



# Felicita west It's all about Experience!

When we talk about experience in yachting, the word can refer to cumulative knowledge or sensory enjoyment or disappointment. In early June, a hand-picked group of the world's yachting press were given an opportunity to witness both definitions on the island of Sardinia. Perini Navi, the world's most successful super-sailing-yacht builder, created the perfect environment in which to experience their latest and greatest project, the 64-m Felicita west. In this context, the reference to cumulative knowledge does not relate to the world's yachting press, but to the team which created this majestic yacht. The reference to sensory enjoyment specifically focuses on the day's sailing and gastronomic indulgence we all had to endure, and finally the sensory disappointment relates solely to the need to return home after the incredible voyage of discovery into what makes yacht owners do what they do.





**The trip.** Sardinia is not the easiest place to get to and requires at least one stop-over from wherever you are flying in the world. A wearisome journey is not enhanced by the fact that the Italian domestic airline's strike action chose to coincide with the Perini trip. Gisella Macchiaroli, Perini's PR guru, must have been tearing her hair out during the 12 hours prior to our scheduled arrival. However, all's well that ends well on this fantasy tour and the journalist élite squad arrived on time at Olbia International Airport, thanks to the Aga Khan-sponsored Meridiana airline which waited in Rome for our three-hour-late in-bound flight from London. As the small commercial airliner banked over the coast of Sardinia, the tall, dark clouds seemed to disperse for our arrival.

I have often wondered about the power of the press and here I witnessed it first hand. The emerald waters and golden beaches winked invitingly at us hard-nosed editors, distracting our minds from the incisive reporting and interrogative questioning planned for this serious press visit. Luggage in hand, we entered the stunning new terminal building at Olbia, only to be greeted by a local Sardinian (are they called sardines?) clutching a Perini sign. Once all had been assembled we quickly boarded the small, dark-blue luxury coach, emblazoned with the names of the finest resorts on the island.

With the air-conditioning at full blast and the airport in the distance, the resort we were destined for was the incredible location of Cala di Volpe. For most people in our market, this is the famous billionaire's playground, a long, sheltered bay a few minutes around the corner from Porto Cervo, the perfect anchorage with all the trimmings. The trimmings in our case was the exclusive hotel and resort of Cala di Volpe, owned by the Starwood Hotels group. This unique oasis was home for the next two days of hardship and strife.

Our programme resembled a military training course, with only minutes available for de-stressing and relaxation. If the Perini team wanted this elite squad of hacks together for two days, they clearly wanted their pound of flesh! This was an intensive course in yacht ownership, exposed as we were to one of the finest hotels in the world, with immaculate service and incredible imbibing coupled expertly with gourmet sustenance; yet this was only part of the itinerary. There was more to come.

Our greeting comprised an army of suited staff, whisking our luggage from chariot to chambre, huge hugs and amiable armlocks from the Perini team, deep and meaningful kisses on each cheek from the PR guru, and there we were. We had arrived in ultimate yacht owner heaven. The foyer and bar area were pristine, silent and polished, apart from the dishevelled euphoria of our arrival, but on reflection the hotel entrance looked somewhat familiar. Back in the hotel's heyday, the James Bond team used the location for 'The Spy Who Loved Me', with the stunning Barbara Bach gracing the furniture, no doubt distracting everyone from the incredible view across the bay. After our introductions, we were dragged kicking and screaming to our rooms: in my, case an immaculate haven, which was relaxing, comfortable and cool (totally unlike a normal hotel room, with its stressful ambience, soft lumpy mattresses and freezing germ-ridden air-conditioning and skin-peeling steam showers!). After standing for twenty minutes under the full flow of the body temperature cascade in preparation for the evening's entertainment, my mind started to wander. How were my stocks performing, was my conglomerate OK without me and will that take-over succeed? I was starting to appreciate what it must be like to be a Perini owner and I was enjoying the feeling. Very soon I realised that this was fantasy and would all be over in the next 48 hours, but in the meantime I was a sensory sponge, absorbing every aspect of the experience.

We all rendezvous'd some minutes later for a short ride along the bay, on board the two Zodiac Hurricane tenders hailing from the mother ship. She was why we were here. This was the latest, greatest creation, a majestic yacht freshly delivered from the Viareggian yard, the largest Perini completed to date, the new Felicita west. The 64-m





white leviathan stood tall in the water and would play host to our dusk work programme (this was a tough assignment). Captain Scott Leadbetter and his team subliminally 'piped' us aboard, trays of proportionately tall bellinis beckoned and the 'hard graft' began. The evening was warm and still. Other insignificant yachts arrived at Cala di Volpe and the bay assumed the role of anchorage. There is a warm fuzzy feeling that any yacht owner must experience when he is comfortable in the knowledge that he has the biggest vessel at any particular location. This is, and probably will always be, a huge driving force in our market, and just by sipping cocktails at 20.00 hours on the aft deck of Felicita west, we witnessed it first hand.

This was a distant cry from my last visit to hull number C.2035, tied up stern to, in front the shipyard office, crawling with subcontractors, yard craftsmen and newly recruited crew, all clamouring to complete their schedule of works and making ready for her maiden voyage. It was even further removed from our first Perini press trip back in the spring of 2001, when we all witnessed the bare-bones structure of Felicita west at the Perini yard in Istanbul (see Issue 41, page 32). All I can say is that if Istanbul was anything to go by, I was physically and mentally prepared for the sequence of events, as were, I am sure, the Perini dynamic duo of Fabrizio Sgariglia and Burak Akgul.

Dinner followed our serene, tranquil on-board cocktail hour, my sensory sponge becoming more and more sodden as the hours passed. A traditional Sardinian feast was hosted alongside the expansive pool of the Cala di Volpe, romantically lit at every few paces, although highly unnecessary as my fellow diners provided minimal diversion in their rugged manly exteriors. After embarking at Heathrow some twelve hours prior to the end of this first day's entrance into 'Owner World', the need to retire took priority. While some made a beeline for the bar, hitting the hay was on my schedule, and what golden soft, fluffy hay it was. The bed was almost comparable to that at home and as a result achieved my first ever full night's sleep in a hotel. That is a clear demonstration of quality in my travel book.

**The team.** Day two of the programme involved a swim at 07.00 hours. Being alone in the Cala di Volpe's vast pool at such a tranquil time of day is the perfect way to reflect and meditate on life's trials and tribulations. Fortunately, they have been few and far between, so my meditation was short lived, as was, unfortunately, the tranquillity, rudely interrupted by two ageing guests who also needed a morning dip. Being of Germanic origin, they chose to dispose of all woven barriers and enjoy the freedom of the pool. Luckily, I had opted to swim before breakfast. After regaining my composure and focusing on the task ahead, I met up with my literary colleagues and our work began.

The Perini team, renowned for their immaculate dress code, be-suited and tied, all arrived in 'resort mode'. Even our principal host, Giancarlo Ragnetti, the Perini 'big cheese', demonstrated that he had the well-toned and tanned legs that typically reside beneath Milan-tailored cloth. Once again we climbed aboard the two Zodiac Hurricanes and glided across the flat calm of the bay. During the short ride we were psyching ourselves up for a serious day's sailing. I noticed that one of the US journalists had even brought wet weather gear. What was he expecting or, more importantly, who was his source of 'divine' information? It was 30 degrees, pure blue sky and with a gentle six-knot breeze, gusting to seven knots. Once again, the operating team, under the command of Captain Scott, welcomed us politely and professionally, and my maiden voyage on a Perini began.

The build team settled into the various seating positions on the aft deck and prepared their minds for the day's interrogation. Naval architect/designer/sailing meister Ron Holland, creator of the hull and performance characteristics, was quickly pacing up and down the decks looking up and down the rig, in childlike anticipation of the hull's 'slickness' in light airs. Franco Romani and Bernardo Chichi, the yard's technical and design experts respectively, were both proudly receiving heaps of praise from all on board, and Dan Lenard, hailing from the Nuovolari & Lenard studio, was admiring his fine lines (on the yacht, of





course, not his face.). Both Dan and Carlo Nuvolari had been involved with the client for some time and, even before the project arrived on Perini's doorstep, had been interpreting the owner's subtle exterior and interior nuances. When you compare the first 40-m Felicita am with the new mammoth 64-m project, it is like taking a huge magnifying glass and examining the smaller yacht at close range. The exterior changes are very subtle and require time and concentration to appreciate the studio's attention to minute detail. This is a clear demonstration that the owner loved his first big yacht and wanted to maintain her profile and appearance.

**The yacht.** Once all the introductions had been completed, we started our brief tour of the yacht, immediately heading below decks to the machinery spaces. A sensible move, as Captain Scott was preparing to press the buttons and get moving. After we had spent the next 30 minutes within the gleaming surroundings, inspecting the hardware and software that give life to Felicita's systems, the Brazilian engineer Jairo Martins gave command of the engines to the bridge. The engine room is clearly a no-nonsense space with proven systems, two 920 kW Deutz engines each driving 1.5-m Kamewa feathering props, three Northern Light gensets, two at 125 kW and one at 80 kW. Watermakers, fuel systems, air-conditioning and sewage plant are all systems that have been seen before and installed on previous Perini yachts with good success. By installing Kamewa propellers, now part of the Rolls Royce group, the parent's expertise provided the necessary system to control the propulsion system. The prop pitch is electronically controlled and the two engines use an electronic governor to control load situations. This ensures that the load and pitch operate in harmony to reduce vibration, noise and cavitation. Engineer Jairo explained that the Kamewa throttle can be pushed forward from 0–10 in eight seconds and the control system will prevent overload, smoothly increasing the revs to a safe maximum of approximately 1,500-1,600 rpm. At 1,800 rpm the system recorded a maximum under power speed of 16.2 knots.

From the comfort of his control room, he went onto explain that the system allows him, at the push of a button, to override the engine controls in case of serious emergency. If necessary, a crash-stop has demonstrated during her trials that Felicita west will stop within two and a half boat lengths, just over 160 m. More interestingly, Captain Scott was able to demonstrate later in the day that in open water, without any obstacles to port and starboard, the yacht can deviate course in an emergency within one and a half boat lengths, just under the 10m mark. Good information to know, but, fingers crossed, it will not be needed.

When questioned about the oversized generator sets, Jairo explained that the requirements for electrical power when hoisting the sails can be extreme, and both gensets are needed. The hotel load for the whole vessel can operate on approximately 100 kW, so he has plenty in reserve. It also allows him to run the gensets at maximum efficiency, swapping over the power requirements to reduce hours. The system also provides ample reserve power in emergency situations. It is nice to see a case of better to be safe than sorry.

With the main engines now in start mode and the congested control room emptying, we all decided that the machinery noise was painful for our delicate ears, so deck level was calling. With our sunglasses back on and the gentle breeze cooling our already reddening foreheads, we noticed that the stable platform had, in fact, slipped anchor and was heading out to sea.

**The sailing.** This was a truly exciting moment, my first sail on a Perini – a yacht that I had always admired on paper, but had never had the opportunity to experience first hand. What was even more exhilarating was the fact that this was the first all-aluminium Perini, with a new hull shape that was designed to perform and an optimised rig. Even though the breeze was gentle, Ron Holland, the brains behind the technical brawn, explained that she should produce some interesting results. When poised on the fly bridge alongside Captain





Scott, I watched push-button sailing in action. Crew were all in position, watching the sails climb the 60-m rig out of the safety of the Marten Marine in-boom furling system. Within minutes, the vast acreage of Doyle's latest Ocean Weave cloth was set and we started to accelerate smoothly to a comfortable speed. This was what it was all about.

Although not crashing through waves or mistrals powering the sails, you felt the power of the rig and witnessed the majesty of the white fabric architecture high above your heads. I immediately asked myself why I had never done this before. The answer was simple, "never been invited, I suppose". With the Kamewa propellers now feathering and the engine idling, we were under the full power of nature, the overlapping arcing sheets, the criss-crossing stays and rigging all capturing and controlling the available wind pressure to propel the 685 tonnes of yacht into open water.

With a traditional steel-hulled Perini, the forces exerted on the hull and superstructure are significant, and suitable scantlings and frames ensure that the yacht meets the necessary loads. In the case of Felicita west, where the yacht has exclusively used aluminium, the expansion properties of this lighter strength metal require huge reinforcement to accommodate the loads exerted on the stays. One example was explained by Burak, Perini's owner liaison: the chain plate for the mainstay extends some three metres into the hull structure and in order to achieve the required strength according to Lloyd's class and the yacht's performance criteria, two solid weeks of welding were required.

An hour or so into our voyage, the wind speed had reached an impressive six knots, but even more impressive was the boat speed reading on the helm, 5.9 knots. This suggested that the hull and rig were as optimal as necessary, giving approximately 100% performance. The breeze climbed later in the afternoon as the island warmed up to double figures and at this time we looked at the loads on the various sheets. Captain Scott explained that during the owner's maiden voyage, when the breeze was substantial, the yankee sheet was showing an 18-tonne load. Luckily, they had predicted a need for 20-tonne Perini captive winches. Ron was clearly impressed with his achievements, suggesting that this was new territory for a cruising yacht. The biggest loads he had seen were on board a much earlier Dutch project of his, the S.Y. Thalia, where the sheet readings showed 13 tonnes.

The Felicita rig itself has been modified from the traditional Perini arrangement, no fisherman, modifications to the mast in co-operation with consultant Chris Mitchell. The main and mizzen have less spreaders than traditional Perinis, but extra stays fore and aft have been employed to reduce the pumping action in lumpy head seas, a common complaint for any large sailing yacht of the past decade. In addition to the above-deck refinements employed on this, the largest Perini to date, more significant amendments had been made below the waterline. Ron explained that, traditionally, the Perini hull shape offered huge interior and storage volume with its deeper V hull shape amidships, while the profile of his new performance-related hull was much more shallow and rounded, as you can see from the CAD illustration. While discussing the subject of sailing with Ron, his animated quote about the performance in the six knots of light breeze was a simple statement in his 'Kiwirish' accent, "She's bloody impressive!" As he pointed out, at the beginning of our trip, "You actually felt the yacht pick up the wind and accelerate; for 64 m of yacht that's pretty special". Ron also suggested that in the right conditions, good clean wind and with some added wave pressure, he could predict a top speed under sail of 20 knots, the wave pressure pushing the hull over the resistance curve. Now that I would like to experience.

I have to add some more superlatives and exclamations about my first sailing experience with the Perini team. When you consider that the majority of yachts in the world today are motoryachts, twin engined, multi state-roomed, floating villas that drive from a to b, drop the hook,

have lunch, a bit of a play in the water and then back to the safety of the marina, I would wholeheartedly recommend that these owners spend at least one day on a large sailing yacht to understand what it is all about and to experience the power and majesty of a large rig, sleek hull and full sails transporting you from a to b without the pitching, rolling and yawing of a motor yacht. It is a common misconception that sailing yachts heel over uncomfortably and roll around when at anchor and provide cramped interior spaces. After this recent enlightening encounter, I would suggest otherwise. The huge rig and sails, countered by the vast keel, hold her steady as a rock and at 64 m you cannot start to suggest that space is limited. Give me a silent powerful sailing yacht any day.

In fact, on our return to Cala di Volpe that afternoon, we spied a large 70-m neighbour anchored 500 m to our portside. This vast, dark-blue six-decked block looked fairly incongruous when surrounded by the beauty of the Costa Smeralda. On which yacht would I feel more comfortable? Both physically and spiritually, it would have to be the Perini, but that's my personal choice and perhaps one of taste too.

**The design.** When we talk of taste, Perini yachts exude vast quantities and in terms of design, they have always excelled. Felicita west is no exception, apart from the fact that much design input has come from external sources, however without being derogatory about the external influence, you would hardly notice. During our day's sailing we were able to live and breathe this yacht, exploring every facet with the freedom of a guest or the Owner himself, there was no stage managed tour or crowded yard situation. This trip allowed one to appreciate the spatial relationships, the atmosphere, the sensations and the purpose of each aspect of the yacht. This was clearly a unique experience and one that should be repeated to allow journalists to appreciate why clients become so absorbed in the design and construction process (All in the spirit of good research Ed.).

During a previous trip to the yard, Captain Scott explained that the design process evolved, as it often does, by the Owner living and enjoying his previous yacht. As we have already pointed out, Felicita west is a blown up version of his first 43m Perini, with minor amendments that have evolved out of experience on board with the family. In essence this was an eight year research and development project for the current Felicita west. Returning to the on board experience, the greatest design impact is achieved when stepping on board itself. As you will see from the opening image, Felicita west has a counter stern very atypical of the current Perini fleet, this provides a grand entrance from water level through a vast open air atrium/stairway, with views skywards to the mast and rig. The design removed any need for a deck head and when in its stowed configuration, the bathing platform and the steps, fold perfectly to create a vast stern platform, aft of the seating cockpit. What is special about Felicita west, when sitting on board is the combination of excellent use of space and the feeling of well balanced proportions. This is a yacht that you can easily roam about on deck and absorb the attention to detail, the angles and subtleties that break up the vast superstructure, the feeling that you are on board a huge yacht, but never dominated by its size. You experience a sense of balance, although the walkways may be wider than you would expect on a sailing yacht, the high bulwarks and small steps cut into the structure prevent the sensation of feeling surrounded by flat shapes. In addition, the design has practical application too, the high bulwarks meeting the necessary requirements for safety and possibly by accident, the angled lines and steps within the main structure, provide safe steps for the crew's cleaning duties. Moving back to the exterior design, throughout the yacht your options for seating and relaxing are complete, however the owner has chosen straightforward configurations with minimal sun lounging platforms. One small area has been reserved for this at the base of the mizzen, no doubt he understands that not only is a teak deck suitable for lounging during sailing. But also you soon appreciate that when exposed to the sun on any yacht, your 'frazzle' factor



escalates hugely and you probably cannot bear to sit exposed for more than half an hour. This has therefore dictated the extensive use of overhead structures and canopies for the exterior seating areas, again probably as a result of cruising the world's oceans in all conditions. Even in early June in Sardinian cool breezes, you appreciated the diffused security of the canopy from the sun's glare. Below decks when inspecting the cabins or using the heads, you were exposed to more of the famous interior quality from the Perini stable. No disrespect, but although this is a fabulous living space and well executed, it warrants very little explanation or description as it meets everyone's expectations of the famous Perini marque. Excellent wood work, witness the impressive staircase leading to the guest cabins, classical fabrics and suitable entertainment options, but if you are able to spend any time on this or any other yacht of similar style and proportion, there are many more interesting spaces to enjoy on deck. To be honest, I would probably be happier to sleep in the vast aft seating cockpit if anchored in the Caribbean. The final page of this report demonstrates the myriad of images created while sitting, lying, walking on board Felicity west. Although I might be slightly biased in terms of my appreciation of the Perini product (only in terms of liking the style of the product), the experience of spending one day living and sailing on board Felicity west made me think that my bias is justified. All I can say to all you motor yacht owners, is that if you get the chance, call the Perini team and ask them for a similar programme, you might be surprised by the whole experience.

**The future.** During the programme we were introduced to one or two new developments from the Perini plan. In addition to an incredibly healthy order book, comprising a 43m, a 54m, three 56m and an incredible 87m, they have in development a brand new 68m project, again in close co-operation with Ron Holland for hull optimisation, but also a light and fast 38m sloop in co-operation with Ed Dubois, who had enjoyed a good working partnership on the recently launched 52m Squall. In addition to the two new projects added to the list, there is also talk of a 40m motor yacht project too. Now obviously this is a whole new departure for the yard but in reality not unusual, especially when you consider that many of the sailing yacht manufacturers have experimented with success in the power market. All I can say, is that judging by the evolving design that we have witnessed through the 31 Perini's that are now part of the world's fleet, one would expect this motor yacht to look pretty special, unfortunately we have to wait and see. The final announcement came as a result of a lengthy discussion with an industry veteran who joined the Sardinia programme. The USA has been an important market for Perini and their Newport sales office headed by Bruce Brakenhoff junior has enjoyed good success over the years. The US office now has a new addition to the team, who flew several thousand miles to introduce the new programme, his father, Bruce Brakenhoff senior. The programme under the control of Bruce senior, will be known as the "Owners Programme" and is clearly a result of the expanding fleet and the wide array of services required by the Perini clients. Effectively what the programme provides is a part management programme for charter operations and brokerage deals, both the fourth 50m is a Rose and the featured Felicity west are already enrolled. Plus with the sale of Andromeda la Dea, Freedom, the previous 50m Felicity west and the Maria Christina, it would appear that the programme is proving it worth already. With 31 yachts in the fleet and a further seven in progress, all of which are significant yachts, not only does the Owner Programme have a ready made client base, it will no doubt keep Bruce senior on his toes. It was a pleasure to meet Bruce senior on this trip as well as enjoy the impeccable hospitality of the Perinists, and I think as a result of my experiences in Cala di Volpe, I am better informed about the Perini way of life, the only problem now is "when will the next experience be?"

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