

Living the (Boating) Life

By Jennifer LeClaire

A sportfishing boat with Cigarette Racing speed. A fast catamaran with four staterooms and a salon. A 120-foot yacht with curved glass panels running the length of its deckhouse. A motoryacht designed for transoceanic voyages.

There are as many breeds of boaters as there are watercraft to thrill them. But the rich and famous megayacht owners, the daring Cigarette racers and the adventurous anglers have at least two things in common: They love the marine lifestyle — and they are flocking to Florida coasts.

Indeed, with more registered boats than any other state, Florida is now officially the boat capital of the nation, according to the National Marine Manufacturer's Association (NMMA). And Fort Lauderdale is widely recognized as the yachting capital of the world. Plenty of famed boat builders are based here — and the boats that aren't built locally are readily available through prominent local dealers and yacht charter brokers.

Marine experts say that what seafaring consumers dream of has changed dramatically over the past five years. For some, the boat is a home away from home, complete with all the amenities and a crew to wait on them. For others, a boat is a thrill-seeking vehicle that satisfies a hunger for horsepower at sea. For yet others, a boat is a vessel in which to compete, relax or even entertain.

A quick look at marine industry trends shows that the consumers who drive it enjoy fine accommodations, have a need for speed, and thrive on technological bells and whistles.

“The marine industry has taken a page out of auto manufacturing's book,” says Cathy Johnson, southern regional manager for the NMMA and manager of the Miami International Boat Show. “You see new advanced electronics and gadgets are coming out every year, and the trend in boats is bigger and more expensive. We expect that to continue.”

Owners want more than just high-tech electronics and luxury amenities in their boats. They also want more products attached to and augmenting their crafts. And it's not just owners driving the demand, says Bill Klimas, executive editor of International Yachtsman magazine in Fort Lauderdale.

“Megayachts need toys because the more toys you have the better the chances you can charter it,” he explains. “We’re seeing everything from amphibious vehicles to recreational submarines going on these megayachts.”

The mega-trends

The biggest trend in boating is, well, big: megayachts, usually defined as yachts more than 130 feet long. And, according to Johnson, they keep getting bigger. Today’s megayachts come fully equipped with plasma televisions, luxurious furniture and just about every other amenity you’d find in a prestigious hotel. And South Florida is home to exclusive dealers that sell some of the world’s finest.

The common trend in this luxury market is megayachts 160 to 180 feet long, Klimas says. “Bigger yachts have a much higher demand in the charter market because they allow a greater number of guests to split the cost of a vacation,” he continues. “Chartering defrays the total cost of ownership so the owner can at least break even on the purchase.”

But some local yachtmakers are working the smaller end of the mega market. Dania Beach-based Broward Marine — the only megayacht builder in South Florida — is hoping to make a comeback after cutting staff and production in recent years and losing favor with boaters and charter companies. The 120-foot Raised Pilothouse Yacht is a mini-megayacht, the fruit of new ownership and styling at the 60-year-old company. Broward Marine worked with British designer Evan K. Marshall to draw up a dramatic profile for the Raised Pilothouse, with curved glass panels that run the length of the deckhouse. Circular stairways, interior luxury and amenities galore put the mega in this mini-megayacht.

Making motoryacht waves

Motoryachts — large powerboats with posh interior accommodations designed for long-range cruising — are also growing larger. The boats come in all shapes and sizes, but many of them have traditionally been labeled production boats, meaning the boat builder takes a cookie-cutter approach to design. As the industry evolves, motoryacht makers are beginning to shed the one-model-fits-all mindset.

Italian Motoryacht maker Mairora, for example, bills itself as an artisan boat builder. The latest vessel available through its Fort Lauderdale outpost is the 76. This 76-foot powerboat is offered in three- and four-stateroom versions with custom interior décor. The galley is equipped with Miele appliances, including a washer and dryer and barbeque. The 76 boasts electronic throttle and gear controls and a finger-touch computerized monitor for a comprehensive view and control of the boat systems. It’s also outfitted with Raymarine navigational systems and the latest in entertainment electronics. Perhaps most important to power boaters, it hits a speed of 30 knots.

Mairora has plenty of company. Coral Gables-based BRB Yachts LLC, the exclusive importer and dealer for European luxury maker Rodriguez Yachts, introduced its 800 WideBody 78-foot yacht last October. The company says it aims for a blend of hospitable

luxury, sporty appeal and power. American Global Yacht Group LLC is pushing five yacht lines from its Fort Lauderdale office; its latest is the Moloka'I 75 luxury expedition yacht, a four-deck boat with a clear foredeck and rounded stern.

“Our clients are cruisers, floating from location to location in multimillion-dollar boats,” says Jeffrey Drucek, CEO of American Global Yacht Group division Outer Reef Yachts. “Our plan is to keep building larger and follow the segment of the population with money: Baby Boomers with trillions and trillions coming to them over the next 15 years.”

Petite motoryachts still cruising

Despite the mega trends, not every boat owner wants a mammoth vessel. There is still plenty of innovation in smaller motoryachts.

Miami-based Ferretti Group USA Inc., part of Italy-based Ferretti Group, is bragging about its new Apremare 60 motoryacht. The company calls it a redesign of the classic “gozzo Sorrentino,” the little fishing boats from the town of Sorrento, Italy. It features a driver’s seat with electric movement, an alarm system, autopilot, electric windshield wipers, and a 14-inch TV with video recorder.

“For us, this has been a new challenge that comes out of a natural bent for innovation, as well as an ongoing quest to find ideal aesthetic and functional solutions to address the needs of pleasure boating enthusiasts who are fans of this extraordinary type of craft,” says Apremare Managing Director Cataldo Aprea.

Even small motoryacht cruisers want to go further in their boats.

To serve their desires, Fort Lauderdale-based Cheoy Lee Shipyards North America Inc. just introduced the Marco Polo 45-meter. It is the first in a new line of transoceanic explorer vessels — boats that can carry enough fuel and provisions to transport globetrotters from ocean to ocean. Innovations such as reduced wave-making resistance and new propellers promise significant fuel savings, and a full gymnasium, library and lounge, plus plenty of indoor and outdoor entertainment options, make the motoryacht a pleasant accommodation. Cheoy Lee is targeting cruisers — world travelers with their own boats.

Fairline Boats of North America Inc. in Fort Lauderdale refuses to be left out of the small motoryacht pack. Its new Targa 40 combines an open cockpit express cruiser with below-deck luxury, including plenty of headroom, wooden flooring and a full-fledged kitchen.

Fishing for trends

Some boaters want more than a good ride from their vessel. Fishing remains a popular boat-based activity, and the trends in the sportfish boating sector are much the same as in other segments of the industry: bigger, faster and more technologically advanced. So says Michael Rybovich, president of the board building division of boat maker and marina company Rybovich Spencer in West Palm Beach. The company is building a 68-foot model with a large mezzanine and crew stateroom he says is unique to sportfisherman vessels.

“People are traveling greater distances to catch fish. Forty years ago the ideal fishing boat size was around 37 feet because all you had to do was run out of the inlet and you could catch all you wanted,” Rybovich says. “Now you have to go to Mexico or St. Thomas or Venezuela. You need a bigger, faster boat that carries more fuel and accommodations.”

Island Runner LLC is also chasing this market with its latest model, the 35 Outboard. The Riviera Beach-based boatmaker’s vessels are known for their tournament-ready design, which includes lockable road storage, dual anchor lockers and 500 quarts of fishbox capacity. The exterior of this center-console boat offers enough dash space to install the latest in electronics and enough below-deck space to stretch out and relax when the tourney is over.

The 290 from Miami-based SeaVee Boats has a new hull design that gives anglers more room. The outboard-powered, open-fisherman configuration cruises at more than 39 miles per hour. The company is betting that tournament fishers will appreciate the ergonomically designed console. Celebrity angler Jose Wejebe uses the company’s flagship 340 series on his ESPN2 program, “The Spanish Fly.”

“The sports fishing industry has gotten unbelievably competitive,” says professional angler Kerri Burrus, one of the most successful females in the male-dominated sport and co-host of the reality TV fishing series “Reel Adventures.” “People seem to want speed more than anything else, even though they do have plenty of technology onboard.”

Manufacturers are also differentiating themselves through specialization. West Palm Beach-based Venture’s 27 model, for instance, is built with bottom fishing in mind. It has a roomy anchor locker with a fiberglass tube that houses the anchor’s shank to keep it from getting tangled in the chain. An in-deck fishbox near the driving console lets captains switch bait quickly, and a bait prep station with a cutting board and sink makes for convenient rigging.

Even companies that make smaller sportfishing boats are upping their size. Riviera Beach-based Albury Brothers Boats, which has traditionally stuck with smaller 20- and 23-foot models, is launching a 27-footer. The new model will have a big console with a head, and be powered by twin 200- or 225-horsepower outboard motors. This bigger model resembles its little sisters, but now popular features such as forward seating, a bathroom and fishbox are built in. Albury Brothers says there is a waiting list for this little big boat.

Satisfying the need for sporting speed

Some who float in sport yacht circles have an insatiable need for speed. Boat makers hope to satisfy that need with faster engines that don’t sacrifice comfort or handling. Innovators are engineering models with custom features and technology that keeps their captains comfortably competitive.

The Cigarette Racing Team LLC in Miami — known for its powerboats — launched its

first-ever fishing boat, the Top Fish Center Console. It is 39 feet long and runs 66 miles per hour with a 275-horsepower Mercury engine.

The fishing vessel joins the powerboat 46', which the company launched in 2006. Offshore powerboat racing champion John Tomlinson reached 172 miles per hour in the 46', marking the fastest Cigarette built to date. Of course, he did that with experimental custom engines, but Cigarette is building on those test results to make faster, safer boats, according to CEO Skip Braver.

“The people who buy our boats are the same people who buy high-end cars, like Ferraris or Porsches,” Braver says. “Just like Harley Davidson, we get all types of people buying Cigarettes.”

Other manufacturers are upping their speeds and cabin luxuries, too. Weston-based AfriCat Marine's latest power catamaran, the 420 model, cruises at 23 miles per hour with fuel efficiency in mind. Its multi-hull construction offers three- and four-stateroom versions, a spacious main salon, galley and bar. It comes stocked with a 42-inch plasma television and surround sound, DVD, CD and MP3 player. The 420 has a 22-foot beam that provides a sweeping deck expanse below the bridge.

Dania Beach-based Intrepid Powerboats Inc. recently introduced the 457, a semi-custom sportfish boat with creature comforts such as microwaves, refrigerators, helm electronics and a cockpit with built-in insulated fishboxes. Down in Opa-locka, boatbuilder Concept Boats Inc. showcases a range of performance and fishing boats from 23 to 36 feet long. Concept's claim to fame is fast fishing and colorful racing stripes that blur at speeds above 70 miles per hour.

Gear goodies

Every sports fisherman needs a rod and reel, and Pompano Beach-based Lindgren-Pitman Inc. hopes to catch technology-minded fishermen with its S-1200. This 12-volt electric fishing reel brings technological advances to fishing, with a digital display and a hands-free retrieval option. That means you don't have to work so hard to bring in that big catch.

Professional angler Burrus hopes to catch onto the trend with lures that include Austrian crystals to turn the heads of Wahoo, Dolphin and other big fish. She recently launched a West Palm Beach-based company, Billfishgirl Big Game Lures, to sell the sparkly lures.

Much of the gadget money boaters spend probably goes into electronics, though. That used to mean sonar, microwave antennas and radar data processing — and there is still plenty of uptake on the navigational side of this industry segment. But consumer electronics trends are finding a warm welcome aboard vessels of all shapes and sizes. After all, compared to the price of the boat, outfitting it with the latest and greatest in marine electronics is a drop in the fishbox.

“When people are spending seven hundred thousand dollars — or more — on a boat, they

don't shy away from spending another \$50,000 to put in every electronic gadget on board that's possible, including recording devices, video cameras so you can see blind spots, satellite phones and safety mechanisms," says Chris Wahler, marketing director for Fort Lauderdale-based manufacturer ACR Electronics Inc.

ACR recently developed two new safety-focused products. The GlobalFix EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon) broadcasts GPS data that aims to help search and rescue teams find boaters faster in an emergency. It automatically deploys when it hits the water. And the Aquafix is a personal locator beacon that can be used to call for help while on land or in water.

Sexier gadgets are even more popular. Fort Lauderdale-based marine electronics manufacturer Raymarine Inc. unveiled a new satellite television system in October. The 60 STV Satellite TV system is encased in an all-white, 24-inch dome and promises all the shows, movies and sporting events a boater would view at home, onboard with digital quality media. With a DVB satellite TV subscription, the 60 STV automatically identifies, acquires and tracks compatible signals from all digital video broadcast satellites, even while the vessel is moving.

Sirius Satellite Radio is available onboard, too, along with a Sirius weather subscription service that displays nicely on a Raymarine G170 or G190 multi-purpose marine display. These sunlight-viewable displays mirror the design of flat-screen PC monitors, with input jacks for cameras, TVs, DVD players and consoles.

Some marine accessories are even more playful. Warwickshire, U.K.-based Gibbs Technologies Ltd. bills its Quadski as "the world's first high-speed amphibian quadbike/ATV." It resembles a seated water ski that becomes an all-terrain vehicle. It can travel up to 50 miles an hour on land and water and makes the transition with the flick of a switch.

Does that all sound like too much? Microsoft co-founder Paul G. Allen's legendary 414-foot megayacht Octopus is equipped with a submarine, a hospital, a helipad and a hangar to house the helicopter.

Storing in style

No matter how many comfortable luxuries they have onboard their vessel, boaters eventually need to connect with land, dock the boat, and possibly even store it. There are hundreds of marinas, yacht clubs and dockage facilities in South Florida, but some in the industry say that's not enough. A growing international fleet of megayachts is demanding more space than ever, just as condominiums grab available waterfront land.

While old mainstays, including The Boathouse of Fort Lauderdale, are serving megayacht owners well, new venues are springing up to meet the demand with a new name: "dockominiums." These offer condo-style ownership of dock space for those boat owners who fear their rental slips will face skyrocketing fees or disappear into residential condos.

Loggerhead Club & Marina, owned by Jupiter-based Seven Kings Holdings Inc., offers another option: membership that allows dockage at more than 2,000 slips from Miami to Vero Beach. As it expands across South Florida, these luxury marinas offer saunas, pools, clubhouses, fitness centers and other amenities that mariners expect, along with vessel maintenance services.

Other companies are implementing high-tech lifts and denser storage. Miami-based **Aqua Marine Partners, LLC**, a marine investment and management firm, recently formed Vertical Yacht Club Development, LLC. The company plans to build South Florida yacht clubs that rely on patented technology to lift boats out of the water and store them safely. These high-tech lifts rely on laser-guided precision lifting and a boat cradle designed to prevent scratching.

Local companies innovating in that space include TNT Lift Systems in Fort Lauderdale, which just introduced its Ultra AM custom megalift for boats longer than 80 feet. The company also makes lifts for bikini and sports boats. Deerfield Beach-based Strike Yachts Inc. is targeting sportfishers with its boat models and its new Auto-Rigger, a remote controlled device that raises and lowers the boat from a switch at the helm.

“In today’s marine market you can have whatever your imagination desires. Most boaters are gadget nuts and it’s about one-upmanship,” Outer Reef Yachts’ Drucek says. “When [Oracle founder] Larry Ellison found out that Paul Allen’s yacht was going to be longer than his, he stopped construction and stretched it by 10 feet. That is the type of attitude that is driving this industry.”