

Uniquely Amel—The new 55



The new Amel 55 is a true Amel design that has been imbued with new levels of luxury and style by George Day



The morning we sailed the new Amel 55 off Newport, RI in Narragansett Bay, the breeze was moderate and blowing from the north. So, once we dropped the mooring lines in Brenton Cove and motored

clear of the mooring field, we decided to head north, into the breeze, since the wind seemed much lighter at the mouth of the Bay.

The new 55 handled easily under power and we even used the bow thruster to help us make some tight

turns in the mooring field. The engine room is right below the center cockpit and accessed via a large trap door that forms the cockpit sole. This is a huge space that we explored prior to setting off. Two adults can fit in the engine room and work together on repairs.





The five cylinder Volvo engine sits in the center and is accessible on both sides so routine maintenance is simple. The hatch is large enough so the engine itself can be hoisted out without modifying any furniture. The Onan genset is mounted to port next to the engine and outboard of that is the main AC/heating unit. The water maker is mounted on the forward engine room bulkhead. Everything is accessible and well thought out. If you didn't know better, the engine room would make you think you were aboard a much larger mega yacht.

With the hatch closed and the engine running at 2000 rpm, the noise and vibration were minimal. The propeller is fitted to the aft end of the cruising fin keel and 10 feet from the rudder aft so there is very little prop wash as you steer the boat. This ingenious prop arrangement means the prop is always protected from flotsam.

We motored into the bay and rolled out the in-mast furling mainsail and then the mizzen. Like all Amels, the 55 is only available as a ketch. The in-mast furling systems use electric winches to deploy and furl the sails as the unique outhaul winches on the booms work in synch with the motors that turn the furling mandrels inside the masts. Deploying and furling the two sails is accomplished with remote switches mounted at the helm.

With the main and mizzen deployed and sheeted home hard on the wind, we rolled out the genoa with the Reckmann electric furling system and soon we were sailing smartly. For a big boat with a fairly short split rig, the 55 responded nicely to the breeze and accelerated pleasantly.

We spent some time tweaking the sails to get the best shape for upwind sailing and once we had her settled into the groove found that the 55 was happy sailing upwind at about 32 degrees to the apparent wind. You could pinch her up to 28 degrees if you needed to but the optimum angle was 32. As for speed, in the 10 knots of true wind we were sailing upwind at 6.5 knots. Not bad.

The 55 is no lightweight speedster. The boat's hull has a very full yet modern form with a slightly raked bow and transom and pleasantly traditional sheerline. The full sections fore and aft provide a lot of interior volume that enhances the accommodations. Plus, the hull shape gives the boat an easy motion in waves.

Under the water,

the keel is a moderate cruising fin with a lead bulb while the rudder is fitted to a full depth skeg for protection from underwater collisions. The idea behind the underwater appendages is to allow the boat to dry out on an old fashioned tidal grid without damaging the rudder or keel.

North of the Newport Bridge, we threw the 55 through a series of tacks and found that she carried her way through the eye of the wind and settled onto the new tack easily and without fuss. Having electric winches on the genoa sheets made this very easy.

The 55 is truly set up for a cruising couple who want to voyage on their own without crew. All lines and sheets can be controlled from the helm and everything is electrified for ease of handling. While there are a lot of systems to maintain in the sailing rig, they do make handling a boat of this size and displacement possible for two people.

When it was time to head back to Newport, we fell off the wind and trimmed for a power reach. Even though the apparent wind fell to below 10 knots the 55 still slipped along very nicely. The helm was always completely balanced and under the control of the autopilot the boat steered straight and true. With an asymmetrical reacher and a mizzen



staysail, we could have added a knot or two to our speed.

Ketch rigs are uncommon these days since they represent a lot of extra cost initially and are less efficient sailing hard on the wind than sloops. Yet, for true cruisers, sailing hard on the wind is usually frowned upon and only attempted under duress. Reaching and running are the angles of choice and a ketch excels at these.

And, ketches are excellent in heavy weather. The old tactic of sailing under “jib and jigger”—headsail and mizzen with no mainsail—offers an easily balanced rig that will function well in very strong winds. Plus, the 55 is fitted with a fore staysail on a Reckmann furling system that will be your storm jib when needed.

The helm in the cockpit is command central for the 55 as it is for all Amels. A low windshield wraps around the front of the cockpit and then there can either be a hard top overhead or the standard “cabriolet” soft dodger that

can be folded away in good weather. Both versions offer great protection from wind and rain so standing watch at the helm is never an uncomfortable experience.

With all sail controls and navigation instruments right at the helm a lone watchstander can maintain control of sail trim, navigation and keep an eye out for ships without leaving the comfort of the large helm seat. Visibility from the helm is excellent whether scanning the horizon for ships or parking the boat in a marina slip.

We sailed back into Brenton Cove and rolled up the sails with the push of buttons. One person can do this easily. We picked up the mooring without trouble and got the 55 put to bed. We came away from our two hour test sail impressed with how easy the 55 is to handle and sail. The systems are well thought out, the winches in the right places and the controls all handy to the helmsman.

The boat sails well and will really

shine when the wind is blowing and the seas getting up. With the split rig and staysail, you have many sail combinations to settle the boat into the right groove. And with a mizzen staysail and a reacher, you will be able to make really excellent daily runs in the trade winds. The 55 is a boat with long legs just begging to head over the horizon.

LIVING ABOARD

Amel was founded by Henri Amel and the company has long been under the founder’s influence. An experienced cruiser, Amel set out to build what he envisioned was the most practical cruising boat for a couple.

In the early process, he came up with some idiosyncratic design ideas and some signature features. The Amel Maramu and Super Maramu made the company’s international reputation. And it also earned the designs the nickname of being the “Citroens” of cruising yachts, meaning that they





were uniquely French, imbued with interesting engineering concepts and had innovations that were not widely embraced by other builders.

The early boats were based on the notion that form must follow function and in that compromise some fine finish and yacht styling was lost. The rigs, hull construction and systems were, however, superb and respected by experienced cruising folk. The engine room, rudder design, electric power rig and helm design are all tributes to this thinking.

Henri Amel passed away some years ago and his company under new management has gone through something of a revolution. The all new 55 and the larger 64 are the fruits of this change. When you step below the 55 for the first time—particularly if you have sailed the older Maramus—your jaw will drop.

Nothing significant has really changed but everything is different. The extremely high finish level of the joinery is now yacht style and elegant. The placement of lights and the choices of fabrics are appropriate and stylish.

The galley is still an alley to port at the foot of the companion stairs and is still one of the best sea-going galleys ever designed. But now it shines with fine fittings, beautifully made cabinets, modern appliances and handsome counter tops. There is ample storage and plenty of counter space for fine cooking.

But don't be fooled completely. Just as in the past, when you open the aft galley lockers you will find all of the control boxes for the electronics built into the helmstation, right where you can get to them for maintenance and repair. The original Amel concepts are still there; they have been given a new look and a new style.

The 55 we sailed was the two cabin version with two double cabins of relatively equal size and comfort. There is also a three cabin version in which the large space for the master cabin is split into two smaller cabins.

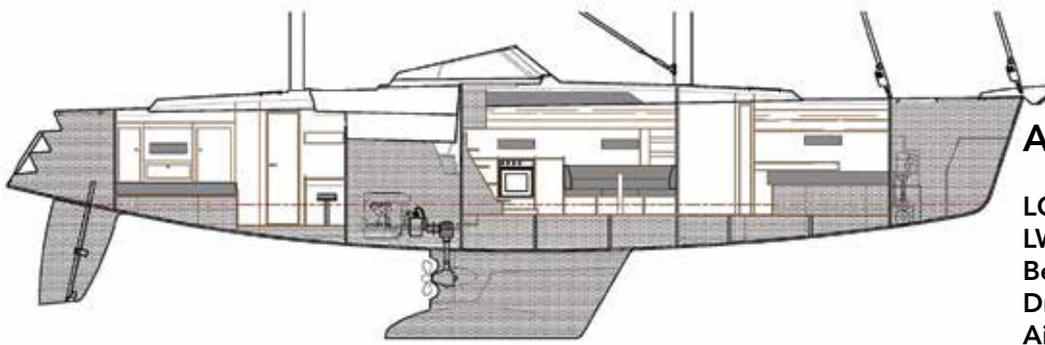
The after cabin will be the owner's stateroom and is lushly appointed. It is neatly divided with a couple in mind—each can have their own hanging and storage lockers, their own drawers and their own vanity desk. The head is

huge and has a separate shower.

Going forward through the passageway, the "day head" is to starboard. In the passageway there is a narrow sea berth that is perfectly placed for the off watch while offshore. The bunk is near the boat's center of gravity so will have the least motion in a seaway. It is close enough to the companionway so the on watch and off watch can communicate. And it is small enough so you won't roll around once the lee cloth has been rigged.

The saloon has the galley to port, the chart table to starboard—also within earshot of the helm—the large dinette to port with seats for six and a bench settee to starboard. It is interesting to note that you are never out of reach of a hand hold, a counter edge or something to brace a hip against as you move through the saloon. At sea, you will be grateful for this seemingly small detail.

The forward cabin as noted is just slightly less luxurious than the after cabin but won't encourage guests to depart before the last second of their invited stay. There is a centerline double berth, plenty of storage and a large head.



Amel 55

LOA	56'8"
LWL	48'6"
Beam	16'4"
Draft	7'3"
Air draft	69'9"
Displ. (light)	47,400 lbs.
Displ. (max)	52,910 lbs.
Water	212 gals.
Diesel	237 gals.
Sail area	1,614 lbs.
Engine	Volvo diesel



In the new 55, function is still a vital ingredient in the design's formula. But, a healthy dash of comfort, luxury and style have been added and that makes all the difference. The new

Amel 55 compares very favorably to any cruising boat in the luxury class and brings to the party all of the unique and well thought out attributes that make an Amel an Amel. **BWS**

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