

Remembering David King - Founder of Princess Yachts



For many people, it is difficult to think of Princess without thinking of David King.

For more than six decades, David dedicated his life to the company he founded, helping transform a modest boatbuilding business on Plymouth's waterfront into one of the world's most respected luxury yacht builders. Yet to define him simply by the success of Princess would be to overlook the qualities that made that success possible.

Those who knew David best remember a man of quiet determination, endless curiosity and genuine humility. He never stopped asking questions, never stopped looking for a better way and never lost his enthusiasm for the next yacht. Even after stepping back from the day-to-day leadership of the business, he remained a familiar figure around the Princess shipyard, discussing ideas with designers, engineers and the leadership team, encouraging the next generation and challenging them to make every new yacht better than the last.

He believed exceptional yachts could only ever be created by exceptional people. That belief shaped not only the yachts Princess have become renowned for but the culture of the company itself.

Born in Dundee in 1942, David studied engineering at the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth while serving in the Royal Navy. It was there that he developed the technical understanding that would underpin his career and help shape his future. In 1965, together with two friends, David founded Marine Projects from a modest waterside shed in Plymouth. Few could have imagined that this small venture would become the Princess Yachts of today, with British-built yachts enjoyed by owners in more than 100 countries around the world.

The company's first boat, Project 31, sold for £3,400. It was only afterwards that the three founders discovered it had cost £3,460 to build. By then, however, it was too late. They had sold two more boats, and, almost before they realised it, they had become boat builders. It became one of David's favourite reminders that every successful business begins with lessons learned and that the willingness to keep improving matters far more than getting everything right first time.

This was certainly true of the early years, which demanded ingenuity as much as ambition. Britain's specialist marine supply chain was still in its infancy, so many of the skills and capabilities needed to build world-class yachts had to be developed from within. What began as

necessity became one of David's defining philosophies. By investing in people, craftsmanship and engineering expertise, Princess evolved into one of the most vertically integrated yacht builders in the world, with designers, engineers and craftspeople working side by side to achieve standards that others would seek to emulate.

For David, that philosophy extended well beyond the shipyard gates.

Whether quietly arranging for Princess craftspeople and boat moulds to help communities in Sri Lanka rebuild their fishing boats following the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, supporting local charities close to his heart such as St Luke's Hospice, or discreetly backing causes that mattered to Princess employees, David did this without the desire for public acclaim. He believed that if he had the means to help, then he should. His kindness was practical, personal and almost always unseen.

He also remained steadfast in his commitment to Plymouth as the home of Princess Yachts. Rather than relocating production overseas as many British manufacturers were doing at the time, he continued to invest in the city and the surrounding region, creating thousands of skilled jobs over six decades while supporting a network of specialist suppliers throughout Plymouth and the South West. His belief in developing talent was equally enduring. Through apprenticeships and close partnerships with local education providers, he helped ensure traditional craftsmanship and advanced manufacturing skills would continue to thrive for future generations.

David's influence soon extended far beyond Plymouth.

His ambition helped redefine Britain's place in the international yacht market. In 1982, Princess launched the Princess 45, then the largest production motor yacht built in the United Kingdom. Its success demonstrated that British manufacturers could compete at the very highest levels of the global market, opening significant new export opportunities and helping establish Princess as a truly international brand. By the early 1990s, exports accounted for more than sixty per cent of production and in 1988 the company received the Queen's Award for Export Achievement in recognition of its international success. Today, Princess exports 90% of its production to more than 100 countries worldwide, carrying British design, engineering and craftsmanship across the globe.

Yet for all these achievements, David remained remarkably uncomfortable with personal recognition.

He believed Princess was not built by one person. Whenever praise came his way, he instinctively redirected it towards the people around him. Designers. Engineers. Craftspeople. Apprentices. Colleagues. He saw Princess as the work of thousands of talented individuals, each contributing to something far greater than themselves.

That humility became one of his defining characteristics. When honoured with numerous Lifetime Achievement Awards by the marine industry, David accepted them with characteristic grace but devoted much of his acceptance speeches to recognising the people who had helped build Princess. He was far more comfortable talking about the achievements of others than his own. It was entirely typical of a man who measured success not by personal accolades but by the achievements of those around him.

Although David built one of Britain's great manufacturing businesses, those closest to him will remember something simpler. They will remember a man who was happiest talking about the next idea, the next improvement and the next yacht. His curiosity never diminished. Long after many founders would have stepped away, David remained fascinated by what lay ahead.

His legacy is measured not only in the thousands of yachts that carry the Princess name around the world but also in the countless lives he quietly influenced through his generosity, the people whose careers he shaped, the skills he helped preserve and the culture he created. His influence can be seen in every yacht that leaves Plymouth, in every apprentice beginning a career in boatbuilding and in every designer, engineer and craftsperson who shares his uncompromising commitment to excellence.

David always looked to the future. He never sought recognition for what he had achieved, simply wanting to build the very best yachts he could alongside people he respected and admired. Those conversations, that curiosity and that quiet encouragement will be deeply missed but the values he instilled remain woven into Princess and will continue to shape the company for generations to come.

Perhaps the greatest tribute we can pay David is not simply to remember what he achieved but to continue the work he cared so deeply about. To keep asking questions. To keep striving for better. To continue building exceptional yachts with the same curiosity, care, humility and attention to detail that defined his beliefs.

Everyone at Princess Yachts extends their deepest sympathies to David's wife, family and loved ones.