



# FRENCH FINESSE AND STURDINESS

Since the turn of the millennium, French aluminium shipbuilder OCEA has seamlessly combined the high performance and robust qualities historically renowned in its patrol, work and passenger boats into the world of motor yachts. Daniel Barnes spoke to OCEA's main man when it comes to all things yachting. Commercial Director Jean-Michel Flour.

The luxury yacht market, by its very nature and the costs involved in each new vessel, has an overstated showmanship quality to it. But flamboyance isn't everything. Flying the French flag in the specialised aluminium motor yacht sector is OCEA, a company that prides itself on the seakeeping quality of its vessels.

"Take our first build, the Espiritu Santo, as an example," said Jean-Michel Flour, Commercial Director of OCEA Yachts, and in effect, the man overseeing all of OCEA's yacht building ventures. "Her maiden voyage, once she had left our facilities in Les Sables d'Olonne in 2002, was a 15,000 miles trip to Auckland, New Zealand, to attend the America's Cup."

To understand the confidence that yacht owners are placing in OCEA, it is best to look at the company's history - before it began building yachts.

Founded in 1987, OCEA began life as six separate companies, before a merger 30 years ago turned them into a collective and cohesive company specialising in the design, building and support of aluminium boats.

"We say to the customer that our DNA is working boats, so very reliable. They are ocean going vessels," said Mr Flour, paying homage to the ongoing and historic successes OCEA has enjoyed delivering patrol, safety and security boats, passenger vessels and multipurpose workboats. "We take care of our clients always as exceptional people. All our clients had one or more yachts before, and they don't want another production boat. They have been at sea, and they know exactly what they want; what size the cabins should be, the power of the engine, and the maximum speed they want etc. It is very interesting."

## Reliability meets indulgence

The motor yacht market was realised around the turn of the millennium.

"I joined the OCEA yacht department in February 2001; it was established the previous year after one of OCEA's existing clients asked if we could build a motor yacht," recalled Mr Flour, who enjoyed a stint as a yacht captain and engineer after spending many years in the Merchant Navy. ▀





Watertight internal design departments have been established as a result of OCEA's other boatbuilding arms. But for the yachting industry, the approach is different.

"I was approached as OCEA needed someone with the necessary understanding of the yachting world and all of the specialities involved in building a motor yacht; teak decking, the paint job, the stainless steel, the beautiful interiors created by interior designers. I was to deal with the external



naval architect, which is something the other departments don't do."

The client in question had assigned the late naval architect Michel Joubert to design the yacht and wanted to find a yard not too far from his home. It was the start of a flourishing relationship between OCEA and Mr Flour with Michel Joubert, and following his passing in 2016, the collaboration between OCEA and the design studio Joubert-Nivelt Design remains firmly in place.

Since 2014, Joubert-Nivelt Design has been busy updating OCEA's Commuter series of yachts which consists of four models - 33m, 40m, 50m and 60m. Respecting the vintage lines and style of the old Commuter series, the new designs bring the yachts right up to date with a number of stylish modern touches.

Standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the Commuter series is OCEA's two other brands; Nautilus and Nemo.

Nautilus, replacing the company's Classic series, is a range of three models - 35m, 40m and 45m - designed in partnership with naval architect Philippe Briand and his design company Vitruvius Yachts. The new designs have all the hallmarks that made the Classic such a success (including robustness, comfort, low fuel consumption and low cost of maintenance) complemented by interior that, through the uses of glass surfaces, ensures plentiful levels of natural light.

### The launch of OCEA Nemo

And for those of us who were fortunate enough to find ourselves gently bobbing up and down as we walked along the pontoons amidst the yachts at Cannes' and Monaco's 2016 yacht shows, we would have seen a brand new offering by OCEA - OCEA Nemo.

Dubbed the Nemo Sport Utility Yacht®, a concept created by renowned nautical engineer Aldo Manna, the new series is arguably

OCEA's most playful. Laden with exceptional capacity to house toys and tenders of all shapes and sizes, the OCEA Nemo series of maxi-yachts has been intelligently and elegantly designed by the Italian naval architect Fulvio De Simoni. The custom yachts come in three different lengths - 33m, 44m and 55m. The largest of the new fleet includes a beach club right on the water at the transom, a spacious deck and a lavish interior spread across three spacious decks.

Describing his concept, Mr Manna said: "Over 20-odd year's activity in the nautical field, I have come to understand how owners of large yachts only live on the sea and its adventures marginally and that entertainment is mainly limited to activities aboard. The Sport Utility Yacht concept was born with this in mind and offers a new yachting lifestyle which includes marine, sports and adventure activities and which really allows a full discovery of the surrounding world!

"To give life to this ambitious project, I chose to involve two leaders of the worldwide yachting market: OCEA for its concreteness and solidity and Fulvio De Simoni, a visionary in his own right, for his creativity and innovation."

Mr Flour, describing OCEA Nemo as "a very exciting prospect," believes this new concept will further enhance the reputation of OCEA as a serious contender in the yacht building sector.

"More and more clients are calling me because they have seen one of our yachts

cruising around, and they are intrigued, because they can see the difference, and not just in the look, but in their seakeeping qualities. A couple of times I have been told that owners of yachts that aren't part of our fleet have wished to go out to sea but their captains have refused due to the sea conditions. They have then seen an OCEA yacht cruising happily in the bay, and wondered what's going on!

"The best advertisement is to have your boats on the open water... If only boat shows were on the open sea, we would have many more clients!"

### The personal touch

Between OCEA's different boat building sectors, the €70 million company is able to keep close to 300 employees busy, averaging 15 to 20 vessels delivered across its four French production sites; Les Sables d'Olonne, Fontenay-le-Comte, Saint-Nazaire and La Rochelle.

Speaking once again about OCEA's yacht building process, and in particular the buzz he gets out of his personal involvement, Mr Flour said: "What is fantastic is that people come with a dream; they have a lot of questions for me, as I have been at sea myself, and the idea is to adjust that dream and create what will be the perfect yacht for them.

"This is very interesting, and this is why I am still in touch with all our clients - even those who have sold their yachts. I can tell you exactly where all the yachts are today - even those with new owners. If I don't see them every year, perhaps at a boat show, then I see them every other year. We talk several times a year. We recently had our very first delivery coming back after 14 years for a refit, which is a great testament to OCEA."

