



The Leopard that *can*

This is one feline that definitely purrs, reports **Kevin Green**, from the deck of the newest 98ft carbon rocketship.

THE 10 KNOT northeasterly breeze blew across a relatively quiet Sydney Harbour as *Leopard* sliced through the flat water doing a shade under 12 knots. Not quite ideal conditions for the new 98ft canting keeled carbon rocketship. "In anything above 12 knots, we're the fastest boat around," skipper Chris Sherlock told me as we powered up after tacking near the Opera House.

The Australian-built and Farr-designed supermaxi had returned for the Sydney-Hobart race. It was also a good opportunity to have the locally built systems serviced after her maiden race, the Fastnet, which she won convincingly after fellow 98 footer *Alfa Romeo* gave up the chase with mainsail problems.

It was also a homecoming for Perth-born Sherlock who has worked with owner and property developer Mike Slade for the past 16 years. The new boat is the latest incarnation, building on the experience of the

two previous super maxis – *Ocean Leopard* (1988-1999) and *Leopard of London* (2000-2006). Like its predecessors, it is aiming at top-level race sponsorship, day charters in the Solent and charters in the Caribbean – where it is heading after Sydney to race at Antigua Week and the Newport Bermuda Race.

Skipper Chris Sherlock said owner Mike Slade had a very successful five years racing *Leopard of London* competitively in worldwide events and the yacht also had proved to be a great business tool for corporate and charter work, but technology had moved on: "The new breed of 30m racing yachts have canting keels and are a lot faster than a fixed keel yacht so Mike decided to upgrade to remain competitive on the racing and charter circuits."

Deckeye view

On board, the crew busied themselves around the wide cockpit to control the miles of running rigging as skipper Chris ducked between the twin wheels. The beamy design, at 6.8m is nearly 2m wider than the Reichel Pugh 98 footers, is designed for high-speed offshore sailing. It features a hard chine, similar to some of the Volvo 70s, that runs aft for two-thirds of the carbon hull. As the wind increased and the 46.9m



ABOVE: THE BREAZI; JACOBER WIKIDOCY

change its spots...

rig heeled over, Chris stabbed at the control panel above the windward steering wheel to cant the 5.6m keel a few notches on the LED readouts, and immediately the boat sat up and speed increased. Further trimming is also available via water ballast with six tonnes deployed aft to lift the bow in fast-running conditions, probably useful, when the hull is designed for speeds of 30 knots plus. Earlier the starboard canard button had been pressed on the leeward console to activate the pinch rollers that lowered it down to give forward stability. On deck, noise levels were much less than I've experienced on some of the other 98 footers such as *Wild Oats XI*, despite the fact that the main Yanmar engine would increase revs as the hydraulics were required. The muted thuds of the main engine was spiced with the whirr of the big Lewar 120 mainsheet grinder and the cracking of the backstay tensioning winch as we tacked our way towards Manly.

On the helm

Taking over the helm from Chris, with the keel fully deployed, I settled myself to get the feel of

this amazing boat. The tell tails were a very long way away and the Windex up in the clouds, it seemed. But there was plenty of instrumentation thanks to messrs Brookes and Gatehouse, as I peered ahead to check the mast-mounted B&G jumbos, which read out 11.9 knots of boat-speed in the 10 knot breeze, as I hardened up on the wind to 38° True. The carbon wheel was light and it didn't feel like it was a 98 footer, at least until peering forward to see the end of the 15 foot bowsprit, to check all was clear ahead for a tack. The big bowsprit was designed to cope with huge 1000 sq m asymmetric spinnakers, Chris said, and to allow sufficient separation of the 843 sq m upwind sail plan. As I cranked the wheel over for a tack near Sydney Heads, *Leopard* effortlessly responded to turning the big single rudder. Beside me, the windward backstay winch whirred quickly as crewman Paul tensioned the rig. Heading back down the harbour, a reaching sail was rolled out inside the forestay and the upwind headsail changed for a No2 reaching sail. An important aspect of the day was for the crew to test some of the lat-

OPPOSITE PAGE:
The Farr designed
98ft supermaxi on
the harbour in
December 2007.

ABOVE:
Wide beam and
plenty of strength
built into the carbon
hull make the canting
keeler a formidable
offshore racer.

DECKEYE VIEW



ABOVE:
Skipper Chris Sherlock and
owner Mike Slade steering.

RIGHT:
Electric Lewmar winches are
deployed across the rooomy

BELOW:
The impressive 15 foot
bowsprit.



Down below

Leopard will have two lives, one as a premier racer and the later as a luxury corporate yacht. For my visit, she was in race mode, the removable interior in storage, with below decks divided into three main areas. The open forward section housing all the racing gear and the spartan saloon area only having a table and surrounding seating. The stern section comprised of the living area with head, galley and central navigation table surrounded by pipe coats for the 20-race crew. But in her other role, there will be space for 12 guests in three double cabins, luxuriously fitted throughout with layouts by Ken Freivokh Design.

est North Sails wardrobe that had been delivered. The No 2 reacher was hanked on to the forestay before hoisting, something that crew boss Paul Standbridge said was all part of the heavier air setup of the rig. It didn't take *Leopard* long to power back down the harbour at 15 knots plus and what seemed like a very quick afternoon was coming to an end. As we prepared to drop the sails, Chris took over and gybed *Leopard*, bringing the huge black Southern Spars boom across the deck. An impressive looking piece of work, it has five sets of brackets interconnected with lazy jack lines, similar to those used on *Mari Cha IV*, for ease of stowing the carbon mainsail.

But the excitement wasn't quite finished and approaching the Harbour Bridge was interesting, as we headed for Woolwich Dock. Clearance from the top of *Leopard's* mast and the lowest part of the bridge seemed minimal from my stance on the wide stern, as I looked across at Chris on the helm. "We've only got only 2m clearance," he said. Pretty fine tolerance, like everything else onboard the impressive supermaxi.



TOP: Clearance is 49m under the Sydney Harbour bridge and *Leopard's* mast reaches to 46.9m.

ABOVE: The stern navigation and crew area also has a separate hatch for access.

LEFT: The spacious saloon on *Leopard* which will include extra cabin space for 12 guests.