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REPORT

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GARÇON – AN ACE SERVICE

While we'll always refer to yachts in the feminine, it will be almost impossible to refer to the new 6711 Sea Axe Fast Yacht Support vessel from Amels and Damen as 'her'. It's a vessel that kicks wide open the doors of yachting opportunity and picks up 10-ton tenders like a kid playing with toys on a beach. **Don Hoyt Gorman** looks at how it may also change both how clients consider their yacht design and how crew live and work in the industry.

There was a huge buzz in Monaco this September surrounding a vessel that looks nothing like a yacht. If anything, *Garçon*, the 67m vessel built by Damen shipyards and sold and marketed by Amels, is a pure commercial machine. Its basic design is intended for the offshore sector as a supply and support vessel attending to the needs of oil and gas platforms.

What made it so exciting was that *Garçon* was delivered to the owner of the 87m Lürssen-build *Ace* as essentially a massive toy-carrier. It's an extravagant idea, but one that Damen was more than capable of delivering on: with 50 of the Sea Axe models already delivered to the commercial sector and 75 more on order and in build, the platform is proven and reliable.

Having just been delivered, *Garçon* made the trip to Monaco from Damen's Gorinchem yard in the Netherlands in six days, averaging 16.3 knots. It has a top speed of 19 knots – the same hull with larger engines

is rated to 25 knots – and a 4,500nm range at 18 knots.

On the T-dock in Port Hercule, it stood out with a Bell 429 chopper casting a shadow down from its LY2-certified heli-deck. But it was only once aboard – between a “packed schedule” of potential client visits, according to Amels' Victor Caminada – that the extent of its toy-handling and storage capabilities became clear.

This 67m version of the Sea Axe Fast Yacht Support vessel series is cavernous, a veritable warehouse of opportunity for owners to carry toys, parts, crew and literally anything they might need for a week – or a lifetime. She's utilitarian, yes, and so I had no expectations of beauty, but was occasionally surprised at the ease of use, simplicity of function and capacity for numerous options that it appeared to offer. If a yacht's design can be, by its delimited scantlings, judged on its clever use of space, then what the Damen 6711 offers is a whole new way to design a mothership.

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Much has been written about the other key feature of the Sea Axe Fast Yacht Support vessels – the axe bow; see Tork Buckley’s report on the hull form in *TYR* 112, pages 46-52. In brief, the form reduces vertical peak acceleration by 70 per cent and resistance by up to 10 per cent compared with a conventional fast hull design, making for a more comfortable ride at speed. The forward end of the hull – the bottom of the axe – is the deepest point of draught. Again, that the form is finding enormous success in the hard-knock world of the offshore industry suggests that Damen’s R&D into hydrodynamics may be paying significant dividends. The hull and superstructure design also happens to look like a serious piece of machinery: there’s definitely a macho-factor going on.

In the case of *Garçon*, it was ordered after the main design and build had started on *Ace* – Moran Yacht & Ship brokered and project-managed both – thereby enabling simply an extension of the owner’s ability to carry a mind-boggling array of toys with his mothership. But if a 6711 was ordered and designed in tandem with a new yacht, it’s easy to see how the available space could be further customised to augment and complement the mothership.

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Garçon is the third Sea Axe Fast Yacht Support vessel that Damen has delivered, and the main appeal continues to be its incredible working deck, which in Monaco housed an 11t 12.63m J Craft Torpedo amongst a landing craft, a 10.5m dive and parasail rib, four jetskis, a rescue tender, kite boards and kites, wakeboards, water-skis, dive compressors, tanks, BCDs – I admit to losing track.

The J Craft didn’t fail to raise a laugh of incredulity in nearly every visitor who was drawn to it. It’s just so big that to think of it as a hoistable tender somehow felt foolish. But that is exactly the kind of feeling *Garçon* provides: impish glee at the potential of the thing. The double-knuckle crane handles 15 tonnes at 7.3m just a flexed muscle, showing off this toy-carrier’s heavyweight strength.

Cradles for the boats and jetskis are placed aboard with twistlocks, the underlying – and essentially idiot-proof – technology that locks containers to the decks of container ships and to each other. Aft, the prominent helideck supports a 5t take-off load, with a D-value of 13.75 – big enough for a Eurocopter Dauphin or an Agusta GrandNew helicopter and is certified for day and night operations





as well as having fuelling, de-fuelling and fuel-cleaning capabilities.

Despite the Esthec Bolidt composite decking, the yachty thinking extended to the obligatory removal of shoes aboard, but it's largely the exterior of the vessel that has a superyacht finish. Almost all of the interior spaces – except the lounge area in the wheelhouse – are built to Damen's commercial specifications, which are comparable to Amels' crew interior spaces.

Touring *Garçon* with the Sea Axe design and proposal engineer Meredith Dijkstra, it was clear that the comfort of the crew and the gentle handling of the toys were key, while the rest of the spaces – the engine room, storage areas and workshops for instance – retain the painted steel look and feel, with visible welds in the floor plating and girders overhead. The impression is of an enormous seaworthy pick-up truck loaded with bikes, inflatable toys, tools and spares. There's even a china store for catered events, housing 11 complete sets of china. The luxurious environment aboard *Ace* is free of dirty toys and wet equipment, while aboard *Garçon*, the enormous, simple spaces are easy to use, easy to clean and neatly ordered. Its tankage, again coming from its offshore support-vessel DNA, provides

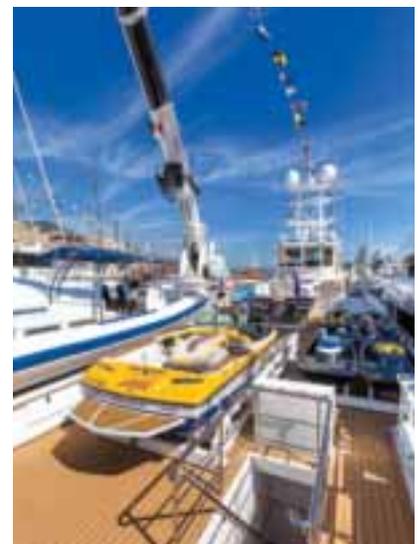
heli-fuel and petrol for the tenders, as well as significant tankage that could be used to provide fresh water or marine diesel to the mothership or any other vessel in need. As you might expect, it has a full tank department with the various manifolds easily accessible to the engineers.

In the cathedral-like engine room, its four Caterpillar 3512C 1,425kW engines were still in their factory yellow colour, though Dijkstra let us know that the yacht's works included a plan to paint the engine room completely white. Aft of the engine room is the pump room, which also houses the heli-fuel and petrol tanks, and aft of that is the steering gear room, itself large enough to store plenty of tools, spare parts and more – if there wasn't already enough room a deck up.

Crew spaces are designed to SOLAS regulations and are decorated to a standard higher than a commercial vessel. There is a gym, a hospital, a large day room, mess and galley, all accessible by the central internal staircase that runs the three decks.

The wheelhouse aboard *Garçon* is the only area decorated to the standard of *Ace*, as it comprises the bridge, with chart table and captain's office, as well

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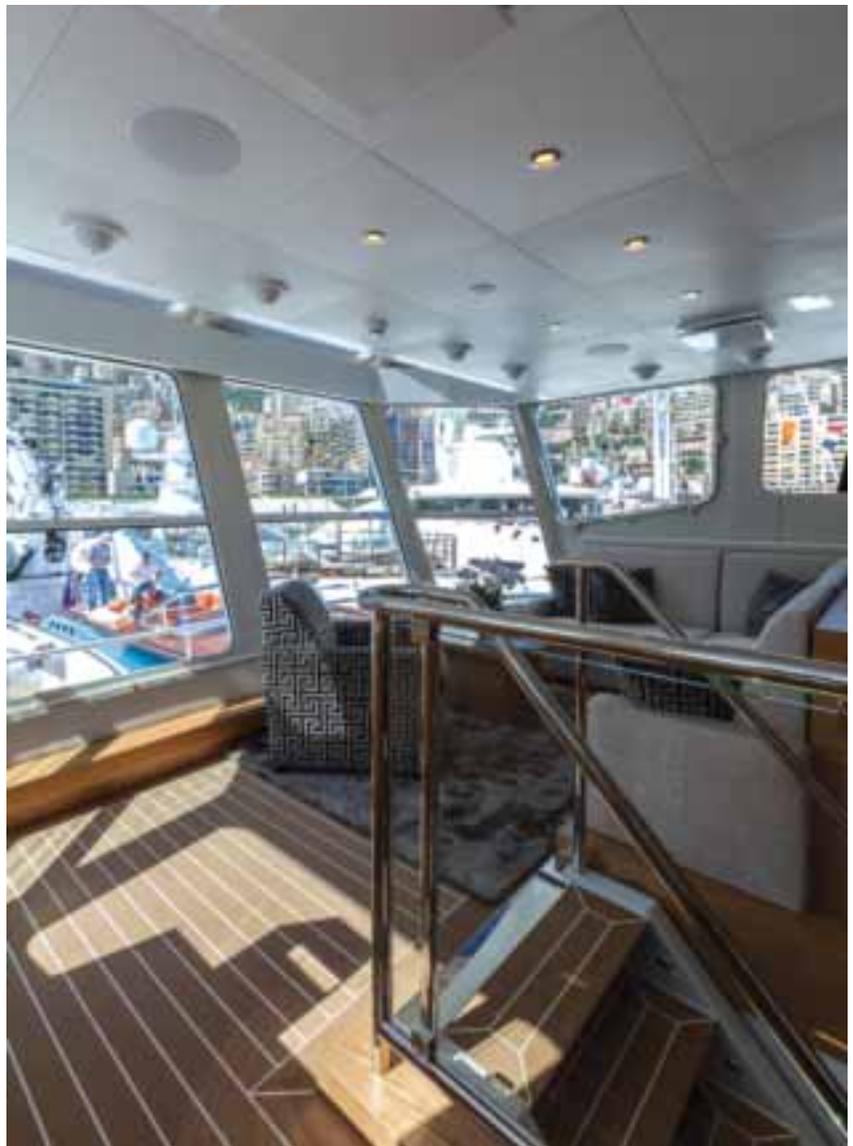




as a lounge area for the owner and guests in the aft half of the structure, with enormous windows looking down on the utility- and heli-deck. On the offshore models of the Sea Axe, this aft position would be outfitted with a second captain's chair to control the vessel while loading and offloading under oil platforms and the like. The windows, therefore, go all the way down to the deck to afford a clear view of the full working deck below. On *Garçon*, this aft area is furnished with soft carpeting, a sofa, upholstered chairs and lamps for a comfortable chill-out nook amidst all the industry. The layout of the front half of the wheelhouse again is commercial, although the standard has been raised: the stations are clad in dark leather.

Throughout the visit, it was clear that *Garçon* couldn't be called a shadow vessel at all. 'Shadow' would suggest that it follows the mothership, but *Garçon* will depart after *Ace* if needed, overtake her and prepare for her arrival by getting the tenders in the water. It's a new paradigm for owners, crew and managers to work with and adjust to. Even as we were there, it was clear that the crew were still figuring out the details of their new charge, and would certainly, in time, develop systems and procedures that would speed up things like the deployment of the J Craft and tenders. They'll also work out the routine with *Ace*, becoming an extension of the yacht experience, learning lessons for the next wave of yacht support-vessel crew. *Garçon* is a full SOLAS vessel, registered as a private motoryacht with Marshall Islands Flag Authority, which accepts crew with MCA yacht qualifications.

With a second 6711 Sea Axe Fast Yacht Support vessel available "on stock" at Gorinchem for earliest delivery in spring 2014, and plenty of activity aboard *Garçon* during the show, I won't be surprised to see more of these Damen Sea Axe vessels in the 37m, 50m and 67m ranges in the very near future. ■



See *Garçon* on sea trial at:
www.superyachtnews.com/syfl/seaaxe

Images: Damen & Jeff Brown

To comment on this article, email
issue139@superyachtreport.com with
subject: *Garçon*



The Damen Shipyards Group, the largest shipyard in the Netherlands, comprises 39 shipyards and marine-related companies worldwide. It's a family-owned company, employs over 6,000 people and in 2011, delivered 150 vessels with a turnover of approximately €1.3 billion. Amels is Damen's yacht-building arm. See Martin Redmayne's conversation with the company's founder and chairman, Kommer Damen, in issue 137, page 63, of *The Superyacht Report*.