

# Living the American Dream

## John Staluppi on boats, Bond and the never-ending quest for speed

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John Staluppi is the epitome of the American Dream: a straight talking Italian-American, a proud New Yorker and dedicated philanthropist, coming from nothing and building his own multi-million dollar business in the automotive industry from the ground up. Growing up in the Golden Age of the American automobile industry, his first job was as a petrol station mechanic, but it wasn't long before he leapfrogged the ranks to business owner. His success grew exponentially over the following years after convincing the then-unheard of Japanese brand Honda that he was the right guy to appoint as the official dealer of Honda vehicles in the States and the rest, as they say, is history.

Staluppi's success with cars stems from a fervent work ethic, of course, but is also steeped in passion: passion for excitement, for speed and for the ultimate in big boy's toys. His successes allowed him the financial freedom to explore this side of his character, which naturally lead to the purchase of his very first superyacht in 1985, the 36 metre Denison built For your Eyes Only. This was the first in what would become a very long line of Staluppi-owned vessels. To this date, Staluppi has owned 17 vessels, 12 of which he has commissioned himself.

Superyachts seem like a natural fit for Staluppi, and with big - top secret - plans for the expansion of his empire further into the maritime industry in the near future, he comments on the similarities and differences between the two industries: "The car business and boating are similar. People want service, they want no brain damage. When you buy a car, it's simple. You go in, you buy the car, sign the guarantee, something breaks, they fix it. Boating is always a challenge. I want to bring some of that from the car business. I want the customers to have a great experience, I want it to be seamless. We want to author everything."

And that's where the aforementioned secretive business venture on the horizon comes into play: "We will own a shipyard soon, only big boats," Staluppi exclusively tells us. "We'll build 50+ metres. I'm going

to make a series of boats, it will be like a production series but semi-custom, and it will probably be in Europe."

Putting the creation of his very own brand of superyachts aside, the defining characteristics of Staluppi's fleet are founded in two elements: speed and, rather unusually, James Bond (the majority of Staluppi's vessels are named after Bond films). The first translates well into the other. Bond epitomises luxury, refinement, excitement. He is a character that is dangerous, glamorous, attractive and who lives quite comfortably on the edge of what is deemed possible... quite like Staluppi's yachts. Staluppi confirms this association, saying, "I enjoy the build. I always want to create something different and something

special. That's why I always want to name the boats after James Bond. James Bond is exciting, everything he does is exciting, and everything we do is exciting."

Along with the elation of speed, for Staluppi owning yachts is also about healthy competition. Staluppi is a self-professed egomaniac, and speed feeds his ego in ways that nothing else can. Speaking of his infatuation with going fast he says, "Nobody has ever gone faster than me. We build the fastest superyachts in the world along with Frank and Bas Mulder. We had Octopussy where we set a whole new standard, then we had Moonraker which took it to another level, then we had World is Not Enough which really took it to another level. To this day, no one with that size yacht - and

we're talking yachts, not speedboats - has ever been faster than us in the timely manner that we achieved."

This rigorous competitiveness couldn't be summarised better than in the renowned competition between Staluppi and the King of Spain with Octopussy. Laughing, he confidently asserts, "He thought he could beat me. He had more money than me, but he couldn't beat me. He never even went close to my speed, and his boat was more or less like a big race boat. It's a nice boat, but not to the quality and finish that we had. Our boat was a real yacht."

With such an extensive fleet and only a limited number of films to choose from, sooner rather than later, Staluppi is going to run out of names for his boats... but not, at least, for the next two years, which is conveniently when his next superyacht project currently under construction with Benetti is scheduled for completion: Spectre.

Measuring 69 metres - for now - Spectre is set to be a little bit different from the rest, with a substantially decreased focus on the seemingly all-important element of speed,

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### Design comments - Frank Mulder

“ In 1986 we started Octopussy which was our first project with John Staluppi. Now, 30 years later, we are working on our ninth project for him: Spectre. The first project was certainly a big challenge since we had to design the fastest motoryacht in the world, but Spectre does not qualify as an average boat either.

We are using the Mulder Design High Speed Cruising Hull which, in comparison with a conventional displacement hull, offers a 20-30% higher speed, without the use of excessive engine power or light-weight construction. This enables us to build in steel, use standard accommodation constructions and use generous systems to reduce noise and vibration and cruise at 20+ knots with reduced power. The second challenge is to have a shallow draft to use this 69 metre yacht in waters like the Bahamas. We achieved a draft of 2.9 - 3.2 metres, depending on loading condition.

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and instead a new emphasis on the luxurious side of the superyacht lifestyle. Being built with Benetti - the third yacht that Staluppi has brought to the Italian shipyard's door - and designed in close cooperation between Staluppi and his wife, the Mulder Design team of Holland and the in-house team at Benetti comprised of interior architect Domenico Gavagnin and exterior design from Luca Moriconi, she is set to be the best of the bunch - and with yachts like the 61 metre Benetti built Diamonds are Forever, the 40.3 metre Heesen Octopussy and the 49.6 metre Christensen Casino Royale, that's quite a statement.

Explaining this departure from his norm, he says, "Fuel got expensive so I decided maybe we won't go so fast anymore. We want a lot of luxury, but we want it to be special. We want the boat to be exciting. At the same time I wanted the boat to have a little speed, so we decided to make it 21-22 knots. I got in touch with Frank and Bas Mulder, and asked them if they would like to join me on the project. All the other projects we've done together were very successful. They came over, we spent a lot of time [discussing the new project]. I wanted a steel boat. I didn't want aluminium. Steel to me is quieter, less problems, less corrosion.

"Bas and Frank took the project, they took it to Benetti, and said, 'Now we're going to build Spectre.' The boat simply started out as a 63 metre, then it went to 64 metres, then it went to 68 metres, and today we might be 69 metres, we're not sure. The boat is going to be luxurious, a very beamy boat, and beautiful. Benetti is doing the whole boat, from interior to design, and Bas and Frank are doing the whole engineering side. I think that between everyone with our input, this will be one of the most exciting boats out there."

Speaking of his good relationship with

Benetti, Staluppi tells us, "I bought a used boat and I retrofitted it, and that was a Benetti, Quantum of Solace. I love it, I love the quality, I love what they did, I love the workmanship. So then we went on to build Diamonds are Forever, we made it to our standards. Now we decided to build a whole new boat from scratch, the way we want it, my wife and I. We're very critical as to what we want. I get involved with everything; we even picked out the doorknobs and the lights."

Regardless of Spectre being the most spectacular of all Staluppi's vessels, this - perhaps unsurprisingly - doesn't mean that this one is for keeps. Staluppi builds yachts to sell: he is an astute businessman, a quality ingrained in everything he does. "We're going to keep it until a certain time, until I get tired of it," he comments in regards to Spectre. "We build a boat for sale and for charter, it's part of my business. But I would like to travel in that boat and take it around, they will use it in the shows... I believe that this boat is going to be special. A lot more special than all the other boats."

With a departure from speed, a distinct shift to luxury, the aim to build the best boat to have graced Staluppi's ownership, and the fact that, at least for the moment, there are no more Bond names to proudly bestow upon a new vessel, will Spectre mark the end of a 30+ year of boat building for Staluppi? The answer, in a word, is a resounding no. "I might decide to go faster again. We're talking about build a 65-66 metre, something that will do about 32-33 knots. I might want to do 35 knots, I might want to cruise at 32 knots, because nobody has done that yet. I think we can achieve the speed I want to achieve, there are new engines coming out all the time, so propulsion is good, the price of oil came down so fuel isn't as expensive. That might be the next project I'm going to do."



## John Staluppi on...

### Building on speculation:

I think it's very important to have boats in stock. If you build boats on spec, people my age don't want to wait three or four years. So if you have a boat that you could offer to someone in a year or two, they will settle. It might not be exactly what they want, but they will settle for that boat, they will pay the right money. People don't have to wait. Most people are impulse-driven. They come to these boat shows, not because they are building a boat, but because they are looking for something to buy. Building a boat from spec is the only way to make it successful.

### Building a brand:

I like to create the brand, I'm an ego guy. There's always going to be a bigger boat, and there's always going to be someone better, but I think what we do changes the tone of yachting a little bit. We've set the level in a different way. If somebody buys a fast race boat, it's just a race boat. You can't live on that. We build a standard where the boat becomes something spectacular, and everyone wants it. It's great for Benetti, it's great for Bas and Frank, it's great for me. It holds the value of the boat right up there because it's really something that no one else has. We put a lot of time and effort into that boat to really be a quality boat.

### Building American:

It's not that yacht building went down [in the States], it's just that a lot of the companies that were here went out of business and it's a bad taste for people when they're building a boat and all of a sudden the shipyard goes out of business. There are less shipyards here, so naturally, when one shipyard goes down, it's like three shipyards going out of business in Europe. So do I think it's a great business here? Yes, but a lot of the stuff comes from Europe. The big furniture companies, the engines... so that's also an issue. Would I like to have a shipyard here? Yes I would, but would build to European quality.

1985 - 36m - For Your Eyes Only

1986 - 20.7m - Illusion

1987 - 35m - La Bonne Vie

1988 - 40.3m - Octopussy

1989 - 36.6m - La Bonne Vie

1990 - 19.8m - Mr Chaos

1991 - 23.3m - Dillinger

1992 - 36.6m - Moonraker

1998 - 36.6m - Goldeneye

2000 - 22.8m - Millennium 75 Express

2001 - 24.3m - Millennium 80 FB

2001 - 52m - Quantum of Solac

2004 - 42.4m - The World is not Enough

2007 - 46m - Skyfall II

2008 - 49.6m - Casino Royale

2010 - 57.9m - Skyfall

2011 - 61m - Diamonds are Forever