

FIRST TEST KRAKEN 50

Conceived as a true blue-water voyager, the Kraken 50 incorporates a host of features that set her apart from other cruising yachts. David Harding reports

Words and pictures David Harding

SPECIFICATIONS

MAKE / MODEL
Kraken 50

PRICE FROM
£704,440 inc VAT

DESIGNER
Kevin Dibley

BUILDER
Kraken Yachts

One glance at the Kraken 50 tells you she's unlike most modern production cruisers: you see no plumb stem, broad stern or twin rudders. There's not even a bolt-on fin keel. To those accustomed to modern design, she will raise a lot of questions. The answers might well change the way you look, not only at her, but also at many other boats.

We need to get one thing straight before going any further: the Kraken is intended for cruising beyond what we might loosely call the 'civilised world'. Owners are expected to have their sights set on far-flung parts, away from marinas, lift-out facilities and repair yards and where coral heads lie in wait. When you're doing this sort of cruising, you have to look at things from a different perspective.

Features such as the Kraken's raked stem, moderately proportioned stern, integral keel and single rudder on →

An offshore yacht needs to be handy enough for coastal cruising once you've crossed the ocean

its full-length skeg are fundamental to the design. They're among the many that Kraken's founder and chairman, Dick Beaumont, considers essential in a blue-water yacht.

Whether or not you go along with all his reasoning and whether or not you're contemplating serious long-distance sailing, the Kraken approach provides much food for thought. After all, who doesn't want ruggedness, reliability and sea-keeping qualities? The question is what you may have to sacrifice to achieve them on this scale.

INTEGRATING IDEAS

When the man behind a boat like this has sailed over 200,000 miles, many of them in remote areas, you have to listen to what he says. Dick's most recent 27,000 miles have been in his own Kraken 66, a boat he conceived and had built based on his experience and because he could find nothing else he wanted. This boat, *White Dragon*, is now a test-bed for equipment and ideas being considered for inclusion within the rest of the Kraken range, which currently

consists of the 50 and 58. During his travels, Dick says he has come across a surprising number of people thinking of buying a cruiser built 30 or more years ago because they're the only boats that offer the features they want, including integral keels. The trouble is that these boats are often showing their age, both in their condition and as designs. They tend to be relatively deep and narrow, lacking in manoeuvrability and, particularly above a certain size, they can be hard work for a couple to handle in confined waters.

An offshore cruiser needs to be capable of crossing oceans and weathering storms. It also needs to be handy enough for day-sailing and coastal cruising when you reach the other side of the ocean.

Probably the single most significant feature of the Kraken is the integral keel. Although we all know that keels can be bolted to the hull or to a stub extremely strongly, sinkings and fatalities due to keel failure are not unknown.

Kraken as a yard simply does not do keel bolts. A relatively long keel moulded as part of the hull is what keeps Krakens sunny-side up. Integral keels have traditionally had the ballast inside them so their centre of gravity isn't as low as with a bolt-on keel that has a bulb at the bottom. Kraken's solution has been to devise a way of incorporating the lead bulb within the integral keel, thus keeping the ballast low and overcoming one of the compromises associated with keels that are moulded with the hull.

A raked leading edge incorporating Kevlar reinforcement has obvious safety implications should you hit something below the water, while the relatively long chord contributes to directional stability and distributes the loads over a larger area.

KEEP ON STEERING

Structural integrity of the rudder is paramount in the world of Kraken. On the way from Cape Town to St Helena in *White Dragon*, Dick hit what he believes to be a whale at 9 knots. It slid down the side of the keel and into the full-length skeg, bringing 40 tons of boat to an abrupt halt. No damage was apparent at the time. Inspection in St Helena revealed some

distortion to the skeg's heel casting. Thankfully the rudder survived unscathed. Had it been a spade rudder, Dick believes he would have lost it and, therefore, the boat. Again, such a fate is not unknown. Twin rudders are considered a no-no by Kraken for reasons including their vulnerability.

While we're in the stern, which is relatively narrower than on many modern boats, we find no dinghy garage. Dick reckons they're of little use in a bouncy anchorage and he cites at least one instance of a hinge-down door being torn off at sea in heavy conditions. In any event, a single rudder can make a garage hard to incorporate on a boat of this size. Davits are offered instead.

At the other end of the boat is more Kevlar reinforcement in the stem, a foam-filled, two-stage crash box, a collision bulkhead between the anchor locker and bow locker and a second one abaft the bow locker. Not surprisingly, a cored hull laminate below the waterline is on the 'banned' list: the hull's lay-up is solid from 8in (20cm) above the waterline to the bottom of the keel.

Another point to consider in the context of integral keels is that modern structures allow a slimmer keel section and a smaller radius between hull and keel than was possible years ago when integral keels tended to go with wineglass hull sections and slack bilges. For hydrodynamic efficiency you want to go from the underside of the hull to the vertical keel with, ideally, nothing in between. In the case of the Kraken there's about 8in (20cm) of structurally-necessary radius that also helps minimise slamming in a seaway.

Some designers and builders believe the hydrodynamic compromises are too great with an integral keel, especially above a certain size of boat because of the volume it adds, so this is one of many

PERFORMANCE FIGURES

POINT OF SAIL	AWA*	AWS**	SPEED
Close hauled	37°	15-17 knots	5.2-5.6 knots
Fetch	60°	11-13 knots	6.2-6.8 knots
Beam reach	90°	16-18 knots	7.1-7.4 knots
Broad reach	120°	12-16 knots	7.6-7.9 knots
Run	180°	9-11 knots	4.8-6.2 knots

*APPARENT WING ANGLE **APPARENT WIND SPEED

areas where you will find differing opinions. Kraken, however, is committed to the integral concept. Some builders also incorporate sacrificial sections in the bottom of a rudder on a partial skeg, an idea that Kraken rejects.

HANDLING AND PERFORMANCE

All the theory and safety features in the world will count for little unless the boat sails well, is easy to handle, looks after the crew and preferably looks good too. To see how the Kraken 50 performed in practice I went to meet boat No.1.

She was in Hong Kong, having been launched at the yard in China a few weeks earlier, and is bound for the Med during the course of the summer. Production is moving in the same direction, to a yard in Turkey, though Kraken 50s, for delivery to Australasia, south-east Asia and the west coast of the USA, will still be built in China.

The first thing you notice on meeting the Kraken is that she looks surprisingly stylish for a heavy-duty offshore cruiser. Another feature some might find surprising is that she really doesn't hang around under sail, even in gentle conditions. Winds are often light in parts of the world where you would choose to cruise, so being able to cover the miles without

BELOW: High coamings and the fixed windscreen create a secure cockpit

BELOW RIGHT: Even in light winds, she picks up her heels surprisingly quickly



ABOVE: With 18 tonnes of displacement, the Kraken 50 powers through choppy conditions on the second test day



A practical sea-going galley with front-opening fridge and freezer, three-burner cooker, two enormous sinks, special provision for gutting fish, stacks of stowage and a practical gash bin



The double berth in the forward cabin is offset to starboard, leaving lots of space



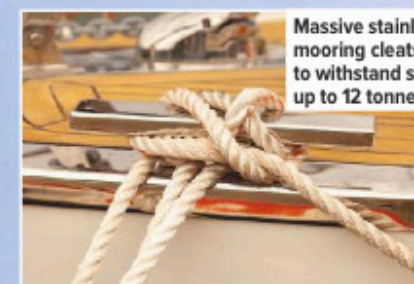
On a centre-cockpit boat of this size there's room for a generous aft cabin. Lee cloths are fitted so the berth can be used at sea



The walk-in engine room houses the 80hp Yanmar, watermaker and generator



The heads are neat and well finished with a separate shower compartment



Massive stainless steel mooring cleats are designed to withstand sheer loads up to 12 tonnes



A large bow locker abaft the anchor locker accommodates warps, fenders and sails



Fuel from the wing tanks passes through two fuel polishing systems as well as the engine's filters



The Solent rig provides a smaller jib for beating, and a large, powerful genoa for fetching and reaching

Our test boat had slab reefing but the high boom makes the sail a stretch. Owners may prefer in-mast furling

There is no dinghy garage, but hefty davits provide stowage for the tender

The bulwarks are formed by a separate moulding and shaped to provide security for bracing feet

She really doesn't hang around under sail, even in gentle conditions

motoring or being forced to wait for more breeze makes sense, especially if you have an ocean to cross.

Under mainsail and genoa with just 12 knots of apparent wind from well ahead of the beam we made a good 6.5 knots. Our speed picked up to 8 knots with 16 knots of wind over the deck from 120°. There's no upwind genoa because Krakens sport Solent rigs and long spreaders with a wide shroud base. For beating, you roll away the genoa and use the jib on the inner forestay — the one that takes the loads and supports the rig. In any event, the distance between the forestays means you would have to furl the genoa before tacking.

While your sail area is substantially reduced with the jib and you might feel under-powered in light airs and a chop, the sail area-displacement ratio of 19 is still healthy for an offshore cruiser and it allowed us to clock around 5 knots upwind in 12 knots of apparent breeze. Questioning the jib's relatively wide sheeting angle, I was told it's going to be made narrower on future boats. That should improve both pace and pointing. A good length of track lets you reef the jib without compromise to the fore-and-aft sheeting angle.

A Solent rig provides scope for variations. An alternative would be to have a smaller, heavier genoa that you could carry closer to the wind in more breeze and then to use the cruising equivalent of a Code Zero to maintain power on a fetch and a reach. For downwind sailing our test boat had a cruising

chute. On day two it drove us home at 8-9 knots on a beautiful broad reach towards the boat's base at the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club's outpost in Sai Kung.

After our light-weather sunny sailing we had a day with more wind — albeit a shifty one downwind of the islands — and a decent seaway, when the Kraken demonstrated her comfortable, slam-free motion, dry ride (among the multiple functions of the raked stem) and impressive stiffness. The six tonnes of lead in the keel balanced the power from the full main and jib, keeping the heel to a comfortable angle unless we intentionally over-powered her. We clocked speeds up to 7 knots on the wind in the flatter patches of water as the anemometer registered 20-22 knots of true wind.

Directional stability is good, as you would expect with a keel of this length, while manoeuvrability appears to have suffered little. One compromise with a full-length skeg in front of a large rudder is that the unbalanced blade will make its presence felt through the wheel. That's partially offset by the relatively low gearing in the steering, which is currently cable but being changed to rod on future boats. It's over two turns from lock to lock. Although you can feel some pressure through the wheel, the boat's natural balance keeps weather helm to a minimum and the load rarely became uncomfortable. For an 18-tonne offshore cruiser that will spend much of her life on autopilot, the Kraken is agreeably responsive and rewarding to sail.



The rudder stock is massively engineered and due to be made lighter, which should help lift the stern by an inch or two. A further change will be the addition of a third bearing at the top of an extended stock, below the deck, to allow the through-hull bearing to be changed with the boat afloat. Kraken aims to leave little to chance when it comes to the integrity of the steering mechanism.

DECK AND COCKPIT

Centre cockpits have their pros and cons. Dick argues that they lessen both the pitching motion and the consequences of being pooped in a following sea.

Winches for the genoa, jib and halyards can all be upgraded to electric (as on the test boat) and are amply specified, as is the rest of the hardware from Harken, Lewmar, Spinlock and other known brands.

The rig is of high-fractional configuration, the keel-stepped mast being supported by three sets of swept spreaders, the two forestays and a bifurcated backstay with a hydraulic tensioner on each lower strand.

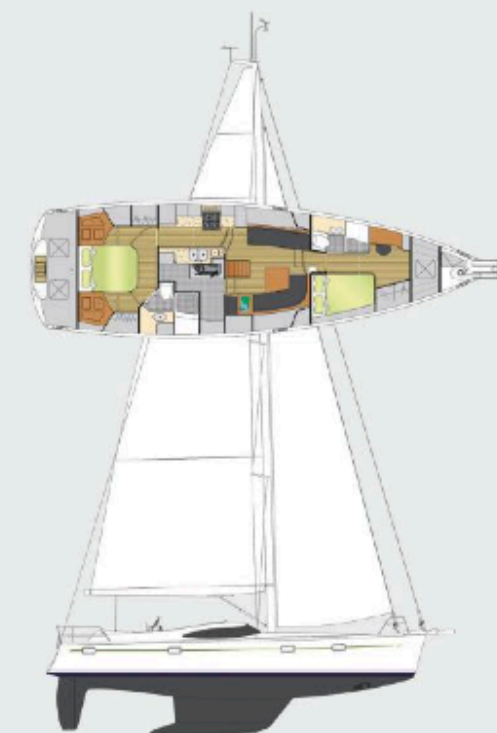
High coamings lend security to the cockpit, which is amply proportioned for up to four crew if they're moving around and more if they're seated, even if the large, fixed table means they need to work around each other at times. Stowage space will be incorporated beneath the helmsman's seat. Large items are swallowed by the large lazarette and bow locker.

ACCOMMODATION

Despite her emphasis on ruggedness and reliability, the Kraken is finished to a high standard below decks in a choice of cherry (as on our test boat), teak or light oak. It's very neat even if there is, perhaps, scope for a touch of European flair here and there.

A choice of layouts is offered, based around the constants of the galley and the impressive engine room that houses the 80hp, shaft-driving Yanmar. And the semi-custom nature of the boat allows further variation, constrained by little more than the position of the structural bulkheads, though these can be moved a few inches either way.

Features to ensure seagoing practicality and easy access to systems abound (engine and tanks can be lifted out, for example) and could fill a sizeable book. It's notably quiet down below under way, too, so off-watch crew should get some decent kip.



KRAKEN 50

THE TEST VERDICT

If you like the concept of the Kraken, you will probably approve of the design and attention to detail, both external and internal. If you don't subscribe to the idea of the integral keel, raked stem, full-length skeg and Solent rig, everything else becomes irrelevant.

The Kraken way of doing things involves compromises, as does any other. What the Kraken 50 does, however, is to give traditional, tried-and-tested features a modern twist. With the help of 21st-century design, technology and styling the boat is faster, sleeker, more fun to sail, more manoeuvrable and easier to manage than older boats that would-be Kraken buyers might otherwise be drawn to. She also poses a serious challenge to modern yachts aimed at those planning blue-water voyages, not least because she's very competitively priced. The addition of a few interior styling details, as might now happen with the move to Turkey, will make her even harder to ignore.

WOULD SHE SUIT YOU AND YOUR CREW?

A boat of this size can be managed by a crew of two given the extras, such as electric winches and a bow-thruster, that most owners are likely to choose. Otherwise the Kraken 50 comes with much of what you need. Our test boat had add-ons to the tune of around £100,000, which is modest in relation to her total value.

Something many owners will inevitably choose is in-mast reefing. A centre cockpit pushes the boom higher than it would be with an aft cockpit, so the gooseneck is around 6ft above deck level and the head of the stowed mainsail closer to 10ft (3m), though a Harken Switch T-Track system will lower the stack a little.

Even if you're not planning blue-water voyages, the Kraken has much in her favour for coastal sailing where rocks abound and seas can be rough. Whatever your sailing plans, she might well be a serious contender if you're after a semi-custom boat of this size that's rugged, functional and practical as well as pleasingly plush.

PROS

- Belt-and-braces design and construction
- Good sailing performance
- Excellent value for money

CONS

- Centre cockpit means a high boom
- Interior styling a little bland in places
- Cockpit can feel crowded

FACTS AND FIGURES

PRICE AS TESTED
£800,500

LOA
15.70m (51ft 6in)

HULL LENGTH
15.24m (50ft 0in)

LWL
13.68m (44ft 10in)

BEAM
4.50m (14ft 9in)

DRAUGHT
2.3m (7ft 6in)

DISPLACEMENT
18,250kg (40,233lb)

BALLAST
6,500kg (14,330lb)

BALLAST RATIO
35.6%

DISPLACEMENT / LENGTH
198

SAIL AREA 134.2m²
(1,444.52sq ft)

SA/D RATIO 19.2

DIESEL
850 litres (187 gal)

WATER
670 litres (147 gal)

ENGINE 80 hp

TRANSMISSION Shaft

RCD CATEGORY A

DESIGNER
Kevin Dibley

BUILDER
Kraken Yachts

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RIGHT: The jib set on the inner forestay is the headsail for windward work

BELOW: The cockpit's modest width and central table enhance security, though space to move from side to side can be tight

