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St. Croix Company Builds One of Fastest Boats in World

BY SUSAN ELLIS — SEPTEMBER 1, 2015



[1]The catamaran that could be the fastest cruising sailboat in the world, designed and built by Gold Coast Yachts on St. Croix, was launched and sailed Friday from St. Croix to St. Thomas in a little over two hours, and then to St. Martin in 15 hours.

These are incredibly fast times, according to the builders. “Our goal has been to build the fastest cruising boat on the planet and we’re probably already there,” said Rich Difede, cofounder and president of GCY.

“It is blazing, snap-your-head fast,” he said, adding “no expense was spared” on Fujin.

The 53-foot Fujin is constructed of a layered carbon fiber, a component produced specifically for the multi-hull vessel. The material provided strength while rendering the finished product about 12,000 pounds lighter than other vessels of its type and size.

“We had to weigh everything” before it was installed, Difede said.

Fujin, which means god of the wind, was designed by Paul Bieker, who engineered foils for the 2014 American’s Cup winner Oracle Team USA and other racing vessels. The boat was built for Greg and Mimi Slyngstad, who plan to race her as well as enjoy leisure sailing.

The Bieker 55 was Gold Coast’s first carbon construction and first serious cruising boat, according to Difede. The design and engineering led by Bieker and Roger Hatfield, another cofounder of Gold Coast Yachts and designer/engineer, took four months.

In another three months, the parts were constructed, using “top of the line technology,” Difede said, and 60 days later the boat was assembled at the Salt River facility with titanium fixtures and carbon rigging. [2]

Two months later, the finishing touches were put on the \$3.5 million cruiser. The final product is comfortable – sleeping 10, with three bathrooms, an office, and the kitchen boasts a stove, oven, refrigerator and freezer.



“Most ship builders couldn’t have done it that fast,” Difede said. “What’s important is that someone in the Virgin Islands can actually build to that standard – a world class standard. There’s only a handful of people who can do that and we can.”

The boat owners have had boats in the Caribbean in the past. Since the Slyngstads “love adventure” and plan to race, the cat can be disassembled and shipped anywhere in the world, Difede said. The inside of Fujin can be further modified to lighten its weight even more.

It takes a crew of seven to sail Fujin and, after several trial runs, it departed St. Croix last Friday just after Tropical Storm Erika churned up local waters, first for St. Thomas and then St. Marten. On the first leg, speeds of 24 knots were clocked and 12-15 knots during the run to St. Marten.

“There’s no one faster,” said Hatfield, who sailed with Fujin last weekend. Prone to seasickness, he prepared for two days, eating rice and avoiding caffeine and red meat, before sailing the six-foot seas. Fujin jumped from wave to wave in almost twice the wind speed.

Gold Coast Yachts has built more than 115 multihulls on St. Croix over the last 30 years. The company currently has 42 employees including several graduates from St. Croix high schools. Employees go through a “lifetime” of career development training and eventually each one can run the company, said Difede. The company’s training model has been used on the mainland, Europe and New Zealand.

“We’re basically a training institution disguised as a boat building company,” he added.

The next boat to launch will be Sea Dreamer, a 65-foot catamaran for the Dreamer Catamaran fleet in Jamaica.

After that, a ferry for use between St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John is currently in the engineering phase. Difede expects it to be in the water by next April.

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