

Grand Soleil 65LC review: One of the most stunning new designs

[Toby Hodges](#) August 27, 2024

The Grand Soleil 65LC is one of the most stunning new production yachts available, but who is it for? and, most importantly, what's it like to sail?



Granted, the sight of Grand Soleil's president Gigi Servidati sailing the beautiful Grand Soleil 65LC off Portofino arm in arm with his partner, tanned and clad in white linen, screams Italian cool. It's picture poster stuff, sailing's equivalent of an Italian supercar pinup from a lifestyle photoshoot.

But that's not what draws my eye. However well Grand Soleil has perfected such a chic theme, we've seen this type of imagery before. Rather, there's a certain angle of photography showing the yacht's lines that hooks me – the aft quarter shot – everything else becomes

peripheral. Show me those flared sections.

Sexy lines sell. And the Grand Soleil 65LC boasts the blend of qualities that befit a pure performance cruiser: contemporary powerful lines mixed with a look that stands out yet should age well. It has a little of the Advanced Yachts 66 to it – another Italian model that perfected the wraparound raised coachroof look (also by Nauta Design) and has stood the 10-year test of time handsomely. But then it adds the modern kick-ass beam, together with a very subtle chine leading to those distinctly flared aft sections... Oof!



'The aft quarter hooks me. Show me those flared sections...!' Photo: Alberto Cocchi

When the [GS 72](#) launched two years ago, these lines stood out. That Matteo Polli has managed to replicate it on a more 'manageable' size without losing any of the wow factor shows a young designer at the top of his game. The GS 65 is, naturally, an evolution, using the same powerful, sporty design.

Polli explains how the hull form "maintains the pronounced V in the bow and low wetted surface of the Grand Soleil 72 for less resistance, greater

dynamic stability when heeling and better performance in light airs". It's a design he optimised for a broad wind range, "from lightship in racing conditions up to full load in cruising mode."



The Grand Soleil 65 is one of the most stunning new production yachts available. Photo: Alberto Cocchi

And the overall beam of the Grand Soleil 65LC is only 20cm less, at a formidable 5.95m (viewed stern-to from the dock, the transom stops you in your tracks). It contains much of the same features as the GS 72, including the same genset and watermaker, but with that brings its own challenges, Polli explains. As the lightships and loaded displacement is a larger range on the GS 72, the attention to weight and wetted surface area becomes stricter on the smaller yacht.

Again it's offered as a Long Cruise (LC) or Performance (P) model, with the variations found in the coachroof – or lack thereof – and internal layouts. Whichever version you choose, it's quite a minimalist deck and cockpit. Helms aft leave a roomy cockpit, with very long, wide benches – you can seat 10 around the long central table – so the higher coachroof coamings and backrests of the LC make a lot more sense for cruising,

offering at least some comfort and protection. It can also house a large sprayhood.

The lines and layout of the LC do it for me personally, however the orders so far are split evenly between the Long Cruise and Performance models – across both the 72 and 65 designs.

A modern powerful shape, the 65LC carries its wide beam right aft. The coachroof oozes style, with coamings extended to encompass the long cockpit. Photo: Alberto Cocchi

Turning it on

You can perhaps sense my eagerness to sail this boat. Following a long, hot and humid, windless Mallorcan morning, just as I was beginning to fear we might not get a chance to experience this 65 LC properly, the sudden arrival of a moderate breeze from the west-northwest was highly welcomed. The uncalibrated wind instruments were not working, but the white caps forming further out in Palma Bay suggested the breeze was in the teens, and at the upper end of that in gusts.

With full sail set and a lively amount of heel on, it felt special to lean onto those powerful aft sections and surge to weather. We clocked a steady

9.5 knots upwind, and could nudge into double figures by footing off a little.

You may notice that the mast is comparatively far aft. This increases the jib's sail area and also brings the boom further aft – “more sail without raising the centre of effort,” Polli told me. This also increases the headsail options, including a removable inner stay, and a shorter bowsprit for the same gennaker area. The 65 LC comes with a self-tacking jib as standard, although the test boat had a more conventional slightly overlapping jib.

It was an increasingly rare pleasure to again sail a performance yacht of this size with a single rudder. This high-aspect blade is mounted comparatively far forward, acting as a foil with plenty of grip. That said, and for a yacht with such a balanced sail plan, I found that upwind leg a little heavy on the helm. The 65 LC carries a significant amount of sail for her relatively light displacement so playing with the sail and weight trim more should help (we had 10 aboard, a mixed ability crew and in cruising mode).

Form and function: the clean decks see lines led underdeck. Photo: Alberto Cocchi

A shimmering halo surrounded the bright afternoon sun, which, together with the breeze ruffling the sparkling seas, made for distinctly pleasant conditions. The wind freshened up more as we approached the lighthouse at the bay's western point of Cala Figuera. It was now 15 to 18 over waves with clear white caps, the GS 65 still clocking 9 to 9.5 upwind with full sail. We could push up to 10 knots in the gusts if we dropped off a few degrees, but even when close-hauled I noted we were not pointing particularly close, tacking through almost 100°.

This is perhaps explained by the wider angle of the headsail sheets, which is reportedly 12° rather than the 8° of the Performance version. The coachroof on the LC version finishes before the mast, with the jib tracks pushed out to the side decks, where the roof on the Performance model extends past the mast and carries the tracks on top and further inboard.

significant beam buys space for large aft cabins and a tender garage below a very open transom. Note how the teak deck wraps up the coamings to soften the visual line of the coachroof. Photo: Alberto Cocchi

As with the GS 72, the project was spearheaded by veteran racer and boatbuilder Franco Corazza, who stressed how good the coachroof line is

for a raised saloon boat – seated at either helm under sail, you can still clearly see the bow. That said it's very much a Med-style performance cruiser deck, where streamlined looks come above cruising practicalities and comfort. This is particularly noticeable at heel.

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Reaching machine

We were gifted a lovely, long, early evening leg back from the lighthouse. The wind was blowing off the island over clear, flat water so it was easy to see each bullet of breeze approaching our aft quarter. With a deep reaching A0 set and pulling from a furler midway along the bowsprit, we averaged 9-10 knots in the lighter breezes, up to 11 in the gusts.

Heat it up a little and you can feel the power. The Grand Soleil 65LC has a potent amount of sail area and relies on the form stability of her powerful hull shape for righting moment. So while it can harness light breezes and puffs, loads should be respected (and the temptation to carry too much sail avoided!).

Signature Nauta styling. The saloon table can seat eight. Photo: Alberto Cocchi

It was certainly enjoyable sailing, but perhaps not the fully exhilarating ride her shape promises. I also found the winch setup a little unusual, particularly for the mainsheet. It's led neatly each side through the deck to clutches right by the helms and winches further aft. Although these are within reach for those wanting to sail short-handed – or when the trimmer is in contact with the helmsman – the winches are right in the quarters. Here you're also conscious of the significant beam and flat deck space to cross, and a lot of open transom behind.

The mainsheet is a reverse T system, led to a single point as on the test boat, onto a winch on a central plinth, or to a captive winch. You can also opt for a recessed and powered traveller. Mastbase halyard winches help keep the cockpit clean, plus there are tailing lockers. But with a completely open transom I'd worry about lines trailing overboard, and the pushpit rail is only 2ft high so I'd want a third guardwire higher up.

The styling on deck is slick, especially the way the teak deck rises up on the coachroof coamings to help lower the visual line. The tender garage is low but provides enough room for a dinghy up to 3.1m, and there's deck

access from above for stowing fenders. The sail locker is also generous, with a heads and pipe cot within, yet still plenty of space for spare warps, sheets and sails.

The galley is at the same eye-level as the saloon. Photo: Alberto Cocchi

Semi-custom step-up

The GS 65 and 72 are available as this 'LC' model, though they're different beasts to the smaller LCs in Grand Soleil's range (more suited to their 'Long Cruise' name). "Over 60ft the concept and the owners change," Corazza explains. He oversees these more semi-custom builds, in a separate facility to Cantiere del Pardo's main production site.

A composite sandwich build, with composite main bulkheads and interior furniture all foam-cored, produces a light displacement of 26.5 tonnes on the GS 65. The hull is built by vacuum-infusing Vinylester resin into biaxial glassfibre (in one shot), with unidirectional carbon used for reinforcement. The infusion is all done in-house.

It's an impressive, semi-custom approach. "It's why we bought Adria Sail,"

says Corazza, referencing the quality and experience of the Fano shipyard which has built custom yachts for a variety of Italian brands. Next up is a Grand Soleil 80 which will really see the brand kick ahead with this new semi-custom range.

Inviting master cabin has good headroom right up to the forward end of the nice low berth and plenty of stowage. Photo: Alberto Cocchi

The LC version of the 65 provides a generous amount of natural light to the semi-raised saloon and the natural teak veneer finish looks smart (also available in Alpi and natural oak). It's offered with three or four cabins and a midships galley, while the Performance version sites the galley aft.

As well as the 270° views it brings, a prime benefit of the LC's raised saloon format is that the generator and tank space is all contained below the saloon sole. This also helps to maximize the space of the two aft cabins as no technical/engine room is needed between them.

Here we see the volume gains the flared sections and all that beam brings. Indeed, these aft cabins can be chosen with doubles or twins and

have wider berths than the master cabin (they are noisier though, particularly under engine).

The aft cabins can be doubles or twins with lots of natural light and a good feeling of space.
Photo: Alberto Cocchi

The port side has separate day-head access, but this is via the shower – somewhat unconventional considering those in the optional fourth cabin will likely need to use this heads too. Although there is space for a crew berth in the large sail locker, the fourth cabin option makes a wiser choice for those wanting to keep a crew for any length of time. This Pullman features good sea-going berths opposite the mast base, tall locker space and is aside the galley, though it's also right next to the owner's cabin so lacks segregation.

The standard layout sees a dinette area rather than this fourth cabin. As well as providing a mess area, this could also benefit those wanting extra office space (he writes, while working on his kitchen table...), as the navstation is an aft-facing affair that adjoins the saloon sofa berth. Opposite, the U-shaped galley has a relatively compact but practical format with good work surface and refrigeration space, even if it lacks the

finesse of customised crockery or glass stowage.

Optional Pullman cabin. Photo: Alberto Cocchi

The test boat costs €2.8m without sails, but with a high level of equipment included. Which is a lot of money. It's a very appealing and well-done package, with a high-end stylish interior that maintains the Italian chic theme, but it's not quite premium finish quality. Some joinerwork didn't line up, floorboards creaked underfoot etc (Grand Soleil says it is changing the sandwich floorboards because owners don't like the flexing). I'm sure such areas will keep improving as the brand pushes more into this semi-custom sector.

Grand Soleil 65LC specifications

LOA: 21.60m / 70ft 10in

LWL: 18.50m / 60ft 8in

Hull length: 20.10m / 65ft 11in

Beam: 5.95m / 19ft 5in

Draught: 3.50m / 11ft 6in

Displacement: 27,500kg / 57,320lb

Ballast: 7,200kg / 15,837lb

Water: 840lt / 185gal

Fuel: 825lt / 181gal

Sail area: 278m² / 2,992ft²

Sail area/displacement ratio: 29.2

Disp/LWL ratio: 117

Design: Matteo Polli & Nauta Design

Builder: grandsoleil.net

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Verdict

Looks-wise, this boat had me at first glance... Take my money! In terms of performance, the GS 65LC carries plenty of sail and form stability so should suit fast Med cruising if handled respectfully. While I'd like to sail it with fewer people, with working wind instruments, and with Matteo Polli aboard to get his thoughts on best trim (weight and sails), I have a lot of faith in the design and designer and therefore the yacht's potential to please. As far as build quality is concerned, it's impressive, especially for a long-established mainstream brand that is used to producing smaller yachts in high volumes. The decision to use a specialist yard has paid off, although some finish quality could be improved if it's to compete against premium brands. And the style: it's one for us dreamers. Just hand me a linen shirt and beam me aboard on the Italian Riviera.