

There is some interesting reading to be found in the April 2009 issue of *Yachting World*. Robin Knox-Johnston reflects in his column on the damages and failures in the Vendée Globe and Volvo Ocean races. He points out that of the eight entries in the Vendée built before 2004, six finished, but of the 22 yachts built since 2004 only five managed to finish, one without the keel! So it is clearly the big budget projects that have failed. Like Sir Robin, I can't help thinking about what have gone so wrong when these yachts simply break down one after the other. After all, they are designed with the sole purpose of sailing around the world in the toughest of waters.

During the fourth leg of Volvo Ocean Race, from Singapore to Qingdao, only three of the seven participating yachts managed to complete the leg without interruption. The fourth - Ericsson 3 - finally made it to Qingdao after extensive repairs in Taiwan. It sustained serious damage to the bow and was on the edge of going down. The rest of the fleet had to give up and was shipped by cargo vessels to Rio after major repairs. The yachts were damaged in strong winds against heavy tidal current west of the Philippines.

Even though these yachts obviously are crammed with modern gadgets and sensitive "high-tech" items, it is a disturbing fact that so many of them sustained structural damages of the hull itself.

Further on in the YW is an article with the title: "A Brutal Leg to China", which describes the fourth leg of Volvo Ocean Race and another article: "Broken by Design?" in which the details of the break-downs are discussed.

All of this makes me think about the way modern "family-cruisers" are designed. Most yards have adopted

the design philosophy from the extreme racers. Minimal wet area. Shallow bows and flat bottoms with a deep keel with a very small area of attachment to the hull and a deep free-hanging spade rudder.

Anyone who have sailed this kind of yacht in heavy seas, knows how exhausting it can be. Every item that isn't attached to the boat is tumbling about, some of those attached come loose and are also tumbling about. Cook, trying to prepare a warm meal for the crew, is tossed about in the galley. No wonder that the entire crew or at least part of it, get sick of it all and just want to get ashore at their earliest convenience. I have been talking to the staff of a repair yard that was commissioned to repair a yacht, only a few years old, that sustained delamination to the bow during a delivery over the southern Baltic from Germany to Sweden.

It was subjected to not more than "normal" bad weather with gale winds and heavy sea. But it's flat bow was not able to withstand the stress of being repeatedly slammed down into the waves. That's the kind of yachts that unsuspecting "family crews" take out on the open oceans. In best case together with others in eg. ARC, in the worst case alone, totally in the mercy of themselves and the elements of nature. In yachts that, by their design, make their crews tired and exhausted and force them into making decisions that might not be optimal. All this in boats that have to be extremely sturdy in order to endure the strain of ocean passage in bad conditions. The inevitable question is of course, is this what modern, cost-effective, mass produced yachts really are?

I try to sail in "bad weather" as often as I can. It's my way of becoming a better sailor. My way of preparing



myself for longer passages in the future. The first goal being to cross the North Sea, and after that, who knows where... Every time I sit in the cockpit of our Malö, I'm impressed of how calmly and softly she takes on the rough seas. How her deep bow smoothly cuts through the waves. Although I sometimes get affected by seasickness in the slow motion of the boat, I never have to endure the hard slams that I have experienced in charter yachts in the Mediterranean when we struggle our way through rough seas. When one gets so tired of all the noises and rattles of constantly being hurled down into the waves, that all one wants is to get off the boat as soon as possible. In our Malö, I never yearn to get ashore. Sure, yachts of recent designs sail me by sometimes, particularly in light winds, but when I'm sitting in my cockpit, sailing in the gale over the rough sea and the waves tower up around me, I keep thinking that there will probably always be a demand from the market for yachts built with Malö's design philosophy. A boat that doesn't break up on you. A boat that doesn't make you tired of sailing. A boat that doesn't make you want to get ashore, but to steer towards the horizon...

Translation into English done by  
Bo Hedqvist

Author: Bo Hedqvist - owner of a  
Malö 38 from 1990