

A CLASSIC IMPROVEMENT

IMIL IPISQUATE
The ketch rig and staysails spreads the sail area, and allows the Amel 64 to be handled by a couple.

REVAMPING A CLASSIC IS NEVER EASY, WRITES KEVIN GREEN, BUT THE AMEL 64 STRIKES A FINE BALANCE BETWEEN MODERNISING THESE BLUEWATER YACHTS WHILE RETAINING THE QUALITY THAT THEIR FRENCH BUILDER IS KNOWN FOR.

Henri Amel has been producing quality cruisers from his renowned yard at La Rochelle on the rugged west coast of France since 1968 when he created an easy-to-sail yacht that would encourage his wife onto the water. There are now more than 1,400 models sailing, including the two current models, the Amel 55 and the flagship 64.

Thanks to local dealer Vicsail, several Amels have passed through Sydney. An Amel 55 attracted a lot of interest at the Sydney International Boat Show, but the yacht that put the yard on the map was its popular 53-foot Super Maramu, which numbers 500 and remains a sought-after cruiser. I boarded one in the Pacific many years ago, and was impressed with its clever features such as lockable deck hatches and the ketch rig.

Even after Henri Amel gifted the company to his 132 employees, his ideology and in-house build philosophy continued in the later models, as I found when sailing the Amel 55 from their Mediterranean base in Hyères on the beautiful Côte d'Azur, and then boarding some of the 64 models in Hyères and also at La Rochelle.

When it comes to bluewater cruisers, waterline length is critical to covering ocean miles, but the concept behind these ketch-rigged yachts ensures that a sailing couple can still manage the larger vessel as well as the smaller Amel 55. The logistics behind this are in the powered in-mast furlers and their centralised cockpit electric controls.

Amel continues to move with the times. The company has done several interior revamps since the 64 launched in 2010, and is up to hull number 22, which is under way at the La Rochelle yard. These are handcrafted yachts that require many thousands of man hours, so the yard does well to produce about a dozen yachts annually.

A MODERNISED, LIGHTER INTERIOR

Comfortable living space is essential to bluewater cruisers, where any nuance or inconvenience will soon become annoying after months at sea, and one good reason why the late Henri Amel sailed his own boats for lengthy periods.

For 2016, Amel offer both their classic layout and a new, more open design. Improving the living space was a good reason to use the expertise of the interior designers at Berret Racoupeau, who had already penned the hull.

Given its more open-plan design, the 2016 layout and light oak design of the Amel 64 is a nod to modern living, rather than purely life at sea. Instead of furniture bulkheads in the middle of the saloon, there is now open space. The port-side, U-shaped dinette dominates the 2016 model and the chart table behind it, but the navigator can still unroll full-sized charts, refer to the B&G and Furuno electronics on the side bulkheads, and stand up to look out a rectangular port light or simply glance aft from the nearby companionway.

Opposite the navigation table, the functional galley remains in the same position. It has undergone a number of changes, however, as it is now finished in a combination of wood and composite (rather than the lacquered white used in older models I've seen in France).



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Roomy chart table with port light and lustrous rosewood on this model. Note the ample opening port lights, which are ideal for the tropics.

AMEL

Another modernist affect is the removal of a longitudinal bulkhead that had enclosed the galley. Gas burners have been replaced by a four-plate ceramic hob. There's a brushed-steel microwave nearby, and hidden below the Corian worktops is a dishwasher and plenty refrigeration (there's a 180-litre upright refrigerator and a 130-litre upright freezer plus a second 30-litre freezer option).

Other essential cruising fixtures on the Amel 64 are deep, double sinks and a large, opening skylight. Ahead of the galley is the cocktail lounge with drinks cabinet and low-slung table for coffee (or something stronger).

PRIVATE OWNER'S SUITE

The semi-custom design offers several layouts and two and four cabins are both possible. The two-cabin has large suites fore and aft, plus a small skipper's bunk near the transom.

Alternatively, the model I boarded had the owner's suite forward, with a small skipper's bunk adjoining. The aft contained a double cabin with a smaller one alongside with bunks – ideal for the kids.

This comfortable cruising yacht had three bathrooms, with two aft. The owner's cabin had a large island bed and spacious ensuite with separate shower area. There is even more space below when the dinghy garage isn't included.

The final big-ticket item the Amel 64 scores is a walk-in engine room. Here I found space to inspect the Steyr 6-cylinder, 150-HP, 3.2-litre engine and marvel at the very clever engineering done in-house by Amel. The latest models now use a 180-HP Volvo.

CENTRAL COCKPIT CONTROLS

The Racoupeau design incorporates features that are core to Amel's popularity with bluewater cruisers: a central cockpit, covered helm and ketch rig. The deep cockpit has all lines running into it through gutters to the electric winches for headsails, mainsail and the mizzen.

The main console bristles with joysticks that control the furling of all sails and the thrusters at both bow and stern are ideal for handling this long-keeled hull. My own handling experience

on the 55 was at first challenging due to the long keel, but once I'd mastered the fore and aft thrusters, I easily berthed this yacht in a very tight marina space at Hyères. Under sail with the 55, I hoisted all plane sail in a mere five minutes from this functional cockpit. Impressive.

Deck gear includes Harken winches and blocks. Jammers are on many lines, which allows multiple controls, and of course, the ketch rig spreads the sail area across the genoa, staysail, mainsail and mizzen.

Electronics include a powerful B&G Hydra H5000 computer that runs plotters at the console and the navigation station, plus a second autopilot, Lewmar chain counter, engine controls and more, such as a primary Furuno autopilot and radar.

The rest of the cockpit is devoted to relaxation with a U-shaped, cushioned bench and elongated table plus plenty of under-bench locker storage.



EASILY HANDLED KETCH RIG

Looking at the ketch rig with its Swiss alloy spars specially made for Amel, the genoa and staysail have quality Reckmann electric furlers with manual overrides by winch handle. The electric main mast furler system can also be manually operated by unbolting two fixings to allow non-electric operation. (This manual-override is a feature on several parts of the Amel 64).

Other good points include halyard locks on the mast that create a tidy base without the Dyneema lines flailing around. Line lockers around the aft decks also add to the tidiness that features throughout the Amel. Other clever touches include the boom doubling as a davit, thanks to a strong pulley integrated into its end so it can lift heavy outboards and other gear (including rescue crew). The large aft deck has sun pads, and beyond are hatches to the dinghy garage.

Unusually, Amel have used composite, moulded deck material called Amel Teak, which is integrated into the topsides. Unlike teak, it won't require replacement. It felt sure underfoot, yet even more security is available from the tubed, stainless-steel handrail when walking forward.

At the bow, there are large double rollers with an integrated water system for cleaning the rode and twin 2000 W windlasses with capstans. For trade-wind sailing, a carbon bowsprit can fit into the port roller. Like most things on the Amel, the cleats are oversized, including midships.

Behind the windlasses lurks an enormous lazarette with collision bulkhead in front, which houses the drop-down bow thruster. The hawse pipes ensure that the anchor chain won't catch on anything.



“THE CONCEPT BEHIND THESE KETCH-RIGGED YACHTS ENSURES THAT A SAILING COUPLE CAN STILL MANAGE THE LARGER VESSEL AS WELL AS THE SMALLER AMEL 55.”



“THE RACOUPEAU DESIGN INCORPORATES FEATURES THAT ARE CORE TO AMEL’S POPULARITY WITH BLUEWATER CRUISERS: A CENTRAL COCKPIT, COVERED HELM AND KETCH RIG.”

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The steerer can operate all sail controls from the sheltered helm on the Amel 64.

LONG-KEELED HULL

Prolific French designer Olivia Racoupeau has created a sleek hull with tall topsides to maximise volume while retaining the trademark integrated keel gearbox system unique to Amel. Construction is solid GRP, and the mast shrouds use tie rods to connect to the GRP/wood hull grid for rigidity. Watertight bulkheads run throughout the hull, including the walk-in engine room. All major furniture bulkheads are integrated into the hull to increase rigidity.

Similar to the Nautor Swan philosophy, the Amel is fitted out as standard with many live-aboard essentials such as generators (19.5 KVA Ona), watermaker, washing machine and ancillaries. Electric power is both 24 V and 12 V, and ancillary power now comes from a Volvo D4 180 HP, which is connected to a unique gearbox system that runs through the keel. On the Amel 55 this initially felt clunky, but worked fine nevertheless.

The Amel 64 has a skeg-hung rudder, so is well protected. For strength, both the skeg and keel-fin are part of the mould, with the cast-iron bulb added later. This gives a rather modest ballast ratio of 25 percent, which is in keeping with the conservative sail plan of these sturdily built and well-proven bluewater cruisers.

094 : AMELS 64

BUILDER	Amel Yachts
MODEL	Amel 64
COUNTRY OF BUILD	France. La Rochelle
DESIGNER	Berret Racoupeau
NAVAL ARCHITECT	Olivia Racoupeau
INTERIOR DESIGNER	Berret Racoupeau
OWNER'S PROJECT MANAGER	Amel Yachts
YEAR OF BUILD	2017
LOA - LENGTH OVERALL	19.6 metres
LWL - WATERLINE LENGTH	17.21 metres
BEAM	5.6 metres
DRAFT	2.4m
DISPLACEMENT - FULLY LADEN	37.5 tonnes
CLASSIFICATION	A
HULL CONSTRUCTION	GRP monolithic
SUPERSTRUCTURE	GRP balsa core
ENGINES	Volvo D4 x1
OUTPUT	180 HP
PROPELLERS	Volvo folding
DRIVE TRAIN	Amel integrated shaft drive
GEAR BOX	Amel
SPEED (MAX)	10 knots
SPEED (CRUISE)	8 knots
FUEL CAPACITY	1400
RANGE	700 nm (15 l/ph at 2100 rpm) estimated
FRESHWATER CAPACITY	900 litres
BLACKWATER CAPACITY	120 litres
GREYWATER CAPACITY	120 litres
GENERATORS (MAIN)	Onan
GEN-SET SIZE	19.5 KVA
BOW THRUSTERS	Maxpower 20 HP
STERN THRUSTER	Maxpower 20 HP
WINCHES	Lewmar
ANCHORING SYSTEMS	Lewmar twin windlassess 2000W
NAVIGATION ELECTRONICS	B&G Hydra H500 and Furuno Navpilot
DEPTH SOUNDER	B&G
RADIOS	Garmin VHF
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEMS (TV-AUDIO)	Bose
GALLEY APPLIANCES	Miele electric plate 220V, Miele microwave, Miele fridges (180l and 130l units)
OWNER	Forepeak island bed with ensuite
GUEST BERTHS	Guest 2 X twin 1 X aft VIP guest cabin
CREW	Bunk at transom
MAXIMUM PEOPLE ON BOARD	12 people
TENDERS	RIB in garage
PRICE IN AUSTRALIAN DOLLARS	Euro price only ex-factory Euro 2,150,000 (ex-VAT)
WINDOWS / HATCHES	Amel
WINCHES	Lewmar
WINCHES - EL OR MAN	Lewmar
DEACK GEAR (WINCHES/JAMMERS/TRACKS/CARS)	Harken, Antil
KEEL STRUCTURE	GRP/cast iron
RIG/MAST TYPE	Amel custom
FURLER	Reckmann 1200 24V
FUEL TANK SIZE	1,400 l
RANGE	700 nm (est)
ISP:	Genoa: 87 m², Mizzen sail: 36 m²
SAIL AREA (FORE)	Stay sail: 38 m²
SAIL AREA (MAIN)	Main sail: 64 m²
TOTAL (CALC) SAIL AREA	225 m²
DL RATIO	185.5
SA/DISP	21.5

