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MARINE INDUSTRY NEWS

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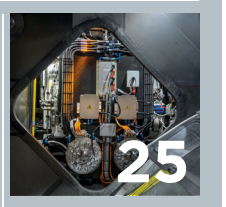

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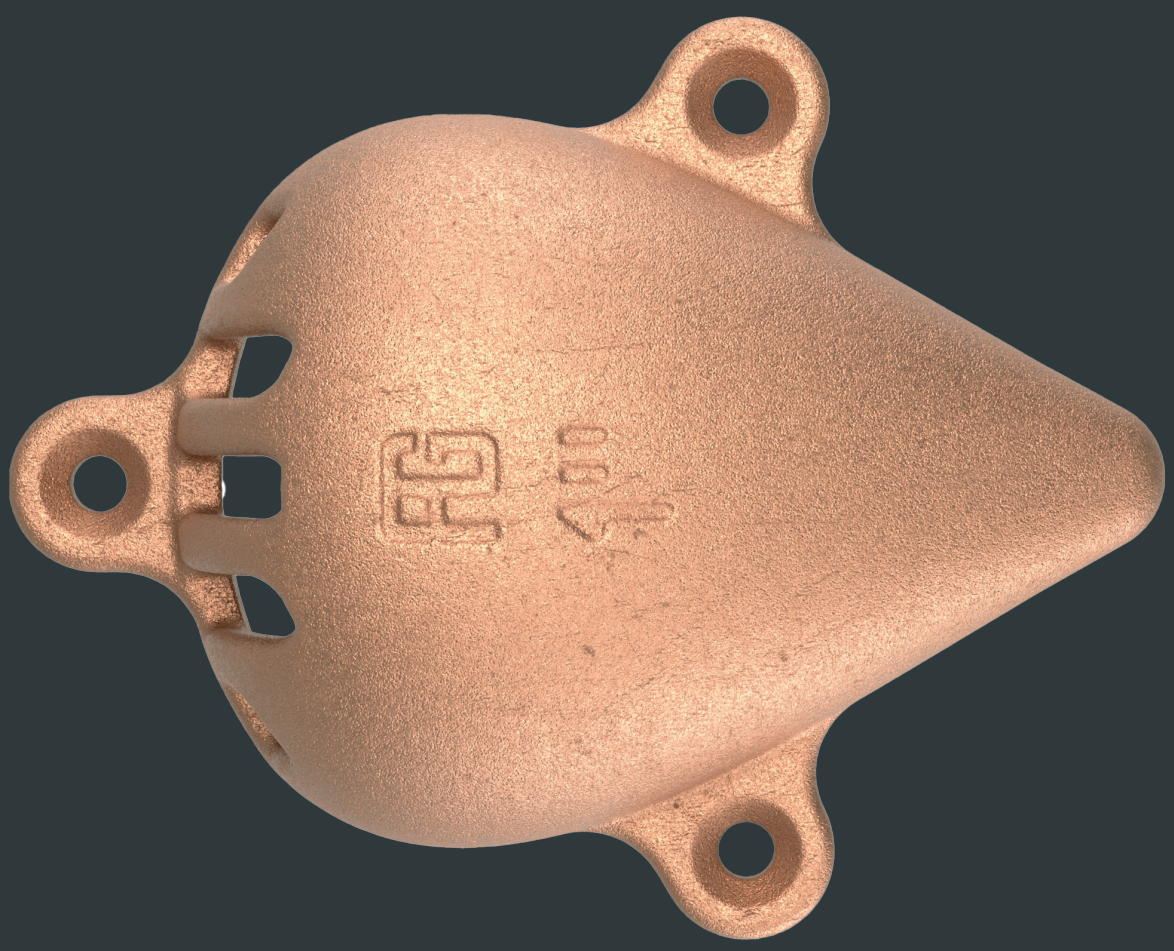

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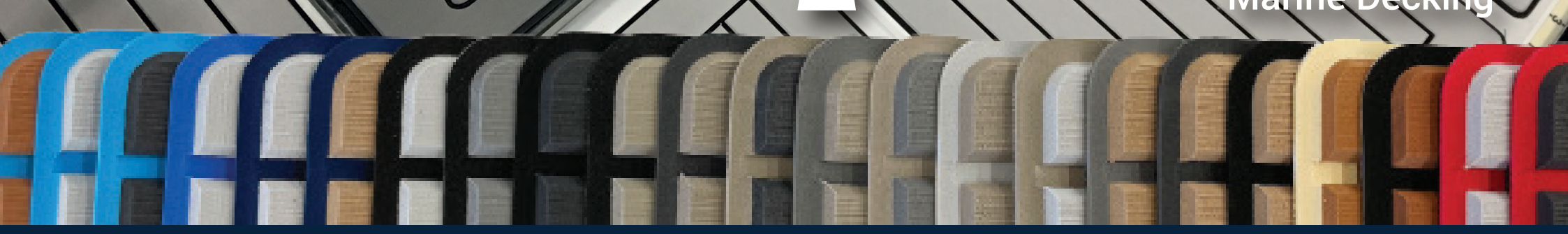

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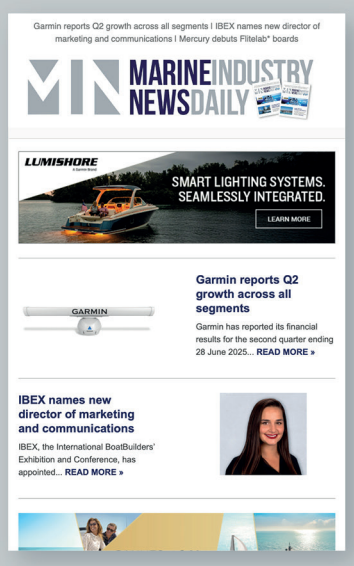

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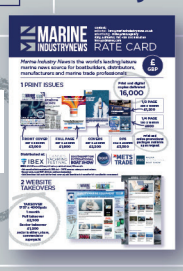

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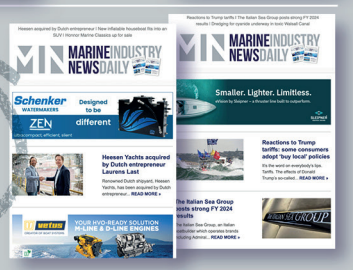

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When the doors of Amsterdam's RAI Exhibition Centre open for Metstrade, the marine trade world converges. From the latest advances in propulsion and composites to the next generation of sustainable systems and digital integration, this show is where innovation finds its sea legs – and where the tone is set for the year ahead in the global boating business.

As ever, the latest issue of *MIN* aims to capture that energy. Inside these pages, you'll find a snapshot of a sector in motion: equipment manufacturers discussing their latest challenges (page 4), brands such as Helix (page 25) and RAD Propulsion (page 41) scaling up for an era of electrification; and startups reimagining what's possible as new technologies reshape performance and efficiency (page 30).

Plus, read about the leading women in marine (page 11) and those teams behind the preservation of traditional wooden boatbuilding (page 48) in the UK.

We hope you enjoy this issue. The *MIN* team will be at Metstrade – drop by and see us at stand 01.583.

Chantal

Show time

Marine tech leaders push sustainability and smart design at Metstrade

Sustainability and smart tech are no longer future trends in the marine industry – they're current imperatives. From the design table to the engineroom, equipment manufacturers are reimagining products to reduce environmental impact, improve performance, and meet the rising expectations of both consumers and regulators.

At Metstrade, this transformation is on full display. It's not just where new products are launched – it's where global brands like Scanstrut, Smartgyro, and Vetus, and expanding and niche brands like Frigomar, and Guidi are shaping the conversation, connecting with industry stakeholders, and aligning innovation with responsibility.

In the case of Scanstrut, it's also melding its marine offering into the world of RVs... with sustainability underpinning it all. "Emerging markets aren't just defined by geography anymore, they're defined by lifestyle trends," says Grant Fox, Scanstrut's head of marketing.

"The outdoor and off-grid sectors are booming globally, fuelled by younger consumers who value freedom, design, and sustainability. These users are demanding better integration of smart tech, and connectivity."

From camper vans to superyachts

For Scanstrut, this means ensuring that every innovation supports a cleaner, more efficient experience, whether that's through low-power wireless charging, reduced packaging waste, or more durable materials that extend product life – and that products can cross marine and RV markets. The latter's become a huge opportunity for the company.

"We're seeing the boundaries between boating and RV markets start to blur," Fox says. "With the launch of our Ventura Series, we've taken our marine-grade technology and brought it into the fast-growing RV and adventure vehicle markets."

Whether it's a boat or a camper van, he says: "People now expect the same level of comfort, connectivity, and design detail. We see that convergence as one of the most exciting shifts in the market today, and we're right at the heart of it."

What consumers want vs what builders deliver

But while Fox is adamant consumers value sustainability, this isn't necessarily the experience of boatbuilders.

During Cannes Yachting Festival 2025 when discussing sustainability, Sunseeker's CEO Andrea Frabetti told *MIN* that "if the market really required [it], now everyone could put together a hybrid yacht."

Grant Fox, head of marketing, Scanstrut

And Fiorella Besenzoni, whose company produces components such as gangways, and fly and stern cranes – with a strong push to electric – recently mentioned that while the market's definitely changing she's not sure "if it's because it's the shipyards are asking more for [sustainable] help than the final customer."

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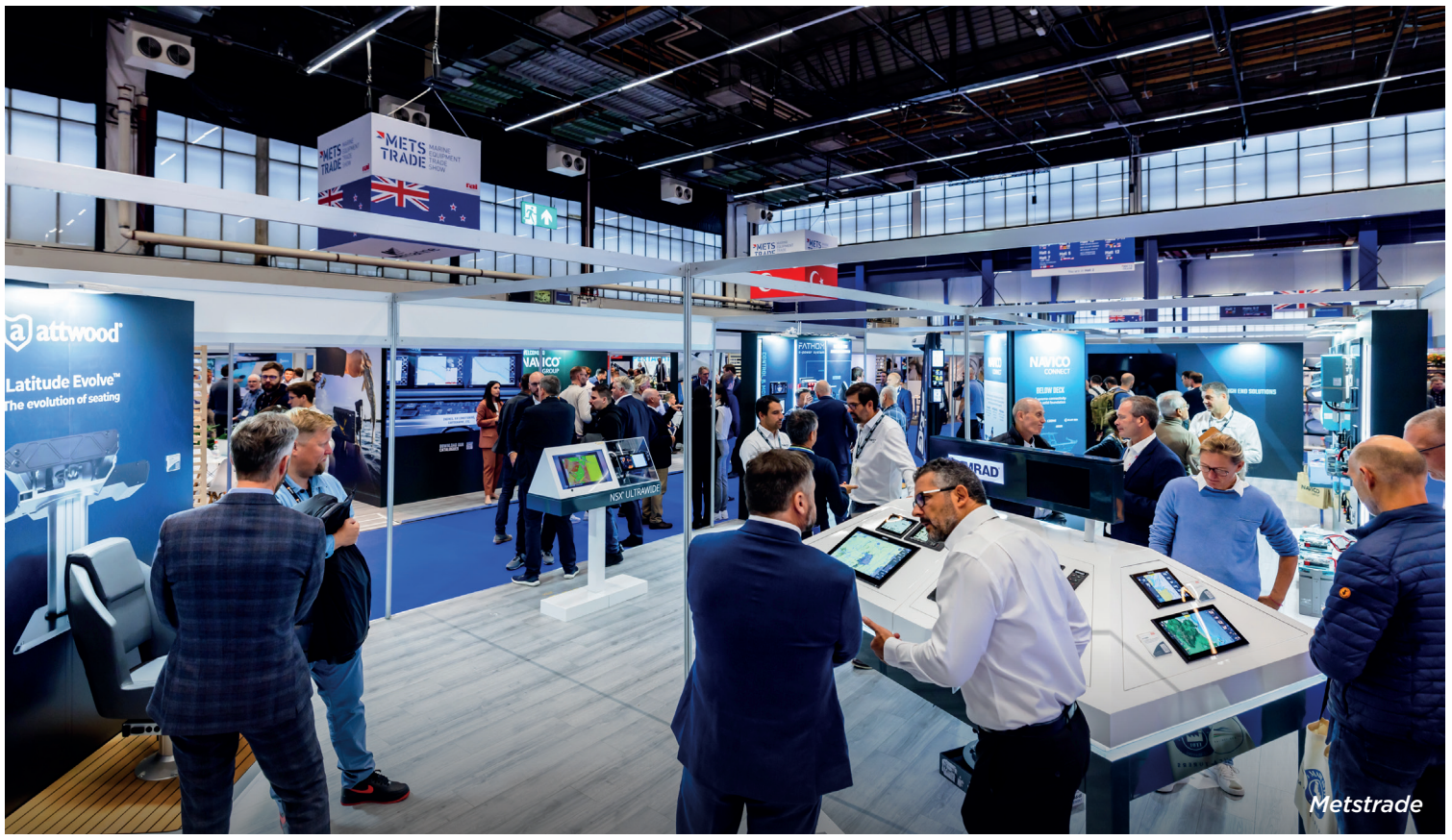
The DAME Design Awards

Metstrade 2024



Metstrade

But “if the final customer finds the solution already on the boat when they buy it, they get used to it.”

Is smart design now sustainable by default?

In B2C events Daniele Guidi - quality & sustainability manager for Guidi Srl, Italy – is experiencing a significant growth in consumer awareness on sustainability, such as the products’ life cycle, materials’ characteristics etc. The company produces thru-hulls, seacocks, fittings and hydraulic accessories and more.

“We think the demand for sustainability is coming from both sides: consumers and boatbuilders. We manufacture products that are quite specific (valves, water strainers, water intakes, etc). thus our number one target are usually the boatbuilders’ technical departments that we meet in Amsterdam.

“But consumers do care about those subjects, and boatbuilders are surely aware of their always evolving needs and requests.”

While Scanstrut’s Fox is bullish about consumer pull-through, he also notes the significant push from

Alessandro Guidi and Daniele Guidi, (RHS) Guidi Srl

boatbuilders. “Across the marine market, sustainability is shifting from a marketing message to a design mandate. What’s interesting is that this change is being driven from both ends, consumer expectations are rising, but it’s the major boatbuilders and OEMs who are embedding sustainability into their long-term strategies.

“Owners are more aware of their environmental footprint than ever before, but the real transformation is happening in the supply chain, where manufacturers are rethinking materials, production processes, and product lifecycles.”

Marine sustainability is a design mandate

Fox believes that sustainability now defines quality. “Products that are better built, longer lasting, and easier to install naturally align with sustainability goals. The real opportunity lies in making sustainability effortless for the user – technology that’s greener by design, not by compromise.”

Elena Ratti, marketing and communication, Smartgyro agrees. “We believe the concept of sustainability is closely linked to efficiency, performance, and long-term reliability.”

She says the company’s recent product developments reflect this approach – the optimised SG40 has a re-engineered system that delivers higher torque, lower power consumption, and reduced weight, while maintaining its compact footprint.

The company’s presenting a new integration for the SG20 at Metstrade this year, its most compact stabiliser designed for boats between 45ft and 55ft. It allows the SG20 to operate for several hours using lithium batteries, providing added flexibility

Elena Ratti, marketing and communication, Smartgyro2

and independence at anchor.

“Metstrade gives us the opportunity to showcase these latest developments and connect directly with builders, dealers, and end users who value technical refinement and real-world performance,” Ratti says.

Manufacturers step up as regulation tightens

According to Sander Gesink, marketing director at Vetus, sustainability in leisure boating is being driven by both regulation and changing consumer expectations. “Increasingly, boat owners are

Sander Gesink, marketing director, Vetus

looking for practical ways to reduce their environmental impact without adding complexity or losing reliability."

He says Vetus' commitment is reflected in the approval of its M-Line and D-Line marine diesel engines for operation with hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO), enabling up to 90 per cent CO_2 reduction without engine modifications.

That's alongside the development of electric propulsion systems for zero-emissions.

These developments matter to Gesink, and the marine community. Reducing emissions and expanding access enables everyone to enjoy boating responsibly.

"As more waterways become designated green zones, electric propulsion is becoming an important enabler of unrestricted cruising, while renewable fuels like HVO give existing boaters a straightforward path to cleaner operation," explains Gesink.

"Metstrade provides a platform to explore these shifts, exchange ideas with partners, and ensure that both boatbuilders and owners are equipped for a more sustainable future."

Tech that lasts: efficiency is the new standard

Like Vetus, Luca Santambrogio, export manager for Frigomar (which makes air conditioning and refrigeration systems) says the company is continuing to invest in development of new technologies and products as well to improve its production lines and quality standards in pursuit of sustainability.

"The market is requiring solutions that can respect the environment and at the same time guarantee energy savings." He says that Frigomar has been ahead of the game since 2013 when it invested into variable speed technology that saves up to 50 per cent in energy electrical consumption compared to the equivalent traditional air condition systems.

"During 2022 we have presented new compact units, the first variable frequency air conditioning system in the world that can work in direct current at 24V or 48V; during 2025, we launched the 12V version," he notes and "starting from September 2025 we added a new production site of more than 4,000 m2 to our historic headquarters so as to increase the production efficiency."

Luca Santambrogio, export manager, Frigomar

The sustainability conversation is becoming more sophisticated at Metstrade.

"We're seeing a genuine market shift where design innovation and sustainability are no longer separate agendas, they're becoming one and the same. That's where the industry's next leap forward will come from," Fox explains.

Tech quest: standard and smarter

Smart technology is no longer a luxury in the marine world – it's the new standard. From stabilisation systems that eliminate boat motion to predictive maintenance and seamless connectivity, the boating industry is embracing innovation that simplifies onboard experiences. And it's all on display at Metstrade.

Tech leaders such as Seakeeper, Raymarine, Volvo Penta, and Scanstrut are showcasing how cutting-edge, intelligent systems are redefining the future of boating.

From bow to stern, smart tech is the thread tying together performance, control, and next-gen user experiences.

"Metstrade is the key B2B show for Seakeeper in Europe," says Will Cimino, chief commercial officer for Seakeeper, which is why it's imperative that the company's there to showcase its smart tech charge.

The company's currently working on new technologies to create synergies across its product line and deliver performance enhancements while enabling greater levels of remote access and connectivity. "Developing

Will Cimino, chief operating officer, Seakeeper

cutting-edge technology is at the core of Seakeeper's business and both of our products," Cimino says, citing Seakeeper, a computer-controlled gyroscope that eliminates boat roll, and Seakeeper Ride, a vessel attitude control system that provides underway stabilisation.

"Both utilise proprietary sensors and software packages that understand a boat's motion and respond instantaneously to eliminate the at-rest and underway boat motions of pitch, roll, and yaw, creating comfort, control, and confidence on boats 6-60 metres."

Raymarine pushes for intuitive boating

For Chloe Rice, director of marketing, Raymarine and FLIR Marine, smart technology and automation are pivotal for industry growth especially for younger newcomers to the sector. Metstrade is a key part of meeting future integration partners, exploring new innovations, and collaborating with boatbuilders.

"Making boating more accessible not just for seasoned boaters, but also for newcomers is essential to drive long term growth across the

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Chloe Rice, director of marketing, Raymarine

industry," she says. "Features such as remote monitoring, predictive maintenance, and onboard automation help simplify the experience and improve safety."

Earlier this year, Teledyne (Raymarine's parent company) acquired Maretron. The move strengthened capabilities in vessel monitoring and system integration. Rice adds: "This is allowing us to collaborate even more closely with boatbuilders to deliver smarter, more connected boats. Customers should feel confident every time they interact with our technology. That means creating an experience that's not only intuitive, so it's easy to use right from the start, but also reliable."

Nicola Pomi, vide president, yacht and superyacht, Volvo Penta

Integrated intelligence: Volvo Penta's vision for efficiency

Volvo Penta's vice president yacht & superyacht – Nicola Pomi – says smart technology is transforming the marine industry.

"For Volvo Penta, intelligence is a key area of focus. We are developing fully integrated systems, from helm to propeller, with a new level of intelligence built in.

"A major step forward is the new dual power input design of the Volvo Penta IPS Professional Platform, and alongside this, the latest eco mode feature. This innovation automatically starts and stops power as needed, with the aim of delivering immediate efficiency gains with today's technology. The feature also extends service intervals by balancing engine running hours."

"Features such as remote monitoring, predictive maintenance, and onboard automation help simplify the experience and improve safety."
Chloe Rice, Raymarine

Volvo Penta has also recently introduced advanced connectivity through remote monitoring and diagnostics, as well as predictive maintenance. "This opens up new levels of service and support, with the aim towards more uptime at sea," explains Pomi.

Scanstrut aims for connected living

Fox notes that smart technology continues to drive the Scanstrut's product innovation.

"Over the next 12 months we will build further on this momentum. Our new Connect category of products is a prime example, bringing enhanced connectivity to the marine world." He says the range is designed for modern marine and RV applications. It combines high-performance connections with streamlined installation.

"It reflects our wider mission to deliver integrated systems that make life onboard easier, cleaner, and more efficient. From wireless charging and advanced power delivery to solutions that enable simpler smart-tech integration, such as waterproof seals and interior lifestyle technology, we're making digital technology work reliably in the dynamic, tactile marine environment.

"As boats become increasingly connected, we're focused on developing technology that enables seamless integration between power, data, and user experience."

As the marine industry continues to evolve, smart technology is no longer optional — it's foundational.

It's always been, and always will be, at Metstrade that the business gets done, however many of the themes have changed over the years. But it's not just about sustainability and smart tech leading innovations.

While Guidi likes the fact that Metstrade is constantly pushing the above themes, two factors aligned with the company's long-time philosophy, it classes Metstrade as the only truly global B2B event for the marine industry.

"It's always a pleasure for us to share thoughts with such skilled people, that really know what they are talking about and are able to go in-depth in our conversations.

"For a company like Guidi, relatively small in size but with a global reach, Metstrade provides the opportunity to get in touch with marine professionals coming from all over the world."

Metstrade: new launches and product innovation

Frigomar has exhibited at Metstrade for many years. Luca Santambrogio, export manager, likes the fact the show continues to grow year after year. "It is a real international event with visitors from all over the world. For us it is an occasion to meet our customers and showing them our new products and discussing with them about trends and news in our market."

This year the company's launching the third version of its three phase chillers: the CU130 and CU180. "These units are mainly projected to be used on superyachts maintaining the same energy savings, standard, and performance of all our products."

Pomi at Volvo Penta says the exhibition is key to understanding the marine industry's ongoing evolution. He says it provides an opportunity to reflect on the future direction of Volvo Penta in line with the sector as a whole.

"For us, it's essential for strengthening relationships across the marine industry and showcasing our latest innovations. The show allows us to gather direct feedback from industry professionals and these insights help us shape solutions for today's needs and tomorrow's opportunities."

The evolving role of marine collaboration

According to Smartgyro, Metstrade serves as a catalyst for its growth and global visibility. "That is why every year we return with new solutions that embody our continuous progress and innovative DNA," says Elena Ratti, marketing and communication.

The company exhibits to "strengthen existing business relationships but also to explore new opportunities across both the recreational and commercial marine markets. Our strategy focuses on expanding the global presence of the Smartgyro brand while gathering valuable, direct market feedback to help guide our product innovation."

Being part of Yanmar, it also benefits from a strong international network and shared commitment to technological excellence and sustainability.

"The show allows us to gather direct feedback from industry professionals and these insights help us shape solutions for today's needs and tomorrow's opportunities."
Nicola Pomi, Volvo Penta

For Vetus, the value is much the same. "Our ongoing presence at Metstrade has consistently provided the opportunity to deepen relationships with customers and partners while gaining valuable insights into emerging trends," says Gesink. "This year, we look forward to highlighting our advanced thruster technology, electric propulsion systems, and Maxwell anchoring solutions, reaffirming our commitment to delivering reliability and performance across all segments of the marine market."

"It is historically where we hold our most valuable boatbuilder meetings, connect with new and old partners, interview with regional media, and discover new vendors to support our growing line of stabilisation products. It is always a strong show for us, and we have launched products and hosted partner events many times over at Metstrade through the years," says Will Cimino, chief commercial officer for Seakeeper, Inc.

Observing wider industry advancements and trends is part of Raymarine's remit at the show. "The conversations and meetings that take place at Mets help play a direct role in shaping our business strategy and driving growth," adds Rice.

"In particular, the DAME Design Award remains one of the most prestigious accolades in the marine industry. It's the benchmark of innovation, and a win is incredibly powerful, not only in terms of recognition but also in reinforcing our focus on developing cutting-edge technology." Raymarine and FLIR Marine develop integrated navigation, thermal imaging, and safety technologies for a wide range of recreational and commercial sectors.

Rice concludes: "Ultimately, Metstrade is where ideas are exchanged, partnerships are strengthened, and future opportunities are forged. Our long-standing history with the show is a testament to its value."

As the marine sector continues to advance, Metstrade holds firm as the industry's cornerstone for connection, innovation, and global growth. It's where strategies are refined, trends are born, and the future of marine business begins – all under one roof in Amsterdam. ■

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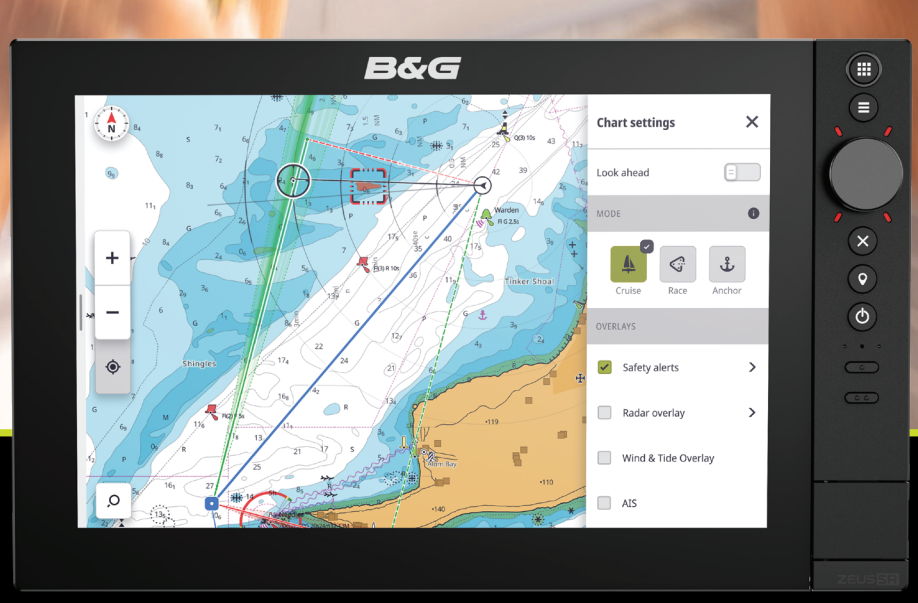

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Michelle Hildyard, vice president of operations, Raymarine & FLIR

From dinghy to boardroom

Michelle Hildyard, VP of operations, Raymarine & FLIR Maritime, explores why underrepresentation remains a challenge in the marine electronics sector

When I was eight years old, I first took to the water in a sailing dinghy off the coast of Southampton. I had no idea then that the sea would shape not only my personal passions but also my professional life. Today, as vice president of operations at Raymarine and FLIR Maritime, I oversee engineering, supply chain, customer service, and product management. It's a role that still surprises many people when I explain that I don't come from a technical background.

Getting ahead in the industry

Marine electronics is often associated with technical roles – software engineers developing algorithms for autopilot control systems and hardware engineers implementing signal processing chains for radar and sonar.

At Raymarine and FLIR, we are fortunate to have talented women in senior engineering roles. These engineering roles are vital in product development, but they are only part of the picture. Behind every product launch, every innovation, every successful customer experience is a network of non-technical expertise in product management, project management, supply chain, logistics, sales, support and marketing.

I began my career at Raymarine in supply chain management and went on to lead commercial functions, customer service, product management, before taking on responsibility for all operations, including engineering. I didn't arrive with a technical degree. What I brought was curiosity, resilience, and the determination to learn, combined with skills in organisation, problem-solving, and leadership. Those qualities have carried me through each stage of my career.

Yet women remain significantly underrepresented in marine electronics and the wider marine industry. Too often, the industry is perceived as overly technical, deterring women from considering roles in the marine industry. That perception is a disservice, not just to women but to the industry as a whole.

The marine industry is undergoing rapid transformation. Electronics and AI are reshaping the way we navigate, communicate, and ensure safety at sea.

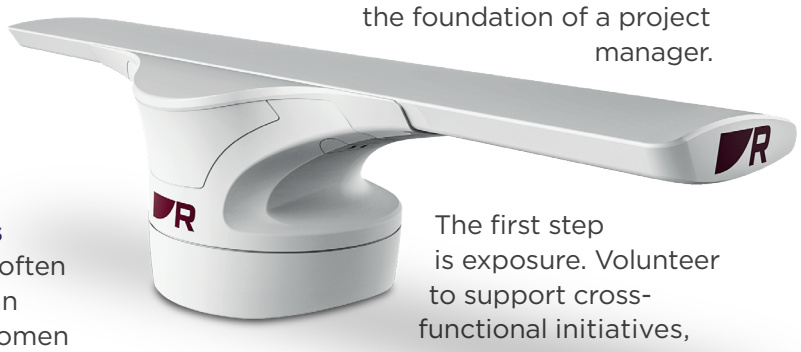
At Raymarine, our latest generation of FLIR marine thermal cameras use AI to detect and classify targets. Our Alpha displays and smart wind transducers use precise motion sensing to capture real-time data, delivering it to users in a clear and accurate format. This provides boaters with a competitive edge through reliable, high-quality information. Connectivity is allowing skippers to monitor their boats remotely, and sustainability is shaping how products are designed and used. If we want to build the best technologies for the future of boating, we need diverse perspectives shaping them.

If we want to build the best technologies for the future of boating, we need diverse perspectives shaping them.

Michelle Hildyard, Raymarine & FLIR Maritime

Opening the doors

One question I am often asked is how we can encourage more women into the marine industry. There are many opportunities. Project management, for instance, is about coordinating teams, budgets, and ensuring deadlines are met. These are transferable skills that many women already use in other industries, or even in their daily lives. If you're organised, detail-oriented, and good at bringing people together around a common goal, you already have the foundation of a project manager.



The first step is exposure. Volunteer to support cross-functional initiatives,

Too often, the industry is perceived as overly technical, deterring women from considering roles in the marine industry. That perception is a disservice, not just to women but to the industry as a whole.

Michelle Hildyard, Raymarine & FLIR Maritime

Raymarine Axiom

even if you're not leading them. That experience will help you understand how different departments, from engineering to operations, fit together. Training can also help with certifications like PRINCE2 or PMP which are widely recognised and can build confidence.

Product management is one of the most exciting roles in our industry because it sits at the intersection of technology, customer insight, and business strategy. It requires curiosity, empathy, and a willingness to understand what boaters really need.

My own lifelong passion for sailing and powerboating means I understand the frustrations and joys of time on the water. When we developed assisted docking technology, I knew immediately how it could make boating less intimidating and stressful for boat owners and safer for families. Product managers don't necessarily need to design the technical solution themselves, but they can translate customer needs into requirements, which engineers can work with and then guide a product through to launch.

For women interested in this path, I'd recommend immersing yourself in the boating lifestyle if you aren't already a boater. Spend time on the water, attend boat shows, and listen to what owners and captains say about their pain points. Pair that with business skills, an understanding of markets, pricing, and customer behaviour, and you'll have a powerful toolkit. Courses in product management can help, but so too can shadowing engineers and sales teams to understand both the technical possibilities and customer expectations.

Retaining talent

Attracting women into marine electronics is only half the challenge. Enabling them to stay and thrive lies with visibility. When women see others like them in leadership roles, it is motivating. I have spoken at events such as Metstrade and the Miami International Boat Show alongside female leaders from across the marine sector, and each time I am reminded how powerful representation can be.

Mentorship is another cornerstone. Throughout my career, I've benefitted from supportive colleagues and mentors who fostered and championed my development. Today, I also actively mentor women within our team to help guide their own careers. Formalising those kinds of relationships through structured mentorship programmes makes a huge difference.

Retention also requires practical policies such as flexible working arrangements, clear pathways for advancement, and a commitment to addressing bias where it exists. These are practices we've embedded at Raymarine.

The business case is clear – diverse teams are stronger teams. They generate better ideas, build products that meet real-world needs, and foster innovation that keeps the industry moving forward. In an era where AI, connectivity, and sustainability are redefining boating, we cannot afford to leave talent on the sidelines.

Taking the helm

For me, the sea has always represented freedom. Technology is helping us preserve that freedom and opening up new possibilities for boaters of every level. But to unlock the full potential of this industry, we need to widen the circle.

My journey proves you do not need to be an engineer to lead in marine electronics. Women need curiosity, resilience, and the confidence to step into spaces where they are underrepresented. If more women are encouraged and supported, the industry will not only be more inclusive, but it will also produce better innovations, better products, and a better boating experience for everyone. ■

Raymarine staff

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Course corrections

Leadership insights from industry trailblazers

Mistakes don't break great leaders – they shape them. Whether it's a botched decision, a missed cue, or a tough conversation avoided, every misstep offers a lesson that can fundamentally reshape how someone leads

MIN speaks with nine business and sport leaders from across the marine sector – including CEOs, MDs, and champions – to uncover the leadership lessons learned the hard way.

From empowering teams and confronting toxic behaviours to understanding that growth isn't always linear, these leaders share how they bounced back stronger – and why vulnerability is at the heart of leadership evolution.

Why mistakes are essential to effective leadership

"Mistakes are part of growing as a leader," says Marieli Solé, MD of Solé Advance.

"They teach you to listen better, involve your team early, and build change through trust, not pressure.

"Early in my role, I made the mistake of trying to change too much, too quickly. I had a clear vision and strong motivation but

Marieli Solé, MD, Solé Advance

I underestimated how important it is to bring people along at the right pace. We introduced new tools and workflows with the best intentions, but the timing and communication weren't right. The result was resistance and a loss of momentum.

"Since then, I've learned to plan more calmly and prioritise better. Today, we prefer to focus on one or two key projects, carry them through properly, and see real progress – rather than start too many things at once and dilute our efforts. Small, well-executed steps often lead to the biggest changes."

> **"Since then, I've learned to plan more calmly and prioritise better. Today, we prefer to focus on one or two key projects, carry them through properly, and see real progress..."**
>
> **Marieli Solé, Solé Advance**

People build long-term results

Anna Silvesjö, CEO of Viken Group, says that while numbers matter, it's people that build the long-term results.

"When I was CFO, I made a cost-cutting decision that felt right in the moment, it was financially good and efficient,

Anna Silvesjö, CEO, Viken Group

but in hindsight, it wasn't the best decision for the long-term results. I didn't involve the project team early enough, and even if we saved money short-term, it disrupted the team's momentum and therefore could have affected the overall delivery and relations.

"To repair the damage, I engaged and had a dialogue with the team to find the right way forward, and

Marieli Solé, MD of Solé, at Metstrade

Giulia Conti, skipper, Luna Rossa Prada Pirelli

learned that what looks right on paper isn't always what sustains performance over time.

"It reminded me, that numbers matter, but people and collaboration build the long-term lasting results. As a leader you need to balance both sides, and as CEO I've made an open dialogue a core part of my leadership to ensure that decisions are made based on both performance and engagement over time."

Empowerment starts with trust, not control

Navico Group's EVP & president Aine Denari reflects on the strength of the team – and calculated risks.

Aine Denari, EVP and president, Navico

"Earlier in my career, one of my biggest mistakes was not building and empowering the strengths of the entire team enough. I now know that leadership does not mean you have to be an expert in everything; it's about trusting others, supporting their growth, and creating space for diverse approaches.

"Another lesson came from how I viewed my career path. Early in my career, I thought a successful career should be linear and always upward. But growth isn't always linear, especially as priorities shift at different stages of life, such as raising young kids. I have had the opportunity to work in many different industries, functions and countries, and I have learned a lot from each experience, which has enabled me to be a more well-rounded leader overall.

"I've also learned that calculated risks are often worth taking. Of course, it is very important to prepare and plan appropriately, including ensuring you have the right support and team. But pushing yourself beyond your comfort zone often leads to the most meaningful growth."

Progress isn't always about podiums

Progress isn't just measured by podiums, but by the ability to learn, to adapt, and to stay kind to yourself when things don't go as planned says Giulia Conti. She's Luna Rossa Prada Pirelli's skipper, winner of the first ever PUIG Women's America's Cup, and a four-time Olympian.

"When I was an Olympic athlete, my world revolved around results. Every training session, every race, every decision was about one thing: winning. I believed that success was the only proof of my value.

"Each time I crossed the finish line first, I didn't feel joy... I felt relief. 'Thank God I didn't lose this time'. Before the medal ceremony was even over, my mind had already moved onto the next competition. There was no space for celebration, or reflection, or gratitude. Only pressure.

"It took stepping away from competition to understand what I had been missing. During the eight years I spent coaching after retiring from Olympic sailing, I started to see things differently.

"I watched my athletes make mistakes, fail, and recover, and I realised how much growth lives inside those moments.

Giulia Conti

"It took stepping away from competition to understand what I had been missing. During the eight years I spent coaching after retiring from Olympic sailing, I started to see things differently."

Giulia Conti, Rossa Prada Pirelli

"I began to see that progress isn't just measured by podiums, but by the ability to learn, to adapt,

Karen Underwood, MD. Spirit Yachts

and to stay kind to yourself when things don't go as planned. That lesson changed everything for me.

"When I joined Luna Rossa Prada Pirelli for the America's Cup, I came back to competition with a new mindset. I stopped trying to do everything myself. I learned to trust, to delegate, to rely on others. And through that, I discovered something I had never truly experienced before: the power of shared effort.

"When we won the PUIG Women's America's Cup, it was a completely different kind of happiness. This time, the joy was bigger than me. It belonged to all of us, to the women who believed, to the team that worked side by side, to every person who helped build that moment.

"For the first time, victory felt whole. And the happiness lasted longer."

Clear communication beats assumptions: define expectations clearly

Communication is key, says Altea Llakmani, CEO of FGI Yacht Group. "Earlier in my leadership journey, I made the mistake of not defining expectations clearly enough. I assumed that just because everyone on the team was ambitious and capable, we were automatically on the same page. I quickly learned that shared ambition doesn't equal shared understanding.

Altea Llakmani, CEO, FGI Yacht

"Things fell through the cracks because I hadn't explicitly outlined roles, responsibilities, or how we would measure success.

"I definitely learned from that experience. Today, I'm very deliberate about communicating expectations up-front, whether it's how we serve a client, how our team collaborates, or what success looks like for a project.

"I've put more structure into onboarding new team members and more transparency into how we evaluate performance. The shift has been transformational. The team is more aligned and, importantly, more empowered.

"When people know exactly what's expected and feel supported, they perform at a higher level. That lesson fundamentally reshaped how I lead."

"When people know exactly what's expected and feel supported, they perform at a higher level. That lesson fundamentally reshaped how I lead."

Altea Llakmani, FGI Yacht

Act fast on toxic behaviour

Jemma Lampkin, global commercial director, AkzoNobel Yacht Coatings notes that there should be no hesitation when dealing with challenging staff. "As leaders, we rely so much on creating high-performing teams around us. Ensuring that the right individuals are in the right roles, at the right time in their careers, and leveraging their strengths is vital for success. Because I don't like giving up on people, I've made the mistake of not dealing with performance issues or toxic team members quickly enough. This hesitation can allow problems to fester and escalate, causing significantly more harm in the long run.

"Because I don't like giving up on people, I've made the mistake of not dealing with performance issues or toxic team members quickly enough."

Jemma Lampkin, AkzoNobel Yacht Coatings

Jemma Lampkin, global commercial director, AkzoNobel Yacht Coatings

"Over time, I've learned that recognising these issues and acting swiftly to make difficult decisions are crucial for a healthy team dynamic. Don't waste time. Confront these challenges head-on and without delay. Your team will thank you."

Make no assumptions

Checking things thoroughly before making decisions is crucial to Karen Underwood – Spirit Yachts' MD.

"It's true to say that everyone can learn from mistakes, not only within the workplace but in their personal life, every day is a school day as they say! I do not confess to having all the answers, but I always find value with 'checking in' whether that's with an employee, supplier, or a friend, before making a decision.

"When I first joined Oyster [a previous role] it seemed like it had its own language: athwartships, midships, deadship – there was lots to learn. One of my first mistakes was encountered during a shipping exercise and not appreciating the difference between 'displacement' and 'tonnage'. This comes back to not assuming and always checking everything thoroughly.

"In my inexperience back then, I hadn't appreciated the difference. In my defence there are three different types of tonnage (gross, net, and deadweight) – I never made that mistake again."

"It's true to say that everyone can learn from mistakes, not only within the workplace but in their personal life, every day is a school day as they say!"

Karen Underwood, Spirit Yachts

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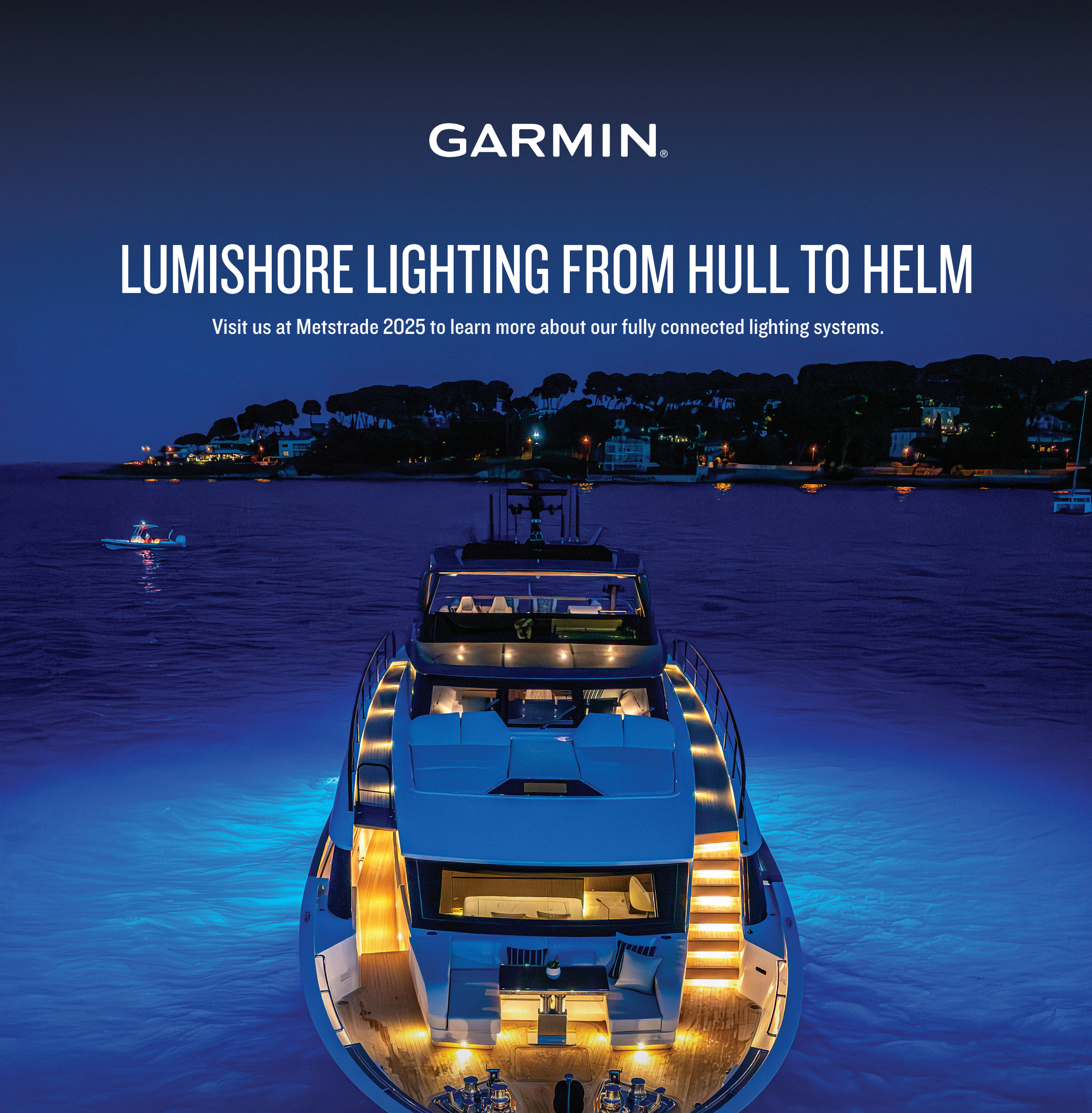

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Pip Hare, CEO and skipper, Pip Hare Ocean Racing

Owning mistakes: from solo sailing to team leadership

Pip Hare, CEO and skipper of Pip Hare Ocean Racing – a professional ocean racing team based in Poole in the UK – says that mistakes make a sailor, especially when they’re alone.

“You don’t know how strong or resourceful you can be until you get into a difficult situation at sea. We learn from these experiences, it helps us to manage risk, to perform at a higher level and to push the boundaries of competition and innovation with confidence. I think the same is probably right in the business world but somehow it seems a lot scarier.

“Personally, as a sailor I have made plenty of mistakes - sometimes they are because I misjudged the situation or pushed too hard, other times it is from cutting corners or not paying attention.

“The interesting thing about solo sailing is that you have to own your mistakes. It is seldom anyone else’s fault. You have to be the solution and carry the can. It is very levelling.

“On the Vendee Arctique race in 2022 I nearly blew up one of the internal ballast tanks inside my boat. It was getting windy and I needed to put some sea water ballast into the windward tank to keep the boat upright and improve speed. To do this we put a ‘reverse snorkel’ down under. It scoops up water as the boat moves forward and fires it into the tank. When the tank is full the water flows out of a breather on deck. I put the snorkel down, then my onboard phone rang.

It was the media team and they wanted an interview that minute. I completely forgot I was filling the tank and went straight into a live update. As I spoke to the presenter the boat picked up speed. We were going faster and faster and water was going into the tank faster than it could come out of the vent.

“The interview finished and I heard a huge bang. My heart jumped into my mouth. I looked at the tank and could see the carbon lid bending out with the pressure of the water. The carbon was making awful cracking noises. I was terrified the tank would burst and I would’ve had one tonne of water in the cabin over my batteries and electronics.

“I managed to slow the boat down and close the scoop before the tank burst but I had broken all of the baffles inside. I couldn’t use the tank for the rest of the race which affected performance and I incurred a big boatbuilding bill at the end of race which affected the rest of my budget. I was focussed on the wrong thing. It was my mistake and I had to own the consequences.

“How has this affected my behaviour as a CEO? I guess my experience as a sailor has made me very pragmatic about mistakes. I feel the same as a CEO and a skipper. I need to own my mistakes – acknowledge them and fix them. I never make a drama.

“With my staff I hope to establish a no blame culture, I have made mistakes and so I expect them too. I try to encourage them to also own their mistakes with the confidence that we as a team will support them.

“I expect honesty around reporting of mistakes in both the business side of things as well as the boat preparation. We try to develop a culture of meticulous attention to detail. You cannot send a race boat out in to the ocean without checking every detail before loading it up, and I like to apply the same to everything we do in the business.”

Mistakes aren’t as big as you think

Victoria Low, Magenta Project CEO says that while mistakes can feel huge at the time, often they’re not.

“I’ve made a lot of mistakes, thankfully mostly small, and ones that could be rectified quickly. Without a shadow of a doubt all these mistakes, whether missing deadlines, sending wrong information, or just simply completely misunderstanding a situation, at the time, seemed huge, and almost insurmountable. But on reflection simply weren’t.

Victoria Low, CEO, Magenta Project

“Thankfully, nothing that I do is life changing in the way that the emergency services, health professionals or other front line services are. But, at the time they are all-consuming, down to basic human error and not negligence.

“In every example, one truth shouts louder than the rest: leadership isn’t about perfection — it’s about progression.”

Victoria Low, Magenta Project

“The recovery from each of these has been multi-faceted: taking ownership, making myself accountable, exploring the key learnings, changing my mindset and adapting my approach.

“That is not to say that mistakes won’t happen again.

“And my new role at The Magenta Project where we are consistently looking at creating new opportunities and building new initiatives, in the words of Albert Einstein ‘Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new’.

“But at least now I feel better prepared for a recovery.”

In every example, one truth shouts louder than the rest: leadership isn’t about perfection — it’s about progression. The most effective leaders aren’t those who avoid mistakes, but those who own them, reflect on them, and use them to forge better paths ahead.

Whether on the water, in the boardroom, or at the shipyard, these lessons show that growth comes not from getting everything right, but from being willing to learn when it goes wrong. Because ultimately, leadership isn’t about never falling — it’s about getting back up, wiser. ■

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Market management

Following September's boat shows, Ian Stevenson, north Europe and UK representative for Italian marine accessories giant, Osculati, takes the temperature of the market

Trade conditions for UK businesses are a growing concern and the UK market requires some dynamism to rebuild and cement growth.

"When I look at the UK industry versus the larger European market, I really do worry," says Ian Stevenson, Europe and UK sales for Osculati.

"The introduction of trading barriers has meant most of the retailers turned off export orders to Europe due to increased paper work, customs and compliance so Brexit has directly reduced sales for this sector. The cost of getting goods from Milan to a boatbuilder in the UK has increased, and the paper work can be daunting for the uninitiated. In the end the UK consumers are just paying more for everything from Europe, which is extremely frustrating and not very productive."

UK trading woes

"The current leisure marine market conditions are challenging, the market is contracting and trading is tough with inflation and regulatory issues," he says.

Stevenson has registered a drop in UK demand over the past year, which he puts down to "a lack of confidence and reluctance to spend money.

"Peace in Europe would be the most effective stimulus for growth and confidence in Europe," he asserts.

There are seeds of positive growth: "If I were to look at the UK tender builders I feel they are certainly leading the way."

"There have been highlights, in particular the spectacle of Cannes boat show was outstanding. However, how much of the glamour has translated into orders has still to be confirmed.

"From an equipment supplier point of view, I believe the 45-80ft sector will contract by about 10-12 per cent. While the smaller boatbuilders (up to about €150K in value/outboard boats to 8m) – having been quite stagnate for the past two years – should start to see demand again, as the covid bounce boats flush through the dealers."

Sector strength in 2026

Stevenson notes that the strongest sector for Osculati is leisure marine – both power and sail – while segments such as defence are providing welcome activity.

"We work in all sectors but we specialise in leisure boats to 80ft. I am starting to see commercial pick up. But the area where we are seeing a lot more development in boatbuilding is supplying the defence sector."

> **"Peace in Europe would be the most effective stimulus for growth and confidence in Europe."**
>
> **Ian Stevenson, Osculati**

Defence is not a new sector for Osculati but the innovation and technical leaps are very interesting for the supplier, in particular in the autonomous craft arena.

Looking ahead to 2026, Stevenson is reasonably confident the company will be able to maintain the current level of sales. "We will have to work a lot harder to achieve this," he explains, "and we will have to diversify in order to achieve this."

Across the marine industry, geopolitical tensions are not conducive to a buoyant sales market. “Undoubtedly the world has become more unstable in recent times and that affects confidence. If we look to Ukraine and what has happened to the largest RIB builder in Europe, it does not take a genius to say we need a stable environment to build confidence and return some optimism. The same could be said for punitive tariffs set by the USA, that just hurt their own domestic consumers in the short term.”

Adopting AI: how is it changing the business?

AI promises one of the biggest step changes for the sector. Osculati introduced AI-driven systems to improve sales forecasting, purchasing decisions and product information management, to improve efficiency.

“When people understand how to use it and what it can offer, it will change the way we work. At Osculati, we are already using it to aid internal and external partners – to help them understand what our products can do as well as many other areas internally.”

AEmilio, is Osculati’s homegrown AI system, and is trained on the company’s catalogue and technical information, to answer customer queries 24/7. That’s no small feat, considering there are over 20,000 items in the Osculati catalogue (a significant chunk of those are made in Osculati’s own facilities, which span two sites – Milan and Lucca).

Stevenson says: “By analysing years of historical data, seasonal trends and market signals, Osculati’s AI tools can predict demand more accurately. This helps with many aspects of the business making us better able to manage stock, ensuring high demand items are always available, while avoiding unnecessary overstock.

“AI also plays a growing role in managing product information, for our customers and end users. With thousands of SKU’s and multiple languages to maintain intelligent systems asset in classifying, translating and enriching product data. This ensures consistency and accuracy across the Osculati catalogues and online platforms, improving internal efficiency and the customer experience.

“By automating repetitive tasks and providing deeper insights, AI allows our teams to focus on the higher value activities.

“As the marine industry embraces digital transformation, Osculati’s use of AI demonstrates how technology can deliver real world benefits in supply chain management, accuracy and responsiveness, helping the company, and its customers navigate the future with confidence.”

“We are using Osculati’s AI tools to predict demand more accurately... improving efficiency and the customer experience.”

Ian Stevenson, Osculati

UK boat shows: can they remain relevant?

Boat shows and marine events provide an important point of connection throughout the calendar for the company, but Stevenson warns that some UK events could struggle if they do not move with the times.

“Every person involved in the UK leisure marine industry has a vested interest in making the main domestic boat show work,” he says. “Sadly the Southampton show was quite disappointing, and needs a major re-think. I feel it will struggle to be commercially viable for the exhibitors next year, let alone the organisers.

“Why it cannot be combined with Seaworks in some way is beyond me, wasting time and money to create two shows in the same location a few months apart is just not sensible. Why not combine and hold the boat show in June when organisers can take advantage of the nice long warmer days?

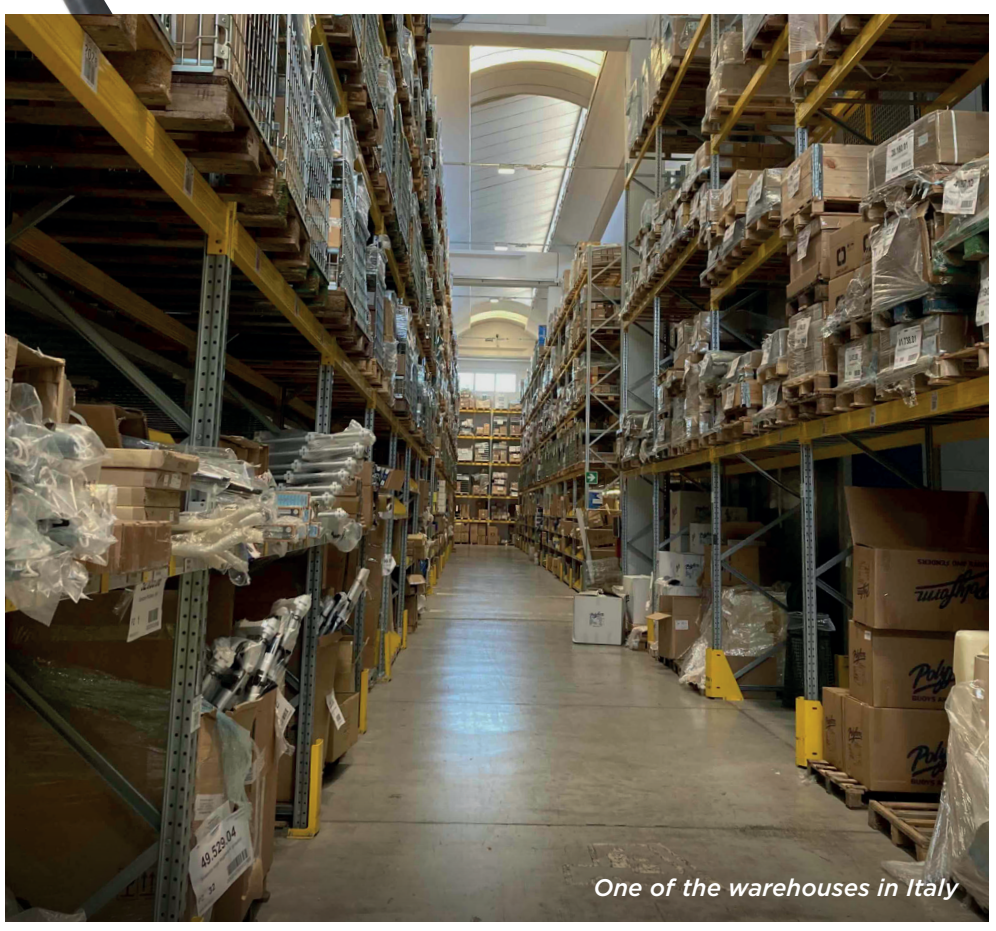
“For example, one weekend Seaworks, and then the next weekend is dedicated to a leisure marine show – the costs would halve. Maybe I don’t understand how these things work, but it seems logical to me. Changing the dates would also remove it from clashing with much bigger European shows held in September.”

UK government support needed for marine sector

Reflecting on the policy support for UK marine sectors, particularly compared with other manufacturing sectors, Stevenson says the government could do better and disconnect with industry bodies is not helping the domestic market.

“I feel the way the support is provided could be better. Government relations are channelled via British Marine (mainly) but many people do not think British Marine is relevant to their business and has no value versus the costs they are charging members. This needs to be addressed – subscriptions have to reflect what member companies can afford, and this is not the case at them moment.” ■

Osculati’s factory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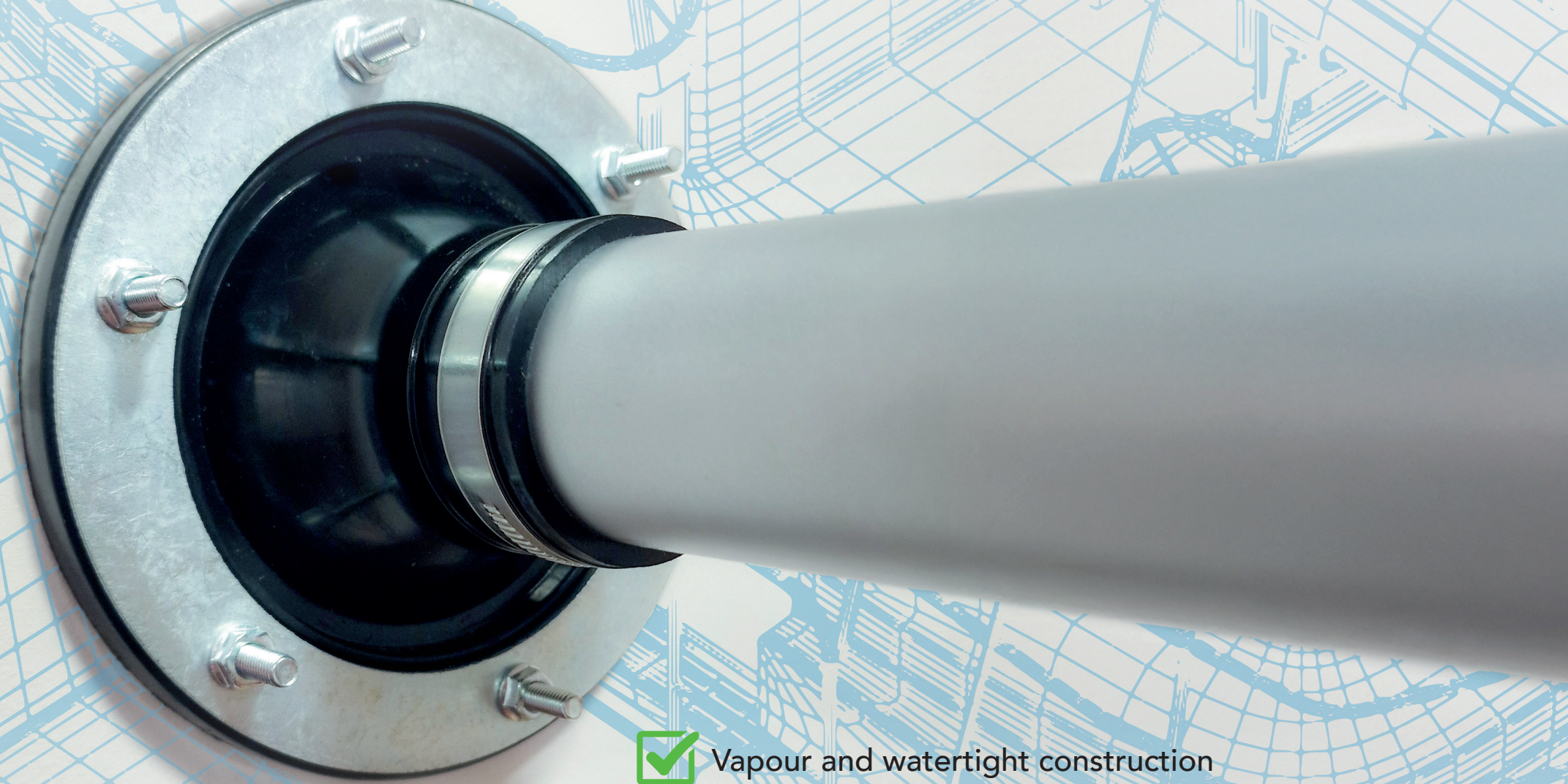

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From Formula 1 to the next wave

Magic Carpet e

British engineering firm Helix may be well known in Formula 1 circles but it is now bringing power-dense electric propulsion to the water

Helix, the British engineering powerhouse best known for its work with Formula 1 and Formula E teams, is quietly rewriting the rules of marine electrification. Drawing on its motorsport pedigree and proprietary scalable core technology, the company is now targeting the marine sector with compact, high-efficiency electric propulsion systems.

With projects such as the hybrid-powered *Magic Carpet e* already on the water, Helix is positioning itself at the forefront of a new era in marine propulsion.

Creating Magic Carpet e

Based in Milton Keynes in the UK, Helix (a trading name of Integral Powertrain Ltd) supplies manufacturers of electric and hybrid cars, motorcycles, and boats, as well as next-generation industrial and aerospace applications with electric motors and converters.

While the company has long-established roots in the automotive sector, Helix most recently supplied its electric motor technology in the *Magic Carpet e* high-performance sailing yacht. Commissioned by former L'Oréal CEO and chairman Sir Lindsay Owen-Jones, *Magic Carpet e* is a series-hybrid yacht powered by a 101kWh battery system. Helix partnered with Persico Marine – the yacht's design and engineering lead – to deliver three ultra-high-performance motors for the project.

Helix's marine developments have been spearheaded by marine chief engineer James Edwards, who joined the company in 2015 to lead its strategic move into marine electrification. His automotive engineering background has provided critical cross-sector insight as Helix adapts its powertrain expertise for the demands of the marine environment.

"I have 30 years' experience as a powertrain engineer and my career has focussed on vehicle powertrain development, emissions, and driveability with a wide range of technologies from diesel, gasoline, LPG, CNG, battery-electric, hydraulic drives, series- and parallel hybrids, and hydrogen fuel cells."

Translating Formula 1 technology to the water

Helix has supplied electric motors to Formula 1 teams for more than a decade. "We also develop hardware for several Formula E teams and have a technical partnership with Kiro Race Co. These applications are the backdrop to wide success in almost all forms of electric and hybrid racing, and this includes one-off vehicles such as the record-breaking Volkswagen ID.R Pikes Peak challenger," explains Edwards.

Helix's motorsport group works at the cutting edge, testing new concepts and developing greater power density. This learning is then cascaded into the products that the other Helix groups can offer to their sectors and much of the motorsport expertise has directly informed the company's marine offering.

"Over the course of our work with Formula 1 and Formula E, we developed a range of one-off solutions which offered the highest power density of any solution in the market. In motorsport, what matters is peak power – how much power a motor can put out in a short burst. But we realised that the continuous power of our technology could be of great importance for a range of sectors, including marine.

"These systems [built for Formula 1] and concepts transfer directly over to marine applications, where the weight sensitivity and small package requirement can offer exceptional benefits."

James Edwards, Helix

"These systems [built for Formula 1] and concepts transfer directly over to marine applications, where the weight sensitivity and small package requirement can offer exceptional benefits and flexibility to the vessel designer and owner.

"Dense units that provide high continuous power are key to making electrification work in marine."

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Elevating advanced digital lighting control, once exclusive to high-end luxury yachts, into a simple and cost-effective package. Introducing Poco 4, the latest evolution of Lumitec's award-winning Poco Digital Lighting Control system. Poco 4 introduces new innovative features such as intelligent sound-to-light, NMEA 2000 compatibility, and seamless CAN bus integration. For all your marine lighting needs, Lumitec has the solution.

BOW2STERN LIGHTING SOLUTIONS

Poco 4: Redefining the Future of Onboard Lighting

LUMITEC®
A Clarience Technologies Company

Words: Tom Manfleet

Since its founding in 2007, Lumitec, the premier LED marine lighting manufacturer in the United States, has built a reputation for pushing the boundaries of innovation. Known globally for reliability and quality, Lumitec has become a trusted supplier to many of the world's leading boat builders. However, the company's focus remains dedicated to a single mission: advancing the marine lighting industry through groundbreaking technology.

With that commitment in mind Lumitec launched the Poco Digital Lighting Control System in 2018, a product that changed the way boaters think about onboard lighting. Built on Lumitec's award-winning PLI (Power Line Instruction) technology, Poco introduced a revolutionary concept: delivering digital commands to lighting fixtures over existing power wires. By eliminating the need for extensive rewiring, Poco simplified installation and gave boaters advanced, intuitive control of their lighting systems. It was a leap forward in both efficiency and experience.

From its start, Poco offered seamless integration with compatible multi-function displays (MFDs) and connected smart devices. The combination of advanced features, user-friendly operation, and unbeatable value quickly won over boat owners and manufacturers alike.

Now, Lumitec has raised the bar once again with the release of Poco 4, the most advanced version of the system yet.

A New Standard in Marine Lighting Control

Poco 4 takes everything that made its predecessors successful and introduces powerful new features that transform the onboard lighting experience. Among its most notable upgrades:

- NMEA 2000 Compatibility – This key addition allows NMEA network activation of lighting commands, ensuring seamless integration with onboard systems.
- Intelligent Sound-to-Light Synchronization – Unlike competitor systems, Lumitec's approach creates a more sophisticated and truly unique experience, allowing lights to interact with music in a more dynamic, customizable way.
- Backward Compatibility – All existing Lumitec PLI-enabled lights work flawlessly with Poco 4, protecting prior investments while expanding capabilities.
- CAN Bus Integration –Allowing for manufactures to have Poco control of Lumitec lighting directly integrated into their native operating systems.

Despite these advancements, Poco 4 still relies on the simplicity of a standard 2-wire DC electrical system - a testament to Lumitec's philosophy of delivering innovation without unnecessary complexity.

Redefining the Experience

The Poco system has evolved tremendously since 2018, but Poco 4 represents its most transformative leap forward. More than just a lighting control system, Poco 4 is an invitation to creativity. With unparalleled customization and personalization, boaters can now shape their onboard environments to reflect mood, activity, and personal style - all at their fingertips.

In Poco 4, Lumitec has delivered more than an upgrade; it has redefined what lighting can mean on the water. It's not just about visibility; it's about creating experiences.

> "With Poco 4, we're not just controlling lights - we're redefining the onboard experience, giving boaters the power to create lighting that matches their mood, music, and personality."

Poco 4 is compatible with all major MFD brands and the app is available for Apple and Android devices.

To learn more visit lumiteclighting.com.

LEARN MORE

“Over the course of our work with Formula 1 and Formula E, we developed a range of one-off solutions that offered the highest power density of any solution in the market.”

James Edwards, Helix

Magic Carpet e

Helix now offers a range of scalable products designed to serve the full spectrum of marine propulsion and auxiliary systems.

“Our motors are available in various sizes and form factors, making them deployable across a boat. Along with propulsion, our motors are ideal for generators, pumps and actuators, providing a much more lightweight solution than traditional hydraulics.

“In addition, we also offer inverters and power electronics systems to control and regulate motors. And, critically, we offer fully integrated electric drive and propulsion units that bring motors and inverters together for best-in-class solutions.”

Edwards’ other career highlights include serving as lead engineer on the development and integration of a 110kW fuel cell system for a major European OEM; leading the creation and calibration of the UK’s first hybrid bus (the Wright Electrocity); and overseeing an award-winning portfolio of alternative-fuel vehicles for Vauxhall Motors – more than 20 variants that together formed the largest OEM range in Europe.

Aiming for plug and play

The company’s long-term goal is to provide fully integrated, plug-and-play systems that simplify installation for OEMs and builders. Translating Formula 1-grade engineering to the marine segment hasn’t been without its challenges. “One of the unique aspects of marine is the ability to operate at high load continuously because of the power-law propeller curve and the lack of obstacles. This doesn’t happen in other mobile applications because vehicles normally have a higher power-to-weight ratio, and are constrained by obstacles, legislation, or – in the case of aircraft – fuel economy. However, because of Helix’s motorsport background, this is an area that we are uniquely prepared to deliver in.

“Corrosion protection was more of a departure, but fortunately with help from our customers and suppliers we have been able to develop a multi-layer coating system that, along with IP6K9K ingress compliance, can withstand the worst that the ocean can throw at it.”

Breaking into the marine world

Helix’s strategy for entering the marine market began “close to home”, working with racing and powerboats – such as the E1 Race Series.

“We’ve branched out to offering solutions for racing yachts and sail boats, such as for the *Magic Carpet e* that launched in May 2025.

“Building on these foundations, some top marine targets for us are markets like service vessels, tugs, and yachts. Mid-sized vessels that spend a lot of time at sea idling are ideal electrification targets and perfect for Helix – before us, many simply didn’t have access to motor or e-drive solutions that can compete with traditional combustion.

“We’re also well-positioned to help with the scaling of next-generation vehicle architectures. Vessel designs like hydrofoils go hand-in-hand with electrification – compared to engines and the accompanying drivelines and fuel lines, motors are far easier to install on a foil. Plus, decarbonisation and the marine industry’s journey towards net zero, our power density is key to allowing larger vessels to reduce their emissions footprint and fuel consumption.”

Boatbuilder partnerships

Edwards confirms the company is working with – and has confidentiality agreements at play – many large boatbuilders.

“In my opinion we are very well placed to support the move to foiling vessels by providing ultra small diameter power units to integrate into fast ferries, larger leisure and small commercial applications.”

Rather than playing second fiddle, marine now forms a central pillar of Helix’s strategic growth plan.

“Marine is at the top of our target sectors, and we believe it will represent one of our biggest markets in the coming years,” he adds.

“We can enable miniaturisation and mass savings in the order of multiples for many propulsion and actuator systems. This doesn’t just reduce vehicle mass, but it also dramatically changes the layout of a vessel’s interior – floorspace that previously would be reserved for engines and pumps can be freed up for passengers, crew, or cargo. And by cutting many of the operating costs around maintenance and fuel, we think marine electrification could revolutionise the business model for many operators.” ■

Helix motor

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Small but MIGHTY

Startups are shaking up the marine world, bringing bold ideas and fresh energy to an industry in motion

Driving change, innovation, and sustainability, marine startups are invigorating the maritime industry and helping to shape its future.

Returning to Metstrade for the third year, the Metstrade Startups area will host 16 innovative companies with a strong emphasis on cutting-edge technologies, digitalisation, and sustainable solutions.

A collaboration between Yachting Ventures and Metstrade, Metstrade Startups has quickly established itself as a springboard for ambitious founders.

***MIN* sits down with six of the exciting startups exhibiting at Metstrade 2025 to learn more about their disruptive technologies and what they aim to bring to the wider marine market.**

Compute Maritime

Compute Maritime is aiming to transform ship design and simulation and has developed 'the world's first GenAI tool capable of designing, simulating and optimising any type of ship hull', its flagship tool; NeuralShipper.

Shahroz Khan, CEO, explains: "Compute Maritime is a deep-tech company using generative AI to overhaul the ship design process. Our core product, NeuralShipper, is an AI co-pilot that helps naval architects design and test vessels far more quickly and efficiently than current methods allow. We're building an end-to-end AI-native ecosystem for the entire ship lifecycle, from initial concept to operational optimisation, to help the maritime industry meet its urgent net-zero targets.

"The maritime industry is under immense pressure to decarbonise, with new regulations like IMO 2030 and the EU Emissions Trading Scheme imposing heavy financial penalties for high-emission vessels. However, ship design is still stuck in the past, relying on a slow, iterative process from the 1950s. This 'design spiral' methodology makes it incredibly time consuming and creatively draining to innovate and integrate new green technologies. 99% of new ships are almost identical to those built 50 years ago."

While some may argue with this point of view, NeuralShipper is certainly built to expedite the design process. "It allows designers to generate and test thousands of innovative, regulation-compliant designs in minutes, not months," Khan continues. "This accelerates the adoption of green technologies (like alternative fuels and wind-assist) and ensures new vessels are built for maximum efficiency from day one."

Khan says the startup's biggest challenge to date has been the maritime industry's "traditional conservatism and slow pace of technology adoption."

"It's an antiquated sector, which means there's a huge opportunity for disruption, but it also makes securing investment difficult. Traditional VCs are often unfamiliar with the industry's nuances and are hesitant about its slower investment cycle compared to other tech sectors. This makes non-traditional funding, industry partnerships, and proving clear, immediate ROI absolutely critical for us."

While built specifically for the complex demands of the marine industry, the underlying foundation model for generating 3D geometry is highly transferable.

"Ship design is still stuck in the past, relying on a slow, iterative process from the 1950s."

Shahroz Khan, Compute Maritime

"We've already received unsolicited interest from the European Space Agency for potential spacecraft design applications and from the Volkswagen Group for automotive design exploration. For now, however, our strategic focus remains 100 per cent on maritime – a large, underserved, and regulation-driven market where we can make the most immediate impact," Khan adds.

Compute Maritime's founders at their new London office

RIB powered by Boatee

Compute Maritime's target market is ship design firms, naval architecture consultancies, and in-house design teams at shipyards and large maritime operators.

"We are initially focusing on the high-growth workboat and yacht segments, where innovation is adopted more readily. Our business model scales from small design firms to large enterprise clients, such as our key partner, Siemens."

Compute formed a strategic partnership with Siemens Digital Industries Software in February 2025. The project focuses on connecting Compute Maritime's flagship platform, NeuralShipper, with Siemens' Simcenter STAR-CCM+ software for computational fluid dynamics (CFD) and results validation.

"Our collaboration with Compute Maritime represents a paradigm shift in maritime design," says Dmitry Ponkratov, marine director, simulation and test solutions, Siemens Digital Industries Software. "The combination of NeuralShipper and Simcenter STAR-CCM+ aims to redefine how multidisciplinary design optimisation is performed. It enables the creation of novel vessel types and demonstrates how designers can automate simulation processes and predict real-world performance, even for the most unconventional designs."

Discussing the partnership, Khan notes: "[Siemens Digital Industries Software's] foresight in recognising the transformative potential of generative AI in maritime design sets them apart. They haven't just been a customer; they've been a true innovation partner, independently validating NeuralShipper's capabilities and actively working to integrate our technology into their ecosystem.

"The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. The director of marine at Siemens called NeuralShipper's capabilities "astonishing," highlighting its ability to dramatically reduce design workflows while improving performance. In one independently verified case study with them, our platform reduced a design task that traditionally takes over a month to just 4.37 minutes. Other early users report a 20 per cent faster design cycle, a 10 per cent reduction in design costs, and a 50 per cent improvement in overall efficiency."

The next goal is to evolve NeuralShipper from a prototype to a fully commercial, full-stack platform (achieving TRL 9). "This involves integrating our AI-driven design capabilities with simulation, optimisation, and digital manufacturing into a single, seamless workflow. We aim to expand our client base to 75 enterprise customers, deepen our integration with major partners like Siemens, accelerate our pan-European market entry, and begin developing adjacent products for hydrodynamic components and green retrofit optimisation," Khan says.

Metstrade is a key opportunity for the business and Khan says exhibiting at the trade show's Start-Up Pavilion allows the company to connect directly with naval architects, yacht designers, and shipyards to demonstrate NeuralShipper's capabilities live.

"We hope to generate qualified leads for pilot projects, build brand awareness as pioneers in maritime AI, and gather direct feedback from potential users to help shape our product roadmap. We are also keen to meet potential strategic partners and investors who share our vision for a more sustainable and digitally driven maritime future."

computemaritime.com

Boatee

Making its industry and press debut at Metstrade 2025, Italian-headquartered startup Boatee is set to enter the market with a lightweight new electric outboard.

"Boatee started because we, as boaters, were tired of heavy, noisy, and complex small outboards," explains Cesare Malescia, founder & CTO. "While the market already has some electric options, we wanted a motor that was radically simpler and lighter. So, we built an electric motor that's incredibly light, powerful, and intuitive. It's about removing the hassle and bringing back the simple joy of being on the water."

Cesare Malescia, founder and CTO, Boatee

"Creating a true 4hp equivalent that weighed under 6kg was an obsession that took intensive R&D."

Cesare Malescia, Boatee

Boatee's core focus is the end-user, specifically tender owners and small sailboat owners who value lightness and simplicity.

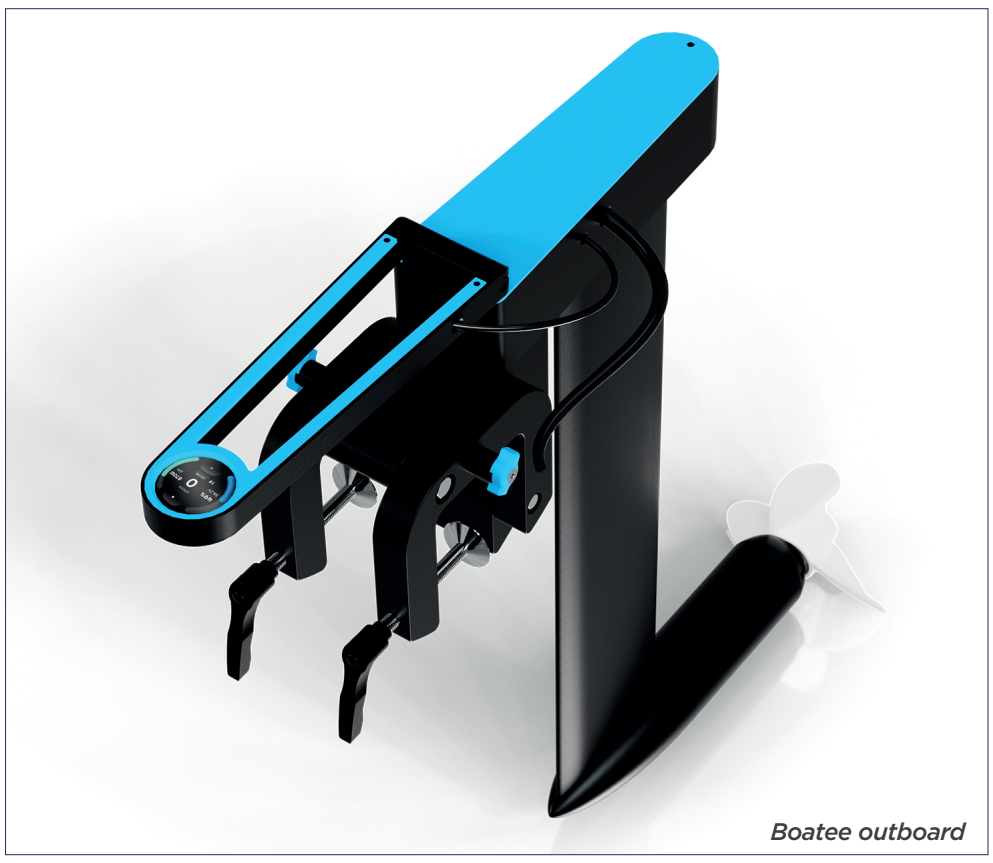
Malescia says the product solves two major user-centric problems. Firstly, weight – at under 6kg, the Boatee motor is light, making it easy for anyone to carry and

mount. “This removes a significant barrier to boating,” he adds.

“When people first lift it, they say, ‘That’s it?’ The reaction to its lightness is immediate and validates our core mission. Feedback from the national and international press, as well as the first dealers who tested the prototype, highlighted its superior performance and efficiency compared to existing options on the market.”

But achieving this weight was no easy feat. “On a technical level, our biggest challenge was defying the power-to-weight trade-off. Creating a true 4hp equivalent that weighed under 6kg was an obsession that took intensive R&D.”

Secondly, Malescia emphasises the simplicity of the outboard. “We’ve engineered out the complexity. There’s no fuel, no oil, and minimal maintenance. Our design is simple to use and simple to own.”



Boatee outboard

The company has leveraged proven technologies like brushless motors and LiFePo4 cells from other industries, but the application is 100 per cent marine-specific.

Sustainability is, of course, a key driver. “First and foremost, we are addressing the environmental impact of traditional outboards. Recent studies show that over 15 per cent of coastal water pollution is caused by unburned fuel, oil, and exhaust from these motors. Boatee eliminates this problem entirely with its zero-emission electric propulsion, helping to preserve the fragile ecosystems we love to explore,” says Malescia

The challenges of startup life are pretty universal but Malescia points to areas where more cohesion could smooth the way in the marine space.

“On an entrepreneurial level, navigating the global certification and compliance landscape is a significant undertaking for any hardware startup. We see this not as a barrier, but as an opportunity for the industry to evolve.

“We are optimistic about a future where streamlined regulations help accelerate sustainable innovation, and we are eager to be part of the conversation that helps shape that progress.”

“We are particularly inspired by the collaborative spirit we see in Northern Europe, where brands work together to make boating more accessible and sustainable. We believe there is a tremendous opportunity to champion this same mindset in Italy. As a country with one of the highest coastline-to-inhabitant ratios in Europe, Italy is perfectly positioned to become a leader in sustainable boating. We see this not as a gap in innovation, but as a launching pad. Our ambition is to be a catalyst for this new wave, proving that Italian design and engineering can lead the charge in creating a more accessible and sustainable marine future.”

Looking ahead, Boatee has clear goals for the next 12-18 months.

“[We want to] successfully launch and fulfill all pre-orders by the end of 2025, build our foundational dealer network across key European markets and finalise prototypes for our more powerful 3kW and 6kW models, expanding the Boatee family.

“At our world premiere at Metstrade we want to build partnerships by connecting with distributors and dealers who share our vision for electric boating. The show also offers great opportunities to engage and learn by gathering feedback from industry experts.”

www.boatee.it

Effetto Venturi

Effeto Venturi is an Italian marine technology startup building an innovative autonomous buoy system known as GiPSy. The buoys are designed to offer a lightweight, precise and sustainable alternative to traditional anchoring for water-based events.

Founder, Valentina Venturi, explains: “We build robotic buoys that replace traditional anchored race marks in watersports. Instead of laying heavy anchors and moving them with boats, our buoys reposition themselves automatically, making race management faster, safer, and more sustainable.

“We’re also the first to design a very small robotic buoy for sailing coaches, a portable tool they can use on the water every day, not just at big events.”

GiPSy – the first robotic buoy ever used at the Olympics

The system’s capabilities were on full display during the Paris 2024 Olympic regatta, where GiPSy buoys were quietly at work.

Despite major shifts in wind strength and direction, start lines and mark positions were accurate throughout the competition thanks to GiPSy’s precision positioning and real-time course adjustment technology.

“Race committees usually need chase boats, crews, anchors, and a lot of time to set up a course. It’s expensive, polluting, and logistically difficult. On top of that, anchoring is now forbidden in many areas in order to help protect the seabeds. Our buoys can move into position on command, hold their place precisely, and adapt to wind or course changes in minutes.”

GiPSy is aimed at clubs and federations across the watersports segment such as sailing, rowing, wakeboarding, and open-water swimming organisations.

> **“Our buoys can move into position on command, hold their place precisely, and adapt to wind or course changes in minutes.”**
>
> **Valentina Venturi, Effetto Venturi**

The startup’s main early adopter was the French Sailing Federation, with the organisation’s feedback proving instrumental.

“By working closely with them, we were able to push the product forward and many of the technical specifications like having a product that can be used over 30 knots of wind speed and strong currents came directly from that collaboration. They helped us test in real conditions, identify edge cases, and refine both hardware and software to meet the demands of high-performance sailing environments,” adds Venturi.

While initial applications are centering on the watersports space, the core principles behind the technology could be adaptable for use in harbours, offshore energy sites, and even water treatment facilities.

The startup ran into supply chain challenges but this has resulted in a production silver lining:

“One of the biggest challenges was the shortage of key electronic components at critical times. For a while, it slowed down production in moments of high demand. That pushed us to design and manufacture our own custom boards, giving us full control over supply and reliability. In the end, what was a challenge became an advantage and now we’re less dependent on global shortages and have a product that’s more robust and tailored to our needs.”

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When asked about other innovators in the marine space, Venturi says: "One company we really admire is BlueRobotics, our thrusters suppliers. What we appreciate is that they started from a real, practical need: affordable, reliable thrusters for marine robotics that did not exist at the time. Their products are now robust, open, and well-engineered, and they've built a strong community around them. It's a great example of solving a clear problem with smart, scalable design."

Over the next 12 to 18 months, Effeto Venturi is focused on three significant milestones. "First, we're scaling up our rental fleet – it has already quadrupled since last year, but demand still exceeds supply. Second, we're launching mass production of our new polyethylene buoys, both large and small formats. And third, we're considering upgrading our tech stack by integrating new communication protocols like LoRa and implementing high-precision GPS through real-time kinematics (RTK)."

At Metstrade, Venturi says the team's goal is to connect with stakeholders across the broader marine industry to better understand their needs, challenges and potential applications for autonomous buoy systems.

www.gipsybuoy.ch

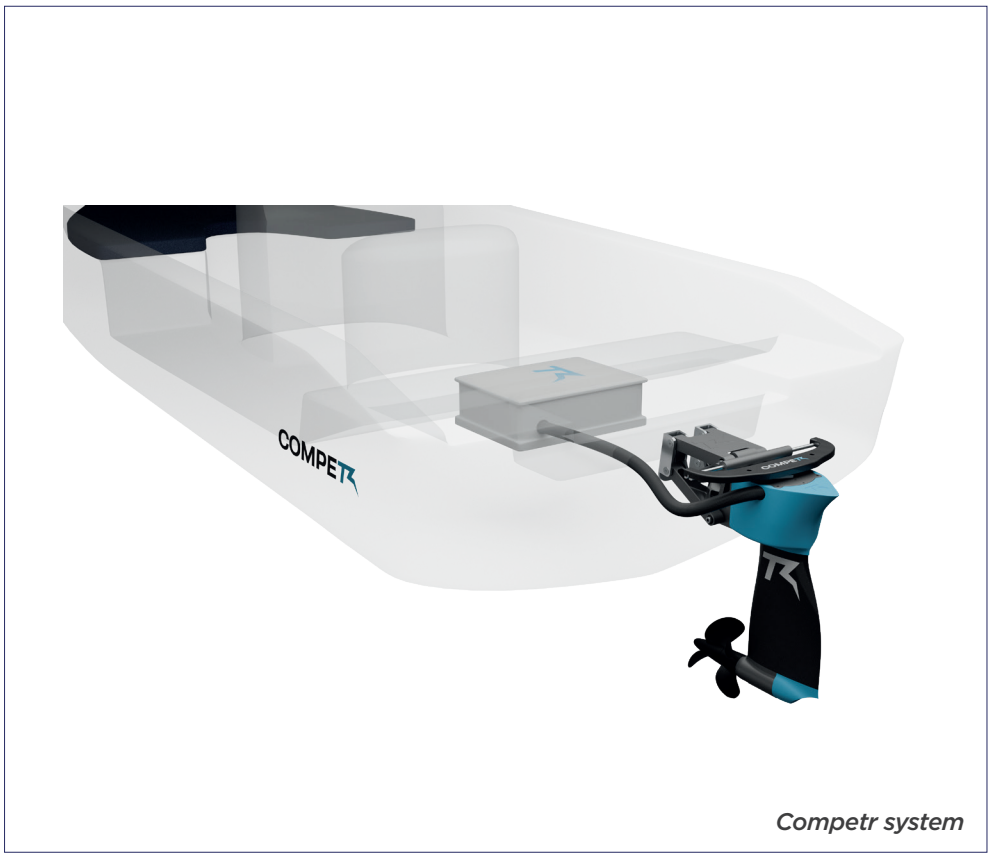
Competr

Developed by the UniBoAT research team at the University of Bologna's Department of Industrial Engineering, Competr – an acronym for counter-rotating and tractor propellers electric outboard – is aiming to revolutionise electric propulsion.

Engineered to deliver high performance while remaining compact and accessible, Competr designs and develops an ultra-light electric outboard motor with counter-rotating tractor propellers.

Iacopo Roncuzzi, co-founder of Competr, says: "Traditional outboard engines powered by combustion are noisy, polluting, and increasingly restricted in lakes and coastal areas. Existing electric solutions are often too heavy or underpowered to be practical. Our motor addresses both problems by providing a lightweight, efficient, and sustainable alternative that maintains the performance expected by demanding boaters.

The 22kg electric outboard motor features patented dual counter-rotating tractor propellers, a carbon fibre frame, and a modular plug-and-play battery – delivering, Roncuzzi says, the power and responsiveness of much heavier combustion engines, with none of the noise or emissions.



Competr system

"The main challenge has been balancing the engineering of advanced features, such as counterrotating tractor propellers, with the need for industrial scalability. Moving from a university-proven prototype to a product that can be consistently manufactured at high quality and offered at a competitive price requires time, capital (a lot!), and close collaboration with specialised suppliers."

While the project was born within an academic setting, Competr's direction has quickly evolved into a commercially focused startup with clear industrial ambitions.

The design has been conceived specifically for marine use, particularly for light boats, tenders and small craft where weight and efficiency are paramount.

The 22kg electric outboard motor features patented dual counter-rotating tractor propellers.

"Some of the underlying technologies, such as lightweight carbon-fibre structures, advanced cooling and lubrication, and modular battery systems, have cross-industry potential and could be applied in automotive or aerospace sectors," he adds.

The startup's core targets are OEMs, boatbuilders, and professional yards looking to integrate a premium electric propulsion solution into their product lines. Secondary markets include end-users such as yacht owners, sports teams, and rental services.

With regulatory pressure tightening on the use of polluting engines across inland and coastal zones, Competr is strategically positioning itself as a credible, high-performance electric alternative.

Roncuzzi says: "Feedback has been highly positive, especially regarding the lightness of the unit, ease of installation, and manoeuvrability. During competitive trials, such as those at the Monaco Energy Boat Challenge, pilots highlighted the responsiveness of the counter-rotating propellers, and the extended range compared to conventional electrics. These inputs have guided refinements in the latest prototype."

Competr's participation in events such as the Monaco Energy Boat Challenge has also helped validate its design approach in real-world conditions, strengthening the team's technical confidence and visibility within the marine innovation community.

Looking beyond Competr's own development and reflecting on other companies driving progress in marine electrification, Roncuzzi says: "We admire Torqeedo for being among the first to open the market for electric outboards. While we are developing a lighter and more efficient solution, their ability to push electric propulsion into mainstream awareness has been instrumental in paving the way for companies like ours."

Priorities over the course of the next 12 to 18 months are to finalize pre-series production, secure key OEM partnerships, and deliver the first pilot units to selected yards and clubs. "We aim to complete the industrialisation process, strengthen our IP portfolio, and validate the product through real-world use cases. Commercially, we target initial presales in 2025 and pilot deliveries in 2026.

"We see Metstrade as the most effective platform to establish strong connections with boatbuilders, suppliers, and distributors. Our goal is to validate interest from the market, initiate strategic partnerships, and position ourselves as a credible alternative for performance-oriented electrification in light marine mobility. We also want to collect feedback from the industry to guide the final development phase before entering production."

www.competr.it

SmartdrinX tap station

SmartdrinX

SmartdrinX is an innovative drinks system designed specifically for luxury yachts. "With the push of a button, your soft drink, wine, cocktail, long drink, or draft beer is served chilled with style," says Jacob Hansen, CEO & co-founder.

"On board, space is limited and storing bottles or mixing drinks can be messy and inconsistent. Our system solves this by dispensing drinks at the right temperature, in the right measure, with no fuss. It's about making life easier for crew and ensuring owners and guests enjoy a consistently high-quality experience," he explains.

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“We primarily work with OEMs and yards who want to offer innovative hospitality features in new builds. But there’s also a strong market for refits and the charter industry, where suppliers and owners want to upgrade without major modifications.”

In terms of feedback, Hansen says crews love the simplicity and space saving, while owners and guests appreciate the quality and convenience.

“Early adopters have highlighted how it reduces waste, saves time, and adds a “wow” factor to the onboard experience,” he adds.

“The marine industry values reliability and tradition, so introducing something new requires proof” Hansen continues. “Our biggest challenge has been demonstrating that our systems are robust enough for life at sea. That’s meant rigorous testing, adapting designs for marine use, and working closely with early adopters to build confidence.”

“On board, space is limited and storing bottles or mixing drinks can be messy and inconsistent. Our system solves this.”

Jacob Hansen, SmartdrinX

The foundation of the system comes from hospitality and catering but SmartdrinX has re-engineered it with compact design, low power usage, and resistance to vibration.

Drawing inspiration from the wider marine community, Hansen says: “Dometic is a company we look up to. They’ve taken essential comforts like cooling and climate systems and adapted them perfectly for marine life. They’ve proven how to translate everyday needs into solutions that work at sea – a philosophy we share at SmartdrinX.”

Over the next 12 to 18 months, the team plans to expand installations to build a strong reference base, scale installations on private yachts as an aftermarket product, partner with leading shipyards and OEMs to integrate SmartdrinX systems in new builds, enter the charter industry and launch a SmartdrinX app to automate drinks configuration, personalised drinks and AI support for drinks recipes.

“Metstrade is our chance to show the industry how SmartdrinX transforms onboard hospitality. We want to meet with builders, suppliers, and owners, form new partnerships, and most importantly, listen to the market so we can refine our offering further,” Hansen concludes.

www.competr.it

Marine Innovations Limited

UK startup Marine Innovations Limited, design and manufacture marine accessories that combine clever engineering with everyday practicality.

The brainchild of founders and avid boaters, Bradley & Rachel Davis, the range includes solutions such as the Adjustable Fender Mate, Fender Slider, Rope Looper, and the Ultimate Boat Bar.

Rachel Davis explains: “We make original boating products that make life on the water easier, safer, and more enjoyable. Every product we sell is our own invention, developed from real boating experience to solve problems that existing marine products often overlook. We focus on designs that are simple, effective, and affordable, so any boat owner can use them without complicated setup or maintenance. Our ideas stand out in a market where many products fail to perform or lack durability.”

The products aim to solve real-life boating challenges for experienced sailors, novices, and users with mobility or dexterity limitations.

Bradley Davis explains that the company has received outstanding feedback from users with dexterity challenges, “who say products like the Fender Mate, Rope Looper, and Fender Slider allow them to handle ropes independently,” thus boosting confidence and enjoyment on the water.

“Professional skippers, collectively logging over one million nautical miles, have also praised our products as gamechangers for solo boating and efficiency onboard.”

The company is targeting marinas and chandleries, and online marine stores and distributors.

“Every product we sell is our own invention, developed from real boating experience to solve problems that existing marine products often overlook.”

Rachel Davis, Marine Innovations

Like many startups, visibility has proved a hurdle. “Our biggest challenge so far has been establishing ourselves in a niche industry while marketing products nobody had heard of all on a tight budget. Without outside investment, we have had to be resourceful, often wearing multiple hats across design, marketing, customer service, social media, packing, and accounting,” Rachel adds.

“Building brand awareness from zero required exhibiting at boat shows, attending marina open weekends, cold calling, producing demo videos, and encouraging customers to spread the word. Designing products that work for all types of boaters also required rigorous testing, refinement, and re-testing.”

The short to medium term, the duo plans to expand the Marine Innovations Limited product range and form strategic partnerships.

Bradley Davis adds: “We plan to collaborate with marine retailers, boat manufacturers, and marina operators. We are passionate about investing more into research and development, customer-driven design, and sustainable materials. We want to build a business known for its creativity, quality, and integrity, not just its product line.”

The startup’s flagship product, the Adjustable Fender Mate, is designed to simplify fender management with quick attachment and adjustment. “At the heart of everything we create is a simple philosophy: boating accessories should be affordable, reliable, and built to last,” adds Rachel Davis.

“We also focus on making our products from recycled materials like nylon, adding glass fibre to create additional strength and durability.

“We offer replaceable parts to help reduce environmental waste and have minimal packaging with all instructions created in video format.”

In recognising the wider wave of marine innovation, the founders say they admire CoastKey for their innovative approach to boat safety, combining smart technology with practical design to make boating safer and more enjoyable. ■

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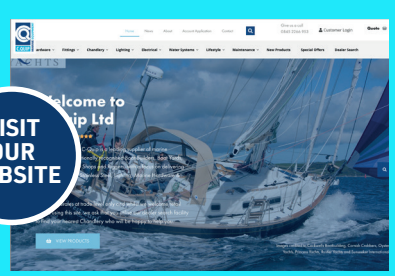

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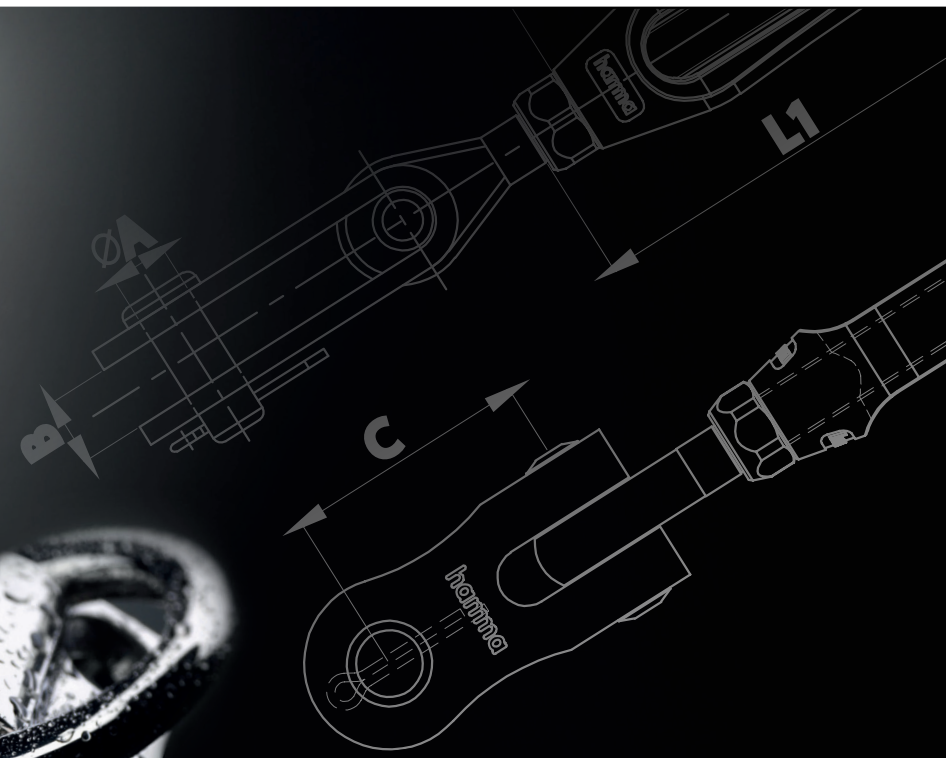

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RS electric

Electric outlook

Dan Hook, CEO of RAD Propulsion, says more collaboration and working as 'Team UK' rather than in silo would expedite growth in the electric marine market

Rich Daltry and Dan Hook founded RAD Propulsion in 2018 – the duo having previously built and developed advanced marine robot boats for the offshore industry, defence and oceanographic sectors.

The company now boasts an expanding team and RAD is making its name building electric propulsion systems. Headquartered in the UK, the CEO has a unique perspective on the marine market and is keen to highlight areas where potential for growth is clear.

How would you characterise the UK marine market currently?

One of the things I love so much about the marine industry is how hard this question can be to answer. It is such a diverse sector with everything from defence, to major infrastructure programmes, to fishing, surveying and leisure.

From our experience at RAD, the commercial and defence sectors are very busy with lots of programmes in action and seemingly most businesses in those sectors announcing new services and product offerings. The leisure sector is arguably quieter at the moment but taking the chance to evaluate product-customer fits, business models and what the changing demographic in that sector means. Shows such as Seawork, Ocean Business and DSEI have all been very buoyant.

I think the UK is very capable in the areas of specialist boat design, composites, software, tech products and, in particular, areas such as maritime robotics and, of course, electric propulsion. We export almost half of what we build at the moment so that has been strong and it has mainly been the commercial and defence side performing well in the last 12 months.

How has customer demand changed over the past year?

It is always good to see what designers and yards are coming up with for their new generations and offerings. We have seen a good increase in the use of HDPE for boats. There's more availability of CNC machines for ever better moulds, making some of the GRP/composite offerings even better and, of course, aluminium as a proven workhorse material.

With our focus on electric/hybrid boats and lots of work in the maritime autonomy space we haven't worked with many steel vessels, but hope to change that.

Twin RAD 40 on test

Although still not as quick as we would all like, there is undeniably a trend towards more electric and alternative energy vessels. We are seeing this at the end-user level where it's being included in tender documents, and that flows through to the designers and yards.

What indicators are shaping your outlook for 2026?

We are optimistic. Generally in our business, with the lead time for design work and boatbuilding, before they install drives, batteries and control systems, we get a good look ahead at what's coming up. We've seen lots of designs and programmes that will be launching in the next 12-18 months. We're definitely travelling lots and growing our presence with partners in different countries and this has helped buoy our optimism.

What are the biggest challenges currently facing your business?

A range of challenges exist, like in any growing sector, but none that can't be worked through without sufficient time, planning and effort.

There are processes for regulation and compliance, investors can see the potential in this space when it is explained to them, pricing can be managed by looking at whole life cycle costs and working hard with the supply chain.

Does the industry receive adequate government and policy support compared with other manufacturing sectors?

I am not really in a position to comment quantitatively in comparison with other sectors but announcements like the September 2025 notice from the DfT and InnovateUK about their ongoing commitment (£480m) are well received. My instinct is that compared to its value to the public, government, security and general way of life it probably is still underfunded and it is our job as an industry to work with the various trade organisations (SMI, Maritime UK etc.) and put forward credible plans with evidence to help this situation.

Which technological advancement will have the biggest impact on your business in the next five years?

There are several but to pick one, the ongoing development of battery technology. In a relatively short period of time (<10 years) we have seen battery/electric boats and hybrid boats move from unviable to absolutely viable in many applications. The pace of investment from the large battery and automotive companies over the last decade is unprecedented, and much of what they have been working on is still to reach marine. I expect to see increasing numbers of applications 'make sense' electrically, based on energy density and cost combinations.

Is the industry doing enough to collaborate on sustainability infrastructure?

I think the answer to this should be not for a long time yet. There is always more to do and we can't get complacent. We could definitely link up on more tasks that are bigger than any one organisation can achieve. Co-ordinating them isn't easy, splitting the costs and profits can be difficult, but the marine industry is full of great and motivated people who want to get stuff done. ■

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Building a new future

Is there light at the end of the tunnel for the preservation – and revival – of traditional boatbuilding in the UK?

Words: Chantal Haines

Much has been written about the widening skills gap, the erosion of traditional craftsmanship, and the struggle to attract new entrants into the world of wooden and traditional boatbuilding. Yet the topic has taken on new urgency following a series of high-profile setbacks for the sector.

The slow decline of traditional wooden boatbuilding reached a critical point at the end of 2024 with the closure of the International Boatbuilding Training College (IBTC) in Lowestoft, Suffolk. Established in 1975, the college trained generations of boatbuilders, conservators, and carpenters. But a combination of challenges – including Brexit, the covid pandemic, the war in Ukraine, escalating material and energy costs, and dwindling student numbers – ultimately proved insurmountable.

“The closure of the International Boatbuilding Training College (IBTC) Lowestoft was more than a local tragedy; it was a signal flare,” says Tom Marfleet of Emsworth Harbour.

The loss of its courses not only impacted would-be boatbuilders, but also deckhands, riggers and yard workers who gained broader practical skills there. In 2023, traditional wooden boatbuilding was added to the ‘Red List of Endangered Crafts’ compiled by the Heritage Crafts Association. Traditional wooden boatbuilding was placed alongside other marine-related trades now classed as endangered – from barge painting and rope making to sail, spar, and oar production. A key factor cited was the lack of formal training opportunities and that was even before the IBTC closed its doors in Lowestoft.

Today, only a handful of training centres remain – notably the Boat Building Academy in Lyme Regis is a key establishment. Its work has become all the more vital as the industry contemplates how to preserve — and revive — the art of traditional boatbuilding.

Boat Building Academy in Lyme Regis

The Boat Building Academy (BBA) in Lyme Regis, UK, has evolved significantly since it was founded in 1997, both in size – having added more workshop space during covid and also in the breadth and diversity of its courses.

As well as developing a thriving furniture making school, the academy now offers a comprehensive practical study programme ranging from tasters and short courses to the 12-week furniture making course and the industry renowned 40-week boatbuilding course.

Attaining charitable status has enabled the BBA to offer a rapidly growing bursary programme, and in recent years its collaboration with Women in Boatbuilding (WIBB) has greatly increased its numbers of women students.

During one of its 40-week courses in 2024, women outnumbered men for the first time in its 28-year history.

A five-day Women’s Workshop course now also runs annually for women to try their hand at woodworking, before committing to further study.

Filling the skills gaps

Alongside much needed diversity and accessibility across the marine sector, the shortage of skilled tradespeople has long been a concern for the industry.

With traditional crafts, in particular, the BBA is one of a dwindling number of institutes where students can learn age-old crafts, alongside new techniques.

Steam bending boat timbers

Planking a traditional clinker

Sailmaking at the BBA

Students working at the BBA

"Our current 40-week cohort includes young people who have chosen the course over going to university, a former banker, a former teacher, joiners and carpenters looking for their next challenge, keen sailors, people who have never sailed and a retired Formula One car designer."

Will Reed, Boatbuilding Academy

Will Reed, the director and co-chair of trustees at the Boatbuilding Academy, says the school is addressing the skills gaps by "focusing on our key skills – training in modern and traditional wooden boat building. Also, by investing in new machinery, talking with industry, and doing all we can to maintain the highest quality, relevant training.

"We've also made great strides in making our courses more accessible through bursaries. Young people often have less money, and a bursary can determine whether they can take our course or not.

"We've invested in PR to shout about what we do and we are working with organisations including Women in Boatbuilding to show women and young people that the marine sector isn't closed off and exclusive but is open to them.

"Developing strong relationships with employers also ensures we're doing the right thing and can feed the yards with great people at the beginning of their career, or after they've built up further experience."

An open door policy

The academy has aimed to encourage students from all walks of life to consider boatbuilding and learn the crafts. "Men and women of all ages come to the BBA. School leavers and career changers looking to forge a new path, career developers who are enhancing their skills – perhaps carpentry or boat related work. Some come in retirement doing it for the sheer joy.

"We've also made great strides in making our courses more accessible through bursaries."

Will Reed, Boatbuilding Academy in Lyme Regis, UK

"Our new 40-week cohort includes young people who have chosen the course over going to university, a former banker, a former teacher, joiners and carpenters looking for their next challenge, keen sailors, people who have never sailed and a retired Formula One car designer."

Reed is a former student of the BBA. "I was in the career development camp when I did the course in 2006," he explains. "Having studied a furniture making and design degree and working in the furniture making industry for five years, I wanted to expand my skills into the incredible world of compound curves and beautiful objects that can actually sail and move under the power of the wind.

"But many of our students are complete beginners who throw themselves into it and begin exciting and rewarding careers."

Meeting industry needs: government backing needed

Reeds highlights that as the marine industry evolves, so must the skills of the BBA's cohort.

The BBA is incorporating new tech to its disciplines, where applicable. "We are constantly looking for more sustainable timber and materials and work closely with organisations such as Sykes Timber. We also explore partially plant-based epoxy resins and install electric motors when appropriate. It's an exciting time for the industry as it steps up to the need to be more sustainable and we want our students to be a forefront of those discussions when they enter yards," Reed adds.

He says the academy communicates with the industry to "make sure we're hitting the right buttons".

"As the only remaining wooden boatbuilding school in the UK, we take our responsibility to supply employers with the skilled craftspeople they require very seriously, and so always welcome input and feedback. We are working with Spirit Yachts to better understand their requirements, and Jack Livesey of Paradise Boats on efficient practices.

"Tutor Justin Adkin rejoined our expert team this year and comes with a wealth of knowledge from many years' experience with traditional and modern boats – from Nautor Swan, to running his own business building anything from Salcombe Yawls to ocean rowing boats."

Reed echoes the sentiments of many others in the segment when calling for more support from the government and education sector.

"I'm lucky that my son's school in Lyme Regis offers excellent DT facilities and dedicated tutors but this is not the norm," Reed says. "Many schools are sadly lacking in this area. Many children are not academic and would thrive if they were given further opportunities to engage in practical work. To support this, we offer fully subsidised taster days for school children and longer opportunities for those who struggle with the traditional schooling system."

Applying a coat of varnish

Student at the BBA in Lyme Regis

Will Reed, director and co-chair of trustees

Letter carving is one of a range of short courses offered at the BBA

Women in boatbuilding

The BBA has well established relationships with marine organisations and boatbuilders that are helping amplify its platform and spread the word.

"Our collaboration with Women In Boat Building (WIBB) and its founder Belinda Joslin has been incredibly important to the BBA and the industry it supports," says Reed.

"Many more women are now interested and see a place for themselves in the industry and a way forward in boatbuilding because of this work.

"Through bursaries for women, an inclusive environment, promotion of opportunities and close links with industry, we are making big differences with a significant shift in numbers over the past year."

New initiatives at Southampton

In 2025, the BBA partnered with WIBB and WBTA to produce the first Wooden Boat Stage at this year's Southampton International Boat Show (SIBS).

"As three organisations at the forefront of keeping traditional skills relevant, accessible, and inspiring the next generation, we teamed up to create the Wooden Boat Stage. We had live demonstrations of everything from carving, steam bending, and oar and paddle making, to epoxy work, knotting, and rigging, alongside a programme of panel discussions, author talks, short films, and workshops.

"Our aim was to showcase both traditional craftsmanship and modern techniques and we received tremendous feedback from the industry. We have also collaborated with the boatbuilder Dan Lee and Wessex Resins."

At a time when timber and materials costs are on the rise, and thus potentially deterring people from buying or maintaining wooden boats, Reeds says initiatives like the Wooden Boat Stage at SIBS are much needed.

"We hope to encourage more people to feel excited about investing in wooden boats for the benefit of their boating experience, as well the huge benefit to the industry."

"The biggest shift in the UK industry this year has been a willingness for collaboration – this is gamechanging in a squeezed industry."

Will Reed, Boatbuilding Academy

Cross collaboration

Getting well trained people into the right jobs remains the biggest challenge facing the UK's boatbuilding and repair sector today. And Reed says there are ample opportunities for closer partnerships between training institutions and industry.

Closer cross collaboration could emerge in the form of shared apprenticeships and R&D projects.

"We are currently exploring some exciting options for paid internships following the 40-week boat building course.

"Funding for bursaries for our training is also an ongoing challenge. But we are developing an impressive database of boatyards we work with to get the right people into the right jobs."

It invariably is a win-win result. "Many of the yards we work with are thriving," Reeds says. "Some of the most exciting opportunities come from Spirit Yachts where they are always looking for great opportunities for development in environmental sustainability. They are also an inclusive organisation who put people first. The biggest shift in the UK industry this year has been a willingness for collaboration – this is gamechanging in a squeezed industry.

"Rather than yards seeing each other as competitors, there is a power in collaboration – to raise the profile of what we do, both nationally and globally. The UK's wooden boat scene is behind when we look at France, Australia, US – there is a lot more we can do to work together as a UK industry – it's an exciting time."

"If you want to support the next generation of properly trained boat builders, I would recommend coming to see us in Lyme Regis and supporting our incredible bursary programme." ■

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