

Big task – big tooling

Persico Marine are well into the production of the first hull shell for Farr Yacht Design's new Volvo 65 one-design

Some 50km to the east of Milan's famous Autodromo di Monza sits the pretty medieval village of Nembro, home to Persico... one of the least medieval engineering companies on the planet.

The day after the final European America's Cup World Series round of 2012 closed in Venice, on the evening of 21 May, two large matching 'boxes', long but slender, emerged from the gates of Persico Marine – the first pair of AC72 hulls for Italy's Luna Rossa Challenge heading to the docks and then on to New Zealand for final assembly.

In the red carpet style familiar to followers of the Prada fashion brand, the cameras flashed away non-stop, even though the stars of this particular collection stayed firmly under wraps. The only identification of the valuable cargo was a pair of stencils, '1 of 2' and '2 of 2', written (in red, of course) on the containers. Italy's latest publicity-shy celebrities were on their way to Auckland.

'I'm quite sad actually,' said Marcello Persico, managing director of Persico Marine. 'I'm sorry to see them go: it was an extremely interesting project.' The two hulls were first trucked to Rotterdam, from where they started their long journey south by sea.

Once the pieces had arrived, the latest AC72 was soon being assembled in Auckland under the disciplined direction of Thomas Gaveriaux, platform project manager, who had followed every step of the construction process at Persico's factory. *Luna Rossa* will go afloat with a big party on 26 October, after which sailing trials will begin out on the Hauraki Gulf.

Marcello could make little further comment, however, bound by the same secrecy constraints that are de rigueur with anything to do with today's America's Cup. The same vow of silence accompanied the two Luna Rossa ACC boats that Persico built for the 32nd America's Cup in Valencia, the Abu Dhabi team's VO70 *Azzam* and the wingsail for the AC72 *Artemis* which all previously had slipped quietly out of the same building.

And these deliveries share more commonality: they are extremely sophisticated constructions in which the advanced application of the best composite materials and lightness are key factors. And in each instance Persico was not only responsible for construction, but also had a major role in developing the final designs with the race teams and their naval architects. In fact, this immersion approach is Persico's speciality.

But the company is now in a position to offer build services at many different levels, from a complete Cup programme to the private owner who wants to build a new performance-oriented sailing or motoryacht. As an example, Persico provided the moulds and tooling for Wallycento No2, designed by Reichel-Pugh and now under construction at Wally Europe in Ancona.

Persico Marine now include some 50 specialist technicians, plus some of the world's most sophisticated milling machines capable of working on individual components of up to 25m in any dimension. The Persico Group also enjoy a wealth of technical know-how and R&D resource, with a portfolio of clients spanning every conceivable area of industry. But if Persico are known for a single characteristic, it is surely the accuracy of the delivered product... reassuring yacht designers in one historic area of concern!



Left: from this to the hull for this (right). What kindergarten class wouldn't love to be let loose on the mother of all polystyrene blocks, fabricated by Persico before CNC-milling into the mould plug for the new VO65. Persico's giant CNC tools can then further fine-tune the carbon mould itself if required

That's probably one of the reasons why Persico were confirmed early on to begin construction of the hulls for the Volvo Ocean Race's new 65ft one-design fleet, the high-performance monohull that will take the startline in Alicante in 2014. For the last VOR edition Persico built the whole of Farr Yacht Design's VO70 entry, this time Persico will produce the moulds, hulls, structural bulkheads, keel boxes and other primary parts.

Persico are one of three boatyards involved in the manufacture of the new VO65, with final assembly undertaken in the UK by Green Marine. 'We are really enjoying the process of working with Volvo and the other members of the build consortium, it's a whole new challenge for us,' said Persico operations manager Mark Somerville, a veteran of numerous America's Cup and Volvo builds.

Somerville is supported on his latest programme by Persico's recent recruitment of Michel Marie as VO65 production manager, with a formidable pedigree that includes time spent with both Alinghi and Oracle Racing.

All eight (or more, hopefully...) of the new VO65s will have their carbon hull built at Persico Marine, where the first lay-up of hull number one was scheduled for late October. But getting to that point was a testing three-stage process: first a huge CNC plug was milled, then the infusion of the carbon mould over the plug and finally the construction of the first hull itself.

As you would expect for such an important one-design product, the VO65 moulds have been built to an exceptionally sturdy and tight specification to minimise any variation between boats. For the same reason, the principal bulkheads are installed to stabilise the hulls themselves before despatch.

Volvo veteran crew and race cameraman Rick Deppe was watching closely as a massive white piece of polystyrene began to take the shape of Farr's latest creation. 'It was pretty cool to see it there looking like a giant slab of marble waiting for Michelangelo to come along and create his David. Of course this particular piece of marble is polystyrene and Michelangelo is a five-axis milling machine.'

Hull 1 is scheduled for dispatch in February 2013, after which subsequent VO65 hulls will leave Nembro every two months. □

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