



Liara is a realisation of a cruising yacht design from the Dixon studio. Not only is she endowed with speed through moderate displacement, the use of lightweight composite materials and efficient sailing systems, but she has the safety and comfort of a centre cockpit and all the fixtures and fittings of a modern luxury yacht.

Words and underway photography by Geoff Green. Interiors, Michael Ng



*Liara* was designed by Dixon Yacht Design in the UK and built by Southern Ocean Marine in Tauranga, New Zealand, for Englishman Tony Todd, is returning to yachting after a seven-year break from sailing to focus on his family and business.

It is not surprising that the 19.8 metre *Liara* is an amalgam of a proven cruising design and performance features, as Todd previously owned an Oyster 48 centre cockpit cruiser and a 15.4 metre Ed Dubois racing yacht. While full-on racing has lost its appeal, the ability to cruise comfortably, achieve 280-mile days and be competitive at club level has not.

'I was looking for a low profile cruising yacht with stimulating performance, two steering positions and a comfortable cockpit in the middle of the boat where our five-year-old twins Liam and Lara could participate safely,' says Todd. In response to this brief, Dixon Yacht Design drew a light-to-moderate displacement hull (23.5 tonnes) with a narrower beam than the studio's previous cruising forms; the design concept heralds a new generation of cruising yacht for the company.

The beam was carried aft to ensure good performance reaching and running and to develop space for the aft helm stations that merge with the centre cockpit. Although a raised section that generates headroom in the master cabin below separates the centre and aft cockpits, the step up and down is comfortable and both cockpits flow together in an easy-to-sail, almost walk-through design.

The fast hull form is matched with a fin keel and bulb – to reduce draught and wetted surface while maintaining stability – and a powerful Southern Spars carbon fibre masthead rig supported by three spreaders swept at 20 degrees. Running backstays are not required and the single backstay divides into a bridle to span the steps descending to the in-built boarding platform.

*Liara* is sloop rigged, with the mandrel line for the furling headsail running aft to a Lewmar winch – one of seven powerful electric/manual winches situated by the





companionway and in the cockpit. The headsail does not overlap and consequently the jib sheets are relatively short and the sail easy to handle.

Provision is made to fit a removable Kevlar inner forestay for cruising and deliveries and

Todd has a set of Revolution carbon/Kevlar racing sails for when he competes.

An in-boom roller furling system reefs the fully battened mainsail, and although Todd's Oyster had a fully battened main and lazy-jacks, in-boom furling is new to him.

'I don't know why in-boom furling is taking so long to be accepted in Europe because it makes in-mast furling systems look absolutely ludicrous,' he comments.

While the sailing systems and rig design ensure *Liara* is easy to handle, and the relatively shallow, moderate displacement hull generates a good turn of speed, the yacht has every facility to make cruising life comfortable, including four private cabins, two en suites and a day head, air conditioning, a washer/dryer, ample fuel and water, powerful diesel auxiliary, a 12kW generator and a retractable bowthruster.

Todd opted for a conservative interior layout proven to function well at sea and anchor, and this placed the two guest cabins and shared en suite forward, the saloon, navigation station and galley within or directly off the pilothouse, the auxiliary and engineering under the centre cockpit, and the master cabin and children's cabin aft. Ample storage is provided throughout, and the large lazette and utility bow compartment house sails, tender and outboard, although it is a sure bet non-essential gear living in the ends will be left dockside on race days. As well as offering storage and access to the bowthruster and chain locker, the utility bow compartment also provides a temporary bunk for Paul Cherry, *Liara's* professional captain, should the guest cabins be taken.

Todd is an accomplished sailor but he chose to employ a full-time crew because time is of



the essence and he appreciates the commitment required to maintain *Liara* in tip-top condition.

Southern Ocean Marine constructed *Liara's* hull using foam, E-glass and epoxy with an exterior laminate of woven E-glass/Kevlar for impact and abrasion resistance, and carbon fibre was utilised in the moulded chain-plates and some areas of the deck and cabin structure. High Modulus engineered the hull and deck to comply with Germanischer Lloyd Structures, supplied all the composite materials and assisted with on-site technical advice. Overall, the yacht was built to European Recreational Craft Directive (RCD).

The interior joinery is finished with Sappelle mahogany veneer complemented with burr, white oak and ebony timber detailing. Southern Ocean Marine's high standards are demonstrated by the detailing in the saloon table – which provides a fine example of craftsmanship and finish.

Maritime Interiors assisted with the specification for the interior decor and Esme McDonald consulted with Todd during his first visit to New Zealand. The interior had to be practical without compromising the overall look because *Liara* will be raced and cruised, and this was achieved by using easy-care products that can be cleaned without degrading their finish. All fabrics have protective lightweight covers for race days.

*Liara* is Southern Ocean Marine's largest and most complex vessel to date and Bill Dixon wants further work be placed with



the company. He says that the target displacement of 23.5 tonnes was ambitious and achieving it required a yard experienced in composite construction – one that could apply a weight control philosophy while meeting high quality aesthetic requirements.

Greg McNabb and Greg Prescott, co-directors of Southern Ocean Marine, were more than capable of rising to the task, being an experienced boatbuilder and professional sailor respectively. Prescott found *Liara's* relatively shallow bilge, straight run and fin keel made it a challenge to fit the engineering systems in a discreet but practical manner when the tankage – three fuel, two water and one black – occupied the majority of the space available under the saloon sole. 'The yacht is a pocket superyacht and it carries all the conveniences found in a larger vessel. It took some effort to place the systems.'

MD Marine, an Auckland-based project management company headed by Mike Relling

**Above: the saloon is ideal for dining or just relaxing**  
**Top right: the navigation station, like the helmstations, uses all the latest technology**  
**Right: the beamy master cabin also has a good-sized en suite shower room**  
**Left: a modern and functional galley designed with cruising in mind**



# REVIEW

and Dave Lewis provided the link between Southern Ocean Marine and the designer and owner on the other side of the world. They represented Jim and Ann Omand in the building of their 19.2m Dixon-designed *Dulcinea* at Vaudrey Miller Yachts in Auckland and Relling sailed competitively with Todd, so both designer and owner were comfortable with their services. Todd says that even though Southern Ocean Marine offered an overall cost and quality advantage he wouldn't have considered building in New Zealand without MD Marine's input. 'I had no knowledge of New Zealand capabilities and it would have been too risky without a representative on site. However, building at Southern Ocean Marine has proven to be a stress-free exercise and all the decisions came easily through consultation.'

Throughout this consultative process, the opposing day-night time difference between England and New Zealand helped keep the build process on track. Todd was contacted at the end of the New Zealand working day and he had twelve hours to consider a response before work recommenced the next day. 'There were few hold-ups and many gains and I'd say the time difference worked in our favour to eliminate two weeks worth of down-time,' recalls Relling.

Significant improvements were generated because the yard and MD Marine were proactive and Todd receptive to ideas. They suggested changes that resulted in a stiffer cabin top, upgraded engine room air intake and filtration system, permanently fitted counter-balanced, recessed washboard to close off the companionway and a fold-away anchor system.

The fold-away anchor system – deployed and recovered using a roving hand-held control – hydraulically pivots 180 degrees to clear the bow and stow the anchor and fairlead below deck, further accentuating Dixon's already clean lines. A recessed stainless steel landing plate on the deck and a matching spigot on the carbon arm stabilise the fairlead when deployed and prevent the bearings from racking. While the idea is not new, the system was custom built to suit *Liara* and Todd says it is an immense improvement on the permanently protruding stainless steel fitting originally drawn.

Todd also encouraged Southern Ocean Marine and MD Marine to provide guidance with equipment decisions to ensure the latest



technology was selected. Furuno's Navnet software was chosen because it integrates with the yacht's computer and B&G instruments and an Iridium phone was installed because everyone involved believes it to be the most advanced product. 'There is so much going on in New Zealand, the industry is totally up-to-date with technology

and I don't think I could have achieved the same level of overall expertise elsewhere,' says Todd.

He visited New Zealand three times – including flying out to inspect the yard and sign the contract – and didn't miss the hands-on involvement he had when building the *Oyster*. He was kept fully informed with digital e-mail images and telephone calls.

Even though the New Zealand dollar strengthened throughout the construction process and additional travel, management and shipping expenses were priced in, Todd is emphatic that building *Liara* in New Zealand was cost effective and beneficial.

*Liara* is now being prepared for the ARC Cruising Rally starting in Gibraltar and finishing in the Caribbean where the Todd family will spend their next winter, before returning to coastal cruise and club race in the UK. □

LIARA		
<b>LOA</b> 19.8m	<b>Sailmaker</b> Doyle and Revolution	<b>Air conditioning</b> Cruisair
<b>LWL</b> 17.37m	<b>Rod rigging</b> Ocean Yacht Systems	<b>Electronics</b> Furuno, B&G
<b>Beam</b> 5.34m	<b>Winches/blocks/hatches</b> Lewmar	<b>Designer</b> Dixon Yacht Design
<b>Draught</b> 2.89m	<b>Hydraulics</b> Navtec	<b>Project management</b> MD Marine
<b>Light ship displacement</b> 23,500kg	<b>Engine</b> Yanmar, 190hp diesel	<b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:relling@ww.co.nz">relling@ww.co.nz</a>
<b>Ballast</b> 8,500kg	<b>Genset</b> Fisher Panda, 12kW	<b>Builder</b> Southern Ocean Marine Ltd
<b>Spars</b> Southern Spars carbon fibre mast and carbon fibre/E-glass boom	<b>Fuel capacity</b> 1,200 litres	30-34 Mirrieless Road, Tauranga, New Zealand
	<b>Water capacity</b> 800 litres + watermaker	<b>Tel:</b> +64 757 141 30
		<b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:info@southernoceanmarine.com">info@southernoceanmarine.com</a>