

Islander March 2008 Technology Update

Dramatic Development in Dubai & Dubai International Boat Show (DIBS)

I have just returned from my first visit to the Dubai International Boat Show (DIBS). This has now carved its place into the annual fixture list of “must attend” international boat shows. I had two reasons to attend DIBS for the first time this year. The first was because I was told by a number of colleagues who had attended the show last year that it was maturing, and it was time to take notice of what is going on there. My second reason was simply that I was intrigued to witness Dubai first hand, having heard so much about it over recent years.

Within half an hour of arrival, I had seen enough to be stunned by the sheer, vast, extraordinary scale of developments. There are not enough suitable adjectives available in the English language. I had also heard terms used to describe Dubai, such as “Las Vegas in the desert” and the “largest building site in the world”. The latter term certainly struck a chord with me. The whole of Dubai and a greater part of its inshore waters are currently under construction, simultaneously. During my visit and just by reading the local papers or listening to the local radio, I was bombarded with statistics. One which particularly sticks in my mind is that 45% of the world’s construction cranes are currently in use in Dubai! Sounds unfeasible, but by the end of my stay, I was convinced it must be true.

Just one example is the Palm Jumeirah. This is the first and smallest of the three Palms being built off the shore of Dubai. Palm Jumeirah alone is ten times larger than I had envisaged. It is almost three quarters built and is already 5.5km from the shore to the outer breakwater, and 5.5km wide! It has its own metro and underwater tunnel system, with a road intersection to rival Spaghetti Junction where the Palm meets the shore. Each palm “frond” has two sizes of villa, each with its own private swimming pool and deep white sandy beachfront. A typical villa towards the end of a frond with 6 bedrooms is selling for around €6 million today. The first owners moved in at the end of 2006 and completion should take place by the end of this year. The total population will be 125,000 including residents and hotel guests.

The outer breakwater has 29 hotels, the centre piece being Atlantis, a \$1.25billion development that includes 9 hotels and a 40 hectare theme park. It has 1,500 bedrooms in every imaginable style. There is another Atlantis in the Bahamas. Both feature a 90ft flume that falls vertically into a transparent tunnel in a shark infested pool. I gather there are 65,000 other tropical fish in tanks in this hotel complex.

The trunk of the palm is the main thoroughfare and it is connected to the outer breakwater by a tunnel. There will be five yacht marinas with about 1500 berths between the fronds. This will also include super yacht berths. Nakheel, the offshore

island developers, have just announced that they are to build these 5 new yacht marinas on Palm Jumeirah, four marinas in the World with 21,000 berths, three marinas in Palm Diera with 8,000 berths and another 15,000 plus berths at Palm Jebel Ali. .

I was staying in a 44-storey hotel on the mainland overlooking the Palm Jumeirah. From the breakfast room terrace on the top floor, I had a breathtaking bird's eye view of the Palm, and quite honestly it looks like a small city.

Now how about this? The Palm Jebel Ali down the coast towards Abu Dhabi is currently being reclaimed. It is almost twice the physical dimensions of Jumeirah but has a capacity of 600,000 people. The next one Palm Deira, off Dubai city, is planned to span 10 nautical miles from shore to the outer breakwater, and will have capacity for 1.3 million people. That is the equivalent of a city the size of Hamburg!

All the developments I have mentioned above are being constructed offshore. Looking onshore, the area around Dubai Marina already resembles the Manhattan skyline, and has a 3km man made canal running through it. Many architects have had a lot of fun, and no doubt made a great deal of money in Dubai. The current airport is being extended with a new terminal solely for Emirates. However a completely new airport is also under construction, which will be the biggest airport in the world with 6 runways! This makes London Heathrow's new Terminal 5 look a little sad! Emirates Airline has increased their order for the new Airbus 380s to 58 plus another 27 odd Boeing 777s!

All the skyscrapers I saw seemed to be either hotels or office blocks. My hotel experience in Dubai was absolutely fabulous!. In fact, most hotels seem to be pretty impressive, and consist of both rooms and apartments. The new tallest building in the world, Burj Dubai, is under construction in Dubai City. This is a hotel, and despite the fact that it is still under construction, it is already the tallest in the world by some 100 metres and still has some way to go. It has already passed 160 floors. The final height is being kept a secret until it is finished. The second highest building in the world is a mere 504m!

Even though there is a six lane highways along the coast to Abu Dhabi, Dubai suffers from massive traffic congestion, especially with all the construction work taking place. During my visit they had the largest motorway pile up in the world on the Abu Dhabi section of this road, in which more than 200 vehicles were involved. The main cause of the crash was vehicles speeding in early morning fog.

Once the sun was up there was a permanent haze over the whole area, made up of a combination of smog from massive traffic jams and dusty sand, or sandy dust, from the building sites.

Construction currently dominates the scene in Dubai, but once this slows down and more buildings are complete, the use of the seafront for pleasure will become a very important factor. I predict now that the typical yacht will be primarily used as a day boat, very fast and furiously fun.

There were only about 6 super yachts in evidence during my visit. There really isn't a large cruising ground for a super yacht. It is a very long way from the Med, and the only cruising is northwards up to Qatar or Bahrain, or eastwards around the Oman Peninsula. Visiting yacht crews told me that the Oman peninsula is quite spectacular – one skipper described it as being like the Norwegian fjords but without the trees. The water is very deep and the darkness at night is intense due to the lack of light pollution.

Every one of the new marinas being built will have super yacht berths, but I think it unlikely that a super yacht will cruise from one Palm to the next.

All the yachts on display in the water at the Show were mid range yachts, that even in Mallorca would be seen mainly as day boats. Italian motor yachts such as Ferretti and Lazzarra were much in evidence. As in most shows, there was a large tent dedicated to the super yacht yards such as Lurssen and Amels, and a strong presence from the super yacht management companies including Fraser, Burgess and Edmiston. Most yachts were motor, and I saw no evidence of any super sail yacht builders.

Most of the service companies appeared to be local companies, and quite a number of these were from the commercial marine sector. The oil and gas industry has dominated this part of the world for many years. Some of the commercial marine companies are quite large with hundreds of staff and offices throughout the Gulf. The yacht business to date has serviced small boats up to now.

I was of the impression that super yacht captains can easily get equipment serviced or repaired, if it is equipment also used in the commercial marine sector, but there are limitations on service and repair facilities for sophisticated electronics.

There were some amazing “off the wall” exhibits at the show. There were some real corkers that I had to check it wasn't April 1st

There was a family of RIBs with a retractable undercarriage just like on a plane. It was brilliant, great quality, all hydraulic with large rubber rugged tyres that could travel at up to 10kph over quite rugged terrain. Look at www.sealegs.com for more information.

The next was the bizarre Aqua Villa. This new patented technology was proudly presented to the world at DIBS by a model filled with dolls house furniture. According

to their brochure “This is no more dream, this is Aqua Villa. The Aqua Villa is the ideal resolution to build any desired floating construction on water. It is a solution to avoid expensive and scarce land, especially those around coastal areas and it formulates a solution for overpopulated cities”. I can’t help but think that a yacht is a very similar concept! I’m afraid there was no web address on their brochure.

Finally, and saving the best to last, I came across the “bbq-donut!!” Look at www.bbq-donut.com to get the picture. This is a floating donut that seats ten around a circular table with a charcoal bbq in the middle. It has a translucent sunshade to protect you from the sun, sound system and a battery powered electric outboard motor. These can be used as individual tables in a floating restaurant with waiters serving you on jet skis! I must admit to assuming that this was most likely to be an Australian development, but I was very surprised to discover that its developers are German....

Both Dubai itself and DIBS were full of surprises, which was very refreshing. The jury is out on where they will find all the people to purchase or invest in all the properties being built, and who will want that sort of holiday or lifestyle. But, if you are going to re-invent a country, this is one impressive way of doing so!

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