

Oyster Marine has come a long way since the 1970s, when the fledgling company's range of solidly built, practical and impressively performing yachts helped to define what form the modern "cruiser racer" would take in coming years. In 2013 the UK-based brand will be 40 years old and is set to celebrate with its own World Rally, circling the globe.

A very credible fleet of around 30 Oysters looks likely, and that shouldn't surprise. It's hard to name another luxury brand whose owners so frequently buy with aspirations – which they frequently fulfil – of completing ocean crossings and circumnavigations. Soon enough we'll surely see the newly evolved 625 joining Oyster's world-girdling roll of honour.

The 625 follows a very able antecedent, the Oyster 62, which received endless rave reviews for her easily handed, clean sailing, deep-ocean cruising capability cosseted in fabulous comforts and protected by top workmanship. Coming of age she impressively reached hull number 21 – not bad for a boat in the \$2.5 million bracket.

Sitting neatly on the owner operation/minimal crew threshold, the 62's successor comes with a complete redesign, drawing on the learnings from the 62 and, interestingly, from the new larger Oyster Superyachts, the 100 and 125, building in Turkey in a close collaboration with RMK Marine who have a long history in absolute top-end yachting.

The result is invigorating, with Rob Humphreys again responsible for the hull and sail plan and the Oyster in-house team taking care of styling and engineering, perpetuating what the builders call the Oyster DNA. The key traits are the signature deck saloon and raised central cockpit – enabling an extra large (relative to length) aft master suite, while keeping the massive lazarette for all that cruising gear so many builders overlook. It's all on a substantially built yet still nimble hull with a cruising-friendly, long bulb keel and skeg-hung rudder. Owners can also opt for a SuperShoal keel for cruising in shallower water and berths.

Good builders do more than think big: they think small too. Oyster wants boats that sail well yet can survive the worst seas. That means strong and substantial boats, which these days utilise weight-saving carbon and Kevlar FRP composites. Oyster adds to the strength by moulding a single section hull: a complex and costly investment for small series runs.

Then the small stuff happens. Inside the under floor sections between sturdy stringers and frames, every single limber hole leading eventually to the deep bilge is chamfered with hand-poured gel coat to get just the right angle to create flow



ABOVE & BEYOND

AFTER ALMOST 40 YEARS IN BUSINESS, OYSTER MARINE IS SHOWING NO SIGN OF SLACKING OFF IN ITS PURSUIT OF THE PERFECT PRODUCTION SAILING YACHT.

MIKE OWEN GETS ABOARD THE NEW 625 AND FINDS THAT THE MORE HE LOOKS, THE MORE HE FINDS TO LIKE.



so as to prevent any water retention and subsequent stagnation and smell. Likewise the cabin soles are all painstakingly fitted and machine screwed onto rubber seals with side pips between. These details, along with the rubber-stopped compression-tight door latches, are small but vitally important ways to reduce noise and vibration. "We don't do creaking floors on Oysters", says a team member. "People live on our boats – it would drive you nuts."

Every deck hatch – and there are many – has drain lines both port and starboard, deftly concealed in a strategically plumbed run of hundreds of metres of piping to outlets below the waterline, to avoid the ugly black streaking of the hull so common with simple, low cost topside scuppers. Also, so as to not interrupt the graceful sweep of hull sides, there are no normal tank breather piercings topside. Instead, Oyster cleverly vents tanks through holes in the stainless steel guardrails over the dorades.

Although only a tad longer than the 62, the 625 is so much bigger below decks, with Humphreys pushing floor lines further out into max beam while also carrying more beam further aft. As usual Oyster offer optional layouts, with the key arrangement to date though revolving around an astonishing saloon made even more impressive by the triple bank of vertical standing windows on either side, complementing the wraparound upper windows.

The trademark full-beam owner's suite, located aft this time, is big without detriment to the general balance. Comforts include a perfectly upholstered settee, as well as the wide centreline bed with lee cloths side and centre; design niceties include a rise and fall television, iPod dock, LED ribbon lighting in the kick recesses (that also effectively increase floor standing area).

Moving forward portside, the linear galley is considerably bigger than on the 62, with space enough for two to pass and an abundance of practically arranged stowage. Equipment includes a gimballed five-burner Force 10 oven, a very ample centre-line fridge, a separate front-opening freezer, a dishwasher and washer/drier and Avonite worktop. Ventilation is again excellent, with three opening hatches.

Forward, two steps lead up to that incredibly bright saloon, where owners can select from a range of woods including maple, teak, cherry and oak. The arrangement here has rise-and-fall TV with high spec DVD and sound system, and a massive fold-over table providing comfortable in-cabin dining for up to ten people. In the open floor area the cabin sole lifts on gas struts to reveal the service pit, with easy access to raw water strainers, fuel filters, watermaker, calorifier, hot water and that deep bilge.

The walk-in engine room is down two steps in the aft starboard quarter, passing the sizeable navstation surrounded by Raymarine and optional B&G navcom equipment and meticulously detailed distribution panels. A bunked passage cabin can be specified as workshop, office or child's cabin. The generator is under the companionway steps, again gas strutted for easy access.

Forward of the saloon are mirrored guest cabins, a double to starboard and twin to port, both ensuite and to the same high standard as the owner's accommodation, and the forecabin, reached through a watertight bulkhead door, or via a deck ladder, can either be fully joined or funky utilitarian, dependent on whether specified as crew cabin or sail locker.



SUN WORSHIP

Left: Flush hatches on the aft deck can be covered with custom made sun pads, turning the space into a flexible outdoor lounge area. Above: The main saloon is a place of understated elegance, with an adjoining galley well designed for use in a seaway. Note the fully equipped nav station aft.





THE OYSTER 625 IS A WORTHY SUCCESSOR TO THE PRACTICAL, CAPABLE AND ELEGANT YACHTS ON WHICH THIS HIGHLY REGARDED BRAND HAS BUILT ITS REPUTATION. ANY OWNER WHO CHOOSES ONE WILL BE WELL REWARDED, AND THERE'S A GOOD CHANCE THAT WHEN THE OYSTER WORLD RALLY SETS OFF AROUND THE GLOBE IN 2013, THERE WILL BE ONE OR TWO 625S LEADING THE CHARGE.

OYSTER MARINE

CENTRE STAGE

Above: The raised central cockpit is a signature Oyster design, and creates a comfortable lounge and dining area away from the twin helms. Left: Panoramic hull windows are a signature styling feature of the 625.



The exterior deckplan is well thought out with dual pedestal steering and controls, and a separate guest cockpit with a hand railed central table with an integral fridge. Expansive teak planking runs seamlessly without any cross caulking of the tightly butted joints. Chain plates are flush, as are deck hatches, but overall deck gear though is optimised rather than simply minimises – sea sense rules.

The standard rig on the Oyster 625 is three spreader Selden alloy, with fully battened main and lazyjacks and a Reckmann electric furler on the foredeck. Hall carbon spars and Navtec rod are available as an option. There's a cutter option, too, and among the eight 625s ordered to date in-mast furling is a favourite. This is not so surprising, as both main and Genoa (both from Dolphin) were sheeted in and working well for us within four minutes of flipping the first of the joystick controls. The boat's 33,500kg displacement gathering pace quickly. With such ease of sail setting, it seems in-mast is bound to lead to fewer engine hours for the quiet running 180hp Volvo Penta, once away from the quayside courtesy also of the Sleipner bow thruster.

With good feedback through the Lewmar torque rod steering and that heavy displacement making a fuss-free ride in a small short chop, on our moderately winded day the 625 found her groove upwind at around eight knots close to 30 degrees apparent, with a bear-away taking her close to 10 in slightly less true wind speed. The team suggested a turn or two on the Genoa at around 15 knots and a reef in the main at 20 knots close-hauled, or 25 downwind when she'd be pushing 13 knots plus.

Docking gear is good with practical anchoring arrangement and armoury of folding cleats. For shade and comfort there's a tidy bimini arrangement with a cover and frame that collapse into specially formed runways. The companionway itself is a treat, counterweighted so that it softly slots into the bridgedeck and then drifts upwards at a touch to close. And for that swim or ski session, there's a big boat-style stairway built into the transom beneath the davits, home to a 3.7-metre sports tender. If diving's your pleasure, there's space too in the lazarette for a compressor.

The Oyster 625 is a worthy successor to the practical, capable and elegant yachts on which this highly regarded brand has built its reputation. Any owner who chooses one will be well rewarded, and there's a good chance that when the Oyster World Rally sets off around the globe in 2013, there will be one or two 625s leading the charge. ○

www.oystermarine.com

BUILDER	Oyster Marine
COUNTRY OF BUILD	Turkey
DESIGNER	Rob Humphreys
LENGTH OVERALL	19.87m (63' 7")
LENGTH AT WATERLINE	17.24m (56' 7")
BEAM	15.44m (17' 10")
DRAFT	std: 12.80m (9' 2"); shoal: 2.15m (7' 1"); supersh'l: 1.82m (6' 0")
DISPLACEMENT (STD KEEL)	33,550kg
STD RIG	Semi-fractional sloop with fully battened main
RIG OPTIONS	In-mast furling, cutter, non-overlapping/ double headsail
SAIL AREA	235.86 sq m (2538 sq ft)
AIR DRAFT	27.20m (89' 2")
ENGINE	Volvo D4-180 132kW (180hp)
FUEL CAPACITY	1700 litres (449 US gal)
WATER CAPACITY	1200 litres (317 US gal)
CABINS	4
BERTHS	8
PRICE	AU\$4M (approx)