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Big Boat Review

THE SKY'S NOT THE LIMIT

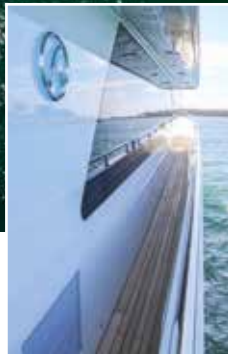
In fact, at 88ft in length, Ocean Alexander's stunning Skylounge is just the start of the range.



By Chris Beattie



the 88 Skylounge you see here
is the smallest craft that
is currently produced



Using modern techniques and computer-aided design tools, it's not hard to build an impressive cruiser when you're talking about something that's just under 90 feet, or 27m in length. After all, that's a lot of real estate to be able to play with, mould and build features into. And there are quite a few companies internationally that play in this space.

But for Ocean Alexander, a family-owned company based in Taiwan and with a smaller manufacturing plant in the US, the sub-100ft segment is where its range of luxury cruisers begins. In fact, the 88 Skylounge you see here is the smallest craft that is currently produced in Taiwan.

And having recently celebrated its 40th birthday, the company has learnt a thing or two about building large GRP craft that represent the epitome of luxurious ocean-going cruisers.

Todd Holzapfel considers himself fortunate to be running Alexander Marine Australia, and it's not hard to see why. A wholly owned subsidiary of Alexander Marine International, Holzapfel's operation showcases one of the world's premier luxury brands, with only a handful of serious competitors locally.

Todd explained that the 88 Skylounge was brought in as an inventory boat to replace a slightly smaller and superseded 85 Open that

had recently been sold. The 88 will be Ocean Alexander's boat show flagship this year, debuting at Sanctuary Cove and Sydney this season.

Todd is an enthusiastic ambassador for the brand, as I was to find out on a somewhat less than ideal day on the Gold Coast recently. While the clouds stubbornly refused to part for our review, Todd shone a bright light on practically every aspect of this incredibly impressive boat, from its stunning enclosed 'skylounge' flybridge to its vast main deck, flooded with natural light courtesy of some of the biggest glazed windows in the business.

THE SHINING

The single-level saloon, galley and dining area is literally where the 88 shines, with light pouring in from all directions. And with a beam of just wider than 6m, minus some space for the generous walkaround decks, there is plenty of room to relax and unwind in luxury.

The glazed windows, boasting large expanses of uninterrupted views, are one of many design features that have filtered down from Ocean Alexander's larger craft, explained Holzapfel.

"There's a lot of our superyacht engineering that goes into the framework and superstructure



they were able to accommodate such large areas of glass using aluminium framework

around the windows," he said. "Other builders have to reinforce and support their windows with large and intrusive mullions, but with Ocean Alexander's experience on its larger vessels, they were able to accommodate such large areas of glass using aluminium framework similar to their much larger boats."

Speaking of construction, Ocean Alexander differs from most other large GRP boat manufacturers in that it doesn't use gelcoat



to finish off its hulls, preferring paint instead, which Holzapfel says gives a more uniform and better finish. It's also easier when it comes to maintenance and damage repair.

Those fortunate enough to consider adding this boat to their private fleet will enjoy many of the features of the superyacht lifestyle, but in a boat that is conceivably manageable by an experienced skipper and partner, without stretching their capabilities. That said, the 88 is built to accommodate a crew of up to three, with separate crew quarters in the stern that are, nevertheless, quite impressive in their own right.

WALKING THE PLANK

The Skylounge experience begins on the substantial aft teak-laid hydraulic boarding platform. Interestingly, there's a gangplank that folds out from the aft starboard gunwale should guests prefer to make their way straight onto the main deck.

Accessed by sturdy stainless steel gates on both sides, the rear cockpit is protected by the Skylounge's flybridge overhang and features a full-width, U-shaped lounge serviced by a beautiful polished mahogany table and a wetbar aft of the saloon. The saloon is accessed via an electrically operated automatic sliding door. There is also an access door to the crew quarters beneath the portside upper deck stairway.

Docking is aided by an aft joystick on the starboard side of the cockpit. Combined with

hydraulic thrusters linked to the main engines, the Glendinning Station Keeper also has a position-hold function.

Once inside, you begin to get a sense of the enormous living spaces that make up the air-conditioned interior – and also a sense of the dedication and skill of the hands that have crafted so much of the 88 Skylounge.

The cabinetry, for instance, is simply superb. Our review model showcased Ocean Alexander's matt walnut treatment throughout, which blended seamlessly with the rest of the furniture, as well as the mostly cream soft surfaces and hard fittings.

As you make your way forward, to starboard is an L-shaped lounge opposite a lounge chair and a longitudinal cabinet including another wetbar and wine cooler, as well as plenty of under-bench storage. At the push of a button a large TV folds down from the ceiling.

WORK OF ART

Amidships, the polished mahogany dining table is a work of art and seats eight while offering panoramic views out of both sides of the saloon. For guests' convenience, there's a small head



concealed in the cabinet opposite the formal dining area.

One step up from the dining area is the forward galley, again with its own expansive exterior views. Every conceivable appliance you'd need for an extended stay at sea is within arm's reach, including a full-size fridge, dishwasher, electric stove and oven. There's also an abundance of food preparation space and storage with overhead, under-counter and other spaces utilised to maximise utility and menu possibilities.

The OA 88 Skylounge boasts fittings and finishes that rival luxury apartments, unobstructed views from every room, and multiple entertaining areas across three levels.



At the epicentre of the 88 Skylounge is the stadium-sized full-beam master



Ahead of the galley, directly aft of the IMAX-like windscreen, is a spacious alcove filled by an L-shaped lounge, opposite which is a large and impressively constructed sea door providing forward access via the port walkaround. It's directly ahead of the interior staircase leading to the upper deck. Concealed within the ledge beneath the windscreen is a large ice-cream deep freezer that will, no doubt, be a popular destination for the younger guests.

As Holzapfel pointed out, all Ocean Alexanders are 'turnkey' boats from the factory, including all crockery, cooking utensils, glassware, linen, fenders and lines.

From here forward, what awaits truly showcases how comprehensively the 88 pampers and indulges its guests.

GLAMOUR BELOW

A central stairway leads down to the accommodation spaces, with the first port of call being the forward VIP cabin. As with the other three cabins, it has its own bathroom and boasts a queen-size bed and plenty of head room and space compared to a lot of other forward cabins.

Immediately aft of the VIP is a companionway leading rearward to the twin guest cabins and on to the master. Being split by the passageway, the guest cabins are more compact affairs that nevertheless manage to accommodate two single beds that can be slid together to convert to doubles. Sunlight floods in via two longitudinal windows.

At the epicentre of the 88 Skylounge is the stadium-sized full-beam master, a space that truly showcases all that Ocean Alexander offers in terms of luxury, comfort and extraordinary indulgence. Large sea-level windows on either side allow daylight to pour in, while at night undersea lighting encourages fish to perform for the occupants.

There is also a king-size bed, ample stowage and head room, twin full-size hanging lockers (one with an inbuilt safe), and a built-in vanity, while behind the berth resides a full-width space to accommodate a shower, twin heads, smoked glass doors, a large sink and a heated marble floor.

Walking around the master, it's hard to imagine what else an owner might conceivably need to make them feel truly at home on the water.

ON THE FLY

But there's another almost as impressive interior space aboard, although to access it you have to



climb several stairs, eventually arriving at the enclosed flybridge, which, among many other things, boasts truly panoramic 360-degree views. The flybridge and, beyond another set of electric doors, its exterior entertaining area, complete with a Jacuzzi, bar, barbecue, abundant seating and lounging room, would, no doubt, be a magnet to all aboard on a good day.

At the helm is an expansive, though not overly complicated dash that houses three 24in Garmin touchscreens displaying GPS and depth information, as well as monitoring the various cameras around the boat. All controls, including the central stainless steel wheel, are easy to hand. There is also a smaller Octoplex display that monitors the status of pretty much every electrical, mechanical and plumbing system aboard. It can also link to the factory directly in case any system requires intervention or a software update.

I'd imagine any skipper worth their salt would find the helm and three opulently upholstered and



electrically operated Stidd helm seats to their liking. And guests can make the most of the many seating options, fridge, stowage space and other features that make the upper deck virtually self-contained.

I've spent the past 1600 or so words trying to convey a sense of the living areas of this boat, but there's so much more, like the aft crew quarters

Top: Luxury everywhere you look ... including an open-air Jacuzzi.

Above left: Central stairway connects the main living and accommodation decks.

Left: Expansive, well laid-out helm.



plenty of evidence of sound engineering, high-quality craftsmanship and thoughtful design touches

with its own galley and laundry that could pass as guest accommodation on other boats. Then there's the massive, ultra-quiet twin MTU 1600hp engines, Sidepower hydraulic fin stabilisers, vast forward sun worshipper's retreat and beautiful stainless steel hardware everywhere.

POWER AND POISE


That's not to mention the 88 Skylounge's sleek, though somewhat traditional lines and effortless power and poise. While we didn't get the opportunity to put to sea beyond the Gold Coast's Broadwater, the brief time I spent underway told me most of what I needed to know about how quiet and smooth the MTU's were, how stable the boat is underway and at rest and how much attention it gets both in and out of the dock.

On the delivery run from Sydney, Todd says he saw 22 knots (41km/h) on the GPS, although it prefers a more sedate 10-11 knots (18-20km/h) to make the most of the 9500lt of fuel onboard.

There is a subtle elegance and absence of ostentatiousness about the Ocean Alexander 88 Skylounge that, if anything, tends to belie the effort, workmanship and sound engineering that is at the core of this boat. There is none of the glitz and gimmickry that can sometimes be found in other boats in its class. For instance, you won't find diamond-encrusted bathroom fixtures, or overly ornately rendered ceilings on this boat.

But what you will find is plenty of evidence of sound engineering, high-quality craftsmanship and thoughtful design touches that set the 88 Skylounge on a pedestal amongst its peers.

If the 88 has a theme, it is about blurring the border between the boat's interior and the great outdoors – but, importantly, without diluting the sense of sanctuary you experience as soon as the electric doors swish closed.

As presented, the 88 Skylounge is priced at \$9.3m. More information: Alexander Marine Australia, tel: (07) 5618 0000. Web: alexandermarineaust.com.au. 

OCEAN ALEXANDER 88 SKYLOUNGE	
Length:	27m
Width:	6.1m
Displacement:	78,000kg
Power:	2 x MTU 1600hp diesels
Capacity:	Eight guests plus three crew
Fuel capacity:	9500lt
Water capacity:	1325lt
Price as tested:	\$9.3m