

MAXIMUS THE OCEAN GLADIATOR

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Meet the Superyacht that manages to both dominate at regattas and boast the latest in onboard luxury

You might have thought that the era of watching men battle for sport died with the Romans. But you'd be wrong. Last year, Vitters shipyard delivered a striking 59m ketch that has been tearing up the yachting racecourse ever since. This is the story of *Maximus*, a gladiator of our times.

It is a tale that begins in 2021, when the experienced owner reassembled a familiar team in the form of owner's representative Jon Barrett and the aforementioned storied Dutch shipyard, Vitters. It was not his first yacht, but it was

to be his biggest, and the brief was for a Superyacht that could be raced and cruised. The renowned Germán Frers was selected for the hull lines.

"The 1999 ketch *Rebecca* was a big influence in the design of *Maximus*," says Barrett. "Both her classic deck structures and sheerlines, and the way she sailed and performed well. That's how Germán Frers was introduced to the owner, but the yacht had to be bigger. There was a certain requirement for volume and cabins and so forth, which brought her up to the 59m mark."





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With *Rebecca* serving as inspiration, the key elements of *Maximus* were already in place – not least the ketch rig. The advantages of this traditional sailplan are undeniable: smaller masts to achieve the same sail area give the boat lower air draught to fit under more bridges, while the sail handling in cruising mode is decidedly easier. “Lots of big boats tend not to get sailed much on passage because the booms are incredibly big, and in a big sloppy seaway, it’s hard to control,” says Barrett. “On *Maximus*, they’re able to furl and unfurl the jib, staysail and mizzen jib with no booms to worry about – think of it like a staysail schooner.”

But traditional lines don’t necessarily equate to traditional performance. Frers was tasked with designing a hull that would allow the yacht to compete hard at the world’s top Superyacht regattas. To that end, he used all the power of modern software to develop a slippery hull form with a lifting keel that varies the draught from 5m to 8m, twin balanced rudders and submarine anchors.

The result is a “wolf in sheep’s clothing”, to borrow Vitters’ chosen phrase. Above the waterline, her low-profile topsides and modest deckhouse belong to a past era of more elegant design, with whispers of the golden age of yachting. But out of sight, her hull is a work of state-of-the-art efficiency – finely tuned for optimum performance and minimal drag.

A lot of thought has gone into the sail handling systems of the boat. Soft sails are stored on large hydraulic drums below deck that make a far more efficient way of storing canvas than the more typical sail bags stuffed into a locker. It also means that they can be more easily deployed at the touch of a button, allowing just two crew to handle the hoist and drop in cruising mode.

Line handling is just as carefully laid out. Only the mizzen lines come back to winches aft – the other sails are all raised and trimmed using captive winches or the giant Harken sheet winches forward of the deckhouse. Rated to handle 25 tonnes of tension, Barrett believes that they are the biggest ever built by the company. The captive winches, meanwhile, are all located in a pit just forward of the main mast. Normally covered with a carbon hatch, this only needs to be accessed by a pair of trimmers during racing.

BUILDING A RACE CREW

To deliver on such a promise takes more than just cutting-edge design. You also need the Captain who can help you exploit it, and in the case of *Maximus*, that person was Lars Loftus – a veteran racer from the *Velsheda* campaign. While handling a thoroughbred J-Class yacht presents its own specific challenges, it has plenty in common with racing a 59m ketch.

“I joined the programme in January 2023,” Loftus says. “In addition to all the hoops you have to go through for the Cayman flag and Lloyds, I also needed to recruit a crew and get the race programme under way. The logistics of racing a boat like this are stark: nine permanent crew goes up to 12-13 for racing; then you have to bring on 35 race crew.”

It is the first ketch that Loftus has captained on a full-time basis, and he says it is heavy on manpower. “It’s two big sloops going round the track with soft sails flying off both rigs – that’s a lot of sails to put up and take down. You get to the gybe and you think, ‘Where is everybody?’ You don’t put a crew like that together overnight.”

Tony Rey, formerly of Doyle Sails, came in as tactician and both he and Loftus brought in other guys from their black books too. Among a host of big names, Nick Bice stands out as Crew Boss and Nacho Postigo as Navigator. And they had to get down to business more or less directly, as the boat was delivered slightly behind schedule in the autumn of 2023.

Across the Atlantic, Antigua beckoned, followed quickly by the St Barths Bucket. “When you start a programme like this, you don’t spend any time hanging around,” shrugs Loftus when asked whether he felt under time pressure.

With just days to spare, he managed to fit in some training for the new crew ahead of Antigua. In fact, they treated the whole event as a training session, going cautiously with the new rig. Naturally enough, such prudence didn’t pay off in the rankings, with *Maximus* coming in fourth of four in her class. But this provided a stepping stone to St Barths, where the crew managed to fix a massive failure of the headsail foil inside 28 hours to reach the start on time. And by the time she crossed the finish line of the St Regis Race at the Palma Superyacht Cup in June, she was scoring bullets.

“We learn something every time and, like any race programme, you learn as much about what you can do as what you can’t,” says Loftus. “There are times when you think you can make an improvement and it turns out you were wrong. But the difference between us in St Barths and us in Palma is massive. The amount of effort and just heroics that took place is almost impossible to explain unless you were there.”

The Ibiza Joy Sail is the next event on the horizon – fast becoming





a fixture for well-connected Superyachts. But it is not just about racing. The yacht is fitted out for comfortable cruising and recently finished an Amalfi trip. She is also available for race and cruising charter through Burgess.

ELEGANCE: INSIDE AND OUT

To imagine that *Maximus* is all about winning performances would be to misunderstand this project.

From the off, the brief required a supremely comfortable interior that would keep guests in fine style during a longer cruise. So, although the twin deckhouse saloons and their bimini-shaded cockpits are the natural place to relax on deck,

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there is a lot more to *Maximus* than meets a casual glance.

The master suite runs the full beam of the boat, for example, and is positioned aft, where it benefits from more privacy. There are two guest cabins aft that can be configured as doubles or as twins with the added accommodation offered by Pullman berths, as well as a further VIP forward of the main saloon. With the full complement of nine permanent crew aboard, the service ratio is exceptionally high.

Styling by Spencer-Churchill Design of Woodstock, England, is unashamedly traditional. There is beige carpet laid throughout the boat, and the cabinetry is in understated blond anegre. Headlinings are white and bordered with more anegre. Unusually, there is a Steinway baby piano in the dining room,

which stays in position for racing. One of the walls is built of hinging elements which can be pushed aside to open up a larger space for bigger concerts. An ethanol fireplace rounds out the sense of a grand New York townhouse.

Behind the scenes, the galley is fitted with modern appliances and includes a walk-in fridge-freezer. The whole boat is built with a thoroughly up-to-date audiovisual system, and it even incorporates a form of hybrid power – enough to keep the generators off at night and sail with just one running. “We added a big bank of lithium batteries and we have a hydraulic system that can run off batteries throughout the day,” says Barrett. “We can race the boat without the main engine running, one generator only – all that sail handling is coming from the batteries. A lot of it is EV technology that has been adapted.

Like a hybrid car, when it needs the extra power, the generator can kick in.”

Other features include a large gym, part of which is now being sacrificed to create a dedicated Captain’s cabin. There’s a demountable crow’s nest that will run a couple up to the second spreaders for a fine view of the anchorage, and room under the foredeck for a 7m tender.

It is perhaps inevitable that *Maximus* will draw comparisons with other modern classics, from the J-Class to schooners such as *Adela*. Her lines certainly invite admiration, but it seems likely that her performance will dominate the commentary. With an experienced Captain, a competitive owner and motivated race crew, this modern-day gladiator of the seas is itching to show what she can do.