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Amid global trade uncertainty, Italy's leisure boating industry remains positive

International markets continue to drive growth and define Italy's global standing, while a relatively stable domestic base – broadly in line with wider European conditions – provides continuity. *MIN* sits down with eight manufacturers and suppliers to discuss short-term disruption, diversification and long-term competitiveness.

Disciplined growth

The export market is “resilient but uneven,” says Andreas Karlsen, CCO of Quick Group. “Demand is still there, especially in higher-value segments, but purchasing decisions are slower and more selective than in the past two years.

“Geopolitical uncertainty, interest rates, and logistics costs continue to influence timing rather than outright demand. Italian manufacturers with strong brands, proven reliability, and international service networks will continue to perform better than the average. In short: exports won't collapse, but growth will be more disciplined and less speculative.”

Karlsen says Quick's currently

facing the challenge of managing uncertainty without losing momentum.

“Markets are more cautious, customers are taking longer to decide, and forecasting is harder than during the post-pandemic boom. The challenge is to stay agile – protecting margins, controlling costs, and keeping the organisation focused – while still investing in products, people, and service. Overreacting would be as risky as underreacting.”

Export resilience underpins cautious optimism for 2026

Italian boating is a global benchmark in the leisure sector, says Giorgio Besenzoni, CEO of Besenzoni.

“We believe that if, and when, the global scenario manages to regain a stable balance – albeit within a profoundly renewed framework – the Italian nautical industry will have significant room for further growth. “In this perspective, new and important opportunities will emerge, driven by the know-how, design excellence, and innovative.”

Marco Donà, CEO of Saim,

reflects that 2026 will feature a more positive outlook. Representatives of several major Italian manufacturers told him (at boot Düsseldorf) that 2026 looks set to be “less critical” than 2025.

“Uncertainty in the US market remains high, but let's say that last year's events have consolidated, and producers have responded immediately, diversifying their products (already underway for several years) and international markets.

“Despite a fierce battle over end-user prices, I believe this year's results are actually better than expected.”

USA and custom duties

Predicting market evolution in the short term remains a challenge. The geopolitical landscape inevitably impacts the economy and, consequently, the industry, notes Marcello Veronesi, Cantiere del Pardo's CEO.

“It will be crucial to monitor developments in the United States regarding customs duties – a significant factor for our vessels.” Any increase would substantially raise the final

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Andreas Karlsen
Quick Group



Valentina Procopio, Cantieri Aschenez



Alessio Loguercio, Smartgyro



Gianni Zucco, HP Watermakers



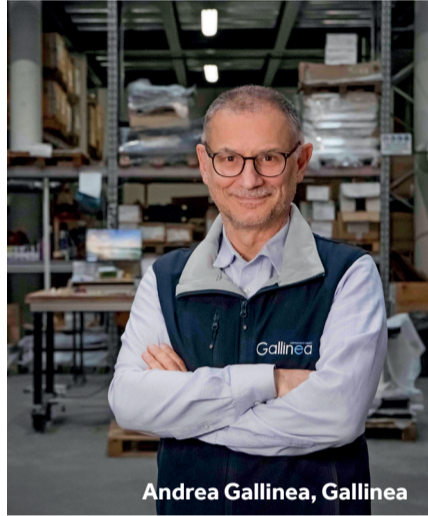
Andreas Karlsen, Quick Group



Marcello Veronesi, Cantiere del Pardo



Gerogio Besenzoni, Besenzoni



Andrea Gallinea, Gallinea



Marco Donà, Saim

price for customers in what he describes as a “vital” market.

So Pardo’s exploring new markets – an essential strategy to offset fluctuations elsewhere. Veronesi is “striving to make our sales network as widespread and capillary as possible.”

Valentina Procopio, marketing and communication manager at Cantieri Aschenez expects the Italian export market to remain a world leader thanks to its manufacturing excellence.

“In the short term, however, it may experience a slowdown in small boats sales ([the] slowdown already began some time ago) and a general decrease in demand even for superyachts, which could lead in some cases to a decrease in turnover.”

Sales of vessels under 30 feet

Donà says a broad-based market recovery is expected to begin in 2026–2027, driven by renewed consumer confidence and changing ownership models.

“The end customer’s approach to the recreational boating market is changing radically and we need to adapt to this new approach of co-ownership, timeshare or chartering through an easy-to-use, sustainable and technologically advanced boat.”

He adds that while the smaller boat segment is currently struggling, vessels under 30ft are expected to see the fastest growth after 2026, driven by innovation, sustainability initiatives and the rise of sharing platforms and charter companies, while “the superyacht segment remains the most resilient one, with growth expected to be five to ten per cent in the premium and large yacht segments.”

Positioning for growth

With renewed confidence in the market for 2026, growth forecast for sub-30ft vessels and continued faith in the Made in Italy brand, new opportunities are emerging.

Veronesi is looking to broaden Pardo’s offering. “Our primary objective for the coming years will be to expand our product range, ensuring a consistent line-up to satisfy all our customers’ requirements in terms of footage.”

The goal aligns with the company’s ongoing commitment to further enhance the quality of its vessels. “These are two objectives that will allow us to strengthen our relationship with our existing clients and acquire new ones.” Similarly, Gianni Zucco, co-founder of HP Watermakers, plans to continue investing in technology and

expanding the company’s service network. “Furthermore, the synergic cooperation with complementary companies in the industry, helps us all to get involved in long term decision process of the worldwide boating industry.”

Andrea Gallinea, owner of Gallinea, is also looking to explore new sectors of the market with an integrated product and support service.

Meanwhile, Alessio Loguercio, Smartgyro’s MD, says the company’s looking at structured growth across both Europe and the United States, with a strong focus on developing long-term partnerships with leading OEMs and boatbuilders. “Stabilisation is increasingly becoming a standard feature rather than an optional upgrade, and shipyards are looking for solutions that combine performance, reliability, and ease of integration.”

Taken together, the picture that emerges is not one of short-term volatility, but of an industry comfortable playing the long game. From evolving ownership models and service-led innovation to a continued focus on quality and collaboration, Italian boating shows resilience built over decades. As global demand recalibrates, ‘Made in Italy’ looks set to remain essential to the future of leisure boating.

“Uncertainty in the US market remains high, but let’s say that last year’s events have consolidated, and producers have responded immediately...”

Marco Donà
Saim

► Words: Zella Compton

Italian SHIPYARDS as centres of art

Italy accounts for an outsized share of the world's luxury yacht market, with prestigious brands producing everything from handcrafted inflatables to superyachts

Boatbuilders answer as much to heritage as to market demand, aware that each vessel carries the yard's name into the future. *MIN* visits northern Italy to discover whether engineering can produce great beauty.

Balancing tradition with technology

Some might argue that modern production makes yachts technological rather than artistic, but tradition and innovation are not opposites. Italian builders push boundaries in hull design, materials, and performance, using lightweight composites and custom engineering.

At Azimut-Benetti's Avigliana facility at the foot of the Alps, two forms of production are combined within the plant: the manufacture of GRP components, and the assembly of complete Azimut Yachts. Large hulls are vacuum infused in a single operation, allowing gelcoat to be applied directly in the mould, so exteriors emerge finished – the smooth, gleaming coat requiring no reworking.

The process has evolved to incorporate carbon fibre alongside glass fibre. Carbon is used in the upper parts of the boat to reduce weight above the centre of gravity, improving overall stability with

all boats now using this mixed-material approach.

Interiors, machinery, furniture, and systems are fitted during assembly while the hull remains open. Painting is now done on site, so boats leave Avigliana fully finished and tested.

But, because the facility is inland, each vessel is engineered to be partially taken apart – typically by separating the upper structure from the hull – ready for transport by trucks, via tunnels through mountains. There the sections are reassembled prior to sea trials.

Training and passing on skills

Similarly, Cranchi is tucked into the mountains. Here training and the transmission of knowledge across generations is essential to the company's approach – like masters sharing knowledge with apprentices. Family members learn directly within the company through prolonged, hands-on experience alongside older generations.

This emphasis on 'learning by doing' is institutionalised in the Cranchi Academy, where new employees train for up to a year before working on finished boats. The academy is described as a response to both increasing technical complexity and a

perceived loss of practical skills among younger workers.

Training takes place on pre-assembly benches rather than inside completed hulls to allow mistakes to be observed, corrected, and understood. At Cranchi, boatbuilding is framed as a craft sustained through continuity, and the preservation of accumulated expertise.

Customisation is part of commercial success

Like fine art, which has a history of being commissioned, patron-funded, and market-dependent, superyachts are more than status products.

At Baglietto, building yachts is a matter of passion. Customisation is central to the product and although the company operates within defined 'lines', no two boats are ultimately the same. Owners may request customisation changes during construction and revise layouts multiple times. While this can create complexity, it delivers client satisfaction and is a defining difference from higher volume or more standardised builders. The ability to adapt each yacht to an owner's physical needs, lifestyle, and evolving ideas is the very reason its clients choose the yard. Baglietto's approach is enabled by



Some might argue that modern production makes yachts technological rather than artistic, but tradition and innovation are not opposites.



Baglietto Marsa Luna

the shipyard's deliberately small scale, its limited number of annual deliveries, and its long-standing relationships with trusted suppliers and specialists.

Partnerships and collaboration

The partnership between Cantieri di Pisa and the Mariotti Group is a collaborative model in which yacht building is understood as a form of collective creation rather than the output of a single yard.

The alliance is a deliberate combination of complementary skills with Cantieri di Pisa managing client relationships, customisation, luxury standards, and quality control, while Mariotti provides the industrial shipbuilding capability required for vessels over 70 metres.

Each company will focus on its own area of expertise, allowing design intent, technical execution, and construction quality to remain aligned as projects increase in scale.

Both repeatedly emphasise flexibility, particularly in working with different designers and in selecting suppliers, who are framed as long-term partners rather than interchangeable vendors. Thus, large yachts will not be treated solely as industrial products,

but as complex objects whose final character emerges through coordination, shared decision-making, and the careful integration of craftsmanship, design, and engineering across organisational boundaries.

Design as identity

Design is described as one of SACS Tecnorib's core pillars and a key means of differentiation within the maxi-rib sector. Its boats are testament to how Italian design culture collapses the boundary between emotional expression and function.

Its long-standing collaboration with studio Christian Grande focuses on style and product identity in a segment often driven by technical considerations. Each product line is said to have its own distinct DNA to avoid overlap and internal competition.

SACS repeatedly stresses balancing design ambition with industrial efficiency – think maintaining lead times, production flow, and competitiveness. This means some design and layout choices are pre-engineered within the production system, allowing variation without requiring structural rework. Thus, design works within clearly defined operational boundaries.



Sacs Tecnorib Rebel 50G

Seeing boats as art

Tankoa Yachts sees each vessel as a unique work of art. The company is working with different designers in order to catch clients' eyes. This philosophy ensures that even yachts of the same base size are strikingly individual. Collaboration with multiple designers allows Tankoa to combine technical innovation with creativity, giving each yacht a distinct personality tailored to its owner's vision.

Across these shipyards, vessels emerge not merely as engineered machines but as embodiments of skill, imagination, and human expression. Every detail reflects a dialogue between tradition, innovation, and the owner's vision and reveals the artistry of those who made it – even if it lives in the realm of engineering rather than culture.

SACS repeatedly stresses balancing design ambition with industrial efficiency – think maintaining lead times, production flow, and competitiveness.

► Words: Zella Compton



Marcello Conti, Sculati

How clear positioning helps shipyards stand out

As the market shifts differentiation is essential

Smaller builders may not be able to compete on scale, but they can compete on identity, says Marcello Conti, head of PR at Sculati & Partners, an international yachting communications firm based in Milan.

For companies still unsure where PR sits within the communications mix, Conti says clear positioning – whether around a niche, distinctive design, specific technologies, or a defined lifestyle proposition – can become a major strength; PR's a strategic lever to build reputation, credibility, and a recognisable brand image.

Why visibility matters more than ever

In a market dominated by large groups, the challenge for smaller shipyards is securing a clear and specific position to remain visible, relevant, and competitive over time.

“Being good isn't enough if nobody knows you,” continues Conti. “Italian boatbuilding is admired everywhere, but craftsmanship on its own doesn't automatically translate into reputation or business. What really makes the

difference is the ability to tell the story properly, in a way that's coherent with the brand, the positioning, and the market.”

PR as strategy, not noise

Conti believes the companies that benefit most from PR are those that don't treat it as a way to “make noise” but as a strategic tool – regardless of company or product size.

“PR works best when it's part of a wider communication system... and when the company has a clear idea of who it is and where it wants to go.”

He is particularly proud of Sculati's association with Omikron Yachts. When the collaboration began, the yard had a strong product but limited visibility beyond a small circle. The quality and vision were already in place, but awareness was lacking.

“Through a structured and well received PR strategy, we give our contribution to position the brand internationally, increase awareness, and gain real recognition. They started receiving nominations and eventually won important

industry awards. That's a perfect example of how PR doesn't just create noise but can genuinely change how a brand is perceived and accelerate its growth.”

Where physical boat shows still win

Conti is clear that boat shows remain a central part of the communications mix, offering one of the few opportunities for clients and media to physically see, experience, and compare products within a short time frame.

“We know they represent a significant investment for shipyards and absorb a large share of marketing budgets, but their value is still hard to replace. During covid, many believed that digital boat shows could become a real alternative to physical events.

“In reality, that success was mainly due to the lack of other options. Once in-person events returned, it became clear that physical boat shows are irreplaceable. Especially in the large-yacht segment, the market is global rather than local. As a result, the key touchpoints are the major international boat shows, not only the Italian ones.”

“Italian boatbuilding is admired everywhere, but craftsmanship on its own doesn't automatically translate into reputation or business.”

Marcello Conti
Sculati

► Words: Zella Compton

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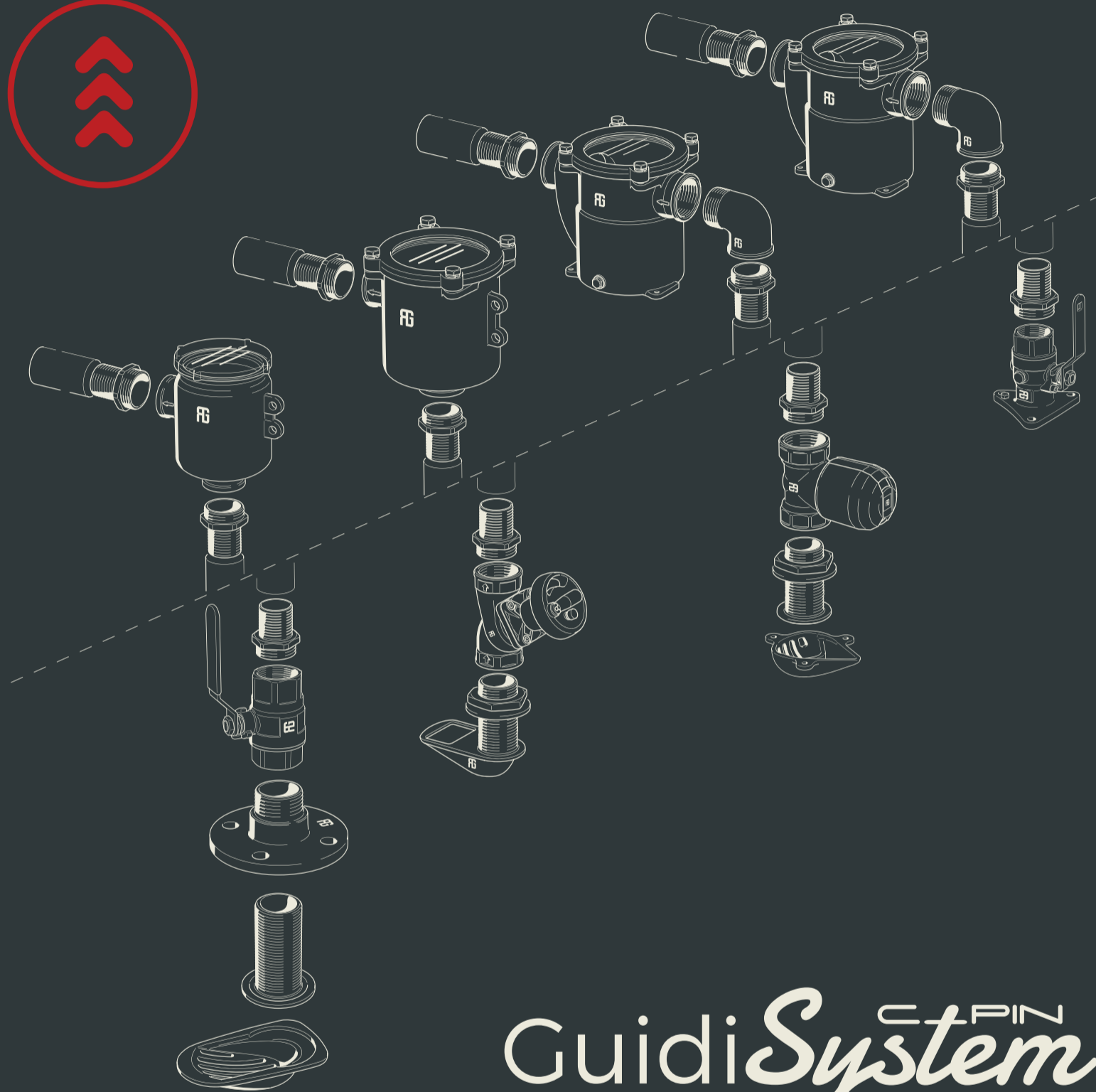
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