

## NETHERLANDS | BOATBUILDERS

# Adapting to a new way of thinking

EASY HANDLING, LOW MAINTENANCE, MAXIMUM ONBOARD SPACE AND COMFORT... THE MUST HAVE INGREDIENTS THAT LOOK SET TO DELIVER MORE GROWTH FOR DUTCH BUILDERS IN 2017

WORDS: BELINDA SNELL

► **Strong recovery:** Moonen Shipyards has resumed production of the Martinique project



Despite a rapidly ageing boating population and lack of newcomers to the market, Dutch boatbuilders are reporting stable sales in 2016. Many have dealt with the economic slowdown of recent years by studying market trends and adapting their products to the changing demographics. Attracting new entrants to boating and appeasing the needs of the older generation are in some ways similar; both are looking for ease of use when searching for new models, along with high levels of onboard comfort. For many boatbuilders, smaller units have been introduced to persuade those on a lower budget. Others are reporting a trend for larger models. But regardless of size, all yards are paying close attention to usability, maximum space and high comfort levels in the development stage.

Diederik van Golen at Rapsody Yachts told *IBI* that customers are moving away from large models in favour of small dayboats that are easier to handle. Rapsody builds classically styled, high-speed yachts from 9m-79m in fibreglass, aluminium and steel. It also offers the largest selection of pre-owned Rapsodys worldwide. "The models that are selling well range from 30ft-36ft," he says. "We launched our latest model, the 9m Rapsody Tender, because we've sold a lot of used tender yachts in that length."

Making its world premiere at this year's HISWA In-Water Boat Show, the Rapsody Tender is a fully

equipped and spacious dayboat that can comfortably seat up to eight people. "We saw an opportunity to increase the level of comfort in this size range, so we designed the new model with a small toilet area in the console, sunbathing areas in the front and back, and enough space for two refrigerators and a Nespresso machine," says van Golen.

Rapsody worked closely with Volvo Penta throughout the development cycle to implement their new battery management system, making it ready to sail with the simple push of a button. The tender can reach top speeds of 34kt with a 300hp Volvo Penta diesel engine. "We doubled our exports in 2015 but the Dutch market also picked up," says van Golen, whose company now sells around 50% of its output in the Netherlands. From 1999 to 2014, this figure was almost 80%. "Our goal for 2016 is to grow our sales abroad even more."

## DELIVERING VALUE FOR MONEY

Like Rapsody, Frisian Motor Boats has also returned from a successful HISWA show where it introduced the third model in its Super Lauwersmeer Discovery line – the Discovery 45 Flybridge. The all-steel vessel joins the Discovery AC (aft-cabin) and OC (open cockpit) models launched in 2015 and is the first flybridge in the yard's 47-year history.

"Customers are looking for value for money," says Bastiaan Jousma, who runs the company alongside brother Louis. "That's why we introduced the Discovery line – and with much success. Business in 2015 was good; sales were better than previous years and the Discovery AC and OC were very popular."

Joining the aft-cabin and open cockpit versions, the Discovery 45 Flybridge offers the best of both worlds – the single-floor of an open cockpit with the option of outdoor steering from the aft cabin. The yacht has ample headroom throughout, generous storage space below the cockpit and in the saloon, a large shower cabin, and comfortable facilities such as a washer/dryer, a Quooker water tap and dishwasher.

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"Potential buyers are very enthusiastic about the modern design, the interior space and the large panoramic roofs in the saloon," says Jousma. "They also love our very good build quality and the possibilities to personalise their own yacht."

"We're also working on a fast, semi-displacement version of the Discovery OC and Flybridge," he adds. "Later this year we're planning to introduce an even smaller Discovery OC of around 12m. We expect to sell a lot."

While production is mostly for Dutch clients, Jousma says that exports to Europe have been a focus since the start of 2016. "We still have a lot of Dutch customers, but to grow we need to look further," he says. "We're focusing on Germany, Belgium and other European markets like the UK and Scandinavia."

Yvonne Linssen at steel displacement motoryacht producer Linssen Yachts expects slight growth in 2016, with more to follow in 2017/18. "The economic climate in general is picking up," she says. "Prospective buyers are more positive and willing to invest."

A new line of motoryachts from 29ft-47ft was also responsible for the uplift. Earlier this year, Linssen introduced the Grand Sturdy 290 Sedan, Grand Sturdy 350 AC, Grand Sturdy 410 AC Variotop and the Grand Sturdy 470 Sedan Wheelhouse. A larger 50ft model is now under development for introduction next year. "These models have already been sold from the drawing board and were received very well at introduction in May 2016," says Linssen. "The first units of the new 50ft model that will be launched in 2017 are already sold, just by presenting the first sketches."

The 41ft Grand Sturdy 410 AC and the 47ft Grand Sturdy 470 Sedan both feature the company's Variotop – a fully automatic convertible bimini that creates a closed wheelhouse or an open cockpit in a matter of seconds. They also have new steps at the transom to provide easy, safe access to the swimming platform. It's something that particularly appeals to the older generation. "In general, people expect more comfort on board. That means all the equipment that they have at home," says Linssen. "But ease of use is also very important. People expect cruising and mooring to be easy, so we try to focus on that in the development. At the end of the cycle, when handing the boat over to a customer, we also offer a full day's training, which makes it even easier to learn quickly."

Full service, which Linssen offers through its extensive sales and service network, is another strong enticement. Around 85% of the yard's output is exported to Europe. Germany is the group's largest destination at 40%, followed by Belgium, France, the UK and Switzerland.

"The market is recovering slowly, but the total market for displacement yachts has decreased substantially over the past couple of years," Linssen explains. "We've made a lot of progress, especially in

the charter segment, and repeat buyers are keeping our order book filled."

Onboard comfort is also a key selling point at Menken Maritiem, builder of the Newport Bass, CAB, Piet Hein and Hudson range of small sloops and motorboats. Its best-selling Newport Bass line, available in 29ft and 32ft versions, offers different deck formats for day trips, weekends or holidays, and can comfortably sit 12 guests in an open cockpit.

"We recently sold the Newport Bass in two new exterior and interior layouts," says owner Bernard Menken. "These new versions cater to new markets and fulfil the wishes of new customers." ➔

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The latest Newport Bass models have a cabin height of 192cm and a spacious kitchen with a three-burner gas stove, giving the 29-footer all of the comforts normally found on a larger yacht. Designed by Dutch naval architect Martin de Jager, they also have great sailing characteristics. The Newport Bass can fully plane with a 280hp engine at a speed of 24kt. Both models feature oak interiors instead of teak and are priced from €160k to €240k.

The Newport Bass XL, which is 1.25m longer, provides extra sleeping space in the aft peak and an even wider cockpit. "To celebrate our 20th anniversary, our stylists also worked together with AIX Rosé to create a Limited Edition version of all models," says Menken. "Style and image is important. Our prospects love the colour combination and the specially designed and selected options."

### MAXIMISING SPACE

Another strong model in the Menken line-up is the CAB series of daycruisers. The 5.75m Fast CAB combines the comfort of a luxury daycruiser with the potential of a speedboat. The company claims that no other 19-footer with a shaft-driven inboard diesel and a displacement of 1,500kg can cruise at 22kt. The CAB XL and CAB XL Cabin are slightly larger at 7.25m and can be fitted with a 180hp Yanmar BY engine. Plans are now underway for a lounge version of the CAB XL in 2017 that will have a large sunbed in the front and a double bed and toilet below deck.

Operating in a niche market with low quantities, Menken exports just 5-10% of its output. "In the past two decades we've built a solid reputation as a builder of classy and sturdy boats that have earned their 'thumbs-up' effect," says Menken, adding that new-build turnover reached €1.4m in 2015. "Our reputation in the Dutch market guarantees a certain order flow, so we'll continue to focus on the home market with a keen interest in exports."

Keeping costs down is also a priority at KM Yachtbuilders, a custom producer of aluminium sailing yachts of up to 100ft. Earlier this year, the company introduced its first series-built model – the Bestevaer 45ST Pure which, at 14m, is also the smallest model in its portfolio. The vessel made its world premiere at the 2016 HISWA in-water show, where it was the only Dutch yacht to be nominated 2017 European Yacht of the Year. "The fact that we build this yacht in series means that we can keep the costs lower compared to a custom yacht," says owner

Euwe Kooi. "That brings the dream of owning a Bestevaer a good deal closer for a lot of people."

Built in collaboration with Dykstra Naval Architects, the Bestevaer 45ST Pure is more of a production yacht in the sense that the size, hull shape, deck layout and styling are all fixed. However, the owner can still choose from options such as fixed or variable draft, tiller or wheel steering, layout/cabin configuration, rigging and more. "Because both the aluminium construction and interior are already engineered and prepared in digital cutting files, we can limit the amount of hours that go into this engineering and building the yacht itself," says Kooi.

Kooi describes the development of the Bestevaer 45ST Pure as a 'real group effort'. "We had sessions with all departments from the work floor to listen to them and find out how they would build such a yacht in an efficient and effective manner," he says. "This way of working and having the work floor make their own decisions is something we have implemented more and more over the last year. Our aim is to have very few 'layers' and to be as lean of an organisation as possible."

The Bestevaer 45ST Pure has also allowed KM Yachtbuilders to target a new category of sailor who wants to circumnavigate the globe or travel to cold areas such as Spitsbergen or Iceland, says Kooi.

Demand for ICE yachts, he says, is a noticeable trend. "Our aluminium yachts are fully capable of sailing in high latitudes and colder regions and many have already explored Iceland, Greenland and Patagonia," says Kooi. "But some prospects are planning on going even more extreme and they're looking for a custom yacht built for those purposes. Both our 66ft and 78ft Bestevaer one-offs were purposely designed and built for sailing in cold conditions and through the ice."

### STRONG ORDER BOOK

Production at KM Yachtbuilder's facility in Makkum is now in full swing, with a Bestevaer 45ST Custom, 45ST Pure, a 49ST and a 78ft Exploration Yacht in build. The company also supplies aluminium hulls for sail and motor yachts of up to 30m and offers refits of any size. As IBI went to press, construction of



▲ The Bestevaer 56ST from KM Yachtbuilders was designed to sail in high latitudes and colder regions

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a new Bestevaer 45ST Pure and a 66ft custom Owen Clarke design was about to begin. In 2017, another two units of the Bestevaer 45ST Pure will be built, along with a one-off 50ft yacht from an Italian designer and the hull of a 62ft model from a Dutch designer.

Makkum-based Hutting Yachts is reporting strong growth in refits and maintenance, something that Margriet Hutting attributes to the return of customers who held back during the worst of the financial crisis. "We think the economy has become and will continue to get better," she says. "Sales out of our brokerage division are also growing and we're hearing that from other yards too."

Hutting recently replaced the keel of *Josephine*, a 51ft Truly Classic Hoek Design, for its UK owner and provided a completely new interior and exterior on the 64ft Truly Classic Hoek Design *Espada*, owned by Pete Townshend of The Who.

As well as refits, Hutting also builds semi-custom, ocean-going sailing yachts from 12m-15m. Its latest model, launched in 2013, is the Hutting 50 – a 15m cruiser that was built for extreme sailing conditions in polar regions. Designed by Dick Koopmans, it boasts an S-frame hull for speed, reliability and functionality, and a substantial sail plan. A spacious area below deck makes it ideal for long-haul trips. Several new designs are said to be on the drawing board, although details remain confidential.

Other Dutch yards are making a strong comeback following a period of instability. Emile Bilterijst, managing director of Moonen Shipyards, told *IBI* that the company is recovering from the financial turbulence that began last year when its majority shareholder, Mexican steel giant Altos Hornos de Mexico, was hit by cash-flow problems related to the collapse of global steel prices. In mid-2015, Moonen was forced to file for protection from creditors, a precursor to bankruptcy. "We are happy to comment that the situation of our Mexican shareholder has significantly improved," Bilterijst told *IBI*. "They still believe in Moonen Shipyards and are willing to support Moonen in any way possible to make it successful. The result of which is that we are continuing the build of the *Martinique* project."

### MOONEN SHIPYARDS: BACK FROM THE BRINK

The 36.5m *Martinique* is the second yacht in Moonen's Caribbean line – a new series of semi-custom motoryachts from 85ft-162ft. As *IBI* went to press, 80% of *Martinique's* hull and 50% of the superstructure had been completed. Delivery is scheduled for the end of 2017 or early 2018, subject to final contract and owner specification.

While the *Martinique* has not yet sold, Bilterijst claims that there is strong interest in new yachts with short delivery times from around the world. "We are further developing our Caribbean line," he says. "The most logical step is to build bigger yachts and therefore we are concentrating on the two yachts up from the *Martinique*. These are the approximate 40m *Marquis* and the 50m *Monito*, which is just under 500GT."

In the meantime, Bilterijst says that the refit and maintenance side of the business is growing. "Very often new owners who bought a second-hand Moonen are bringing the boat back to its place of birth to adapt it to their needs," he says. "Because quite a lot of Moonen yachts have been sold second-hand recently, we see this part of the business going up slightly from around 10% of our turnover to 20%."

Another Dutch yard that fell into financial difficulties was Consonant Yachts, builder of the *Kuster* range of steel displacement vessels from 31ft-47ft. The company was taken over by the *Kusters* owners club early last year and eventually sold to North-Line Yachts, a family owned producer of GRP motoryachts whose facilities in Harlingen are located directly on the Wadden Sea. At the time, North-Line director Sipko van Sluis described the acquisition as one of strategic importance. "Kuster Yachts has an excellent position in the upper end of the market and also has an established name in the steel yacht building industry. It is therefore a very good addition to the existing activities of North-Line Yachts," he said. "We now operate in the upper segment of exclusive, fast, seaworthy GRP motoryacht construction and with the acquisition we can offer a wider range."

North-Line builds semi-displacement GRP motoryachts from 26ft-60ft. All models are CE Category A rated with a maximum speed of 30kt. *Kusters*, on the other hand, are full displacement vessels built in steel. They are CE Category B rated and offer slower speeds of up to 10kt. Shared features include their seaworthiness, high-quality construction, and unique classic/modern style.

Company spokesperson Marije Mulder told *IBI* that seven pre-owned *Kuster* yachts ➔

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have been sold since the acquisition, and that the North-Line order book is completely booked until next year. The company hopes to deliver its first North-Line 50 to a repeat buyer in early 2017.

Impressing Dutch clients is of particular importance to North-Line, which offers a special kind of yacht in a niche market. Around 50% of the yard's output is exported to the UK, Germany and Belgium, and the company is now looking to increase brand awareness on the Scandinavian market.

"This summer we made a trip with a North-Line 42 *Dauntless* to Iceland-Greenland," says Mulder. "This was to let people know that what we build is an all-weather boat and that such trips can be made with a relatively small semi-displacement yacht in a relatively short time. No adjustments were made to the ship and with the standard tanks this trip was successfully made."

As for Kuster, North-Line has been working on modifications and improvements to the range in consultation with past owners. "The original design needed an update and our designer, Arthur Mursell from TT Boat Designs, has created a completely new Kuster series," Mulder explains. "We've just started with the most popular model, a new Kuster 38, which we intend to present at the HISWA In-Water Boat Show in 2017.

"People are looking for strong, good quality boats and will no longer accept mass production," she adds. "With our products, we're focussing on these potential buyers."

Other Dutch builders are reporting a growing trend towards larger models. Earlier this year, Contest Yachts entered the 80ft-plus sector when it introduced its new flagship sailing yacht, the Contest 84CS. Designed in partnership with German naval architects judel/vrolijk & co, the 26m vessel is one of eight models from 13m-26m and is ideal for distance cruising, regattas or social sailing with enough space for 10 guests. It can be customised with up to five cabins with separate heads, and another two cabins for a crew of four. Unusually for its size, the Contest 84CS owner can specify either aft or forward master suite, with service quarters also changing ends.

### BUILDING BIGGER: DUTCH YARD ENTERS 80FT-PLUS SECTOR

"There's no doubt that boat sizes are increasing, but there's a limit," says Contest Yachts CEO Arjen Conijn. "Owners are starting to rationalise on size as well, and running costs are becoming a more important consideration in the decision-making process."

Conijn told *IBI* that sales in 2015 were solid and up across the entire range. "Our forecasts for 2016 are also good," he says. "We've started construction of the new flagship 84CS and we're seeing a continuation and good follow-up in sales for our latest models in the range – the 67CS, 42CS and 52 MC – without losing buyer interest in our earlier models also."

While Contest Yachts' domestic sales are healthy, Conijn told *IBI* that they represent just 20% of the business. "At this level of yachting, export is of course most important and we are steadily building our overseas sales and service centres," he adds.

Other yards have picked up on the growing trend for multihulls, thanks to their easy handling, low maintenance and maximum onboard space. DutchCat, a relative newcomer to the market, has spent the last 12 months preparing for the global launch of its first-ever model – the 12m DutchCatTwelve.

Jan van Eck, DutchCat founder, told *IBI* that the eco-friendly 12m catamaran generated lots of interest from potential buyers at this year's HISWA In-Water Boat Show, where it was nominated for a 2017 Dutch Powerboat of the Year Award. "I've had 33 requests for sea trials, and among them at least five potential buyers," he says. "It was very busy. All days."

The DutchCatTwelve is a CE Category B rated multihull that can be sailed either at sea or on inland waters. Six different types of propulsion are available – two diesel options, three hybrid and a 100% electric version – and the interior comes with a choice of one, two or three cabins.

"In the beginning we expect the Dutch market to lead in terms of sales, but there's already interest from foreign countries," says van Eck. "The market outside the Netherlands is very important, especially for the development of new types of DutchCats. In 2017 I want to have the first studies ready for a flybridge and a longer version."

DutchCat is now setting up a European dealer network following the appointment of its first dealer in China. **IBI**

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