



Polished perfection

Most authors that write about wooden express cruisers, runabouts or the like generally start with a historical tribute to the European founders of such elegant craft, Italian builders Riva — summoning up the glamour of the silver screen days when the likes of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton would romantically pose for the camera sitting entwined on the bench seat of the famous wooden cruisers that populated the exclusive sights of the Italian lakes.

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Far away from the rolling green-wooded hills of Lake Como, artistic boat designer-builder Nino Autore sits in his new factory in Dubai's desert-encircled Al Jadaf marine development yard, looking down on the results of 12 months of hard labour. From the galleried soundproofed offices, the four semi-built seven-metre wooden cruisers below offer a frame-by-frame guide to the birth of Nino's children — a range of three models starting with the five-metre tender-style runabout, followed by seven- and nine-metre cruisers in enclosed cabin or

open bowrider versions. While the build process starts with the two different types of jig where the models begin to take shape, their bare carcass appearance almost looks as if they are at the end of the process, the glossy finish and interlaced planks having been stripped by a flock of carrion. Such is the frugal beginnings of the time-honoured tradition of wooden boat building, carried out in a shipyard alongside other manufacturers working with steel, Alustar and modern composites. So what brought Nino and his company, Monte Carlo Marine, to Dubai's desert shores?

Having owned and run a boatyard on the shores of Lake Como for over five years, the rising costs of basic necessities such as transporting materials, ground rent and labour began to push the cost — not of the final product — but of the time that each project could be given. "When it comes to the build of wooden boats," explains Nino, "it is the time spent on a project that produces a better product." Without wanting to raise the price of his final product, Nino decided to move his production facility away from the climate that was becoming prohibitively

expensive for business, and after much research it was Dubai that drew his attention. "I see big opportunities here for the future," he nods, "With the encouraging growth of Dubai and ease of doing business it is an amazing place to be."

Having chosen Dubai as a base, Nino began by bringing out a team of experienced craftsmen and boat builders to help establish both the factory and its processes, so that a new workforce could be gradually trained and integrated, expanding the facilities and production capabilities until



maximum capacity was reached. "The reason for moving to Dubai was not to necessarily create a cheaper end product, but a better one," enthuses Nino. So with his facility all set up, it was then a case of getting his beautiful hand-drawn conceptual drawing passed through the computer design offices of external naval architecture contractors to ensure the sleek lines and classic curves would be replicated in the weight distribution, performance and safety. "Of course everyone looks to the classic style, lines and romance of the Riva Aquarama Special as inspiration. And from a distance, my boats may conceptually resemble such a design. But not up close. Both the active (in water) and above water shapes, build and dynamics are all modern in concept, using lessons learnt from what has gone before."

From the elevated position on the gantry, the craftsmen working on the unfinished

hulls seemed manic in their enthusiasm for sanding and shaping, ensuring the perfect finish. But with so many obstacles to building in wood and the advent of modern materials, why has Nino taken this line? "There will always be something romantic about a wooden boat. It is the ultimate luxury. But there are many problems also with wooden boats, particularly maintenance and finally rot. To avoid this we use the West System wood saturation concept."

Having built the hull using fixed counterframe jigs, and sanded it finely to realise the mahogany's natural colour and make sure each boat is the same, the entire hull and deck structure is subjected to over 20 days of sanding, epoxying and polishing to ensure the three coats of primer, 14 of epoxy and eight coats of topcoat varnish, are fully prepared and bonded. "The wood needs to be totally sealed

with light sanding between each coat," explains Nino, "so that it will keep its finish and last for many years to come. All my boats have a three-year warranty, in which time I will repair any imperfection that arises." And what about damage from the sun? "Using internationally-recognised resins and paints, they have all been tested and incorporate UV protection," he reveals. "Besides, from the models we have produced there has only ever been a natural darkening of the mahogany, which when reached stays at that deep rich hue."

While Nino is adamant that wood is the right material to be crafting his beautiful boats from, he is in no way afraid of embracing the modern composite technologies that enable his boats to not only keep their impeccable finish, but to add strength in areas that previously would

of wooden structures. In this way, while the hull and bow is strengthened in the traditional form of wishbones and ribs, the transom is built up with composites to support the weight and vibration of the propulsion unit chosen, and to add rigidity to the entry steps over the transom. With the planks of the hull curving back along the quarter, the reverse camber is used to hide the join between the topsides planking and that of the laminate wood bonded to the stern.

Talking of joins, one of the aspects of Nino's boats that first pulled me when I saw them on show through UAE dealer ART Marine at the Dubai-based World Powerboat Championships in December was the beautiful uninterrupted grain of the hull. "What makes Monte Carlo Marine boats special is that there are no vertical joins in the hull," boasts Nino proudly. "We source wood from an Italian supplier who gets us beautifully-



seasoned wood to the length of the project. Then we cut it to size and into planks that can be cold moulded to the 3D curves of the hull." There is certainly no doubt as to the craftsmanship on the hull finish, as it is practically impossible to determine that the hull is anything other than a single sheet of wood, such is the book matching that is attained. "To get the curves, especially at the bow, you need to use solid wood," continues Nino. "Though building out of plywood would obviously be quicker, it would never be able to form the complex curves we need."

To save time during the build process, while the hulls are upside down being prepared for their extensive lamination and polishing, the craftsmen preparing the interior fittings and structures are not left twiddling

their thumbs, as a GRP female plug of the interior has been prepared to allow the complete interior to be built, carved and finished, then reassembled within the finished boat. This allows all aspects of each boat to be worked on separately — fulfilling Nino's desire for the quality of his product to be achieved by the amount of time spent on each project.

Having established such a fluid system of build, it is not surprising that the detail on each boat is reflected in the bespoke fitments and furnishing it is finally decked out with, following their final polishing and painting. From the air intakes to the flag mast, the development of a new fitment follows that of a whole boat: a sketch is turned into a drawing, which is then turned into a

wooden model and played with before being turned into a 3D specification and sent off to the foundry for casting.

Based on his three hull models, Nino has conceptualised a number of different variations in terms of layout, from the standard automotive-style forward facing seating, to a chauffeur-type central helm position with aft seating around a central table. For exclusive tender applications, the hull dynamics for the five- and seven-metre models allow for the engine to be placed amidships, splitting the conventional sunpad arrangement and enabling unhindered teak-soled access to the stern, with bench seating on either side for use as a shuttle from fabulous yacht to tantalising quayside. In terms of propulsion, Nino is very flexible as to a

variety of different options. "With the engine in the stern and a V-drive you will get better performance and handling, but then jet drives are also very popular, especially for tender models, as they are both safer for watersports and there is no extrusion below the line of the keel — enabling the boat to sit cleanly on the deck."

With all three models and versions either produced or being finished off, the next model to be started is a sleek luxurious take on a Venetian taxi. Based on the nine-metre hull, the cockpit is entirely enclosed in a mixture of darkened glass and polished wood, with a classic interior of leather furnishing and inlaid marble flooring. An ideal escape from the sun and onlookers' eyes, this limousine model will surely be a head turner. ➔



Following a developed business plan, Nino wanted to produce the full range of Monte Carlo Marine-branded models before launching the company commercially. "I want to demonstrate to the customer that we are not one-off builders. We are producing beautiful boats to the same standard every time."

However, demand for his boats has already followed him from Italy, with his first models being snapped up for export to the Mediterranean, US and the domestic market. "I don't wait for orders, I am just producing the hulls to a basic level so that clients can see, touch and feel the boat. Then they can specify the finishing touches. I don't want a brochure, I want people to desire the boat, not an image of it."

While the original Rivas were the fastest wooden boats of their era, Monte Carlo Marine boats

are not slow on the uptake, with all models looking at above 40-knot performance — for the owner that is looking for that fast boat with something a little special. At speed the spearhead-shaped bow rides high out of the water, cutting the plane without the need of a step. At rest a convertible hood retracts behind the seats to allow for a modicum of shade away from nature's ravages, protecting both occupant and interior.

Due to Nino's production organisation, it takes a mere three months for a standard five-metre to be built from scratch — a testament to the skills that have been passed down to the current workforce. But over and beyond the three-model range being worked on, Nino's reputation has brought in international interest in the form of a large wooden catamaran project for a European

client. "It is reaffirming to find a confidence people have in us for our boatbuilding skills that exists beyond our current range. It is a shame we do not have enough space for more." As for the future, Nino is looking forward to the prospects Maritime City will offer in terms of space — something he needs to up his production output. But beyond that and the development of new designs, his interests are smaller scale. "We have built scale models of many of our designs. I have even managed to get some miniature water jet drives, and I would love to have the time to have these prepared and offered to future owners during the build process." For someone who has achieved so much in a mere 12 months in Dubai, it is refreshing to hear ambitions of looking after his clients as well as the company's aims. 🚤



LOA 6.9 metres
Beam 2.35 metres
Draft 0.6 metre
Weight 1.2 tonnes
Top speed up to 40+ knots
Fuel capacity 300 litres

Engine(Duoprop):
 Volvo D3-160/DP-S 160 hp diesel Duoprop sterndrive
 Volvo 4.3/DP 225 hp petrol

Monte Carlo Marine boats are built in Dubai

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