

IT'S A BLAST

Finot Conq has a reputation for designing superfast, yet reliable raceboats, but now it has drawn what is claimed to be the world's fastest 100ft cruising yacht. Elaine Bunting was blown away

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“Pascal Conq and his team had never before been commissioned to design a yacht of this size”



A Mistral is blowing 30 knots out of an empty sky. Once the mainsail of *Nomad IV* is hoisted to the second reef point and the J2 jib snaps out, we are off. Hitting 20 knots as we are fired out of Marseille, our wake streams astern like a river in spate. We are going so fast that by the time the spray from the bow atomises in the wind it is already at our lee quarter, refracted into a rainbow.

The raw sensation of power is what you might expect on muscle boats such as a Volvo Ocean 65 or a Vendée Globe racer. But this is the carbon super-cruiser *Nomad IV*, according to designers Finot-Conq ‘the world’s fastest 100ft cruising yacht’, and as Ile de Porquerolles rolls by, the bear away is no more than a helmsman’s finger jab at one of the control panels. The aroma of dinner being prepared by the chef wafts up through the companionway. On a yacht that could easily gobble up 400 miles a day, it is reassuring to know that, come what may, there will be canapés at eight.

With her bowsprit, plumb bow, chines and huge beam carried right aft, *Nomad IV* is a dead ringer for those ocean racers, and with good reason. For a cruising boat with a comfortable proportion of that power and performance, the owner turned to the French design group renowned for their mastery of short-handed offshore racers, from Mini Transat pocket rockets to IMOCA 60s. Lead designer Pascal Conq (see page 65) has been behind numerous groundbreaking innovations over the past 30 years, yet he and his team had never before been commissioned to design a yacht of this size.

A true sailor’s superyacht

The owner, a French IT and telecoms entrepreneur, wanted a 100-footer that he could race and charter, cruise round the world and take part in ocean racing classics such as the Middle Sea Race, the Fastnet and Sydney-Hobart. A lifelong sailor, he grew up with yachts and in his twenties sailed around Europe and to the Azores with his family in their 44ft steel Frans Maas design – “in the days of sextants,” he adds. After years of owning motor boats, he wanted a yacht on which he could entertain, so the brief was for a yacht with cabins for 12 guests, four permanent crew and a cockpit that could hold 50 people.

The yacht should be capable of entering shoal waters – the keel lifts from 5.4m to 3m – and not heel to more than 12°, so that his wife and any nervous guests would feel more at ease on board. Above all, she had to be a yacht for sailing – fast.

From all these ingredients, Finot-Conq have come up with a true sailor’s superyacht, one that that is scorchingly quick, looks gorgeous at anchor and has a dramatic interior that is simple and modern rather than one weighed down by opulence. By stripping back weight and complication, and using solo race boat technology, *Nomad IV* needs only a small crew.

Design work began in 2010 and she was three years in build at the Maxi Dolphin yard in Italy before her launch this year. The FC100 has been referred to as Finot-Conq’s take on the Wally Cento: an offshore racer, lightning fast high-tech cruiser and luxury charter boat. She carries up to 690m² of sail upwind, but to give her stability has an enormous beam of 8.3m, probably the widest of any yacht of this length built to date, and can load in 9 tonnes of water ballast, the equivalent of 100 people on the rail.



▲ Top: the view astern as we blast out of Marseille in a Mistral with the wake streaming behind. ▲ Above: the cockpit of the boat has two tables sheltered behind the coachroof and room for a party of 50 people. ▶ Right: 8 knots of wind, but it’s like helming in a wind tunnel!



▼ Below: spray flies off the leeward bow as we reach out beyond the Porquerolles under reefed mainsail and J2. As you can see here, the FC100 has carbon standing rigging, though Kevlar backstays





▲ Above: showpiece deck saloon, with carbon deckhead beams. ◀ Left: spacious owner's suite with minimalist styling



Photos: K Sprang/Finot Conq

The benefit of ballast can be felt beneath the feet, and as we harden up towards Saint Tropez in a dying breeze, the main is raised to full hoist and the J1 is unfurled. The owner offers me the helm as we tack up into the bay. Thrillingly, the boat spins crisply through the wind and when I let her draw up on the new hand, and feather the boat into the gusts as they bullet off the shore, the helm remains light, with a neutral feel very similar to wheel-steered IMOCA 60s.

That she sails and feels similar to the powerful, but forgiving Open class raceboats is unsurprising, but it did challenge the designers. "There is a lot of volume and the boat is very beamy, very powerful and stable," says Pascal Conq. "It was a big step-up in size, but we have been able to apply what we've learned from our racing boat experience. It [posed] some architecture problems; the power of the shape, the keel structure and load points, but that is what we really like to do."

The sailplan is raceboat style, with a towering 43m (120ft) mast set in the middle of the boat. She has a fully battened square top mainsail, J1 headsail on a hydraulic furler; a J2 and a J3 staysail that can be removed to make tacking easier. Upwind sails are all in moulded North 3Di carbon/Dyneema laminate (lighter, more durable and with less deformation than 3DL, but more expensive). The gennaker is Cuben Fibre and there is an enormous 980m² spinnaker for downwind sailing.

With such a tall rig, there is a huge yardage of halyard tails and falls – on a 2:1 purchase, the gennaker halyard measures 90m – so Finot-Conq incorporated a long halyard box beneath the deck forward.

Building a full carbon cruiser with Nomex interior, despite the huge expense involved, has its pay-offs for a cruising yacht, insists Conq: "The advantage is that it is stronger and if you invest in a light design you can get more equipment for comfort for the same weight and divide the benefit."

Every possible item was pared back. For example, there are only three winches at the mast so halyards are reeved through open blocks rather than fixed turning blocks. As is standard on grand-prix racers, halyard locks in the mast are used to reduce compression loads and allow for a lighter carbon mast.

Systems and machinery were also put on a fastidious diet. A 370hp Yanmar engine was chosen because it was the lightest option for producing a cruising speed of 10 knots, and everything from the Fischer Panda generator to the battery banks were picked with weight foremost in mind.

Carbon water ballast pipes are opened and closed with pneumatic butterfly valves (much lighter than hydraulics) and, inside these, bow thrusters transfer water from side to side – "very, very fast," say the designers.

Nomad IV's showpiece is her deck saloon, a few steps down from deck level. This big, bright area is full of space and light thanks to windows all the way round. The ingenious trick performed by Finot-Conq's interior designer, Pierre Forgia, is that it is large enough to lend shelter to the seating area of the cockpit, but not so bulky as to detract from the boat's sleek lines.

As we enter the harbour at Saint Tropez, the owner declines the help of his skipper to do a very neat piece of stern-to parking. The hostess emerges with champagne and canapés, along with plastic flute glasses and plates. The owner tells me he wanted plastic furniture, glasses and plates to save weight. He says this with a smile, but maybe it is true because this is a yacht with a firm sense of purpose. **YW**

LOA	30.48m	100ft 0in
Beam	8.30m	27ft 4in
Draught (lifting)	5.40m/3.00m	17ft 9in/9ft 10in
Disp	55 tonnes	
Keel	15 tonnes	
Water ballast	9.5 tonnes each side	
Upwind sail area	690m ²	7,427ft ²
Downwind sail area	1,400m ²	15,070ft ²
Fresh water tanks	2000lt	440gal
Fuel tanks	4000lt	880gal
Design:	Finot-Conq Architectes	
www.finot-conq.com		



▶ Right: open blocks at the mast step allow halyards to be led to either of two winches. ▶ Far right: the engine and machinery room. In the foreground, the grey pipes are the carbon water ballast pipes with valve shut offs, pneumatic system to the left, watermaker, genset and engine behind



G. Martin-Roger

A man of ideas



One of the most successful Vendée Globe designers ever, Pascal Conq, 52, has always been a pioneer of new ideas. At the age of 20, he invented the first ever canting keel, for an 18ft plywood pocket racer. Three years later, he teamed up with Jean-Marie Finot, a designer already well known for his successful quarter tonner *Ecume de Mer*.

Their Mini 6.50 designs were the first to feature twin rudders and water ballast. They also designed the 39ft aluminium *Levrier de Mer*, one of the early ULDBs, and it was this and the First Class 8 designed for Beneteau that brought them to the attention of solo sailor Alain Gautier.

The result of this collaboration was *Générali Concorde*, which Gautier sailed in the first Vendée Globe in 1989 and in which he won four years later. Since then every Vendée Globe has featured at least one Finot-Conq design and they have had three more wins: Gautier's *Bagages Superior* in 1993; Christophe Auguin's *Geodis* (first carbon/Nomex construction) in 1997; Michel Desjoyeaux's *PRB* in 2001; and the same boat again in 2005 under skipper Vincent Riou.

Their landmark inventions include Yves Parlier's radical Open 60 *Acquaine Innovations*, the first to have a rotating mast with deck spreaders. Conq broke new ground again with kick-up rudders on *PRB*.

But to my mind, the most notable aspect of Finot-Conq designs has been their remarkable reliability in a field notorious for structural failures. On average only around 50 per cent of Vendée Globe entrants complete the course, but these designs account for 33 entries since 1992 and 24 have finished.

Conq admits that he worries when his boats are being raced round the world and thinks deeply about safety and self-sufficiency for remote cruising, a reason why *Nomad IV* has two watertight bulkheads forward and one aft. "Some sailors are sensitive and have a close feeling and some do not. Michel Desjoyeaux and others feel very well the tensions and the loads on the ropes. Some are very careful and some more brutal. The [latter] are those we are frightened for."