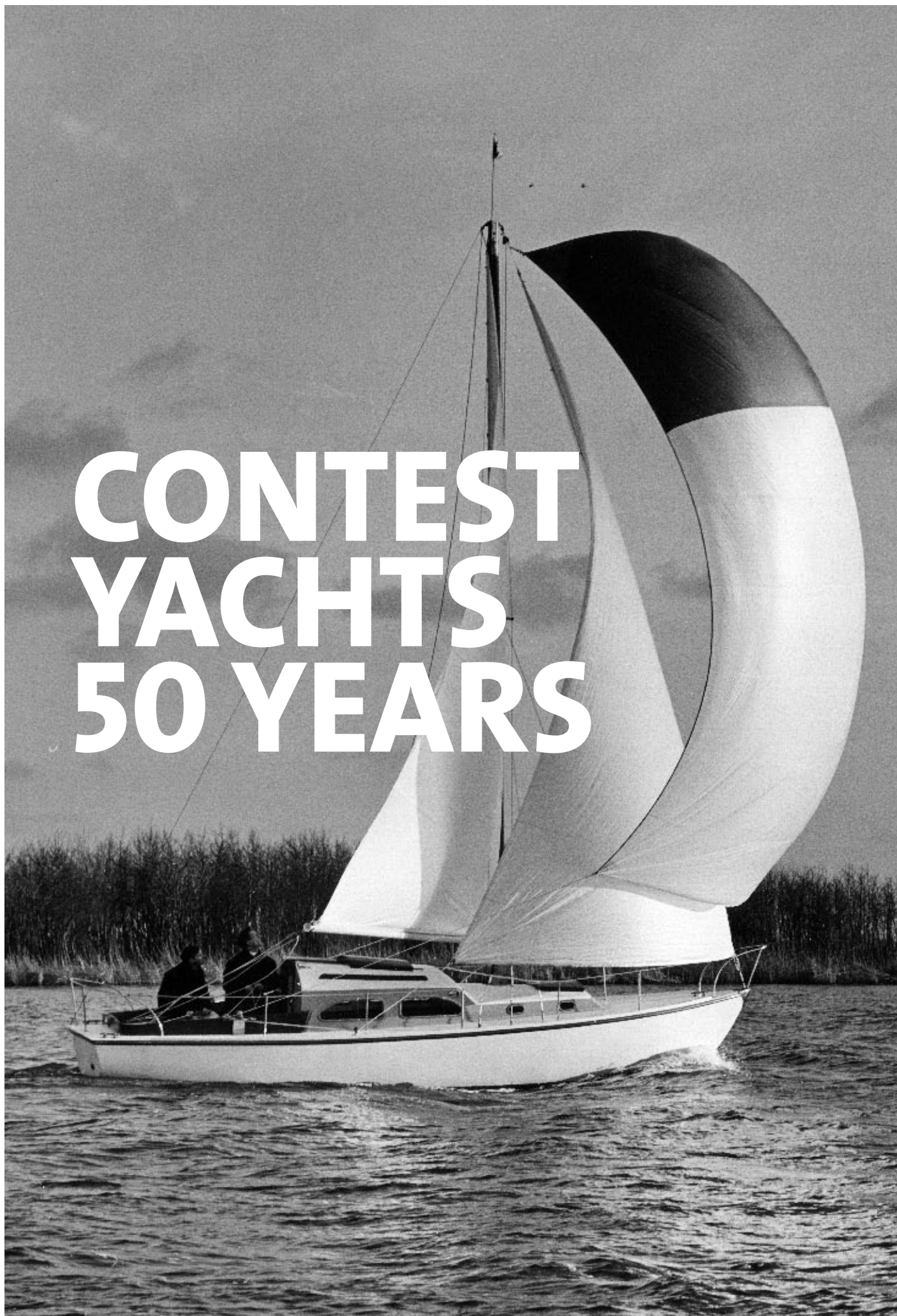


CONTEST YACHTS 50 YEARS





With Contest Yachts due to celebrate its 50th anniversary in June 2009, three generations of the Conijn family reflect on the past and present of the yard. In addition to their genes, Anne, Fritz and Arjen share something else in common: All three were brought up to have a passion for sailing.

THE BEGINNING

The founder of Contest Yachts, Ed Conijn, and his wife Anne were always keen sailors. "They were special times," says the now 90-year old Anne Conijn. "At the time, there were only around 30 seagoing sailboats in the Netherlands, so you knew everyone on the water. My husband only started working professionally in the watersports industry in 1959 when seeking a way to take his mind off a tragic event in our lives. Ed took over a factory for polyester lightshades after seeing the possibility of using the material for other purposes. One of the first projects was our own boat that was then being designed by Van de Stadt."

Buoyed by the results, Ed Conijn decided to focus on boatbuilding in polyester. The first launch was an open two-man leeboard boat called Flying Dutchman, which was an immediate success. Over 600 of this type of boat would eventually be built.

INTERNATIONAL

Extending his target group across the Dutch borders, Ed had major ambitions and had soon developed an extensive dealer network both in Europe and the USA. "Whenever the dealers gathered in the Netherlands we had a huge party in our house," Anne Conijn remembers. "My husband would not allow his guests to sleep in a hotel. Everyone stayed at our house and we had some wonderful dinners together. We were one big family, and my husband also welcomed reporters from the world over to our home in Bergen."

After the Flying Dutchman's success, Ed Conijn saw that an increasing demand was arising among fellow sailors for a fast cockpit sailboat. In anticipation of this trend, he teamed up with designer Luyten and soon realised the first Contest 25. The boat met a clear niche in the market and ushered in the era of the first series builds in the Netherlands.

PIONEERS

Then as now, issues such as house style and market positioning were actively considered. Keeping in mind export to the USA, the tulip was chosen to represent the Dutch yard. Every yacht galley had a working surface embedded with a typical Makkum tile. Partly due to these eye-catching details, the Contests attracted considerable attention, for instance at the New York Boat Show. In the years that followed, many Contest 25 yachts left the shores of Holland for delivery to American clients.

In the meantime, Ed Conijn was also working on new designs with his son Fritz and Henk Burger, a real jack-of-all-trades at the yard. This led in the 1960s and 1970s to the Contests 27, 29, 31 HT and 33. "Back then we were seen as true pioneers in the yacht-building industry due to our constant search for innovative ideas to improve our yachts," explains Fritz Conijn. "Our yard was the first

in Holland to introduce a large steering wheel (instead of the helm tiller) and a comfortable solution for spray hoods. Our designers also dared to move the cockpit all the way aft, despite the prevailing trend in sailyachts."

BREAKTHROUGH

The real breakthrough in the 1970s came with the Contest 33. "It was the start of the second generation of Contest yachts," Fritz continues. "The revolutionary designer Robbert Das combined aesthetics and comfort in a design without a doghouse. This sailyacht appealed to many sailors and the Contest 33 became immensely popular. The following Contest 36 also attracted lots of attention from the international media as it was the first design to feature a centre cockpit. This allowed people to walk below deck to the aft cabin, and the yacht caused quite a stir at the time."

CREATIVITY

"The leap forward to the first 48-footer in the late 1970s demonstrates how my father was always prepared to take risks," says Fritz, continuing the history of the family business. "He built a yacht with a real bath in the owner's cabin, which was unheard of back then. Not that this was necessarily a resounding success, but it does show the ambitious and open-minded way my father managed the company. His creativity and ability to motivate others were major strengths. Ed recognised that others were much better at selling and let them get on with it. He was the driving force behind the global reputation that Contest Yachts has built up over the decades."

INNOVATION

From the outset innovation has been one of the spearheads of the Contest story. When Ed Conijn heard a lecture by Piet van Oossanen on how the latter's revolutionary wing keel had helped the yacht Australia win the America's Cup in 1983, he was intrigued. Soon afterwards, the keel was successfully incorporated into the new Contest designs.

Taking over the helm from his father after university, Fritz Conijn continued this strategy of constant innovation. "In my day, there was lots of focus on product development.

We took the initiative to seek cooperation with the renowned research institute TNO in order to improve and speed up the production process. I have also always set great store by experienced personnel and ongoing training as ways to guarantee the quality of our yachts."

FAMILY YACHT

Contest Yachts means more to the family than business alone. "We all have fond memories of the many summers spent on our family yacht in Scandinavia, England, France and the Mediterranean," adds Arjen Conijn. "The love of sailing is in our blood, which is not surprising as our grandparents were even sailing around San Francisco in the 1950s and 1960s."

Arjen says that it was never self-evident that he would take over the business from Fritz. "My father handled it well. He kept his

father were able to take a step back when the time was right. A new generation at the helm means a new perspective on management, which is usually a good thing. I believe, for instance, that performance and design are vital spearheads within our corporate philosophy, as is clearly shown by the Contest 60CS. Branding is a key issue in this day and age, and Contest Yachts is no exception. Although the quality of our product is and always will be our number one priority, brand association is increasing in importance and we are addressing this point."

HAPPINESS

Three generations, three directors, three individuals. Grandmother Conijn accurately describes the individual characteristics of each. "My husband was a creative and motivated pioneer, Fritz had a commercial and strategic character, and Arjen is a mix



distance, never pushed me and waited patiently until I was ready to take over. From that moment he withdrew from day-to-day operations, although he is still very closely involved with the company as a supervisory board member.

"I think it is one of the strengths of our company that both my grandfather and

of the two. They all followed their own course, which is how it should be. Most important of all is that both my husband and Fritz were happy with their work, and this also clearly applies to Arjen today. And that is the best possible reason to propose a toast to half a century of Contest Yachts."



Global support for Contest sailors

Ton de Jong started working at Contest Yachts as an engineer 32 years ago, and became the coordinator for service and warranties in the mid 1990s. After-sales has an important role within Contest Yachts: In addition to solving all kinds of problems, one of the key functions of this department is to ensure that customer input is used to improve new and existing services and equipment.



WORLDWIDE

"I know the company through and through by now, of course," Ton says. "I was involved in the technical aspect of our operations for years and ever since I established our professional after-sales department a decade ago, direct customer contact has been a constant occurrence. Wherever Contest owners are in the world, we endeavour to find a solution for any technical issues they might face. As you would expect, I often work together with our worldwide agent network. Should a situation turn out to be unsolvable at a distance, I will board an aircraft to go help out on the spot. In a way it's like working for an automobile association, except I take care of Contest owners instead."

FEEDBACK

"Although troubleshooting is an important part of my work, the feedback I get from customers is equally crucial. In the weekly meetings at Contest Yachts, one of my first priorities is to ensure that customer experiences are taken into account. If any structural issues arise, for instance, the

product development team will immediately act upon this information and look at various ways to improve. In this respect, I'm also a link between the different departments within the company, which makes my job even more interesting. I could never find the freedom and variety that I get here at any other type of work."

FRIED EGGS

Looking back over his many years with Contest, Ton can still remember one of the first times he met then manager Ed Conijn and his wife. "I hadn't been working for Contest Yachts for very long when it turned out that the boss had some trouble with his own Contour. This was one of just ten motoryachts that the yard had built around this time. We jumped in a car and raced off to Harderwijk, where the boat's rudder problems had left her stranded on some rocks in a very strange position.

"Once we'd managed to clamber onboard, Mrs Conijn cheerfully said 'let's first have some breakfast', as if it was the most natural thing in the world. She then proceeded to make a fried egg sandwich.

For some reason, perhaps the 90-degree angle of the boat, or was it the butter melting off the bread, this food didn't go down too well, or stay down either. I'll never forget this comical adventure as long as I live!"





Contest for life

As a friend of the Conijn family, Hans de Sonnaville had already gained plenty of experience with Contest yachts by the time he bought his first Contest 28 in 1981. "Fritz felt that this model would be perfect for a family such as ours, with two small children and a third one on the way. Of course, in the end we were blessed with twins – so much for planning. Nonetheless, even with four kids, we kept that first boat for seven years, and have never been without a Contest since."



"Fritz Conijn had just taken over his father's yard when I met him through a friend. I was still a student at the time, and Contest Yachts needed an extra hand for its watersports shows – which turned out to be a great job on the side for me. I eventually worked at several exhibitions, and this resulted in a friendship with the whole crew at the yard. Another result was that Fritz and myself went sailing every now and

then, and the desire to have a boat of our own gradually grew."

"My wife did a lot of research and we eventually opted for a second-hand Contest 28 in good condition. And although four small children made for quite a bustle onboard, we never wanted for space or comfort. When the kids got a little bigger, we upgraded to the larger Contest 31. In 1990 we could finally commission our own yacht and chose for a Contest 36, followed a few years later by a 43, and then a 44. This was actually one of the last Contest 44s made by the yard, as they switched to exclusively building the CS range shortly thereafter."

LOST MAST

"Of course, every now and again we had to improvise. No matter how well the boat shows were prepared, there were always surprises. Once, for instance, we had to use a mast from winter storage for a boat at an exhibition, as its new mast wasn't complete yet. It turned out that the mast had fallen off the trailer and landed in a ravine during transport, so we had to explain to the owner of the mast what had happened. He didn't mind, of course, because he got a new mast instead."

STRAY EGGS

Traditionally, we start the sailing season with the Conijn family, sailing to the island of Vlieland at Easter. When the children were small, we'd hide eggs onboard the yachts and the kids had great fun searching above and below decks for them. Most years I'd find a stray egg in a winch during the season...

SPREADING THE WORD

"The Baltic has been one of our favourite haunts for years now. The weather is usually constant, currents aren't an issue, and it's relatively quiet, even in the high season. Most of the many miles we clock up on our Contest 44 now tend to be in the Baltic. During the summer months, both we and our children and friends are onboard for weeks at a time. I suppose you could say that we've transferred our love for Contest yachts to quite a few others."





Staying up-to-date

Fred Paardekooper left, came back and eventually retired, but he still can't let go of his work... "That is nothing for me. And I try and keep fully up-to-date." With this in mind, Fred still regularly helps out with security at the yard and performs various jobs for Contest Yachts.

TONS OF STEEL

Fred Paardekooper handled many tons of steel during his long career. Two weeks after joining Contest in 1968 he was hired by steel construction company Hoekstra, also established in Medemblik. Coincidentally, Fred started almost immediately working on orders for the yard and in the years to come was often outsourced to Contest Yachts. His first large job involved the cradles for transporting Contest yachts to the USA. Soon thereafter followed a small boat trailer and the 'Super Mouse', a larger boat trailer that is still in use today.

PERMANENT APPOINTMENT

The 1980s were difficult times economically for Europe, but in 1982 Hoekstra and Contest Yachts received a large, international order that kept them very busy. "It was a challenging and welcome project that required my full attention," remembers Fred. When Hoekstra entered more turbulent waters several years later, the Contest Yachts board placed a small machine factory in the yard so that Fred could continue doing his work.

It was only logical that he rejoined Contest Yachts in 1988 in a permanent position. In the years that followed, Fred designed, manufactured and maintained the boat trailers, and the portal and mast cranes.

SECURITY

Over the past decade Fred has been responsible for another important task, joining the permanent security team that circles the grounds every evening. Are there any people left in the building, are all the doors closed and lights off. All these things and more have to be checked on a daily basis. Although Fred officially retired last summer, this is one of the jobs he still carries out for Contest. "I live just two minutes from the yard," Fred explains. "So it is easy to arrange, and I work together with two colleagues one week out of every three. Working at different hours every night – for security reasons – does affect your personal life, but it is a great way to stay involved with the yard and former colleagues."



Championing the tailor-m



Exclusive Contest importer for France Werner H. Firros has an unorthodox career path behind him. Born in Germany to a Greek-Australian and German family, he initially worked as an engineer at the renowned CERN laboratory near Geneva, only to open his own yard and start importing Contest yachts almost 40 years ago. He also earned his sailing spurs on

the Olympic sailboat Star on the Geneva Lake in the late 1960s, as his nautical passion came to define Werner's life.

"When I started selling Contest yachts in the 1960s, Ed Conijn was still in charge of the yard. I've since worked with his son Fritz and then the third generation of the family, Arjen. Things have certainly changed over the years, each new owner taking the company and the yacht designs in a distinctly more modern direction. This has been especially obvious recently, including in terms of woodwork and styling. I firmly support this development – these yachts clearly have their place in the market today and in the future."

MOVING WITH THE TIMES

Werner relocated his yard from Switzerland to the Mediterranean coast 30 years ago, moving with the times and the clientele. Among the more



made experience

than 450 Contests he has sold over the years, quite a few have gone to famous people, like Formula One driver Nelson Piquet. So why do connoisseurs prefer Contest?

“It’s the same principle as with a suit: Tailor-made is better than off-the-rack,” Werner points out. “Our customers have already owned yachts in the past and know exactly what they want in terms of appearance and equipment. As Contests are semi-custom-built, customers can choose colour, mast type, interior layout and décor, and any number of other aesthetic and technical details. Selling a Contest is not like selling other yachts – it’s a process involving the customer and the yard as partners. Future owners practically design their yacht together with the technical department. In a way it’s a little like building a luxury villa, as it typically involves repeat visits to the yard and several years of work.”

PARTNERS IN PERFECTION

Werner’s long sailing and selling experience means he has considerable insight into his customer’s wishes and their underlying motivations. Fortunately, Contest Yachts sees eye to eye with him in this. “One thing I’ve always been impressed with is how open the designers are to new ideas, including those relayed by agents. For example, the 60CS design – including its groundbreaking tender garage – was partly triggered by a request from one of my customers. This input from below certainly helps the yard maintain its edge and ensures our mutual goal is attained - giving customers exactly what they want.”



Jane of all trades

Contest Yachts built various landing craft for Middle Eastern clients in the 1980s and these projects were extremely demanding. Jane Zwaan, who has been working at Contest Yachts for 26 years, came up with a playful prank in these stressful times to help take her colleagues’ minds off things...

TURBAN

“The assistant director at that time was putting considerable pressure on the employees to get the landing craft ready on time,” says Jane Zwaan. “We were working hard and everything was going well, but I thought that we could all use a laugh. So what we did was dress one of the employees in a garment, added a kaffiyeh and shawl, and with some cool dark sunglasses, he looked the very picture an Arab.

“We then ordered the nicest taxi Medemblik had to offer and arranged a ‘spontaneous’ visit by our Arabian client to the yard. The assistant director was scared out of his wits by this unexpected check-up on how construction of the landing craft was progressing. But he had no choice but to respectfully welcome the guest, show him to the landing craft and try his hardest to convince the man that everything was going to plan. Eventually the poor assistant director became suspicious and we had to ‘unmask’ our Arab. By then we had already had a great deal of fun, however, which was exactly what was needed at the time.”

JACK OF ALL TRADES

This is one of the many memorable moments Jane has experienced in her 26-year career at Contest, where she still works with great pleasure. “I lived nearby and started working full-time for MYS with the agreement that I could go home if something should happen to the children during school hours. Initially I performed mostly administrative duties, but before long I switched to Contest Yachts where my activities were far more varied.

I showed clients around, was secretary to Fritz Conijn, helped at boat shows, organised personnel parties...

“I was a ‘Jane-of-all-trades’, really, and got to know all aspects of the company well. This is why work has remained so enjoyable over the past quarter of a century.

The international character, the constant innovations, the great co-workers and the fact that I love sailing all mean that I am exactly where I want to be. I wouldn’t swap this job for the world!”





Pioneers of the 60CS

The Simoneaus were the first family to have a Contest 60CS delivered. After their hugely satisfying experiences with a 55CS, they were immediately entranced by the beauty and comfort of the newest yacht in the Contest range. The decision was quickly taken: number 1 would go to the French sailors. How do they feel about the yacht after a full summer of sailing?

GOING DUTCH

Jacques Simoneau first discovered the beauty of a Contest yacht during a sailing trip to England in 2002. "I immediately liked the looks of the boat and found out that she had been built by a Dutch yard," Jacques remembers. "This was reason enough for us to carry out some research which resulted in the purchase of our Contest 55CS. The fact that we have now again chosen for a Contest speaks for itself. Yet even so, we have been very positively surprised by the 60CS."

HIGH QUALITY

"Although certain that we had bought a high quality yacht with great performance, you always expect some teething problems when you buy a new boat, especially when you are the first to sail away with a newly developed

model. But nothing could have been further from the truth. We have done a great deal of sailing and yet only experienced some very minor problems, which were easily solved. I can honestly say that we have only compliments for the yard and are delighted with our 60CS."

The yacht was named Grand Cripic and her thorough first-season test is thanks to the sailing schedule of the family. "After christening the yacht in Medemblik we headed for France. Later in the summer we sailed in Portugal, Spain, Morocco, around Sardegna and the Balearic Islands to finally end up in Tunisia. Here we left Grand Cripic for the winter, ready for next summer's exploration of Croatia, Greece and Turkey."



PERSONAL TOUCH

Jacques is impressed by the performance of the yacht. "I have been sailing my whole life and still have a smaller competition boat in France for training in the winter. Although the standard of comfort and performance on the 60CS is, of course, completely different from the training boat, the standards actually exceeded all our expectations.

"We had some excellent discussions with the architect and yard about our ideas for the ideal layout and rigging systems. In fact, the contacts with people at Contest Yachts were a real pleasure. They really are prepared to listen to your ideas, while standing firm on points where they do not want to compromise on quality. I really appreciated the personal touch of the Contest Yachts personnel during the entire building process."



Three decades of UK sailing history

The success of Contest Yachts in the UK is a testimony to the technical quality and lifestyle appeal of the renowned yachts from Medemblik. Context talks to Charles Watson, sole agent for Contest Yachts in the UK for almost 30 years, about developments in the British market and the reasons for the Dutch yard's success. "It's been a tremendous time," he says.

Charles started selling Contest yachts in 1979, around the time that the yard started targeting the premium market. "It was the era of the Contest 38 ketch, and we were just about to launch the 35," he remembers. "Fritz Conijn had recently taken over and the yard was just completing the construction of the Van Essen designs 33 and 31HT. And even though the UK market was going through a slump at this time, by 1982 things had already picked up for us, especially as the first 36s and 48 ketches started rolling out."

PREMIUM PREPARATION

According to Charles, there were various reasons why a Dutch yard started doing so well in the UK, which of course has a boatbuilding history of its own. "One of the key advantages for Contest was that the yard had already perfected higher-volume production techniques before it entered the premium market. This allowed it to stay efficient and cost-competitive while maintaining a reputation for solid construction and excellent finishing.

"Lacking relevant economies of scale, UK-based builders meanwhile went under or shifted to building larger yachts. Camper & Nicholson's, for instance, was giving up on small boats just as I was starting to sell Contests, and few boats under 48 foot were built in the UK from the early 1980s onwards."

A WORLD OF CONTESTS

Charles Watson Marine has sold around 130 yachts over the last 30 years, and Charles is always impressed by the adventurous nature of many owners. "A Contest can go quite a long way – we've had some transoceanic voyages, a cruise to the Norwegian Lofoten Islands and the Arctic Circle on a Contest 48, and even a trip up the Amazon on a Contest 44 around three years ago.

I think that the fundamental appeal of a Contest yacht for most of my clients is recreation and relaxation as much as it is for exploration."

Ask Charles how he sees the future of Contest Yachts and he responds very positively. "I'm pleased to say that the boats being built now are better than ever and that the quality is constantly improving. The past years with Contest have been tremendous, both professionally and personally, and I look forward to continuing our cooperation."

