

Missy, Nilaya and Shamanna finished within two minutes of each other after a splendid downwind display on day one

RACING RETURNS

A STUNNING EXHIBITION OF RACING MARKED THE WELCOME RETURN OF BIG BOAT REGATTAS WITH THE SUPERYACHT CUP PALMA IN JUNE. SAM FORTESCUE REPORTS

Missy and Shamanna battle for second place. Missy had the edge thanks to two second places in the first two days



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A newcomer who had never flown the spinnaker before has carried off the silverware at Europe’s longest running superyacht regatta. The 43m Royal Huisman sloop *Ravenger* won both her class and the overall event at the 25th Superyacht Cup Palma, held at the end of June. It is the first time in 15 years that a rookie owner has triumphed, but there was plenty else that was new about this year’s event.

It was a year which saw a somewhat reduced field of competitors, with nine boats emerging from lockdown to race. But after losing last year’s regatta to the pandemic, organiser Kate Branagh was determined that racing should return in 2021. The fruit of her labours was world-class superyacht racing in plum conditions in the Bay of Palma, which left big smiles on the faces of owners and crew alike – many of whom were racing for the first time in 18 months.

“The success of Superyacht Cup Palma over the past 25 years is in large part down to our ability to react and respond to circumstances and the changing requirements of the superyacht community,” said Branagh.

It was this spirit of flexibility which saw the venue moving to Palma’s Real Club Nautico, the prestigious sailing club which has long provided the race management on the water. At the same time, the buzzing social functions which usually form the heart of the event were

pared back in line with social distancing requirements.

“All the feedback I’ve had from the boats has been very positive, so it certainly sounds like everyone has appreciated being able to go racing again,” Branagh enthused.

Filip Balcaen, owner of the Baltic 112 *Nilaya*, commented: “In the Covid times, I really appreciated how they tried to make it a good race. Palma is a magnificent venue – you have the sea breeze, steady moderate winds. Racing superyachts in this bay is a brilliant thing.”

And race winner *Ravenger* was naturally ecstatic after the prizegiving. Captain Lars Klische declared: “To get out there now after such a long time, beautiful weather and great sailing conditions – I couldn’t ask for more. Especially here in Palma being the first regatta, because it’s the hometown for many of us. The committee always puts great effort into it and to make it happen under these conditions for the 25th anniversary, it’s just great.”

ON THE RACECOURSE

Racing in the Bay of Palma is renowned for the steady sea breezes that build from the south-west across its sheltered waters. Measuring some eight miles across and the same from top to bottom, it offers plenty of scope for setting course marks according to the conditions on the day. The land is mountainous to the north-west, with low cliffs to the east, all of which can play a role in



Left: splendid Palma Cathedral backdrop

Below left: *Nilaya*’s experienced crew on their way to a Class A win



influencing the wind. Local knowledge is key to success here, especially in light winds.

The Superyacht Cup Palma unfolded over three races – one held on each day. As is common in the superyacht world, starts are staggered at two-minute intervals, allowing each boat to time its crossing of the line without the threat of collision. “It’s pretty hard to manage a boat that weighs 300 tonnes,” said Steve Branagh, tactician on winning yacht *Ravenger*. “You’ve got the bowman saying ‘down a bit’ and, by the time the helmsman has responded and you’ve cracked the sheets, the bow is calling for you to go up again.”

“Tacking is a 20-second process of checking with everybody – then coming out on the other side and building up speed. It takes 1-1½ minutes to get back to full speed. It’s a little bit like chess on water.”

The yachts are all rated according to ORCsy rules, and they were further divided into two classes for the racing, to avoid the bigger, faster boats tangling with the smaller boats as they pass. There is also a Corinthian class for yachts that don’t intend to use a spinnaker, with a more generous rating that allows them to compete with the faster boats that do fly a kite. The aim is to make it possible for any boat that is well sailed to achieve a podium place.

Entries in the smaller Class A ranged from the 24m ▶



The Dubois-designed and Vitters-built *Ganesha* took second place overall in Class B

‘The aim is to make it possible for any boat that is well sailed to achieve a podium place’

Umiko, a slippery Swan 80, to 35m *Shamanna*, a Swan 115. All the boats in this class had raced at the Superyacht Cup Palma before, but the most competitive were undoubtedly the 34m Baltic *Nilaya* and the 33m Reichel-Pugh *Missy*, who had sparred here in previous years.

The big class had five entrants – three on the 46m mark. But a similarity in LOA conceals a huge difference in design. *Aquarius* is a 1990s ketch-rigged heavy cruiser, a Perini featuring a huge flybridge and classic lines with steep overhangs. At the other end of the scale, *Ganesha* is a low-profile Dubois flyer with a plumb bow and a towering sloop rig.

SETTLING THE NERVES

Racing kicked off on a 23-mile course around the Bay of Palma, with an ideal 12-knot sea breeze that calmed nerves after the threat of a light wind day. The staggered starts for both classes went off without a hitch, and the whole fleet was underway within 20 minutes of each other, close-hauled on the long tack out towards the Pantaenius mark near the former fortifications at Cap Rocat on the eastern side of the bay.

Aquarius paid for her decision to stick to the right-hand side of the course, coming in fourth place after more than four hours of sailing. *Ravenger*, who won on corrected time, stuck firmly to the left side with advice from local boy Paco,

“In Palma, everyone knows you’ve got to come a bit off the line and the left side is generally best,” Steve Branagh explained.

British Paralympic sailing champion Helena Lucas, trimming mainsheet on the Swan 80 *Umiko*, was a newcomer to the Superyacht Cup Palma, but she knows the waters here like the back of her hand. “When I was in the British sailing team, we used to go out there training and on fitness camps, plus we’d do the Princess Sofia Regatta every year,” she revealed. “As a sailing venue, I think it’s amazing, and so lovely to go back to a place I know so well. Compression down the side of the cliffs; seabreeze establishing and building – you know all the signs!”

Shamanna and *Nilaya* duelled magnificently on the water, finishing within 30 seconds of each other as they dashed for the line under their vast asymmetric spinnakers. The former took line honours, but *Nilaya* won



Socialising is normally a huge part of the Superyacht Cup Palma, with a large tent village on shore hosting up to 600 sailors and team members. Pandemic restrictions swept away almost all of the social programme, with most crews choosing to relax together in onboard bubbles. But the prizegiving on the final day was the notable exception. “Everyone was allowed to come together on the terrace of the Real Club Nautico,” said Steve Branagh. “It was a chance to catch up with mates you hadn’t seen all week. For a lot of these guys, it would have been the first paid work in ages. I think [event organiser] Kate will be getting a lot of Christmas cards this year.”

Kate Branagh added: “We are hopeful of course that next year we will be able to return to the more usual combination of great racing and a vibrant social scene ashore.”



Unmistakable *Missy* with her elegant overhanging teak decks and scarlet kite

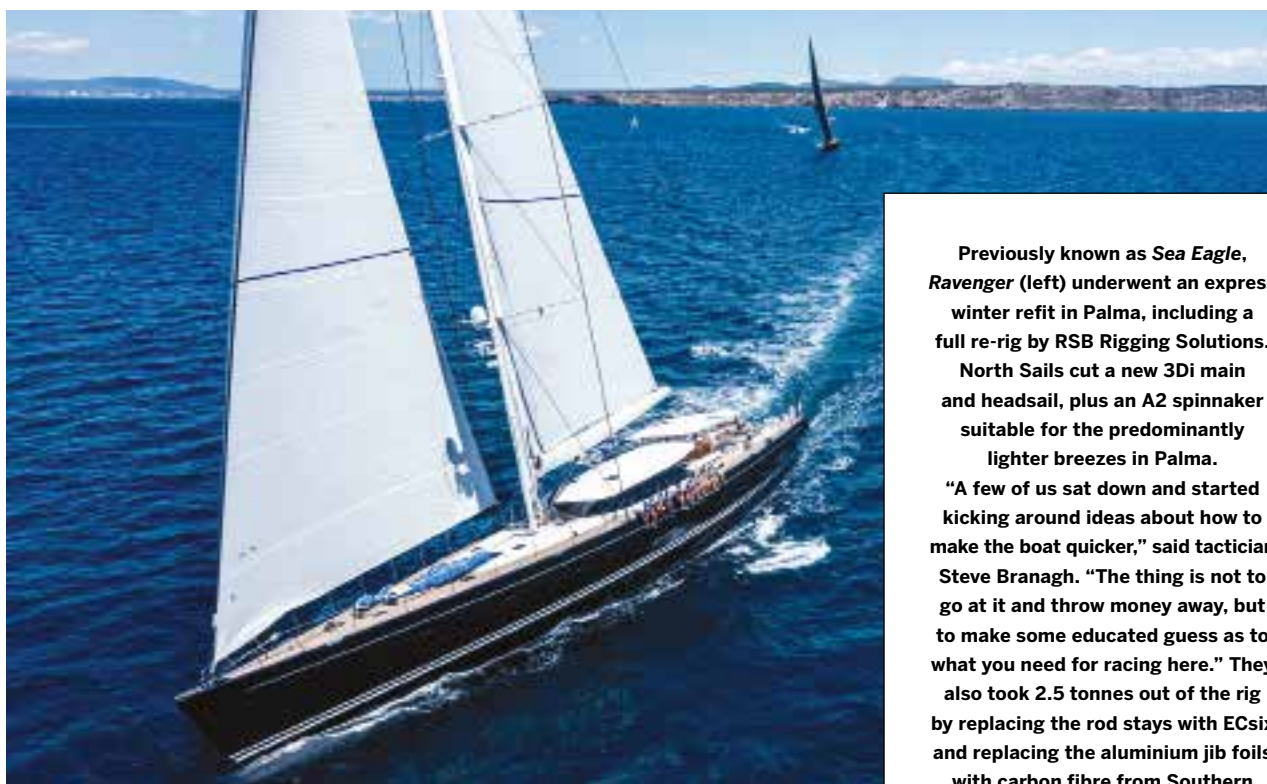
the race in Class A after the handicap was applied.

Veteran racer Bouwe Bekking on *Nilaya* described it as typical Palma racing conditions. “It had been quite difficult on the beats because we didn’t gain anything, but the crew were good and on the run the gybes were going nicely, and the owner did a good job of driving,” he recalled. “It was one of those days it paid to be patient, to keep it close and wait for your opportunity.”

TIGHT-KNIT RACING

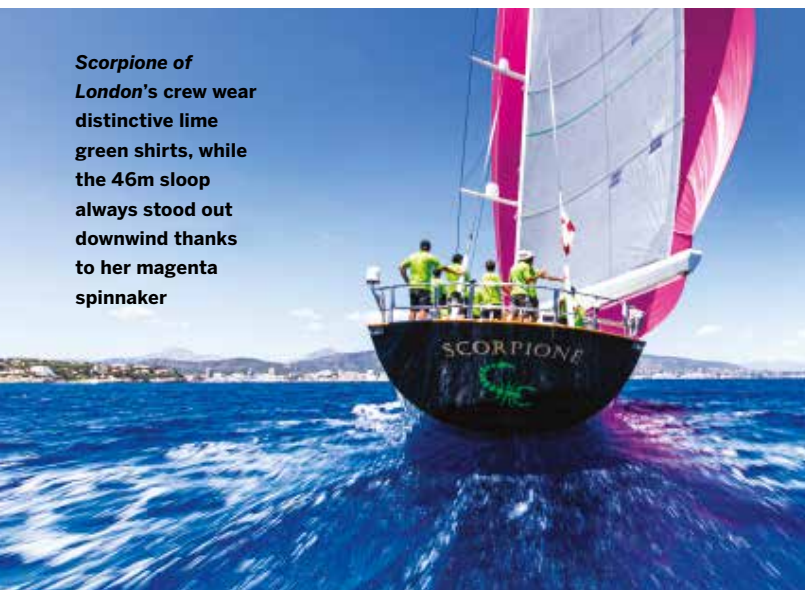
Two very different courses were set on day two, known as New Zealand Race Day. *Nilaya*, *Missy*, *Shamanna* and *Umiko* were sent to the middle of the bay, then off on a long 16-mile leg south-east, providing a test of their ability to coax the best from every shift. The bigger Class B boats followed a five-buoy circuit around the bay which put crews through their paces with repeated tacks and gybes.

This time *Shamanna* battled with *Missy*, crossing the line within 15 seconds of each other in a moment of high drama. In the bay, *Ganesha*, *Ravenger* and *Scorpione* finished within four minutes of each other, bearing further witness to the closeness of the racing and



Previously known as *Sea Eagle*, *Ravenger* (left) underwent an express winter refit in Palma, including a full re-rig by RSB Rigging Solutions. North Sails cut a new 3Di main and headsail, plus an A2 spinnaker suitable for the predominantly lighter breezes in Palma.

“A few of us sat down and started kicking around ideas about how to make the boat quicker,” said tactician Steve Branagh. “The thing is not to go at it and throw money away, but to make some educated guess as to what you need for racing here.” They also took 2.5 tonnes out of the rig by replacing the rod stays with ECsix and replacing the aluminium jib foils with carbon fibre from Southern Spars, and threw in a hydraulics refit and a lot of engine room work. “During the regatta, we had very few issues for a boat that had come out of a major refit,” said Branagh.



Scorpione of London's crew wear distinctive lime green shirts, while the 46m sloop always stood out downwind thanks to her magenta spinnaker



providing a thrilling spectacle for race watchers.

Far from the close quarters sailing and rapid reactions of the 2.4mR class in which she won Paralympic gold at the London 2012 games, Helena Lucas relished the teamwork and communication that's necessary on a big boat. “That’s one of the beauties of sailing – you can never get bored,” she said. “Every time you switch a boat, you’re on a whole new learning curve. It’s so easy to trim the main because you’re just pressing a button. I love adapting to the boat – all this knowledge you’ve got that you can always bring to something new.”

As mainsheet trimmer, she was manning the hydraulic push buttons by the vast primary winches on the cockpit coaming. “I’m looking at the shape of the main, checking

in with the speed, of course. And talking to Jake the helmsman about the feel of the boat – weather helm or sweet. He can feel a lot more through the helm than I can through the sails. Then I’m working with Tommy on jib trim – am I twisting off? Is he matching? We’re always trying to match the two sails.”

MAXXED OUT

This second day was a particular highlight for the Superyacht Cup rookie. “We were in 10-12 knots, then as we turned the corner we were suddenly in 18 knots – properly overpowered,” she recounted in a tone of delight. “It was hard work for me: I was trying to work off the leech without the sail flogging. I just needed that ▶



Left: *Umiko* on the chase at the mark.
Right: *Ravenger's* owner and his captain Lars Klische collect the trophy for overall winner of the 2021 Superyacht Cup Palma



RESULTS

CLASS A

Nilaya, 1, 1, 1, Total 3

Missy, 2, 2, 4, Total 8

Shamanna, 3, 3, 2, Total 8

Umiko, 4, 4, 3, Total 11

CLASS B

Ravenger, 1, 1, 1, Total 3

Ganesha, 2, 3, 2, Total 7

Baiurdo VI, 3, 2, 3, Total 8

Scorpione of London, 5, 4, 4, Total 13

Aquarius, 4, 5, 6, Total 15

'The final results completed a clean sweep for the leaders in both classes'

communication – we had more backstay on than we'd ever used before! That was pretty exciting. I told Jake on the helm that he'd have to sail a bit inside the jib because I was maxxed out on all the controls."

It is moments like this that form the lasting memory of a race and help to cement a crew. Steve Branagh on *Ravenger* has his own similar story. Acquired by the new owner in October, the boat had undergone a rapid winter refit, including a pared-down suit of new race sails. But the crew had just two days to practice together and ran out of time to test the A2 spinnaker properly. "By the time we'd got upwind to start coming back under spinnaker, the breeze died. We got one or two gybes in, then that was it."

With a rich well of experience on board from other campaigns, the crew made the most of the big sail, reaching along at an exhilarating 12-13 knots on day two. Branagh remembered the look of horror on the face of the sailmaker, who was trimming the spinnaker as the boat hardened up.

"Much to Quinny's [Quinny Houry, North Sails Palma] disgust with this stunning looking A2, we were very, very tight by the end of one of the legs. You lose so much

ground bearing away to get the spinnaker down, then coming up for the headsail. So we carried the spinnaker at 60° apparent for 4-5 minutes. We were convinced it was going to go bang!"

Nevertheless, by soaking it down when the breeze came up and sheeting in again as it eased, the owner fighting hard on the helm, they weathered the mark. Expectations rose as the boat progressed from what felt like a lucky win on day one, through to hardly-dare-hope victory on day three. "The owner was over the moon – he was very, very happy," Branagh said.

"He's a seasoned yachtsman who's done an enormous amount of racing in smaller boats, so for sure, he wanted to win."

The final results completed a clean sweep for the leaders in both classes, with *Nilaya* clinching her first place by taking line honours by a big margin. *Ravenger* crossed second, close after *Ganesha*, and won on handicap. There were also wins for *Shamanna*, which was presented with the 'Spirit of the Event' award from North Sails, and for *Baiurdo VI* which had the best start with a precision crossing on the start signal. ■