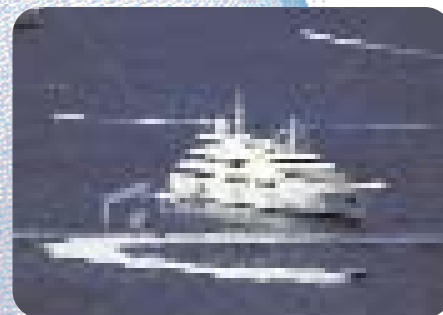
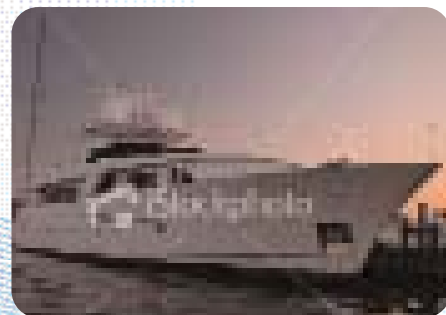




Mega-yachts

What better way for a billionaire playboy to go show-boating than in a multi-million-dollar mega-yacht? Especially when its only limiting factor is its owner's imagination...

Story by **Nat Barnes**



TIt used to be chauffeur-driven limousines, then second homes in the Caribbean, then private jets; today it appears that you're barely fit to rub shoulders with the super-rich unless you've got a mega-yacht.

According to yachting experts, there are now more than 6,000 yachts 80ft or longer around the world, double that of a decade ago. But in world of the mega-yacht, 80ft is barely big enough for your bathtub. To really stand out in the harbour, your yacht has to be at least 200ft long, with the real kings of the waves – such as Sheikh Mohammed of Dubai or Chelsea FC owner Roman Abramovich – boasting boats of more than 500ft. On the water, it seems, size really does matter.

In fact, when it comes to mega-yachts, all sense of reality tends to go out the port-hole very quickly. Even the most 'affordable' of these huge, floating palaces will put at least a \$150m dent in your bank balance. Moreover, they are fitted

out with virtually every millionaire's toy imaginable, from wine cellars and helipads to cinemas and private submarines. When money is no object, anything becomes possible – however outlandish.

Not surprisingly there can be intense rivalry out on the water, sometimes even in the building yard. When Paul Allen, the co-founder of Microsoft, ordered his yacht, the 416ft *Octopus* in 2003, his arch rival James Ellison, the American CEO of software firm Oracle, soon followed suit, planning his own yacht, the *Rising Sun*. Although the *Rising Sun* was originally planned to be 387ft long, Ellison later had the hull extended to 452ft, some allege simply to ensure his was the larger yacht.

Not that Paul Allen's *Octopus* is second rate. The hull is ice-classed, allowing him to explore the Arctic and Antarctic should he so wish. The ship has its own helicopter with a separate helipad for guests on another deck, while a 60ft submarine fits neatly within the bows of the hull. This



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submarine is capable of carrying up to eight people, can remain submerged for up to two weeks and shares the yacht's underbelly with a powerboat.

Octopus also has a permanent berth at the International Marina in Antibes in the south of France, which Allen only acquired by purchasing the existing boat in the berth (which he immediately sold). When *Octopus* is in dock there, however, so great is its power consumption that he has had to install his own three-phase electrical substation alongside to avoid tripping the fuses for the whole harbour!

'Sales of mega-yachts have rocketed in recent years and at the last count there was about 27km of mega-yachts [the combined length of all their hulls] currently being built around the world,' says Hugo Andreae, editor of *Motor Boat And Yachting* magazine. 'Despite their size, though, many of these mega-yachts also have shadow boats that follow them around, effectively as a floating garage for all their toys as it's simply too much to carry around with the main boat.'

But as impressive as Allen and Ellison's water-bound rivalry is, where mega-yachts are concerned, there is always something bigger and better just around the next bay.

In their case, that came in the form of the 524ft *Golden Star* owned by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum of Dubai. Also sporting helicopter pad and submarine, the \$300m *Golden Star* additionally has its own landing craft to ferry a complement of cars around the world, plus a hangar for light aircraft. Its interior is the work of designer Philippe Starck, and on-board features include a fully-equipped gym, squash court, cinema, theatre, swimming pool and spa. To put its length into perspective, the *Golden Star* is 60ft longer than a British Royal Navy Destroyer, hardly known for its dainty dimensions.

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But stratospheric though the eventual bill for your mega-yacht might be, that could well be the easiest part, according to expert Hugo Andreae. 'The biggest problem for these mega-yachts is finding someone to build it. For anything over 200ft long, you need a naval architect, interior designer and then you have to find a shipyard,' he says. 'There's such a shortage of build slots at shipyards worldwide that there's often a market in the trading of positions in the build queue!'

'The big bills don't stop once your mega-yacht is finished either,' continues Andreae. 'You'll have to spend around 10 per cent of the build costs each year just to keep your yacht in good order. Berthing costs, a full-time crew and fuel all add up. It will probably need a full service in a dry dock every two to three years and after a decade they tend to go out of fashion. Nobody wants a mega-yacht that's dated and slightly tatty. At that point the yacht either gets fully refitted or the owner sells it and buys a new one.'

Even the *Golden Star*, though, could soon become second best. Currently under construction at the Blohm & Voss shipbuilding works in Hamburg, Germany, is a mega-yacht called *Eclipse*, rumoured to belong to Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich. Seen as the Rolls-Royce of shipbuilders, Blohm & Voss has been producing ships and other large machines for 125 years (including numerous famous flying boats in World War II) and now builds warships for the German Navy and oil drilling equipment and ships for numerous commercial customers.

The *Eclipse*, due to be finished late this year, is set to become the world's largest private yacht at 550ft long. Although Blohm & Voss is sworn to secrecy over details of the *Eclipse*, it is believed to have two helicopter pads, a swimming pool, several hot tubs, a cinema and disco, three

TOP LEFT: IN THE SHIPYARD - THE *LADY MOURA* - BUILT BY GERMAN COMPANY BLOHM & VOSS

TOP MIDDLE: THE *KATALINA*, BY BLOHM & VOSS

TOP RIGHT: COMPUTER GENERATED DESIGN FOR THE *ATABEYKI* BY BLOHM & VOSS

OPPOSITE MAIN PICTURE: ONE OF ROMAN ABRAMOVICH'S THREE MEGA-YACHTS, *PELORUS*

OPPOSITE, LEFT TO RIGHT: SHEIKH MOHAMMED BIN RASHID AL MAKTUUM OF DUBAI AND ROMAN ABRAMOVICH

launch boats and the obligatory private submarine. With a crew of more than 50, it will also accommodate 24 people in six guest suites, five VIP suites and the owner's cabin. It will also be fitted with bulletproof glass, motion sensors and a missile detection system. The bill for the *Eclipse* is reckoned to be on the wrong side of \$400m.

Not that Abramovich will have to slum it while waiting for the *Eclipse* to be finished - he already owns three yachts, the *Ecstasy*, *Pelorus* and *Le Grand Bleu*. To put the size of the *Eclipse* into perspective, it will boast more than double the

gross tonnage of the already-substantial 377ft, 5,317 gross tonnage *Pelorus*. It's reported that when the 370ft *Le Grand Bleu* docked at Monaco in 2004, the singer Dame Shirley Bassey complained that it blocked the view from her Monte Carlo flat!

With all the mystery surrounding the new owner and full details of the *Eclipse*, you can be certain of one thing. Despite her huge price and size, she too will soon become eclipsed. In the world of mega-yachts, nobody remains in the number one slot for very long...



The world's largest mega-yachts

	Name	Length	Owner
1	Eclipse	550ft	tba (rumoured to be Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich)
2	Golden Star	524ft	Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum of Dubai
3	Prince Abdul Aziz	482ft	King Abdulah of Saudi Arabia
4	Al Salamah	456ft	Crown Prince Sultan of Saudi Arabia
5	Rising Sun	452ft	Larry Ellison (co-founder and CEO of Oracle)
6	Octopus	413ft	Paul Allen (co-founder of Microsoft)
7	Savarona	408ft	owned by Turkish Government but leased by Kahraman Sadikoglu (Turkish businessman and head of Dubai-based International Marine Contractors)
8	Alexander	400ft	Latsis family (Greek shipping tycoons)
9	Turama	381ft	Charter yacht
10	Atlantis II	380ft	Niarchos family (Greek shipping tycoons)