

The Superyacht

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A BUCKET FULL OF OPPORTUNITY

Ask anyone who has attended the St Barths Bucket since its infancy and they will tell you how much the regatta has changed. Veterans will recall how the early years involved four boats that would take on a few extra crew to help with the downwind sails for a single race around the island, which concluded with a couple of beers on the beach. Now professional crews are flown in from around the world, full sets of racing sails are bought and the entire large sailing yacht industry, it seems, is in attendance for three highly competitive races. **Bryony McCabe** reports.





OPENING IMAGE: ON BOARD *TWIZZLE*.
LEFT: CAPTAIN BILL BAILEY AT THE HELM
OF *LADY B* WITH OWNER GERRY HINES.
RIGHT: ON BOARD *CLAN VIII*.
FAR RIGHT: OVERALL WINNER *MARIE*.

This year's St Barths Bucket saw 38 yachts between 27.4m and 66.7m divided into four classes competing in three days of pursuit-style racing. With winds up to 27 knots, big swell and boats being pushed near to their limits, many were left with significant repair lists in the wake of the racing. However, spirits were high throughout and the regatta culminated in a fantastic prize-giving that announced the spectacularly sailed *Marie* as the overall winner.

As the Bucket has evolved, the organisers have kept a tight focus on maintaining the original, non-commercial flavour of the event, but with its growth, sponsorship from the major shipyards and marine industry has been brought in and it seems that the event is used more and more as a commercial tool. "The shipyards pretend it's not a sales platform, but it is," admitted one broker. "They all want to look the best and that means winning." To give their boats the best chance of winning, the shipyards can be seen to give a variety of support. "Perini Navi has a big showing at the event and is able to give back up to its yachts in the form of race crew and technicians," said Captain David Evans of *Clan VIII*.

While this takes the event further away from its original roots, many will still uphold it adds to the

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– Ed Dubois, Dubois Naval Architects

Bucket's overall experience and charm. "I cannot imagine anyone not completely enthralled and excited about it all," said David Price, charter manager at Hill Robinson. "Guests see the crew in a completely different light when racing compared with cruising." The Bucket's captivating quality is evident throughout the event. An example of this occurred when one of the yachts that had been racing secured a charter as the guests were leaving the boat for the day. The owners had bought a potential client on board to witness the action first hand and the exciting day of racing had done the job – it had shown off the yacht and her crew at its very best; the client was hooked and ready to sign on the dotted line.

Generating charters was not the only commercial benefit I witnessed during the regatta. Even the owners were in a headspace where they are thinking about future options and possibilities, making the Bucket a chance to

capitalise on their competitive spirit. "It provides an opportunity for yacht owners to get to do something different with their boats and it gives them more of a reason to own," explained Ben Bartlett, sailing yacht broker at Y.CO. "The owners are getting a lot more pleasure out of their boats, and the more fun you have with your boat, the more time you spend on board and the more you think about the next boat."

TSR was welcomed on board *Lady B* by owner Gerry Hines, who confessed that, besides the immense enjoyment that came from participating in the regatta, he also saw it as an opportunity to think about his yachting future. "I enjoy coming to see the new boats that have come out and how they are being built," said Hines, "as well as interchanging with all the yachting people I have done business with: my designer, my builder and my project manager. It is fun to see those people





again and hear what they are doing. You might build a boat at some point in the future, so that is always on my mind.”

Combine this attitude with the fact that many of the big players in the industry are together in a relaxed environment over the course of four days, the opportunity to build relationships and secure new leads is outstanding. “There is a high concentration of quality people and potential clients,” said Ethan Doyle, stakeholder of Doyle Sailmakers, who admitted that due to the relaxed nature of the event, it is hard to come with a structured agenda. “You have to go with the flow and you will come across very important people by accident and unexpected opportunities will arise. It would be silly not to take advantage of it.”

With more yacht owners and guests in one place during the Bucket than most boat shows, the opportunity to network and renew relationships in an intimate and personable environment is vast. Ed Dubois of Dubois Naval Architects agreed that the Bucket is incredibly important to the sailing yacht industry. “The regatta scene is certainly a big ‘playground’ for designers and builders, and it has become increasingly important for the industry in general,” he believes, adding that its ability to shape

the future of superyacht design is another edge to the Bucket’s sword. “With the pressure on ever-greater performance, it may well be that certain owners will commission designs to be more race-orientated with less focus on the most comfortable cruising facilities.”

“At these regattas owners are looking at their boats and they are thinking about what they could do to make it faster,” concurred Bartlett. “For these owners that are building their next boats, most are going to be more regatta orientated. It is no longer about comfort, they are now compromising on cruising because they want to be more successful at the superyacht events.” He cited the most relevant change he has perceived in the last few years is that lifting keels are now a standard feature of most superyachts in addition to the pressure for improved sailing systems, hydraulics, winch design, sails and rope manufacturers.

While it has been a long-standing tradition that the Bucket should not be used as a sales platform, times are changing; the industry is more competitive and as a result the event is evolving. To ignore the commercial potential of the Bucket would be a huge opportunity missed. The focus will always remain on owner enjoyment, as bombarding owners

would not go down well at the Bucket (the instruction to the sponsors is that if they need to explain the difference between networking and overt marketing to their representatives, they are sending the wrong people), but if a balance can be found, the opportunity to entice new business is considerable. With sailing yacht owners more passionate about their boats by nature, and sailing yachts changing hands less often, the market tends to be slower and any help to shift yachts on the secondhand market will benefit the whole industry.

The value of this year’s St Barths Bucket to the industry was incredible: a high concentration of owners, potential clients, decision makers and industry professionals all in one place for four days and all at their most relaxed and approachable. It was a fantastic opportunity for the industry to meet, catch up and build relationships in an environment where the industry is being shown off at its very best. ■



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