

After two championship wins with his previous smaller Italia 9.98 this year the Italia/Polli team opted to push right up against the upper limit of ORC Class C, where in the hands of skipper Sandro Montefusco's Estonian crew the brand new 11.98 *Sugar III* won the worlds at their first attempt in Croatia in May



# A rare beast indeed

... is a fair way to describe a 'genuinely competitive genuine cruiser-racer'. But designer Matteo Polli is making steady progress in his mission to disprove the adage that, as far as high-level competition goes, such a concept remains the stuff of fantasy and adverts...

## Italia 11.98

It has been a while since production builders have found a successful design niche for the true performance cruiser-racer. As they have for decades, many have tried to employ a handful of trendy features copied from current raceboats to hint at performance, but in reality they never quite get there since their real mission is to sell to the larger cruiser market. These boats may look fast in the brochures, or sitting next to more unassuming cruising designs at the boatshows, but one look at the hull lines, deck layout, rig and above all the displacement numbers reveals there's no way for them to win on the racecourse. A long options list is another giveaway, with hundreds of kilos of variance waiting to be piled

on top of the already unachievable displacement figure provided by the designer.

But fortunately nothing is for ever and there are glimmers of hope – including those emanating from the Italia Yachts shipyard in Venezia who work hard to break the mould (sorry – *ed*). Their philosophy has been to identify the essential features of what makes for an attractive yet functional cruising yacht, but where the basic essentials of comfort are achieved through clever design and not excessive plushness and thus weight.

The boats in their Sport Line range are not ultra-light by any means, but they do exhibit a suitable balance of length, power and stability to be more competitive than most under today's two principal rating systems, ORC and IRC. Certainly their newest Polli-designed Italia 11.98 demonstrated its potential in winning the Class C title at this year's ORC Worlds in Croatia... which surely warrants some further examination.

Matteo Polli is a Southampton-trained naval architect who is now installed as Italia's in-house designer. However, Polli first appeared on the international racing radar several years ago for his optimisation work on existing ORC Class C designs, earning podium finishes in several world and European championship events in both

the Baltic and the Mediterranean.

But it was in 2015 at that year's ORC World Championship in Barcelona that the brand-new Polli-designed Italia 9.98 *Low Noise* struck gold, getting everyone's attention and setting a new design benchmark for Class C for several years to come. Subsequent examples took gold again at the 2016 worlds, silver at the 2018 worlds along with medals at nearly every ORC European championship since being launched in 2015.

This outstanding success, earned in what most regard as the most consistently crowded of the three ORC classes (at 35-50 boats), is made more remarkable given this boat is not at the head of the class in rating or size: she is 34ft long – 3 or 4ft shorter than most of her top-tier Class C rivals. Not exactly David and Goliath, but in these crowded fleets size often matters.

With their new 11.98 Polli design Italia now have a new Class C weapon that sits at the top of the class. Two metres longer at 39ft but still just sneaking in under the Class C limit, winning the world championship crown in Croatia this year was achieved across a good mix of both breezy and light conditions. Polli was aboard for that event, and offers some more background.

'The 11.98 was actually a concept that

PHOTOS ANDREA CARLONI



**The ends of the 11.98 have been drawn in at the waterline relative to its smaller predecessor to take away some wetted surface and improve performance in light airs. At the same time, as well as adding stability and power, fuller mid-sections combine with the finer ends to allow the boat to be very easily trimmed fore and aft, giving the crew more flexibility than a higher-prismatic design would**

was started two years ago, with the first hull and deck finished in November of 2017, and tooling finished in June of 2018,' he said. 'The factory was busy, so we took our time to get the tooling and all the details right from the start. We must have made the right decision, because right away seven boats were sold even before the first boat was launched. And following the worlds there are now quite a few more interested suitors!'

Interestingly, those with early interest coming into the 11.98 are not brand-loyal fans of Italia – only one is stepping up from the 9.98. This may change now following the win in Class C in Šibenik, where the class was overflowing with 55 entries. And there does seem to be interest across the performance spectrum: one of the boats launched to date has tiller steering and minimal interior, while another has twin-wheels and more comprehensive interior comforts.

'Several of the boats we have sold will feature carbon spars, but the weight difference is relatively small at about 40kg,' says Polli.

'The cross-over for a rating advantage, in ORC at least, of having an alloy versus a carbon spar used to be at about 40ft overall. But ORC no longer gives much help to alloy spars in this size range.' Polli should know, he has sat on the ORC Technical Committee for some time now.

In terms of hull form Polli says he looked at the relative weakness of the 9.98 in light

air (the super-light 2017 worlds in Trieste was the only edition since 2015 when a 9.98 was not on the podium), and with help from some new CFD studies, he has made some scaled changes he thinks are improvements in the 11.98. 'This hull shape has a lower prismatic and a finer entry, with lower wetted surface overall,' he said. 'The wider BTR is also what helps keep this boat within the CDL limits of Class C.' The boat features long stern overhangs to minimise IMS-measured length but with enough volume forward to increase waterline when heeled and also increase stability when it's needed.

The hull and deck are built in an E-glass/vinylester laminate over a 25mm core for the deck and a thicker 30mm core for the hull topsides, producing good panel stiffness without a lot of extra weight: the hull weighs in at a not embarrassing 700kg. Below the waterline a composite sub-frame around the keel takes the mast compression and keel loads, a structure engineered to exceed ISO standards. The interior layout is simple but clever, forming part of the main structure and contributing to global stiffness. There are a number of interior options that will drive the final displacement ranging down to a choice of hard shell or fabric storage lockers.

Similarly, the keel fin is cast lead with a steel internal structure incorporating ballast windows that allow a substantial 500kg variance in weight for trim purposes (there

are no pockets in the lead bulb itself). The result is a boat with a Stability Index of 115°, the minimum needed for most off-shore races, and a STIX value of >35.

Standing rigging is attached at the extremities of the boat to accommodate a generous sailplan which completely fills the large-aspect ratio foretriangle and mainsail 'spaces'.

And don't be fooled by the bolt-on integrated carbon bowsprit. In big fleet windward-leeward racing where good VMG sailing can deliver the small advantage needed at the gate marks, the 11.98 may carry an S2 on a pole yet also have an A1 flown off the sprit in lighter air. This is a handy versatility, to be able to switch downwind modes according to the race format. In longer offshore contexts the sprit can also take a Code 0 or 'headsail set flying', a masthead beast of a sail between 55 and 75 per cent mid-girth that can be devastating in light-air close reaching.

We have yet to see how the new 11.98 fares under IRC but there is no reason, on paper at least, why the boat – which is far from a light-displacement design – should not be equally at home as under ORC.

So could this typically pretty Italian design be a nice machine with which to travel to Newport RI for next summer's combined IRC/ORC Worlds... depending on the waiting list, of course.

*Dobbs Davis*

