LOOK WHO STOLE THE FUTURE

Bill Springer salutes the “disrupters” — boatbuilders and designers who dare to be different and still make it work.
At first glance, Dashew’s rugged, raw aluminium cruising yachts couldn’t be more
different than Peter Johnstone’s all-carbon fliers (see overleaf). But looks don’t
tell the whole story: Dashew and Johnstone are cut from the same cloth. Both
started in the boat business by building boats for themselves; both have strong,
and in some cases controversial, opinions about what makes an ideal yacht. Most
importantly, both continue to flout convention with disruptive design.

To Dashew, however, his designs aren’t an attempt to upset the status quo.
Rather, they just make sense. “Many hundreds of thousands of sea miles have
taught us one immutable fact,” says Dashew, referring to himself and wife Linda,
with whom he has been sailing for more than 40 years. “You have to be mentally
and physically comfortable at sea. Otherwise, excuses keep coming up
to avoid leaving, and the dream of distant adventure turns into another
marina. So what does it take to make the dream a reality? This starts
with heavy weather safety, and the ability to recover capsizes. Next is
the ability to average 230 nautical miles a day – the magic number that,
combined with a basic understanding of weather, keeps you safe and
comfortable,” he says.

How do you achieve this? It’s simple, continues Dashew. “A yacht optimised
to cross oceans will have a modest beam, relatively fine bows and stern for
an easy ride in head seas and when running at speed, and an interior that
concentrates living and working areas close to the motion centre. It will also
have draught in the area of 1.5 metres, watertight bulkheads, coffer dams around
the stabilisers, plenty of machinery access and an electrical system that does not
require a genset running 24 hours a day.”

Dashew first made waves by designing and building a purposeful offshore
cruising sailboat that he and Linda could take around the world, which led to
him designing a series of sailboats – and then motor yachts – that have earned
an almost fanatical following. He brooks no compromise in the design of his
yachts. If it can’t cross an ocean safely, it doesn’t get built. “We’ve always designed
and built boats according to a few simple principles that matter to
offshore cruisers,” he says.

“Safety and self-sufficiency have always been paramount.
So every boat we’ve built has been designed to be able to sustain a
hard grounding at full speed
with minimal damage. We’ve
also adhered to the rule that safety
depends on superior steering
control, stability and the ability
to handle rough weather.”

These rules apply equally to his sailboat designs and the new
breed of FPBs (functional power
boats) built at New Zealand’s
Circa Marine. The whole range,
running from 19.5 to 35 metres,
features the trademark narrow,
bare aluminium hull. “What gives
us the biggest thrill is the fact
that, for the most part, our yachts
spend a majority of their lives
crossing oceans and at anchor,
rather than sitting in marinas,”
he says. “And of the sailboats for
which we have licence, the average
is something like 57,000 miles
covered for each, with numerous
circumnavigations.”