

IRINTZELLA

REVIEW

Ola 54

The 16.5m (54ft) Ola 54 is a high performance cruiser, designed by Marcelo Penna and built by Ola Astilleros. With twin saildrives, a centreboard or wing keel and high-tech composite construction, including carbon-fibre mast, the boat offers fast cruising to even the shallower grounds.

Words by *Adrian Morgan*. Photography by *B.Gedlek*



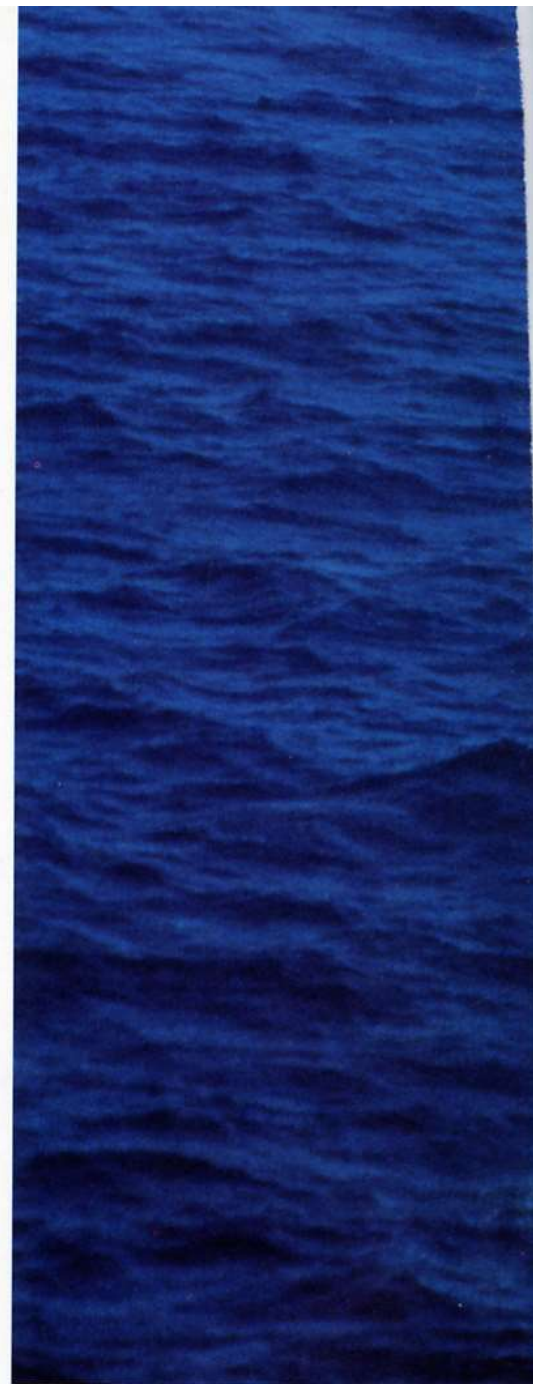
The Gulf War virtually wiped out Spain's yacht building industry. Demand dropped overnight and by the time the conflict had ended a thriving sector of the economy, producing innovative yachts at attractive prices had sunk without trace. Ola Astilleros, based in Barcelona, survives thanks to the efforts of a dynamic young designer Marcelo Penna, a team of experienced shipwrights salvaged from the yards that failed and a group of far seeing businessmen prepared to invest in the future.

Ola is very much a reflection of Penna's philosophy, which is, in his own words, 'to satisfy the highest requirements of cruising and ocean racing sailors, using the latest technology'. It becomes clear when you meet him and see the yachts he has designed that here is a man who prefers to do things his way. 'I am quite capable of designing a modern classic in the style of Herreshoff, like Bruce King, but that's not my style,' he says. 'I'm looking for new ways to build lighter and stronger and my clients seem to like it that way.'

Over 100 yachts have to date been built to his designs, for yards such as Northwind, a victim of the recession from which Ola emerged and for which Penna worked as technical director. The Ola 62, for example, is a development of the Northwind 60 and there are further echoes of the past in a range that should eventually comprise 36-82 footers (11-25m) and fill the gaps in between.

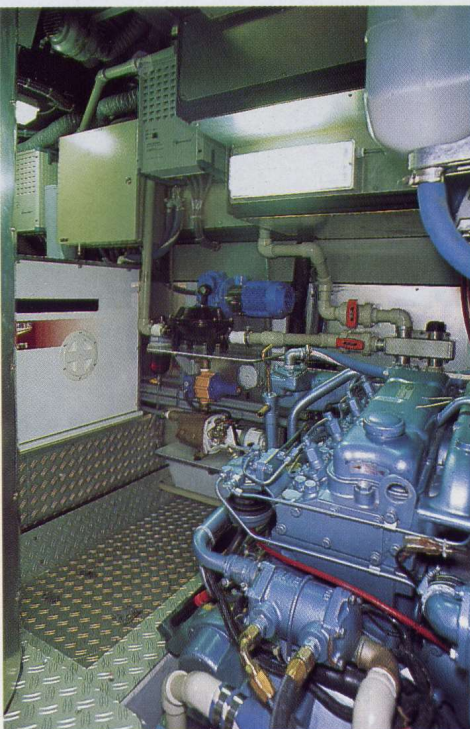
Marcelo Penna first came to Spain from Argentina in 1977 where he trained as a civil architect and has sailed since a child. Ola was set up to build a one-off 82-footer and if the new shipyard, that it is negotiating to move into right in the centre of Barcelona's port area, becomes a reality, the company will be in the strongest possible position as one of Spain's foremost builders of large yachts.

Penna is also a keen racing yachtsman and confidant of the royal family, sailing aboard a succession of their racing yachts of his own design, including *Banca Catalana*, a 3/4 tonner, *Salao* owned by Prince Filip and Princess Christina's





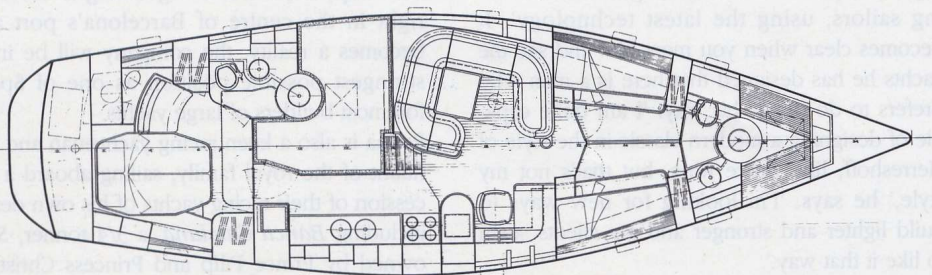
Above: the shared guest bathroom has a shower cubicle in the bow. Right: looking aft in the starboard guest cabin. An alternative layout replaces the two twin-bunked guest cabins forward with just one large double cabin. Below: the well sound-insulated engine room is remarkably spacious for a 51-footer with full standing headroom



a strong lightweight structure with exact resin-to-fibreglass ratios.

Not only does this eliminate the possibility of voids, thereby achieving aerospace-grade quality without the use of an autoclave, but also provides better environmental protection for the yard's employees.

Trintella's skills in aluminium construction, in combination with this new technology and their renowned quality of interior joinery and finishing skills, will surely maintain their position in the forefront of Europe's sailing yacht builders.



Trintella 51A

LOA	15.60m (51ft 2in)
LWL	13.00m (42ft 8in)
Beam	4.60m (15ft 1in)
Draught	2.10m (6ft 10in)
Displacement	20.5 tonnes
Sail areas	Main 64.5m ² (694sqft); Genoa 62.5m ² (673sqft); Spinnaker 209m ² (2,249sqft)
Engine	Perkins 4.236 M90 83hp diesel
Generator	Mastervolt Whisper 6000, 6kW
Fuel	850 litres (187 gallons)
Naval architect	Van de Stadt Design
Builder	Trintella Shipyard Ertveldweg 3 5231 XA s'-Hertogenbosch Netherlands Tel:+31 73 412455 Fax:+31 73 420866
UK agent	Transworld Yachts Ltd Hamble Point Marina, School Lane Hamble, Hants SO3 5NB Tel:+44 (0)1703 457704 Fax:+44 (0)1703 456406



The semi-custom philosophy even extends to a choice of exterior profile with an enclosed wheelhouse (below left) as well as the standard aft cockpit version we sailed (above). High performance was high in the design brief and 200-mile runs have been regularly achieved by the designer

Donalgodon. In Spanish racing circles the name Penna is well respected. Since Xavier Visiers hung up his drafting tools and Pepe Gonzales' tragic death, Penna stands virtually alone.

Ola has also benefited by inheriting the best workers from the defunct yards and being based in Barcelona with its easy access and international connections with the world marine trade. 'We have a historic opportunity to be the prime yard in Spain,' says Penna. The former owner of Northwind recently joined the company as manager, further adding to the expertise available.

The family resemblance among Penna-designed yachts is strong. The Ola 54, one of which Penna and his family have made their home, is a shallow draught centreboard cruiser that will not date. In due course it will be joined by a 36, on the drawing board last December, a 50 – developed from the 47 –, the 62, and two ex-Northwind designs, the 70 and 44, in addition to the 82. Penna is intrigued by high performance in a cruising yacht, and has long advo-

cated seawater ballast rather than carrying the weight of unnecessary lead.

Thus, not unnaturally, the Ola 54 we sailed was Penna's, and carried all the paraphernalia of a young family's needs – washing machine, playroom etc. Its simple layout is dominated by the bright saloon, flooded by light from the wrap-around windows. The specification lists at least six different internal arrangements so a detailed description of Penna's would be pointless. It is built around the needs of a couple with a child. In common, however, with all variations this 54 has two Volvo saildrive engines under the saloon boards, which help enormously in close manoeuvring and provide a cruising speed in excess of 8 knots at the 50hp Volvo Penta MD22L's 2,700 rpm optimum. Under one engine alone that figure drops to a still acceptable 7.6 knots.

Hull construction here was wood/epoxy, but subsequent versions use PVC sandwich with biaxial and quadaxial E-glass and Kevlar, laminated with vinyl ester resins. An even higher

spec can be chosen including epoxy/Ampreg hull and deck with lots of carbon reinforcing and the customary go-faster deck gear and fancy sails.

This semi-custom philosophy extends to choice of profile, with deckhouse and enclosed wheelhouse options available alongside the standard aft cockpit version we sailed. The added protection afforded by the inside steering position deters little from the overall profile, that of a thoroughly modern performance cruiser. And if the 6-tonne cast iron profiled centreboard doesn't suit, then there is an up to the minute 7.3-tonne winged keel option, reducing the draught from 3.7m (board down) to a highly manageable 2.2m.

Amid this plethora of choice Penna's family home is certainly the only one to have a carbon fibre mast from the 1992 Italian America's Cup challenge. *Il Moro di Venezia's* spare, suitably cut down, and boom sections add a touch of the exotic to this sensible cruiser. Carbon spars, however, with their manifest advantages of



Above: the saloon has a refreshingly different feel to other yachts of this size, with a vast floor area accentuated by the white lacquered bulkheads.
Below: immediately aft of the saloon is a dinette to starboard opposite the galley with the companionway in between them right aft



lower weight – especially valuable in a centre-boarder – are an option on all future Ola 54's. The standard version has a Selden or Proctor rig with aft-swept spreaders and roller or fully-battened mainsail.

Penna's yacht is set up like a BOC racer with twin furling headsails set one behind the other from which 150 per cent genoa or a smaller working staysail can be set. Again this is unique

to his boat, and the standard is a more conventional single roller. All sport the retracting bow sprit on which an easily controlled asymmetric spinnaker is flown.

We chose a typical late Autumn day for our sail and it was clear from the outset that, even in the light airs that prevailed, the Ola 54 would be travelling a fair way down the coast before lunch, spread on the cockpit table as the

autopilot took us towards Gibraltar and beyond. From her tight berth in Barcelona's new Olympic basin it was clear that manoeuvrability under twin engines was a bonus, although no surprise. Once away and under full genoa and main the yacht makes swift progress, with one proviso. The need to keep the rudder's draught modest so that it does not project below the ballast keel does compromise control



Above left: the galley can be closed off by a sliding door. Above: for live-aboard cruising a washing machine is installed in the forward bathroom. Left: the master suite in the family layout has a large double to port and bathroom to starboard. Two twin-bunked children's cabins are entered through this cabin – a secure arrangement. Six layouts are offered in this true semi-custom yacht



Ola 54

LOA	16.54m (54ft 3in)
LWL	13.33m (43ft 8in)
Beam	4.58m (15ft)
Draught (wing keel)	2.2m (7ft 2in)
Draught (centreboard)	1.4/3.7m (4ft 6in/12ft)
Displacement	19.5 tonnes
Ballast	7.9 tonnes
Mainsail	70m ² (753sqft)
Genoa 150%	85m ² (913sqft)
Engines	2 x Volvo 50hp MD22L Saildrive
Fuel	850 litres
Water	1,200 litres
Designer	Marcelo Penna
Builder	Ola Astilleros

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under sail. Steering was an acquired skill when it should have been a delight in an otherwise fine yacht that cries out for more rudder area. Indeed Penna himself, whilst clearly quite happy with the steering, system is toying with the obvious solution – twin rudders.

That said the yacht was powerful and stiff, the big asymmetric dragging the hull at a mile-eating pace that would make short work of the usual Mediterranean island hopping. Penna regularly sets off for the Balearics which are within a weekend's range from Barcelona in a yacht that is capable of reeling off 200-mile day's runs with ease.

With building costs up to 30 per cent cheaper here than elsewhere in Europe, and quality acceptably high, Ola are in a good position to make the most of their unique position in Spain. Very reasonably-priced and with equipment that is all top of the line household names, the Ola's specification is unusually complete and construction up to the minute.

As Spain's economy follows the path out of recession, its countrymen will find a home-grown product that carries a surprisingly long pedigree. Buying Spanish is looking more attractive again.

