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## A cruiser with class

Grand Soleil's first true cruising yacht

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# ON TEST GRAND SOLEIL 46LC

## A cruiser with class

The first true cruiser from this Italian yard aims for comfortable sailing, easy handling and a light interior, finds Toby Hodges

Cantieri del Pardo, based in Forlì in Italy, has built nearly 4,000 Grand Soleil yachts in its 42-year history. Every model shares a common trait: all have been performance-based cruiser-racer designs – until now. The 46LC is Grand Soleil's first cruising yacht, and it will make you sit up and take notice.

A cruising yacht means different things to different sailors. LC stands for 'Long Cruise' and there are many clues that this

Italian brand is targeting warm weather/Mediterranean-type cruising. For a start the deck is replete with relaxation areas: a double sunbed nestles in the foredeck, there are aft-facing lounge seats in the cockpit and a large swimming platform aft that lowers hydraulically.

But these features are matched by practicality in a cockpit that provides protection for its crew by means of high bench coamings and a





## FACTS

Test Editor **Toby Hodges**

- ▶ **Where we tested:** Lavagna, Liguria, Italy
- ▶ **Conditions:** flat waters Force 2 min to consistent Force 3-4
- ▶ **Model:** three-cabin, two-heads layout, with optional taller mast, Code 0 pack and electric winches



Photos by Richard Langdon/Ocean Images

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## ON TEST: GRAND SOLEIL 46LC

A rollbar arch keeps mainsheet and boom clear of the cockpit for easy, safe cruising. Sail systems are led to the helm



rollbar-style arch that keeps the boom and mainsheet clear of the cockpit and also helps support a full cockpit bimini.

Now you may be forgiven for thinking that this is similar to many other performance cruisers launched in recent years, particularly by Italian yards. These are typically fast cruisers: lightweight, flat-decked, trendy yachts that can be raced occasionally. But few are proper cruising yachts with hull shapes that will softly part the seas and provide good tankage, a comfortable cockpit and adequate stowage for long-term sailing.

Grand Soleil's new yacht marks the start of a range that will address that gap



between the mass production cruiser offerings of French and German yards and high-end – and typically more traditional – cruisers from northern Europe.

Seven years ago, faced with a decline in sales of racing yachts, X-Yachts took the bold decision to produce a new cruising line. It helped keep the company trading during the downturn, but the Xc line is still very much a Scandinavian-style cruiser, traditional in both looks and interior finish.

### Italian through and through

The 46LC is Italian through and through, a design collaboration between Marco Lostuzzi and Nauta Yachts. She has bold looks, straight, angular lines, with big tinted hull portlights contrasting with stark topsides. And she has space and comfort to enjoy warm conditions to the full, is nimble enough for light-wind sailing and has a light, open and spacious interior.

Why hasn't Grand Soleil produced a cruising yacht before? General manager Fabio Planamente says the company has been planning a cruising range for some years, but that this LC line only evolved once the company was back under Italian ownership. Now is the right time, he believes, to cater to different customers, including new clients from powerboat markets and those wanting to step up in quality from the larger production brands.

Grand Soleil's most productive year was 2007 on the eve of the recession, when 187 boats were built. Today, after a brief spell under the umbrella of Bavaria, it enjoys a long-term commitment from current owners the Trevi Group and the focus of the company is on quality not quantity. "We want to produce around 50 boats per year in very good quality," says Planamente.

### The code of sailing

It was fitting that we tested this Med-style 46LC in archetypal Mediterranean cruising conditions: 6-14 knots over flat water. We sailed out of Lavagna, staying offshore to find the best breeze, and nosed into the colourful picture-postcard cove of Portofino for lunch.

The test boat had performance upgrades that included a taller mast (by 1m), plus rod rigging and a hydraulic backstay. But she still felt a little sluggish under white sails when the breeze was in single figures. The standard self-tacking jib ensures she is easy to manage, and helps her point high and tack sharply. But it was only when the wind nudged up to double figures that we could clock 6-6.5 knots.

In these light conditions it's all about the Code 0, however. This close-reaching furling sail, set from the end of the 46LC's chunky bowsprit, is the first option I would tick on the specs list. It can







- ① The carbon bowsprit is wide enough to stand on and has non-slip grip on top – useful if mooring bows-to. It also neatly houses the anchor underneath.
- ② Huge anchor locker – this contained 100m of chain on the test boat. The sail locker is comparatively small, but large enough to stow the furling Code 0.
- ③ Split chainplate bases allow side deck access to the foredeck. Flat topped coamings make it easy to step from cockpit to side deck.
- ④ A carbon fibre arch keeps the mainsheet clear of the cockpit and provides support for a huge sprayhood and bimini.
- ⑤ Long hatch covering the shallow companionway slides into the coachroof and the washboards recess equally neatly vertically.
- ⑥ No lockers under the cockpit benches. Instead cockpit stowage is in the bilge-deep central locker under the sole. The test boat also had a watermaker here.
- ⑦ The large stern platform hinges hydraulically; once lowered, an integrated step and liferaft stowage are revealed.



completely transform light-air sailing, inducing heel, speed and pleasure in breeze as light as six knots true. In these conditions I wanted to remain at the helm for most of the long day.

The 46LC is only one tonne heavier than the Grand Soleil 47, but she has a much fuller, deeper shape that carries more beam aft. "A main difference compared to the performance range is that we step the masts on deck," Planamente explains, "to stop any possibility of leaks when cruising." Another difference is that an L-shaped keel is preferred to a T-keel. It still benefits from the same stiff structure as the performance models, including a carbon-reinforced internal grid and vacuum-infused hull and deck.

Nauta has kept the deck design as clean as possible. The arch keeps the boom and mainsheet out of the cockpit and a self-tacking jib comes as standard. And the boat can be handled using just two winches within reach of the twin wheels (although four winches are fitted to make handling offwind sails easier).

A German mainsheet is led back to the cockpit and a bank of clutches each side helps free up the working winches.

Bins are built into the aft end of the cockpit benches to help keep the cockpit clear of rope tails. These are a little too small to cope with the amount used under sail, I felt.

The code sail enabled us to hit peak speeds of around 8.5 knots, while pointing at around 50° to the apparent wind, and our average boat speed was typically just one knot less than single-figure wind speeds. It has a deeper cut than a Code 0, meaning we could sail on a beam reach and deeper while maintaining similar speeds.

Good performance might be expected from a Grand Soleil. But the ease with which you can set, douse and trim this sail is indicative of how well this yacht has been set up for cruising. The endless furling line is led back to the cockpit, as are all the sheets and halyards, which gives the helmsman complete control.

It meant we could sail to within a few lengths of the vertical cliffs for the photos, before either gybing or furling away the code sail in seconds.

This really is a boat that can be sailed easily and comfortably short-handed, ideal for cruising, especially with families or less experienced crew aboard. The pedestals

▲ Above: fast and comfortable cruising under the optional Code 0

are well designed, helping to ensure the wheels are within safe reach of each other. Crucially, the winches can also be reached easily from the wheels. What's more, the helmsman has a comfortable position at each quarter for sitting out, with uninterrupted views forward.

The 46LC is fun rather than exhilarating to sail, which is no bad thing given her objective. The helm is neutral, with hardly any feedback at all – I even found myself having to check the numbers and angles on the instruments. The benefit of this is that you can leave the wheel without fear of a sudden round-up.

The combination of a small self-tacking jib and a large furling sail is ideal for Med conditions. The neutral helm did make me wonder if the mast might be a little far forward and the arch obviously pushes the boom up high. Planamente says he has discussed the option of lengthening the boom with designer Lostuzzi to provide more sail area and pressure on the rudder.

As we gybed back to Lavagna under a dying evening breeze, I couldn't help but appreciate how comfortable she is for all aboard. The 46LC seems to be the right size and the right style pitched at the right





market level at the right time. In fact, there are few monohull designs I can think of today that I would prefer to cruise long term around the Mediterranean.

### Space for travelling

Some clever design tricks are used in the accommodation layout to maximise space. The saloon sole is slightly raised, which helps create a shallow descent from the cockpit. The companionway is offset to accommodate a larger galley including an inboard sink area.

And the galley is one small step lower than the saloon, which also helps create the perception of a larger yacht.

A convertible table is preferred to a fixed navstation in the saloon; this drops to fill in a full berth. And by doing away with cockpit bench lockers, Grand Soleil has created significant extra headroom and light in the aft cabins. It is hard to over-emphasise the formidable amount of natural light that Nauta consistently manages to coax into its interiors.

A combination of a relatively deep hull and a slightly raised saloon provides generous bilge space – enough to centralise all the water and fuel tanks



▲ Above: the convertible – another 46LC in Lavagna marina had the full suite of various options that can be fitted to enhance Mediterranean-style cruising. These include retractable telescopic davits, a full cockpit bimini, a fixed windscreen, a sprayhood that links windscreen and arch, plus a bimini over the forward sunbathing area.

▲ Top left: novel, forward-looking coachroof window that looks good from both inside and out. ◀ Left: note the split chainplates for the shrouds, making for an easier passage along the side decks





**Saloon** Tanks mounted centrally below the sole are not only ideal for weight distribution, but it also means the sole is raised. This reduces the angle of the companionway and the areas below and behind the seats are available for stowage. Three different table options are offered, including one that drops to form a double berth. The chart table lowers to form a sofa berth. This solution works fine for short-term use, and makes for a great view through the hull port, but it has no backrest and lacks segregation/privacy from the saloon.

under the saloon sole for optimum weight distribution.

The standard tank volume is 900lt (owners can specify the ratio of fuel to water), but an upgrade of a further 300lt is available. Factor in an optional watermaker and it becomes clear that the 46 is capable of living up to its Long Cruise signature. I was also impressed to find a proper wet-hanging locker in the heads.

To help maximise internal volume, the 46LC's freeboard is high – if you combine this with the coachroof, she is nearly 15cm higher than the 47. Despite the spacious feel this creates below, however, the doorways are all surprisingly narrow.

The joiner work is smartly finished in natural oak (teak is optional), using solid wood around rounded corners and surrounds. And there are some tidy details, including the cotton sidelining, LED courtesy lights and dual Oceanair blinds fitted to all hatches.



**Galley** The offset companionway helps to create space for a practically laid-out galley. The inboard island incorporating the sink provides useful support for working at heel and the generous work surfaces have high fiddles. There is plenty of stowage in the galley area in the form of soft-closing drawers, deep, raised lockers (which continue through the saloon), bottle stowage in the bilges and a bin area below the sinks.



**Forward cabin** All three cabins have hull portlights and provide superb space and light for a boat of the Grand Soleil's size. The master cabin has good stowage in a large hanging wardrobe, plenty of raised lockers and deep drawers below the island berth. The compact ensuite works well and has a separate shower.



SEE THE VIDEO

yachtingworld.com/  
grandsoleil46lc



Or scan this code with your phone or tablet to access the GS 46LC video

## DATA GRAND SOLEIL 46LC

## SPECIFICATIONS

LOA	14.72m	48ft 4in
LOD	14.00m	45ft 11in
LWL	12.72m	41ft 9in
Beam (max)	4.41m	14ft 6in
Draught	2.30m	7ft 7in
Disp (lightship)	12,000kg	26,455lb
Ballast	4,200kg	9,259lb
Sail area (100% foretriangle)	99m <sup>2</sup>	1,067ft <sup>2</sup>
Berths	6-9	
Engine	75hp shaft drive	
Water	600lt	132gal
Fuel	300lt	66gal
Sail area:disp	19.2	
Disp:LWL	162	
Price ex VAT:	€369,000 (£270,424)	
Price as tested:	€499,102 (£369,875)	
Design:	Marco Losuzzi and Nauta Yachts	
www.grandsoleil.net		



## Conclusion

At last, an Italian design that doesn't claim to be all things to all people! This is not a cruiser-racer, racer-cruiser, performance bluewater

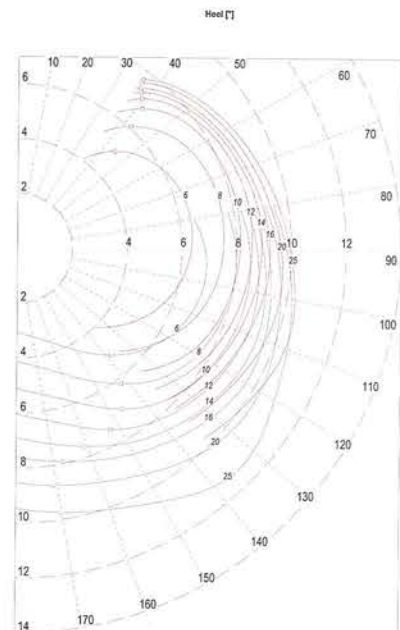
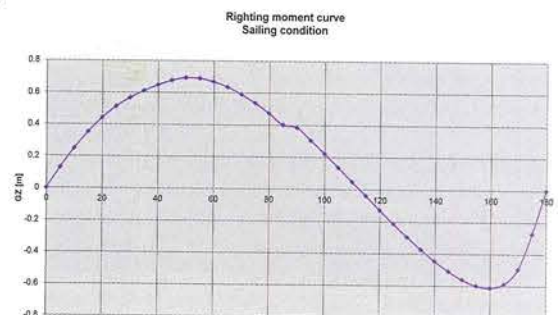
cruiser-cum-daysailer extraordinaire. The 46LC is simply a cruising yacht ideally suited to long-term sailing in sunny climes.

So if the mass production cruising boat options are not quite cutting it, or if you want something a bit sexier, a little more luxurious, a bit classier, a bit quicker ... here she is.

The 46LC is a consistently good all-round yacht, which neither dazzles nor disappoints on the helm. She is what you might call a production yacht upgrade: one with more style and panache, and with greater quality and refinement.

She might be a little stark and angular for some; the contrast of the black hull portlights against the bright white topsides perhaps emphasises her slab sides a little. But this shape helps create impressive internal volume and once you've cruised with these large portlights and seen the blue water rushing by from down below it is hard to go back.

In my opinion, she is an ideal size and format for Mediterranean cruising, a voluminous modern monohull that might just convince any fence-sitters that they needn't switch to a multihull after all.



**Aft cabins** In contrast to the majority of aft guest cabins, the aft cabins on the 46LC give an immediate impression of space and light. With no cockpit bench lockers impeding there is enough headroom to sleep head-aft. The starboard cabin has direct heads access and a clever twin berth that can convert to a double.