

Comparing Amel Super Maramu to the Amel 54 & 55

By Joel Potter

As background, I was Amel's sole representative for all North America for more than three decades. During this time, I had several Amel SM 53's made available to me as demonstration boats for potential purchasers to try based in Fort Lauderdale. I also owned two Amel SM 53's in my name that I used as demonstration boats during the last five years of SM 53 production. I have more than 40,000 miles at sea in the SM 53.

I also owned an Amel 54 and put about 20,000 miles on that boat and a variety of other 54's traveling to boat shows, bringing them up from the Caribbean for resale and sometimes just to goof off and go sailing with client friends.

Amel made available to me in Fort Lauderdale a new Amel 55 for a bit more than a year. I was able to put about 3,000 miles on that boat performing test sails and traveling to boat shows.

I have sold more Amel boats on this side of the Atlantic than everyone else put together and know these boats technically very well. I say that not for my ego but so you can learn that it is very little you can ask me about an Amel that I won't know. Amel's training was that good and they spent a lot of money every year giving me recurrent training to make sure I knew as much about the boats as they did. I have a lot of very genuine enthusiasm for Amel boats and the people at Amel.

The SM 53 was a boat designed by Captain Henri Amel with the capable assistance of Jacques Carteau who was Amel's right-hand man for his entire working life. As you may know, Henri Amel was almost completely blind and Carteau was the one who took Amel's ideas and put them on paper. The SM 53 was the culmination of everything Henri Amel, a very experienced offshore sailor, had learned. This was the last boat Amel and Carteau created together. The SM 53 is an exceptionally sea-kindly boat, probably the best, by a small margin, compared to the Amel 54 and 55. I had several occasions to be at sea when I would have preferred to be anywhere else, *and I mean anywhere*, in all three boats and the SM 53 is the most predictable, linear, and viceless of all three, again by a small but noticeable margin. While the boat has no pretense as a racer, if you have good sails and you know how to use them, the SM 53 performs well in any breeze above about 6 knots and absolutely flies in a big breeze. I have been quite secure in wind of 40 knots plus very comfortably rolling off 220 miles a day, in total control. In adverse seas the boat doesn't pound much and, again, remains predictable and easy to manage at all times by a competent cruising couple. It is hard to come to grief in any Amel boat if you don't do anything deliberately stupid. Moving boats to place them in boat shows means restricted schedules because to not show up on time is not an option. Neptune knows this and would usually punish me for past evils with really crappy weather. I never felt anything more than healthy levels of fear when at sea in an Amel.

A comfortable liveaboard and the easiest of all three to own and take care of, the only problem today is in finding a good SM 53 that has been well owned and competently cared for its entire life and not messed up by unwanted or ill-conceived 'improvements'. The youngest one is 14 years old and one bad owner can quickly erase the efforts of several good ones.

The Amel 54 was the last boat with complete Amel DNA as it was designed by *The Amel Design Group* which was composed of all the Amel management, Jacques Carteau, department heads of all the different construction disciplines, the After Sales Service team, of course, all of us salespeople. This well-qualified and knowledgeable group was well led and managed by Jean Jacques Lemonnier who was being groomed to be the next Chairman of Amel. Captain Amel was retired by this time and living down in the south of France.

After building 479 SM 53, we knew what folks liked and didn't like about the 53 and a lot of attention was paid to correcting deficiencies and adding improvements that SM 53 owners said they wanted. These mostly focused on liveability with a better galley with more refrigeration/freezer space, stall showers, and a centerline queen berth in the aft cabin, as well as a forward-facing navigation station, two 'easy chairs' in the saloon, and lots more ports and hatches, all of which were opening (except the four 'windows' in the hull) which greatly enhanced natural ventilation and brought much more daylight into the boat. The 54 had about 13% more internal volume than the SM 53 and when you consider that volume is a cube, this quite a bit more space. The aft locker easily swallows a 310 hard bottom inflatable to keep it out of sight when you are away from the boat. The boat sails pretty much like a larger SM 53 and is marginally faster in 10 knots of breeze and better. Some SM 53 owners say that they are faster. Nope. More sail area, longer waterline, more powerful/wider sections aft for more powerful reaching.

I have sailed with several 53's while enjoying my 54 and I always had a bit more turn of speed, especially off-the-wind. Both boats are comparably stiff and go to weather about the same. There are two quite large poles for the 54' Amel downwind balloon system instead of two short ones and two medium ones on the SM 53. These big poles are more difficult to maneuver, especially when they are aluminum instead of lighter carbon fiber. One person can still set the balloon but it takes a bit more energy and planning. I did not order the poles on my 54 but opted for a code zero and some other off-the-wind sails which gave me slightly better off the wind performance without the poles and with the boat rolling a lot less with more pressure on the sails. It was about a wash speed-wise with the same arrival time while sailing a slightly longer course. The Amel 54 was designed to have a staysail which increases the versatility and adaptability of the rig to conditions. The Amel 53 was designed NOT to have a staysail (really, Captain Amel was dead set against this) and if you find one that does, make sure it was installed so the loads for the stay are carried down and into the stem and not terminated on the deck or on the soft mahogany vertical separation/nonstructural bulkhead in the foredeck lockers. This is the advice of Jacques Carteau who should know better than anyone. I have seen this modification done incorrectly on more Amel SM 53's than SMs done the right way. In conclusion, the Amel 54 is a more comfortable boat to live aboard, has a better cockpit and dodger, even more, storage space and is still easy for two to manage. Jacques Carteau retired at the end of the development of the Amel 54. Captain Amel passed away about the same time as the last SM 53 was built in 2005, just before the 54 was introduced.

The Amel 55 pointed toward the new direction now fully seasoned Chairman Jean Jacques Lemonnier wanted to move the company toward. The overall design was more focused on the type of cruising Mr. Lemonnier liked to do and where he thought the cruising sailboat market was evolving. It was the first Amel where the boat was designed by an outside firm, the well-

respected firm of Berret-Racoupeau in La Rochelle. Overall, the 55 has a much more modern appearance. The layout and engineering of systems were still done by Amel and the quality of construction was every bit as good as previous Amel boats. Berret-Racoupeau designs many racer/cruisers and outright racing boats. The hull form of the 55 is more performance-oriented than previous Amel boats designed in-house. The boat sails better on every point of sail and is faster in the same breeze than any previous Amel sailboat. Like many higher-performance sailboats, the hull's forefoot is flat to promote surfing. This can cause the boat to pound when in choppy seas or when coming off the tops of breaking waves. The freeboard is taller than previous Amel boats which make for a very voluminous interior. It also makes the boat much more lively when maneuvering in and about the marina and dockside. The powerful bow thruster was up to the task but if I were to order one today, I would get a stern thruster too if a lot of marina and dockside living were in order. Two can still manage the boat but you need to be on your toes and stay ahead of the boat when in tight quarters. The booms are mounted higher on the masts allowing easier movement on deck but raising the center of effort which increases heeling and the rate at which degrees of heel are acquired. Quite different than the 53 and 54. One thing I noted quickly is that the dodger is about as good as it gets for all-weather operation, but you are located much higher off the water than in Amel boats that came before. A lot more movement with a quicker motion. The long-term liveability of the 55 is superb and the accommodations have a much more modern look and provide a very comfortable place to spend a lot of time. The galley in the 55 is as close to perfection as my wife and I had ever encountered.

In a nutshell, The 53 and 54 are much more similar performance-wise than they are different. They feel slightly different underway and the 54 is slightly faster. The 54 is a better liveaboard. The 55 is a whole new class of Amel boat that sacrifices a little bit of sea kindliness for a well-enhanced increase in performance.

I hope this is helpful and I would be happy to answer any further questions you might have.

All The Best, Joel

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