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BY ANDY ADAMS

Getting a Feel for 2010

IN THE LAST ISSUE of *Boating Industry Canada*, we briefly reviewed a selection of Canadian-boat builders – mainly ones offering a mainstream model selection. We suggested that to minimize currency and market fluctuations (and for many other sound reasons) Canadian boat dealers would be well served by having a Canadian-built line as well as boats from the US or abroad.

Maybe it was obviously a smart and logical move or maybe some readers stopped to reflect on the benefits of a domestic alliance, especially for out-board powered boats, but whatever happened, Canadian builders at the Toronto International Boat Show were gaining new Canadian dealers.

Brock Elliott at Campion had been looking for dealers in a few key areas and he basically got 'em at TIBS. The Campion display looked especially impressive as some formerly major imported brands were weakened or missing altogether.

The post-show release from show organizers stated that Parry Sound-based Connor Industries Inc. had a great show, not just from a consumer sales point of view, but also as a result of interest generated on the part of potential dealers. "Our custom line of extremely durable, welded aluminum boats fulfill a niche that more and more people can identify with and our experience at this year's

show has been just great," said Bill Connor, President and CEO. "The combination of our coordinated marketing efforts, our online activity and our expansion really paid off this year."

An overall good sign at the show was that several key exhibitors noted that their full lines were selling, from family bow riders to upscale cruisers.

According to Dave Mayhew, President of The Boat Warehouse, the future is looking good for the boating industry. "The first-time customer is back and ready to buy," said Mayhew. "It didn't matter what size of boat they were interested in, if they saw it and liked it, they were willing to pull the trigger and buy it." The welcome return of the first-time buyer is the biggest change since the 2009 show, adds Mayhew. "They played a big role in our success at this year's show."

"Consumer confidence is simply much better than it was," said Sea Ray dealer Frank Farnsworth of Skyline Marine. "This was our best show in the last three years in terms of both leads and sales and I'm convinced that's because people feel more confident in the Canadian economy. I'm cautiously optimistic that the coming year will be very good."

While sales were very encouraging, *Boating Industry Canada* had one concern: the unprecedented level of dis-

counting seen on some models, especially big power. The consumer is always happy to score a great deal and maybe that is what it took to pry open the wallets again, but with a broadly-based concern about possible new boat shortages this summer, let's hope the margins were good (enough) for our dealers.

In this issue of *Boating Industry Canada*, in Manufacturing & Fabrication, we celebrate the pioneering spirit at Campion Marine as the entire line changes over to a bio-based resin. We look closely at Harken's new Radial line of winches in Propulsion. These are impressive designs with easy-to-maintain mechanisms and many of the manual Radial winches can be upgraded to power later – smart.

Our Impact feature this issue is the modest but innovative Peter Kropf of Kropf Industries and Con-o-Lift trailers. His products set a high standard, yet they are very price competitive, allowing them to succeed in markets like Europe.

We simply love the innovation of the FLIR First Mate night vision camera and what issue would be complete without a detailed repair by Glen Cairns in The Boat Shop. Finally, let's get Social as in Social Marketing with the always irreverent John Morris.

Hope you enjoy this issue!



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On the Cover: Peter Kropf is a modest and soft-spoken man who, with his family and team of employees, is building an international success story using expensive Canadian manufacturing and international quality levels. Peter shares some of his personal story and his recent European export experiences. Read about Peter Kropf on page 20.

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imagination at work



Campion Marine Commits to Ashland's Envirez®

for their Full Line and Sells the First-ever "Bio-boat"



BY ANDY ADAMS

At the Toronto International Boat Show in January 2010, Campion Marine Inc. – Canada's largest fibre-glass boat builder – broke the news that the company will become the first boat builder in the world to manufacture all of its boats with Envirez®, a renewably sourced bio-derived resin from Ashland Performance Materials. This is one of the most emphatically "green" moves the marine industry has made so far and it was bound to attract attention.

Envirez resin is the first resin that

Brock Elliott, with father Gordon (left) proudly stand beside the poster created for their Toronto International Boat Show display the day the company announced that Campion Marine was the first worldwide boat manufacturer to make their entire line of Campion boats with Envirez, a new bio-based resin.

uses a substantial amount of soybean oil and corn-derived ethanol in its formulation.

"Ashland's bio-based resin delivers the performance characteristics we want for our boats and it reduces our reliance on petroleum-based counterparts," said Brock Elliott, General Manager of Campion Marine. "We are

putting Envirez resin in all our boats, not only because of its superior performance relating to strength and elongation, but because it's the right thing to do for our world."

Research shows that the move to Envirez resin by Campion will eliminate over 100,000 pounds of CO₂ from entering the atmosphere.

"We are pleased to be working with a great company like Campion to bring this technology to the boating public," said Mike Wallenhorst, Director of Product Management, Ashland Performance Materials. "Envirez is a fantastic product that offers outstanding toughness and is a big step towards a totally renewable resin. It's exciting to realize that hundreds of boats made from Envirez resin will soon be navigating the world's waterways, thanks to Campion."

This move continues Campion's commitment to build the best boats with the best materials while reducing its environmental impact. In 2008, Campion Marine was selected as the world's first builder of bio-resin boats. After two years of thorough testing on Lake Okanagan, the superior performance of the Envirez resin was apparent. "The future is now!" said Elliott.

Campion Marine has been building high-performance sport boats and cruisers for 36 years. The company, at its facility in Kelowna, BC, builds the Allante line of sport boats and cruisers, the Explorer sport utility water craft, Chase high-performance boats and the Sv fara wake/surf towboats. They manufacture more than 37 models and 48 variations of boats ranging from 16 to 30 feet in length and market and sell their boats in more than 30 countries.

In spite of the size and scope of Campion Marine, it remains solidly a family-owned and operated business. Both Brock Elliott and his father Gordon Elliott are active and involved in the business and they were at the Toronto boat show in person. The team at Campion is prepared to discuss special



This was Campion's first Envirez test boat being put through the paces by a professional test driver. Without regard to the environmental aspects, Campion first determined that Envirez could produce an equal or superior quality boat before they went further.

requests that come from their customers and barely days after the company's announcement about moving the full line to Envirez resins, they were approached by Mark Hayhoe who wanted to discuss a special idea that he had.

Mark Hayhoe, "Kaptain" of K2 Milling, an Ontario "kustom" miller of grains and oilseeds, didn't take long to react to Campion's announcement at the start of the Toronto International Boat Show when he learned that Campion had decided to begin manufacturing all of its product line with Ashland's Envirez resin.

"I have wanted an ecologically friendly boat for some time, but the right combination has not been available until now," says Hayhoe. "I have spent a lot of summers on the Muskoka lakes and I am impressed with Campion's vision towards a more ecologically responsible boating experience."

Visiting the Volvo Penta display at the Toronto International Boat Show, it didn't take long for Hayhoe to learn about the Volvo Penta D3. This is a 5-cylinder common rail electronic diesel engine

with all the latest features. It can be hooked to a Volvo Penta Aquamatic Duoprop stern drive unit with its twin counter rotating propellers. Producing up to 220 HP and plenty of torque for fast planing and load-carrying, the D3 was also capable of burning bio-diesel fuels – the same products as Mark Hayhoe's K2 Milling helped to produce.

Following their person-to-person meeting, Brock Elliott, Campion's General Manager said, "We have just contracted the first ever Envirez boat to be run on bio-diesel. The Campion Allante 645i bow rider will be powered by a new D3 220 HP engine and will be built using resin from renewable resources."

So, now we have a new Campion bio-resin boat with a high-tech power plant that can burn bio-diesel fuels as well. What a showcase!

Hayhoe continued, "This will be an exciting project and I look forward to picking up my Campion bio-boat from Campbell's Landing and getting out on Lake Muskoka."

Gary Campbell of Campbell's Landing stated, "We are extremely excited about



This is what Mark Hayhoe's Champion Allante 645i will look like. Would you guess it is a "green" bio-boat?

this project." Campbell's Landing is located in Gravenhurst, Ontario on Lake Muskoka and they are long-standing Champion dealers for Muskoka.

It seems that the stars aligned and Mark Hayhoe's bio-boat will break new ground in many respects, yet the final product will both look and run like all the other fast runabouts in Muskoka. His Champion 645i Bow Rider will look like any other high-end fibreglass family boat and it will carry passengers and pull skiers just as well too.

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Harken's New Radial Winches

The “Engine” of the Sailboat



Massimo Dell'Acqua has come from Harken's offices in Italy to the Toronto International Boat Show to appear in the Harken display at the Western Marine and Transat booth. He explained the many features of the new Radial winch line.

BY ANDY ADAMS

You could say that winches are the engine of every large sailboat, helping the sailor to haul in far higher loads, far faster than their strength could normally manage and also trimming the sails by playing out sheet with control and precision...at least until the winch grinds or jams from salt or grit.

In the past, having to dismantle a winch was a task few sailors enjoyed and one that many would face with absolute dread should the winch need attention while out on the water. Disassembling a winch where every part is essential and where a tiny screw can vanish in the cockpit, or where a roller bearing can squirt overboard in a heartbeat, is something to avoid at all costs.

For most sailors, the good news is that winches are generally very reliable and long-lived. But, to do their job properly, they still need attention and that means taking them apart for

cleaning and lubrication – at least once in a while.

The new Radial line of winches from Harken addresses those issues and several more as well. Harken Technical Director, Andrea Merello has stated that, “We started from a blank sheet of paper addressing the needs of specific types of sailors.”

A bit of quick background: Harken entered the market in 1987 by adapting original Barbarossa designs to be Harken's standard line and adding a Grand Prix racing line as well. Grand Prix racers have always demanded constant innovation, but most sailors just wanted solid, efficient winches that would last for 30 years. Now, sailors and boat builders want all that and more; they want faster installations, easier maintenance and simpler upgrades.

[PROPULSION]



In only seconds, Massimo Dell'Acqua had dismantled one of his new Radial winches. The red and white rings are composite material in roller bearings for smooth action without grease.

The changing demographics of sailing are largely driving the need for this.

It used to be that the winches were spec'd out by the boat builder and they remained on the boat throughout its life, or until one failed and had to be replaced. Today, the baby boomer sailors are aging but they want to remain active and keep sailing. Today's new boat buyers may upgrade their standard winches before they ever take delivery but the dealer runs a risk if they order the boat that way.

Next, upgrading to electric winches is appealing, but that is a

cost-driven decision in many cases. The desirability of power winches for aging sailors is easy to understand but the retrofit can be difficult and, in some cases, requires major yacht surgery.

The reason Harken went to a blank sheet of paper was to design "from the deck up" with a few key ideas in mind: safety, long-lasting performance, streamlined installations and simple hydraulic and electric upgrades.

This January, Massimo Dell'Acqua, sales manager from Harken in Italy was on hand at the Toronto International Boat Show to talk about their new products and new processes.

Massimo explained to *Boating Industry Canada* that Harken's new line was designed with yacht builders in mind.

These days, there's a bigger focus on the time required to install the winches as well as the weight and ease of handling from a worker's point of view, plus the complexity of the assembly process. As Massimo explained, "About 85% of winches are OEM products." So, the boat builders were key design drivers.

He explained that the industry was looking for reduced installation time, reduced labour and that boat owners were asking for reduced wear on their lines.

Massimo explained that, "Grip is a compromise of friction and wear. In the process of designing the new Radial line, we tested more than 70 different types of ropes. We tested different case angles, dry and wet conditions and with the test winches on actual racing and cruising boats. It is a huge job to



An excellent safety feature of the new Harken winches in their self-tailing models is that the whole top cover remains stationary instead of rotating as on many other winches. This makes it much safer – less likely to pinch a finger when they are near the winch.

This cutaway drawing shows the mechanism clearly enough, but many of the best features are how these winches come apart and go back together so easily.





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[PROPULSION]

finalize grip.”

The final patented designs use slightly diagonal lines on the drum. These push the lines down to ease the lines and give the best control.

Safety was another important consideration. The new Radial models have a full steady top that remains steady and only the centre shaft turns. There is no way to pinch a finger in this design the way old designs can.

Talking about electric and hydraulic powered winches, Harken designed the Radial to accept an electric motor directly to the centre shaft of the manual winch. Some other designs mount the motor off centre acting on gears which really complicates retrofit. The manual Harken Radial winches can be upgraded to electric quickly and easily and both horizontal and vertical electric engines are available to accommodate the often oddly shaped under-deck spaces.

Builders can pre-drill a 3.00 in. [7.6 cm] shaft hole in the deck to simplify future conversion from manual to electric. Harken offers removable gaskets to seal the holes until upgrades are made.

Then, a standardized pattern for the mounting screws means these winches can be changed out and upgraded easily in the original mounting location. Harken has patented their install system. It allows quick installation without removing the drum and the socket by holding hex

With this new Harken design, many of their Radial model manual winches can be upgraded to power while still using the same mounting. This is a horizontal engine mount but a vertical one is available as well.



head bolts captive in the base with a washer and top snap fit together to simplify maintenance and for mistake-free assembly. Alternatively, there is a more standard way to install these new Harken winches. If you chose not to use the captive hex head bolts, the base can also accept standard round head fasteners that just need to be loosened. They remain threaded in part-way so you can't lose one. Next, in a classic Harken design parameter, composite roller cages are used to reduce friction and require no grease. That reduces the odds of attracting and holding grit inside the winch. The only grease used is on the bottom.

While their old models had bases made of bronze, they are now aluminum which delivers the same strength with significantly less weight. That is good for weekend racers, makes these winches easier to handle and install and they are also easier to ship to the OEMs.

Massimo ended by explaining that the many features of their new Radial line are all guided by the concept of “Sailing made easy” and it seemed clear that the new Radial line delivers on that promise. He easily and quickly tore-down a Radial winch on the desk at the display booth and showed us how the parts re-assemble only one way so there's no chance of getting it back together incorrectly.

Emphasizing this ease of maintenance, he told us about a YouTube video with 8-year old Gabriel who dismantles and re-assembles a Radial winch for the camera. It's something any owner can do. Have a look: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmECmNhplqs>

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In the marine industry, many talk about how to get more people into boating. That is what the NMMAs Discover Boating campaign is all about.

Discover Boating talks about all the "positives". But sometimes, it's the negative side that keeps a person out of boating. In fact, a negative like 'darkness' may also keep those who already go boating tied to the dock after sundown.

Consider how frightening it could be for a novice boater to get caught out in darkness. It's not like driving a car where you have street lights and headlights and other cars have taillights. Consider how many of our aging baby boomer population are starting to experience deterioration in their night vision. Do you know anyone who

avoids driving their car at night now? (I sure do and I'm not that old.)

A few months ago, FLIR Systems announced the launch of their new First Mate line of hand-held maritime thermal night vision cameras. Their goal was to create nighttime navigation aid for use on any recreational powerboat or sailboat, but the First Mate is also a valuable tool for finding people in the water and providing a higher image resolution than other hand-held thermal cameras at a fraction of the cost.

With the First Mate thermal camera, users have the power to see navigation hazards like channel markers, finger

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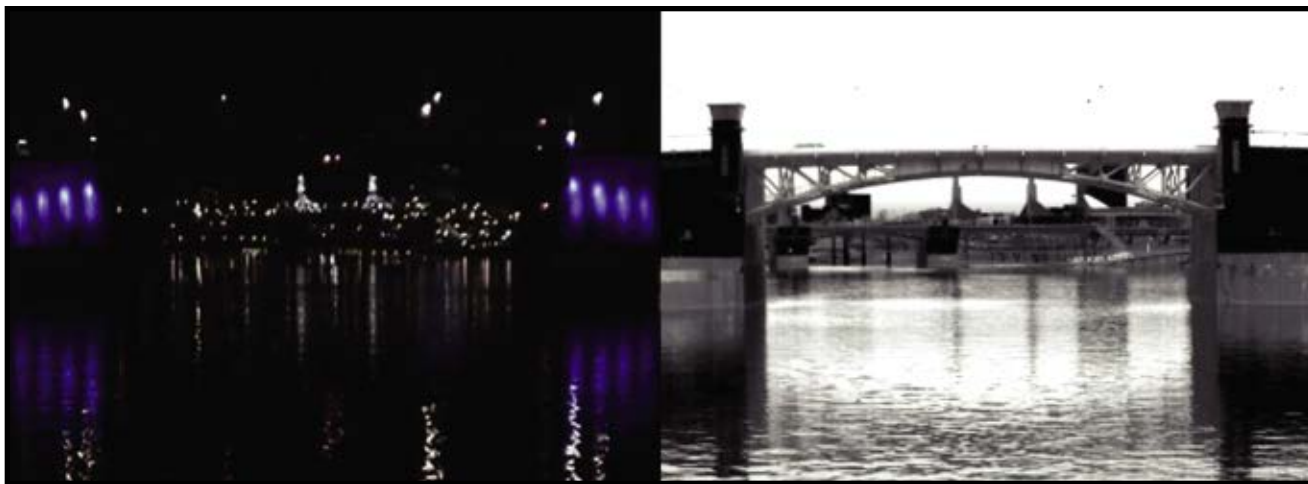
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Above: You almost can't believe what you are seeing. In this example, the left side of the photo is what you would see at night while the right side is the same scene at night, viewed through the FLIR First Mate. You can easily distinguish the water, bridge structure and I suspect you could spot debris or channel markers in the water as well.

Below: Rob Barkley of Esterline CMC Electronics demonstrates holding the FLIR First Mate up to his eye.

docks, the land, other boats and even people in the water more clearly and from farther away than ever before, even in total darkness.

Depending on the exchange rate, you may be able to sell your customers a FLIR First Mate for as little as \$2,999. While three thousand dollars is not a small sum, we think many boaters would afford a First Mate so they can safely and conveniently be out on the water after dark.

As you can see from the photographs in this article, the First Mate looks like and is about the same size and weight as a video handycam. It is built to survive the demanding environmental conditions of life onboard your boat, too.

First Mate is fully submersible, runs for over five hours on a single battery charge and has more than 120 hours of standby battery life. Because the First Mate isn't bolted to your boat, you can take it with you anywhere. Check on your pet in the backyard at night. You could even keep it in your night table in case the power goes out!

Unlike image intensified night vision binoculars and scopes, thermal night vision cameras from FLIR make pictures from heat, not light, so thermal night vision cameras like the First Mate can see clearly without any light at all.



"Thermal imaging has become an indispensable tool for maritime navigation and safety," said Lou Rota, Vice President of Maritime Business Development at FLIR Systems. "Our new First Mate camera combines our industry-leading thermal cameras with our tested military technology to deliver the ultimate hand-held imager for recreational and commercial marine markets."

The First Mate uses the same core thermal night vision technology as FLIR's industry-leading Navigator II, Voyager II and M-Series equipment. The

company claims to have more maritime thermal cameras at sea around the globe than every other manufacturer combined.

The name FLIR stands for Forward Looking Infrared Company and FLIR designs, manufactures and supports thermal imaging systems and subsystems for industrial, scientific, government, commercial, and firefighting applications. They have a 40-year history of infrared innovation and +100,000 systems in use worldwide. ●

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Marine Business

Opportunities in Cuba

BY BOATING INDUSTRY CANADA STAFF

AN AMAZING, one-time-only business opportunity is opening up to Canadian entrepreneurs while American business people are blocked by the US embargo of Cuba.

Lying a mere 90 miles away from Miami and only 60 miles south of Key West, the Caribbean island of Cuba is about 2/3 the size of the state of Florida. Under the regime of Fidel Castro, this huge island has had very limited Western-style development since the 1950s. For many years Canadians, Europeans and others (but no Americans) have been allowed in as tourists. And these days, Cuba's popularity is growing rapidly.

Since the country has been quite isolated both politically and from a trade perspective, there is no significant commercial fishing fleet; even private yachtsmen dreaming of Ernest Hemmingway-type sport fishing trips in the richly abundant waters off Cuba have been blocked from access. Cuba may prove to be a sort of last frontier for sport fishermen.

The quickest way to appreciate the size and scope of Cuba is to go to Google Earth. In only seconds, Cuba's prime position in the Caribbean and its close proximity to the population of and airline flights from North America becomes clearly obvious. It's a huge island with more shoreline than the rest of the Caribbean islands combined.

The question is: how would a businessperson get started working in what remains a communist country?

This is in Cayo Largo. People say that Cuba has more shoreline than all the other Caribbean islands and yet under the regime of Fidel Castro, this huge island has had very limited Western-style development since 1959.

There continue to be legal issues and unsettled land claims, particularly with Americans that date back to the beginning of Fidel Castro's time in power. However, Canada's British Columbia-based company, Leisure Canada has been operating in Cuba for the past 19 years. They are now well-established as a developer of high-end resorts, marinas and hotels in Cuba and currently have projects in the works in claim-free properties. Leisure Canada has also made investments in natural resources. *Boating Industry Canada* contacted Walter Berukoff to learn more about Leisure Canada's business interests in Cuba and to investigate whether or not there are business opportunities for other Canadians there.

"Yes, there certainly are opportunities for Canadians opening up in Cuba," Berukoff explained, "and you should know that in the US at the present time, they are restricted from opening new marinas in South Florida or as far west as Texas, so that is building up demand. We believe there will be tremendous interest in Cuba both as a resort destination and also for marinas and yachting. We think Cuba is just going to take off as a yachting destination."

Berukoff went on to explain, "While Americans cannot currently come into Cuba, Canadians are now visiting in significant numbers. But, since the Obama administration, the political climate has been changing in Washington. We think the embargoes and sanctions are going to be relaxed and that it is



This is a glimpse of the beach where the Leisure Canada group is doing a development in Jibacoa (pronounced “Hib-a-coa”). It will have a marina and resort complex and there is an opportunity for a Canadian to set up a charter operation or to apply to manage the marina.

only a matter of time before Cuba becomes open once again to Americans. It certainly makes Cuba an attractive looking business opportunity.”

We learned that the Leisure Canada group is a major developer in the Havana area and that they currently have projects in Jibacoa (pronounced “Hib-a-coa”), Cayo Largo and Monte Barreto. Leisure Canada is developing a marina and resort complex right now in Jibacoa. They have also gained experience and contacts in dealing with the authorities in Cuba to secure development lands for future projects.

Of course, we have to emphasize that this is a “buyer beware” situation and that we have no interest in this nor does *Boating Industry Canada* in any way endorse Leisure Canada or Cuban development. But this is a business opportunity that we believe some of our readers may find interesting.

The first opportunity lies in the fact that the Leisure Canada group is a developer, but not marina operators. Given that the Jibacoa project is a resort and marina, the first opportunity is for an

individual, or corporation to bring in a fleet of charter boats to operate out of this new Jibacoa marina.

The second opportunity is for an experienced Canadian marina operator to enter into a management contract to run the Jibacoa marina itself.

The third opportunity is that Cuba is a huge but largely undeveloped landmass that is certain to someday support many marinas and cruising areas. As it is, Cuba is only a short hop by boat from the Grand Cayman Islands. Leisure Canada may be able to partner with investors on other marina properties, or to directly assist in gaining land for development.

Cuba is certainly not as stable as Canada, but the potential rewards of getting established there now could be spectacular if all the US embargoes and restrictions were to come down. ●

www.leisurecanada.com



The white sand beach at Jibacoa is becoming busier, but it clearly offers a bit of privacy and seclusion as well. The Leisure Canada group has gained experience in dealing with the authorities in Cuba to secure development lands for future projects.



Leisure Canada's beach at Cayo Largo extends more than two miles. This is another development the company is doing where there could be business opportunities. They are also working in Monte Barreto.

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Kropf Industrial Inc./Con-o-Lift

A CANADIAN SUCCESS STORY

BY ANDY ADAMS

THE MOST SURPRISING thing in our interview with Peter Kropf was learning that, in Europe, his Canadian-designed and -built Kropf Industrial products are regarded as being very versatile and highly cost competitive.

Top quality was what we expected to hear. Often, Canadian manufacturers say that due to the high Canadian dollar, our manufacturing sector has become uncompetitive, so it is encouraging to hear that the export markets view Kropf Industrial products as being well priced.

In fairness though, Kropf Industrial builds unique and innovative products. While everyone else thinks the US marketplace is all but dead, Kropf Industrial has sold six Con-o-Lift trailers in the US since January 1, which is very unusual timing. He thinks that's a good sign. Remember their trailers start at \$20,000 and can go up to \$300,000 or even more for a specialized large trailer.

The story of how Kropf Industrial got to where they are today and how they earned their sterling reputation is an enjoyable tale.

Peter told us that he started off with a good job in Parry Sound, Ontario but hoping for more, he invested in a truck with a portable welding outfit. In the 1970s he started doing additional work at night. His employer realized that Peter was the kind of person who was going to try new things anyway, so he gave Peter the opportunity to go out on his own and yet he placed such a high value on his skills that the door was open to return to his old job if things didn't work out.

Like so many other entrepreneurs, Peter started by setting up a shop at his



home and within just a few months he brought on two employees. Also, like a good entrepreneur, he had identified an opportunity: there was much more demand for welding and fabrication in the Parry Sound area than there were people to fill it.

By 1981, they were starting unintentionally to develop a real product line. One of Peter's friends was Ollie Constable who was in the boat salvage and repair business. Ollie had seen a hydraulic marine trailer and he came to Peter and asked if he could build one. Peter was not willing to copy the other trailer, but felt that he could build one to his own design. The first trailer was called a Con-o-Lift because of Ollie Constable. The business got started as soon as the trailer was fin-

For pioneers and innovators like the team at Kropf Industrial, to build your own parts assures your customers that you've got what you need, when you need it with no waiting.



This brand new trailer has a galvanized finish and it's waiting outside the plant for delivery to a US customer.

ished. Ollie picked it up and used it to make a delivery to Toronto. He then stopped at Crates Marine in Keswick, Ontario on the way home. The trailer attracted a lot of attention. Crates bought it on the spot.

They immediately realized that they were on to something. Peter built Ollie another trailer and then continued on to build five or six in the first year, 10 in the second year and as of today, they have built nearly 1,000 Con-o-Lift trailers from the 3-ton to their big 60-ton highway trailers and also yard trailers up to 80 tons. As difficult as it is to imagine, Kropf Industrial has concept drawings for trailers all the way up to a 300-ton capacity.

The real secret behind the company's success is the willingness of Peter's partners and design team to work with him through what has sometimes been an extreme learning curve in the development of their products. A good example is to look at the way their highway trailers are designed. The massive side rails are only joined together by a yoke at the front – no side braces. This makes the design very effective for picking up and moving boats, but from unloaded to loaded, the wheels still have to align properly even after the weight of the boat stresses the structure, forcing the wheels out. To make it ride smoothly

and easily, especially at highway speeds, they had to learn how to pre-stress the structure for even tire wear. As huge and heavy looking as these trailers may be, they have to be very precise to roll with a minimum of wear and friction.

Peter acknowledges the fact that the operating concept and primary features of their trailers have been the same since almost the beginning (a testimony to his design skill), but the company is constantly refining the details to make these trailers both more efficient and user-friendly.

An example is the radio remote control that's now available. These controls have evolved from a pendant control box on a long cord, to a radio control. With this, the trailer can now be operated by one person. This reduces manpower and makes the trailer that much more useful.

Other features they have developed are things like salt water resistant brake parts, galvanized and stainless steel parts and my personal favourite, custom-made hydraulic cylinders.

Most people would assume that Kropf buys hydraulic systems to use but not true. Kropf Industrial machines and manufacturers all of their own hydraulic cylinders. By building their own and exerting their level of quality control, the company is able to make the specific yet

reliable cylinders required for their unique equipment designs.

An interesting side aspect to this is that it is very difficult to find a used Con-o-Lift trailer. They last for ages and the trailers don't depreciate very much. It's not uncommon for early Con-o-Lift trailers to sell today for close to, or more than the original cost.

Something else about building their own hydraulic systems: they discovered that as a result of the trend towards lean manufacturing, if they were to go to a supplier and order some specially-sized hydraulic cylinders, delivery could take up to 16 weeks. Instead, the craftsmen at Kropf Industrial just go to work and build exactly what they need. The reason the supply chain can be so slow, according to Peter, is because the whole idea of lean manufacturing is to not be financing your own inventory. For pioneers and innovators like the team at Kropf Industrial, to build your own parts assures your customers that you've got what you need, when you need it with no waiting.

Not everybody has the talent and capacity to do this but as Peter said, "I think you have to enjoy the entrepreneurial end of this. And don't plan on making a killing. You really can't do that. Just enjoy the challenge and take your satisfaction from solving a customer's problem or special needs."

Peter describes his career at Kropf Industrial as being a lifestyle choice that he and his family have made, but it's an



When you see the wall thickness of the tubing, the precision of the cut and the attention to detail in the welding, it's easy to see this product is designed for long life.

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attitude that pays real benefits to their customers. As an example, Peter explained, "We have a warranty policy, but if something doesn't work right the first time around, we stay with it and make sure that we go that extra mile to make it work."

The obvious question from there was to ask Peter how he's been able to market his products through the downturn that the marine industry has experienced, particularly in North America. Kropf Industrial has been a steady print advertiser staying top-of-mind for that day when their customer decides to buy. He told us that for their company, boat shows were quite effective. Kropf Industrial exhibits at the Toronto International Boat Show, the Miami and Tampa shows for the US market and now they've become regular exhibitors at METS, the Marine Equipment Trade Show in Amsterdam. "METS is getting us the exposure in Europe. The first year we



went, they just looked at us and wondered who these guys were. We didn't really get anything out of that show. It seems people wanted to see if we would come back. So, the challenge is to be there and to be consistent. Now we've exhibited for our fourth year and we got lots of serious hits at the latest show. We came away with 40 to 50 good contacts and that's a good return on our investment."

We asked Peter how a Canadian manufacturer could go over there and do business, especially when his products are so large, heavy and expensive to ship. "Well, the cost of European manufacturing is very high. We've raised a few eyebrows with our Canadian pricing. But, they also recognize that our product is top quality. Canada has a good reputation and they see our trailers as being user-friendly, effective and also versatile," Peter told us, "Our trailers save them on labour costs at their marinas."

The primary export item is the Con-o-Lift line of trailers which includes highway, yard and self-propelled models, as well as sling lift and mobile straddle carriers, but the company's metal fabrication expertise has effectively carried them into commercial duty dock systems and they are also doing well with galvanized boat stands.

All these marine industry-focused products market well together but in their advertising, Kropf Industrial likes to say, "If you can imagine it, we can build it!"

That is the attitude of innovation that started the business in the first place and that is what will keep the Kropf team competitive in markets around the world for years to come. ●



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SOCIALIZING!

WHAT DOES SOCIAL MEDIA MEAN TO YOU (IF ANYTHING)?

By JOHN MORRIS



Special parenthetical note to loyal readers: *Here in the secret backroom at the boating marketing think tank, we are having some very scary moments. Even the most confident of us has lately been pretty spooked by the many things we don't know about the media. And, let me caution you that I don't claim to be encyclopedic on this stuff, but in my line of work I encounter a lot of people who claim to be experts and I find myself reading like a fiend so I can deal with these people in some reasonable way that won't cost me my budget and sanity.*

The topic then is Social Media: Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs and so forth. You have likely caught that many large companies are pouring bushels of their resources into this stuff and that, in turn, has devastated the 'traditional media' like TV stations, newspapers, magazines and books. That puts a lot of us on edge – the ways we have learned for marketing our products appear to be under siege. That would be fine if we understood where to head, but for most of us, the fog surrounding the new media has yet to clear.

Here's a question that has come up recently that illustrates how screwed we are. The new iPad – does it change everything: Internet, publishing, social media?

The answer to that question is 'possibly'.

Social media is certainly the buzz and by now you and your business are on Facebook and on LinkedIn. If you're not, a good idea might be to do so immediately. At least you will then have an idea what these venues are so that eventually you can evaluate them. Both Facebook and LinkedIn, the classic social sites, may well connect you to a lot of people. But, to keep on top of these sites and deal with the relationship of your 'friends', their endless posts, and so on, is very time consuming. You can create an organizational site, post information and distribute it to interested followers of your page – that I do recommend, if you can mesh

it with the information on your existing website. Facebook is free and worth every cent of that!

I don't suggest you explore Twitter, except maybe to have a look. If you have an ongoing need for its services, dandy, but mostly it's an endless, repetitive means for people to shoot you short bursts of information you don't need. The only real use is that if you or your company want to send other people short bursts of information they do need, then it's a great tool.

On top of all that, you can use some of the available measuring tools out there. These are similar to measuring the effectiveness and reach of your website but pertain to social media. (FYI: if you are not evaluating your web site's effec-

tiveness, you probably should be. Heather Robertson, who knows the marine business extensively from her years at Boat for Sale, is now building a business consulting practice on web efficacy. She uses Google Analytics among other tools and you should familiarize yourself with that, or deal with someone who has.)

Google Alerts is a good tool for hearing about product or company mentions and you should set up an Alert so you see how it works – just follow the links on Google.

Not meaning to overwhelm, here's a few of the tips for evaluating social media, as described in Marketwire's reasonably cool (and free) 5X30 Social Media Workout site (if you have the inclination, check it at www.sm10x30.com):

- Stay on top of popular bloggers in



your space via Technorati™ and BlogCatalog

- Spend some time searching the social media universe in real time at Social Mention. Use the Social Media Index on the Vitruve® home page to compare your social media involvement with competitive brands
- TwitterAnalyzer lets you review the frequency of your tweets, how many people you're reaching, how topics break down and more
- Get to know TubeMogul, where you'll

find analytics on who's watching videos, how they're being viewed, when people are dropping off and more

All this is out there and a whole lot more, but it does lead to some tough questions beyond the obvious: "When do I find time to deal with all this and still sell boats?" A bigger issue is whether the hard work in harnessing new media has value for your business.

Here's the guidance I offer:

- Don't be so quick to dismiss trad' media – then may be on the ropes, but content trumps trendiness in the long run (I hope).
- Dip your toes in and see how it goes. If online ads work, move resources there. If Facebook generates customers or friends, work it. And so on.
- Be open to change – there's lots coming.

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Bass Boat **Saved**

BY GLEN CAIRNS WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO HERMAN BOLGER OF OFFSHORE MARINE
PHOTOS BY OFFSHORE MARINE



IN THE OCTOBER ISSUE, we carried an interview with Herman Bolger of Offshore Marine in Amherstburg, Ontario. In that article, Herman outlined his general philosophy for best practices in boat repair. In this issue, he returns to give us a play by play on the repair of a bass boat that was badly damaged in a close encounter with a channel marker at 45 mph. Apparently the owner, who is an experienced boater and fisherman, bent down to retrieve something from the cockpit floor, looked up, was a bit disoriented, knew there should be a marker here somewhere – and found it. The boat's starboard side was extensively damaged as were the interior floor and helm area.

Looking at the extensive damage to the boat's starboard side after hitting a channel marker at 45 mph, it's amazing the owner escaped with only minor injuries. Perhaps just as amazing is the fact he was able to travel 10 kms back to the launch area without sinking.



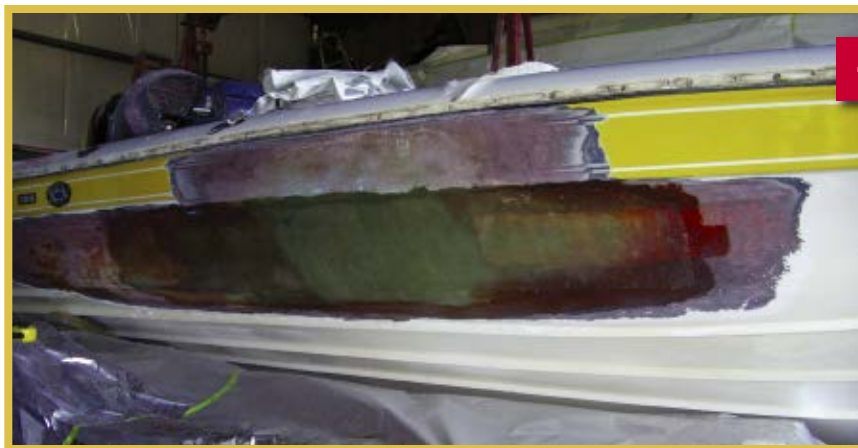
To gain access to the damaged area, it was necessary to cut an opening in the forward fishing platform and remove a small locker.

Here we see the laminate being ground back to reasonably solid material. The hole has been blocked off with a piece of cardboard to preserve some of the hull contour. A final trim of the edge is done when the ragged glass on the inside is ground away.



3

Using matting and a biaxial stitchmat, the laminate is built back up as close as possible to the boat's original lay-up. Because of the way the side of the boat was torn open, it was possible to count the number and type of the laminations.



4

The remaining damaged laminate is ground away from the inside to meet with the newly laid laminate applied from the outside. The inside laminate is also laid up using matte and 1708 biaxial stitchmat. Offshore always uses vinylester resin to ensure a good chemical and mechanical bond between the layers, something that is not assured when using regular polyester resin. It is also important to use an unwaxed resin so layers can be built up one over the other without needing any preparation to remove residue.



5

The repaired area has been ground and finished to the proper hull contour. Here Interprotect 2000 is used as a primer because of its high-build and water-proofing properties.



6

We see the locker and cockpit floor have been sectioned back together and then glassed over to form one continuous piece.



In the helm area the foot throttle pad is bonded in place before being laminating to the cockpit floor.



Now that the repaired area has been faired, the first coat of two-part polyurethane white finish is applied and the surface is checked for blemishes and pinholes.



Almost done. Here the upper part of the topsides (cove) are prepped for the accent colour.



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11



With the yellow accent colour sprayed on, the boat is starting to look like new again.

12



With the repairs and painting completed and the rub strake in place, the boat is ready for final detailing.

13



Looking at least as good as new, everything cleaned and made ready for a return to the water.

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