

# POCKET IRC RACER

IF THE RECENT IRC RACE AND REGATTA SUCCESSES OF ITS LARGER SIBLINGS - THE A 40 RC AND A 35 - CONTINUE DOWN THE LINE, THIS 31-FOOT POCKET ROCKET FROM ARCHAMBAULT COULD BE AS LETHAL ON THE WATER AS ITS PROJECTILE APPEARANCE SUGGESTS.

By Anthony Twibill



Archambault is a racing focused French yacht builder that is certainly making waves on the competitive IRC yachting circuit in Australia. The small, family company only builds around 200 boats a year exported around the world but mostly used racing and cruising in the Mediterranean. The yard has more recently focused on the “IRC racing” niche by optimising the design and lightweight specifications of its three production racing yachts for competing extremely well under the increasingly popular IRC rating handicap system. With the major growth in IRC-rated racing occurring in the production boat sector - particularly from 10 to 14 metres – rather than the rarefied air of more expensive custom IRC yachts and GP maxis it makes a lot of sense. The new arrival in Australian waters of the comparatively little A 31 (9.55 metres LOA) will be welcomed as a great alternative to consider for those wanting to try racing under IRC on an affordable budget.

The flag carrier in Australia for the relatively unknown Archambault brand has been Rod Jones, the current Audi IRC National Champion in his well sailed and well rated A 40 *Alegria* in which he has successfully competed and won a swathe of races and regattas around the country. Tasmanian Sally Rattle has also had recent IRC winning success in her A 35, being the first woman to win the Maria Island race, and going on to win the Melbourne to Hobart Easter Coaster race last year.

The “baby” A 31 has been already competing most successfully in the Med, winning six major regattas including Spi Quest since its launch. So, it is now attracting the attention of many Australian yachties interested in a smaller, easier to handle racing yacht with swift sailing performance. Simply being much smaller overall means that all rating dimensions of the A 31 are much less than her larger and heavier competitors out on the racecourse, so the new little Archambault rates, well ... bloody well! The lowest rated A 31 currently racing in the Med has a TCC (time correction calculation) of only .984, with the standard alloy rig. But it is not simply

its relatively smaller dimensions overall that brings about such a rating. Every detail of the A 31 has been designed and built for boat speed and to rate as well as possible under the IRC rulebook – not only the hull, keel and sail plan, but even the relatively spartan interior of the A 31 (compared to typical European cruiser/racer standards) is optimised to be as light as possible providing only what is required to rate well.

For the smallest Archambault, designers Joubert / Nivelte have delivered a performance hull that’s optimised for IRC, while still having a useable cabin with six-foot headroom, cockpit space and good stability when used for cruising. The hull is constructed to the most contemporary standards being vacuum-bagged foam sandwich while the deck is fully resin-infused, with vinylester resin used throughout the yacht. A simple plan form lead keel is extra thick at the bottom for the lowest possible centre of gravity, drawing 1.9 metres and conferring a 40 per cent ballast ratio for the A 31’s small total displacement of 3,050 kg.

The hull is distinctly bullet-shaped carrying the maximum 3.23-metre beam well aft to enhance form stability and to provide a long waterline when heeled. It also affords a really huge working cockpit (which pleasingly dominates first impressions) and when the day’s over the large beam of the A 31 provides plenty of room down below for an aft double bunk for a kip, or no doubt more often used to store sail bags in this yacht. All joinery work below decks is in a pleasing moabi mahogany, complemented by serviceable, long life microfibre upholstery. While there’s no teak, ultraleather, or granite bench tops in sight (or on the options list), that’s not surprising as such luxuries are not in the design brief or typical use of this lightweight performance yacht. But there is all you need for a few nights away racing or cruising, with the aft double, another forward double vee berth, basic galley, head compartment and nav station.

For a 31-footer the A 31 manages a swift upwind working speed in the six-to eight-knot range, even in light breezes of around 10 to 12 knots, and with a beamy sled-type aft section it can top 15 knots downwind under spinnaker when it’s really blowing. The bullet-like sailing performance for its length, together with a kick-ass IRC rating below par for TCC, makes the potential of the A 31 a one-two knockout if sailed well in IRC regatta racing.

Given the low price of entry the A 31 provides to “the IRC Club”, with a fully equipped yacht at under \$250,000, I have no doubt about the appeal of the new A 31 for club and regatta racing throughout the country. The bigger question for many potential ocean racing skippers in open waters, would you want to sail, for instance, 628 nautical miles from Sydney to Hobart in 31 feet of fibreglass? Maybe not, but shorter IRC ocean races and regattas on protected waters are well suited and exactly what the A 31 is designed for.

The base price is only \$199,000 on water (plus owners choice of sails and electronics). An optional (but recommended) A 31 “Racing Pack”\* adds \$9,970 to the base price and an upgraded, more powerful 21-horsepower Nanni diesel auxiliary is an extra \$1,870. With a complete set of racing sails from a major loft (locally made to international A 31 specifications) and quality mast-mounted racing instruments, an A 31 can be fully IRC race ready for \$240,000.

The first A 31 into Australia has just arrived, with more orders on the way. The Australian importer Newcastle Yachting now has four state dealers in place and is supporting the yachts under the Archambault Australia brand. Although not a generally recognised yachting brand in Australia until the



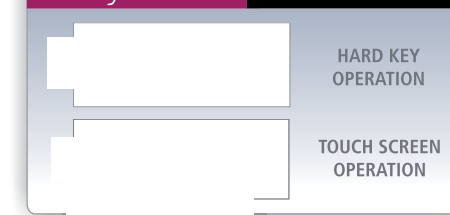
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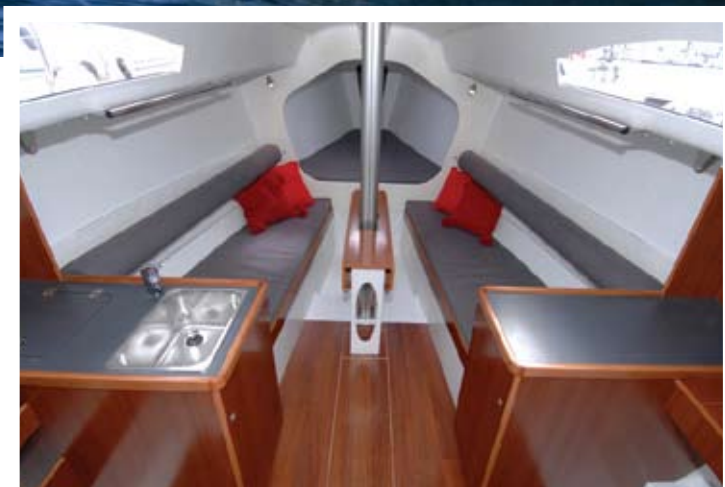
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recent IRC racing successes of the last two years, Newcastle Yachting has been consistently working on getting more Archies out racing, having now imported around 20 yachts over the last four years in business.

I sailed the first sparkling new A 31 on a perfectly sunny day on Sydney Harbour, ideally suited for getting out on the water. Departing Middle Harbour Yacht Club, *Aroona* (so named after the natural spring water company of the new owner Harvey Milne) was a delight to sail by tiller in the light afternoon breeze of 10 knots or so. Working upwind the yacht is light and responsive to the helm and exhibits stability characteristic of a much larger yacht. As the pressure builds and the puffs arrive, the lightweight 31-footer accelerates much more quickly than customary for an IRC racing yacht, reminding you more of sailing a skiff, with little apparent sign other than the numbers rapidly escalating: five – six– seven knots on the large panel Nexus instruments.

Being tiller steering, the helm position is forward of the traveller and mainsheet, so the trimmer can sit aft of the skipper to trim the main, and to adjust the full beam traveller and adjustable backstay. It's a good arrangement, providing a clear line of sight forward for the skipper, and the seating position on the moulded coaming of the wide cockpit is near perfect.

Like some larger yachts designed for optimal rating under the IRC rule, the A 31 does not have a large sail plan for its length. The total sail area of its working sails is only 51.5 m<sup>2</sup> (28.5 m<sup>2</sup> main and 23 m<sup>2</sup> Genoa). The standard spinnaker is 72 m<sup>2</sup>, although the owner of *Aroona* decided to carry a slightly larger spinnaker, offset by a very small TCC penalty, deciding in consultation with North Sails that the additional downwind performance of the larger kite would more than compensate for the slight rating penalty. Consequently *Aroona* has a TCC of .988.

The sail wardrobe by North's Sydney loft is fairly straightforward with

a single 3DL main, a light #1 Genoa (up to 10 knots), a medium/heavy Genoa (up to 10 to 20 knots) and a small headsail for 20-plus knots. *Aroona* also carries two masthead spinnakers (one med/light and one med/heavy) mast set from a carbon pole. Although setting asymmetric spinnakers are a possible alternative, and a removable carbon bowsprit is an option, *Aroona* has been optimised to compete in the Audi National IRC circuit, where symmetric spinnakers are far more effective for the predominantly windward/leeward courses. So, although asymmetrics are easy to set and suited for passage races, it's generally considered that they don't generate enough apparent wind angle to suit the current IRC circuit in Australia.

That's it for A 31 sails and as they are comparatively small and light, sail handling is a literally a breeze compared to the demands on crew handling the larger, heavier sail plans of 40-foot-plus IRC racing yachts. As such, the little A 31 can comfortably race with a crew as few as four, although you would more likely race with six or more if racing offshore.

So, if you're still racing under the PHS system and are tired of the discretionary powers of the club's race handicapper, why not go for the certainty of a given TCC and try racing under IRC? Newly affordable yachts such as the Archambault 31, designed from the outset to be optimised for the very best possible IRC rating, means that the racing out there on the course can be less about how your yacht might be handicapped on the day, rather all about you and your crew sailing your yacht all well as you possibly can. Sail well, and even David may bring down a Goliath of the yachting world on the level playing field of IRC rated racing. ○

For further information contact Archambault Australia / Newcastle Yachting on (02) 4962 5288 or visit [www.newcastle-yachting.com.au](http://www.newcastle-yachting.com.au)

\*The A 31 "Racing Pack" comprises an upgrade on all running rigging to dyneema sheets/vectran halyards with tylaska clips and dyneema backstay; additional spinnaker and genoa halyard; genoa in-hauler system; spinnaker sheets, tweakers, kicker; turning blocks and take off points for blocks for the spinnaker system; carbon spinnaker pole; cunningham eye system; and an upgraded 12 / 1 outhaul system.

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS



Joubert / Nivel / Mercier	DESIGNERS
9.55m	LOA
3.23m	BEAM
1.90m	DRAFT
Lead plan form	KEEL
3050kg	DISPLACEMENT
123.5 m <sup>2</sup>	TOTAL SAIL AREA
14hp (21hp optional)	AUXILIARY DIESEL
6	ACCOMMODATION
\$240,000 IRC race ready with sails and instruments.	PRICE (AS TESTED)