Billy Black

FRERS FLYER

By Tom Linskey

A performance hull and fins, plenty of sail, and wide beam give the Hylas 54 boatspeed and belowdeck space. The rest—whether the boat is a liveaboard you can live with—is in the details

How far should a 54-foot performance cruiser push the tradeoffs of the speed-versus-comfort equation in search of speed? One reasonable, cruisable set of performance-cruising boat parameters might be: Fast enough to knock off 170- to 190-mile 24-hour runs on an off-wind bluewater passage, and fast enough to uphold an owner's honor in the occasional race (whether under a handicap system or in a pick-up Sunday afternoon race back to the harbor). At the same time, a performance-cruising boat in this size range shouldn't turn scary-fast (tippy, temperamental, breakable) in a breeze or leave comfortable, livable accommodations behind in the greed for boatspeed.

The German Frers–designed Hylas 54, a team effort by Taiwan boatbuilder Queen Long and Marblehead, Massachusetts, importer Hylas Offshore Yachts, sails a careful line between the often contradictory ideals of performance (speed) and cruising (comfort). Frers has given the boat up-to-speed fins (a moderate-length bulb keel of moderate configuration and a skeg-hung rudder) and a hull body that is neither skimming dish nor deep-sea tanker. For sail-carrying power the Hylas 54's wide beam (15 feet, 9 inches) is maintained nearly all the way aft (the transom is almost 12 feet wide). The sailplan is generous-

ly sized, reflecting the reality that most offshore cruising routes are off the wind and that a high percentage of ocean, as well as coastal, sailing takes place in winds under 15 knots.

Under working sail (mainsail and 135 percent genoa) the Hylas 54 moves out quickly—8.8 knots, beam-reaching in 10-to-12-knot winds—and the boat's motion in a seaway is settled, not skittish. Wide beam, coupled with the fact that designer Frers has kept the freeboard and cabinhouse characteristically low, means that when you're seated in the boat's center cockpit the sensation is that of being connected to the boat instead of perched and riding high. The stainless-steel fuel and water tanks, which, when their 500-gallon capacity is full, weigh over 4,000 pounds, are located under the cabin sole, low and close to the centerline rather than high and outboard in the settee and bunk furniture, thus adding to the boat's stability and low rotation.

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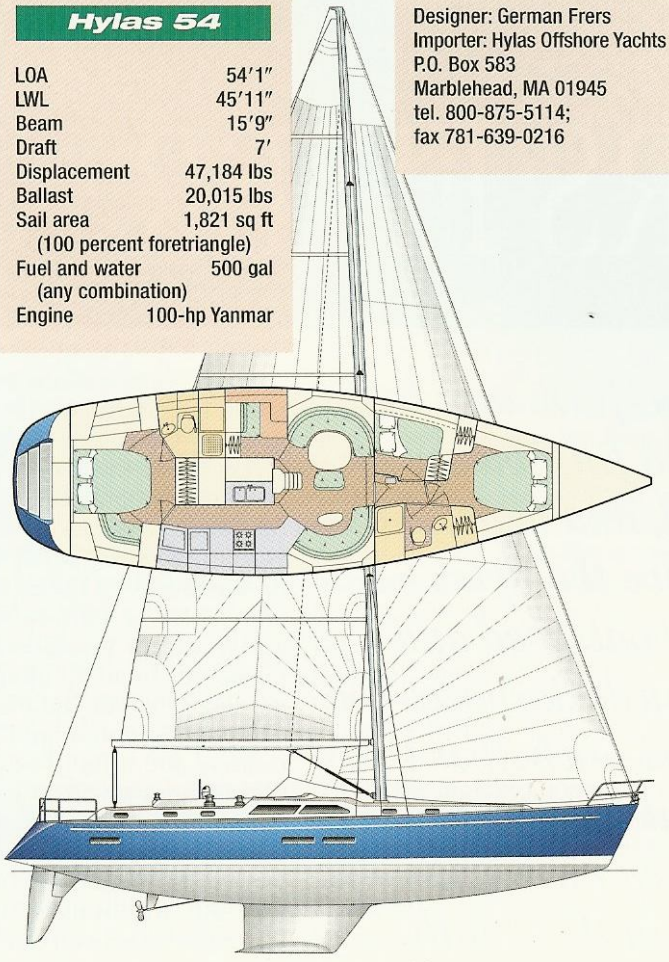
Lots of "glass" in the Hylas 54's dodger means a clear view forward from the wheel

Hylas 54

LOA	54'1"
LWL	45'11"
Beam	15'9"
Draft	7'
Displacement	47,184 lbs
Ballast	20,015 lbs
Sail area (100 percent foretriangle)	1,821 sq ft
Fuel and water (any combination)	500 gal
Engine	100-hp Yanmar

Designer: German Frers
Importer: Hylas Offshore Yachts
P.O. Box 583
Marblehead, MA 01945
tel. 800-875-5114;
fax 781-639-0216



The Hylas 54's construction tends toward the durable side of high-tech; collision protection has been given a higher priority than weightsaving. The hull, for example, is a solid vinylester laminate reinforced with, for impact resistance, a shock-absorbing layer of Twaron (a Kevlar-like aramid fiber that has twice the strength of conventional fiberglass). The deck laminate is 3/4-inch balsa core and vinylester; for increased tensile strength in high-load areas, such as around winches and anchor windlass, a solid, Twaron-reinforced laminate is used instead of balsa.

A considerable amount—58 percent—of the Hylas 54's 47,184-pound displacement is devoted to the cruising side of performance cruising. The boat has an uncommon quantity of custom metalwork, a full teak interi-

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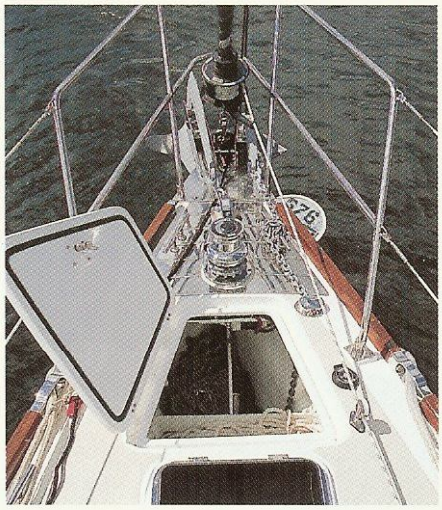

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Anchor detail: The Hylas 54 features twin bow rollers and a jumbo-size rode locker

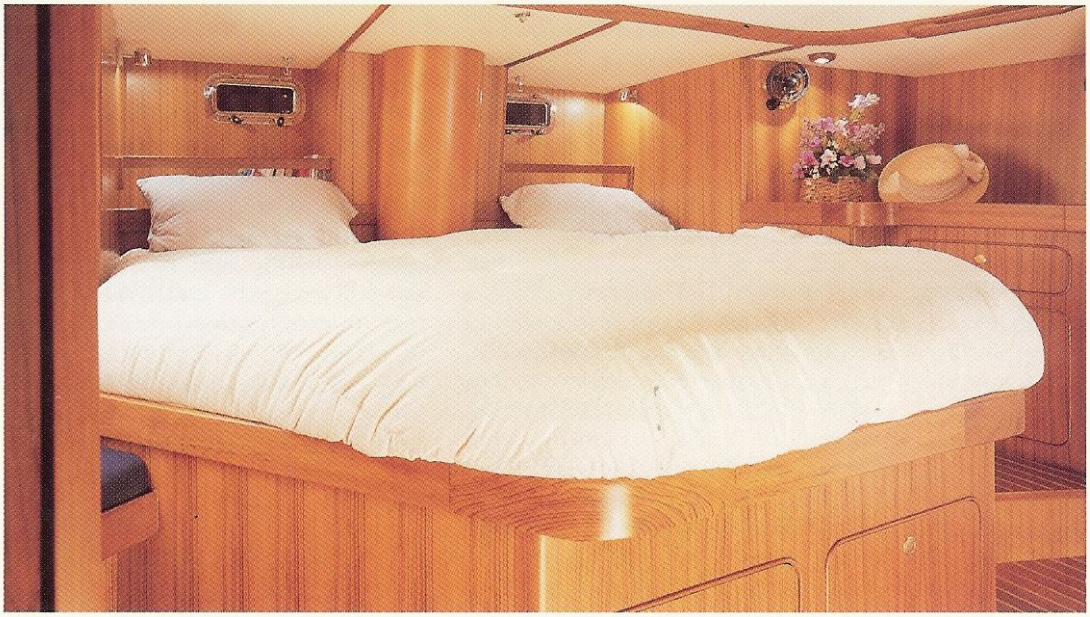
or that features floorboards, doors, and drawers of solid wood (instead of plywood), the requisite electrical and mechanical systems (400-amp ship's service battery bank, plus isolated engine-starting and windlass battery, for example), and the infrastructure for more. Options include a 150-amp alternator, genset, air-conditioning, icemaker, trash compactor, and just about everything else you could think of to make tropical or temperate liveaboard life comfortable.

More than a collection of hand-rubbed wood and machinery, the Hylas's strength may be the sum of its parts: the boat is a liveaboard cruiser that promises to be truly livable, mainly because so many of the details present in a boat of this size and complexity have been studied and worked out. In short, the Hylas 54 is a progression, not a one-off or a first-time foray.

Because of lower labor costs and the (increasingly) favorable exchange rate with Asia, the Hylas 54 offers U.S. buyers a generous amount of performance-cruising boat for the buck

"I've been compiling a list of our customers' wants for the past eight years," says Dick Jachney, president of Hylas Offshore as well as father-in-charge of the Jachneys' family-owned and -operated Caribbean Yacht Charters. "We've taken what we think are the best of everyone's ideas and tried to incorporate them in the 54." When Jachney says "everyone" he means charter customers and Hylas owners alike; with the Hylas line (which began with the 44, 45, and 51, and currently offers the 46, 49, and 54) in both Caribbean bareboat service and Stateside slips, that's an active, opinionated database from which to draw. The result, apparent everywhere in the Hylas 54, is clever, thoughtful touches and a commitment, in terms of space and luxury appointments, to giving people what they've asked for.

The galley, for example, runs a whopping 12 feet fore-and-aft, providing enough countertop space for concurrent sashimi-, salad-, and soup-making operations (and don't forget the pantry and sink island opposite, an urban spacemaking solution). The aft master stateroom, using every inch of the transom's 12-foot beam, boasts: an 80-inch-wide, on-centerline king-size berth; four opening ports and a 2-foot-square Lexan-and-stainless-steel opening hatch; 20 clothes drawers (or lockers, your choice); and a near-walk-in hanging locker. The wealth of space and accoutrements is similar in the forward stateroom (a double berth, 18 lockers and/or drawers, two hanging lockers) and in the midships port stateroom (a queen-size berth, an opening hatch, two opening ports, a hanging locker). The main saloon is no slouch, either; 6-foot, 11-inch headroom, a dinette area that handles nine for drinks and six or seven for dinner. The Hylas 54 is a big boat that can handle big people; there's enough elbows-flying bustle room belowdeck to have a couple of your son's buddies, who are up for varsity football, along for the week and not get run down at mealtime.



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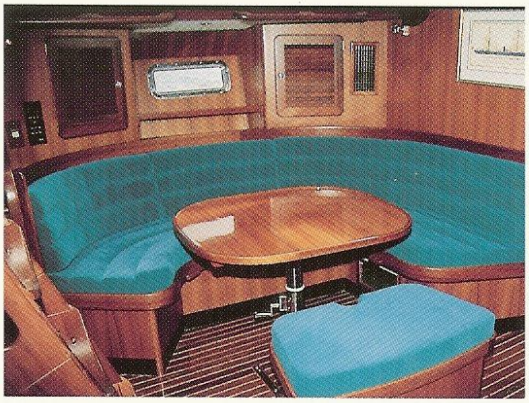
The Hylas 54's near-12-foot-wide transom means an expansive aft owner's stateroom

The other result of Jachney's research are the nice touches, the "Gee, why didn't I



The Hylas 54's dinette handles seven for dinner and converts to a double berth

think of that?" details. A sampling: The lower lips of all opening ports are angled down 54 degrees to shed water, even when the boat is heeled; no unwelcome puddle of dew or spray will dump into your lap when undogging ports. The deck hatches are lightweight and clean (a two-piece mold imparts both panel stiffness and a finished underside to the hatch lid) and feature durable, recessed gasketing, two-way hydraulic arms that automatically keep the hatch lid up when opened and exert downward pressure when closed, and adjustable-tension, stainless-steel lift rings. The midships boarding ladder, overbuilt in stainless steel, features a clever action—double-fold-down for use and swing-up-and-collapse for stowage; it becomes a sturdy, handrail section of the lifelines. There is a similarly cleverly done slide-up, fold-down, oversize table and two swing-up seat backrests in the cockpit, but perhaps the biggest concentration of good ideas is in and around the swimstep transom.

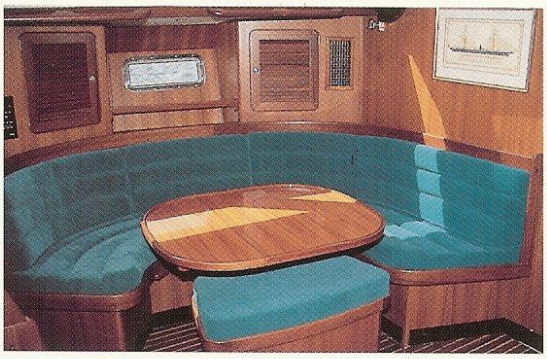
The middle section of the teak-planked steps swings up to reveal a large-size locker—a thoughtful use of the wide transom's stowage space. The swimstep locker is big enough to accommodate a dive compressor, scuba tanks, and a roll-up inflatable—or a lot of other such wet-and-ready gear. The compartment has its own bilgepump (of course), and a light automatically goes on (makes sense) when the locker's swimstep lid is opened. The transom also features well-placed stainless-steel handgrips by which snorkelers (or a man overboard) can pull themselves aboard via the swim ladder. Finally, there's more stainless-steel detailing—a bump strip protects the edge of the transom against inevitable hard knocks from dinghies and docks, and the flagpole socket and the horseshoe life-ring holders are built into the lifeline stanchions. You get the picture—someone's put a lot of think-through into everything.

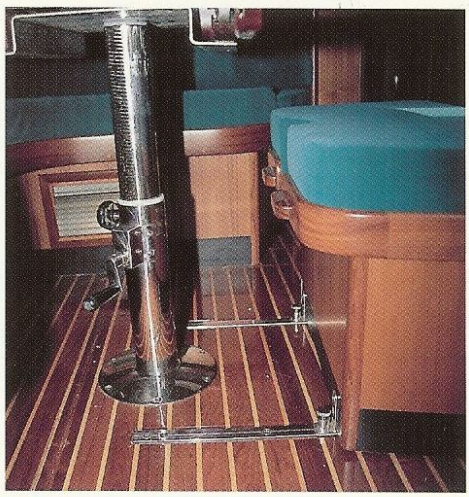
The bigger picture is that the Hylas 54 is big and modern and fast, a progression in design and construction from a builder and an importer who have been working together for 14 years. As a final enticement to customers, Jachney and builder Queen Long will build what comes close to a custom boat; within the confines of the 54's hull and deck mold, every bulkhead can be moved, just about any arrangement plan will be considered. A raised-saloon version of the 54 will be available soon.

As of the end of this year, the sail-away price for the Hylas 54 is $495,000. While that's no small chunk of stock portfolio to cash in, the whistle of surprise you're likely to hear from people shopping new 50-foot-plus luxury cruisers is caused by the fact that the figure is one or several hundred thousand dollars lower than similar-length and -purpose boats. Because of lower labor costs and the (increasingly) favorable exchange rate with Asia, the Hylas 54 offers U.S. buyers a generous amount of performance-cruising boat for the buck.

Of course, along with this 54-footer's standard equipment list, similar to the rest of its ultimate-cruising-boat competitors in the market, comes a host of options you probably should not (and may not be able to) resist, such as: Lewmar 66 electric winches ($10,300); Selden Mast electric in-mast mainsail furling spars and system ($26,500); an Onan 8-kilowatt genset ($11,500); air-conditioning ($11,800); Awlgripped hull ($6,700); ultrasuede interior ($2,900); cockpit dodger and bimini enclosure ($5,300).

The old saying about the devil being in the details? That particular





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Sliding on recessed tracks (above), the dinette seat can be moved under the table for sailing, out for dining

folk wisdom applies to big boats, but it does not apply to the Hylas 54; the boat's details are well executed. Another old saw—Know thyself—may be more apropos when considering this boat, or any custom or semicustom performance-cruising boat in this size range. With so many options up to you, from deciding between bulkheads or pass-throughs, casting your fate with systems that are manual, electric, hydraulic, or a combination, or simply choosing between drawers or lockers, it's the options you opt for that will make the boat you're going to own into your own boat.

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