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Superyacht space and explorer yacht capabilities, the Darwin 86 has achieved big things

Text: Alan Harper Photos: Cantiere Navale Delle Marche



Human-scale, seagoing spaces: the Darwin's deck saloon is comfortable and homely



The styling of the Darwin 86 might not be everyone's idea of chic nautique, but it is a yacht with undeniable authority and presence

Nothing is quite what it seems with Darwin. This new 86 might look like a cross between a tug and a trawler, but it has more in common with a superyacht than most vessels this size can claim. Its steel hull and aluminium superstructure are faired to the micron and polished to perfection. It sits in the water like the Rock of Gibraltar, immovably displacing nearly 200 tonnes. Everything about the big, pro-spec wheelhouse says you're on a 130-footer, except that in order to see the bow, you have to walk to the windscreen and look down.

The company that builds it is also surprising. Occupying swish new waterfront premises in the shipbuilding town of Ancona, on Italy's Adriatic coast, Cantiere delle Marche only came into being in August last year. But already they have designed a range of motor yachts of between 75 and 115ft and claim to have sold five of them, the first of which, *Vitadimare*, was delivered to its proud Venetian owner in June. While the second, its construction long under way, is scheduled for launch in February.

A yacht like the Darwin 86 might not appear to be an obvious first design for a fledgling Italian boatbuilder. Heavy-duty and with a no-nonsense air, it is an explorer-type motor yacht with a superyacht finish, and a price tag as impressive as its fuel capacity. In marketing terms it could be said to occupy a niche within a niche – the diametric opposite of a mainstream product.

Yet buyers have been found. As sales manager Vasco Buonpensiere – an ex-CRN man – explains, the company is only new on paper. Its founders are true industry insiders. Cantiere delle Marche was set up by a consortium which got together after the Ferretti Group, whose CRN superyacht shipyard is next door, relinquished the lease on one of its new building sheds. The largest shareholding, just under 40%, is held by the Cecchini family, co-founders of the CRN yard back in 1963. Ancona businessman Massimo Vergili, who owns the premises and is therefore the shipyard's landlord, holds another 20%, with a similar share held by a local investment company. The other two owners, with around 10% each, also have roots in Ancona: CPN engineering, and GS interior furnishings, who undertake much of the fitting-out work at Cantiere delle Marche.

Sub-contracting is standard practice in Italian boatbuilding, and it is crucial to the business model at this shipyard, where the principal sub-contractors are co-owners, and full-time staff number just 16. Unorthodox it may be, but as a system it seems to work.

SUPER-SIZED STYLING

The styling of the Darwin 86 might not be everyone's idea of *chic nautique*, but it is a yacht with undeniable authority and presence. As you approach, it seems to grow not just in apparent size but in stature, and up close the lustrous superyacht finish becomes positively dazzling.

The suggestion that you are dealing with something considerably larger than 86 feet is heightened as you step aboard. The interior is not designed to create any illusions of space – somewhat to the frustration of the shipyard's sales department – because the owner, intelligently, has opted for practical, human-sized living areas which will be safe and comfortable at sea. But there is a certain thickness to the steel handrails, a solidity about the fit-out, an absence of creaks and groans, and above all the rock-like stability of the heavy steel hull's stance in the water, which conspire to make you question what you know about the vessel's dimensions. And the longer you spend on board, the more you start to convince yourself that it's a



Stowage

The owner's clearly have serious cruising in mind with plenty of stowage like this full-height wardrobe.



Up in the bows, the first 86's VIP suite has lots of built-in stowage



The roomy port twin. Both guest cabins also have fold-down Pullman berths



The non-standard master cabin layout, which maximises stowage volume over living spaces



The superyacht finish is dazzling. The longer you spend on board the more you start to think it's a cunningly disguised 120-footer



A superyacht wheelhouse, but at a certified 23.99m in length, the Darwin is built with owner-drivers in mind

cunningly disguised 120-footer. Not needing to create illusions of space is a luxury afforded to vessels which possess the real thing. While the Darwin's length and beam invite comparisons with similarly sized yachts, the sheer volume of its deep, round-bilge hull puts it in another league from most.

While the shipyard is happy to entertain any request an owner might have regarding the interior, *Vitadimare* departs from the standard layout in only a few key areas. The owner's cabin, occupying the full beam of the lower deck, has been fitted with a lot of extra stowage space – notably a large, walk-in wardrobe which would not look out of place on a superyacht. This considerably reduces the floor area and succeeds in making the suite seem rather small – although it is still a respectable size.

The other key decision was entirely for the benefit of the captain, whose excellent ensuite cabin abaft the wheelhouse shares the upper deck with a small TV lounge and library for the guests. This contrasts with the standard layout, which banishes the captain below to the perfectly respectable crew quarters, and creates a full-width 'sky lounge' on the upper deck, which looks like it would be a stunning place to install yourself with a G&T, whether in port or on passage.

The VIP cabin in the bows has also seen some of its width sacrificed to stowage space – you can never really have too much, especially on a long trip – while the two twin guest cabins each have an extra fold-down berth.

With a potential ten guests on board, the catering facilities need to be up to snuff, and *Vitadimare's* galley is a very impressive affair, with professional-standard equipment and considerable stowage and freezer space. There are several places where you could choose to eat: the ten-seat formal dining table amidships, the sheltered table in the cockpit when not in harbour, or at another big table on the upper deck. Connected via a food elevator to the main galley, this elevated dining area has its own alfresco cooking facilities – particularly specified by the owner's wife, by all accounts an excellent chef – which include a fridge, three hotplates and an expanse of Corian worktop, expressly for preparing fresh fish, Japanese style.



Finish

The fit and finish throughout is of a high quality and the muted decor in *Vitadimare* suited the purposeful craft

LIFE ON THE OPEN SEA

With this emphasis on stowage and catering, it is clear that *Vitadimare's* owner intends to cruise extensively. He has bought a yacht designed to do just that. The lazarette aft of the engine room contains a fitted workbench, a toolbox and spares lockers to reduce the engineer's reliance on shore supplies of either kit or expertise. There are two gensets, a high-capacity watermaker and zero-speed stabilisers. The big six-metre tender stowed on the upper deck also plays its part in the yacht's self-sufficiency, ensuring that getting ashore is safe and anchoring a more attractive option for guests.

The low-powered, torquey Caterpillar diesels installed in the beautifully engineered machinery space turn enormous props via huge gearboxes which have a ratio of nearly four to one. These small engines are perfectly capable of driving the yacht economically at close to its maximum hull speed, and thanks to the fuel capacity – 36 tonnes, an astonishing quantity for a boat this length, in tanks set right down at its lowest point amidships – they can carry on doing so for days. Weeks, even. The yacht's range at 10 knots should only be described as transatlantic if you mean across and back again.

That's the thing with the Darwin 86 – everything about it is big, except perhaps its length. Biggest of all, though, is its ambition. This is a true explorer yacht of impressive capabilities, that wants to convince you it's 120ft long. And after a little time on board, you might start to believe it. **MBY**



The crew mess, which seems to have been borrowed from a 40-metre yacht



Two commercially rated CAT C12s sit in a spacious engine room. Access is via the transom



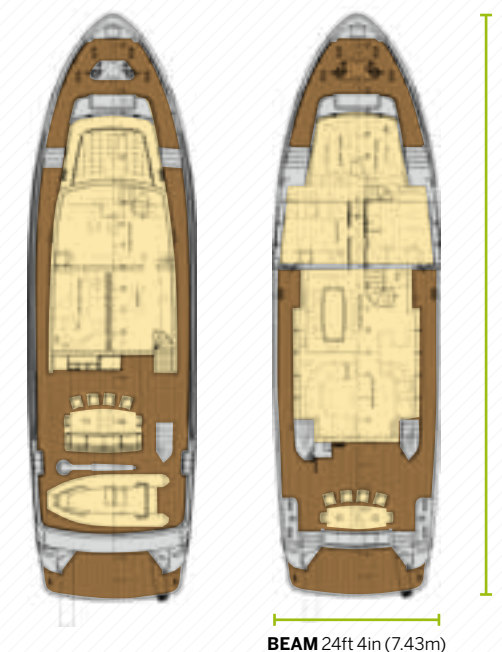
Built for the sea: an aerial view shows off the 86's stubby, purposeful looks

THE DATA

SPECIFICATIONS

HULL LENGTH (ISO 8666)
78ft 9in (23.99m)
BEAM
24ft 4in (7.43m)
CONSTRUCTION
Steel/aluminium
FUEL CAPACITY
9,239 gal (42,000 litres)
WATER CAPACITY
748 gal (3,400 litres)
DRAUGHT
7ft 6in (2.30m)

DISPLACEMENT
185 tonnes (loaded)
ENGINES
2 x 385hp Caterpillar C12
MAX SPEED
11.5 knots
CRUISING SPEED
10.0 knots
RANGE
7,000nm @ 10 knots
PRICE
From €6.05 million ex VAT
(approx £5.47 million ex VAT)



LENGTH OVERALL 85ft 5in (26.04m)

BEAM 24ft 4in (7.43m)