



BOAT
TEST

TRUE SPIRIT

A real-world yacht for family cruising in style...
Designed by Dutch naval architect Andre Hoek, the
Spirit of Tradition yacht *Alexa* took a gong in the
2014 Classic Boat Awards. We find out why...

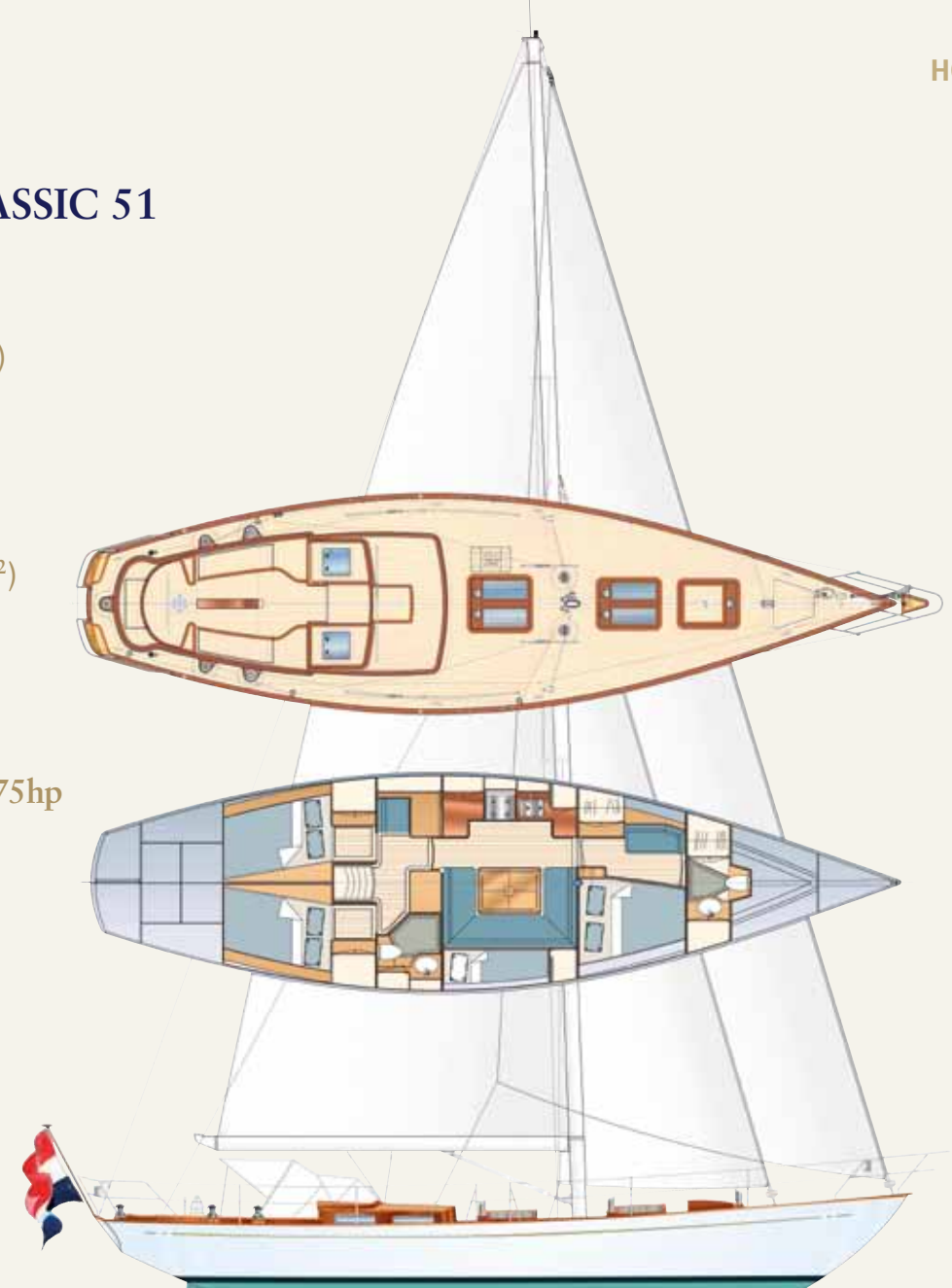
STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS **RON VALENT**



AHMET PEKCAN

TRULLY CLASSIC 51

LOA
51ft (15.5m)
LWL
36ft 5in (11.1m)
BEAM
13ft 6in (4.1m)
DRAUGHT
7ft 3in (2.2m)
SAIL AREA
1,787sqft (166m²)
DISPLACEMENT
18.9 tonnes
MAST HEIGHT
72ft (22m)
ENGINE
Volvo Penta D2 75hp
CABINS
3



Left: Dutch designer Andre Hoek at the helm of *Alexa*

It comes as no surprise that the Trully Classic 51 *Alexa* collected so many votes in the Spirit of Tradition category at the Classic Boat 2014 Awards. Yachts that win prizes in the SoT section tend either to be sporty daysailers or out-of-reach superyachts. *Alexa*, on the other hand, is a real yacht for family cruising in comfort and style and so is within the reach of many yachtsmen – albeit with a price tag slightly higher than that of the average 50ft (15.2m) piece of plastic currently on the market. But then this decidedly classic-looking yacht is anything but average and you do get an extraordinary vessel fitted out to the highest possible standards.

Alexa is also a bit of a wolf in sheep's clothing. Despite having described her as a yacht for family cruising, she sails like a witch. Her powerful, well-designed rig, fine lines and sensible deck layout also make her a yacht to reckon with in the blossoming Spirit of Tradition class at events such as the Panerai Cowes Classics or Les Voiles de Saint-Tropez.

So when Dutch designer Andre Hoek himself offered to take *Classic Boat* out for a spin in Palma, Mallorca, the first plane flight down there wasn't quick enough.

Arriving on the dock in Palma I am met by the sight of not one, but two TC51s. Or to be more precise, a 51 and a 56. *Bartelli II*, the 18-year-old 56 parked next to *Alexa*, is actually an identical sistership with the same length waterline but longer overhangs fore and aft. Arguably this makes for a prettier boat in the eyes of a classic boat lover, but 4ft (1.2m) less yacht to house the same interior makes sense when it comes to maintenance and harbour expenses – especially when Mediterranean or Solent rates apply.

WINNING CONCEPT

Otherwise the resemblance is striking. The deck layout, generous freeboard, cockpit and interior are all identical. Why change a winning concept? *Bartelli II* looks sportier and sleeker with her low toerail, but *Alexa's* perfectly scaled bulwarks provide a more seaworthy feel and in no way does her shorter length give her a boxy look.

Hoek Design also has a yacht refit and maintenance company called Mallorca Management in Palma run by Andre Hoek's sailing buddy Robert Holthuizen. So this "old" boat looks surprisingly new and well maintained and the for sale sign probably will not be up for long.

Obviously Holthuizen and his crew take good care of the Hoek Design fleet, which is quite sizable in the Palma area. Just across from our berth was a batch of Hoek superyachts as well as the J-Class *Lionheart*!

Standing before *Alexa I* knew I was looking at a timeless design. At events across the globe, Spirit of Tradition yachts are increasingly becoming accepted as "true classics". So maybe Trully Classic, the brand name given to this series of yachts by Hoek in 1989 when the classic boat renaissance was still in its infancy, was not just a marketing gimmick but a prophecy. Over 60 Trully Classic yachts have been built since then.

Alexa was intended to be as complete as possible yet still come in at an economic price. Hence the decision was made to have her built in Turkey at Metur Yacht, which had already built three earlier Hoek designs.

"After 30 years of building to the Trully Classic concept," says Hoek, "the amount of detailing, especially in the interior joinery, has evolved to a level of quality and sophistication that cannot be compromised anymore without letting go of what we feel a TC should represent. The only way to achieve that quality for a yacht like this is to make use of the master carpenters in Turkey, who

Above left: *Alexa* in the waters off Palma; her scaled bulwarks give a more seaworthy feel than her 55 cousin, yet she doesn't look boxy



will deliver a top-quality finish at a low hourly wage. This yacht built to this standard in Europe would have a totally different price structure and an ordinary production yacht of comparable pricing will not have this level of detailing.”

The interior is built using an African wood called anigré. This gives a very clean and bright interior despite the fact that, with her lovely flush deck, *Alexia* does not have large windows in an oversized deckhouse. Hoek Design has used this wood on several of its yachts. The interior of the 180ft (54.9m) ketch *Marie*, for instance, is also made of anigré. The rubbed-effect, varnished finish looks as if the wood is untreated.

Meanwhile, handgrips and the margin boards of the teak sole are varnished with a satin finish, while the teak itself is treated to several coats of teak oil. Combined with the slightly off-white finish on the panelling above the dado rails, this gives the interior a classic feel without the usual acres of mahogany and darker varnish. Hoek is obviously proud of the result on this yacht and tirelessly points out examples of details that altogether contribute to the pleasant feel of the boat.

“We really wanted to keep this yacht as simple as possible and maintenance friendly for her owner. Even

50-footers nowadays are crammed full of so much kit you have to be an engineer to do even the simplest job!”

So *Alexia* does not have air conditioning, although the interior has been prepared for this; the dorade vents provide fresh air and cooling. There isn't a generator either. For emergencies she has a simple portable Honda that can be set up on the foredeck. The engine is a standard 75hp Volvo Penta saildrive installed below the cockpit. Without an engine housed in a large box smack in the middle of the saloon, the space here feels glorious. Overall, the absence of space-eating hardware means that *Alexia* offers more storage areas than are usual.

AMPLE BEAM

Alexia sleeps six in three cabins and full use of her ample beam is made by also having a very sensible pilot berth in the saloon. The forward owner's cabin has its own en-suite heads and shower, while the two cabins aft share one on the starboard side. Electronic charts and laptops may be standard on most yachts nowadays, but *Alexia* is fitted with a proper navigators corner with a seat, a generous chart table for paper charts and all ships' electronics and functions neatly installed in plain view. Although a U-shaped galley might seem like a better

Clockwise from top left: note glass doors of companionway; air vent with protective hoop; folding table with leaves down in the cockpit; view showing her buttock lines and overhangs



workplace when under way, the set-up in *Alexia* – the galley has plenty of storage and runs along the port side – makes it possible for more than one person to prepare a meal, and there are enough handholds around to hang on to if the going gets rough. A test I like to perform is to close my eyes and walk from one end of a yacht's interior to the other in an imaginary seaway, trying not to fall. *Alexia* passed easily, as every time I needed to steady myself my hand landed on a raised edge or handhold!

BULLETPROOF

Alexia is built of red cedar covered with two layers of mahogany veneer. She has a glass coating inside and out, which results in a hull that is immensely strong and low maintenance. “Bulletproof and over specified” were Andre Hoek's words. The deck is solid teak sheathed in glassfibre and was built in Holland using a plug Victoire made for this series of yachts. *Alexia* is hull number eight.

An experienced yachtsman fitting out his yacht for a second world cruise once told me that: “You can always reef, but you can't glue anything on when you need more!” This remark came after he'd received adverse comments following his decision to lengthen his mast substantially before sailing 30,000 miles around the

world when the so-called sensible thing to do was to go for comfortable low-aspect rigs that you only had to reef while rounding Cape Horn in gale-force winds.

He explained that nothing was more frustrating on a world cruise than to float around without getting anywhere because your heavy and often overloaded cruiser didn't have the power to move in less than 15 knots of wind. The fun of cruising is getting somewhere nice and anchoring there, he explained, and not taking forever to do so or, worse, having to stack big drums of diesel on deck to safely navigate the doldrums!

Alexia is a yacht that would have received his approval. After many years of development through seven earlier sister ships, she is the culmination of everything learned in that process. Her deck and interior layout reflect thousands of miles of experience and feedback. Weighing in at 20 tonnes she is definitely in the heavy displacement category for a 50-footer, although when you sail her and feel her dinghy-like reaction to the helm you could be forgiven for thinking that she's a light-displacement flyer. This is in part due to the deep spade rudder, deeper keel and higher ballast ratio of this version of the TC51 but, of course, also to her larger-than-standard rig and sensible sail plan.

Clockwise from top left: spacious saloon features a cosy pilot berth to starboard; adjustable hatch lock in stainless steel; the galley offers plenty of storage and handholds



Above, left to right: Alexa has a proper nav station with a generous chart table; close-up of the sink in the galley; glasses are stored neatly away in racked cupboards

When we left Palma the forecast was as usual for the time of year. Ten knots of breeze that would slowly build to a steady 20 to 25 knots as the lands became warmer. Manoeuvring under power was surprisingly easy, although unlike most 50-footers these days, *Alexa* does not have a bow thruster fitted. Her Volvo Penta saildrive effortlessly pushed us out past the breakwater against the building wind. Before I had accustomed myself to her very direct steering – the tiniest movement of helm has her spinning off on a new course – we were already doing 7-8 knots. The speed and acceleration was thrilling compared to the often more leisurely pace of a ‘real’ classic. She would heel to 10-15 degrees quite easily, but then settle down and take off like a train.

As the wind slowly increased a reef was quickly and easily put in her main – no complicated inmast furling here, just simple and efficient slab reefing – and the genoa and staysail partially rolled in. All the time she was perfectly in control and, if anything, kept going faster till eventually we were flying over the building chop at nearly 10 knots! There was some spray on the foredeck, but otherwise it was a comfortable ride in

more than 20 knots of wind. Our heading was east-south-east and I would gladly have continued for another 500 miles in the general direction of Malta. This is how a cruising yacht should perform!

While I was having all the fun sailing her from the separate helmsman’s position aft, Andre Hoek was enjoying lunch with four guests in the large, forward half of the cockpit. Hoek told me that on earlier trips with the boat in 3-4 knots of breeze she easily did 6 knots immediately, justifying the expense of her taller rig that was designed specifically for Mediterranean conditions.

I am something of a purist when it comes to classic boats, but *Alexa* proved to be the perfect antidote to this affliction. All too soon the day had drawn to a close, but not before I was convinced that in the hands of Hoek and fellow J-Class designer Dykstra, a Spirit of Tradition yacht can be given all the beauty, charm and warmth of a real classic yacht while retaining the benefits of comfort and sail-handling capabilities of a modern one. CB readers got it right when they voted for *Alexa*!

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What defines a Truly Classic?

The first yacht Hoek built in 1989 was for Michael Peacock, captain of the British Admiral’s Cup team and a very experienced yachtsman. She was called *Truly Classic*. This was a 65-footer (19.8m) and was later owned by Peter de Savary. She started off the series that was named after her and which since then has seen yachts built in a wide range of sizes ranging from 51 to 126ft (15.5-38.4m) and have been built cold-moulded and in GRP, aluminium and steel.

A Truly Classic is built to conform to a number of principles. Hoek explains: “A TC must have a flush deck with only hatches and a low deckhouse, a spoon bow, low freeboard and, above all, she must be beautiful!” The TC concept is built around the idea that many prospective owners want a (semi) custom-built yacht, but do not have the experience or knowledge to oversee all the challenges and decision-making of such a project. Therefore, making choices from existing yachts and then customising them within a concept has



proved to be a success. The hull is a fixed factor but after that everything can be adjusted: rig, keel, material and the interior layout. The more TCs that are built, the easier it becomes for clients to make decisions. “There have been four 56-footers built,” says Hoek, “and not one of them is the same!”

For more New Classics, go to classicboat.co.uk and search ‘new classics’