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An industry united

As the recreational boating industry gears up for another American Boating Congress in Washington D.C., I'm reminded of my early days entering this industry.

I was not born into this industry, like so many of my colleagues. I didn't necessarily grow up as a boater, aside from the occasional fishing trip with my dad as a kid. Yet, upon joining the ranks, I was instantly hooked by this industry. Why? Well, boating is fun, of course, but the thing that really hooked me was and continues to be this industry's passion.

The recreational boating industry is a big, small industry. The U.S. recreational boating industry generates roughly \$230 billion in annual economic impact, supports more than 36,000 business and 812,000 jobs, according to the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA). Yet, when you walk any boat show or attend any industry event, it's like a class reunion. Laughter and hugs all around as friends and colleagues catch up.

Across the industry, there is a camaraderie likely not found to the same degree in similar industries. And while American Boating Congress is really a culmination of our industry's united front, we must continue to band together year-round.

Whether it's advocacy for our industry at the local, state and federal levels, pushing technology further through innovation and partnerships, or something else entirely, our industry's ability to unite and work together continue to ensure that boating is here to stay. And with increasing challenges ahead, from economic stability to competition for customers' free time, it will be more important, maybe more than ever before, that the recreational boating industry remains united.

Part of the industry's ability to unite comes in the form of celebrating each other and hard work across every segment. This issue of Boating Industry does just that in celebrating invention and innovation with the annual Top Products Awards. From new boat models to new services and everything in between, the recreational boating industry is ripe with continuous innovation to enhance experiences in boating across the board and this year's Top Products provide a shining example of that.

Across the industry, from competitors to colleagues, as we head into another summer of helping people make memories on the water, let's remember to stand united to continue growing the spotlight on boating and pushing ourselves further well into the future. •



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NMMA hosts Capitol Hill technology showcase

On April 11, NMMA hosted a marine technology showcase on Capitol Hill to demonstrate to Members of Congress and Congressional staff the existing and emerging sophisticated technologies available to lessen the risk of vessel strikes to marine mammals with particular focus on the North Atlantic right whale. The full-day event, which took place on both the House and Senate sides of the Capitol and included a Congressional Boating Caucus briefing, came as federal regulators consider the finalization of the expanded 2008 North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Strike Reduction rule.

The North Atlantic right whale (NARW) population faces considerable challenges, and vessel strikes – especially large vessels over 260 feet

– have been identified as a source of mortality to the species. The recreational marine industry, in conjunction with technology, modeling, communications, and software companies, have been working together to take immediate action on the development and deployment of various tools that can be leveraged to reduce vessel strike risk and to provide real-time information to vessel operators to improve their awareness of management measures and the present of NARWs.

The purpose of the marine technology showcase was to inform members of Congress and policy makers on this important work, how it can be supported, and what technologies are both available and operational for use today to reduce the risk of vessel strikes.

Representatives from Fathom Science, Garmin, SEA.AI, National Marine Electronic Association (NMEA), Navico, Viam, Viking, and Whale Seeker presented on the groundbreaking technologies that can help predict, monitor, and detect marine mammals and lessen the risk of vessel strikes. The representatives outlined how risk reduction is an ongoing process that has been accelerated given concerns over the NARW status.

Technology holds significant advantages in efforts to protect the NARWs, and the recreational marine industry is uniquely positioned to advance these risk reduction tools given its work in vessel safety and collision avoidance over the past 50 years.

As SEA.AI wrote in their press release on the event:

“This gathering highlights the important collaboration between technologists and legislators in advancing maritime safety and protecting the environment. Legislative support for technologies such as machine vision is crucial for boosting maritime safety and protecting ecosystems. SEA.AI’s AI-based lookout illustrates how new technologies can make significant positive contributions in these domains, emphasizing the importance of policies and regulations that foster such innovations. The partnership between technology creators and policymakers is essential to ensure the protection and sustainability of our oceans for the future.”

At the same time the recreational marine industry continues to collaborate and develop additional tools to reduce risk of vessel strikes, NMMA urges for the withdrawal of the proposed rule. NMMA says that on-board technology can create a better performance environment for both boaters and regulators that increases safety, protects endangered marine wildlife, and ensures that both can co-exist while significantly reducing risks that current approaches cannot achieve.

Suntex joins forces with Almar Marinas

Suntex Marina Investors, LLC announced that it has agreed to join forces with established marina management company Almar Marinas, merging Almar’s owned marinas and management company Almar Management, Inc. with Suntex Marinas.

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Founded in 1974, Almar is the largest operator of coastal marinas on the west coast of the United States. Their portfolio consists of eight owned marinas across California – located between Marina Del Rey and Oakland – and another nine marinas managed on behalf of third-party owners in California and Hawaii.

“The values at the heart of Almar Marinas and their management team are also at the heart of our business practices here at Suntex,” said Bryan Redmond, CEO, Suntex Marinas. “Our core principles are entirely focused on delivering a world-class hospitality experience to every marina customer with the knowledge that marinas are many things to many people. This merger just solidifies what’s most important to both of our companies, and we’re so lucky to join forces with

the leading west coast network of marinas who understand our vision and are dedicated to building it together.”

The Almar Marinas merging with the Suntex portfolio include Marina Del Rey Marina in Marina Del Rey, California; Peninsula Yacht Marina in Channel Islands Harbor, California; Bahia Marina in Channel Islands Harbor, California; Westport Marina in Channel Islands Harbor, California; and the management company. Merging of four Oakland marina properties is expected within the next 60 days, subject to government approvals.

Brunswick Corp. names new Venture Boat Group president

Brunswick Corporation named Jerry Newton president of its Venture Boat Group division effective immediately. Newton will be responsible for the overall business performance, strategic growth and operational execution of the Venture Boat Group portfolio including brands Bayliner, Heyday, Quicksilver, and Uttern in North America, Europe, and Australia.

Newton brings nearly 30 years of expertise from multiple disciplines with an international career that spans Fortune 500 corporations such as John Deere and Fortive as well as leadership positions in private equity.

“I am thrilled to join Brunswick Corporation, specifically the Venture Boat Group, which consists of some of the most well-known brands in the world,” said Newton. “I am excited to work with leaders across each division and leverage the full magnitude of the Brunswick portfolio to drive

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growth across all of Venture Boat Group.”

“Jerry has extensive experience leading companies through record growth, and I am confident his depth of expertise in operations, breadth of functional capabilities, and leadership will be a tremendous asset to the boating industry,” said Aine Denari, President, Brunswick Boat Group. “I look forward to supporting him as he positions the Venture Boat Group for continued international success.”

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DealersCircle, Lightspeed launch integration partnership

DealersCircle, Inc. – a web-based manufacturing industry provider that links the manufacturer, dealer and customer together with its software application – and Lightspeed – a Dealer Management Solution (DMS) company with uniquely-tailored software solutions for dealers in recreational industries – are integrating their respective platforms to provide a more robust, all-inclusive solution for dealer networks in various industries.

“After working with our now 1800 strong dealer network over the past two decades, we’ve identified a few of the pain points that the dealers experience with their current DMS systems,” said DealersCircle president Scott Davis. “That drove us to find a reputable, forward-thinking DMS solution that we could effectively integrate with, and we found that partner in Lightspeed.”

“We are excited to bring industry-leading OEM integrations to our dealer partners through this partnership with DealersCircle,” said Brian

Provost, CEO of Lightspeed DMS. “With our continued focus on creating efficient processes for our dealers, this collaboration is yet another way we can help Lightspeed dealers streamline their operations and improve their profitability.”

The DealersCircle / Lightspeed integrations will be rolled out in phases and include high points such as:

- **Unit Inventory Management** – Saving time and preventing manual entry errors.

- **Unit Ordering** – Processing unit orders in DealersCircle; automatically update the unit information in Lightspeed.

- **Unit Receiving** – Import unit invoice information for new and existing units directly from DealersCircle with a single keystroke; Changes to invoices and the unit will be updated.

- **Unit Configurator** – Easily connect to DealersCircle from Lightspeed and build a unit that will update in Lightspeed for quoting; Once the customer agrees to purchase, and the dealer processes the order in DealersCircle, it will update the unit information in Lightspeed.

- **HIN (Hull ID Number) Decoding** – The

HIN Decoding integration enables users to import vital unit information by simply entering a HIN. Once the HIN is entered, Lightspeed automatically populates the vehicle details and specifications, which the dealer can access from within the system, eliminating the need for manual entry. This not only saves time but also enhances the overall customer experience.

- **Warranty Dates** – Unit warranty dates will automatically update and be visible on the unit when writing up a service repair order. Helps reduce time lost jumping cross platform to look up or calling the manufacturer to confirm warranty status.

- **Bulletins** – Quickly view technical bulletins and recall information within a Repair Order and be notified of stop sale notices in a sales deal. Users will be notified of new technical and safety bulletins when accessing the Repair Order. Save time by adding jobs from the bulletin right to the repair order.

- **Part Price Updates** – Receive master parts file for easier parts inventory ordering, receiving and price updates directly from the manufacturer. ●

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THINKING OF SELLING YOUR MARINE DEALERSHIP?

As with stocks, don't try to time the market

By Brad Stanek
CFP, Morgan Stanley

Ancient Roman philosopher Seneca once said: "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." I couldn't think of a more elegant way to describe what's happening in both the economy and buy-sell market for marine dealerships today. Clearly, we've hit an inflection point. The exceptionally buoyant days of the pandemic have been replaced by the Fed's aggressive rate hiking campaign, which has made the cost of capital substantially higher for boat buyers, dealers, and acquirers alike.

A prominent industry professional and Marine dealer consultant told me on a recent webinar that the pace of transactions has slowed from what we saw during the pandemic, as "Margins are back to more normal levels of 15-20% and depending on the non-current [inventory], maybe even less." He also went on to note that, "Floorplan interest is now up to 8-9%, levels we haven't seen since the early 2000s. Now we have to get back to doing business as usual." However, returning to 'business as usual' is not happening at the speed we would like. He also stated that he has seen dealers paying \$300K per month in interest and curtailments, which is not sustainable.

That being said, my team and I have found that premium dealerships situated in expanding markets, with desirable brands and other high-quality attributes, continue to command respectable multiples. But with more and more sellers entering the market, buyers can afford to be pickier. So, if you're thinking of exiting, you'll need to sharpen your pencil and get prepared well in advance.

Current environment for sellers

Jon Couwenberg, a partner at Performance Brokerage Services, Inc. and Director of the Marine Division said the marine buy-sell market remains brisk, though it has certainly shifted over the past year. As more sellers are considering an exit, buy-

ers have become more selective with the stores and markets they pursue.

"The record-breaking margins we saw during COVID are normalizing.

Recognizing that those profits were unsustainable, buyers are assigning less weight to those years when preparing their forecasts and projections," Couwenberg asserted.

However, he said the national dealership groups still have a strong appetite for "quality acquisitions that align with their long-term strategies." He said that they know such opportunities are rare in any economic climate and might not become available again for another decade or generation. Couwenberg shared, "We are still consummating transactions at all-time highs for these quality businesses." Further, he said regional dealers are actively pursuing local acquisitions that "seamlessly integrate into their portfolios" allowing for shared expenses across multiple locations.

Couwenberg's colleague, Jesse Stopnitzky, cautioned that today's climate is a single moment in time, and not a reliable predictor of the future. As with the stock market, he said it's futile "trying to time" the buy-sell market if you're thinking of exiting. "Selling a business is a complex, emotional decision that may require group consensus," observed Stopnitzky. He continued, "It shouldn't be driven solely by market conditions. The right time to exit is when it's right for you and your family, and when it accomplishes your business and personal goals."

Economic impact on marine dealers

My colleague, Anthony Nasca, CEPA, Financial Advisor, Financial Planning Specialist and Certified Exit Planning Advisor with the Stanek Group at Morgan Stanley, said he suspects we're close to the top of the Fed's rate hiking cycle and we could start seeing cuts within a year. While that bodes well for the economy, he cautioned dealers not to expect an immediate pivot into growth mode since interest on floor plans and consumer lending is still high. If you are considering an exit near-term, Nasca states you must ask yourself the following:

1. What is my business worth today?
2. What do I expect it to be worth in the next two to three years?

3. Is it worth the time and stress of waiting to pursue an exit in the future when the economy might be the same several years down the road?

Prepping for sale

First, Nasca said you need a professional opinion of value so you can make reliable projections about your financials and business valuation several years down the road. Next, assemble a dedicated team of advisors – attorney, CPA, financial planner, and business broker -- to protect your best interests. Ideally, Nasca advises, your advisors should have experience in the marine industry and with buy-sell transactions. "This will reduce the risk of a confidentiality breach and help you maximize your performance," he said. "Remember, the selling process typically takes four to six months and it can be overwhelming. To expedite the process, make sure you have ALL of your affairs in order before you go to market." Nasca recommended engaging a CPA to prepare or review your financial statements, as it gives buyers an extra layer of confidence when they review your financial data.

Our marine professional suggested focusing on improving areas of your business that are most likely to move the needle. Take F&I for instance. While F&I numbers have recently gone down, F&I remains a viable income source. "I'm still surprised by the number of dealers that don't go after F&I. Dealers at the top end of the market are doing 4% and 5% in F&I on new and used sales with an average closer to 1.5% to 2.5%." He said a range of 2% to 3% on new and used sales is "very doable" after paying compensation to a source for F&I management.

It's also important to look at cash on hand. Our panelist advises dealers to have three months' worth of expenses in cash or cash equivalent to take them through the winter months. "You want to try to get two or more turns on your new inventory and four turns or more on your used inventory. Especially when you get in season, if you have fewer than four turns, you're probably missing sales." He went on to say that you also want to focus on parts and service. When sales slow, parts and services go up in relation to new and used sales. This is because people repair their boats and keep them another year or two. He also said to make sure you're



charging enough for labor. According to our industry professional, the average labor rate is \$179 to \$199 per hour, with \$225 per hour not uncommon in more expensive areas of the country like Seattle.

You also want to have a pricing strategy that allows for trade over-allowances. “Don’t be afraid to ask manufacturers for help in closing a sale, especially if it’s a conquest sale of a competitive brand. You’d be surprised how willing manufacturers are to come up with some extra money to help you put a deal together if you just ask them.” As the old saying goes: “You don’t get if you don’t ask.”

Finally, we discussed that it’s important to get re-focused on marketing, which hasn’t been a priority for many dealers since the COVID-era bump they enjoyed. He stated that sales is a function of two things: Marketing, which brings in the lead and closing ratio. If you haven’t done so already, our panelist advised bringing in a full-time marketing person.

Both Couwenberg and our marine professional advised cleaning up balance sheets, assets,

inventory, vendor contracts and real property. “Especially review all long-term vendor contracts and equipment leases as they can result in a serious liability for buyers and potentially jeopardize the deal,” noted Couwenberg. “If possible, renegotiate them into shorter terms, ideally month-to-month.” When it comes to real property, Couwenberg strongly recommended a professional appraisal to gain insights into your property’s value. If leasing the property, talk with your landlord about your rights to assign or sub-lease the property to a potential buyer, advised Couwenberg.

Speaking of real property, you can boost your curb appeal by adding landscaping, replacing LED light bulbs and applying a fresh coat of paint. You never know when potential buyers will be visiting or driving by. And since your transaction will likely be an asset sale rather than a stock sale, work with your accountant to identify assets that have been sold or disposed of and personal assets that are not integral to the business or will be excluded from the sale, added Couwenberg.

Additionally, leverage the Section 179 allowance to expense equipment purchases instead of depreciating them and reclassify assets that were either expensed or subject to accelerated depreciation. Conduct regular inventory assessments to account for obsolescence. Identify aged, damaged, unboxed, and non-returnable parts as these may require adjustments during the closing process. Giving buyers a clearer picture of what they are acquiring will enhance your fair market value.

Conclusion

Research shows that the vast majority of business owners do not have written exit plans or formal advisory teams in place. Thus, seven out of eight (88%) are not fully satisfied with their deals. The advice above can help you flip the odds in your favor. ●

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The advertisement features a large background image of a speedboat moving across the water, leaving a white wake. In the bottom right corner, there is a stack of Boating Industry magazine covers. The top cover is the June/July 2023 issue, priced at \$9.50, with the headline "WOMEN making WAVES" and a sub-headline "30 Women Making Waves as nominated by the industry and selected by Boating Industry". Other visible covers include the May 2023 issue (\$9.50), the March/April 2023 issue (\$9.50), the February 2023 issue (\$9.50), the November 2022 issue (\$9.50) featuring "2021 TOP 100 DEALER OF THE YEAR", and the October 2022 issue (\$9.50) featuring "2021 MOVIE & SHAKER OF THE YEAR PAUL SINGER".

THE DAYS OF JUST WORKING ON MOTORS IS OVER

Q&A with ABYC Foundation's 2023 Educator of the Year

By Sarah Devlin

Accreditation Director, ABYC Foundation

The American Boat & Yacht Council (ABYC) Foundation has been looking to schools that provide Marine Service Technology programs as a means to fill the labor gap in the boat building and repair industry. One initiative is to highlight the educators who have made an impact on students and industry with an annual Educator of the Year award. The Foundation receives multiple nominations, vetted through various ABYC staff and industry stakeholders.

This year, the honor goes to Freddie Fowler of Manatee Technical College (MTC) in Bradenton, Fla. We caught up with Fowler via email.

ABYC Foundation: How did you end up teaching marine service technology?

Freddie Fowler: While I was working for Yel-lowfin, my former instructor and mentor Kelly Ewing (Prior MTC Marine Services Technology Instructor, Retired) informed me that a part-time position was available at MTC. I applied and the rest was history.

ABYC: What is most rewarding about teaching these students?

FF: Seeing students who struggled at the beginning of the program become confident in their abilities to work on boats and start a successful career. I enjoy working side-by-side with students on issues that arise while working on a project to instill confidence in them to know they can find solutions.

ABYC: Can you talk a bit about your relationship with the marine industry as a whole—how do you engage folks who work in the industry with your students and graduates?

FF: I like this question, because it's extremely important for our industry, advisory, and business partners to understand how to engage and work with the technical schools that have marine service programs. Now, not all marine programs are the same and I don't want our program to be the same because I want to do something that has



never been done before.

My approach to industry leaders is to get involved with the tech schools. Most industry partners look at me funny when I say this: "Come see our program for yourself and speak to our students. You don't want to hear it from me; you want to hear it from the students. See our classroom, what we are currently accomplishing, and what the program is progressing too. I'm not asking for money, nor do I need or want donations; what I want is your advice and involvement." Advisory input is more important to the program, curriculum, and students. It keeps us in check. Also, keep in mind I never look at our program as mine. It belongs to our industry, and we need businesses to ensure we are teaching the correct information and current technology. The marine industry evolves and changes so fast, so their involvement is crucial.

I believe we are doing something different here at MTC and I hope that other technical schools and the entire industry take notice.

ABYC: Have students changed much over the years, and in what way? How do you work with students who struggle with the work?

FF: I've only been an instructor for two and half years, so I haven't seen much change in students.

Now, our numbers have increased because I believe what we are doing at MTC, teaching the "total boat concept," is making a difference and the community is seeing that.

What has changed is technology in the industry. People are wanting to have the same amenities in their boats as they do in their cars and homes. So, the days of just working on motors is over. The new technician needs to understand the boat from front to back. We teach our students from the ground up, which gives them a firm foundation that can be built upon as we move into more complex topics such as engine diagnostics and repair, electronics installation, network installation, and electrical install and troubleshooting. Not only does this program provide a firm foundation for students, but it also prepares them for the future.

ABYC: What are some principles you instill in your students?

FF: I tell my students "I'm training my replacement every day" I come into work.

We are not in the business of doing guesswork. Your certification, reputation, and people's lives depend on it.

Never stop learning and listening.

Most importantly: "Read the Manual!"

ABYC: Do you want to give any shoutouts to team members?

FF: Thank you to former marine service instructor and mentor Kelly Ewing, Yamaha District Service Manager (DSM) Kerry Schroeder, Suzuki Service Representative Lius Gonzalez, NMEA Director Mark Reedenauer, ABYC Foundation Accreditation Director Sarah Devlin, and fellow instructor, Ron Tomlin, for all their support. Also, the Marine Service Technology Program wouldn't be where it is today if not for the continuous support of Doug Wagner, Director of MTC, and Justin Erickson, Deputy Director of MTC.

Past winners include Kevin McKiernan, North Providence High School (2022); Magnus Gedda, Volvo Penta of the Americas, and Anthony Margiotta, College of the Florida Keys (2021); Stephen Spencer, Palm Beach State College (2020). ●

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The newest
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for 2024



FOR THE LAST 11 YEARS, the *Boating Industry* Top Products program has brought to readers 50 of the marine industry's newest and most innovative products and services of the year.

In order to be eligible for consideration, products or services had to have been introduced or significantly updated since January 2023. The proceeding list of products differentiated themselves from a large group of submissions for their impact on the industry, innovations and how they advance the product category, or in some cases, create a new segment in its own.

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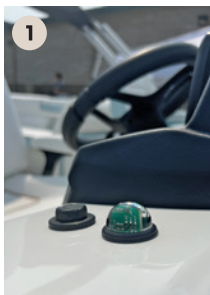


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1 American Technology Components NYTCRUZ

NYTCRUZ is a patent-pending automated sensor designed for boating enthusiasts, that senses the sun's UV and ambient light to automatically switch both your navigation and anchor lights on at dusk and off at dawn when ignition power is present.

2 Avalon Pontoons Carbon Fiber Excalibur

The Carbon Fiber Excalibur from Avalon Pontoons is the builder's newest flagship model Excalibur redesigned for 2024 using full carbon fiber walls and tower. After previously using a heavy-duty aluminum and fiberglass construction, the new model offers higher quality control and produces consistent long-lasting product, free from gel coat issues and spidering cracks associated with fiberglass plus additional benefits in shedding weight.

3 Avikus NewBoat Dock

Avikus's NeuBoat Dock, the first in a series of new product rollouts, consists of a six-camera system, which is based on the company's advanced autonomous vessel technology. It provides a 360-degree bird's-eye view of the vessel through a multi-function display to assist in tight-quarters maneuvering and docking.

4 B&G Hercules

Hercules from B&G is the brains behind the ultimate sailing system. Featuring an ultra-fast quad-core processor and maximized integration options, the new processor delivers sailing data sets including advanced true wind calculations, motion correction and calibration, advanced heel and correction settings, boat speed calibration and advanced Starline calculations, along with Polar Tables for performance data.

5 Basta Boatlifts Floating Lift

Basta's new Floating Lift introduces a fast hydraulic, solar charged floating lift, with an 11,000-pound capacity that can fit in a 12-foot slip, be side-tied to a dock, moored in open water on a buoy, rest freestanding on the lake or seafloor, or be directly attached to a floating or fixed dock. With a 40-second launch time, the Floating Lift from Basta is packed with a variety of new features and options.

6 Bayliner Trophy Explorer 23, 25 and 29

Providing a full range of 23- to 29-feet, the Explorer series from Bayliner features include a foredeck with opening hatch that can be converted to a large sun lounge; ergonomic helm with mounting space for a 9-inch GPS/Chart plotter; walkway to the bow area and a sliding cabin entry door; versatile cockpit area suitable for cruising and dining or sunbathing with easy deployable sun lounge and water access; fully equipped galley with sink, recessed storage and optional stove and refrigerator; enclosed cabin with a fully equipped bathroom and sleeping quarters.

7 Bennington Pontoons S-Series

With a variety of layout options, the new S Series models do not compromise luxury for price. The interiors of the S models feature a mix of premium Serene Soft Touch and Simtex vinyl. The helm has been redesigned from the ground up with a helm station that features updated ergonomics. The standard binnacle arm provides fingertip control, which is unique for a pontoon at an entry level price point. Finally, the new models come with a Sure-Last Mooring Cover with an easy access entry zipper.

8 Boat Fix Sea Pro Connect

Primarily a service, Sea Pro Connect is paired with hardware to create a product that combines boat monitoring, a 24/7 mechanical hotline and towing. Imagine your boat

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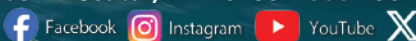
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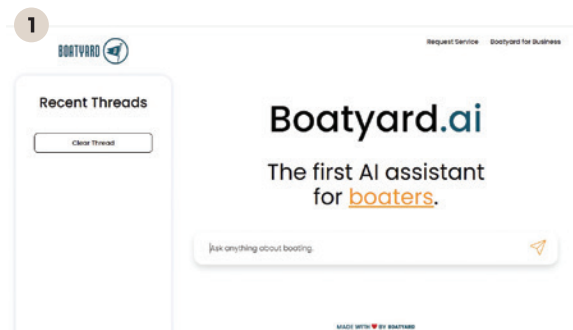
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breaks down on the water and you get an SMS notification saying you're having engine problems or your battery is dead, however Sea Pro and Boat Fix don't stop there. Boaters can call the Sea Pro Connect Mechanical Hotline and speak directly to a mechanic, including having a video call if necessary. While Boat Fix is successful at resolving 86% of the calls that come in, if unable to resolve the issue on-water, the Sea Pro Connect program will cover your towing costs to get you back to the dock or your trailer safely.

1 Boatyard by Boatyard

From Q1 2023 to Q1 2024, Boatyard has transformed its dashboard interface with over 50 new features and UI updates. In particular, there are seven major new platform functionalities that demonstrate how Boatyard is redefining the landscape of marine service solutions including: Boatyard's AiAssist tool, user-friendly Digital Forms, Boatyard's scheduling tool, VIP Customer features, a Job Activity Feed and Boatyard.AI.

2 Boston Whaler 210 Vantage

The new Boston Whaler 210 Vantage is a boat designed to meet the needs of the widest possible range of boaters.. This model features a dual console cockpit with a wraparound windshield, seating in the bow, cockpit and stern, roomy storage beneath seating and a convenient anchor locker. At 21 feet, this model is easily trailerable, but 250 horsepower on the transom means boaters can get up and go when they're ready to ride.

3 Brownell Boat Stands & Equipment BL8AIR

Brownell's BL8 Air/Hydraulic Boat Lift provides greater strength while saving labor and increasing safety in the workplace. This is the first boat lift of its type to be powered by the shop's air supply. This allows control of all four jacks to a single manifold, allowing a single operator to control the boat remotely.

4 Dockbloxx by Dockbloxx

Dockbloxx is a patent-pending product designed to improve functionality, organization, convenience, safety and enjoyment on the dock and on the water. The unique design of the "bloxx" allows boaters to secure accessories to dock posts without drilling or using unsightly zip ties, bungee cords, or other hanging contraptions.

5 Dockmate Positioning System

The Dockmate Positioning System (DPS) has two operating modes: one mode for use on open water and another mode to use for short periods of time in close quarters. In the open water operating mode, DPS will use only the engines to keep the boat in its target position. In the close quarters operating mode, DPS uses both the engines and bow and stern thrusters in concert to keep the vessel in its target position. Dockmate Positioning System is driven by an IMU unit and a DPS Receiver installed within the vessel and connects to Dockmate GNSS antennas installed on the hardtop. It is designed for installation on any vessel with at least two engines and Dockmate compatible engine and thruster controls.

6 Dometic NRX-S Refrigerators

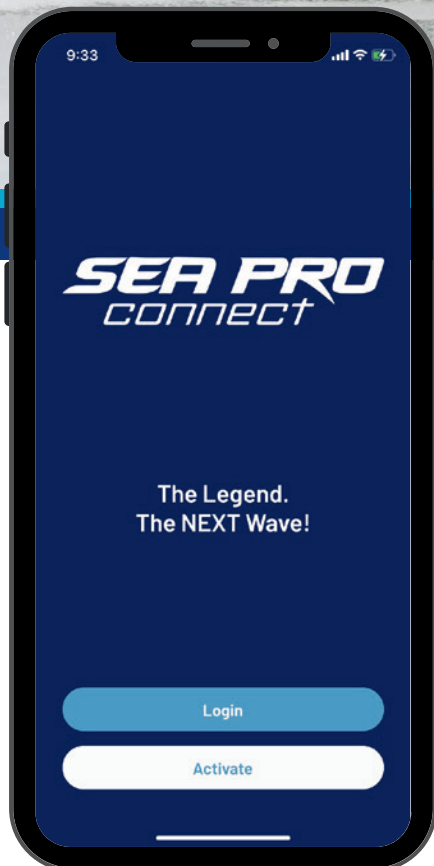
The NRX-S Marine Refrigerator line was designed to provide superior refrigeration with far less energy consumption than other solutions on the market. A full line up of models brings this capability to a wide range of boat sizes and styles, from 20-foot center consoles to 100-foot yachts and everything in between.

7 ePropulsion eLite

Designed to be a compact and lightweight electric outboardthe ePropulsion eLite 500W electric outboard is an easy-to-use alternative to small internal combustion engines. With

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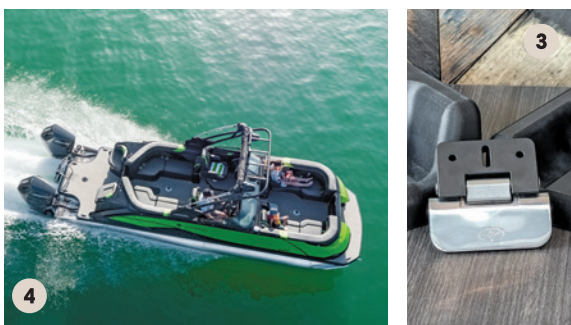
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multiple charging options it can be fully charged in around 4 hours. At just under 3-feet in length and weighing 15-pounds including the built-in battery, the eLite stores easily and the one-click quick-release bracket allows for installation and removal in a matter of seconds.

1 Formula 457 Center Console Sport

The Formula 457 Center Console offers buyers the opportunity to create the exact boat customers desire from one platform. At 45'7" LOA with a 13'9" beam and powered by triple Mercury 600 Verados, the Formula 457 will impress with its aggressive yet reliable stepped FAS3TECH hull and 22-degree deadrise, delivering speeds up to 60 mph. Features include: Wind-Armor wind and spray protection system, custom-designed triple helm seats feature folding armrests and electrically adjustable seats, cooled by an 18,000 BTU air conditioner, an electronics suite, up to 51 drink and rod/drink holders throughout and much more.

2 Garmin GPSMAP 9227

The recreational marine industry's first and largest 4K resolution touchscreen chartplotter, the GPSMAP 9227 features a 27-inch IPS (in-plane switching) sunlight-readable touchscreen display with edge-to-edge clarity that can be both flush- or flat-mounted into a boat's dash. The IPS display provides consistent, accurate colors that can be seen from all viewing angles, even with polarized sunglasses. The GPSMAP 9227 is the first series to offer Garmin BlueNet.

3 Gemlux Paddle Latch

Gemlux created a new, improved paddle latch that is smoother, quieter and has a stainless-steel finish. Installing the latch is now easier, as the keeper can be installed in the precise location while still attached to the latch. Gemlux's paddle latch incorporates a roller keep technology, which ensures a smooth and effortless closing mechanism, eliminating the alignment issues. The paddle latch can be used for forward-facing and rear-facing seats and lids, and is available in both horizontal and vertical applications.

4 Godfrey Pontoon Boats XP

Godfrey Pontoon Boats' new 2024 XP Series' helm features a dedicated wide-screen 12-inch display and 7-inch touchscreen displays, which controls everything from the JL Audio sound system to the RGB LED accent lighting and even which of the two forward facing cameras are shown. For added comfort, the XP is appointed with a folding, action-powered Bimini that allows for 11 feet of shade coverage, optional Cool Touch seating, lockable storage compartments and cooled cupholders and plenty of USB-C chargers throughout. The XP's exterior and interior are completely customizable, including a variety of color selections for the exterior, vinyl, vinyl accents and flooring.

5 GOST Hardwired UCU

The GOST Universal Control Unit (UCU), used with its GOST Apparition IDP and NT Evolution IDP is fully compatible for hardwired inputs for up to 192 zones. The UCU offers a great option for customers that want to hardwire GOST systems. Whether the UCU is being used on a high-end center console, sportfish or a superyacht, this platform can operate over both cellular and Inmarsat Geostationary Satellite networks, allowing for true global coverage.

6 Harris Crowne 250

The Harris Crowne 250 offers a new design featuring a new exterior and thoughtful interior design that combines crisp details and understated elegance for a one-of-a-kind boating experience. The Crowne 250's launch coincides with Harris's all-new RPM Technology platform that underwent dozens of design iterations and hundreds of hours of endurance testing to create a solid foundation for the entire Harris lineup.



7 Hempel Silic One

Hempel's Silic One is a high-performance, copper- and biocide-free antifouling coating. Formulated with advanced silicone and polymer technology, Silic One provides a smooth, low-friction surface that makes it difficult for fouling organisms to attach to the hull and easy for them to be removed when the boat is in motion. Unlike traditional antifouling, Silic One is not constrained by boat type, construction material, water type, temperature or even geographical location.

8 Honda Marine BF350 V8 Outboard

The Honda Marine BF350 targets 25-foot-plus boats and is designed with multiple benefits including a broader, flatter torque curve; smoother power delivery throughout the engine's operating range; ergonomically designed controls; excellent fuel efficiency; and improved reliability, ease-of-use, maintenance and ownership. The Honda Marine BF350 5-liter V8 outboard delivers 350hp at the propeller shaft while operating on 86 octane unleaded gasoline.

9 JBL JAM5000

JBL JAM5000N is a mid-entry level marine audio source unit designed for multi-element environments and engineered to meet the demands of extreme environments while satisfying the performance requirements for marine audio consumers in this price range. The 2.8-inch color sunlight viewable TFT, IP6-rated marine audio source unit features four channels of RMS power output at 25Wrms. The JBL JAM5000N marine head unit supports multiple audio sources – Bluetooth, USB, AM/FM/WB, and is DAB+ ready.

10 Kenyon VDC 48V Grill

The Kenyon VDC Grill is the first 48V battery-operated electric grill, blending innovative design with the IntelliKEN Touch control technology for precision in temperature regulation and energy efficiency. Tailored for the marine sector's transition to 48VDC power systems, it addresses the growing need for high-current accessories. This grill offers substantial cooking space to accommodate family-sized meals all while minimizing power consumption.

11 Lowrance Eagle

Eagle is the latest offering in the Lowrance brand's entry-level fishfinder/chartplotter lineup. Featuring newly designed high-definition enhanced sonar, with FishReveal technology and detailed C-MAP charting including Genesis Live, Eagle is Lowrance's most accessible fishfinder yet. The Eagle fishfinder is available in 4-inch, 5-inch, 7-inch and 9-inch display sizes.

12 MasterCraft Boats Power Board Racks

MasterCraft's patent-pending Power Board Racks revolutionize board storage at the touch of a button. Designed to accommodate a wide variety of boards, these racks boast a split-angle design for the forks. Powered actuators open and close the all-new clamping mechanism, allowing consumers to store two "surf style" wakesurf boards while retaining the ability to rotate the racks outward or into the cockpit with boards in place. Equipped with built-in circuit protection to monitor clamping force and prevent potential board damage, the Power Board Racks also features a manual override function for board release in the event of power loss.

13 Mastervolt Mac Plus DC-DC Charger

Mastervolt's 36V and 48V Mac Plus DC-DC chargers feature a new bi-directional technology that provides a quick, safe and consistent charge for both service and starter batteries, with a stable output that powers even the most sensitive loads in boats, RVs or



any off-grid system. The new bi-directional technology ensures both service and starter batteries receive all the power they need by using either side as an input or output, delivering a reliable and consistent charge.

1 Mercury Marine Avator 20e and 35e Electric Outboards

The Mercury Avator 20e and 35e outboards generate 2200W and 3700W of power, respectively, at the propeller shaft. The 20e can produce similar acceleration as a 5hp outboard, while the 35e generates acceleration that is comparable to a Mercury 9.9hp FourStroke outboard. The Avator 20e and 35e 2300Wh lithium-ion battery was developed in partnership with the Navico Group's Mastervolt brand and engineered exclusively for marine applications having been drop tested and IP67 rated for water resistance.

2 Mercury Racing 500R

Mercury Racing elevated its outboard engine power and technology with the supercharged 4.6L V8 500R. The 500 horsepower and 10% higher torque over the 450R in a compact, 4.6L supercharged 6600 RPM V8, delivers a class-leading power-to-weight ratio on 89 octane pump fuel. This powerhouse is full of technological advancements including: a new mid-section, new gearcase, and first-for-the-marine-industry humidity compensation technology.

3 Mustang Survival MIT 150 Convertible A/M Inflatable PFD

The MIT 150 Convertible A/M Inflatable PFD—the sole Type II in the MIT line, offers unmatched buoyancy, turning, and airway protection. Users can switch between manual and automatic inflation modes for versatility in any activity or conditions. The exclusive Membrane Inflatable Technology (MIT) and high-tenacity nylon face fabric create a comfortable, lightweight, and flexible fit.

4 PCM Marine Engines ZZ8

For the 2024 model year, PCM's new ZZ8 models include the industry's first supercharged inboard towports engine over 600hp to run on 89 octane fuel. For the new 2024 ZZ8S and ZZ8R models, PCM developed a new ground up marinization featuring a custom supercharger cooling circuit to provide the engine with cooler intake air temperature and higher performance. Utilizing this new marinization along with custom calibration for engine optimization and protection, the mandate for premium fuel in supercharged boats is no longer.

5 Premier Marine Troll & Stow

More than just a new way to look at trolling motor mounts, Troll & Stow is a real game changer by eliminating the mess and clutter of traditional trolling systems with a design that deploys fast and stows completely below the pontoon's deck in seconds.

6 Raymarine Alpha Series Displays

The Alpha Series displays are 7- and 9-inch-high visibility tactical touchscreen instruments with a fully customizable dashboard and graphic displays to help sailors make smarter sailing decisions. Designed for helm or mast mounting, the Alpha Series is controlled and customized via touchscreen or remotely from a Raymarine Axiom chartplotter. The Alpha Series displays can be mounted in portrait or landscape and only require a single cable for data and power.

7 Regal Boats 38 Surf

As the world's largest surf boat, the Regal 38 Surf creates a category of its own. It features a surfing experience, day yacht amenities such as a refreshment island, seating for 18



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people or more, unparalleled technology, a cabin for overnight stays and available options like a fishing package and paddle board racks for added versatility.

8 RELiON Battery RB36V40

The RB36V40 is a durable, long-lasting 36V 40Ah marine lithium battery. The RB36V40 provides maximum capacity with minimum hassle thanks to its parallel design. The improved connectors and small Group 31 footprint make onboard installation simple, on top of weighing 70% less than the lead-acid equivalent. Built for the marine environment, the 36V battery includes an IP67-rated case, which completely repels dust and resists water ingress for up to 30 minutes submerged at 1 meter.

9 Scanstrut ATMOS 12V Integrated Air Station

ATMOS represents a paradigm shift in marine air pumps. At the push of a button, ATMOS is ready to inflate your paddleboards, towables and more: simply set the target pressure and let ATMOS do all the hard work. Utilizing Scanstrut's outdoor technology DNA, this is waterproof on-board air that's engineered to thrive in the marine environment.

10 Scout Boats Sport Tower Upper Station

Scout was determined to create an upper station design that was not only highly functional, but also highly innovative. Most upper stations/towers on a bay boat put the legs of the driver in front of the helm passengers. Scout's new patent-pending upper station moved the positioning of the captain aft of the helm passengers creating increased visibility and offers full controls - including a flush mount Garmin touchscreen - topside, with the ability to transfer controls up or back down with the push of a button.

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3 kW



Navy 6.0 Evo
6 kW



X12
12 kW



X20
20 kW



X40
40 kW

Inboards



I-10
10 kW



I-20
20 kW



I-40
40 kW



H-Series
60-250 kW

Pod Drives



Pod Drive
1.0 Evo
1 kW



Pod Drive
3.0 Evo
3 kW



Pod Drive
6.0 Evo
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Pod Drive
12 eSSA
12 kW

Batteries



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3072 Wh / 48 V



E163
8345 Wh / 48 V



G102-100
10240 Wh / 96 V

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1 Sea Pro Boats 245FLX

The first thing boaters will notice about the new 245FLX is a unique cockpit layout and versatile seating options that let families make the most of their time on the water. For example, instead of the traditional helm leaning post, the 245FLX features two captain's chairs that swivel 360 degrees, allowing the captain and first mate to face in any direction. Sea Pro also moved the traditional stern livewell to make room for a large bench seat that spans the entire transom. Keeping with this theme of comfort and family interaction, the 245FLX also boasts starboard and port stern seats that convert to face either towards the outside of the boat or inward towards the cockpit.



2 Sea Ray SDX 270 Surf

The SDX 270 Surf from Sea Ray offers large social zones, powerful propulsion, convertible seating throughout, substantial storage organization and premium amenities. The first surf vessel offered in Sea Ray's SDX line showcases the brand's next-gen Sea Ray design language and is propelled by a standard 350hp MerCruiser 6.2L engine with a forward-facing Bravo Four S drive. With contra-rotating props, SmartCraft technology and DTS, the boat is enabled for family-friendly water sports and exceptional maneuverability when docking or traveling at low speeds. The SDX 270 Surf is outfitted with an intuitive surf system that generates repeatable, rideable waves for wakesurfing and other watersports.



3 Sea-Doo 2024 RXP-X

Sea-Doo introduces the quickest personal watercraft on the water today with the 2024 Sea-Doo RXP-X. Featuring a new 325hp Rotax 1630 ACE engine, a new approach led to the development of a completely redesigned air intake system paired with a proven engine which has been enhanced to cope with the significantly increased power output. Less restrictions in the complete air path and a supercharger capable of spinning at almost 100,000 rpm supply the engine with the necessary cool air to get the extra output. Combinations like the planetary gearbox with a spring-loaded cam clutch drive make the supercharger maintenance-free. Further improvements on the piston package, crankshaft, valve train, lube oil circuit and electronics package make it possible to safely rev the engine up to 8250 rpm.



4 Simrad Yachting NSX ULTRAWIDE

NSX ULTRAWIDE is the world's first fully-featured ultrawide marine display. Delivering all the benefits of dual screens in one place, the new NSX ULTRAWIDE is up to 63% wider than the NSX and provides a more streamlined and immersive experience resulting in an elevated dash aesthetic that unlocks new possibilities and a superior charting experience. Available in 12-inch and 15-inch screen sizes, the NSX ULTRAWIDE is a versatile premium solution for a variety of vessel types including surf/wake, pontoons, cruisers, and small to mid-size center consoles.



5 Skyhawk Oversea Boat Monitoring System

The Skyhawk Oversea Boat Monitoring system features a compact, self-powered Oversea Hub that can be located almost anywhere on the boat. All that's required is to drop the IP67-waterproof-rated hub into place. By itself, the Oversea Hub provides location-on-demand tracking, whether it's in a storage yard, in a marina, or on a trailer, using multiple location technologies. Boaters can customize their Oversea system and monitor more aspects of their vessel with a full family of IP67 waterproof wireless sensors. The Oversea sensor family allows boaters to monitor battery status, shore power connection, bilge pump activity, and temperature/humidity/high water, sending alerts that can help keep a vessel safe from costly damage and ready to use whenever the owner arrives.



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6 Sunstream Boat Lifts Helix-P

The Helix-P is the first rotary hydraulic boatlift. High-speed DC hydraulics, versus AC electric motors, enable speeds 12-times faster, quiet operation and higher reliability. Since it is 100% submersible, the structure is hidden, the cradle locks in the up position without sway and is protected from storm surge. The compact design enables marinas to have approximately 15% more slips, less electrical cost, nicer looks and improved safety. The single motor design enables the boat to be off-center, closer to the dock for easier/safer boarding and without constant releveling. Helix-P is also the first boat lift with computer control enabling acceleration/deceleration, soft-stop, overload protection and multiple stops.

7 Suzuki Marine Stealth Line

Suzuki Marine listened to its customers and boat builders to give them what they wanted — a full line up of motors with a bold new look. The new Suzuki Stealth Line -- Shinobi in Japanese — features five motors from 115 to 250hp that look great on a wide range of freshwater and saltwater boats, combining Suzuki performance and reliability with distinctive matte black finish and graphics.

8 Tiara Yachts EX 54

Tiara Yachts' EX 54 is packed with features from a robust interior amenities to a variety of exterior appointments. Customers' flexibility and preferences are prioritized with the ability to select from three aft cockpit layouts, making each EX 54 uniquely personalized to their owner. Aft cockpit module options include a lounge module, glass patio or an adventure module. Above deck, the EX 54 features twin terraces and swim platform as well

See 2024 Top Products, Page 30

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MARKET TRENDS

BY KRYSTINA SKIBO

Outboard Engines Market Remains

STRONG

After seeing the highest sales volume in 20 years in 2020, demand for outboard engines remained steady in 2022 as unit sales surpassed 300,000 for the third consecutive year, reaching 305,900 units, according to the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA).

Even though unit sales were down slightly, it's not necessarily a bad thing. Jim Loftus, Director of Strategic Planning / Business and Products, American Honda Motor Co., says sales are just going back to normal after a Covid boom.

"During Covid, everything outdoors went nuts," he says. "2021 was really popular for any outdoor product. We peaked at 350,000 units sold, which was the strongest year for us. Traditionally, we see 300,000 unit sales in outboard engines. But because of interest rates, we're seeing outboard engine sales trend back to what we've seen in the past."

Younger generations getting into boating

One particular trend that Loftus has seen pop up since Covid is the younger generation's interest in

boating. "For the first time ever in our industry, three-out-of-four new boat buyers with outboard engines were millennials. A lot of Gen Y have also moved into the marine market which is fantastic because a concern of ours for years was that our industry would disappear," he notes.

Lightspeed research between April 2023 and March 2024 found that even though baby boomers are still the top purchasers of outboard engines, the millennial generation spent the second highest amount on the unit purchase price, at an average of \$6,466.

In Lightspeed's study, baby boomers purchased 40% of outboard engine units sold. On average, they spent \$5,591 on the unit purchase price. Millennials purchased 19% of the units, while Gen Z spent an average of \$6,946 on the unit price and purchased 2% of the units.

A focus on carbon neutrality

Another notable trend that Loftus mentioned, along with Ben Speciale, President, Yamaha U.S. Marine Business Unit, is that the marine



industry should be focusing on reducing its carbon footprint.

"Innovation and technology will recreate opportunities to move towards more carbon neutrality," says Speciale. "That is why Yamaha has, and will, invest in the people and resources needed to create the next generation of marine systems."



Internal combustion engines (ICEs) represent the dominant technology in marine propulsion today, and Speciale believes they will continue to be a mainstay in the industry for a long time. The fuel used to power them, however, will and should change.

"We have successfully demonstrated sustainable marine fuels. This will have the greatest impact as there are over 10 million boats that could reduce the carbon footprint if these fuels become part of the mainstream fuel," he explains. "Liquid fuels simply have the best power density."

Yamaha Marine announced in Miami earlier this year that they are also exploring hydrogen, which Speciale says the company hopes to be running its hydrogen outboard in a test form this summer.

Honda Marine has also been looking at hydrogen technology as of recent, according to Loftus, but it does come with its challenges.

"The one issue with hydrogen is filling stations. That's where it becomes a challenge," he says. "And you can't fill up a hydrogen-powered boat in Florida, even though it's the largest location for boats. You can get hydrogen in California, so that market is great for that type of application."

John Buelow, President of Mercury Marine, says the company is monitoring sustainable trends in other transportation sectors, from electrification in cars to eco-friendly fuels in trucking and aviation, that could also increase the sustainability of the marine industry.

"Upstream, we are doing everything we can to minimize our impact such as using recycled aluminum, installing solar arrays, adding to our list of zero-waste-to-landfill factories and more. We're proud of our efforts," he says.

Electrification

Aside from hydrogen technology, electric engines are another sustainable alternative that can help reduce the marine industry's carbon footprint. "If you look at electric, in certain states where you can't get fuel, there will always be electricity. Depending on where you are geographically, each technology is relevant in its own way and has an opportunity," mentions Loftus.

Honda Marine has a proposal now to electrify roughly 24 horsepower and below, according to Loftus. They even just launched a pilot program in Japan for their EV.

"I like to say on the electrification side, it's not if, but when," Loftus notes. "The industry will have 70% of electric motors by 2031, and it's going to require technology."

For Buelow, support for growing electric loads as boats get larger as well as electric steering are two key innovations in sustainable outboard engine manufacturing.

"Our innovation award-winning Fathom system provides 48V charging for Fathom ePower-equipped boats, which could really change the game for customers who ticked every option box but don't want a generator," he says.

A need for speed

While sustainability concerns continue to be a hot topic for discussion, Speciale has also been seeing an increase in the number and horsepower of engines on types of boats that he hasn't seen in the past.

"A few years ago, it was unheard of to see twin 300 to 450 horsepower outboards on a pontoon, but now it is becoming more common," he says.

Agreeing with Speciale is Buelow, stating that the industry remains focused on high horsepower.

"This has enabled larger and larger outboard-powered boats," he says. "10 years ago, there were a couple of 42-foot outboard-powered boats, whereas today we have a few OEMs building models over 60 feet. Pontoons are seeing a significant increase in installed power, too, which is making them even more versatile."

Speciale notes that mid-range horsepower is a best-selling segment because it fits the needs of the majority of Yamaha Marine customers.

"However, boats continue to get bigger and increased outboard horsepower is important to meet the needs of those customers," he says. "Technology is just as important. More intelligent systems and lighter weight engines can improve the per-



formance and accessibility of larger boats while reducing the intimidation factor. If we can make it easier for new boaters to enjoy time on the water and at the same time allow experienced boaters to confidently operate larger boats, then we all win."

Loftus is also seeing a desire for increased horsepower at Honda Marine. "Whether they need it or not, in the marine industry, there's still this thought process that bigger is better. Do I need it? No. But can I afford it? Yes," he says.

More specifically, Loftus is seeing customers lean towards 300 to 350 horsepower. Even during hard times, those engines continue to see growth.

Welcoming new boaters to the industry

Even though discretionary spending is still tight for some consumers, Yamaha Marine's Speciale expects to continue to see new customers from the Covid years upgrading to larger, more feature-rich boats.

"We also expect to see first-time boaters continue to enter the market," he says. "The outdoor lifestyle is a part of our culture now. People enjoy and see the benefits of recreating outside with friends and family. The more access we can create for fishing and water, the more our industry can help people create those wonderful memories on the water to cherish for a lifetime." ●

Steve Potts

Founder/CEO, Scout Boats

When selecting a personality to profile for the *Boating Industry* Top Products Issue, veteran boat builder Steve Potts was a natural choice. As founder and CEO of Scout Boats, Potts has been fully immersed in product design and development for 57 years, from his earliest days as a teenager working at a retail dealership where he found his passion tinkering on a skiff named Scout, to a fulfilling lifelong career encompassing everything from small trailer boats to sailing vessels, yachts and center consoles.



By Wanda
Kenton Smith

Over the decades, Potts has earned four utility and two design patents along with dozens of documented product innovations; his energy and drive show no signs of deceleration. In fact, he and his product development team headed by son Stevie are entrenched in “Project Everest” – aka Scout’s flagship 670 LCS – reportedly the largest outboard powered boat on the planet slated for debut this September.

Boating Industry spoke with Potts about early challenges, his relentless pursuit “to create what doesn’t exist,” and many lessons he’s learned along the way.

Boating Industry (BI): You were plant manager of a fiberglass company and manager of composite operations for a sailing company prior to investing all your earnings to launch Scout in 1989. Tell us about those early days.

Steve Potts (SP): My wife Dianne and I had saved up \$50,000 to start the business. I worked evenings and weekends through 1988 to design and build the plugs for two new Scouts, the 141 and 151 Sportfish. While I brought my skills in boat manufacturing to the business, I was young and naïve and didn’t know diddly about sales. I took the two boats on a double-stacked trailer to coastal towns every weekend. My strategy was to find a phone booth at a gas station, tear out the yellow pages for boat dealerships and then go visit... I was thrown out 75% of the time!

BI: Your story is one of sheer perseverance. Talk about the natural disasters that challenged your young company.

SP: Hurricane Hugo hit September 22, 1989, and leveled our building. We were paying around \$500 a month for rent and working from a 100-year-old former horse stable. I visited the facility with my two young kids and brick by brick, we unburied what we could salvage. I never had the inclination to give in, but to just put one foot in front of the other. Dianne and I took turns standing in the FEMA line and got a loan for \$10,000 which we used buy groceries, rent a



Scout Boats founder and CEO Steve Potts shares his rags to riches story in a new book coming later this year from Forbes.

smaller building with a dirt floor and just survive. Two months later, on December 23, the worst snowstorm in history hit the area, caving in the roof of our building and once again, destroying everything we owned.

I remember asking, what was heaven trying to tell me with these two back-to-back disasters? We put the plastic up and restored things to the best of our ability. It set us back from two boats a week to one, but we just kept at it.

BI: What was the watershed moment when things turned around?

SP: It was 1990. We had scraped together enough money to showcase three models at IMTEC in Atlanta – 14’, 15’ and a new 172 Sportfish. At the time, we had six dealers and had just hired a salesman. By the end of the show, we had 100 orders, signed up 31 dealers and sold out our production for the next 2.5 years. It was the highlight of my life!

BI: Why the resounding sales success?

SP: Most of the coastal boats at the time were kind of crude and dealers at the show were looking for something different. Our boats brought a new look to the market. I’d looked to Boston Whaler and Bertram for my benchmarks and our new Scouts featured finely finished touches throughout, different styling and a totally hand-laid, high-quality fit and finish.

BI: From its humble beginnings, Scout has emerged as a product innovator and highly respected global brand. What’s the scope of operations today?

SP: We have 500 employees operating from a 34-acre campus where we design

and manufacture luxury models from 17' to 53' including dual consoles, bay boats, and center console sportfishing machines; our new 670 will debut in September. We have Plants A–D, product development and engineering, plus are underway on construction of Plant E, which when finished will bring us to around 400,000 square feet.

BI: You've sure come a long way from dirt floors, with world class facilities and sales to a global marketplace.

SP: To put it in perspective, our first boats sold in the \$1200 range, while our current 53' sells for north of \$3 million. Interestingly, we've even sold a number of boats to several royal families in the Middle East!

BI: Speaking of families ... your adult children and their spouses all work at Scout. What are the benefits and challenges of operating a family-owned business?

SP: The benefit is that the entire family is as passionate about the brand as I am. I struggle with the disconnect between the generations of my children versus my generation of baby boomers... work schedules and commitments are not the same priority for them.

BI: In terms of product design, what's your genesis for new ideas?

SP: I've always been crazy about cars. I follow the styling trends of the luxury automotive industry.

BI: Regarding trends, any opinion on the future of electric boats and related technology?

SP: Interestingly enough, I drive a Tesla which is the ultimate in EV in the automotive industry. For several years I worked on the design and development of an electric boat and built a test boat that I ran. I determined that it's up to the industry and the development of new technology with lithium and propulsion to meet the consumer demand before a truly successful electric boat can be marketable.



Steve and Dianne Potts both enjoy the boating lifestyle, including cruising in the Florida Keys where they own a home in Marathon.



For many years, Steve Potts personally painted the stripes on every boat sold. Recently, a customer demanded Steve's personal touch, along with a video documenting it as a prerequisite for delivery.

BI: Your insight regarding R & D and the investment required for successful new product design?

SP: The timeline of a new design has been shortened significantly with advancements in technology. Product development is the lifeline of any business. PD & E is first in our company... new products are what consumers want and demand.

BI: Advice for young professionals considering a marine industry career in product design?

SP: Anyone who gets into this industry must have a passion for it; it's not an industry you can consider based purely on economics.

BI: What's the biggest challenge facing the recreational marine industry?

SP: The health of the marine industry is purely based on how many independently owned companies are competing. When publicly traded corporations or investment groups take over these companies, you lose the drive, passion and focus on why the company exists in the first place.

BI: When you're not absorbed in the next big design hurrah, what's on your agenda for fun?

SP: I love to travel and spend time on the water. My favorite places are the Virgin Islands and Florida Keys.

BI: Besides earning key industry product distinctions and awards, you've personally been recognized by Ernst & Young as 'Entrepreneur of the Year,' won regional CEO honors, plus Scout was named among South Carolina's Fastest Growing Companies. As you consider your enduring career, what has been the key driver behind your success?

SP: Never give up! ●

2024 TOP PRODUCTS

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as a disappearing bulkhead that opens the salon to the alfresco cockpit with breakfast bar. Below deck, three peaceful and private sleeping accommodations for six adults alongside two heads provide space and comfort for all onboard.

1 Volvo Penta Twin Forward Drive

As an extension of the Forward Drive propulsion system, the new iteration is now available to power the world's largest surf boats. Volvo Penta has created an extension of the forward-facing, counter-rotating prop design with the new Volvo Penta Twin Forward Drive, paired with a Volvo Penta V8-400hp gasoline engine. The original propulsion drives were completely redesigned with a new size and hydrodynamic shape to accommodate twin applications. The complete Twin Forward system features improved high-speed stability and lower noise levels and was optimized to create a more surfable wake, enhanced by an upgraded Watersports Control operating system.

2 Wavve Boating Discover

Powered by over 75,000 crowd-sourced points of interest populated by the Wavve Boating community, this new feature from Wavve Boating makes it easy for boaters to uncover top boating destinations. Similar to the 'For You Page' on many social media platforms, and in the spirit of the 'Explore' tab in Google Maps, the 'Discover' tab provides real-time, custom listings for every boater, specific to the area they are searching. Using the "Discover" tab, a boater can select a popular destination, explore details provided by other mariners, and if desired, easily calculate a safe, and efficient route to that location. The calculated route will consider the draft of their vessel and current water level conditions.

3 Yamaha Marine Siren Connected Boat App

The Siren Connected Boat app is a robust marine Internet of Things (IoT) experience created with significant benefits to consumers, dealers and boat builders. For consumers, the app allows them to monitor, control, track and maintain their boat from anywhere, in the palm of their hand. For dealers and boat builders, it includes three new B2B products for customization and branding, campaign management, and it will be the first systems of its kind providing real world boat usage data back to dealers and boat builders.

4 YANMAR SD60 Rope Cutter

The YANMAR SD60 Rope Cutter is a stainless-steel circular saw blade fitted between the SD60 sail drive lower leg and the propeller. This safety feature has been designed to prevent these objects getting tangled around the propeller shaft by cutting them into smaller pieces when the propeller shaft is turning. Suitable for both mono hulls and catamarans, the SD60 Rope Cutter is ideal for a range of cruising sailors, charter boat operators and sailing schools, and has been designed to enhance safety and reduce maintenance costs and downtime. ●



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