POWER CATS

SILENT 60

Silent-Yachts is the brainchild of bluewater cruisers Michael and Heike Köhler, who have sailed and cruised over 75,000 nautical miles. Their new yacht, the Silent 60 is a transoceanic-capable power cat. With solar panels, electric motors, and batteries, there's virtually unlimited range cruising at 6 to 7 knots. The sun powers everything: stove, freezer, air conditioning, washing machine and the watermaker.

In 2010, the Köhlers began a four-year sea trial on their test boat, the 46. Across the Black, Aegean and Mediterranean seas, the solar-electric drivetrain worked flawlessly through sun, snow, rain, ice, and Force 9 storms. The generator was not needed. "During the last year, we only used the generator for 30 minutes per week so the engine wouldn't become rusty and break down," says Michael.

In 2016, the company launched its first boat, the Silent 64. Their client became the first person to cross the Atlantic with a solar-powered yacht. Today, Silent-Yachts has operations in Italy, Thailand and Turkey.

The Silent 60 that I boarded in Ft. Lauderdale was the company's third such build. Inside lies a four-stateroom, four-head layout. It's high-end, with sleek, contemporary lines; a precisely executed fit and finish with top quality fixtures and fittings. It feels minimalistic, yet elegant. The platform is spacious, measuring 59 feet overall with nearly 30 feet of beam. With the help of bow thrusters and twin electric motors, Miller made short work of getting her out into the relatively narrow canal where she was berthed side-to on a bulkhead.

LOA: 62′
Beam: 29′6″
Draft: 3′10″
Displ.: 58000 lb.
Water: 264 gal.
Fuel: 500 gal/
Solar: 17kW
Power: 2/50kW (67hp), 2/200kw (268hp), 2/340kw (456hp) electric
Price: $3 million

Thanks to electrification, the most notable sound is only the whoosh and hum from ventilation venting on both sides of the cockpit. With A/C off, even that whoosh disappears and with that door opened, our 7-knot speed generates a brisk breeze and comfortable cabin despite 95-degree heat. We only hear the gurgling of the propellers and water rushing past the hull.

The batteries lie beneath two hatches in the salon. Motors are accessed behind the transom steps at the aft end of each hull. Wiring and installation of supporting tech is neat and well-secured. Three power packages are available: from 100-680kW of motor power, 143-286kWh of battery capacity and 145-150kW gensets.

The solar array lines the forward and aft cabin tops, and the flybridge hardtop. The panels produce up to 17 kW of charging per hour, in ideal conditions. There's shore power charging too.

At the helm, Miller pilots along the ICW at 5.4 knots, drawing a combined 8 kW. An easy-to-read display shows power draw and charging simultaneously. Running at just under 7 knots increases energy draw to 14 kW, which means 3kW is still flowing into the batteries from the sun. A kite-sail option can also pull the big cat along at up to 3 knots. "It takes a bit of time to set up," Miller says, "but once it's deployed, its operation is totally automatic."

One guest comments that aside from normal items you'd find on any boat, all that really needs maintaining is the diesel generator. The savings from requiring little to no diesel fuel or diesel maintenance could be significant. This midrange Silent 60 has genset-boosted speed of 13 to 14 knots, though Miller says running constantly at that speed: "fights against the theme of the vessel. You certainly need that speed to sometimes escape weather or make it to the anchorage before dark. But the way we're using this boat today—at 6 to 7 knots—is the way it's most sustainable." —*Gary Reich*