

WAVE AWAY

£65K

... because that's what you'll pay for only one day on board the world's most expensive charter yacht (and be warned – champagne, staff tips and harbour fees are extra). By Piers Hernu



Kings for a day - Piers Hernu (right) with Simon Rogers, producer of new television programme *Top Deck*, on board the *Alysia*



There's not a cloud in the sky on the French Riviera, and alongside the old stone wall that protects the ancient town of Antibes from the sea, all manner of yachts and

speedboats are packed together in a dazzling display of wealth. Nothing, however, prepares the visitor for the sight that greets them as they round the wall and enter the large yacht marina.

There, beneath the sapphire blue sky, some of the biggest superyachts in the world are moored side by side, oozing money and power. Vast, sleek and pristine, each vies for attention from the

steady stream of gawping tourists. It is here that Roman Abramovich moors his new, custom-built, £72 million *Ecstasy*.

But today, it seems, all eyes are on one gleaming-white wedge in particular - the one with the legend *Alysia* emblazoned in gold letters across her stern.

I would like to think the fuss and chatter is because I am standing some 70 feet above the sea on her top deck. But even I am not so deluded. Rather, it is all down to *Alysia's* official status: the world's largest and most luxurious charter yacht. And from my perspective, I begin to understand why someone like Hamad Bin Isa Al Khali fa, the

King of Bahrain - *Alysia's* most recent customer, who messed about on her for two weeks - would be prepared to part with £65,000 a day for this experience. Yes, *per day*. That's almost £1 million for a fortnight. I don't believe any other holiday on Earth can possibly compare.

At 282ft long and weighing in at nearly 3,000 tons, the £65 million, five-decked *Alysia* is brand spanking new and an absurdly awesome sight to behold as she sits on the crystal-clear Mediterranean waters. I watch as two lorries pump 50,000 gallons of diesel into her tanks, more than enough for the day's jaunt to Monaco (indeed enough for more than

7,000(? nautical miles, or a return trip across the Atlantic).

There are bigger and more expensive privately owned yachts. The 525ft *Platinum*, commissioned by Prince Jefri Bolkiah of Brunei, the younger brother of the Sultan of Brunei, is now the world's largest yacht. The second largest - at 482ft and 5,200 tons - is *The Prince Abdul Aziz*, owned by the Saudi royal family, and this is followed by the steel-hulled, 453ft German-made *Rising Sun*, which belongs to Oracle chief executive Larry Ellison.

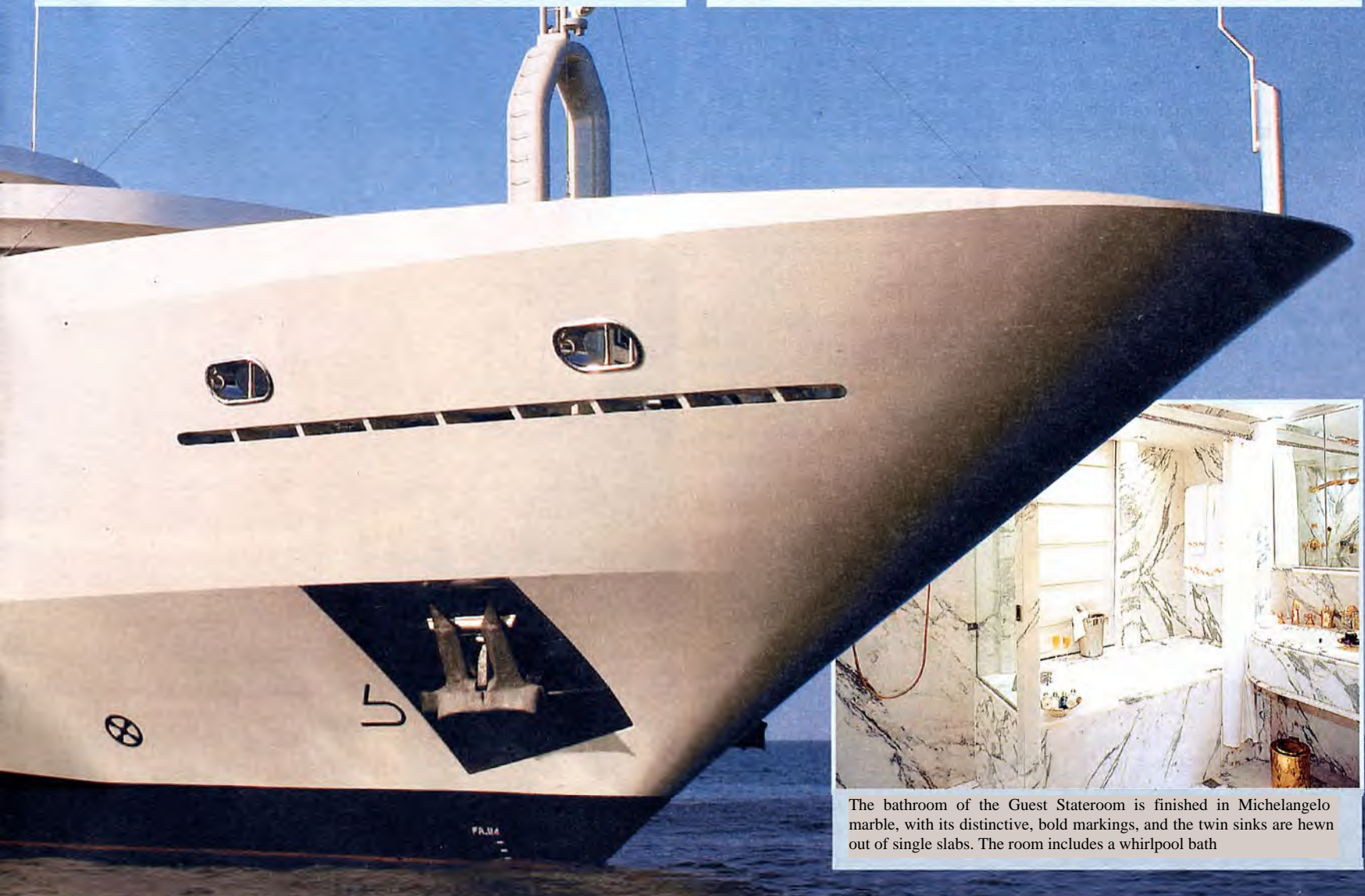
Microsoft's Paul Allen owns the 414ft *Octopus*, which has a permanent crew



The health centre on the lower deck has a sauna, steam room, gym, nail and hair salon, and hydrotherapy bath. The centrepiece is the Jacuzzi of Azul Paraiso marble surrounded by backlit glass panels that subtly change colour



The Master Suite includes the Master Stateroom, above, a private deck, sitting room, a bathroom finished in white marble and a separate bedroom for children or personal staff. The Stateroom window has a 180° view over the front of the yacht



The bathroom of the Guest Stateroom is finished in Michelangelo marble, with its distinctive, bold markings, and the twin sinks are hewn out of single slabs. The room includes a whirlpool bath

of 60, two helicopters and a ten-man mini-submarine. Nevertheless, having cruised past it while on *Alysia*, I can confirm that it looks exactly like a ferry.

None of these is as breathtakingly beautiful as the *Alysia* - and none is available for charter. This means that kings, multimillionaires, rock stars (Robbie Williams was a guest on *Alysia* for a party held during the Monaco Grand Prix) and generous corporations can hire her out to entertain their friends and customers without the complicated and hugely expensive business of owning, mooring and maintaining a superyacht themselves.

I'm greeted by our host Simon Rogers, producer of *Top Deck*, a new television show that will take viewers inside the secretive world of superyachts.

'Yachts this big are usually owned by billionaires who are fiercely protective of their privacy, so you rarely get to see inside them,' he says. 'What's unusual about *Alysia* is that her owner charters her out, which offsets the £7 million a year it costs to keep her afloat.'

At the top of the passerelle - gangway to you and me - the boat's immaculate teak main deck glistens in the heat. I am advised that the first thing guests must do is to remove their footwear and

replace it with *Alysia*-monogrammed white slippers. I comply and pad into the mirror-ceilinged saloon. Here, puffing a generous-sized cigar and backed by a supporting cast of a long, white-marble bar and a grand piano (rather gauchely, it plays itself), proud owner, Greek businessman Andreas Liveras, lounges on a fat leather sofa. Liveras made his money in tinned food. He began his foray into yachts with a modest 80ft vessel, and is already planning his next two superyachts, both of which will be more than 320ft in length.

He says that most of his charters are for a week, with the price starting from

around £450,000. This entitles you and 36 guests sleeping in 18 bedrooms to go wherever you want with a hand-picked crew of 34 catering to your every whim. The fee includes crew, use of all facilities, food, wine and laundry - but not a seven per cent staff gratuity, fuel, champagne and harbour fees.

'The gratuity is particularly important,' says Liveras. 'It is in the region of €40,000 [£27,000] and is shared equally among the crew, so the housekeepers get as much as the captain.' A C40,000 tip shouldn't unduly bother anyone paying half a million pounds a week to hire the boat. After a sumptuous ▶

► lunch (see below) I head to the sun deck for a snooze. A few hours later, I awake to the sound of half a dozen deck hands scuttling to the top of the ship to prepare the helicopter pad for a visit from friends of Mr Liveras, who are popping in for drinks.

The ship drops anchor and, on cue, a speck on the horizon heads towards us. It is gloriously decadent watching a helicopter land, knowing full well that the young man in a crumpled linen suit and his gorgeous girlfriend have only dropped in for the afternoon.

I am coming to the end of my £65,000 day and, as the guests begin to arrive for Liveras's dinner party, it is time to step into the yacht's tender and head towards port. As the sounds of the self-playing piano and clinking champagne flutes fade into the distance, there is time to reflect that while money can't buy you happiness, it can charter you a very big yacht indeed.

AIRBORNE ARRIVAL

Once you've hired *Alysia*, the only way to arrive is by helicopter. The landing pad is on the top deck, and it converts into a circular sunbathing terrace, a bar and a bubbling hot tub surrounded by sunbeds. Two decks beneath this are two 26ft tenders and four Yamaha jet skis, which can be lowered by crane into the water. Alternatively there is scuba-diving equipment for those wanting to explore what lies beneath, and racks of

top-quality fishing equipment. And don't worry about tiring yourself, trudging up and down the stairs between decks - there are six lifts.

FIVE-STAR FEATURES

There's a gym, and a health and beauty salon - a marbled palace of pampering set around a large hot tub, backlit by glass panels that slowly change colour. While the decor may not be to everyone's taste, it is never short of opulent. On the lower deck is a spacious cinema with an extensive choice



For entertainment, you can choose between the cinema with 100in screen, overhead projector and surround sound, a singalong around the grand piano or the main deck, or sitting at the main bar enjoying the 51 in plasma screen

of DVDs, and the ship's library offers everything from Shakespeare to Jilly Cooper.' More than 150 tons of marble have been used throughout the vessel,' boasts Liveras as he reels off an impressive list of steam rooms, saunas, massage rooms, hair and nail salons that complete the yacht. There's even an on-board medical centre staffed by a nurse with access to a special ship-to-shore link should she need expert advice.

CHIC SUITES

Accommodation ranges from the Standard Suite (like a compact luxury hotel room) to a Master Suite, which contains twin hot tubs, yet more marble, an enormous bed, retractable 42in plasma TV and windows affording a 180° view of the French coastline - and, importantly,

other, lesser superyachts. Of particular note is a door that leads to a deck offering complete privacy.

DINE IN STYLE

Lunch is served at the rear of the bridge deck at an 18-seater table. Chef Eduardo Salvador, who was taught by the three Michelin-starred chef Bernard Loiseau, and his team can prepare any type of cuisine - you name it and they'll make it - day or night. Today there's a choice of foie gras, sea bass, langoustines and beef Wellington, with wine from the 500-bottle cellar. 'There is enough here to feed 72 people for three weeks,' says Liveras. 'You'll never go hungry.'

THE POWER AND THE GLORY

Alysia is powered by two gleaming 2,750hp Caterpillar diesel engines, each of which is as big as a caravan. The bridge, by contrast, located at the front of the vessel's superstructure, looks as if it belongs in *Star Trek*, with a bewildering array of navigational screens, radars, switches and gadgetry. ■

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The fully equipped 30ft helicopter pad can accommodate a five-ton craft -and it converts into a sun terrace



→ DECK SPEC

Name *Alysia*
 Built Greece, 2004
 Cost £65 million
 Weight 2,990 tonnes
 Length 280ft
 Top deck height 701t
 Top speed 18 knots
 Engines Two 2,750hp Caterpillar engines
 Running costs £7 million pa Daily charter fee £65,000 Range 7,000 nautical miles Cabins 18
 Passenger capacity 36
 Crew 34