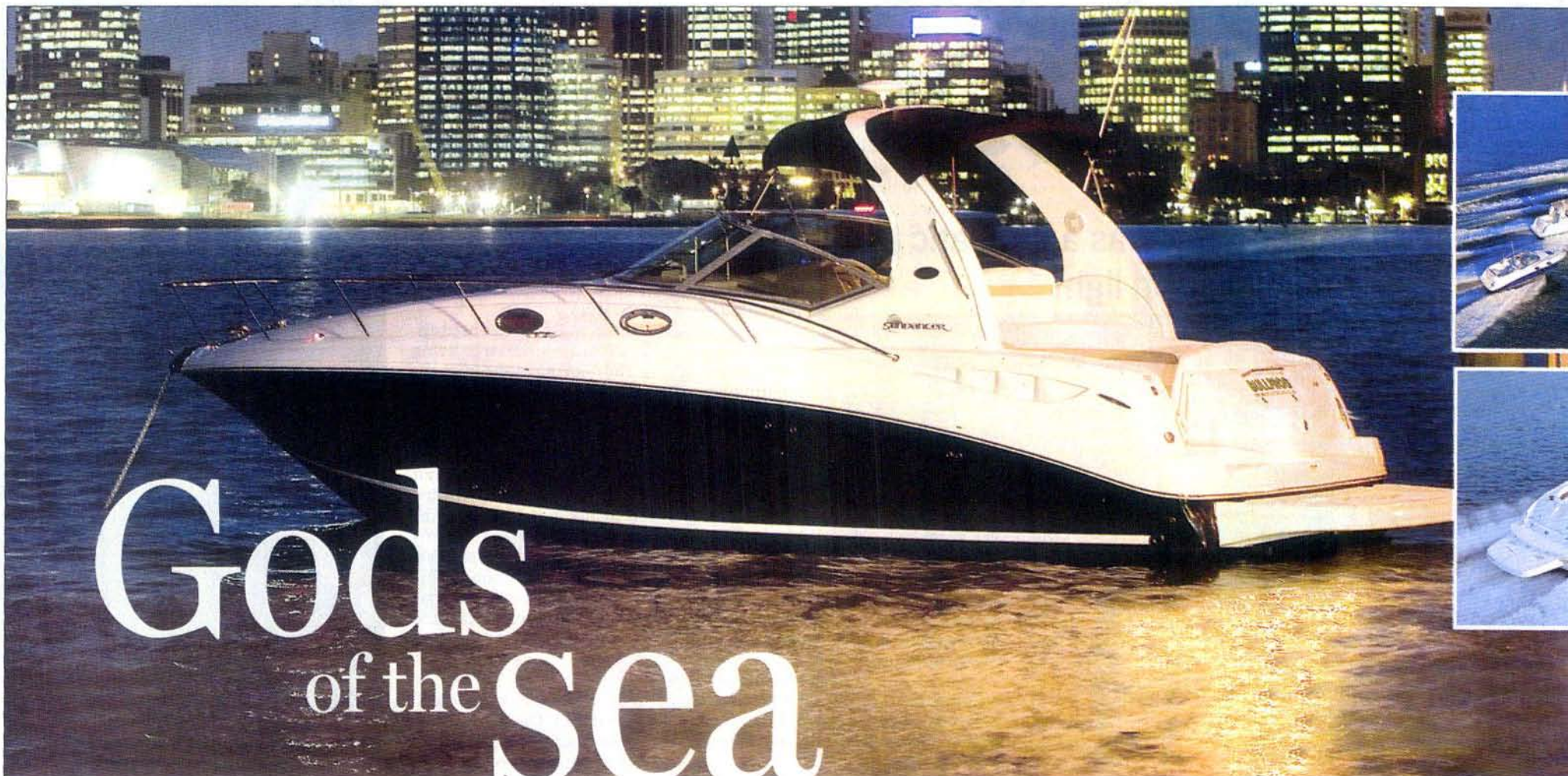


Splurge

HT LUXURY PULL-OUT

Saturday January 6, 2007

Match point
If it's wine it doesn't have to be Californian — San Francisco experiments with wines
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Gods of the sea



The 30-foot Sea Ray yacht—which was unveiled in Mumbai by Marine Solutions in 2006 is worth a crore

■ Seema Sreedharan

It's almost intimidating when you walk up to it. But by the time you have climbed the spiral staircase, enjoyed a relaxing drink by the alfresco jacuzzi, intimidation has melted away into admiration. We are talking about the 313-foot stunner — Indian Empress — Dr Vijay Mallya's latest acquisition. She's reckoned to be the fifth-largest privately-owned super yacht in the world and she sure seems like it. A mega yacht might seem a trifle extravagant but not when you consider the Maybachs and Mercs that zoom down the Mumbai roads, palatial holiday homes that dot the coastlines of Paris and London and private jets that are hired for meetings. For

those who have acquired all symbols of success, the question is always 'what comes next'? Well, if we go by the trend, it's a yacht, no, it's the mega yacht. Conspicuous consumptions you might say but it certainly is a great way to stand out among the droves of tourists at summer hotspots.

Even as the we were still gushing over Mallya's mammoth yacht, Gautam Singhanian announced the arrival of his indigenously-designed MY Ashena. And then there are plenty of yachts that are ready to drop anchor and set sail immediately. So your Lamborghini can wait; in any case it can't handle the cratered Mumbai roads, grab a Ferretti and ride the waves instead.

Water babies

"Leisure sailing has gained momentum in India in the last five years," says Aashim Mongia, Arjuna Award winner yachtsman and founder of Mumbai-based West Coast Marine that represents Gulf Craft, Dynacraft, Bristol Boats and Platinum Spyder

The sea has become the playground of the jet set

yachts. "Yachts are the new status symbols. The trend, of course is driven largely by business tycoons. I've heard of million-dollar deals being signed on these floating homes," adds Mongia. Anju Dutta of Marine Solutions, which recently unveiled the 30-foot Sea Ray in Mumbai concedes: "The other reason for the growing popularity of yachts is the Indian coastline. The vast, unspoiled shores are enticing upwardly mobile Indians to buy a yacht and go cruising." And then like Mongia says, cruising along a personally chosen route gives them access to unhurried luxury.

Bespoke luxury

For the jet set, no expense is spared when it comes to construction and design. Most such yachts boast full-time crews and are outfitted with a mind-boggling array of accessories, including swimming pools, helipads, jet skis and even submarines. Mallya,

reportedly had to shell out \$113 million for Indian Empress. Though we have no idea how much Singhanian had to pay for MY Ashena, we sure know that it was exclusively designed for him and the interiors were specially designed by Greenline Yacht Interiors, a world-renowned company that has worked extensively with the Lurssen Shipyard in Germany. Now that's called custom-made luxury.

On the high seas

But it's not just these mammoth vessels that are flirting with the Indian shores. Smaller yachts too are testing the Indian waters. Take for instance the recently-introduced 30-foot Sea Ray, which will cost you, well, only a crore. "While we estimate the industry potential to be \$1,500 million, our own sales projections for the next three years are 50-60 small-to-mid sized crafts and another 10 in the luxury segment," says Dutta. It's a com-

plete lifestyle change. The only thing that Mumbai lacks though is a good marina. "If developed right, the Mumbai coastline can rival the Mediterranean," avers Bharat Kewalramani, who's sailed the Mediterranean, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

Meanwhile Mongia has just finalised a deal with another Mumbai industrialist for the 66 foot stunner — Gulf Craft Majesty. Though he refused to reveal the name, he didn't hesitate to let out the price — 1.4 million dollars! Mumbai shores definitely never had it better.

"Cruising along a personal route gives you access to unhurried luxury," says A Mongia of West Coast Marine

