

MOTORS / MARINE

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A Giant Kite Sail Injects This 60-Foot Motoryacht With an Extra Dose of Emissions-Free Speed

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Silent Yachts

Kite-surfing has become the go-to sport for board lovers, but now a kite will be standard equipment on a 60-foot motoryacht. Already known for creating large, electric-powered cats, Silent Yachts' CEO Michael Kohler spent several years searching for an easy-to-use, automated system that would serve as a workhorse for his zero-emission yachts.

"It's more tool than toy," Kohler says of the 130-sq.-foot Wingit kite. "It can add five knots to a boat's speed, save energy and increase the boat's efficiency. It generates 10 times more power per square foot than a conventional sail."

Tethered by Kevlar lines to a two-foot-high foredeck mast, the kite is inflated before being sent aloft. It flies up to about 400 feet, where wind is more intense, doing figure eights as it pulls the boat forward. "The kite is controlled automatically," says Kohler. "You can steer the boat just as you would any vessel."



Setting up the kite.
Courtesy Alberto Cocchi

The kite also comes handy in emergency situations, such as times when the yacht's propellers run afoul of fishing nets or line floating in the water, which will kill the engines. Instead of having to dive over the side with a knife to cut the line, the kite can guide the boat into safer, shallower waters, where the prop entanglements can be more easily removed.

The system is housed in a box on the foredeck, so after the kite comes down, it's stowed away and is ready to be deployed for the next trip.



While the Wingit could be used to propel a yacht over long distances, even a transatlantic crossing, Kohler says it will be most commonly used for day cruising. “We designed it for normal, light-wind conditions,” he says. “If you intend to cruise for an hour or more, much as you would on a sailboat, the system makes sense.” It certainly does to Silent 60 buyers, who have all opted for the kite.