



# Tri just a Little Bit Harder

Image: © John Shuttleworth Yacht Design Ltd



## *A Conversation with owner Anto Marden*

**By Tork Buckley**

McConaghy Boats Zuhai was the unexpected surprise of my Chinese trip last year. Following trips from Australia to Zuhai I found a vast Aussie-owned yacht factory in the region. There amongst foil moths, match racers, carbon parts and mini maxi *Alfa Romeo's* new hull was an unusual 41-metre motor Trimaran in build. The owner is a very experienced yachtsman and ship operator living in Hong Kong. Here I chat with him about the project.

## YACHT OWNER ANTO MARDEN

*We discussed the concepts behind this radical yacht and a new maritime role for beanbags. One look at this trimaran and one might easily assume it is yet another designer concept/fantasy. Not so, this is a real project and one based in part on a successful world-speed-record breaker.*

That's a very interesting project you have over in China...

AM: Yes, it's been going for quite a long time actually. 30 years ago when he was still living at home with his mother, John Shuttleworth designed me a 45-foot sailing trimaran, *Mazinga*. He charged me £1,000. I had her built by a couple of hippies in the south Philippines. They were cruising around, up to no good, swallowed the anchor and went ashore to build two boats. One was called *Airmail*, a Kelsall catamaran design; the other was *Mazinga*. John was working for Kelsall at the time, then he went out by himself and we built *Mazinga*. Since then, she's been everywhere, all over south-east Asia, and I've still got her. She is built of wood, but the decks are Verticell cardboard honeycomb cored. I think there's wood on top and underneath, and to save weight, we used Kevlar. There's S-glass and carbon bands, which for her time (1983) she was very advanced. Yes, the boys were right up there on the cusp and she's done very well. I'm on my third engine now.

I like that; the engine wears out but the boat doesn't; quite a good sign, I'd think.

AM: Well, round here your only good sail is in the winter from Hong Kong to Manila. You do also get wind in the north of the Philippines; the winter monsoon in the north blows like s\*\*t. But that's it. The summer monsoon is wet; OK, you can get a 10-day fine spell, but it's basically wet; and Indonesia is all light variables. You do get the odd Sumatra belt through and for 45 minutes you think you're going to die, but then it all stops. So it's not exactly great sailing, and you do spend an awful lot of time motoring, at 7 knots in my case. But if you're cruising, and going long distances – Indonesia is thousands of miles across – it's

motoring. And so I thought that seeing as I'm also getting old (laughs), I'd better have a motorboat.

But a very radical looking one.

AM: Right; I've been toying with the idea for quite a long time, with John. Then I made some money because the shipping market went up and I finally had a few pennies to spend on frivolities.

I went to Nigel Irens, because he's really the leader in power Trimarans. I was also talking to John; they're both very brainy. John drew this super shape – actually very reminiscent of *Mazinga*, except the floats are kind of stubby. Finally, I decided I'd go with John. But I also asked Nigel to draw a power monohull for me.

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(Nigel in fact drew a 40-metre monohull *Hang Tuah* for Anto that would also be built in China [and is indeed now finished]. It conformed to Nigel's LDL, or Low Displacement to Length ratio concept.)

How did the concept for *Hang Tuah* come about?

AM: I originally wanted to build the tri in steel and aluminium, but there were weight considerations and John doesn't know much about aluminium construction. Meantime Nigel said, "Forget the pontoons, let's just build a really long, thin narrow monohull with a steel hull and aluminium superstructure." He went ahead and drew it and it looked great.

I'm in the shipping business and build all my ships in China, so I looked round and found a yard to build it in – in Jintan near Nanjing, on the Imperial Canal up the Yangtze from Shanghai.

(Anto has a hotel property on an island in the Indonesian archipelago near to Singapore ([www.pangkil.com](http://www.pangkil.com)). The monohull will be used in and around the hotel

property and through Indonesian waters. He has previously cruised Indonesia and I wondered how the legendary paperwork difficulties affected his cruising.)

It's quite difficult cruising, in Indonesia?

AM: Nah, it's easy. Well, there's always a tap dance in the third world wherever you go, but at least you don't get pirated. It's just the officials that can be difficult. In the old days I'd sail all around Indonesia; you have to get a cruising permit, but that's pretty easy. You just pay the money; and in those days it was pretty cheap. You have to clear in and out, and deal with customs, immigration and the harbour master, at every port. And actually I never paid; we were never asked for money. We were in the out-ports up in Sulawesi. They weren't very quick, but they were always really polite and it was really all OK – except for Bali. So Indonesia's not that difficult, unless you want to ply for hire. Actually the Philippines is the best place for cruising around, regulation wise. Because you just clear in and that's it.

I hear Indonesia has beautiful cruising grounds.

AM: It's hugely extensive and really nice. And this is where the *Hang Tuah* is going to be used to cruise. She's going to be Indonesian owned, crewed and flagged.

(Back with the Trimaran it's clear that Nigel's previous designs had a strong influence on the look and concept. Anto commented: "But Nigel, of course, has spent his life designing boats that he thinks people should have. He's a really good bloke. I took him to China to see the yard and he loved it. He is basically the guy who has the most experience of power Trimarans.")

His design, the 1998 record-breaking *Ilan Adventurer* (for Cable and Wireless), and an earlier 1988 proof of concept *Ilan Voyager*, are clear ancestors to Anto's Trimaran. *Ilan Adventurer's* record stood from 1998 until another Trimaran – Craig Loomis' *Earthrace* – broke it just last year. *Voyager* is still in use; Anto believes it's in the Canary Islands "running backwards and forwards as a ferry".)

AM: So, John designed the tri and provided a package to go out to tender.



Image: © John Shuttleworth Yacht Design Ltd

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It was composite by now?

AM: Yes, it nearly went to carbon fibre, but we luckily decided against that. It would have been possible, if a bit more expensive, but John had already designed it in conventional composite and didn't want to redo it. I heard that McConaghy were building America's Cup boats in Dong Guan and I tracked them down there. I brought a drawing of the boat and that's when I first met Mark Evans. He was in Dong Guan, then in a joint venture with a Hong Kong/Chinese company that was making carbon fibre surfer parts. Mark said, "I'd love to build your Tri but I don't think I could do so here and I don't really know how to charge you for it." Life (and time) went on and Mark moved the factory to Zuhai and when the time came for us to go out to tender, he called me. "Are you still on for this big trimaran?" I said: "Funny you should mention it, because I've got a bid package here; do you want to quote?"

(The tender went out to a yard in the UK and also in South Africa [John being originally from South Africa].)

AM: However, McConaghy was quite honestly the obvious choice, just across the river from my home and market leaders in composite construction; they invented it.

(Anto explained that McConaghy's founder started building Aussie 18 skiffs. Skiff racing goes back to 1892 and is also a sport on which many Aussies like to gamble extensively. Skiffs had been built in a variety of material from wood to today's radical composites.)

AM: Yes, the 18s were really huge in his day. Mr McConaghy heard that they'd got some "special stuff" in California so he flew there, brought back a roll of carbon fibre, or something like that, and I think he built the first floating object out of composite, for an 18-foot skiff.

You rate the Aussies?

AM: Mark is a very ambitious young man; he's ready to take over the world. He is really "can do". Aussies are fantastic boatbuilders. They do great yacht work. And there's a reason for that: when they poke their noses out of Sydney heads, it's rough, really rough;

so they have to build good boats. The guy who looks after our ships in Australia – Chris Rabbidge, of Fenwick Shipping Australia – is a sailor; they go out for a Saturday afternoon sail and come back with broken ribs!

And the Sydney-Hobart is one of the toughest races in the world.

AM: And remember that's in mid summer. Eventually it became obvious that McConaghy would build it, and I cut a deal with Mark. Had she been completed in 18 months, she would have been cheap, but seeing that it's probably going to take 24 she's going to be what you might call over budget. But superyacht wise, it's inexpensive.

Where are you going to cruise her?

AM: Around the world; she'll wander the world awaiting my pleasure (laughs).

Is a deep-ocean yacht able to handle whatever conditions she meets?

AM: Yes, talking about that John built a working r/c model, with adjustable pontoons to determine their optimum position and of course we did the tank tests.



I presume it's very efficient; you've not much wetted surface area?

AM: Yes, it is also a very long waterline length. We've got a single screw on a single 745 kW Cat engine.

Do you have a "get-you-home" system?

AM: The thrusters are supposed to give you 6 or 7 knots in flat calm, of course in any sort of sea they won't. But I'm quite used to one engine. Normally if you have two motors they conk out at the same time, from either electrical or fuel problems. No one really has a completely dedicated separate fuel system for each engine; so if you've got gunge in the fuel it gets to both. Anyway if you keep the yacht maintained there should be no problem.

Tell me about the accommodation; the yacht is quite small in volume?

AM: There are only three cabins. I find it's very difficult to get people to come on a yacht (laughs). They think it's a bore. Maybe they'll come for two days in the Med off Portofino, but they don't want to come for longer. So, you're carrying around completely useless accommodation. In fact I wanted to design the tri with just one cabin, but John said; "Sorry, that's just too sad."

And the interior design?

AM: Yes. Superyacht-wise the most important person is the interior designer. They get much more money.. I contacted a couple of mainstream ones, for our interior. They were charging a fortune.

Plus extras.

AM: Yes. Here in Hong Kong we have a lady called Inge Strompf-Jepsen from Denmark. She is an ex-Commodore of the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club and she's a sailor like most Danes, and she runs a interior design firm for yachts. I'd seen some of her work; she's here, we know her, we like her, she can do the drawings, and she gets on well with my wife. She also knew Mark



previously, so it was a perfect fit. Personally I think yacht interiors have become perverted away from the nautical look. I'm quite happy with beanbags; which I think are very, very good; in a seaway a beanbag is really fantastic; especially in some crappy old monohull all heeled over. You're on your ear, but wedge the bag in a corner and you're out like a baby. But unfortunately that concept wasn't going to fly here (laughs).

You're not building to class or code?

AM: No, it's impracticable to build something like this to class. But we used consultant engineers, Asta, in Southampton (coincidentally run by Richard Oliver, McConaghy GMs' Steve Oliver's brother).

They did what?

AM: FEA testing, to see what needs to be strengthened and whether it's going to bend, break, or anything like that. They've been actually pretty continuous on the job. They work with DNV a lot. John has his own knowledge of breaking strengths etc built up over 30 years of naval architecture, but we can also ask Asta does this exceed or is it slightly below DNV standard?

And we're actually at or above that in most areas; also DNV standards don't include, for example, fitted furniture, which is in this case part of the structure.

And when do you expect her to be complete?

AM: Well, I was hoping for spring but it now looks more like summer 2010.

TYR will, of course, cover this project on completion in a full yacht report. That launch will be a significant one for McConaghy and may be only the first of more superyachts to come from this experienced racing (but not as yet superyacht) builder.

It goes without saying that it's of great importance too for the designers, as well as – above all – its proud owner Anto and his family.

**Images supplied by Anto Marden, McConaghy Yachts and John Shuttleworth**

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