



# SKIP NOVAK

A YACHT WITH NO STOWAGE IN THE FOREPEAK AND BEDS INSTEAD OF BERTHS FORWARD OF THE MAST IS ONLY FIT FOR DAY SAILING BETWEEN MARINAS

**W**here have all the forepeaks gone? After perusing the websites of some of the best known yacht builders, I am struggling to see a design with an adequate forepeak, at least one suited for cruising beyond 'marina land.' I'm talking about a walk-in forward area with standing headroom and enough space to swing a cat.

If a yacht is billed as a 'world cruiser,' a 'go-anywhere concept', or a 'bluewater dream' that is capable of cruising the mid-latitudes and tropics, this implies load-carrying capacity for at least a few of the following items: spare anchor and rode; inflatable dinghy and one spare outboard; some spare running rigging and cordage; snorkelling and diving gear; fishing gear; paddles; oars; awnings; a gennaker and more. Then there are the optional toys, such as stand-up paddleboards (inflatable), surfboards, kitesurfing gear, fold-up bicycles and the rest, according to your interests and fancy. Go high latitudes and you can add climbing gear and skis.

Unless you plan to voyage as a floating boat jumble with most of this gear lashed to the deck or suspended from

gantries and bimini tops – hardly a seamanlike solution – all this equipment must somehow disappear into the lazarette and cockpit

lockers when offshore. Yet even on the best designs these lockers tend to be horrendously uncomfortable spaces accessed by deck hatches.

None of the above solutions is impossible of course, but when it comes time to get out the fins and masks to jump over the side and watch, say, a sea turtle swimming past, the turtle will have long since disappeared by the time you have dug down through multiple layers of kit, leaving you with nothing to show for the effort apart from bruised knuckles. Does any of this sound familiar?

When renting or buying a house the price is largely determined by the number of bedrooms and the world of yacht sales seems to have followed suit. Cramming the maximum number of berths in below decks is often the key marketing tool.

Maybe I'm getting old and intolerant, but the idea of

eight or nine people cruising on a 55-footer? This is what catamarans are for.

It's not just the number of berths; a certain configuration has also become standard. Almost invariably, the owner's bunk is now in the forepeak and resembles a five-star hotel suite with a free-standing double bed instead of a berth. Of course, it is absolutely useless for sleeping at sea.

This forward space on any yacht is really only fit for inanimate objects that have been lashed down. Even with some clever dividers and lee cloths suspended from padeyes on the designer ceiling, can a berth with no bulkhead surrounds ever be comfortable at sea?

I realise for Mediterranean mooring this is very desirable and for marina-bound charter fleets operating in sheltered waters it is now a standard feature, but to market this concept as an owner's cabin for a yacht capable of world cruising? Not in my book.

## Unpleasant sensation at sea

An alternative layout, especially on larger yachts, is to locate the hotel suite aft. This leaves professional crew, if you have any, or guests wedged into tiny forward berths hard by the crash bulkhead. They will have to migrate aft when at sea, taking up space in the main saloon.

On my boat I sleep in the foremost cabin just forward of the mast and it is a wild enough ride. Forward of that any sleeping accommodation would be exquisite torture of levitation and then impact. Even downwind it is a pretty unpleasant sensation. I suspect quite a few owners have realised when it is all too late that they will have to move aft into a guest cabin offshore. Probably not what they had in mind.

To have a real working forepeak seems fundamental for any serious cruising design. Back in the days of the IOR racing fleet, on yachts that doubled as cruisers between regattas, this was a practical necessity. Sail bins for the enormous sail inventory encouraged by that rule shared the space with cordage and all manner of racing hardware. It was also a great place while in port to have a bit of fun in the folds of the 2.2oz spinnaker! I suspect there are designers still active today that might have indulged in their youth. Maybe that's where the concept of sleeping up there got started in the first place? ■

## 'EIGHT OR NINE PEOPLE ON A 55-FOOTER? THAT'S WHAT CATAMARANS ARE FOR'