

# CENTRAL EUROPE'S CONTENDER

Poland, known to be the shipyard to some of the world's top yacht brands and commercial vessel builders, is strengthening global confidence in its domestic brands and expertise.

By Andrew Dembina











GLANCING AROUND THE POLAND-MADE CRAFT during the 14th Wind and Water Boat Show in Gdynia at the country's northern tip, both ingenuity and passion for boatbuilding quickly becomes obvious.

The marina is a stone's throw from Gdansk in Pomerelia – one of four regions with a strong reputation for high-quality yards that produce power and sailing yachts, as well as much larger commercial vessels. In Europe, particularly to its east, Poland's skill in the yard has been noted since the 19th century. And in subsequent years, as well as attracting overseas yachting brands and commercial shipping operators to commission hulls, interest in high-end sails, particularly for replacing those on tall ships, also became a niche. All these areas of manufacturing have been booming in the last four decades, notably more so from when the market economy began to develop from the start of the post-communist era from 1990. Some of the largest boat producers in the world have collaborated with Polish yards in recent decades, including Jeanneau, Beneteau and Brunswick Marine. Naturally, the furthering of expertise in private yacht manufacturing has spawned domestic brands of yachts, rigging, marine toys and other boating equipment. There are some 1,000 yacht-related companies across the country, and according to Polboat – the Polish Chamber of Marine Industry and Water Sports – the current projection for Polish yacht output is more than 22,500 per year. In line with that figure is the

**Above: Domestic sailing boats get put through their paces off Gdynia Marina.**

**Bottom: Northman 1200, a 2019 award-winning and much-nominated domestic motor yacht.**

**Previous pages: Wind and Water Boat Show at Gdynia Marina, July 2019.**

impressive fact that Poland is now the second largest producer of motor yachts in the six- to nine-metre-long category, after the US.

So it came as no surprise that during four days of the Wind and Water show this July, visitors attended from across Europe to discover some of the upcoming brands and developments in some of the more established marques. Domestically-made and imported water toys, navigational equipment, accessories and boating clothing all appeared across stands, with 130 exhibitors interacting with 11,000 visitors.

### State support

The burgeoning interest in the Gdynia show, the annual Wind and Water Warsaw Boat Show and in the country's yards and brands reflects proactive Polish government support of the yacht sector, which it views as a key industry. "Assistance is provided in the form of cash subsidies – entrepreneurs receive co-financing for participation in fairs







and the development of innovation as well as promotional support,” explains Wojciech Nowicki, Project Manager at the Polish Investment and Trade Agency (PAIH). “We organise 10 national stands for the yacht sector at international boat shows, including in Düsseldorf, Dubai, Miami, Amsterdam, Sydney and Oslo.” PAIH works closely with Polish Chamber of Yacht Industry and Water Sports – Polboat and there is close cooperation with education and development institutions – particularly at the University of Gdansk. “This is an effective ecosystem helping the yacht industry,” adds Nowicki. “We believe that the strong Polish yachts sector promotes Poland just as Poland promotes yachts.”

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**Above: A high-tech towing tank and hybrid engine experimentation at the impressive Faculty of Ocean Engineering and Ship Technology at Gdansk University of Technology.**

**Bottom: Wojciech Nowicki, Project Manager at the Polish Investment and Trade Agency.**

another six jobs in other industries – such as logistics and parts suppliers. So this sector is important, among other reasons, because it generates more jobs throughout the entire Polish economy.”

Government support for the yachting industry and maritime sector is continually impressive. Arranged to coincide with Gdynia Wind and Water Boat Show 2019 in July, the PAIH – with the support of Polboat – organised a study visit for journalists and select members of the boating industry from both the USA and China. These two countries were picked as they are considered particularly important for the Polish yacht industry: the US is one of the largest recipients of Polish yachts, and the production of many well-known American brands is carried out in Poland. The Chinese market is perceived as a still untapped potential one for Polish yachts. The launch of this annual international invitation began in 2018, when a similar visit took place for guests from the UAE and Russia.

This year’s visit took international visitors around shipyards, the country’s most highly reputed sailmaker and to Gdansk University of Technology’s Faculty of Ocean Engineering and Ship Technology, to show how serious the country is on maintaining its reputation from the ground up, from undergraduate to arguably the country’s strongest yacht brands: Galeon and Sunreef.

The university faculty is very impressive, and its focus on the yacht industry really started in earnest in 2013. Housing 1,200 students, 100 academic staff and 35 technicians, the faculty provides three BSc courses – including Ocean Engineering (in which a specialty option is Yacht Building). Four MSc courses include Ocean Engineering, with a specific profile oriented to small vessels and yachts. Modern facilities include a cutting-edge towing tank, ship technology, equipment, stress-test laboratories, and a propulsion system simulator. The faculty has close cooperation with ship design offices, shipyards, ports, terminals, manufacturers, industrial and government partners, as well as classifications societies – steering students into marine-related careers domestically, with 25 per cent currently entering the small-boat industry.





## Powering forward

“The specialty of our industry is motor boats of six to nine metres in length,” acknowledges Michał Bąk, Secretary General of Polboat. “Currently, the Polish marine industry is the European leader in this the most popular segment – as well as second place in the world in this regard. But the showpieces of the Polish marine industry that we are the most proud of and that gains praise for our industry worldwide are the luxury products: catamarans from Sunreef Yachts, of up to 30 metres [98 feet] in length and the large luxury motor yachts of Galeon, which are up to 24 metres.

“Polish shipyards also produce a lot of yachts intended for recreational sailing on inland water-ways, displacement boats for recreational cruising on rivers, canals and lakes, and houseboats designed to be used as homes and – keeping up with new trends – electric and solar boats.

“Each year, the high quality of the yachts produced in Poland brings them numerous prestigious awards and even more nominations for

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– Grzegorz Tuszyński, Managing Director, Galeon

*Above left: Gdynia Marina, prized in Poland’s yachting circles, is a jumping-off point for the Baltic Sea.*

*Above right: Michał Bąk, Secretary General of Polboat.*

*Bottom left: The Galeon 640, new for 2019; Grzegorz Tuszyński, Managing Director of Galeon.*

*Bottom right: Fresh off the production line at Galeon’s newly expanded yard in Wislinka, near Gdansk.*

Polish companies in competitions organised throughout the world. And in the future, we expect further development of design, technology and research in the field of yacht construction.

“There are more innovations in production in progress – we already use numerous [new-tech] machines, like CNC 5 axis [cutting and milling tools] and we use infusion technology extensively. We are working on improving materials and composites in which yachts are built, using carbon-fibre laminates and Kevlar, more construction of electric motors, lithium-ion batteries and much more.”

## High-end production

Away from the show, a visit to shipyards follows, some mentioned by Bąk and known by many a boater internationally – Galeon, Sunreef Yachts and Conrad Shipyard.

Half an hour or so by road from Gdansk on the Martwa Wisla River, is the recently-expanded second yard of Galeon, in Wislinka. The floor was busy with eight hulls at various stages of construction when







**Above left: Sunreef 80 and 60 sailing catamarans to appear at Cannes in 2019.**  
**Above right: Gdansk's old city, from the flybridge helm of a Sunreef 80 sailing catamaran.**

**Left: A typically immaculate interior aboard the Sunreef 80 Above.**  
**Bottom: Conrad 133 Viatoris – World Superyacht Award 2019 winner.**

I visited. And it was interesting that a large number of female staff are involved in finishing work.

Galeon has leapt way beyond its dinghy and fishing-boat beginnings in 1982. “We’re aiming at boats of 80 feet now,” says its Managing Director Grzegorz Tuszyński, “while our main segment is 40- to 70-foot yachts at the moment. We were fourth most popular in the US in this size in 2018 – we’re hoping to better that this year.”

Tuszyński puts some of Galeon’s success down to innovation – its luxury yachts have become especially known for the rotating sofa on their aft deck and their drop-down balconies. In the works are a 700 Skydeck model and a 400 Fly... and in 2020, something is coming up



but I can’t say what it is,” he teases.

Dealers are growing in Australia and Asia, he commented. Sales in the 30- to 40-foot range went up from 80 units in 2016, to 120 in 2017 and 159 last year. “We’re hoping for 180-plus this year,” the MD said, adding that employee numbers are being increased by 100 to 1,400 this year.

“The China market is a difficult one,” he says. “Ads in magazines are not enough – we need more [interaction] from dealers. We’ve put a lot more effort into Australasia and Asia in the last two years, and we plan to continue to do so.”

Sunreef Yachts, founded in 2007 and located in the downtown old Gdansk Shipyard, will move to a new 50,000-square-metre (538,195-square-foot) facility next year. The brand is all about 100 per cent custom design, based around its sailing and power hull sizes completed by its 700-plus employees. It takes seven to eight months to build a Sunreef 80 sailing catamaran, known for their immaculate interiors – which I trialled with a group on the river from its yard and through Gdansk’s old town. Catamarans are designed and finished in-house – and orders are up: average sales were at 10 to 15 units annually until 2018, when 17 were ordered; this year, 24 new boats are being produced.

Conrad Shipyard, best known for its luxury 20- to 120-metre motor yachts is another quality purveyor – with a large production that counts 25 engineers and designers and 400 skilled floor workers in its staff. Its four-decked 45-metre C133, *Viatoris*, scooped up a 2019 World Superyacht Award in May. The yacht continues the yard’s collaboration with a rota of naval architects and interior designers. In this case two were consulted: the UK’s Reymond Langton on interiors and Diana Yacht Design for naval architecture.

Within the Conrad compound is Sail Service: hand-making sails of all sizes and weights for sailing boats that start from five to six metres long, all the way up to tall ships. The company, founded in 1987, continues the tradition of J. Conrad sail-loft which began in 1945. The Sail Service brand has supplied 67 tall ships from 23 countries, using the highest quality fabrics for production of horizontal, radial and membrane sails. It also takes commissions for custom covers for sails, companionways and biminis and to completely cover motor and sailing boats.





## Back at Gdynia Marina

Parker Poland, initially a boat distributor, got into its own small boat production in the 1990s and helps other brands with nautical engineering for manufacture.

The 33-foot, Parker Monaco 110 is the first of a new series of high-end sporty outboard boats designed in collaboration with Tony Castro Yacht Design in the UK. The spacious cruiser uses the latest outboard designs, a choice of efficiency and offering great value for money – delivering performance and light weight compared to inboard engines. A uniquely designed sunbed covers the outboard motors, to lower the noise levels. Winner of the title “Best for Family” in the Best of Boats Awards during the Boat & Fun Berlin show, the first Monaco off its production line in 2017 was sold to a customer in Hong Kong at the Southampton Boat Show in the UK. “Since then, we’ve had more interest from Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan,” says owner and Managing Director of Parker Poland, Philip Scott. “We were one of the first to bring an outboard to this size of boat, and now so many brands have decided to put out outboard versions.”

The Monaco and other Parker Poland boats will be on display at the 2019 Cannes Yachting Festival.

## Boats born from passion

Parker Poland is the story of a dream being realised for its owner, and so were a few boutique brands that were still in their very early days



**Above:** This year’s Parker Monaco model, a high-end motor-cruiser from one of the country’s established domestic motor yacht brands, Parker, being trialled at Gdynia.

**Bottom left:** D-Boat co-founder Pawel Sierocki.

**Bottom right:** The luxe interior of Musica.71 – a prototype day cruiser with a nod to mid-20th-century Italy.

**Facing page top:** Eagle One, from White Eagle – the prototype of a limited edition with retro touches.

at the Gdynia show. A few standout brands and models were born from out-of-the-box ideas that were brought into the public domain of the boat show. The Diamond 550, a debut 5.5-metre (18-foot) sport boat by D-Boat is a case in point. Co-founder Pawel Sierocki says that he and his partner – both are from non-boating backgrounds – wanted to design something sleek, cool, comfortable and powerful. That was two years ago and they have certainly achieved their wish. Seating up to five for exhilarating day trips, engine options are a 75 to 200-horsepower outboard, though one potential customer has been negotiating for a version with a 300-horsepower fit. “I’m not saying it’s not possible,” says Sierocki, “but it means rebalancing the hull and a lot of re-thinking.” There is a two-person cabin below deck and a swim platform and shower aft.

A real talking point at the show was the Musica.71 from new brand Etiuda. A modern take on vintage Italian motorboats of the 1950s and ’60s, this seven-metre day cruiser, powered by an inboard engine







from 180 to 300 horsepower, can seat up to five. And that's in the plush comfort of its white leather seats and chrome detailing within its maroon hull.

Etiuda's contemporary-looking Tender 740, maxing out with a 110-horsepower inboard engine – but configurable with solar panels and electric engine – is another example of fine detailing in the brand's six- to seven-metre focus of its models. Like other small-boat exhibitors, Etiuda director mentions that yacht-building is just a fraction of what its 30-year old parent company Markos manufactures, initially having gained expertise in boatbuilding for Dutch clients. "It's 25 per cent, maximum of what we produce," Szymon Koseski confirms. "Our company also makes automotive parts, rescue boats and windmills – and we've been planning to gain more markets since 2018."

A smaller-scale passion production (of the one-model variety, like

D-Boat) is White Eagle, founded by two brothers, Artur and Rafał Osipowicz. Their Eagle One, a lusciously tactile prototype of bubinga – a prized wood from Africa – and two types of mahogany is quite an eye-catcher. The 6.3-metre luxury wooden recreational yacht with planing hull and outboard engine (80kW) sleeps two adults and a small child in its cabin. All materials for seating and cabin are customisable – as are wood finishes.

"We were worried that we would make this boat and no one would be interested enough to buy one," says Rafał Osipowicz, "but we are now exhibiting at our second show in Poland and we're getting a lot of strong interest from buyers and dealers."

This was a fairly off-heard comment at the Gdynia show from a number of new Polish producers who sounded excited to take the plunge into the world of yacht building.

## SAILORS, PUSHING THEIR LIMITS

The four days of the boat show in Gdynia hosted two remarkable Polish sailors: one was Captain Joanna Pajkowska – the first Polish female sailor to singlehandedly complete an unassisted non-stop circumnavigation of the globe. That was 29,000 nautical miles in all, around the three famous capes: Good Hope, Leeuwin and Horn in just 216 days in her 12-metre (39-foot) aluminium hull – at the age of 60. This was her third attempt to circumnavigate without stopping, she told an audience at the show – a decade after her last try was scuppered by a heavy storm that forced her to take shelter in South Africa. The successful trip that ended this April included the use of an onboard router which played up at times, forcing her to go old-school and make calculated assessments of coordinates and incoming weather by eye.



**The fearless Polish sailor Joanna Pajkowska (left) completed her third solo circumnavigation of the globe in April.**

Another around-the-world sailor in-waiting was Rafał Moszczyński – he hopes to do a solo circumnavigation within 150 days. His boat is a 9.5-metre racing hull that he has been building himself on land next to his house – he used the last one he had built himself to cross the Atlantic solo.



**Rafał Moszczyński (right), prepares for his first solo circumnavigation.**