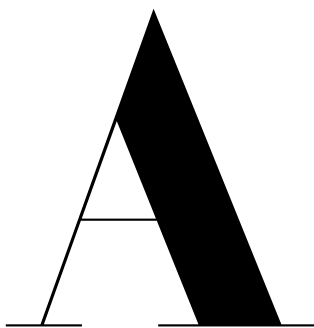


PHOTOGRAPHY
GIANLUCA NAPHTALINA CAMPORESI

Going the distance

The 80LC brings Grand Soleil into a new era with a confident, distinctly Italian take on the pocket sailing superyacht, writes *Will Bruton*



A black-and-white image of Italian industrialist Gianni Agnelli leaping into the Mediterranean from his wooden yacht hangs in the main saloon of the first Grand Soleil Plus 80 Long Cruise, *Bianca II*. The image is not one of contemplation, but motion. When I mention it to the owner, a fellow Northern Italian businessman, he explains why the photograph, which few visitors seem to notice, is there: “He was this controversial figure of relentless action. He’s on the yacht because he represents some of the old ways that I hold to be important; the combination of style and action really matters to me personally.”

Grand Soleil owners, since the first yacht emerged in 1973, have always cherished speed. The GS80 is the brand’s decisive move into a competitive arena where charter, bigger boat racing and extended time aboard without compromise all become possible.

From the dock, *Bianca II*’s beam is immediately striking. At 26.2 metres length overall, her beam is still a proportionately wide 6.6 metres at its widest. On the day of my sea trial, during the Grand Soleil Cup regatta in Porto Cervo, the broad cockpit allowed guests to watch the racing unfold without ever feeling under the sailing crew’s feet. The attention paid to layout and careful positioning of winches, lines and the switches to power them is clear as soon as we move from the dock, while the movement itself is silent thanks to the Torqeedo electric drive system specified by the owner.

Matteo Polli, responsible for eight Grand Soleil designs to date, drew her lines with a brief to build on a well-established racer-cruiser ideal, while keeping a hull length of just under 24 metres exactly. This is a critical mark, above which ownership and operation become more complex. “The variation in weight of the yacht according to what the owner wants can be up to three tonnes, so that has to be carefully planned for to ensure a wide range can be accommodated,” he says.

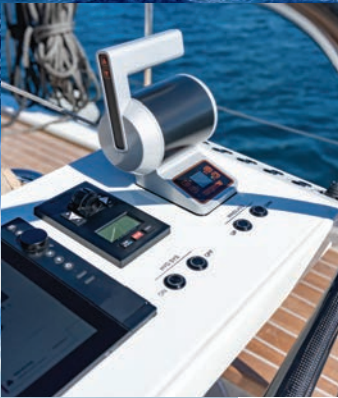
Grand Soleil’s Plus Line, comprising yachts above 18 metres, has given the yard considerable experience in custom construction. “It simply



LOA 26.2M
LWL 22M
BEAM (MAX) 6.6M
DRAUGHT (STANDARD) 3.95M
LIGHT DISPLACEMENT (STANDARD)
42.5 TONNES
ENGINE 250HP YANMAR 4LV250 TM170
SAIL AREA 400M²
OWNERS/GUESTS 10
CREW 3
NAVAL ARCHITECTURE MATTEO POLLI
INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR DESIGN NAUTA
BUILDER/YEAR CANTIERE DEL PARDO/2026



The GS80 was drawn by Matteo Polli to retain Grand Soleil’s sailing pedigree at a significantly larger scale. Far right: the Torqeedo throttle and control system – the first GS80 combines electric propulsion with twin generators and hydrogeneration under sail



cannot be one size fits all: each yacht under the sole boards will be quite different depending on what the owner specifies, if we are to ensure something with the balance we are known for,” adds Polli. To make sure each build comes out of the yard to this serious sailing standard, Polli works with an aeronautical engineer to carefully check weight and balance; much like it would be on an aircraft. A reflection, perhaps, of the importance Grand Soleil places on sailing first and foremost.

Unlike the already popular Plus line 65, the GS80 has been a twin-rudder design from the start, albeit with a single rudder as an option. Getting the twin-rudder placement correct is something Polli delivered through computer modelling and testing. “Getting it right is inherently more complicated,” he says. “A single

rudder simply sits on the centreline, but with two there is more than just the shape to think about. Too high or angular off the hull and you’ll not get enough grip. Too low, and the yacht will start to draw too much water; something at this size that is a real consideration in terms of ensuring she can be taken into as many harbours as possible.”

To windward in light airs, the yacht is effortless and beautifully balanced – counting fingers needed on the wheel rather than hands. The helm positions outboard, whether stood or sat, offer an unhindered line of sight forward across the flush deck. A captive mainsheet makes trimming from the helm effortless and keeps the aft deck clear of clutter. Additional buttons to trim are found on the helm console, also positioned to have a good line of sight as adjustments are made.

The cockpit is arranged as an outdoor living space, with twin seating areas beneath the boom and clear separation from sailing functions aft

Having 26 metres to work with means charter can be done properly and without compromise



Sailing ops are aft, largely separate from guest areas. Below: the professional galley is ideal for extended cruising and charter



Below is unsurprisingly spacious, with the beam allowing a broad saloon that's easy to pass through

Sail options are numerous, but *Bianca II* is equipped with a fully battened North Sails mainsail and low-cut headsail. A barber hauler, emerging neatly from the flush deck, can be trimmed remotely from the cockpit, enabling the headsail to be brought well inboard.

On the days I sailed, we saw light airs but in these conditions she made her ability to keep going pleasingly evident. She simply keeps sailing without complaint until the wind is into just over single figures, at which point augmenting with a little electric power is possible, keeping everything wonderfully quiet.

Bianca II, named after the owner's daughter, has been specified to take maximum advantage of her Mediterranean cruising ground. A telescopic keel developed with Cariboni brings the draught in harbour to 2.8 metres, while not requiring the compromise of space lost in the saloon. It's a clever system with a mechanism that

ensures the end of the keel folds aft in the unfortunate event of an accidental grounding.

The Torqeedo electric drive system, coupled with two 40kWh battery packs and twin 45kW generators, provides silent propulsion at over seven knots for more than four hours in real-world testing. Several practical features have been designed into the set-up. Generator starts are automatic when the battery falls below a user-set level and rapidly replenish the bank, meaning run times can be surprisingly short. Far quicker, in fact, than many marina shore power supplies could manage.

Under sail, hydrogeneration through the same system can top up the batteries. The compound benefit is a system that guests will appreciate, with hotel battery capacity also being enough to run air conditioning overnight without the need to call on the generator. Even over a few hours it becomes clear how much thought has gone into



BIANCA II <#R#>

Large coachroof windows and overhead glazing flood the saloon with natural light. Nauta's interior combines warm oak joinery with restrained detailing and practical features. Bottom: the full-beam owner's cabin and en suite

a system designed around real-world use and the demands of charter operation.

Having 26 metres to work with means charter can be done properly and without compromise. Guest and crew separation has been thought through. The latter have their quarters forward, accessed through a professional galley.

Italian studio Nauta was engaged for both the interior and exterior, making the transition between the two work well. Below is unsurprisingly spacious, with the beam allowing a broad saloon that's easy to pass through. The material palette has been kept deliberately restrained; warm oak joinery, soft neutral upholstery and broad areas of glazing give the saloon a light, residential quality, while darker detailing and leather accents prevent it from feeling stark. Textile-covered bulkheads are a refined alternative to traditional hard panelling. It is an interior that relies more on proportion and light than decorative affectation.

"An 80-foot [24.2m] yacht is among the most demanding sizes to design," says Massimo Gino, CEO and co-founder of Nauta. "We've meticulously optimised the freeboard heights, interior spaces and cabin sizes, integrating all necessary equipment and accessories in every area, whether on deck, in the sail locker, in the cabins, or the galley. The yacht must encompass the qualities, functions and features typically found on yachts ranging from 95 to 100 feet."

There is a distinctly Italian take evident in the GS80 that refuses to dilute the fast-cruising vision on which the brand was built. When I walk down the dock at the Grand Soleil Cup in May, early 12 Metre yachts competing alongside the brand new GS80 bear, essentially, the same sail-fast lineage.

To blend strong owner demand for weighty hybrid drive systems, a technically impressive telescopic keel and a yacht that will undoubtedly charter well (*Bianca II* is almost fully booked for summer) is no mean feat. All this in a model that will deliver an ownership experience marked by an unusually strong sense of kinship among owners who want to sail fast and, just perhaps, indulge in *dolce far niente* occasionally, too. ■