



SAIL INTO THE WIND

Award-winning advertising photographer Tim Wallace talks to Caroline Wilkinson about his latest shoot of a luxury yacht that turned in to a logistical nightmare

"THE AMERICAN SUPERYACHT market is full of big personalities and visionaries trying to push the envelope and make a dramatic statement to help sell their charters. Photography for charter yachts is usually documentary, and not very inspiring, so New York-based company Burgess, the agents for Genevieve – a multi-million pound superyacht – asked me to approach the shoot the same way I photograph expensive automobiles like Aston Martins. So, as well as, documenting how the yacht looked, the images needed to capture the experience that compels clients to spend a lot of money. I'd never shot a yacht before, but it wasn't something that worried me or Burgess as they wanted an approach that was completely different.

"Monopolising the yacht meant it lost a charter and a substantial amount of money, so we had to be sure the place and date we chose would work visually, have helicopter facilities and little risk of the weather turning on us. We decided to do it off the coast of Palma De Mallorca, in Spain, near Dragonera Island as it made a



beautiful backdrop, had bays for dropping anchor and access to good helicopter pilots, which was imperative as it takes great skill to fly within touching distance of a yacht. Using a small chopper such as the R22 chopper meant we could get two feet above the sea and two inches from the bow if it had to.

"We planned the shoot meticulously, but unfortunately the day we were set to fly to Palma – the day before the shoot – French air traffic control went on strike. The yacht was on its way to Spain, but we weren't. There wouldn't be another window of opportunity for at least three months so Paul Waterworth, my colleague from Hasselblad, and I hired a BMW, managed to squeeze the

TOP: "The helicopter had to do tight rotations on its side in order for me to get shots down the mast."

ABOVE: "To make it look like it was later than noon, I had to obliterate the sunlight by overpowering it with the Magnum dish that's placed 15ft behind and above her."

"It was very difficult to achieve the evening shots as positioning was crucial and the scenes' dynamic range was so extreme that anything but a Hasselblad may not have coped."



“As a commercial photographer you can’t make excuses, you have to make it work”

ABOVE: “One of the images I really wanted to give the client was a shot with a classic ‘60s Italian feel and we got that by using a brunette model and converting it black & white.”

RIGHT: “As time was really tight, I only had ten minutes to get this picture and managed to nail it in three shots. Although it looks later in the day, it’s 1pm and I got this effect by balancing the flash and harsh sunlight. I blasted one Profoto twin-head, attached to two battery packs, at full power using a Magnum dish from a rubber dingy. The kick-back from the light was horrendously powerful.”

FAR RIGHT: “We tried various poses and places on the boat with the model, but always tried to shoot in to the sun.”

equipment in, and drove to Barcelona in a day. From there we got a ferry to Palma, where we arrived just in time for the 6am shoot.

“We only had two days to get all the images, with a 40-minute window in the morning and evening to get the aerial pictures during the golden hour and the lifestyle pictures aboard in between. After manoeuvring around the island and the yacht to get the best angle of ambient light, there was a mere 20 minutes to get the shots before we had to turn back to fill up on fuel. There wasn’t time to experiment, so communicating with the pilot about what shots were needed prior to flying was fundamental otherwise we would have wasted half our flight time getting on the same page. I prefer to use only available light when I can, which made some of the late evening shots difficult as the yacht and helicopter had to be positioned correctly with the sun. The dynamic range was extreme too, as there was often an 11-stop difference between the sea’s surface and sky. The Hasselblad H4-50 coped especially well though, enabling me to get dramatic shots that didn’t need little post-production. Photography is a skill, not just data capture that can be sorted out in Photoshop, so getting the images right in-camera as much as possible is important to me. Digital is a fantastic tool but it’s not an excuse to be lazy.”

“One of the shots I wanted was of the yacht at sunset lit with strobes, which is very tricky with a yacht of this size. We had to use Profoto twin-heads attached to two battery packs to get enough power – 2400 watts to be exact. I then used radio triggers to fire the lights from the helicopter, while directing the crew on where to position the lights and what power to set them to over the radio. A



lot of the shots were taken from less than 50 feet off the sea’s surface, apart from when I’m shooting down the mast. You can’t do this by simply leaning out the helicopter because you’ll get the skids in the shot, so the pilot has to scoop in over the mast and do a tight turn so its on its side. The only thing holding us in is the safety harness and G-force. The second day was slight trickier as we didn’t have any wind to fill the sails, so we had to risk doing very low and quick rotations with the chopper to push wind in to the sail, then spin the helicopter round to get a shoot of the yacht’s front. For a shoot that costs in the region of £15,000, and as ultimately the person responsible for making it a success, I can’t turn around and say ‘there’s no wind, sorry can’t finish the job’. As a commercial photographer you can’t make excuses, you have to make it work somehow.

“For the lifestyle shoot, we had horrendously harsh

sunshine as we had no choice but to shoot it in the middle of the day. We got around it by using a Profoto twin-head at maximum power and the Magnum dish, positioning it to work with the sun and balance with the ambient light. So much light should have killed the image, but it worked because I underexposed the ambient light by a couple of stops and positioned the flash at full power so it created my own sunlight.

“The iconic shot of the day, where the model is standing on the back of the yacht, and we’re shooting straight in to the sun, was technically one of the hardest to do as there’s only one flash. I’m bobbing up and down in an inflatable boat at the back of the yacht with a massive Magnum dish next to me and two battery packs kicking out a lot of power to balance with the direct sunlight and only had time to take three frames.

“Overall, it was a very successful shoot but it’s also a classic example of commercial work, which demands of a lot more than just taking pretty pictures.” For more of Tim’s work and the behind

