

Pulaski factory at forefront of luxury yacht industry

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Shannon Folkman works Wednesday on the hatch of a VanDutch yacht being built at Pulaski-based Marquis Yachts.
Corey Wilson

By Rick Barrett of the Journal Sentinel



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They've been described in terms such as "simple elegance" and luxury that's a bit on the "wild side" in the stately world of yachting.

Now, the factory that builds Carver and Marquis yachts in Pulaski also is building a line of yachts for people who sometimes use them as water taxis or "day boats" to entertain a small group of friends.

The VanDutch yachts, with a 40-footer starting in price at \$695,000, are fancy and fast enough to impress the ultra rich and race car enthusiasts in Monaco. They're also capable of day trips on the ocean.

They're for boating enthusiasts wanting to "leave in the morning and come back in the evening because they have all these nice things at home," said Anko Mast, CEO of VanDutch America Inc.

VanDutch yachts have been used as marina tenders by a Formula 1 race car team at the Monaco Grand Prix. They also have been showcased at boating events, including the Cannes Yachting Festival in France.

"The VanDutch 40 is for those who like their luxury a little on the wild side. ... This is an uncompromised boat. The standard specification includes everything an owner could possibly want," the magazine Think & Grow Rich noted in a review.

Originally built in Europe, and then in Holland, Mich., all of the VanDutch production has been transferred to Pulaski. Because of the additional business, Marquis said it could hire up to 150 more people at its factory.

The first VanDutch boats produced in Pulaski were 30, 40 and 55 feet in length. Now the company has plans for a 75-foot boat that it says will be the "most majestic member of the VanDutch family."

Formed in 2008 in the Netherlands, VanDutch Marine Ltd. introduced its first boat a year later, a 40-foot model, and has since sold 130 of them.

That was an amazing success during the global financial crisis because the boating industry had practically dried up, Mast said.

In 2010, VanDutch developed a 30-foot day boat often used as a tender for larger vessels but also aimed at inland lakes in the United States.

"Then people were asking for a bigger one, so we did a 55-foot" model, Mast said. "We see now, the bigger we go, the more beautiful it becomes. The shape is amazing. It's perfect."

Slow recovery

Yacht building is an important niche in northeast Wisconsin, where the brands include Carver, Marquis, Palmer Johnson, Burger, Cruisers and Rampage. The industry also supports dozens of suppliers, including companies in the Milwaukee area.

The high-end boat business has experienced a slow recovery since the global recession, fueled partly by the creation of smaller yachts appealing to a wide base of customers.

The Carver and Marquis brands, based in Pulaski, were sold in a bankruptcy auction in 2010 to a group that included previous owner Irwin Jacobs, a Minneapolis businessman.

Seeking a manufacturer, Mast said he met with Jacobs at the 2013 Fort Lauderdale, Fla., boat show, and they struck a deal in a very short time.

The workforce at Marquis and Carver are used to working on the details and complexities of a sophisticated yacht, according to Jacobs.

"This is an extension of what we do," he said about producing VanDutch boats.

VanDutch was so satisfied with the work done in Pulaski that it moved all of its production there, Mast said.

The company's boats are shipped worldwide from Pulaski. They're sold through dealerships that handle VanDutch exclusively.

'Understated elegance'

The boats have "minimalistic styling" that represents an emerging genre in yachting, said Bill Prince, a yacht designer in Port Washington.

"It's understated elegance. The non-yachtsman might not pick up on it," Prince said.

Design features include a deck with hidden cleats, a retractable navigation light and a Bimini top that retracts into a dedicated stowage locker. Storage for the swim ladder and docking fenders also is recessed to give the boat a sleeker, less cluttered appearance.

With twin diesel engines producing nearly 1,000 horsepower, the 40-foot model has a top speed of more than 40 knots — very fast for a boat its size. Reviewers have described VanDutch boats as elegant, powerful, agile, easy to operate and having a smooth ride.

There's a growing trend toward this type of expensive day boat, Prince said, as people who own 150-foot or 200-foot yachts also want something smaller that doesn't require a crew, and they want to spend a few hours at a time on the water rather than weeks traveling.

They also want a little more hands-on experience.

With a 200-foot yacht, you're more of a guest than an active participant in boating, Prince said.

"Sometimes people want to be alone on the water, maybe for a sunset, or with a small group of friends and no crew. And they want to do it in a style that projects the level of wealth they have obtained," he said.

"A simple (sport cruiser) isn't going to do it for those guys."