

Compensating With a Yacht



As everyone who has ever been on the French Riviera knows, the bigger and more polluting the yacht, the shorter, more vulgar, and greedier the

owner. Last month, I went to the Cannes film festival on my boat, and before anyone cries foul, my yacht may be large, but it's a sailing boat with a tiny engine, hence I pollute as little as a jet ski, if that.

It is one of the anomalies of yachting that as new mega-yachts—I refer to them as refrigerators on steroids—become stereotypical, everyone seems to admire the look of boats from the Edwardian era. Mine is a replica of a 1920s beauty, with an all-black steel hull, wooden masts, and mahogany decks and superstructure. To my delight, some of the owners of ugly, humongous stinkpots wave as I sail by and make thumbs-up signs.

What I'd like to know is if they know a beautiful thing when they see it, why do they choose to build big and ugly? Ah, but that's human nature, you'll say. Big is beautiful: just look at General Motors. Well, that's the last thing I wish to look at, as no one who is associated with the Hummer—9 mpg—should be mentioned in the same breath with classic sailing boats. (If one has to mention the Hummer, it should be in the same breath with the neocons.) Don't get me wrong. As a libertarian-conservative, I believe I have no right to dictate to anyone what his yacht should look like as long as his boat does not pollute the water I swim in and the air I breathe.

Having said that, let's take the case of Mr. Larry Ellison, whose boat, *Rising Sun*, blocked half the bay in front of the Carlton Hotel and destroyed any illusion one might have about boats being in harmony with the sea. The Oracle boss

likes to win, as they say, but if *Rising Sun* is a victory, so is our presence in Iraq. At 453 feet long, it just beats out in length *Octopus*, which is 414 feet long and is owned by Paul Allen of Microsoft fame. *Rising Sun* is extremely ugly and has no redeeming value except showing off—my thing is bigger than yours.

My boat is 125 feet long, and its engine has 350 horsepower. Larry baby's engine has an outrageous 48,000 horsepower. 48,000 horses pollute more in a day's cruising than 350 horses pollute in a boat's lifetime. Instead of buying a boat, Ellison should get a facelift or a penis enlargement to help him feel less insecure.

Mega-yachts are big, gold-plated toys that look like office buildings, with interiors inspired by nightclubs. They are built simply to show how much money one

Alas, even nice people do it. A friend of mine, who owns a reasonable boat, took me out on his tender for a spin. We were doing 65 mph and bouncing, and when I commented on the excessive speed, he told me with a straight face, "This is nothing. I've ordered one which does 110 mph for next year."

I should be surprised, but I'm not. Americans are encouraged daily to buy gas-guzzlers, and while the mayor of New York has prohibited smoking in public places—soon to be banned in our homes, too—he hasn't even noticed that no limo in his great city turns off its engine while drivers wait for their masters to finish doing whatever they do. (Drivers keep their engines idling because of the radio, heat, or air-conditioning, poor dears.) In Switzerland, the last civilized country in Europe, some traffic lights signal mandatory turning-off of engines.

Meanwhile, GM, Ford, and Daimler-Chrysler buy votes in Congress to keep the stooges from imposing improved

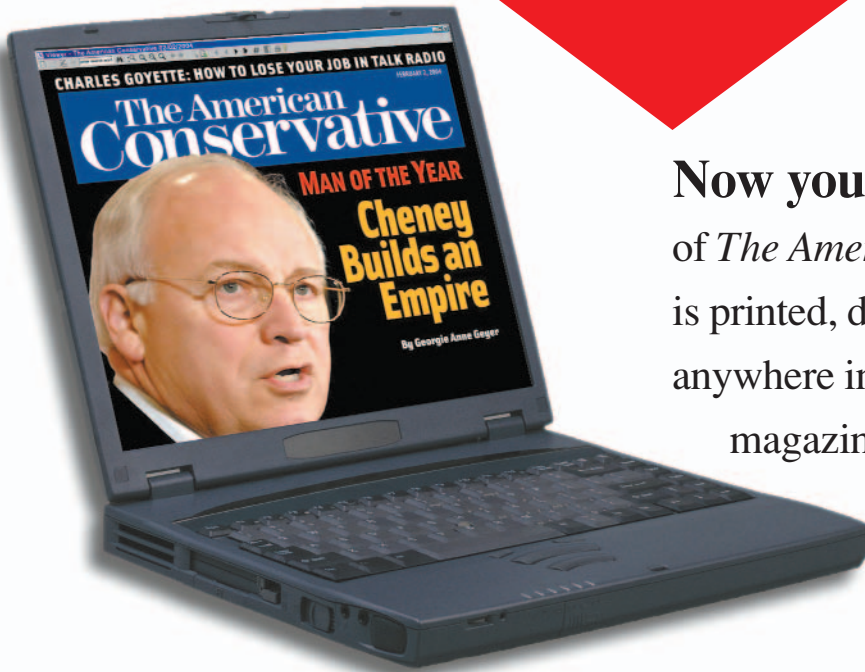
THE ORACLE BOSS LIKES TO WIN, AS THEY SAY, BUT IF *RISING SUN* IS A VICTORY, SO IS OUR PRESENCE IN IRAQ.

has—to hell with aesthetics and the environment. Once upon a time, when most boats were owned by reasonable people whose last thought was to show off, the bays of the Riviera were pristine and azure. Now they are dark and brownish, crisscrossed by 60-mph powerboats, jet skis, and, of course, mega-yachts. Russian kleptocrats and Arab camel thieves lead the pack of polluters, but then come our very own *nouveaux riches*, starting with Ellison and Allen. (Sorry about mentioning such people in a family magazine, but facts are facts.)

mileage standards. No president or politician dares to go after them the way they went after Saddam.

So why am I being so hard on *Rising Sun*, *Octopus*, *Limitless*, and the rest of the gin palaces of ugly rich men with beautiful bank accounts? In the next issue, I will list Taki's ten commandments of how to save our planet. Don't yawn. There will be nothing too green, scary, or hysterical. Just ten ways every one of us can make a difference for our grandchildren and their children in the future. ■

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