	1.0m	1.2m
<b>Displacement</b>	12-tonnes	26-tonnes
<b>Max Speed</b>	20kts	20kts
<b>Cruise Speed</b>	18kts	18kts
<b>Construction</b>	Aluminium	Aluminium
<b>Fuel Capacity</b>	1200 litres	6000 litres
<b>Water Capacity</b>	600 litres	6000 litres
<b>Engines</b>	2x230hp Yanmar	2x500hp Cummins Mercruiser
<b>Gearboxes</b>	ZF 635i	Twin Disc MG5065
<b>Drive System</b>	Conventional shaft drive	Conventional shaft drive
<b>Propellers</b>	4-blade 22"D x 25.5"P	4-blade
<b>Generator</b>	Onan 11kVA	2xOnan 11kVA
<b>Inverter</b>	3kW / 80A	3kW / 10A
<b>Air Conditioning</b>	CruiseAir 33,000btu	MarineAir 50,000btu
<b>Watermaker</b>	Sea Recovery 65lph	Village Marine 65lph
<b>Bow Thruster</b>	NA	Side Power 25hp
<b>Windlass</b>	Muir-VRC2500	Muir 4200Thor
<b>Steering</b>	Gateway Hydraulics	Gateway Hydraulics
<b>Engine Controls</b>	ZF Micro Commander	ZF Micro Commander
<b>Lighting</b>	Cantalupi/Hella/LED	Cantalupi/Hella/LED
<b>Paint</b>	Jotun	Jotun
<b>Paint (antifoul)</b>	Jotun	Jotun
<b>Hatches</b>	Bomar	Bomar
<b>Wipers</b>	NA	Vitus
<b>Windscreens/windows</b>	MEC Yachts	MEC Yachts
<b>Port-hole Hatches</b>	Bomar / MEC Yachts	Bomar / MEC Yachts
<b>Heads</b>	Dometic	Tecma
<b>Veneer/Plywood</b>	Teak	Rock Maple
<b>Davit/Passarella</b>	ADC	ADC
<b>Tender</b>	Caribe	Caribe/Ocean Cylinder
<b>Stainless Steel Work</b>	MEC Yachts	MEC Yachts
<b>Helm Chair</b>	Reelax	MEC Yachts
<b>Electronics</b>		
<b>GPS/Plotter/Sounder</b>	Raymarine E120	Furuno
<b>VHF</b>	GME	ICOM
<b>Radar</b>	Raymarine 24NM	Furuno
<b>Entertainment Systems</b>	NAD	NAD
<b>Instruments</b>	Yanmar	CMD SmartCraft
<b>Software</b>	Nobletec / Raymarine	Nobletec / Furuno
<b>Switch Panels</b>	BEP Marine	BEP Marine
<b>Base Price of Boat</b>	\$890,000	\$1,650,000
<b>Price As Tested</b>	\$995,000	

Contact:

**MEC Yachts, Factory 17**  
**76-84 Waterway Drive, Coomera, Qld #4209**  
**P : +61 7 5502 8811**  
**F : +61 7 5502 8822**  
**E : info@marineeng.com.au**  
**W : www.marineeng.com.au**