



**FACTS** Tested by **DAVID HARDING**

- ▶ **Where we tested:** Punta Ala, Italy
- ▶ **Wind:** 21-26 knots, flat water
- ▶ **Model:** Contest 85CS, heavily customised including carbon rig and modified deck layout



Photos by David Harding and Carlo Baroncini

**ON TEST: CONTEST 85CS**

# BUILT FOR BLUEWATER

MADE FOR AN OWNER WITH A VERY PARTICULAR SET OF DEMANDS, THE FIRST CONTEST 85CS INCORPORATES A HOST OF FEATURES THAT MAKE IT A WORLD CRUISER WITH A DIFFERENCE.

**DAVID HARDING** TELLS THE STORY

**C**ruising the world in a large, fast, comfortable yacht is everyone's dream. Even if your finances allow the dream to become a reality, however, you're still faced with the practicalities of running the boat; of undertaking or organising maintenance and repairs in parts of the world where you won't find lift-out facilities and a well-stocked chandlery in every port.

You might have a permanent crew, but a modern yacht and its systems are complex. The greater the size, the greater the complexity and the more crew you will need, so how do you make sure you can enjoy your sailing with minimal downtime and without an army of technicians to hand? And if you're a keen and experienced sailor who doesn't want to forego the simple, elemental pleasures of

sailing when a boat becomes larger, how do you make sure you end up with a boat that's still fun to sail?

The answer to all these questions is to make some important decisions carefully from the outset. This is the story of a boat whose owner did exactly that; who knew what he wanted and chose with the greatest care. Those choices were, critically, shaped by the loss of his previous yacht, an extended Oyster 825 also named *Polina Star*, which lost her keel and sank in the Med in 2015.

Here we're going to look at the design, the systems and the engineering that have gone into the creation of the new, truly remarkable yacht – an 85-footer that can be handled by a crew of two and in which sophistication and technology are combined with good old-fashioned back-to-basics practicality.



### A project of integration

Few decisions are more important than choosing your builder. For the owner of *Polina Star IV*, that decision was easy: Contest. It might not be the first name you think of for a boat of this size, but with the launch of the 85CS this Dutch builder has shown itself capable of more than just challenging the established names at the top end of the semi-production market.

Contest celebrated its 60th anniversary this year. And that's 60 years in the ownership of the same family. During this time it has progressively moved up the size range. Having started, as many of us will remember, with the 25, Contest produced classics such as Dick Zaai's phenomenally successful 31. Recent decades have seen the launch of the 42, 45, 50, 57, 62, 67 and 72 – though not in that order – so the development of the 85 has been a significant, if not wholly unexpected, step.

Venturing into new territory is something Contest has, in its own quiet way, done many times before. This is not a company that bangs its own drum particularly loudly. It just gets on with developing boats that people have wanted to buy for the past 60 years. It was in the vanguard when it came to introducing features such as keel-stepped, swept-spreader fractional rigs with large mainsails and smaller foretriangles. At the same time it has been building to Lloyd's standards since 1972, making a point of blending innovation with structural integrity.

For *Polina Star's* owner, one reason for choosing Contest is that he had already owned two previous boats from the yard – a 48 and a 62. When the time came for the next one a few years ago, the 72 was the largest in Contest's range and wasn't big enough. To accommodate a permanent crew of two or three and have comfortable quarters for the owner and guests too, all with a degree of privacy, you need 80ft.

An alternative yacht of a suitable size was found but, when circumstances dictated that it be replaced, Contest was the yard on the receiving end of the call. Plans had already been afoot for an 85, and, not surprisingly, progress was accelerated by the prospect of an owner for the first boat. In the autumn of 2018, after more than two years of collaboration between Judel/Vrolijk, Contest's in-house engineers, the owner, his skipper and Wetzels Brown Partners (interior designers), the new *Polina Star* was launched.

When a small window of opportunity to see *Polina Star* in action appeared in May, I flew to Pisa, and, little more



- 1 The 111% headsail is furled away during tacks. A Code 0 and a gennaker provide the downwind power.
- 2 Triple guardwires all round are in solid stainless steel for comfort, security and aesthetics.
- 3 Four Lewmar hydraulic winches by the helm each side allow efficient short-handed sail trimming.
- 4 Wide deck abaft the helm stations: two rows of stainless steel foot-braces can be fitted into sockets here.

**A stainless steel frame supports the permanent cockpit cover for all-weather protection**

than an hour after touching down, found myself bouncing around in a RIB in 25 knots of breeze taking photos as 85ft of Contest thundered past. On boarding, I was greeted by Contest's CEO, Arjen Conijn (whose grandfather founded the Contest yard in 1959), together with the skipper, Alessio Cannoni, and his crew.

### The Italian job

Within a minute I was given the wheel – well, a choice of the twin carbon wheels – and enjoyed the experience of guiding 55 tonnes and several million pounds'-worth of yacht around the Gulf of Follonica.

It was instantly apparent that sailing pleasure was a high priority in the design of the 85. I have always maintained that, by and large, the pleasure derived from sailing a boat is in inverse proportion to its size. The Contest proves that there are exceptions. For all her size and power, she was extraordinarily responsive. The feel from the single large rudder on its carbon stock was transmitted directly to the helm with no slack or delay in the linkage, never leaving any doubt about what the boat was trying to say.

On a reach under staysail and single-reefed main



Barber-hauling the staysail significantly improved upwind performance. Extra blocks and lines together with plenty of winches allow almost any sheet or halyard to be led to any winch



Above: stainless steel frames around the six large dorade vents increase security on the foredeck.

Left: mainsail handling is from the mast and can, if necessary, be managed manually and single-handed



## 'SAFETY WAS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE DESIGN FROM THE OUTSET'

we clocked an easy 12 knots. Upwind the log hovered between 6.5 and 8 knots in the gusty conditions with the apparent wind at around 30°. We were marginally over-powered at times and had to feather into the stronger gusts. I wondered whether we might have been faster with two slabs, especially given the slight sag in the inner forestay as it's the outer stay for the 111% headsail that supports the rig.

As with many smaller boats, especially those that share the Contest's relatively hard turn to the bilge, the balance changed noticeably at different angles of heel. This meant actively steering, making helming a far more engaging process than you might expect. It was like sailing a very big, powerful dinghy.

Sails can be trimmed from the helm with the bank of four hydraulic Lewmar winches each side: two 111s and two 88s. The owner has chosen more winches than would be the norm because he and Cannoni want to be able to trim and work the boat effectively should any winch or other hardware become unusable. They also have two more Lewmar 88s either side of the mast to handle the fully battened, slab-reefing mainsail on its Harken Switch T-Track that minimises the height of the stack. The extra winches, together with an array of additional blocks, tweekers and barber-haulers, means that virtually any line on the boat can be led to any winch.

Barber-hauling the staysail inboard while sailing upwind had an instant and significant effect, increasing our pointing by 8° and our speed by a good half-knot.

### Designed by experience

Compared with the owner's previous boat, *Polina Star* is lighter, with greater form stability, a lighter rig (in carbon, by Hall Spars) and a lighter keel. An aluminium rig would call for a heavier keel, substantially increasing both weight and rolling. For tradewind sailing, minimising rolling is important. Light-air performance has been shown to be good: in 10 knots of wind at 50°, the crew has clocked 8.5-9



A working cockpit for the crew would normally be abaft the guests' cockpit, moving the wheels further aft

As the centrepiece of the interior, the saloon does full justice to the build: the quality of finish and detailing is hard to fault

knots. Speeds like this make for fast passages.

Throughout the boat, weight and where it goes has been carefully considered. As you would expect, hull and deck are foam-cored. They're also vacuum-infused, using Contest's 'single-shot' system whereby the resin is introduced in one go. Interior joinery is foam-cored too.

Weight is concentrated where it's needed. No chances have been taken with the massive matrix distributing the loads from the slim-sectioned, stainless steel-and-lead T-bulb keel. On the other hand, if a little weight needs to be placed higher up in the interests of safety, it is. For example, the batteries, all cabling and the principal electrical components are 1.5m above the waterline to make sure they would continue to work in extremis. Similarly, navigation and communication systems use separate circuits from the domestics.

Safety features such as these are an integral part of the approach with *Polina Star* and were incorporated into the design from the outset. A boat of this size won't be rolled by anything short of a tsunami, right? Even so, the sole boards are secured by catches because you wouldn't want them floating up if the bilge were to flood. The bilge pump system has been paid particular



Galley area, with U-shaped work surfaces and a secure area for the cook at sea



An extended stern garage allows the 2.9m RIB (modified by Contest with a folding transom) to be stored fore-and-aft for easier launching. Also back here is a fully independent bilge pump that can be used as a fire hose at the flick of two valves



Above: nav area includes touch-screen displays for full management of the boat's systems. Above right: ladders drop down from the deckhead in every cabin



The master cabin befits a boat of this nature. Even so, the practicality theme dominates: handholds are everywhere and the maximum width between bracing points is just 60cm





Reaching under big masthead asymmetric. The sails are by North

attention, a central spine running the length of the hull – which has four watertight bulkheads – and ‘ribs’ also feeding into it from each side. Sensors outboard warn of bilge water when the boat’s heeled.

The level of detailed thought in the build of this yacht – and there’s much more in the bilge-pump system alone – is testament to the experience of the skipper and the owner and the preparedness and ability of Contest to work with them.

Essential elements aside, you might imagine that a luxury yacht of this size would be full of electronic wizardry. Naturally the systems are many and complex. Nonetheless, the belt-and-braces approach and the desire for manual back-up is evident throughout. Should the PLC (computerised control) system fail, every function can be activated manually via relays. Life will continue: a functional bilge pump is clearly vital but a cold beer is also still nice.

Down below, as on deck, minimising dependence on powered systems is a fundamental aspect of the design and what you see above deck is often a clue as to what’s below. Substantial stainless steel rails around the six large dorade vents forward of the mast provide important handholds and foot-bracing points in an area that feels exposed on many boats.

The vents themselves ensure a through-flow of air down



Alessio Cannoni is *Polina Star IV*’s hugely experienced skipper. A former design engineer and seasoned racing sailor, he has been involved in the project since its inception

below such that the aircon has rarely been needed. One vent is right over the washing machine and tumble-drier in the crew’s quarters to save the need for an extractor fan.

### Comfort on passage

Stylish and beautifully finished the Contest undoubtedly is. On *Polina Star*, the styling and detailing are combined with the owner’s wish for substance and functionality rather than a visual ‘wow’ factor that might quickly be forgotten as soon as the boat leaves port. Changes from what Contest would offer as the norm – if there is a norm on a boat of this nature – can be seen in the cockpit arrangements. The original plans show a second, working cockpit for the crew abaft the main cockpit, so the wheels would be further aft.

Below decks there’s inevitably an enormous choice of layouts. The arrangement in this case reflects the owner’s dislike of wide open spaces except in the saloon, though even this is no dance floor and can be used at sea.

His cabin is in the stern and, because he likes cooking, so is the galley: close by and where the boat’s motion is felt least. You can wedge yourself in. Lockers, fridges and freezers (multiples of each, of course) can be opened safely on either tack and at any angle of heel. This sort of thinking, to make life easier and more comfortable on passage, is evident everywhere.

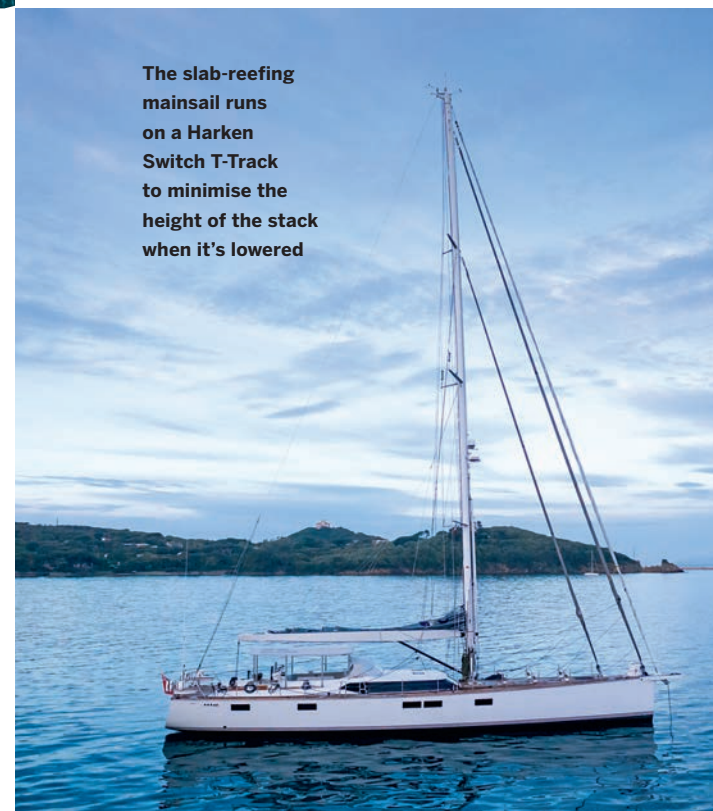
Forward of the saloon is a guest cabin and, to port, the crew’s quarters with bunks, showers, nav area and control centre, and full workshop facilities. The parts of the twin watermakers that need regular inspection and maintenance are here, while the noisy elements (the high-pressure pumps) are in the sound-deadened engine room. Having two identical watermakers means common spare parts and the ability to cannibalise one to repair the other if necessary. The same goes for the twin Onan generators, which are also fitted with hydraulic pumps to send oil to the winches, furling systems, backstay, vang, bow-thruster and other hydraulically-operated systems.

In the bow, reached via a hatch on deck or through the door in the watertight bulkhead from the crew’s quarters, is the enormous sail locker. From here the Code 0 and deep-cut gennaker can be hoisted to ensure *Polina Star* is carrying the right offwind sail for the apparent wind angle. Motoring is principally for entering and leaving anchorages; the rest of the time, this boat sails.

### Mission accomplished

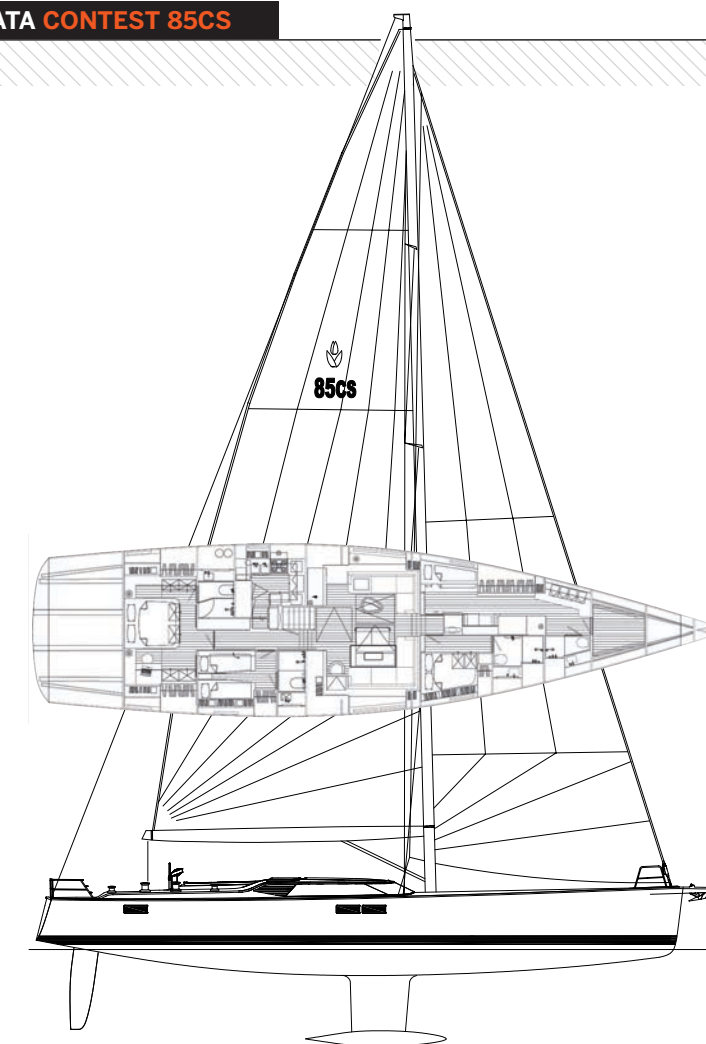
The detailed thought and practical experience that has gone into the conception, design and construction of *Polina Star* is on a scale that one rarely has the privilege to witness. Many of the results are hidden: a boat show visitor would only see a tiny fraction of what makes this remarkable yacht what it is. One hopes that the safety features, only some of which we have covered here, will never be needed. They give the owner and crew the confidence to do what they want to do and go where they want to go.

The features that make *Polina Star* sail the way she does, that enable her to be handled by a small crew and that will keep her sailing the oceans while other boats are stuck in port waiting for technicians or spare parts to arrive, are what really set her apart. ■



The slab-reefing mainsail runs on a Harken Switch T-Track to minimise the height of the stack when it’s lowered

### DATA CONTEST 85CS



### Specifications

LOA (excl. bowsprit) 25.82m (84ft 9in) • LWL 23.17m (76ft 0in) • Beam 6.40m (21ft 0in) • Draught 3.79m (12ft 5in) • Displacement 53,900kg (118,830lb) • Ballast 18,500kg (40,785lb) • Sail area (11% headsail) 330m<sup>2</sup> (3,552ft<sup>2</sup>) • Engine Volvo D4-260 • Fuel 2,500lt (550gal) • Water 1,500lt (330gal) • Design Judel/Vrolijk / Contest • Interior design Wetzels Brown Partners • [www.contestyachts.com](http://www.contestyachts.com)

### Our verdict

We’re all familiar with tough, heavy-duty cruising yachts that will get you there in one piece while lacking a little sparkle. Race boats will get you there faster as long as you have more crew (and/or put in more effort), don’t mind the discomfort and manage not to break anything. With an 85-footer like *Polina Star IV*, you would hope that length alone would provide a fair measure of pace – and it does – but this is one

seriously efficient sailing machine by cruising standards as well as being as bullet-proof as a slippery hulled modern yacht could possibly be. And she’s so enjoyable and responsive to sail: you really could take her for a spin around the bay just for the fun of it. This blend of robustness, reliability, performance and ease of handling makes the Contest 85CS an unusual and remarkable yacht.