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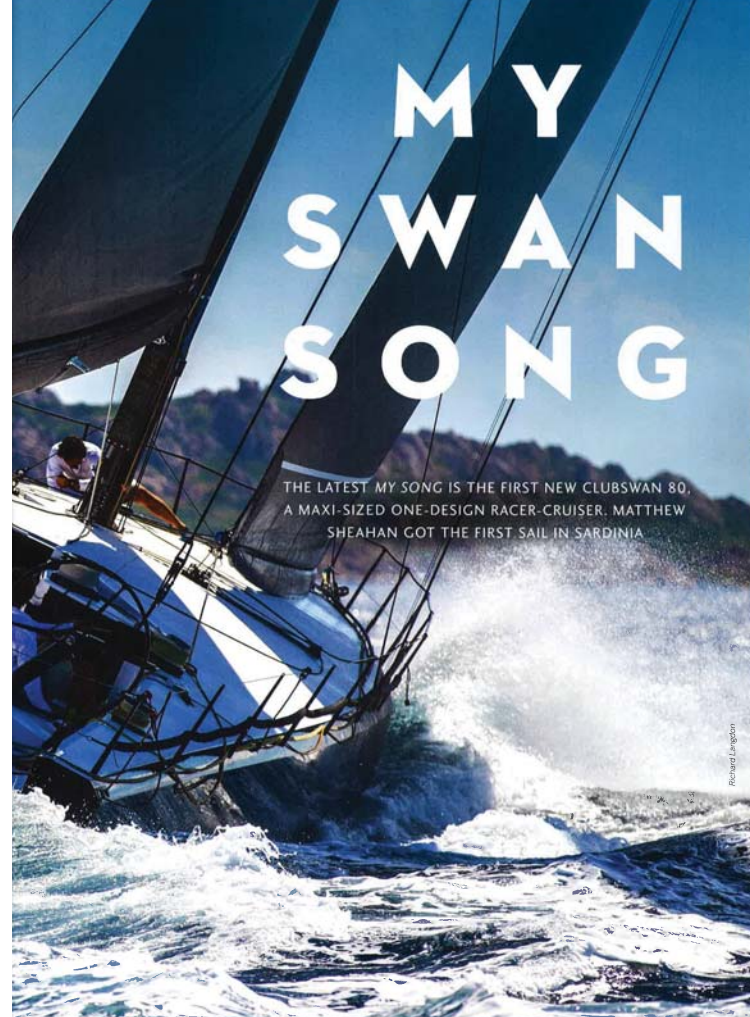
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ON BOARD // CLUBSWAN 80



MY SWAN SONG

THE LATEST MY SONG IS THE FIRST NEW CLUBSWAN 80,
A MAXI-SIZED ONE-DESIGN RACER-CRUISER. MATTHEW
SHEAHAN GOT THE FIRST SAIL IN SARDINIA





Luca DiBiase

Left: not just stunningly clean, the ClubSwan 80 proved slippery downwind, even if it feels like you're heading upwind. Below: the upwind performance is impressive too given the non-overlapping headsail

As we slipped our lines from the dock in Porto Cervo I was trying to conceal my disappointment.

After being present at the original launch of the design for the new ClubSwan 80 at the Düsseldorf Boat Show back in 2019 I'd been looking forward to the opportunity to climb aboard this super sleek, no holds barred, full carbon racing machine. Now it was a reality, but as we headed out through the rocky entrance to this famous harbour, I was cursing my luck as the forecast light and fickle breeze had arrived and showed every sign of refusing to climb into double figures. Instead, the 8 knots that was currently on offer was hardly great testing weather for a boat that promised so much.

Yet, minutes later, with no increase in the breeze or change in the calm-looking sea state, there were suddenly 14 pairs of legs draped over her windward topsides and 14 heads had popped through the guardwires. Our keel was fully canted and visible for all to see as our upwind boat speed sat at 9-10 knots. Now the apparent wind speed was in the high teens.

In just a couple of minutes the act of setting sail and

sheeting in had transformed the feel of the day and provided the first clue as to what the ClubSwan 80 is about. But it had also shown why it was best not to jump to any early conclusions.

WHY ONE-DESIGN?

The route from concept to reality had been a long one for the ClubSwan 80, thanks in part to the challenges that the global pandemic presented. The long gestation period had also allowed plenty of speculation as to why one of the biggest and best known quality builders in the world had decided to create a one-design class at the Maxi end of the scale.

Whatever the size, creating a new one-design class nowadays is a bold call and yet the motivation for creating a fleet of identical boats is clear.

For a builder, a one-design fleet makes sense from a financial point of view by spreading the development costs across the fleet you're about to create. And if the class takes off and the build routine is established, the spreadsheet can look even better.

'The route from concept to reality has been a long one'

For owners, having the assurance there'll be others to play with is also a strong incentive and helps to reduce the need to gamble on whether the boat will be as quick as her designers suggest. Safety in numbers makes it much easier for owners to consider taking the plunge.

But as we know, the real world isn't always like this. There have been plenty of one-design promises that simply haven't delivered. In addition, attracting owners to one-design boats of over 70ft LOA is particularly tough as in this league owners like to, how shall we put it, express themselves with a customised design rather than risk the embarrassment of losing to others in identical boats. It's much easier to blame the boat.

Nautor Swan believes it has a few trump cards, one of which is the success of its existing ClubSwan fleets. Its recent ClubSwan World Championships in Valencia provided a good example and drew 34 boats representing 13 nationalities across four classes – all of them strict one-design classes, all with an owner/driver rule.

Among those fleets it was the ClubSwan 50 that was not just the biggest class present but a good indication as to why Swan thinks it can make a bigger boat work. The ClubSwan 50 is a class that many said originally wouldn't succeed because the boats were too big for many owners and that there were other racing alternatives at this size. The detractors also pointed to the failure of other attempts at a soft one-design racing class.



Far left: the running backstay turning blocks are covered with a fairing. Left: the centreline lifting canard has a variable angle of attack of +/- 8°



Carlo Borinighi



Richard Langdon

'If you're not keeping an eye on the numbers, it can mess with your mind'

But it turns out they were wrong. While Swan acknowledges that it's unrealistic to just scale up a 50-footer to 80ft and expect a similar success, it also believes there is plenty it can take from its current achievements and experience.

SOLID FOUNDATIONS

Buoyed by the success of their radical, Juan Kouyoumdjian-designed ClubSwan 36 on the one end and the 125ft carbon monster *Skorpios* at the other, a full-on 80ft racer looked like a good fit in the range.

Juan K was signed up once again, but this time Nautor's own Finnish yard was already at capacity so Italian composite expert Persico was brought in as strategic partners to build the ClubSwan 80.

The partnership is one that appears to have worked well to create a boat that has a sleek, elegant, and in many ways minimalist, low windage look. This is a yacht with beautiful lines from wherever you look.

As you step aboard it is the simplicity of the wide open, clutter-free cockpit that strikes you first. Aside from the single mainsheet winch slap bang in the middle of the

cockpit just next to the navigator's access hatch, the area is so open that it looks like there is something missing. And of course there is – a winch grinding pedestal or two – because this is a Maxi with powered winches. So, whether trimming the jib or mainsheet, this is a design that has swapped biceps and brawn for a boat that is



The standard of finish throughout is high. Here the mainsheet traveller is recessed below the level of the cockpit sole

PHOTO: RICHARD LANGDON



PHOTO: GÖTTMANN

Above: cruising fitout definition is questionable, but the modular approach to the dual role is clever and suits those who are more interested in performance. **Left:** under A3 kite we sat at 16+knots in 12-14 knots true

controlled largely by fingers and toes. There is of course nothing groundbreaking in this, but it is an indication of where the bar is set on the ClubSwan 80.

Another can be seen with the push button controls at the steering pedestals where the well positioned and tidy control stations for the canting keel and canard belie the sophistication of what lies deeper within.

"The very light displacement at just over 19 tonnes is achieved in part thanks to the canting keel," explained Kouyoumdjian, "as we can achieve the same righting moment with about 25% less displacement. Being able to generate righting moment more efficiently means you can have a shallower draught and when you compare the hydraulics required with those for a lifting keel, the canting system is lighter and less complex.

"But a canting keel does have some downsides because the keel fin is being used to hold the bulb and not driving the boat upwind. Therefore, something else is required and in this case we have gone for a canard sitting in front of the keel that can be rotated plus or minus 8° in order to reduce the leeway and optimise performance."

Meanwhile, back on deck the pit area is clean and tidy thanks to control lines that run under the deck, which also makes the foredeck more secure to move about on.

As you'd expect of a boat of this type, the chainplates run to the full width of the boat and when you look up at the three-spreader carbon rig the large square-headed mainsail says a great deal about the power this boat can



generate, while the narrow sheeting angles on her jibs thanks to the two transverse sheet tracks illustrate the boat's pointing ability.

Beyond this, the foredeck is completely clear apart from the foredeck hatch that doubles as a genacker chute with a sock that runs all the way to the back of the boat. "Clearly having a long bowsprit is an efficient way to fly the genacker and Code sails but it also allows the jib to remain as the staysail of the boat," continued Kouyoumdjian, "Not having to drop the jib helps with the handling of the boat while the retractable bowsprit makes the boat easier to manoeuvre during pre-starts and at close quarters."

What isn't so apparent when looking at the deck is that this is a boat that has also been designed with fast cruising in mind. Perhaps not quite the style of cruising where the spray dodger goes up and a tender gets slung beneath davits, but the kind of day sprits where the focus is short-handed fast sailing for the fun of it rather than the level of luxury when at rest.

While Juan K and others explained this alternative style of cruising, I still found it difficult to envisage such a sleek looking racer in a cruising role. Nevertheless, the owner of *My Song* has already done just that.

"There has been a great deal of effort put into this aspect of the boat, especially below decks where Nauta Design has created an impressive looking interior using a variety of modules that can be slotted into place.

On deck, cruising modules have also been created to provide sofa benches in the cockpit which transforms into an outside dining area.

A MODULAR FORMAT

In the configuration we sailed her there were no cruising modules present, but subtle mahogany laminate strips and carefully placed LED lighting provide a surprisingly welcoming feel in what would normally be a carbon racing shell. They also provide references to the stylish renderings that show off the interior cruising style which interior experts Nauta has created.

"The brief was that this boat has to be transformed from a pure racer to cruising mode in a couple of days with the work of only two people," said Martino Manjio of Nauta Design. "So, there's a module that goes in the galley that is on top of the canting keel box and there are two



Far left: the cavernous forward area makes for a huge owner's cabin when the cruising module is in place, otherwise it's simply open. Left: cushions on pipecoats aft, a luxury only for cruising

modules which form the bed in the master cabin.

"We worked on making the structures part of the interiors, highlighting and underlining their presence."

Just as on deck, it's the space, volume and the uncluttered feel below that creates the first impressions. It's a clever arrangement that will doubtless be overlooked when the 80 is being operated in racing mode. But look closely and it's easy to see how the interior has been created around the structural items without giving the impression that you're in a pre-preg carbon maze.

Moving aft as the deck starts to lower and the freeboard reduces, you enter more familiar racing territory where the navigation station feels more like a caving expedition. But what else would you expect?

The other thing to strike me was the quality of her build. There is no paint or treatment to the inside faces of the pre-preg laminate, making it easy to see the precision with which the CS80 has been created. I accept that it's nerdy to follow individual laminates and bonding areas, but workmanship at this level is impossible to ignore.

NUMBERS GAME

It was probably simply habit that had me jotting down performance numbers periodically during our sea trials, which were part of My Song's practice session ahead of the Maxi Yacht Rolex Cup, but Kouyoumdjian had a far simpler way of explaining her performance profile.

"In essence, the performance upwind will range between 12 and 13 knots when the boat is fully powered and when we're sailing downwind VMG we will always go approximately

two knots quicker than the speed of the wind," he said.

Which, looking back at my notes is pretty much how she played out in a breeze that by relief, built beyond the forecast throughout the day. So much so, that by the time we saw 14 knots of true wind we were indeed sliding downhill at 16-17 knots. In the relatively flat water off Porto Cervo the ride felt effortless.

But like so many modern performance machines, achieving the predicted speeds is more about knowing the numbers you're looking for rather than getting there by feel alone.

With the breeze up it was also clear that, like other modern lightweight yachts, the performance is more about understanding apparent wind sailing where bearing away doesn't always mean easing sheets. At one point we were sailing at 12 knots with everything still sheeted in as if we were going upwind with the apparent wind angle showing 35°. Except we were actually sailing at 70° true. If you're not keeping an eye on the numbers boats like this can mess with your mind.

What was easier to get to grips with, and fun to experience, was the rapid acceleration from 10 to 16 knots as we rounded the weather mark. We hadn't even hoisted the kite at that stage, but the slingshot ride as we bore

away felt more like a mark rounding aboard a multihull.

The ClubSwan 80 is clearly a slippery boat but as the crew got to grips with settings, numbers and routines there was still one big question that wouldn't be answered until My Song got onto the race course for real. How would this 80-footer stack up against the competition in handicap racing?

Because even though it has



Even the carbon heads manages to be stylish in a minimalist sort of way

Stéphane Gagnier



SPECIFICATIONS

LOA 23.99m 20ft 9in
LWL 23.89m 20ft 5in
Beam 6.02m 19ft 9in
Cruising lifting keel
Draught keel down 6.30m 20ft 8in
keel up 4.50m 14ft 9in
Ball area 1.6m²
Crews + 10X75 fuel (range) 440nm 4,260mi
nautorswan.com

Richard Langford