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the biggest turnaround
in sailing history

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a star to steer her by”*

John Masefield

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to sailing



Featuring

The icon

ATHENA

The champion

UNFURLED

The thoroughbred

NIKATA

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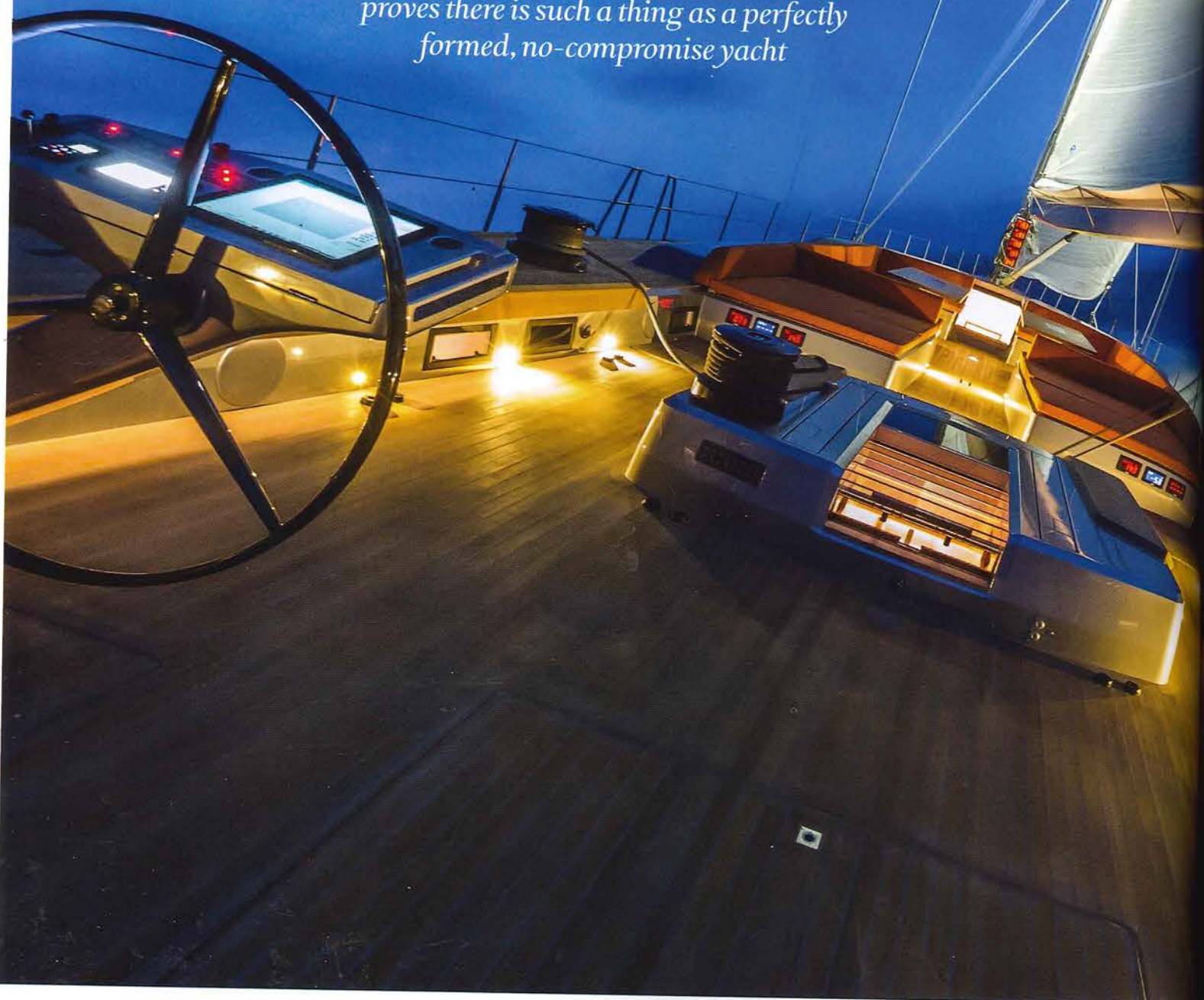
TRAVEL

In the wake of
Picasso: the
art lover's
Côte d'Azur
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BALANCING ACT

*Baltic's 35 metre racer-cruiser Nikata
proves there is such a thing as a perfectly
formed, no-compromise yacht*





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“Are you ready to throw some rags up and see what she can do?” *Nikata*'s captain is itching to go sailing and, on a yacht like this, who can blame him? The latest collaboration between Baltic Yachts, Nauta Design and Judel/Vrolijk, the 35 metre fully custom *Nikata* is a high-performance, carbon-built sailing machine that's designed to strike the perfect balance between racing and cruising.

Custom yacht projects ordinarily involve some compromise, especially a racer-cruiser like this where the line between speed and comfort is a thin one. Push one element too far and the other invariably has to give. But *Nikata*'s designer, naval architect, builder and captain all insist that this yacht met her brief without any compromises at all.

As soon as I step on board in Palma, it starts to become clear that they have really ▶



The hugely experienced Mario Pedol, of Nauta Design, is the pen behind Nikata. "The brief was for three main ingredients: racing

performance, absolute elegance and outstanding functionality at sea and in cruising mode. These three are fundamentals of our DNA"





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pulled it off. Created for an experienced yachtsman who enjoys competing, she is in equal parts a luxurious, comfortable cruiser and a fast, responsive racer. With her high-tech construction methods, a thoroughly studied hull design, boundary-pushing rig, an obsession with weight saving and the ability to transition from racing to cruising mode, *Nikata* has it all.

The owner’s brief – and enthusiasm – pushed the designers and builder to this result. “I was inspired by the owner’s passion; I was able to feed off his energy,” says *Nikata*’s designer Mario Pedol, of Nauta Design, who has penned countless sailing yachts of all sizes and also the longest motor yacht in the world, 180 metre *Azzam*. “The brief was for three main ingredients: racing performance, absolute

elegance and outstanding functionality at sea and in cruising mode. These three ingredients are very much fundamentals of our DNA, which we share with *Baltic*.”

Nigel Ingram, of MCM Newport, served as a hands-on project manager and was instrumental in introducing the owner to Nauta Design and naval architect Judel/Vrolijk, and in guiding him to *Baltic Yachts*. *Nikata* marks the second instalment of a successful collaboration between the four.

But *Nikata* is an entirely new family of hull shape that’s very different from her *Baltic* predecessor, 35.5m *Doryan*, which is “a successful cruising boat but [designed] less for racing performance and more as a big-volume boat that sailed well,” according to naval architect Rolf Vrolijk. “This was the

opposite. *Nikata* is a big boat but a lot more performance-oriented; less volume, with a narrow hull and narrow waterline.

“The shape is influenced by racing boats we have done, by *Maxi 72s* that rely on increased hull stability when heeling. *Nikata* has a low-drag hull but not a light-displacement hull,” he says.

The hull went through extensive computational fluid dynamics testing, experimenting with variations on the waterline beam, maximum beam, volume distribution and more, considering factors including where the owner will cruise and the races he plans to enter.

“It was a real challenge to come up with a concept that is competitive but also comfortable,” says Vrolijk. “To be competitive ▶



Left: Nikata's cruising mode is enhanced by the section of aft deck that folds down to create a swim platform. Right: the bright orange cushions



stand out against the teak and silver exterior. "We achieved a fresh and relaxing atmosphere with light colours and veneers," says Pedol

in racing, a big part of that is weight savings, while having enough sail area and stability to perform well. The sails are the engine of the boat, of course."

Vroljik worked closely with North Sails, optimising both the racing and cruising sailplans that utilise its high-tech 3Di sails. *Nikata* is in essence a transformer, morphing from cruiser to racer not simply by switching sails, but by her mast, runners, backstays and bowsprit changing to suit her mission. Racing requires more performance downwind, so the changes allow *Nikata* to carry a bigger sailplan and her mast shape shifts to accommodate a square-top mainsail. The metamorphosis from cruising to full racing mode can take a few days and also involve stripping out luxurious appointments inside to reduce weight as much as possible.

Nikata isn't just a nimble racer, she's also a fast cruising yacht as she demonstrates with ease. Within seconds of the gybe going up, we are beating the wind, making 13 knots in

10 knots of true wind speed. This is the trend all day, conquering the wind and overtaking everyone around us in the Bay of Palma.

The 8.07 metre beam stretches nearly all the way aft, so when you stand at the wheel while heeling, it's a long way to the water below. At the helm, lifting plates under foot level out the deck no matter how steep we heel and hide flush away when not in use. The captain admits that, at first, he questioned this novelty, calculating the weight, however minuscule, it would add.

But he has appreciated the even footing greatly on the long Atlantic crossings, on one of which the yacht hit a top speed of 28.8 knots. "It's definitely worth the few extra kilograms," he now says.

Nikata is full of ergonomic features of this sort, serving to make sailing more comfortable. The entire deck is clean and clear,

with tracking hidden beneath the teak. The captain points out the entry points where the sheets enter the deck and run concealed, reappearing at the bow.

The responsive handling on this boat is one of its many highlights. She feels much

more like an 18 metre than a superyacht: turn the wheel and you are instantly rewarded. "I like the way it feels like a smaller boat," the captain says. "People are always trying to build bigger. It's refreshing to be on a big boat that feels like a sailing dinghy in terms of responsiveness.

"She is just under the full size range for requiring captive winches. It's not a 35-footer where you're turning the winches by hand," he says with a laugh, "but you still feel like you're on a real sailing yacht."

Hydraulic power supplies juice to the winches and sailplan. The underbody, meanwhile, was also carefully planned with speed in mind. "We installed an optimised propeller line on her using a titanium propeller and foil-shaped P bracket coupled with an ultra-thin shaft for reduced drag," says Henry Hawkins, Baltic Yachts' CEO.

Nikata moves fast and, with a silver-grey paint job and low-profile deckhouse, looks fast. Pedol says the perception of speed was a priority. "We wanted a design that exuded speed, modernity and technology – a ground-breaking design that would stand apart," he says. "So we did something totally new for us, with geometrical shapes that flow into one another and a custom colour scheme." Three shades of grey define the exterior lines. ▶

"We wanted to exude speed, modernity and technology – a ground-breaking design"



Mario Pedol's exterior designs on Nikata incorporate geometrical shapes and a custom colour scheme. For the hull design, naval architect Rolf Vrolijk "looked somewhere between

the Baltic 116 and the Maxi 72 hull shape". Together they have created a yacht that can transform from cruiser to racer by switching sails, mast, runners, backstays and bowsprit



The hull, coachroof and cockpit coamings are painted in different custom colours by Awlgrip. Nauta produced mock-ups of how various shades of grey could change the perception of the exterior design. The contrasting shapes and shades create an arrow shape, conveying speed.

The Milan studio made good use of the low, lean superstructure, fitting in as many windows as possible. There are long windows outside the coachroof, adding to the geometrical play of the exterior lines, rectangular windows inside the cockpit that give light to the crew quarters and then, the main event, a giant T-shaped window over the coachroof itself that serves as a skylight into the saloon below.

Nikata's interior is bright and airy, with an ample saloon that's a convivial space for entertaining. "We achieved a fresh and relaxing atmosphere with a lot of light that's enhanced by light colours and veneers," says Pedol. For privacy reasons interior details can't be revealed, but *Nikata* contains luxuries and design features that are rarely found on sailing yachts of comparable size, let alone a racing boat. The weight, or lack thereof, is the trick.

"Behind the appearance of wood and stone, it's all light sandwich foam construction," says Pedol. "That is another area where Baltic Yachts is very good. They have been cultivating that skill for decades."

Built in a female mould using the pre-

preg/sprint method and carbon sandwich construction, *Nikata* has a light but stiff hull and deck. Hawkins explains that it was achieved "by using finite element analysis to identify critical areas and then optimising the laminate in those areas.

"We focused on saving weight in all areas of systems design while still achieving a quiet boat," he says. "We put great effort into making the engine and generator foundations as efficient as possible in terms of both their weight and their vibration deadening capabilities."

The focus on weight savings even applies to *Nikata's* grand staircase – a section of the aft deck folds down to become a swim platform, with a broad

staircase leading down to it. Pedol says: "It's not an easy thing to build in a light way because of all the hydraulics and double hinges – it's generally very heavy. It's great how Baltic Yachts engineered our design totally in carbon fibre."

Hawkins adds: "We have never gone this far before in terms of the sheer size. When guests arrive in the custom tender, the owner insisted

that they should feel as if they are walking up the staircase of a luxury hotel and feel warmly welcomed." No compromise.

Nikata may be among the new generation of lightweight racer-cruisers that are designed equally for comfort and serious competition, but whatever comes next, it's clear she will remain in a class of her own. ■

"When guests arrive they should feel as if they are walking up the staircase of a luxury hotel"



Clever ergonomic features are found everywhere on Nikata. Her deck is clean and uncluttered, emphasising her comfortable cruising credentials as well as her lightness and speed

NIKATA

BALTIC YACHTS

LOA 35m
LWL 32.6m
Beam 8.07m
Draught (keel up/down)
3.65m/5.85m
Displacement 88T
Mast & boom
Southern Spars
Sails North Sails 3Di

Total sail area
Upwind 625m²/
Downwind 1,318m²;
Racing Mode
Upwind 698m²/
Downwind 1,382m²
Engines Cummins
280kW
Max speed under sail
29 knots

Max speed under power
11 knots
Fuel capacity
6,000 litres
Tenders
1 x 6.3m
Owners/guests 8
Crew 5

Construction Pre-preg
carbon, nomax, corecell
composite
Naval architecture
Judel/Vrolijk & Co
Exterior styling
Nauta Design
Interior design
Nauta Design

Builder/year
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