

Sustainability, efficiency and performance. These three intrinsically linked and increasingly important trends are integral to each stage of yacht design, development and construction. Michael Kohler, CEO of Austrian builder of luxury solar-powered catamarans, is a well-versed expert on the absolute necessity of these factors to the longevity of our industry. We caught up with Michael to hear more about the momentous strides SILENT-YACHTS is taking in the field of sustainable yachting.

Q. How did SILENT-YACHTS begin and what is its philosophy?

A. Even though I am a lawyer by profession, I am a sailor at heart. My wife Heike and myself have travelled the oceans for over 23 years on conventionally powered sailboats and motorboats. We spent over 5,000 days on board of our own yachts and sailed over 75.000 NM around the world. The experience we gathered for over 2 decades on the open sea led us to the conclusion that there had to be a better and more efficient way to supply yachts with energy. Therefore we finalized the development of our first prototype, the SOLARWAVE 46, in 2009. It was the first ocean-going yacht which exclusively used solar energy not only for actual propulsion, but also to provide energy to all household appliances on board.

The philosophy behind SILENT-YACHTS is very simple and expressed clearly within our mission statement. We strive to create an independent and environmentally friendly yachting experience which combines the silent cruising of a sailing boat with the luxury of a motor yacht. Hereby, we seek to establish a new era of sustainable yachting by creating the most innovative and self-sufficient yachts.

Q. How do you assure long range reliability with your catamarans? What would you say to those who argue that solar power is too unreliable a fuel source?

A. During the many years we spent on board sailing across the oceans, we came to the conclusion that in regular holiday destinations where people spend their vacations most of the time, the sun is far more reliable than the wind. The simple reason is that people generally seek out sunnier destinations for yacht charters and cruises. They look for calm and protected bays - not for windy ones. Furthermore, once there is no wind, which happens quite often, sailors are forced to make use of their diesel engines - which on average is about 50% of the time when cruising. In comparison, once there is no sun, we simply make use of the solar energy stored in the batteries and can continue for several hours depending on the energy reserves stored in the batteries.

Our Silent 64, the first production catamaran that crossed the Atlantic Ocean on solar energy, has only 160 engine hours (based on a 150 kW generator) in four years of extensive cruising with charter guests in the Caribbean and the Med. This is only 40 hours per year! And we additionally offer an optional kite-sail for every Silent model - so we can use the wind as well for propulsion.

Q. How does SILENT-YACHTS guarantee the luxurious feel of the yachting experience in the more relaxed layout of a catamaran?

A. We are able to equip the boat with all materials our customers wish to have and also think that the layout of a catamaran offers an even more luxurious feeling because of the available space and its stability in the water. Next to this, we offer the absence of noise, fumes and vibrations combined with independence, which is a luxury that no other yacht can offer.

Q. Why should people choose a SILENT-YACHTS solar-powered catamaran over other fossil fuel alternatives?

A. There are three reasons why you should choose a Silent Yacht.

First one is independence and sustainability. As sailors we love the ocean. It is where we belong to be and where we spend some of our greatest moments. However, what we also love is clean ocean water. When you love something, you need to treat it with care and respect. None of us would enjoy sailing in polluted waters. Therefore we need to make use of sustainable technologies which enable us to continue sailing in harmony with nature without sacrificing any luxurious and comfortable amenities we all like to have on board. Next to this, the SILENT system offers complete independence and unlimited range.

This leads me to the second reason, which is comfort. We called ourselves SILENT-YACHTS for a reason. It is a unique experience to enjoy all the luxurious amenities on board our yachts, without the noise, vibrations and smell of a running generator. This is a great example of sustainable technologies actually enhancing the levels of comfort on board instead of compromising them in any way. Making use of the AC, kitchen and any other household appliance while anchoring in a bay, complete silence is something you will never want to miss again once you experience it for the first time. Not to mention the stress of constantly refueling at crowded gas stations.

The third and final reason is cost. Not having to regularly refuel the yacht is something your wallet will definitely thank you for. In combination with very little to no maintenance, the running costs of our solar powered yachts are much lower than on conventional yachts. Another important aspect hereby is modularity. Once there are new technologies available on the market such as improved solar panels, you do not have to buy a new yacht. You can simply replace the existing solar panels or batteries and therefore actually improve your yacht in accordance with the latest technologies available.