

EVENTFUL Horizor

By John Heselwood

In the last four years, Horizon Yachts has doubled its output. Based in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, Boating Business looks at how this yacht builder stays afloat.

In recent years, Horizon Yachts has enjoyed unparalleled success. For over two decades, the company has been improving its designs and increasing its production. In 2005, Horizon's founder, John Lu, announced expansion plans that will allow the company to build boats up to 50m (168ft). But rather than rest on his laurels, Lu is already looking ahead and planning for the future.

Today, Horizon is divided into four interconnected subsidiary companies, namely Horizon Yachts, Vision Yachts, Premier Yachts and Atech Composite.

Horizon Yachts

Founded in 1987, Horizon Yachts has been one of the biggest success stories in the boating industry. After starting out with just 30 engineers, designers and craftsmen, the company now has a total workforce of over 600 and has built more than 400 motoryachts over the last 19 years. According to a 2005 report published by Yachts International Magazine, the company is now placed sixth on a list of the world's Top 10 largest luxury yacht builders. Given its plans for expansion, Horizon is expected to further advance in the rankings in the coming years.

With bigger yachts, more sophisticated interiors and sleeker designs on their newer models, Horizon is poised for continued commercial success, especially with the Horizon 82. As well, new dealerships have been signed around the world and the company's order book is full for another year.

With more than half of Horizon's customers coming from Europe, the company stands apart from other Taiwanese boatyards who rely mainly on the US for sales.

As Lu admits, before Horizon can crack the US market, there has to be change in the



almost perfectly symmetrical and remarkably consistent. To build a mould for a 25m yacht in the traditional way takes more than six months. Using this computerised, 5-axis milling machine, the process is completed in less than one month. The process reduces costs, improves quality and allows for the development of new models.

SCRIMP (Seemann Composites Resin Infusion Moulding Process): This resin-moulding process uses a vacuum to pull liquid resin in a dry lay-up. Not only has this innovation improved efficiency, but it has also made the composite structures stronger and more reliable. A record-breaking 130ft SCRIMP hull is currently under construction.

Material Research Centre: According to Lu, in the last 20 years Horizon has invested millions of dollars in R&D. Part of that investment went into developing this research centre which tests the quality, solidity, weight of composite material.

Vision Yachts

Acquired in 2001 by Horizon and still managed by the charismatic Austin Lin, Vision Yachts specialises in smaller yachts below 80ft. Today, the 210 employees focus on manufacturing the new Vision 68 and Horizon 62. Built on a huge volume hull and designed by Greg Marshal, Vision 68 is intended to be run by an owner/operator but, with four cabins, she can accommodate a crew.

In order to cope with the rising demand, Vision shipyard has relocated to brand new

warehouses that will allow the company to double its production output.

Premier Yachts

The latest acquisition for Horizon, Premier Yachts joined the Group in 2005. The 25,000 sqm shipyard deals exclusively with superyachts over 130ft. This brand new facility is already operating and new developments will include a marina with 100m pier and slipways to launch any new Horizon Group Yachts for sea trial.

In an interesting development, John Lu is considering moving into building steel and aluminum superyachts. By subcontracting production of the hull and superstructure to surrounding shipyards, Premier Yachts will do the rest in their largest shed, designed to hold 160ft superyachts.

By 2010, Horizon Group expects to deliver up to 60 yachts over 80ft in length. As well, it is anticipated that production facilities will grow from 44,000 sqm to 95,000 sqm and staff numbers will balloon from 800 to 1,100.

Horizon Group epitomises the rebirth and growth of Taiwan's boatbuilding industry. While the company can be credited for much of its success, outside influences have also boosted Horizon's fortunes. Jack Chen, for example, is the president of the Taiwan Yacht Industry Association, and has actively encouraged investment in the local marine scene. He did this in two ways: by actively promoting Taiwan's Kaohsiung

County as a boatbuilding hub and by allocating a new industrial zone for shipyards. Hsingda Yacht Industrial Park will occupy 115 acres, 75 of which will be set aside for manufacturing facilities.

Already two yacht manufacturing companies, Vitech Marine and Dyna Craft, as well as eight other component suppliers, have agreed to set up their plants within the Hsingda industrial park.

Over the last 20 years, many Taiwan-based boatyards have either shut down or relocated to Mainland China (Jet Tern, Ocean Alexander, Marlow Yachts, Prima Yachts, Hampton, Hi Star Marine). However, the Horizon Group is proving that, through innovation, quality control and investment in technology, Taiwanese

companies can not only remain competitive, but also increase market share. In order for other Taiwanese shipyards to survive, they need to follow Horizon's lead and produce yachts that are better rather than cheaper.

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mindset of American buyers who equate the words 'Made in Taiwan' with inferior quality.

In response to the tough competition, in Europe Horizon is marketed under the Elegance brand.

Horizon has also enjoyed success in Asia. Kit Chotithamaporn, managing director of Kingfisher Marine, Horizon's dealer in

Southeast Asia, says in the coming months he will deliver Horizon yachts to owners in Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Atech Composite Company

Built to supply fibreglass hulls for the Horizon Group, Atech Composite was created in 2000. Located just across the road from Horizon Yachts shipyard, Atech Composite occupies 23,000 sqm and employs 180 workers. As one of the most modern and efficient fibreglass manufacturers in the world, Atech ensures Horizon Yachts, Vision Yachts and Premier Yachts are built with cutting-edge technology.

Some of their innovations include:

CNC Milling Systems: Working with precise measurements, this high-speed milling system can create forms that are