NO RESTRICTIONS

HOLLAND'S NO LIMIT SHIPS PROVES THAT SEARCH AND RESCUE CRAFT HAVE A STABLE PLACE IN CRUISING BOATS.

BY DAG PIKE

No Limit Ships. The name tells us that these boats are built to deal with anything the sea throws their way. Many builders make claims about the seaworthiness of their boats, but No Limit has made its reputation among those who are most serious about watercraft—the commercial sector—in which the company's built-strong DNA has proved its mettle time after time on Europe's challenging North and Baltic Seas.

It is quite a challenge to design and build a yacht that can cope with extreme conditions, so No Limit went to the Dutch Lifeboat Service for inspiration. Founder, Evert Stel, wanted a yacht that had no restrictions and could venture to sea at virtually any time. When Stel laid eyes on a new, large, rigid inflatable lifeboat at the Terschelling station, he was inspired. Coming away impressed after a few sea trials, Stel took sketches to a friend and plans were drawn up for the first No Limit Ship build. Initially Stel saw the market for their design restricted to the commercial sector, and designers were brought in to fine-tune the concept before production started in earnest.

After a slow start, the company made several modifications until they ended up with a design that exceeded their expectations. The No Limit Ships brand was born in 1996, and today these vessels are built in limited numbers for both commercial and private clients, as the latter have come to acknowledge the intrinsic cruising and safety benefits of the boats.

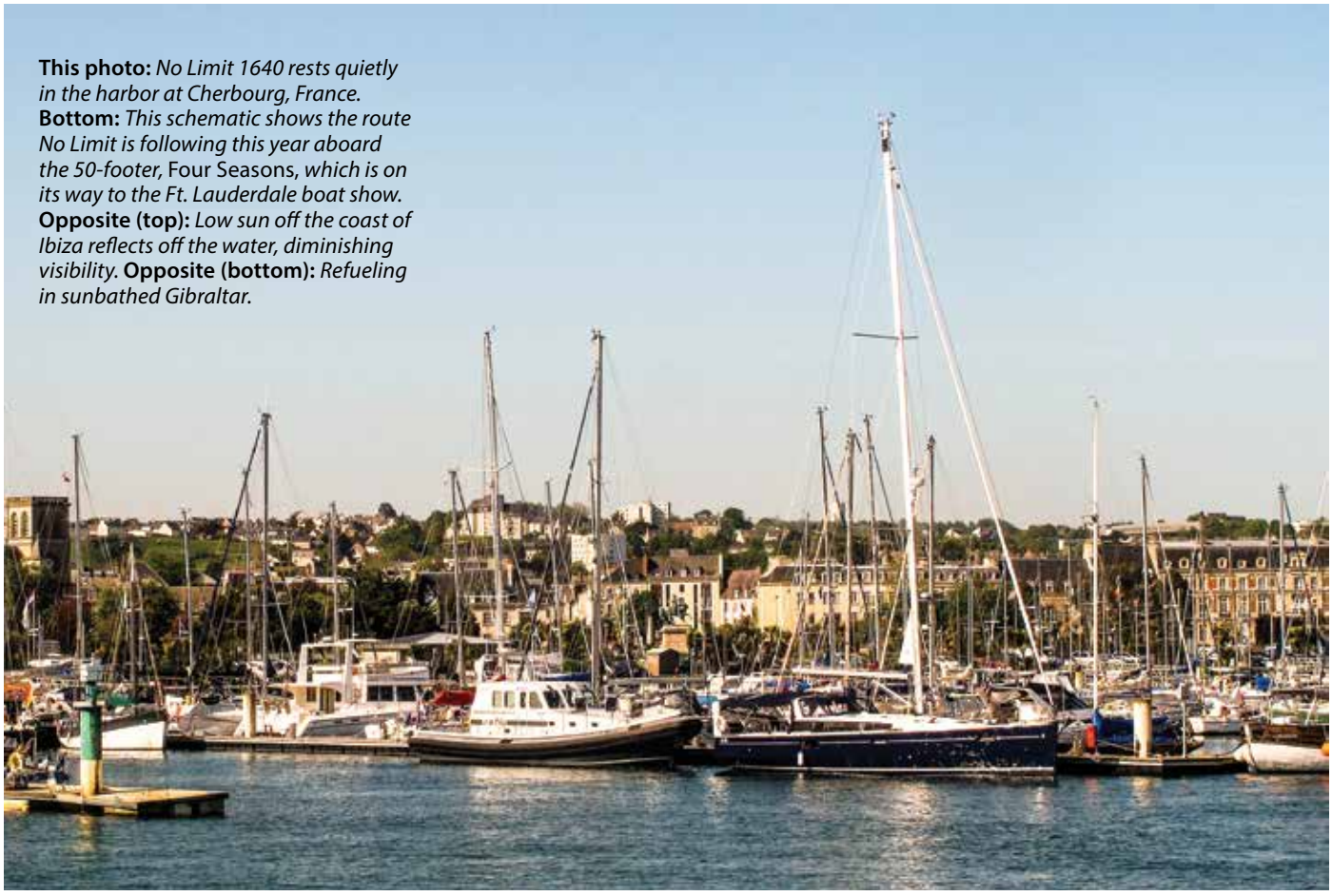
RIGID STRUCTURE

No Limit is full of surprises. First, this yacht is a rigid inflatable, possibly the only all-weather rigid inflatable yacht of its size on the market. Second, the hull is built from steel which is an unusual material for a planing hull. Then the hull design also is different. It is basically a very deep vee with a deadrise of close to 30°, which is more than you'd find on most racing boats. At the stern, the vee of the hull merges into a fin keel with spaces cut out of the vee on each side to create a pair of wide semi-tunnels that accommodate the propellers, keeping them within the protection of the hull.

It is not the most efficient hull shape in terms of performance, but it adds to seaworthiness, offering a smooth ride in normal cruising conditions and a well-cushioned ride when the conditions get wilder: the best of both worlds for the cruising yachtsman. It is quite eerie the way this hull rides through the waves as though they did not exist. I am sure that in larger waves than we had for our test you would get some pitching—show me a hull that doesn't—but it all seems to be so tamed and manageable that you build up enormous confidence in the boat.

Unfortunately on the test day we only had waves up to about

This photo: *No Limit 1640 rests quietly in the harbor at Cherbourg, France.* **Bottom:** *This schematic shows the route No Limit is following this year aboard the 50-footer,* Four Seasons, *which is on its way to the Ft. Lauderdale boat show.* **Opposite (top):** *Low sun off the coast of Ibiza reflects off the water, diminishing visibility.* **Opposite (bottom):** *Refueling in sunbathed Gibraltar.*



4 feet high, which amount to ripples for a hull of this caliber. And in these conditions, the ride was level and true. At lower speeds there is quite a lot of spray, mainly emanating from the low chine line that runs the length of the hull. But once the hull rises onto plane, the spray vanishes astern and we enjoy the full speed approaching 24 knots. I can't remember when I have been on a boat that has given me such confidence.

CLOSE-UP LOOK

Let's look at more details about the construction of a No Limit boat. The hull is built from a special high-tensile steel marketed under the trademark Cor-Ten, most often spelled without the hyphen. It is a weathering steel that rusts on the surface when it is exposed to the elements, and the rust protects the metal from further deterioration in the same way that a layer of oxidation protects bare aluminum. Unlike painted mild-steel plating, Corten resists pinholes and bubbles in the paint so it reduces the frequency of repaints. The tensile strength of Corten allows No Limit to use hull plating which comes in at a shade over ¼-inch thick. This is supported by longitudinal stringers, which are in turn supported by larger transverse frames. It makes for a complex structure on the whole, but the build has the benefit of reducing the size of any unsupported hull panels. With every square foot reinforced, there is no panel deformation from the inevitable pounding in waves.

LOA: 54'
BEAM: 17' 6"
DRAFT: 3' 10"
DISPL: 54,000 lbs.
FUEL: 1,300 gallons
WATER: 260 gallons
SLOW CRUISE: 8 knots
RANGE: 2,700 nm
POWER: 670-hp Volvo Penta (x2)
CONTACT: www.nolimitships.com

The inflatable tube around the hull is D-shaped and fastened to the structure with reinforced Kevlar bands. A unique feature is the auto-inflation system wherein each of the vessel's eight air compartments is connected by a small tube to a manifold that runs around the inside of the craft. This is connected to an air pump that can pump in air or expel it to maintain the tube at the optimum pressure. No Limit normally sets this at 1.5 psi, a pressure that allows the tube to deform slightly under wave impact to help smooth the ride.

This is one of the main characteristics of rigid inflatable boats, but most RIB builders these days inflate their tubes to 3 or 4 psi, which means the tube will bounce like a tennis ball in rough seas, but it also affects maneuvers, such as pulling alongside another vessel or a jetty for tie-up. No Limit's inflatable tube not only improves the ride by absorbing wave impact, it also provides reserve buoyancy and helps to improve the stability, both desirable features for cruising.

To reduce weight, No Limit builds the superstructure from aluminum. It is a very conventional shape, sloping at the front and squared off at the rear—boxy, if you will. The test boat is model 1640 (16.4 meters or about 54 feet) and is equipped with just a small standing platform built into the rear of the house. When specified by the owner, this small flybridge control station can be extended rearward from the after portion of the cabin. Below it, the cockpit is large, comfortable, and on our test boat, was fitted out for deep-sea fishing.

ON BOARD

Because of the small number of boats No Limit builds per year, each one can be fitted out according to an owner's requirements. The standard layout has a double cabin in the bow and a single cabin set aft in front of the engine room. These are fairly compact, utilitarian cabins, but still look comfortable and each has a private head. The focus of the design on seaworthiness restricts the amount of space and luxury we take for granted on modern

yachts, but the accommodations are still comfortable.

Between the two cabins is the saloon, with L-shape settees on both sides suitable for socializing and dining. The well-equipped galley is aft on the port side and the four-ring electric cooktop comes with fiddles to keep the pots and pans in place on a cruise.

The wheelhouse can also be customized for each owner, but the central helm station is fixed. On the test boat, this was provided with a captain's chair and a small guest settee alongside. At the rear lies a corner table that could convert to a great relaxing area when you get to harbor, but it is versatile enough for dining. There is a great all-round view from the wheelhouse.

Two large Raymarine displays provide all the navigation information to the helmsman, with supplementary displays for the Volvo diesels. Engine controls are standard Volvo units, though it is possible to specify a joystick for low-speed maneuvering. Our test boat had individual controls for the bow and stern thrusters and a tiller steering option. In harbor this was sufficient for precise control, and the No Limit is a joy to handle in close quarters.

There is an exit door to starboard alongside the helm and one aft to access the cockpit. These are fully watertight, essential to make No Limit boats self-righting in the event of a capsize, but this self-righting is not a fully implemented feature as the engines are not duly equipped and there are no seat belts for the crew to ensure their survival through a 360° rotation.

A watertight door in the cockpit gives easy access to a spacious engine room and the two 670-horsepower Volvo Penta diesels. These are coupled to a conventional driveshaft-and-propeller system, and a small generator is tucked under the access ladder. The generator is primarily used to supply power to the galley equipment and a larger unit might be required to power the optional air conditioning. For year-round operation in Dutch waters, a diesel-fuel heater is a more useful feature.

This photo: *Steaming through the night, the No Limit 1640 seems to tow the full moon in her wake.* **Opposite: (***clockwise) Peter, Edzard, and Jurgen Braam aboard* Four Seasons**. Bottom:** Four Seasons *severs the water in fine style.*

Holding 1,300 gallons of fuel and 260 gallons of water, the No Limit 1640 has an extensive range at lower speeds. At 8 knots, she burns 4.4 gph and, at the time of writing, the 50-footer, Four Seasons, was crossing the Atlantic, following the northern route via Iceland and Greenland. With a draft of four feet and an air draft that can be reduced to 12 feet by lowering the radar arch, this No Limit is equally adept at cruising inland waterways.

OPTIONS APLENTY

Each No Limit model is built to meet a specific owner's requirements within the limits of the design. One version was built with an aluminum hull because the owner wanted a faster top speed—in this case, exceeding 30 knots. On the commercial workboat side, No Limit offers designs up to 64 feet.

No Limit ships are fine examples of what can be achieved by thinking outside the box. I was involved in the development of the first-ever RIB, some 52 years ago. During the design process, we found out quickly that we had an exceptionally seaworthy concept on our hands. Today, the RIB has been widely adopted and is used worldwide in a variety of challenging operations, from Special Forces interception craft to Coast Guard patrol vessels. No Limit Ships has taken the concept one level farther with this serious, all-weather cruising yacht. A No Limit yacht labels you a serious cruising seaman, and this yacht will get admiring—and curious—glances wherever it goes. I fell in love with the No Limit as soon as I stepped onboard. After 65 my years at sea, this is the kind of yacht for me. ■