

# Big-cat bounce

WITH TWO CUSTOM CRUISING CATS AND A NEW 46M SUPERCAT IN THE OFFING POLISH BUILDER SUNREEF IS ON AN UPWARD EXPANSION CURVE UNDERPINNED BY BOLD INVESTMENT

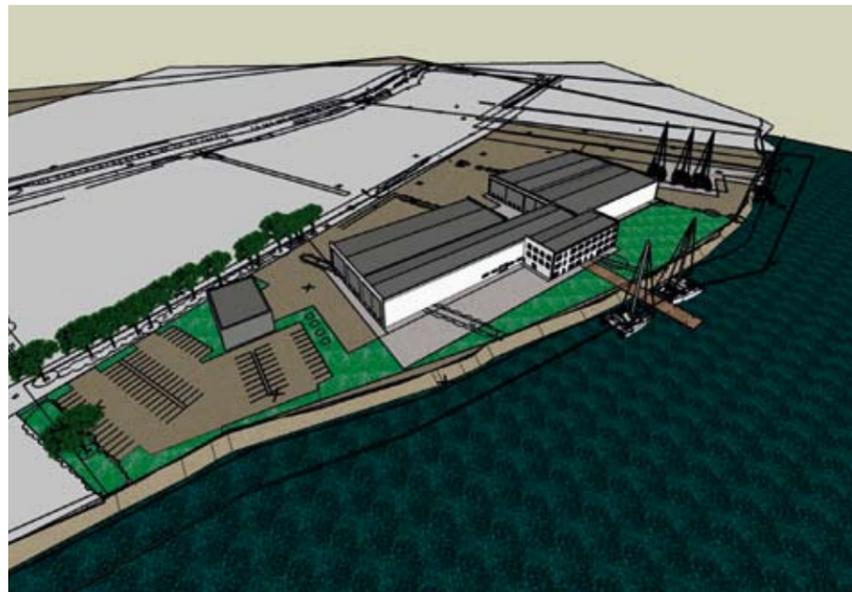
BOB GREENWOOD REPORTS

**H**ome to Sunreef Yachts is the 1,000-year-old Polish port of Gdansk where, since 2000, it has built flybridge cruising catamarans of 18m (60ft) and larger. The company now leases 6,000m<sup>2</sup> of workshops, construction sheds, offices and Baltic Sea quayside in the heart of the city's dockyards where, in the early 1980s, Lech Walesa worked as an electrician and led the Solidarity movement that toppled the communist government in Poland. The actions were instrumental in starting the political domino effect that saw the fall of the Berlin Wall and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union.

The story of Sunreef is fittingly symbolic of the regeneration of the Polish economy following the displacement of the former communist regime. Making use of a pool of skilled local labour that's willing to work up to 250 hours a month if they so choose under Polish labour laws, the availability of a prime — albeit dilapidated — site with suitable industrial buildings, and low operating costs compared with western Europe, the company has achieved much in just a decade.

## The French connection

The market niche for cruising catamarans has been a speciality of French builders and designers for decades and so it is perhaps not



An artist's impression of the new Sunreef facility. The site should be ready by the end of 2010

**“The story of Sunreef is fittingly symbolic of the regeneration of the Polish economy following the displacement of the former communist regime”**

surprising that there's a French connection with Sunreef.

The business was started in 1998 as a cruising catamaran charter operation by Frenchman Francis Lapp and his son Nicholas after Francis, a competitive Hobiecat sailor, visited the Paris boat show with the intention of buying a Hobie 16 but came away with a 46ft (14m) Fountaine-Pajot cruising cat instead.

This yacht was soon joined by a second Fountaine-Pajot and a 37ft (11m) power cat, thus forming the nascent fleet of Sunreef Travel (renamed Sunreef Yachts Charter in

2006) operating in the Seychelles, Madagascar and Mauritius. As the popularity of its sailing holiday packages grew, the Lapps looked around for more yachts to add to the fleet.

With their generous deck space, stability, and good sailing performance, catamarans were undoubtedly suited to group charter but there was something that those available at the time still lacked.

“The yachts that we had bought were fine but we wanted more luxury,” explains Francis Lapp. “At that time only small catamarans were available. No one was building large cats



Sunreef's first 74 footer, *Che*

for the clients that we wanted to reach, so we decided to build our own.”

## The flybridge factor

As well as size and luxury, the Lapps considered that there was a third essential — a spacious flybridge that would enable charter parties to enjoy open-air conviviality along with the practicality of greater living space on the main deck below.

Within just a few years their conviction has been proved right. “Now everyone wants a flybridge,” says Francis Lapp.

But why build large cruising catamarans in Poland, of all places? There were good historical and practical reasons. Lapp had lived there since 1992 and had built up a highly successful electrical fittings business based in Warsaw. With a burgeoning new economy springing up after the collapse of Communist rule this was a period of

## TOPVIEW NICOLAS LAPP VICE PRESIDENT

**W**e introduced our first yacht, the 74ft (22m) *Che*, at the Cannes boat show in 2002. Our success since then comes from our focus on innovation and by extending the range of yachts we produce. This year we will launch the world's first double deck (plus flybridge) catamaran superyacht, which will be followed early next year by our 114-footer (35m), so right now we're the only yard in the world building two 100ft- (30m-) plus cruising catamarans simultaneously.

Pretty soon we hope to be building a futuristic 150-footer (46m) that we have designed in-house, like nearly all of the 35 yachts that we have built in just under a decade.

By the end of next year, when our new 24,000m<sup>2</sup> state-of-the-art yacht building facility comes on stream a few kilometres from our present site, we will have the ideal environment to move forward.

This is a really good time to build the new shipyard. Construction costs in Poland are 30 per cent less expensive than they were just eight months ago, thanks to the economic slowdown. And the fall on foreign exchanges of the value of the Zloty — it has gone down from 3.2 a year ago to 4.4-5 versus the Euro — has come at the right time for us. It has given us an ideal opportunity to launch our new Custom Yacht Shipyard International business division that offers our full range of skills and capabilities to individual yacht owners, naval architects, captains and project managers who want to build custom yachts of 60ft (18m) and over at very reasonable rates.

So far, it's hard to see any major effect on our business from global recession. A lot of our smaller competitors have stopped and that has made more space in the market. For sure, we will maybe not have the growth this year that we expected one year ago, but with the



Nicolas Lapp says that despite the downturn the company is still moving forward

success that we've seen with our 70ft (21m) sail and power models introduced last year, business this year is not so bad. Actually, it's pretty good.

The big question is — what will happen in 2010? We're busy now but, on the smaller yacht side, we rarely sell 60ft-70ft (18m-21m) yachts two years in advance. However, there is still interest in bigger boats. We are still receiving requests and the enquiry rate now is the same.

The main thing is that in this time of crisis we don't have the vulnerability that many yards have. With our expanding skill base and capability, we are in relatively comfortable waters and are still moving the business forward.

Our secret is continual innovation. We will do more composite work. We are already moulding more of the complex components. The new 80ft-82ft (24m-25m) sail and power models that we have in development may be executed in high-tech composite, perhaps epoxy carbon, and quite likely most of it infused.

Alternatively, it may be done in aluminium. Either way, they will be one-offs and there will be no real time saving one way or the other. Ultimately, it's an issue of budget. Usually, there's no real customer interest in whether its aluminium or composite.

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**PICTURE THIS**

Large flush-glazed picture window matrixes let plenty of light into the cabins housed in the hulls. The concept, used increasingly on express powercruisers, but so far Sunreef is the only cruising catamaran builder offering it



**WIRELESS SWITCHING**

Interior electrical distribution is controlled by NaviBus wireless switching by Navylec. Instead of point-to-point wiring and bulky switchboards, this system uses a single databus to carry operating commands between small and slim switch panels

extensive new construction and, hence, a big demand for electrical services for construction projects. So successful was the electrical business that when Francis Lapp sold it he was able to start the luxury catamaran building business from the proceeds of the sale alone.

The yard's first luxury catamaran was the one-off 74ft (22m) *Che*, which was completed in 2002 and presented at the Cannes boat show in September of that year. The one-off aluminium yacht, designed by specialist multihull naval architects Van Peteghem/Lauriot Prévost, was at that time the largest luxury cat ever to have appeared at a European boat show and as such attracted wide attention. Since then the company has gone on to launch 35 yachts to date, all but two of them the company's trademark flybridge catamarans. The exceptions are a one-off 60ft (18m) monohull sailing cruiser and a 50ft (15m) classic Hood motor launch.

A further eight orders are at various stages of completion.

In volume terms the semi-production 62

sailing cat has been Sunreef's staple model. Twenty-five of these have been built since the model was introduced in 2005. The model proved to be a massive hit at the September 2007 Cannes boat show with no fewer than 10 ordered, keeping the yard busy into this year.

**Optimising production**

Like the 70 Sunreef Power Expedition power cat and the 70 Sailing launched last year, and debuted respectively at the 2008 Cannes and Barcelona boat shows, all semi-production yachts that have been built at the yard since 2007 have been moulded in vinylester resin and e-glass composite by vacuum infusion. Naval architecture and styling are done in-

**SPACE RACE**

Flybridge will offer 50m<sup>2</sup> of deck space and has the main helm and navigation station



**“Many itinerant skilled workers who went abroad for higher wages after Poland joined the EU have since returned to Poland following the onset of the world economic decline”**

house. By optimising production and operational processes, as well as taking on additional workers, the yard has rapidly improved its productivity. Many itinerant skilled workers who went abroad for higher wages after Poland joined the European Union have since returned to Poland following the onset of world economic decline. This has helped to ease a domestic shortage of qualified labour allowing Sunreef to increase its workforce from 350 to 450 within a year. This has helped Sunreef to reduce the production lead time for the 62 base models,

for instance, from nine months to as little as four months. The development focus at Sunreef has switched to the superyacht spectrum over the past couple of years, however. Two major projects are now well underway at the yard. The most advanced of these is the Sunreef 102, claimed to be the world's first twin-deck-plus-flybridge catamaran superyacht. After signing the contract with her European client and the completion of design (again, all in-house) and all pre-production work, construction of her hulls and superstructure

**HYDRAULICS**

Deck winches, along with capstans, furling gear and thrusters are hydraulically actuated. All mechanical power for sail handling and other control functions is provided by four hydraulic pumps, saving a considerable amount of electrical energy



**TENDER GARAGE**

Sliding beams on tracks inside the aft deck roof extend to launch and recover the yacht's 5.2m tender and a selection of water toys. All are raised on a lifting platform from the aft garage, shown here under construction



in welded light and strong Alcan Marine Sealium 5383 marine grade aluminium alloy commenced in February 2008. By August last year her twin hull assembly (which was constructed upside down like all Sunreef's custom one-design yachts) had been turned over and the upper deck and flybridge lowered onto it.

As SB went to press, fitting out was advancing rapidly with launch day looming in the latter part of this year.

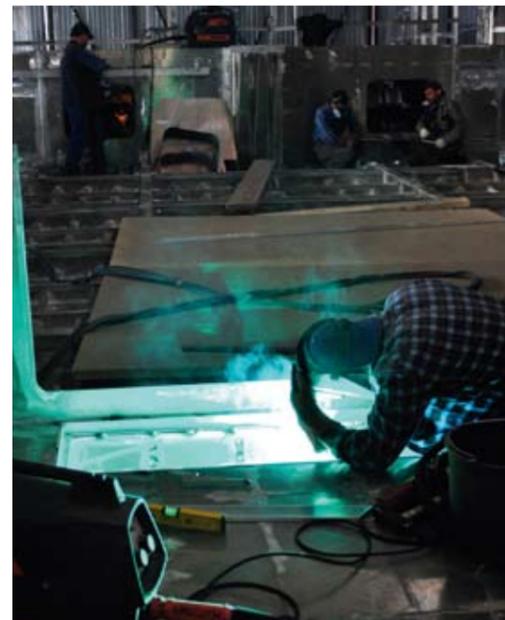
“We are very excited by the interest we have had in this model,” says Nicolas Lapp, group vice president heading the sales and marketing aspects of the Sunreef group. “It's certainly the only double-deck (cruising catamaran) and an innovative Sunreef idea. It is really quite revolutionary.”

**Cruising cats**

Designed by Sunreef to the owner's brief that she should be “cosy, comfortable and homely” the sloop-rigged yacht's interior will be dominated by contrasting dark and light wenge and anegre woods. She'll have accommodation for 12 guests plus six crew.

The building of a cruising catamaran of more than 100ft (30m) is a rare event worldwide, but building two beyond that size simultaneously is exceptional. Yet it's happening now at Sunreef. In late May this year the flybridge was lowered onto the twin

**Outside the construction hall the 114 flybridge is turned right-way-up and lowered onto the main deck**



**Final welding and preparation of the Sunreef 114 takes place as the hull section is made ready to receive its flybridge**

hulls of the Sunreef 114 Sailing, the Gdansk yard's largest project to date. Very different in concept from the 102, this single-deck, low-freeboard yacht is designed for performance as well as range.

The 114ft (35m) design is an extended and customised version of the yard's design concept for a 100-footer (30m). Internally, the styling will be modern and minimalist, with brightly-coloured upholstery, bamboo veneer applied to solid wood furniture, teak decking below decks and topsides, glass table tops and furniture elements, a saloon and galley separated by a furniture 'island' and large panoramic windows in the saloon and cabins to promote a feeling of light and space.

After nearly eight months of design, research and development and one and a half years in build, the yacht is due for completion early next year.

“Catamarans as large as this are a lot

more complicated to build than our semi-production yachts," says Nicolas Lapp. "I would say that this is equivalent in complexity and time requirement to building a 140ft (43m) monohull."

In spite of today's unfavourable economic climate, orders are holding firm with a dozen new ones signed this year. Deliveries are expected to climb this year from 12 units in 2008 to 18 units in 2009 according to a financial statement released in April by the company. From 2007 to 2008 Sunreef's net income from production and services increased by 41 per cent from €19.6m to €27.6m. The company predicts that in the current calendar year net income will rise by a smaller, yet still impressive, 22 per cent to €33.6m.

Though not the original group activity, yacht building accounts for more than 85 per cent of group turnover. Yacht charter and yacht management services account for the remainder.

**Further growth planned**

"Yacht management is quiet now, with just five or six contracts running," says Nicholas Lapp. "But charter continues to grow, although we're told that the charter market is probably not a growth area at the moment."

"We're doing well, however, because we're more known now. Fraser Yachts and CNI are booking through us. Cats are more popular for charter nowadays and we're the only company chartering over 60ft (18m).

"There are more 'big customers' (paying up to US\$380,000 per week) now than before, but customers are deciding later and asking for discounts," he adds. "Clients are now making their minds up as late as April and May — two or three months later than in previous years, but charter turnover is still rising."

Commissions from charter rose to €1.8 million in 2008 and the company expects to see a further 30 per cent rise this year. Just over half of the yachts that Sunreef builds are

**CARBONFIBRE CROSSBEAMS**

The crossbeams for the 114 are vacuum infused in carbonfibre reinforced epoxy



**PERFORMANCE HULLS**

Narrow aluminium hulls with fairly deep keels promise fast sailing performance



**MINAMALIST APPEAL**

Interior design is modern with light woods and upholstered furniture in light grey leather. Wall panels and wooden furniture is veneered in light caramel bamboo



**HELM STATION**

The main helm station is on the 52m² flybridge. All sail handling is controlled from here



finishing and painting capability.

To cope with the continuing expansion of the Sunreef group, the Lapps have bought a new green-field, waterside site of 16 hectares that's located 10km from the present Gdansk shipyards location. Plans have been officially approved for a new purpose-built yacht-building complex that will include two 12,000m² production halls which, if all runs to schedule, will be occupied by the end of 2010.

**Futuristic One Fifty**

This will give Sunreef the capacity to build up to 50m (164ft), in-line with the company's aim which, Nicolas Lapp says, "is quite simply to

**IN THE SHADE**

Wide open spaces: the aft deck provides 78m² of relaxation space, shaded by the vast overhanging flybridge



sold to owners who offer them for charter.

Sunreef also has its own brokerage division which has worldwide representation through a network in Spain, Italy, France, Greece, Turkey, Qatar, the US and China, among other markets.

Just before SB went to press we were told ahead of general release that Sunreef group is opening a new section to its business, Custom Yacht Shipyard International (CYS Intl). Through this new division the company will offer its yacht construction expertise and capacity for the construction of large custom yachts on a subcontract basis to outside designers, clients, and project managers.

"This new in-house service has been tailored in response to frequent enquiries from design studios as well as individual clients seeking a professional and experienced shipyard to perform their custom-made

**Sunreef's Gdansk base where it has been building boats since 2000**

projects in advanced composite materials or aluminium using innovative production techniques, carried out by an experienced workforce — all at a very competitive price," says Nicolas Lapp.

"We are looking forward to co-operating with design studios and naval architects alike to be able to cater for the custom-designed projects of their clients," he adds.

Customers will have full access to all the Gdansk shipyard facilities and infrastructure,

including a floating crane with 300 tonnes capacity, plus five covered workshops with a total covered area of 12,000m² that includes a 3,000m² metal working area, a composites working area of 5,000m², a carpentry shop of 1,000m² and a fully equipped design office with 3D CAD/CAM. There is also a workforce with a full range of skills that includes: welding in lightweight aluminium alloys such as Sealium and Alustar; panel and components lamination by vacuum infusion using vinylester and epoxy resins, glass, carbon or Kevlar fibres. In addition, CYS will make available its full range of upholstery, carpentry, electrical, hydraulics and mechanical installation, steelwork, fairing,

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maintain our position as the world's largest manufacturer of large and luxury catamarans from 60ft-200ft (18m-61m)."

Plans for a futuristic sailing catamaran built to this upper limit were unveiled by Sunreef at the Düsseldorf boat show at the beginning of this year. The Sunreef One Fifty is the product of a year-long study by Michał Górzyski of the Sunreef design team.

Externally, the concept is one of clean lines and minimalism of form, with what in profile appears to be almost a flush deck, but is in fact a low-profile teak clad flybridge which blends into a gently sloping foredeck that's recessed between the twin hulls which rise to contain it.

The deckhouse spans the entire 56ft (17m) beam to create a second floor within the hulls, providing living space on the main deck that's big enough to house cabins for 12 guests under a glass top. Below decks are crew quarters for nine, storage rooms and the galley.

Sunreef reports strong interest in the concept but, as yet, no buyer. If one emerges

and the yacht is built it will usurp the premiership of *Gemini*, the 44m (144ft) aluminium catamaran designed by Van Peteghem/ Lauriot Prevost and launched from the Derektor yard in Connecticut, USA, in 2007, as the world's largest sailing multihull — perhaps the one remaining peak left for Sunreef to scale as leader of its niche in the superyacht market. ●



## SUNREEF ONE FIFTY

### PRELIMINARY SPECIFICATION

- ▶ **LOA:** 150.56ft/45.89m
- ▶ **Beam:** 56.27ft/17.15m
- ▶ **Draft:** 7ft/2.13m
- ▶ **Displacement:** 165 tons
- ▶ **Mast height:** 179.4ft/54.38m
- ▶ **Mainsail:** 7535 ft<sup>2</sup>/700 m<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ **Genoa:** 4305 ft<sup>2</sup>/400 m<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ **Solent:** 21252 ft<sup>2</sup>/200 m<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ **Guests:** 12
- ▶ **Crew:** 7

### THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Ambitious plans for a futuristic 150ft sailing catamaran megayacht could soon become a construction reality for Sunreef Yachts. If it takes shape, the Sunreef 150 will surpass in size the world's current largest catamaran sailing sloop, the 145ft Gemini launched by the Derektor yard in Connecticut, USA, in 2007. It will also introduce some radically new catamaran design.

Michał Górczyński and the Sunreef design team spent a year to come up with a detailed proposal for a yacht with a full beam deckhouse that, though raised above the main deck, is recessed between twin hulls that taper upwards from the bows to form a wedge. A teak-clad sundeck slopes down from the flybridge helm to the cross beam in a gentle wave that's interrupted only by steps down to the bow and trampolines.

Neither guardrails, nor hatches or portlights in the hulls interrupt the yacht's clean lines. All natural light enters the cabins in hulls from above as the topsides are entirely flush-glazed with skylights and solar panels.

When it introduced the One Fifty concept at this year's Düsseldorf boat show Sunreef says that it received strong interest from prospective customers.