

BOAT OF THE MONTH

Beau Geste

Despite appearances, Karl Kwok's new Farr-designed 80-footer is a big step forward for maxi design for her impressive handling systems, says Matthew Sheahan

Taken at face value, the latest *Beau Geste* is yet another high-tech 80ft LOA maxi.

Her hull looks strikingly similar to that of a VO70, with a hard chine running aft from amidships to an abrupt and vertical transom, where twin rudders provide the finishing touches to the pumped-up Volvo clone. She has a fixed bowsprit like a marlin's snout and no spinnaker pole – she has masthead asymmetric kites.

Her towering carbon mast, with its five sets of spreaders, twin topmast backstays and checkstays, are evidence that her mainsail will look like a modern VO70, with its square top head and rectangular shape. Once up, it does.

Yet Karl Kwok's latest Farr-designed racer is much more than a grouping of all the juicy bits in race boat design and technology. *Beau Geste* is a big step forward for maxi boat design and an indication of what could be about to filter down through the ranks.

Fact file

Designer – Farr Yacht Design

Builder – Cookson Yachts NZ

LOA	24.33m	79ft 10in
LWL	24.20m	79ft 5in
Beam	6.15m	20ft 2in
Draught	5.55/3.8m	18ft 3in/12ft 6in
Disp	24,031kg	52,979lb
Sail area:		
Mainsail	230m ²	2,476ft ²
Genoa	159m ²	1,719ft ²
Spinnaker	571m ²	6,146ft ²

IRC RATING – THE COMPETITION

Beau Geste – 1.626

Ran – 1.562

Alfa Romeo 3 – 1.568

Leopard – 1.868

VC70 – 1.698

The clearest indication is when she's racing round the cans on an inshore course. To hoist and set the giant masthead asymmetric spinnaker takes one minute, ten seconds. At least it did on the sparkling 18 to 25-knot day I sailed with Kwok and his 12-strong team led by Gavin Brady.

It took the same amount of time at the bottom of the downwind leg. And both manoeuvres employed just three people on the foredeck!

A large part of this manoeuvrability comes down to powered winches and the innovative spinnaker-handling system that allows a 'conventional' asymmetric to be furled (see *Leading Edge*, page 33). Indeed, most of her sails forward of the mast are furling types. Those that aren't use soft hanks and no headfoils. The result is a sail plan that is not only easy to handle, but ready to be deployed in a moment, especially the spinnakers which don't require repacking or wooling each time.

On deck, the lack of pedestals, let alone genoa tracks or complex multi-purchase control lines, makes for an open and uncluttered cockpit. Instead hydraulically powered conventional winches provide the grunt for trimming and soft toggle-style loops provide a variety of anchoring positions for the genoa barber hauler.

"I believe we're living in a changing world where organisers are taking a different view on powered systems," says Kwok. "We decided against a canting keel system, however, because that would take us into a different division."

But perhaps the most impressive thing about her is that it takes just 12 to race her. It doesn't seem that long ago that double this number were required aboard a maxi to go half as fast.

The five-spreader rig incorporates a full-width chainplate base and non-overlapping headsails. However, the fathead-type mainsail does mean that twin top mast backstays are required to support the mast fore and aft



Lazyjacks are more usually the domain of cruisers, but *Beau Geste* is fitted with lazyjacks to help flake the mainsail when lowered



The lack of pedestals makes for an open, clutter-free and spacious cockpit. This in turn makes the area better for non-participating crew, with the motion upwind less violent than when perched at the back of the boat.



Looking aft on port side from the companionway. She's spartan, but comfortable and beautifully finished below decks

Season's Successes

Cowes Week
Just 2m 10s short of new round the Island record

Fastnet Race
2nd across the line, 7th overall

Maxi Yacht Rolex Cup
1st in class in Sardinia in September



A deck-stepped mast is unusual aboard a boat of this size, but is necessary given the lifting keel, which rises up to the deckhead. Note the shims required for setting the pre-tension in the rig



Soft eyes with toggles replace the more conventional transverse genoa tracks. The system is geared more towards offshore sailing and saves weight, not only in the track and car system, but with the additional components required. Note the full-width chainplate base



Rig – Southern Spars carbon mast with EC6 continuous carbon rigging

Halyard locks – a red light under the mast-mounted instrument displays shows when the halyard has gone beyond the lock

Winches – all winches are powered apart from those for the running backstays, which are manual for safety reasons. All winches can be operated with a top handle

Primaries and mainsheet – Harken 1125. Pit winches: 2 x Harken 990, 2 x Harken 65

Crew – she typically races with 12-14 crew, less than half the number required on maxis of two decades ago. The rest are guests!

The lifting keel extends to underside of the deck and reduces draught from 5.55m to manageable 3.5m



Forward cabin doesn't get more minimalist than this, but the boat is used for cruising



Navigation station is positioned on the centerline, under the cockpit floor aft



The wheel-shaped steering quadrant drives tillers for both rudders