

The Maxi knack



'Swedish flair and superior performance': Peter K Poland salutes the extensive range of Maxi boats designed by Pelle Petterson

Mention Scandinavian-built cruisers in general and Swedes in particular, and solid stalwarts like Hallberg-Rassys, Najads and Malös spring to mind. Such quintessentially Swedish craft, with substantial displacement-to-length ratios and elegant interiors with rich joinery and blue upholstery, evoke dreams of blue water voyaging. And all have found great favour down the years with cruising sailors, even if they cost more than volume production cruisers from France and Germany.

But the most prolific Swedish builder and designer of cruising yachts followed a slightly different path. Indeed, the first world-beating design drawn by Pelle Petterson didn't even float. He studied design at the Pratt Institute in New York, and then – while a student of Pietro Frua – he drew the most successful sports car ever built by Volvo. Called the P1800, it even featured on the TV series *The Saint* starring Roger Moore.

However, competitive sailing was Petterson's real passion. He twice represented Sweden in the Olympics in the Star class, winning silver and bronze medals; he won World Championship medals in

the Soling class; he skippered Swedish America's Cup challengers twice; and he won the 6 Metre World Championships in 6s of his own design. Latterly, he received the King's Medal for his outstanding contributions as a sailor and boat designer, and most of these boats go by the name of Maxi.

As one would expect from a designer who collects awards for a sports car and wins yacht races galore, the Petterson-designed Maxis don't resemble the heavier and more traditional HRs, Najads and Malös. They combine Swedish flair with superior performance and volume production methods (at least in the early days). And – as with other Scandinavian brands – there's not a bilge keel in sight.

Hitting the bullseye

In 1972, the Maxi 77 (7.8m/25ft 6in LOA) set the ball rolling. Its transom-hung rudder, bulbed fin keel and sleek full-width coachroof were

unusual for its era. A conventional saloon, aft galley and separate forecabin (with WC located under the berth) gave plenty of space, while its DLR of 150, ballast ratio of 49% and sporty SA/displacement ratio of 18.15 ensured above-average all-weather performance for a volume-built family cruiser.

And how did the market react to this trendsetting yacht? An astonishing 3,900 were sold. Petterson hit the bullseye with his first Maxi. When asked 30 years later how he viewed the Maxi 77, Petterson modestly replied: 'I see that many boats seem to be well cared for and that the owners enjoy their sailing in it. That it still seems to fill its need is clear when owners tell of how happy they are with their boats.'

Larger (the 8.7m/28ft 6in Maxi 87) and smaller (the 6.8m/22ft 4in Maxi 68) models soon followed. Both shared the 77's looks, the distinctive blue flash on the

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Maxi 1050: available second-hand from £70,000

Sailing Scenes



Maxi 95: available second-hand from £10,500

Sailing Scenes



Maxi 84: available second-hand from £4,500

Sailing Scenes

galley situated aft on either side of the companionway steps. Once again, Petterson went for a moderate DLR of 222 and high-ish SA/disp ratio of 15.49 to ensure sharp performance.

Maxi 95 owner Richard Shardlow says: 'It's very spacious, certainly living up to the nickname of the Swedish Tardis. We have a cockpit enclosure that means the rear cabin is very useable even in inclement weather while in port. This gives privacy to guests. Would I buy her again? A very definite yes!'

Another owner, Rob Watt (cruiser captain at Greenwich Yacht Club), adds: 'My wife Kim and I were looking for a good boat with comfortable, spacious accommodation that the two of us could handle without any problems. I also wanted something that could hold its own in club races.' A 95 fitted the bill, and as Rob observes, 'she's an excellent boat, handles well in all conditions and is a good club racer. When we are on our four-week summer cruise the rear cabin becomes Kim's wardrobe and dressing room. The one problem was leaking windows: the design is "of the era" and they tended to flex. They have now been sealed and then bonded with Sikaflex.'

Runaway success

The 1977 **Maxi 84** (8.5m/28ft) was another runaway success, and around 1,350 were built. The Petterson Maxi recipe evolved with a slightly wider beam (2.9m/9ft 8in), slightly lower ballast ratio (37.5%) and more substantial DLR (268). The layout remained practical and traditional with amidships heads and L-shaped galley aft. A Volvo saildrive provides powered push, and it remains a marvellous cruiser to this day.

A subscriber to an online forum recently asked: 'I'm looking at a Maxi 84 which seems well specc'd and is a good price. Has anyone any experience of these boats? We are looking for something that will go well round the cans but will also cope with west of Scotland cruising.' One respondent replied: 'I have had two 84s, one in the UK and now another in Norway. It's a safe family boat: good in a blow, easily sailed single-handed and with lots of room inside.'

'Fast? Yes, if you sail it right. I've had 7, 8 and even 9 knots both up and downwind and won handicap regattas! The latest win was last year. Total ownership is more than 20 years.'

Another sailor replied: 'The Maxi

coachroof and coaming sides, and good performance. The smaller 68 boasted a ballast ratio in excess of 40%, a DLR of 205 and SA/displacement ratio of 14.99. These figures, combined with a fin-keel draught of 4ft 3in, gave sailing qualities that 'same era' owners of similarly-sized bilge-keelers like Westerlys and Snapdragons could only dream of. In total, 1,295 Maxi 68s were sold.

The 1976 **Maxi 95** (9.7m/32ft LOA) introduced another 'first' for Petterson – a separate twin-berth stern cabin and a centre cockpit – but these new characteristics were not allied to a heavy long-keeler (as on similar-sized early HRs).

The sleek 95 has a low coachroof, skeg-hung rudder and sharply raked fin keel. The engine lives well forward, placing its weight low and in the centre of the yacht to maximise stability and minimise pitching. The saloon is comfortable and practical, with an enclosed heads compartment and



Maxi 999: available to buy second-hand from £29,000

Sailing Scenes

84 is about as close to the ideal boat for the uses you describe in terms of pleasure per buck spent. Not the fastest in light airs, but it's competitive in moderate winds upwards. If there's a good No3 with the boat that can be sheeted inside the shrouds, it will point really well in a blow and little can touch it. The windward performance is useful and the boat will keep you out of trouble due to its stiffness. Like all boats, some will have issues, so caveat emptor applies!' This particularly applies to elderly Volvo diesels. Spare parts can be expensive.

Maxi 84 owner Alan Jeans says: 'I've owned my 84 *Snowgoose* for about six years. I have cruised extensively in the Clyde, the east coast of Ireland, the Irish Sea and North Channel including Rathlin Island, and up the west coast of Scotland as far as Tobermory. I bought the Maxi because I was really impressed with the build quality, the space inside and the sailing abilities. I would happily recommend Maxis to anyone considering purchasing a boat – especially an older one – as they are so well built.'

By the time the 84 was built, Maxis were also gaining popularity for charter in the Med. Those were the days when boats around 30ft were the norm rather than the exception in flotilla fleets. Popular charter company Sailing Holidays Ltd – winners of The British Travel Awards 2014 'Best Holidays

Company to Hellenic Europe', silver in the 'Best Activity Holiday Company' category and bronze in the 'Best Family Holiday Company' category – now buys fleets of brand-new yachts for its flotillas. However, it still uses its older Maxis as lead boats crewed by its employees.

Amy Neilson (daughter of founder and MD Barrie) says: 'All our lead boats are still Maxis, a mixture of 95s and 100s. They have been our lead boats since 1990 and are still going strong. We have bought a number since then and each crew has added its own modifications over the years.

'They offer unrivalled solidity, and have excellent onboard storage room that is essential for carrying spare parts to keep our flotillas running smoothly. These models have a fantastic layout for three crew members to live on board. The centre cockpit splits the living area, and the aft cabin – affectionately known as the "dog box" – offers more space and privacy than found on other boats of a similar size.'

A desirable yacht

As the 1980s approached, Petterson launched the Maxi 108 (11m/36ft LOA). This centre-cockpit fast cruiser adopted a new look, substituting a conventional coachroof for its earlier full-width cabin top. It's a desirable yacht that sails well, thanks to a DLR of 220, ballast ratio of 38% and SA/



Maxi 33: available second-hand from £30,500

Sailing Scenes

disp ratio of 17.5. The 9.4m/30ft 10in Maxi 100, introduced in 1982, followed a similar format with the addition of a fixed wheelhouse 'lid' over the front of the cockpit.

When he introduced the 8.3m/27ft 3in Maxi Fenix 8.5 in 1981, Petterson changed to fractional rig for this performance fin-keel cruiser. He also updated the styling. The change was obviously well received, because around 1,300 were sold. The accommodation plan features a separate forecabin, a heads area just aft of this, and a choice of a dinette or conventional layout in the saloon. Large quarter berths with an optional infill (to convert this to a cosy double) stretch back under the cockpit. A DLR of 192 and ballast ratio of 35% ensure that the Fenix 8.5 is a sporty rather than staid yacht.

Fenix owner Graham Bremer says: 'I was looking for a modern, easily-handled yacht for the two of

us retired folks which would offer effort-free coastal cruising.

'Before then I was a wooden-boat enthusiast, but there was too much labour! I needed an easily-maintained GRP yacht with a well-crafted wooden interior, and found a Fenix with a new engine and saildrive!

'Maxi yachts have a reputation for build quality, safety and performance, and all the criteria were met. The yacht handles easily and predictably, both under sail and under power in the marina. The self-tacking jib arrangement is a joy: no more winch grinding and, allied to a powerful fully-battened main, provides progress even in Force 2.'

This move towards more contemporary styling, a choice of cruising or racing accommodation layouts, fractional rig and pepped-up performance continued with the 10.5m/34ft 6in LOA Maxi

Mixer in 1983. A DLR of 188, ballast ratio of 40% and SA/disp ratio of 20.0 tell the tale. Petterson said that finish quality moved to a higher level when Maxi production moved under the wing of Swedish motor-cruiser builder Nimbus, and added: 'Buyers now wanted higher quality and more elegant styling on the boats. By launching the Maxi name and making boats that differentiated themselves from the older versions, we hoped to meet this demand.'

'It's possible our move came a little late; the competition had increased and it was difficult to build quality boats at good prices. Even if Mixer did not become a great commercial success, its lines still bear appreciation today.'

This change of tack continued with the 1985 **Maxi 999** (9.9m/32ft 6in LOA), the 1986 Maxi 909 (9m/29ft 6in), the 1988 Maxi 39 and the 1990 **Maxi 33**, which was a more 'cruisey' development of the 999. All were fine yachts and were finished more luxuriously than earlier Maxis, but they sold in smaller numbers.

True to the classic Scandinavian look

By the time the **Maxi 1000** (10.2m/33ft 6in LOA) hit the water in 1993, the new look had definitely come of age and this model was a great success. The conventional modern accommodation with forecabin, spacious saloon, forward-facing chart table area and aft double cabin and heads is beautifully finished. Extensive gleaming joinery and blue upholstery are true to the classic Scandinavian look.

To get an owner's view, I asked Charles Price why he selected a Maxi 1000. He said: 'I was looking for a good-quality sailing boat around 10m which I could race if I wanted, but primarily as a quick, good-handling cruiser. I read reviews and looked at a number of boats and narrowed it down to a Maxi 1000 or a Westerly Storm. A friend had sailed Maxis for some time and was very impressed, so that helped.'

'She handles very well in heavy weather. She is a fin-keeler, inevitably more lively than a long keel. You need to get your sails balanced and make sure you reef in time, but otherwise there's no problem at all. There's very little weather helm, and I have yet to find conditions where she will not heave to, which is very useful when short-handed.'

When I asked if she had lived up to expectations, Charles replied:

'In a word, yes. I occasionally look at other boats at shows and so on, but have yet to find one that ticks any more boxes for me. I have decided to keep her until I need to downsize, so I have gradually been refitting/upgrading with new sails, a heating system, a cockpit enclosure, bowsprit etc.'

'Though she's built to sleep seven she's very comfortable for two couples over a prolonged period. The aft cabin is a good size and the forecabin ample too. One other great feature is good locker space, particularly in the cockpit with a huge sail locker and two very spacious lazarettes. She's just a really well-designed boat and fun to sail!'

David Williams, who enjoys cruising his Maxi 1000 as well as taking part in the increasingly popular two-handed races run by the Royal Southampton YC, is another satisfied owner. His previous boat was an X³/₄-Tonner and he changed to the Maxi five years ago because 'I had sailed on one and also knew one of the most successful owners in the JOG fleet who had three Maxis. It's an all-round boat that does everything: it can be a single-handed or a couples boat, or a long-distance cruiser.'

He has fitted a bowsprit to fly small and large asymmetrics, adding: 'The small sail is ballistic in its sweet spot but a nuisance if you have to run, as it is cut to fly on a spinnaker pole, so gybing is a big work-up. The larger asymmetric does not fly effectively below 150°, and despite being easy to gybe I don't think it pays unless you have a planing hull. So this year I'm

going back to a symmetric kite.'

Many ARC and Transquadra sailors come to the same conclusion. Unless a yacht planes, continuously gybing an asymmetric down a deep run can be a pain; while a good old-fashioned symmetric spinnaker can gobble up the miles with the wind almost dead astern. When asked if he would consider changing boats, David replies: 'Maybe. I would go down to a Maxi 999 and keep hold of my gear.'

An exceptional fast cruiser

As the millennium loomed, Petterson brought out the 10.5m/34ft 7in **Maxi 1050**. With a DLR of 167 and SA/disp of 18, this elegant and comfortable yacht has excellent performance. As with other more recent Maxis, this is combined with a high-quality finish, making the 1050 an exceptional fast cruiser. A bulbous fin keel puts the CG low and ensures good stability.

Maxi 1100: available second-hand from £95,000



Sailing Scenes

Maxi 1000: available second-hand from £47,500



Sailing Scenes



Maxi 1300: available second-hand from £162,500

Transatlantic voyages prove the point. In the 2009 ARC, the family-crewed 1050 called *Minimaxi* won Class F and came 7th overall out of 158 monohull cruising entries. She also won the prize for Best Performance by a Family Boat.

Loosely translated, the French skipper wrote about one squally night wherein 'we decided to play with the surrounding clouds. The first of these was no big deal, but the second was unreal. Ronan was on the helm, Laurent held on to the spinnaker sheet, the yacht's stem played torpedoes for minutes on end and our three-day-old speed record of 15.3 knots fell as *Minimax* vibrated from masthead to keel tip, hitting 17.3 knots'.

That must have been some ride, and proves once again how a well-built family production cruiser-racer can cross oceans at surprising speeds.

Another French owner, Eric Bompard, entered his Maxi 1050 *Boulinou* in the 2014/15 Transquadra race. This event, very popular in France although it is yet to attract much British interest, is open to amateur crews who are over 40 years old, sailing IRC-rated yachts up to around 40ft. There are separate classes for solo and two-handed crews and the race kicks off from two starts, one in Barcelona and the other in Saint-Nazaire. Stage one stops in Madeira then the combined fleets sail on to Martinique.

Eric's solo transatlantic trip took 17 days 16 hours and he won his division. Via another loose translation, he said that at one stage 'I made a magnificent tack of a bit over 1,000 miles under spinnaker on port at 155° to the wind. My arms and the halyard were well worn, but all went well. I limited breakages to just one



Maxi 1200: available from £150,000

ripped genoa. This was satisfying when I saw the problems some had. Boats adrift, shipwrecks... I wasn't there to experience that sort of thing!

'My boat's hull form gave me an advantage compared to some of my competitors.'

Eric beat a JPK 9.60 into second place and an A31 into third, both of these brands being dedicated racers compared to Eric's trusty Maxi 1050 fast cruiser.

The **Maxi 1100** (11m/36ft) that followed is very much a development of the 1050; elegant, beautifully finished and no slouch. Gary Heward says he bought a 2000 example, attracted by its build quality, pedigree, performance and reputation as a cruiser racer. He is another owner to enjoy double-handed racing with the RSYC, saying: 'I won offshore series in IRC class 2

last year. I also started racing single-handed with SORC in 2014. After the Solo RIOW, I took part in the solo Celtic challenge from Falmouth to Kinsale, then round to Dingle and a long leg back to Plymouth – 52 hours.

'In the *Yachting Monthly* Triangle event I was first in class 2 and second overall, beaten by a J/105. An X332 was our closest rival. It was a light weather race; wind more constantly above Force 4 would have suited us better.' When I asked what he likes about the boat, he replies: 'It's a real cruiser-racer – good accommodation, nimble and performs well, particularly upwind in strong winds. During the Triangle Race I was asked why we did so well with a full complement of crockery and the cockpit table onboard!'

Having owned boats ranging

from a Hunter Impala 28 to a Sigma 362, Matt and Jean Findley also went for a Maxi 1100. In addition to cruising, Matt entered the RSYC two-handed series, winning comfortably in a fleet of 30 yachts that included strong opposition from J/105s and J/110s.

With his son Mathew as crew he also won Class 1 in the two-handed *Yachting Monthly* Triangle race, all of which goes to prove that a well-designed quality Swedish cruiser can hold its own against sporty and spartan racer-cruisers, thereby offering the best of both worlds.

Nicely finished

After being built (briefly) by Najad when Nimbus ran into financial troubles, Maxi has now been taken over by the successful Delphia yard in Poland. Two models – the recent **Maxi 1300** and new **Maxi 1200** 40-footer – are currently available. Both are designed by Pelle Petterson, and the new 1200 has an attractive interior design from Tony Castro. Andy Horwood of the Maxi Owners Association (and owner of a Maxi 1100 that he cruises extensively from Hamble and races in the RSYC double-handed series) went to the 2015 Düsseldorf Boat Show to look at the first Delphia-built 1200.

'We were pleasantly surprised,' he says. 'Initial thoughts are that the new boat definitely has the "Maxi feel". It was nicely finished with thought to detail, albeit with a few teething issues you might expect in any new model.'

The construction methods follow the Maxi 'way'. Carbon reinforcements beef up the grid that takes loads from keel and rig, while the hull and deck are laminated in vinylester resin around a PVC core. Designer Pelle Petterson comments: 'The Maxi 1200 is meant to be very fast and very comfortable, elegant and easy to handle.'

She certainly looks the part, and all bodes well for the new UK dealer Russell Hodgson of Regatta Yachting Ltd, who says the new Maxi 1200 comes to Port Hamble in late July and makes its UK premiere at SIBS. The price looks attractive, so these new models have every chance of maintaining Maxi's enviable reputation for producing desirable fast cruisers.



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