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Power Players

Soundings Trade Only's Top 10 Most Innovative Marine Companies Awards honor the past year's biggest leaps in thinking, products, technology and more.

TRADE ONLY TODAY EDITORS • OCT 30, 2023

Samantha - stock.adobe.com

There are those who have dreams, and those who achieve goals. The chasm between the two is immense, with the most successful marine companies actually walking the talk of innovation. This much is always true about industry leaders, whether a company creates electronics, builds propulsion systems or produces equipment to make boating safer.

Our panel of experts focused squarely on achievements when they sat down to decide the winners and honorable mentions of *Soundings Trade Only's* Top 10 Most Innovative Marine Companies Awards. The awards, now in their sixth year, honor forward-thinking companies that are transforming the future of the marine industry through new initiatives, technologies, processes and more.



Garmin this year launched the GMR xHD3 open-array radar and announced the acquisition of audio manufacturer JL Audio. Courtesy Garmin


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This year's judges were Bill Sisson, editorial director emeritus of the Active Interest Media Marine Group; Gary Reich, *Soundings Trade Only* editor-in-chief, Sara Anghel, past president of NMMA Canada; and Lou Sandoval, former national director of business development for Brunswick Corp. Michele Goldsmith, vice president and general manager of the Soundings Trade Only Group, served as an advisor to the panel.



In the following pages, you'll see what all of our judges saw: plenty of reasons to be excited about where the recreational marine industry is headed.

Garmin

In the highly competitive marine-electronics segment, Garmin has continued to prove itself a formidable player. Since its founding in 1989, Garmin has produced many notable innovations. At ICAST this year, the company introduced the Kraken trolling motor, just four years after entering the trolling-motor market, declaring Kraken the "most powerful trolling motor the recreational fishing market has ever seen."



*Garmin's Kraken trolling motor launched this year at ICAST and features a long list of clever features, including anchor-lock technology, wireless plotter integration and more.
Courtesy Garmin*

The features list includes anchor-lock technology, longer shaft lengths, a pivot-style mount for boats with limited bow space, LiveScope sonar cable management, wireless integration with Garmin chart plotters, an illuminated arrow that helps to confirm the boat's heading, a remote that allows for speed and heading adjustments from anywhere on board, and the ability to control features from a Garmin smartwatch — all of which speak to industry-leading expertise in technology, design and application.



And the Kraken was just the start. In the past year, Garmin also premiered the GMR

xHD3 Series open-array radar, the ECHOMAP UHD2 Series and the Fusion Apollo WB675 Hideaway Stereo, to name just a few new products. In a hint of what's to come, Garmin also acquired JL Audio, which manufactures premium audio products for the marine and other markets.

All the while, Garmin continued its social-awareness programs, such as matching all employee donations in support of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Combined with donations to the United Way campaign, Garmin's donations surpassed \$2.25 million last year. Garmin also received recognition from the National MS Society for achieving \$250,000 in lifetime fundraising for Bike MS, which it became involved with in 2010.



Garmin employees came together this year to provide humanitarian relief for refugees from the war in Ukraine.
Courtesy Garmin

"Around the world, our employees are involved in community outreach and volunteer efforts serving a broad range of organizations, from education to medical research to human services," says Jarrod Seymour, vice president and segment leader for Garmin Marine. "Our global Garmin family came together to help provide humanitarian relief for refugees from the war in Ukraine. Through employee and Garmin matching contributions, we raised \$450,000 for the United for Ukraine Global Fund."

Garmin is also doing its part to help stem the labor-force shortage that has plagued the marine industry for years.

In 2023, the company hired more than 310 summer interns in the United States, and hosted 50 incoming high school freshmen and sophomores for Garmin Engineering Day Camp. Employees taught the students about software, as well as mechanical and electrical engineering, through various challenges, including building their own rover.

And Garmin is betting big on the future, with the opening this past year of a 540,000-square-foot expansion. It has office and lab spaces, an aviation visitor's center and such amenities as a café and well-being center with gyms, fitness equipment and rooms for on-site classes to help employees stay healthy and continue innovating.

Brunswick

Brunswick Corp. continued its tradition of innovation this past year by unveiling numerous new brands and products into the marine marketplace. The offerings include the Boston Whaler 280 Dauntless, the Sea Ray SLX 260 Surf, Lund's redesigned Pro-V model line, the CZone mobile app for boatbuilders, Simrad's HALO 2000 and 3000 open array radars, and the Quicksilver 409 MPI Bravo FWC engine.



New for 2023 are Lund's rotomolded Veer skiff and Mercury Marine's Avator line of electric outboards.
Brunswick Corp.

Avator electric outboards also came to market. "Electrification is strategically

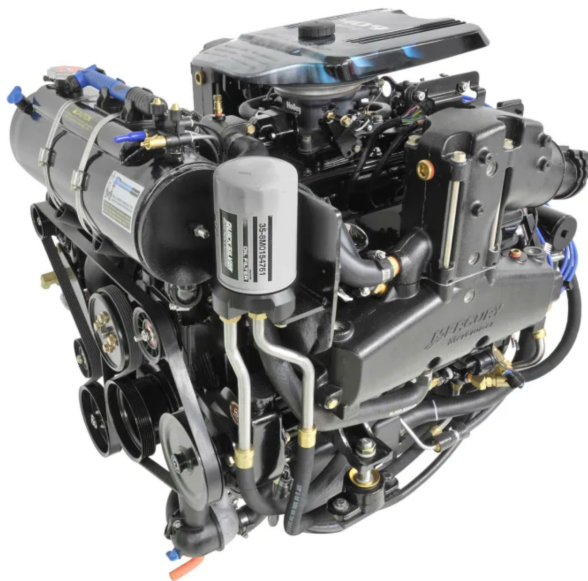
important to us, and this concept provides a first look at how we intend to deliver on our commitment to being the industry leader in both internal combustion products and electric propulsion,” said Chris Drees, then Mercury Marine president, when Avator launched. “We are taking efficiency to a new level, opening up new ways to enjoy the boating experience.”

For traditional power options, Mercury introduced the industry's first V-10 outboard with the 350- and 400-hp Verados. The 5.7-liter engines reportedly run 45% quieter than competing brands and will be offered with an optional dual-mode 48-volt/12-volt alternator to pair with Navico Group's Fathom e-Power System. The Fathom system eliminates the need for an on-board generator, along with the noise and vibration that come with it.



Brunswick also unveiled the boat brand Veer with its first model: the 13-foot X13. Veer is intended to appeal to the next generation of boaters, with electric Avator or traditional Mercury outboard power, a rotomolded polyethylene hull, a galvanized trailer, and a base price of \$11,995.

The corporation also made additional inroads into the sharing economy, with the Freedom Boat Club unveiling its 400th location, in Jupiter, Fla. It is expected to add to the more than 90,000 current club members. “By attracting many first-time, diverse and younger boaters, Freedom Boat Club has become a powerful force contributing to long-term industry health and expansion,” says Brenna Preisser, division president of Brunswick Business Acceleration.



*Mercury Marine's Quicksilver 409 MPI gas engine weighs 150 pounds less than comparable engines and has a small footprint.
Brunswick Corp.*

Beyond those accomplishments, Brunswick also continued its efforts to help lead the industry in sustainability. It added solar panels at three facilities, had nine facilities achieve a 90% landfill reduction (bringing the total number of those facilities to 12), found ways to save 2.2 million kWh of electricity at the Mercury Marine complex in Fond du Lac, Wis., and reduced water consumption at Mercury by 16.5% compared with 2016. About \$300,000 of Brunswick's \$1.2 million in community support went to conservation efforts, as did about \$600,000 for sponsorships and memberships in the environmental conservation space.

Looking ahead, Mercury Racing has partnered with the Union Internationale Motonautique E1 electric powerboat racing championship series to develop an electric powertrain for use in a new E1 powerboat racing series. Brunswick is also working with Arkema to replace thermoset resins, which are difficult to recycle, with recyclable thermoplastic resins in boats. All of this was achieved in a year when Brunswick's 19,000 employees had their lowest-ever recordable on-the-job injury rate.

Volvo Penta

Some of the biggest news this past year at Volvo Penta was the evolution of the company's Inboard Performance System, which dates to 2005 and revolutionized boatbuilding, including by minimizing the space required for engines so that more on-board real estate can be devoted to creature comforts. Countless builders have changed the designs of their boats to accommodate the pod-drive system.



Volvo Penta's Watersports Control platform
Volvo Penta

Now comes Volvo Penta's IPS 40 drive, a professional platform that can utilize different combinations of energy sources, from combustion engines running on renewable fuels to fully electric or hybrid solutions. Deliveries of the IPS 40 platform are expected to begin in 2025, with sizes that will allow the system to be used for the first time on superyachts, as well as commercial vessels from 72 to 180-plus feet, and with top speeds from 12 to 40 knots.

The past year also saw an evolution of Volvo Penta's joystick control options for smaller vessels, adding yet more features to a system that has helped boaters feel more confident at the helm during close-quarters maneuvering. Joystick Driving integrates shift, throttle and steering into a single joystick control, which means maneuverability, course adjustment, throttle and shift can be controlled by a single hand. Acceleration is proportional to the angle of the joystick, while pulling back reduces the throttle until the boat eventually stops.

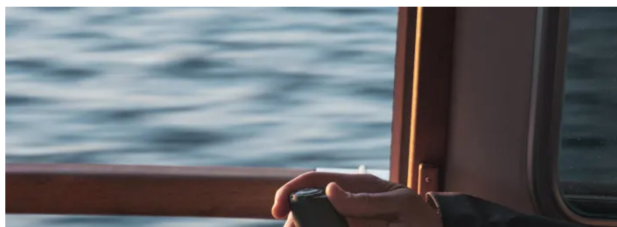
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 **Huntington**

Volvo Penta's Assisted Docking technology became available for retrofit across the IPS range, allowing boat owners to upgrade without having to purchase a new boat. Also introduced this past year was an extension of the company's Forward Drive propulsion system to suit larger boats. The Twin Forward Drive can be matched to the new 400-hp, V-8 gasoline engine on boats up to 38 feet, meaning bigger wakes for watersports enthusiasts. Volvo Penta also released an enhanced Watersports Control platform with upgrades for the touch-screen control, a simplified menu, an improved user interface and expanded diagnostics.





Volvo Penta's joystick steering system
Volvo Penta

The company's commitment to sustainability this past year included continued efforts to reach net-zero value chain emissions by 2050 through fossil-free, renewable fuels, electric and hybrid technology, and fuel cells. A partnership with CMB.TECH will allow for the development of dual-fuel hydrogen engines as a low-carbon interim solution before zero-emissions alternatives become viable. (If hydrogen is unavailable, the application continues to run on traditional fuel.)

Also in the arena of sustainability, Volvo Penta partnered with Groupe Beneteau to create a hybrid-electric system with intuitive operation and near-silent cruising. Media, dealers and customers were invited for a hands-on testing experience, and a third-party market research analyst found that more than 70% of attendees indicated a high likelihood of choosing a hybrid-electric system for their next purchase.

And Volvo Penta launched variable-speed generators that let boatyards install hybrid-electric modular propulsion systems. This advancement means consumers can invest in new boats with the knowledge that they are future-ready to accommodate emerging alternative energy sources.

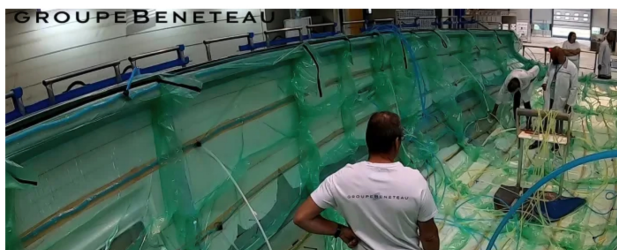


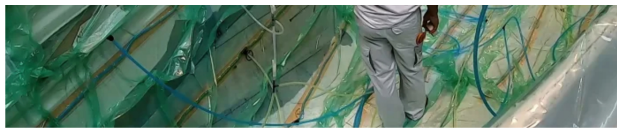
In the past year, Groupe Beneteau has developed bio-sourced resins that incorporate up to 38% bio-sourced content into the boatbuilding process
Beneteau

Groupe Beneteau

Groupe Beneteau is a behemoth of a marine company, with 8,200 employees in the United States, France, Poland, Italy, Portugal and China. Its brands include Beneteau, Jeanneau, Prestige, Lagoon, Excess, Four Winns, Wellcraft, Glastron and Scarab — which means that if Groupe Beneteau makes a move toward more sustainable building methods, it can seriously move the needle on all kinds of boats that are used around the world.

That's what happened in the past year, when the group developed bio-sourced resins that incorporate up to 38% bio-sourced content into the boatbuilding process. The switch was made in addition to the incorporation of hemp fibers in GRP core materials. The hemp fibers are grown in the Vendee region of France, near the majority of the company's operations. Thus, environmental impact from logistics was also reduced. The company also advanced its partnership with Arkema regarding a thermoplastic resin called Elium that can be recycled — meaning a GRP part can be completely recycled at the end of a boat's life.





Beneteau boats built with Arkema's Elium resin can be recycled into base components at the end of a boat's life.
Beneteau

The objective that Group Beneteau has for these initiatives is to deploy them at scale, without changing how boats or parts are used, but instead by reducing boating's impact on the environment. "It is easy to build a proof of concept or a one-off project with these types of materials," says Erik Stromberg, vice president, power and motoryacht product, "but the Beneteau group wants to deploy at scale in order to have a significant impact on the emissions and the industry as a whole."



What does deploying at scale mean? Groupe Beneteau is molding more than 30,000 GRP parts with this combination of bio-sourced resins and hemp fiber core materials. According to the company, that's the equivalent of producing around 300 boats, "the largest number of green GRP products ever produced in the marine industry." In terms of environmental impact, Groupe Beneteau says, it is the equivalent of removing 1,500 cars from the road annually. It represents an 11% reduction of the group's carbon-dioxide emissions. "This is really a sea change that has a real, measurable impact on the environment and the future of the marine industry," Stromberg says.



Beneteau boats being built in the factory.
Beneteau

The work that Groupe Beneteau did with Arkema also allowed for creation of the first serial production boat using 100% recyclable resin. A Beneteau First 44 sailboat built with Elium was presented at the 2023 boat shows. "This is a first of many boats that will be able to incorporate the Elium resin," Stromberg says.

The First 44 also has a hybrid-series propulsion system. A 20-kWh battery pack powers two pods that integrate the electric motors driving folding propellers. The system allows for silent cruising under power or for sailing in light winds, because the electric motor helps to create apparent wind. The First 44 also has decking made of iroko from Forest Stewardship Council-certified forests in the Congo, as an alternative to teak. Executives say they plan to deploy these innovations on all Groupe Beneteau boats.

Dometic

Dometic Marine president Eric Fetchko has laid out a clear goal for every product the company conceives and releases: "My goal is to make it easier for everyone to boat." Quite a few companies say similar things these days, but the products that Dometic released in the past year show a real drive to achieve the goal.





Dometic's co-op program matches students from local universities to try their hand at a number of disciplines.
Dometic

First on the list is Optimus electric wakeboat steering, which is a way for popular wake and ski boats to implement advanced electric power steering technology. At the wheel, drivers feel more like they're handling a sports car than a boat, making it easier to focus on the experience they're creating for riders.

Dometic also released Marine Gateway this past year. The telematics product lets boaters connect, monitor and control multiple devices and systems via Bluetooth on board, or via Wi-Fi or LTE cellular from shore. Marine Gateway integrates with Dometic's DCM digital switching solution, allowing control of multiple systems through the mobile app. Marine Gateway also has geofence security and what Dometic calls a digital "security loop" to protect outboards, multifunction displays and other components that thieves target.



Marine Gateway is a telematic product from Dometic that allows boaters to connect, monitor and control several devices and systems via Bluetooth, cellular or Wi-Fi.
Dometic

Yet another new offering from Dometic is the Breathe Ionizer, which is an affordable option to add air purification inside any boat. It uses positive and negatively charged ions to reduce airborne pathogens and mold spores by attaching to their core structure. Odors and volatile organic compounds are also reduced, and allergens and dust are removed from the air.

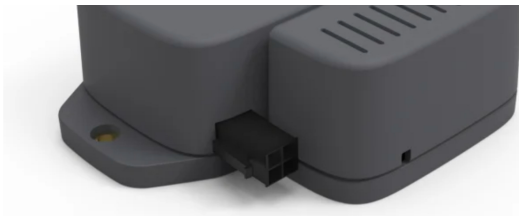


[Here Are 97 of the Coolest Gifts for This 2023](#)

Many of these new products, according to vice president of marketing Laurie Louvier, "have been among some of our most successful new product launches ever. Just recently, Apex Marine announced it is making our Xtreme Power Assist cable steering and Optimus electric power steering standard equipment on its premium pontoon-boat models. This is state-of-the-art technology filtering down to the masses."

Dometic also has been working to help increase the number of skilled people coming into the workforce. The company's Student Co-Op Program with the University of British Columbia and other regional universities sees 40 to 50 students visiting the company each year to gain work experience across a spectrum of disciplines. Many are engineering students, but Dometic also provides paid internships in the areas of finance, quality control, operations, sourcing, IT, human resources and marketing.





Dometic's Breathe Ionizer, which is an affordable option to add air purification inside any boat.
Dometic

Beyond the water, Louvier says, the company is also proving that “the sky’s the limit” for Dometic’s climate control technology, with DuraSea Series A/C condensers now being used aboard SpaceX’s autonomous spaceport drone ship A Shortfall of Gravitas. The unmanned vessel operates off the East Coast to support launches of SpaceX’s Falcon Heavy and Falcon 9 rockets from Kennedy Space Center and Cape Canaveral in Florida. The DuraSea units are networked via Starlink satellite so Mission Control can operate them, keeping the launch vessel’s electronics, computers, sensors and other technical systems working properly.

Suzuki

Microplastics are a scourge of the sea. They come from all kinds of things that end up in our trash: cosmetics, clothing and other textiles, fishing nets, water bottles. And they can take hundreds or thousands of years to decompose. Fish often end up eating them, which means the microplastics then go up the food chain into human bodies.

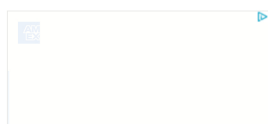
The microplastics collecting device that Suzuki Marine has made standard equipment is intended to help clean up this ever-present pollution. The device comes on all of Suzuki Marine’s 115- and 140-hp outboards, which are two of the company’s most popular engines. Its filter element can be easily cleaned and reused, with a built-in bypass that prevents a clogged filter from causing engine performance or overheating issues.



Suzuki’s microplastic collection device is standard on its 115- and 140-hp outboards.
Suzuki Marine

In the area of sustainability, Suzuki also undertook an initiative that involved the National Marine Manufacturers Association. The company worked with NMMA to promote the use of new renewable fuels, including a 940-mile passage from Florida to Washington, D.C., using only EcoGen90 sustainable marine fuel (and, yes, the microplastics collecting device). At the nation’s capital, Suzuki joined with industry leaders, dealers and the press during the American Boating Congress to highlight sustainable marine fuels for government officials.

Suzuki Marine USA also continued its Clean Oceans Project with beach cleanups this past year. The cleanups were timed to coordinate with major boat shows as a way to encourage industry and public participation. Two examples were the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show and the Miami International Boat Show. Members of the public who helped with the beach cleanups were given free tickets to attend the events. Suzuki Marine also coordinated a beach cleanup with the National Football League’s Tampa Bay Buccaneers, in which cheerleaders and players joined Suzuki’s team to clean up beaches. Next up will be an event that encourages Bucs fans to help make an even bigger impact, with a goal of 10,000 people cleaning up the Tampa area’s coastline and beaches.





*Suzuki's DF350AMD V-6 outboard
Suzuki Marine*

Closer to home, the company is working to reduce plastic waste in its production cycle. "Suzuki has expanded and strengthened its efforts to reduce the use of plastics in the packaging and shipping of motors and parts, so far eliminating tons of plastic waste annually," says general manager Brandon Cerka. "Our company will continually expand this effort to reduce or reuse materials that could contribute to plastics pollution and unnecessary materials going into landfills."

All of these initiatives are happening at the same time as product innovation. The past year saw the launch of the DF350AMD and DF300BMD V-6 outboards, which have integrated steering and a re-engineered lower gearcase to enhance durability, increase top speed, improve fuel efficiency and make maintenance easier. Also new is the flagship of Suzuki's V-6 Sport Series outboards: the DF250ATSSW. It's the first SS Series outboard compatible with the Suzuki Precision Control electronic shift and throttle system, and will integrate with Suzuki's Digital Pro Pedal foot throttle.

Chris-Craft

A lot of builders are talking a good game about producing versions of their boats with all-electric propulsion. A favorite pastime these days at the shows is debating whether the future looks brightest for models that evolve from existing designs, or for models that show boaters something entirely new.



*The Launch 25 GTe is Chris-Craft's first electric model.
Chris-Craft*

Chris-Craft stood out this past year because its team built a boat that most people didn't realize had electric propulsion until they asked. The Launch 25 GTe prototype was fully operational in time for the Miami International Boat Show in February, with a stern-drive configuration, electric motor and battery bank replacing the engine and fuel systems in the original version of the boat.

Chris-Craft worked with the Advanced Technology Group at parent company Winnebago Industries to create the Launch 25 GTe, which releases zero emissions, reduces noise and can reportedly achieve a top speed of 43 knots with a run time of two hours. The concept boat represented the first time the Advanced Technology Group brought out an electric marine product for the public to see, and Chris-Craft says it has already received more than 160 online leads for sales since the prototype launched.

Company president Stephen Heese called the boat a "step on a continuous journey of bringing innovation to the marine industry." The company is working on more advancements at its new manufacturing facility, which increases capacity by 50% and spans more than 70,000 square feet, giving Chris-Craft the space to build six models from 24 to 28 feet. The plan is for an expanded model line, as well as increased output, giving boaters access to newer models at a faster rate.



*Chris-Craft president Stephen Heese cuts the ribbon on the company's new 70,000-square-foot factory, which increases manufacturing capacity by 50%.
Chris-Craft*

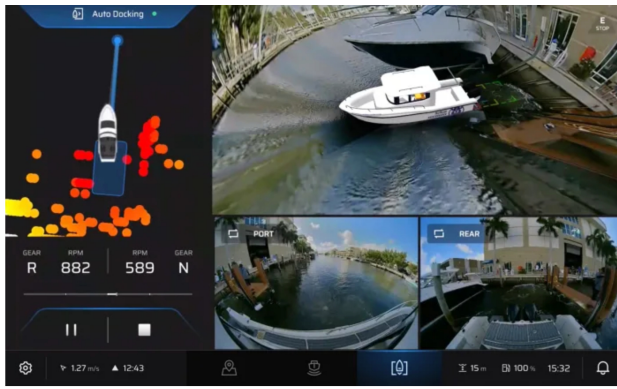
One of those new models is the Calypso 32, which made its debut at the Miami show. Key features include a fully enclosed, climate-controlled windshield that can be stowed; a standard Seakeeper Ride to eliminate as much as 70% of pitch and roll; and a lithium-ion battery bank to power variable-speed HVAC systems. The boat also has LED lighting, multispeaker audio and a motorized SureShade, along with aft seats that can be stowed or pulled out to create different social zones. Power is Mercury's V-10 outboard with fully electric steering and standard joystick control.



The Calypso 32 is the first Chris-Craft model that can be fully connected through the MyChris-Craft app, enabling real-time monitoring of GPS, engine, battery and bilge data. It's a feature that the builder says will be standard on all Chris-Craft models starting in 2024. Chris-Craft reports that it has already sold multiple Calypso 32s, with more than 70 online leads for freshwater and saltwater use since the launch.

Avikus

Autonomous systems are among the most anticipated technologies for making it easier to operate boats. In January 2021, Korean shipping giant HD Hyundai founded Avikus to advance the technology. The HiNAS (Hyundai Intelligent Navigation Assistant System) for commercial shipping was developed. In June 2022, Avikus carried out a real-world test, reportedly becoming the first company to guide a ship across the ocean. Partnering with SK Shipping, Avikus' HiNAS navigated the 180,000-cubic-meter-class, liquefied natural gas carrier *Prism Courage*.



Avikus' NeuBoat system uses LiDAR, cameras and other sensors to self-navigate and self-dock.
Avikus

Avikus' next move was to scale down the technology to the boating market. Using navigation data obtained through its experience with HiNAS in shipping, the company created a recreational system called NeuBoat that was unveiled and demonstrated at the 2022 Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show.

"Our NeuBoat Dock product, along with our future autonomous products, which we demonstrated at IBEX to the recreational boating market, will forever change and greatly improve the on-the-water experience for boaters around the world," says Avikus managing director Paul Petani. "We are excited about the positive feedback we received from leading boat and propulsion OEMs, and look forward to establishing additional technology partnerships, as we have done with Raymarine, to bring our product road map to life in 2024 and beyond."

NeuBoat contains two technological components: a Navigation Assistant System and a Docking Assistant System. Both use sensors, LiDAR and cameras, and employ a deep-learning and sensor fusion algorithm. The NAS lets a boat recognize and assess on-water situations in real time without human intervention, focusing on object-detection and collision warnings. The system also creates and maintains an optimal route for safe travel using GPS data, and provides intuitive navigation assistance through augmented reality displays. At its highest level, the system navigates the boat autonomously through Avikus' autopilot and engine interface units.

The DAS applies an integrated cognitive system to ease the docking process, using a six-camera suite that provides a bird's-eye view around the vessel to help with close-quarters maneuvering. The standard version of the system employs distance guidance and collision alarms, as well as a three-dimensional surround view and the ability to pan or pick camera perspectives to display. The premium level uses Avikus' autopilot and engine interface to dock a boat autonomously.

During the ocean-crossing, *Prism Courage* operated autonomously on optimum routes, increasing fuel efficiency by approximately 7% while reducing greenhouse gas emissions by about 5%. The system also recognized the locations of nearby ships during operation to avoid collision about 100 times. The voyage was conducted under real-time monitoring of the American Bureau of Shipping and the Korean Register of Shipping.

According to Hyundai, HiNAS has received 282 orders to date (228 of which are on HD Hyundai ships and 54 on others). All new ships built by HD Hyundai will have HiNAS moving forward. NeuBoat was recognized at this year's Consumer Electronics Show with an Innovation Award in the field of Vehicle Tech & Advanced Mobility. The technology agency Thetius also recognized Avikus as one of the 50 most innovative startups in the maritime industry.

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Radian IoT's device can trigger notifications when a boat leaves the factory floor, track it on its way to delivery, monitor its location for floorplan financing, and then provide the end consumer with robust telematics for remote vessel monitoring.

Radian IoT

Radian IoT

Radian IoT installs predelivery, internally powered monitoring devices on equipment in the marine, powersports and RV industries. After a product is delivered, Radian leverages GPS-tracked movement to produce real-time data. Companies can retrieve operational information — including supply chain, inventory management and logistics, plus experiential data like how and why things happen at the consumer level — to drive improvements and accelerate decision-making across an entire enterprise.

“Manufacturers, dealers, marina operators, boat clubs and financial institutions can all customize and prioritize their unique access to the aggregated data,” says Radian CEO Joe Czarnecky. “Each entity can select the most relevant data to its enterprise.”

Radian's platform integrates time-stamped GPS location and sensor data with a database of hundreds of product-related attributes unique to a given boat or personal watercraft. Model name, color, dimensions, serial number, horsepower and specific options are all populated within the system, then associated with the specific asset on each report. By overlaying the time-stamped movement of each unit within the list of product attributes, Radian can tell a dealer and manufacturer what is selling and why.





Radian IoT

The company's new M3 device expands the insight by connecting with a vessel's NMEA 2000 network and CAN communication buses, allowing engine and electronics data to be captured and reported with each transmission to the Radian platform. Remote diagnosis can be done, and in some cases, real-time solutions for operational issues can be provided.

When a boat or personal watercraft is purchased, an owner can choose to subscribe to Radian's end-user system. There's no device to buy. Opting in means buying an annual subscription. A subscriber can remotely keep an eye on a boat and receive alerts if it moves outside a custom geofence. The M3 also lets consumers share operational data with their service provider so issues can be addressed faster. In addition to position monitoring and mechanical alerts, Radian aims to help dealers and manufacturers understand how boats, trailers and boat systems are being used, and what the industry can do to attract new boaters.

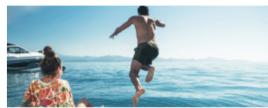
Radian says its equipment is the first cellular/GPS device with an internal five-year battery, and the first with a two-year rechargeable battery. The company says it is also the first platform for the marine industry to provide a B2B2C (business-to-business-to-consumer) product that delivers real-time information. The platform was the first developed to deliver data for boatbuilders, dealers and suppliers, and it was the first to support setting unlimited geofences for manufacturers, dealers and consumers. The company won an Innovation Award at the 2022 International BoatBuilders' Exhibition and Conference.

"We take a relentless approach with daily, weekly and monthly sprints around new features and functions, creating a robust, flexible product where our approach is to be able to provide continuous upgrades and improvements for our customers," Czarnecky says.



E-Series batteries from ePropulsion are IP67 waterproof and can deliver up to 3,000 charging cycles with three times higher density and 70% less weight than conventional lead-acid batteries.

ePropulsion



Fuel Less, Feel More.

Freedom. That's the feeling you'll have each time you hit the water with Volvo Penta. Our advanced propulsion technologies deliver an easy boating experience that is second to none.

Explore how you will get more with Volvo Penta.

VOLVO PENTA

ePropulsion

In 2022, electric motor manufacturer ePropulsion celebrated 10 years in the boating business. From the start, back when they were college students, co-founders Danny Tao, Wayne Wan and Peter Pan have been innovating. It started with the company developing a brushless, direct-drive electric outboard. Eliminating brushes reduces energy consumption and can let a motor run up to 50% longer. Brushless motors also result in longer battery life.

"We pride ourselves on being an innovator and market challenger, which led to the first introduction of electric outboard motors integrated with boating IoT, brushless direct-drive electric outboard motors and the first incorporation of hydrogeneration capabilities into electric outboards," says Tao, who is CEO.

After launching outboards from 1.3 to 8 hp (1 to 6 kW) in output ratings, ePropulsion expanded its OEM capabilities with the debut of the the H-100 electric inboard. It's a 134-hp (100 kW) motor engineered for larger sailing vessels and for powerboats from 60 to 100 with a full displacement up to 200 tons.

The I-Series that launched at the 2022 Metstrade show includes integrated ePropulsion Smart System Architecture and IoT connectivity. The I-Series comes with a motor, gearbox, control system and cooling system. According to ePropulsion, the inboards take up 60% less space, are 65% lighter than an internal combustion engine of equal power, and are 30% lighter than similarly rated electric motors.



I-Series electric inboards are 65% lighter than internal combustion engines.
ePropulsion

The core of the eSSA system is an electronic control unit that manages the electric drive system, battery and connectivity. The ePropulsion Connectivity Service is based on IoT technology that lets boat owners and fleet managers communicate with their boats. A user can access cloud-based connectivity services without needing additional accessories, and can receive real-time data and statistics.

Also new for 2023 are the company's E-Series batteries, which launched in March. The batteries are rated IP67 waterproof, have a lithium-iron-phosphate base, and can reportedly deliver up to 3,000 charging cycles with three times higher density and 70% less weight than lead-acid batteries. The E60 battery is designed for use with the Navy 3.0 Evo (6 hp) outboard, and the E163 pairs with the 9.9-hp Navy 6.0 Evo. The battery management system's display shows state of charge, voltage, current and alarm data.

The company has also been supporting students competing with electric boats in the Monaco Energy Boat Challenge. The Rochester Institute of Technology's Sailing Tigers team finished second in the 2022 competition. This year, ePropulsion upgraded the team with two Navy 6.0 Evo electric outboards and controls. The company also supported the Research Marine Technology Solar Boat Team from Diponegoro University in Indonesia. That team's entry was powered by a Navy 6.0 outboard, and an E80 battery and controls. It was recognized for its hull, which was made with recycled mask waste.

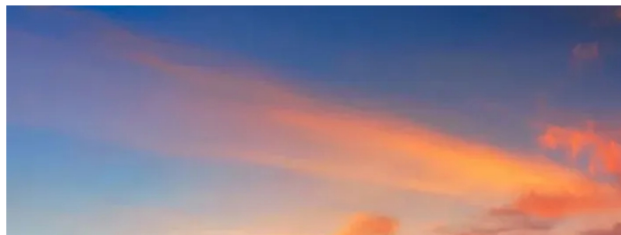
"As a company incubated at a university institution, it's a noble tradition for ePropulsion to give back and support the young generation's initiatives to accelerate the transition into clean energy in the marine industry," Tao says.

Honorable Mentions

At the 2022 Miami International Boat Show, the National Marine Manufacturers Association hosted a session about sustainable fuels and other alternatives to electrification for reducing carbon emissions. One of the presenters, Jess Hewitt, president of Hyperfuels in Houston, talked about the biggest difference between electric power and more environmentally friendly sustainable fuels for boats.

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Purfuel is a product that Hyperfuels makes specifically for marine use.
Hyperfuels

Purfuel is a product that Hyperfuels makes specifically for marine use. It includes 12.5% Gevo, which is corn-based and is a building block for renewable gasoline. "We need to jump to the next generation of boater fuels," Hewitt said at the Miami event, which included virtually every marine engine manufacturer. "We make this specifically for vented fuel systems on an outboard-powered boat."

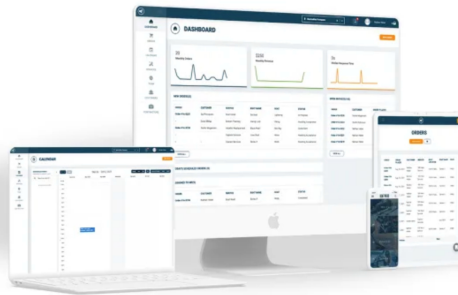
Purfuel is EPA-approved for blending with gasoline, and it's endorsed by NMMA. It is also supported by the American Boat & Yacht Council and is endorsed by Mercury Marine. The company says its mission is to "provide premium ethanol-free gas to marinas and other marine-related entities. Gasoline components are renewable and more sustainable than typical gasoline supplies. Purfuel premium e-free gas will reduce carbon emissions from the current engines in use now."

One of the biggest challenges for alternative-fuel suppliers is getting the fuels to dealers. Purfuel has increased production capacity through innovations in fermentation technology around isobutanol, making it more economical to produce. In 2018, the global isobutanol market was valued at \$2.2 billion. By 2025, Hyperfuels expects it to reach \$5.2 billion.

Because isobutanol has a higher energy density than gasoline, it can provide more power per unit of fuel, leading to improved efficiency in marine applications. It also burns cleaner than gasoline, reducing emissions of pollutants such as carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides. In addition to the environmental benefits, the reduced emissions are better for overall human health.

As reported in *Soundings Trade Only* in 2018, the general manager at Galveston Yacht Basin in Texas had center-console owners with triple and quad outboards that were experiencing vapor-lock problems with their engines. The operators were buying premium fuel, but the octane wasn't the problem. The temperature of the fuel was too high, and it was vaporizing before it could get to the injectors in the outboards.

The manager did some research and found isobutanol. Even though the customers said they wouldn't pay the extra money for it, he bought some anyway. Once the boat owners saw how their engines ran on it, they were willing to pay extra for it. "It's unequivocally better for the boat, the consumer and the environment," says Jeff Wasil, director of environment, health and safety compliance at NMMA.



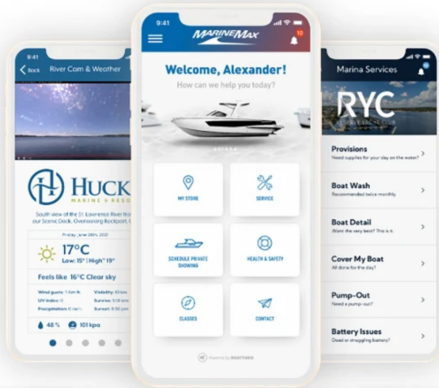
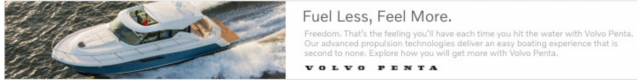
Boatyard's customer portal
Boatyard

Boatyard

One of the most difficult challenges the boating industry is working to improve is the sometimes-contentious relationship between service providers and consumers. After dropping off a boat for service, the owner often feels ignored by the dealer or repair facility until it's time to pick up the boat and pay. The Boatyard app improves

communication between the two parties. Boatyard's four key values are trust and transparency, personalization, ease of use, and surprise and delight. In the past year, Boatyard has continued to introduce more features to ease the stress around servicing.

"Boatyard's customer portal transforms the way marine companies communicate and manage their customers," president Nathan Heber says. "Branded to match a company's identity, a customer portal modernizes their customer experience by creating the digital touchpoints and transparency that today's consumers expect."



Boatyard's goal is to bridge the gap between service departments and customers.
Boatyard

Highlights of the app, which is available for Android and iOS systems, include online service requests with saved, account-level details; one-click service orders for instant requests, such as "launch my boat" or "book winterization"; digital estimates, approvals and invoices; status updates; and a digital wallet. "We believe better scheduling is at the core of creating a better marine customer experience," Heber says. "Our new scheduler offers uniquely designed features that focus on keeping service advisers, managers, technicians and customers all on the same page."

The scheduler includes drag-and-drop functions across days, teams and technicians, as well as real-time status updates with prompts to keep the customer informed, and integrated work orders and mobile access.

This past summer, Boatyard launched updates to its Pro app, to improve a repair shop's efficiency and provide more transparency to the customer. Personalized team views let technicians record their time in blocks, and will prompt them to add notes and instantly alert managers with status updates. Then the service advisor can send the customer an update with a single click.

Boatyard AI is a tool that provides the boat owner answers to common questions about boats and local waterways. According to the company, marine businesses using Boatyard have processed more than 153,000 service orders worth \$20 million in revenue. On average, customers have seen a minimum of 10 minutes saved per service order. Boatyard says that figure translates to more than 25,500 hours of administrative work saved, with service facilities seeing a 72% reduction in average payment time, from 18 days down to five.

Boatyard says there has also been a 38% reduction in charge-backs, and a 439% increase in online service bookings. Automated service reminders have generated a 20% increase in transition to service orders, and there's been an 80% reduction in administrative work during winterization and spring commissioning.

"Our goal is to change the old adage, 'the best days of a boat owner's life are the day you buy it and the day you sell it,'" Heber says. "By making it easy to request service for your boat, and by taking the guesswork out of service schedules, we make responsible boat ownership achievable for busy people."



Lippert's SureShade division developed a Power Bimini top that can be fitted with an extension to cover the bow area.

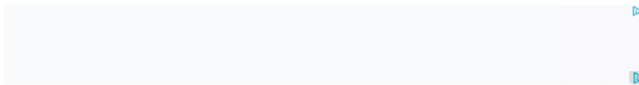
Lippert

Lippert

Lippert is one of the best-known OEM suppliers in the boating industry, having forged partnerships with countless manufacturers. This year, the company launched an initiative to broaden its reach in the aftermarket, organizing a Marine Innovation Team that consists of OEM and aftermarket-focused staff from its Lewmar, SureShade and Taylor Made divisions.

"While we have always been in tune with OEM-driven innovation projects, we have shifted in the last year to complement with internally driven innovation and aftermarket integration," says Matt Johnston, managing director of Lippert's European Group. "Ideas for innovation come from internal and external sources, including customers who are boaters, distributors, dealers and boatbuilders."

Lippert says its innovations start with two primary focuses: how to make boating more enjoyable, and how to remove stress and make boating easier. The goal is to ensure that people keep their boats and use them more often.



Lewmar's Axis shallow-water anchor eliminates the need for hydraulic pumps and supply hoses.

Lippert

Lippert launched three aftermarket products and more than 10 integrations with boatbuilder customers. One example is SureShade's Power Bimini top that now comes standard on many new pontoon boats. Some customers need even more shade at the bow, so the Lippert team designed a zippered compartment in the Bimini top. For minimal cost and with little effort, a boat owner can add a 7-foot extension panel. Also this year, the Lewmar division introduced the Axis shallow water anchor, which is an electric, pole-style anchor that eliminates the bulk of hydraulic pumps and hoses.

Lippert also has a culture of giving back to the community. Its marine division partnered this year with such charities as Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeastern Indiana for its annual STEAMfest; DIF Farm Home Shelter in Juarez, Mexico, to provide

children ages 3 to 6 with clothes, toys, diapers and milk; the American Cancer Society for its Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk; and Indiana State Parks, by building blue jay birdhouses. Marine team members also are using a former golf course to host an annual "Hole in One Run" that raises money for the Indiana Center for Recovery's drug and alcohol detox programs.

To promote a positive work environment, Lippert provides walking paths, a "walking challenge" for employees, a weight-loss program, smoking-cessation support, skin-cancer screenings and free preventive care. In the Just Fix It program, any employee can identify and resolve a quick fix in his or her work area. The company also focuses on increasing employee retention by promoting a "treat others as you want to be treated" environment, which translates into better relationships inside and outside of work.

This article was originally published in the November 2023 issue.

· PRODUCT INNOVATIONS



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Hatteras Yachts Announces Cutbacks

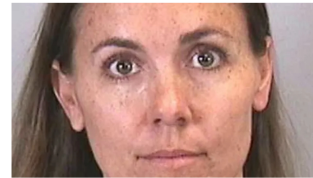
The builder laid off 80 workers this week, two-and-a-half years after White River Marine Group acquired it with a goal of supporting 500 jobs.



MASTERCRAFT

MasterCraft Boat Holdings Posts Tough First Quarter

Net sales, adjusted EBITDA and diluted adjusted net income per share all declined during the first quarter of fiscal 2024.



BOAT DEALERS

Ex-employee convicted of embezzling Florida dealer

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FLIBS 2023: 'Crowds Abound' on Day Two

A roundup of company news and product launches by the Sounding Trade Only Team, which is reporting on-site.



LIPPERT

Net Sales Down in Lippert Third Quarter

The accessories and components manufacturer posted net sales of \$1 billion, pointing to lower North American marine production levels and decreased selling prices.



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The IBEX Interviews: Radian IoT CEO Joe Czarnecky

Soundings Trade Only interviewed several forward-thinking industry leaders during the recent IBEX show. Today's video interview features Joe Czarnecky, who talks about the state of the telematics industry, data harvesting, boat usage post-Covid and more. The video series is sponsored by Garmin.



MALIBU BOATS

Malibu Boats Reports Declines in First Quarter

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