The superyacht industry continues to spawn ever larger motor and sailing vessels designed and built by shipyards scattered throughout the four corners of the globe. Why then, are large sportfishing yachts such a uniquely American phenomenon? In conducting an informal survey of large custom sportfishers that were launched in the last year, are in build or are new to the design board, we only found one built outside of the U.S.—although that lone Turkish project is among the biggest at 105 feet.

According to Michael Rybovich, who represents the third generation of one of sportfishing's legendary boat-building families, "It's for the same reason we Americans developed the SUV and corporate aircraft; we are still an adventurous culture, and if we're going to travel great distances, we're going to go in comfort and style."

Back in the mid-20th century, when Rybovich's father and uncles were helping to advance the design of the modern sportfishing vessel, most of the boats they built were less than half the length of the "yacht-fish" being launched today. What has led to such an exponential growth in size and volume of this genre?

"Though it would be convenient to blame the increasing size on ego or one-upsmanship, it really is about what works best," Rybovich says. "In the golden era of the sport from the thirties to the sixties, a dayboat in the thirty-six to forty-foot range was the most practical solution. All we had to do was clear the sea buoy out of Palm Beach Inlet and from there to The Bahamas Banks, we were in the most fertile of sportfishing grounds. In a typical program of today's sportsman in search of adequate billfish action, the destination can be thousands of miles from home. This requires a boat with comfortable long-term accommodations, significantly more refrigeration, far greater fuel and freshwater capacity, more onboard power generation and engines that will get the customer there fast. All of this results in a larger design envelope."

Recent advances in engine technology, combining increased horsepower with a compact footprint, have allowed sportfishing yacht designers and builders to give vessels in the 75- to 105-foot range similar performance to much smaller sportfishers. But the real design talent lies in keeping the larger sportfishers light and maneuverable enough to back down on a hooked fish and follow one as it races through the sea—especially as many of the custom builders still are handcrafting these vessels from wood, utilizing a cold-molded construction process.

"The boats are built light enough that they are still nimble," says Roy Merritt of Merritt's Boat & Engine Works, another storied yard. "It does all it's supposed to do."

Here is a look at the latest large, luxurious "cruiser/contender" sportfishing yachts.

**RECENT LAUNCHES**

Stuart, Florida, known as the "Sailfish Capital of the World," is home to several of the major builders in the large custom sportfisher market. This summer, one of these, Jim Smith Boats, launched the biggest U.S. sportfisher built with cold-molded construction to date—the 105-foot Marlena. Powered by twin 2,600-hp MTU 16V 2000 M94s, she is capable of a top speed approaching 40 knots, while her fuel
capacity of 3,300 gallons and draft of just five feet, seven inches will let her head just about anywhere in search of fish or adventure.

Topped by a hardtop-sheltered "skybridge" and an enclosed flybridge, Marlena has a five-stateroom/five-head layout with an interior design by Elizabeth Dalian, whose work also can be seen aboard the 281-foot superyacht Cakewalk. Cherry raised paneling provides a rich back-drop to the luxurious living spaces made possible by the yacht's LOA and generous 25-foot beam.

The 105-footer combines large-yacht systems such as a Seakeeper M26000 Gyro stabilizer with the serious sportfisher outfitting that is part of the Jim Smith tradition. A tuna door is cut into the teak transom, and there's a commercial ice maker waiting to receive the owner's fresh-caught sushi (See the full feature in this issue, page 80).

Another Stuart builder, American Custom Yachts (ACY), delivered a speedy 90-footer under the name C'est La Vie in April. Built with lightweight cold-molded construction, this yacht has twin 4,600-hp 16V MTU 4000 series engines nested in a custom aluminum engine bed fabricated over the keel, stringers and chine. The yard has clocked her at over 48 knots.

"By significantly increasing the horsepower and incorporating V-drive propulsion, along with independent rudder controls and larger props, C'est La Vie is able to achieve speed and performance comparable to our smaller yachts," says Dominick LaCombe, ACY President.

C'est La Vie has six staterooms and five heads encompassed in a traditional, teak-lined interior. The main-deck layout places the galley aft, overlooking the cockpit, so a crewmember fixing lunch also can keep an eye on the bait. Outside, the large teak mezzanine deck is complete with drop-down TV, barbecue grill and overhead light boxes that double as air-conditioning ducts.

Moving to the Gulf Coast, Sea Force IX in Palmetto, Florida, recently delivered a new 94.5 Sky Bridge Performance Sport Fishing yacht featuring a full-beam master suite and three ensuite guest staterooms in a custom interior by Destry Darr Designs. Entertainment areas abound on this elegant sportfisher, including the enclosed bridge deck, which combines the helm area and skylounge; the main-deck salon and galley, and the outdoor "leisure deck" overlooking the tournament-ready cockpit.

Sea Force IX's yachts are built in composite with blended vinylester resin and Divinycell structural foam core, utilizing what the company terms "monolithic" construction technique: The stringer grid system, hull-side stiffeners, stem reinforcement and structural bulkheads all are bonded to the superstructure, yielding a lightweight yet strong and seaworthy hull. Equipped with twin MTU 16V 2000 M94s, the yacht's top speed is 36 knots.

"Maneuverability is our key," Sea Force IX President Ron Rookstool says. "We had a guy tell us [our yachts] turned on a dime and gave you nine cents change. And they back up faster than you can crank a reel."

North Carolina, known for its rough seas and sudden storms off the coast, is also a well-known producer of large sportfishing yachts. Here is where the sweet, wave-dampening "Carolina flare" hull shape was born.

In the spring, Carolina builder Jarett Bay Boatworks delivered
its largest custom sportfisher yet, the 77-foot Blank Check. Built for the Doyle family of experienced tournament anglers, she is constructed of cold-molded fir and okoume wood with a fiberglass skin. Prop tunnels allow for a shallower prop angle, giving her a draft of five feet, eight inches, while the ubiquitous MTU 16V 2000s power her to a top speed of 41 knots.

Blank Check's cockpit measures 225 square feet, and is equipped with all the latest angling equipment, including two pressurized livewells. A mezzanine deck with a large overhang for shade overlooks the fishing arena. The salon door ushers guests into an elegant inner sanctum trimmed in high-gloss cherry veneers. The 77-footer's interior layout encompasses five staterooms and six heads, an impressive space-planning feat.

"The milestone of building our largest hull and working with such a discerning owner has given rise to the next benchmark in custom sportfish construction," says Jarrett Bay President Randy Ramsey.

In our March 2012 issue, we showed a rendering of a new sportfisher under construction at Bayliss Boatworks, another Carolina builder: the 80-foot Dream Time. The yacht, which was delivered to her owners in November 2012, features a custom interior clad in teak veneers, all crafted from the same log. The guest accommodations include a master stateroom and two VIPs, along with a separate captain's cabin and a double bunkroom for the crew.

Dream Time is outfitted for long-range adventures with two ASEA shore power converters, an 1,800 gallon-per-day watermaker, two Eskimo 600-pound-per-day icemakers and a Brownie's dive compressor. Of special note is the bridge, which features four 21-inch KEP monitors, four refrigerator/freezer compartments, and seating for 12.

IN BUILD OR ON PAPER
Bayliss will take another step up in LOA with its next project, the 84-foot Orion, which is nearing completion at the Wanchese, North Carolina, yard. Her hull, designed in collaboration with Robert Ullberg, was built utilizing the shipyard's hallmark triple-plank cold-molded construction process. Top speed is projected to be 40 knots with twin MTU 16V 2000s. The 84-footer has five staterooms, including Bayliss' first full-beam master suite, which will include a king berth, a six-foot walk-in closet, a sofa and an office area.

Ullberg also had input into the hull design of the new Merritt 86, a highly successful sportfisher that is one of three models now available from Merritt's Boat & Engine Works in Pompano Beach, Florida. Roy Merritt just introduced a version of the yacht with a further modification—an extended mezzanine deck. A large sofa with a return and a cocktail table to starboard make this an inviting alfresco dining area, as well as a great place to watch the action.

"We've added three more feet to the mezzanine than we've done in the past," Merritt says. "It gets you out in the sun a little bit more, and it makes a lounge." With twin 2,800-hp Caterpillars or twin 2,600-hp MTU engines, the 86-foot yacht will top out at around 38 to 39 knots, according to Merritt.

A fourth generation of the Rybovich family recently joined Michael Rybovich & Sons when Dusty Rybovich went to work with his father at the Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, yard. Their next project is a cold-molded 86-footer that combines the Rybovich legacy of boat-building know-how with cutting-edge equipment and propulsion (you guessed it: MTU 16V 2000s).

The new 86 will accommodate eight to 10 guests in four suites, including a king-berth master, cleverly fit together like a jigsaw puzzle on the lower deck. The main deck layout places the salon forward and a large galley with center island aft. The cockpit is all business, overlooked by a substantial mezzanine.

A projected top speed of 45 knots, combined with a draft of just five feet, should make this a popular vessel both for tournament anglers and those bound for The Bahamas and other shallow fishing grounds.
Viking Yachts of New Gretna, New Jersey—dominant player in the production composite sportfisher market—recently unveiled plans for a new 92 Convertible. It is available in both Open and Enclosed Bridge configurations; the first Viking 92, an Enclosed Bridge version, is scheduled to debut at the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show in 2014.

Combining sportfishing savvy with superyacht luxury, the 92 EB has two helm stations on the bridge deck—one in the pilothouse, which also encompasses a large skylounge, and the second, an exterior helm, located aft so that the captain can react to the fishing action in the cockpit and beyond.

The main deck also has an unusual layout incorporating a galley with bar seating and a dining table for eight, located forward of a spacious salon. The salon door opens to an outdoor aft deck dining area and, a few steps down, a large mezzanine deck. This abundance of living and entertaining spaces should give the Viking 92 a wide audience of both anglers and cruising yachtmen.

Following a highly confidential build project delivered to a Russian client (rumor has it his last name starts with an ‘A’), Bob Roscioli has a new 92-foot Donzi by Roscioli Design modeled in collaboration with Ward Setzer on the drawing board at Roscioli Yachting Center in Fort Lauderdale. She will be the ‘complete’ traditional sportfisher, with a fully custom tournament cockpit and luxury interior.

The R-92 will be built of cored fiberglass via Roscioli’s signature “total beam” construction process, which incorporates advanced resin infusion techniques, resulting in a light, yet strong hull. Top speed with the ubiquitous MTU 16V 2000s is projected to be over 40 knots.

Designed with this performance in mind, the boat will feature a fume-free underwater exhaust system that yields less exhaust back-pressure than traditional mufflers, and a Seatorque Shaft System, which minimizes vibration, drag and friction. A Seakeeper Gyro and Naiad interceptors will help to ensure an ultra-smooth ride.

At what point does a yacht stop being a sportfisher and instead becomes a superyacht with a fishing cockpit? Our lone Turkish vessel, the Logos Marine 105 SF, might be a candidate. Developed on the same platform as the 114-foot Seya, which the shipyard delivered in 2008, the new 105 also will be built of cold-molded, laminated epoxy wood with a fiberglass/epoxy skin.

“The main differences between the 105 and the 114 are an enclosed flybridge instead of an open [bridge], double screw instead of triple screw, and some other design touches from Greg Marshall,” says Logos Marine founder Cem Tuncyurek.

The 105’s main deck is all about entertaining, featuring a huge salon with galley and separate dining room forward, as well as an extensive aft deck with outdoor dining area. The galley is located on the lower deck, alongside two double crew bunkrooms. Forward, and separated from the crew area by the engine room, up to 10 guests may be accommodated in a full-beam master stateroom, VIP and two twin staterooms with Pullman berths, all with ensuite heads.

With twin Caterpillar C32 ACERT diesels, the Logos Marine 105 is projected to have a top speed of 25 knots and a cruising speed of 23. She will be built to RINA pleasure certification standards.

BIGGER SPORTFISHERS?

With Logos Marine’s 114-foot Seya already setting a precedent, it’s easy to imagine the builders featured here may be working on even larger sportfishing yacht projects in the near future.

"Could 110- to 120-footers be the next trend?" asks John Bayliss.
"It’s hard to say, but I don’t think so in the near future. We would have to find different power sources, for one."