

# MADE IN POLAND FOR THE WORLD

*Renowned as the home of luxury yacht leaders Sunreef and Galeon, Poland is also home to other thriving boatyards and production facilities for dozens of famous foreign brands, building 23,000 boats a year and exporting 95 per cent of them. The country is even the world's second-largest producer of motorboats up to 36ft, yet its boating industry leaders are keen for continued growth across all sectors.*

WORDS JOHN HIGGINSON





*Tennis legend Rafa Nadal with Sunreef founder Francis Lapp*

**S**unreef Yachts has been helping raise the international profile of Polish yacht building since Frenchman Francis Lapp founded the luxury catamaran builder in 2002 in the historic Gdansk Shipyard, on the country's north coast.

The Central European country's profile as a major player in the yachting world is now taking another leap after Rafa Nadal was announced as a future owner of the new 80 Sunreef Power.

Nadal – one of tennis's all-time greats, with 18 Grand Slam titles – is set to see model's world premiere at this year's Cannes Yachting Festival,

although his customised version, hull number three, is due for delivery in 2020.

"As someone from an island, the sea is part of our lives and it's not a secret that I love the sea," said the Spaniard, who has previously

visited and chartered Sunreef catamarans.

"When I'm at home in Mallorca, I try to go out and find that time where I can just enjoy my time on a boat. I am very happy to be on board with the Sunreef Yachts family and would like to thank Francis Lapp for making this possible."

Lapp's company has been on a roll in the past year and has already sold over a dozen units of its 80 sailing catamaran, which only made its debut at Cannes last year. From producing about 10-14 units a year, Sunreef completed 17 in 2018 and this year expects to produce about 24, a company record.

"It has been a spectacular year for us," says PR and Marketing Director Karolina Paszkiewicz.

Sunreef now has over 720 employees, with about 500 from Poland and over 200 from Ukraine, a remarkable head count for a company that customises the layout and interior of every yacht.

Yet Sunreef's super-luxurious catamarans are a stark contrast to the historic but decaying brick-walled sheds in which they've been built for the past 17 years. The company is now in a transition to a nearby four-hectare (40,000sqm) facility, with the move from Gdansk Shipyard set to be complete by 2020.

## LECH WALESA: FROM SHIPYARD ELECTRICIAN TO PRESIDENT

Lech Walesa, the 1983 Noble Peace Prize winner and former President of Poland, has an unusual connection to Sunreef in that he also worked at the Gdansk Shipyard, although in a very different era.

Born on September 29, 1943, Walesa started work as an electrician at the then Lenin Shipyard from 1967 and became noted as a trade-union activist, for which he was persecuted by Communist authorities, placed under surveillance and arrested several times.

In 1970, following an increase in food prices, he helped organise protests at the shipyard, which were joined by protests at other yards including in neighbouring Gdynia and resulted in dozens of protesters being killed.

Walesa was fired from his job in 1976 for anti-government activities, but famously returned to the shipyard in 1980 to take control of new – and peaceful – protests following price increases and the dismissal of female crane operator Anna Walentynowicz.

He was instrumental in political negotiations that led to the ground-breaking Gdansk Agreement between striking workers and the Government, then co-founded the Solidarity trade-

union movement.

After martial law was imposed in Poland and Solidarity was outlawed, Walesa was again arrested. Released from custody, he continued his activism and was prominent in the establishment of the 1989 Round Table Agreement that led to semi-free parliamentary elections.

Despite being leader of the Solidarity movement, Walesa wasn't allowed on the ballot, but on June 4, 1989 – following the Tiananmen Square protests in China – Solidarity representative Tadeusz Mazowiecki was elected as the first non-communist Prime Minister for 40 years, which began not only the end of communism in Poland but started a domino effect across Europe.

In the Polish general election of 1990, Walesa successfully ran for the newly re-established office of President of Poland and led the country until 1995.



## POLISH BOATING INDUSTRY

1,000 related companies • 45,000 people employed  
23,000 boats per year • 95% of production exported

## BOATING IN POLAND

440km of coastline • 7,000 lakes • 631 marinas

## VALUE OF BOAT EXPORTS (2017)

Norway €69.9m • France €55.1m • USA €51.5m  
Netherlands €49.4m • Germany €48.9m

## GDANSK BECOMES BOATING HUB

The enormous shipyard is situated on the side of the Martwa Wisla river and on Ostrow Island, and established Gdansk as one of northern Europe's leading shipbuilding cities.

It was also the site of iconic protests in 1980 led by former shipyard electrician Lech Walesa that led to the foundation of the Solidarity movement and eventually the end of communist rule (*see separate box for more details*). In the mid-2000s, Jean-Michel Jarre and then Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour played big concerts here in tribute to the Solidarity movement.

Gdansk Shipyard was founded as a state-owned company in 1945 on the sites of former German shipyards considerably damaged in the Second World War, while other large-scale shipyards emerged in neighbouring Gdynia, as well as Szczecin to the west.

Poland also developed as a boatbuilding nation after the Soviet leadership chose it to produce yachts, among other products, for all countries from the Eastern Bloc. Even today, many yachts cruising the waters of the former Soviet states – Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia – are labelled as 'Made in Poland'.

In the 1980s, yachts built in Poland started to be exported, primarily to northern and western Europe, and North America. However, with the political changes following the end of communism,



*Sailing boats by prolific Polish builder Delphia Yachts, which was acquired by the Beneteau Group late last year and is now focusing on motor boats*

many of the biggest yacht-building companies went bankrupt and new privately owned companies emerged.

## BOAT FACTORY OF THE WORLD

Poland became home to production facilities for many foreign brands, including several from yachting's two biggest conglomerates – France's Beneteau Group and USA's Brunswick Group.

In 1992, Jeanneau was among the first foreign companies to build boats in Poland. Today the Beneteau Group has a 16-hectare (160,000sqm) facility in Ostroda, an hour's drive southeast of Gdansk, that employs about 900 people and builds Beneteau and Jeanneau boats, including the Merry Fisher 895 Marlin that features in this issue's *Islands & Coasts*.

Last year, Beneteau Group added a second facility in Poland – and another brand – when it bought Delphia Yachts, one of the country's biggest yacht builders and now focused on motor boats at its facility in Olecko in the northeast of this country of 38 million people.

*Sunreef, founded in Gdansk in 2002, displays its cats in the Old Town for the Pomorskie Rendez-Vous; the Sunreef 80 (facing page, top) has sold over a dozen units*







*A Galeon 650 Fly takes pride of place in this year's Wind and Water show in Gdynia; Galeon's riverside facility (below) has a marina and is the larger of its two production sites*

Brunswick brands like Sea Ray, Bayliner and Quicksilver are also built in Poland, while other foreign companies that have boats built in the country include Hanse from western neighbour Germany, Denmark's X-Yachts, Finland's Axopar, and Norway's Windy and Askeladden.

The vast majority of yachts built in Poland, including by local brands, are exported and overall production has ramped up dramatically in recent years. According to Polboat (Polish Chamber of Marine Industry and Water Sports), the value of the country's exported boats doubled from 2013 to 2017, rising from €241m to €484m.

Polboat also announced that the country's annual production recently returned to its pre-2008 financial crisis high and has since bettered it, with 23,000 boats in a year and turnover increasing by 15 per cent. About 95 per cent of the boats are exported, primarily to Norway, France, USA, Netherlands and Germany.

Furthermore, Polboat states that Poland is Europe's leading producer of motorboats with outboard engines from 6-11m (20-36ft), while globally it's second only to the USA.

"Poland produces a lot of boats for local brands and also a huge number for foreign brands. This shows we've built trust and that this

is one of the best countries to produce boats and invest in," says Sebastian Nietupski, President of Polboat.

"This is now one of the best times ever in Poland as we have benefited from European grants for new projects and investments, so many of our boatyards have brand-new machinery and the latest technology. This is a really strong asset.

"But we don't just want to produce or follow. We want to be leaders, to be the best. We want Poland to be known for the best fuel-economy solutions or the most innovative designs. In fact, because of brands like Galeon, foreign shipyards are now copying our design ideas."

#### GALEON MOTORS AHEAD

There's a healthy representation of local brands among the massive number of Polish-built boats exported around the world, with Galeon leading the local charge and still growing fast, globally and particularly in the US.

Established in 1982 in the communist era, Galeon now has 1,400 staff working on 30-49ft models in its inland site in Straszyn and 50-78ft yachts at its bigger site, with marina, along the Martwa Wisla river.



From building about 80 boats in 2016, its units increased to 120 the following year and 150 in 2018, even though the company is slowing down production of its 30-40ft models.

Across the world, Galeon has become renowned for innovations like the rotating cockpit sofa and 'Beach Mode' drop-down sides, features first incorporated on the Tony Castro-designed 500 Fly unveiled at Cannes in 2015. Such features have since been rolled out on other models including the 460 and 640.

The brand's huge growth in the US has followed its sales partnership from 2016 with MarineMax, the world's largest yacht retailer, while other dealers around the world include Hong Kong-headquartered Asiamarine and Alexander Marine Australia.

"Our innovations have brought us a lot of success around the world in the past few years, although we've only been really active in the US in the last three," said Grzegorz 'Greg' Tuszynski, Galeon's Managing Director.

"Last year we were already fourth in sales among 40-70ft motor yachts in the US, making us the top European or non-American brand. We expect this ranking to increase in 2019 and are hopeful of eventually becoming No. 1, while also growing in Europe, Asia and Australia."

#### CONRAD BRINGS SUPERYACHT ACCLAIM

Poland enjoyed further acclaim in May when the Conrad 133' Viatoris, built in Gdansk, was honoured at the World Superyacht Awards in London, winning Best Displacement Motor Yacht 300-499GT – 30-47.9m.

Conrad Shipyard has generally been a custom-boat builder and has in the region of just 80 full-time staff, but can also draw on the resources of its parent company, Marine Projects, which has about 400 people working in its waterfront site on the Martwa Wisla.

With a name inspired by Heart of Darkness author Joseph Conrad

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*Sebastian Nietupski,  
President, Polboat*



*Conrad's 133ft Viatoris, pictured in the heart of Gdansk's Old Town, was a winner at the 2019 World Superyacht Awards, another success for Polish yacht building*







Parker's flagship Monaco 110 (top row), which had an early order from Hong Kong, and the Northman 1200 are exhibiting at this year's Cannes Yachting Festival

**“Parker was the first in Europe to launch a boat of this size with outboards, but I said ‘watch this space’. Look what’s happened in the last two years.”**

*Philip Scott, Managing Director, Parker*



Philip Scott (left), Managing Director of Parker Poland, moved to Poland in 1972

(born Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski), Conrad was established in 2003 and has worked on a wide variety of motor yachts, classic tugboats and large sailing yachts, including tall ships such as the 67m *Le Quy Don* for the Vietnamese navy.

However, when the 40m *Viatoris*, designed by Reymond Langton for a Russian owner, was shown at both Cannes and the Monaco Yacht Show last year, it enabled Conrad's build quality to be compared with the most renowned superyacht builders.

“Presenting *Viatoris* at Cannes and Monaco put us in a completely new market. *Viatoris* showed we can be compared with superyachts from the Netherlands, for example, and for a good price,” says Michael Michalczewski, Conrad's Marketing and Sales Director.

“Also, as it was more of a commercially viable project, we can now go down the route of offering semi-custom builds, using the Conrad 133's naval architecture.”

Because of its rich shipbuilding history, Poland is well known for its body work, and local shipyards often construct the hulls or superstructures for globally renowned superyacht builders, particularly from Germany and the Netherlands.

Dutch conglomerate Damen Group, the parent company of renowned superyacht builder Amels, has a marine-components facility in Gdansk and its own shipyards in Gdynia and also Kozle in the south, west of Krakow.

In recent years, Damen Shipyards Gdynia built the 140-tonne aluminium superstructure for the 83m *Here Comes The Sun*, Amels' largest yacht to date.

**POLISH BRANDS SHINE IN GDYNIA**

Gdynia is just 20km along the coast from Gdansk, while in-between is the resort city of Sopot, the three forming the Tri-City area.



The sleek Diamond 550 was a late addition to this year's Monaco Yacht Show, a great boost for D-Boat and CEO Szymon Zielinski, who's also a DJ

Gdynia has a population of about 250,000, but in contrast to Gdansk, it's a young city, only achieving city status in the 1920s following targeted development after the First World War.

This summer, Gdynia was in the spotlight when it hosted over 400 sailors from 66 nations in the Youth Sailing World Championships, with races held just a few hundred metres from locals playing volleyball and sunbathing on the huge beach in the city centre.

During the same week, Marina Gdynia, beside the beach, was hosting the 14th Wind and Water on-water show. The Gdynia event features in-water and on-land displays, in contrast to the indoor exhibitions in the capital of Warsaw early in the year and Katowice in October.

This year's Gdynia show event attracted 11,000 visitors over the four days, according to organisers, with Galeon displaying a strong line-up including a 650 Skydeck finished in a dramatic shade of blue.

Parker, another established Polish builder, showed its Tony Castro-designed Monaco 110, the company's flagship. The 26-footer won the Best for Family category at last year's Best of Boats Awards in Berlin, was named 2019 Yacht of the Year in Poland and is on display at Cannes this year.

Philip Scott, Managing Director of Parker Poland, revealed that the first unit of the Monaco was sold to a Hong Kong owner two years ago at the Southampton International Boat Show, while admitting the new model generally had some pushback from clients due to its outboard engines.

“People were like, we love the boat, but why outboards? We were the first in Europe to launch a boat of this size with outboards, but I said ‘watch this space’. Look what’s happened in the last two years. Just about every big player has introduced an outboard boat.”

Scott moved to Poland back in 1972 to work for Parker in another line of business. The company entered the leisure boat business in the mid-1980s as the distributor for Mercury Marine, a position it still holds today and for good reason, considering the amount of the brand's

engines seen on boats in the Gdynia show. “Then, as the Wall came down and the system changed, we started building boats,” Scott says.

Initially focused on RIBs, Parker also produces motor boats from 20-37ft and has 420 staff at its Model Art boatyard, which also produces boats for Nimbus, Windy and Askeladden.

Also on display was the Northman 1200, which has moved into double figures for sales since its launch last year and is another of this year's Cannes line-up. Designed for economical cruising, the 40ft Category B boat has a displacement hull and a single 57hp Yanmar as standard, but can fit two 150hp outboard engines or 110hp inboards.

The standard layout features three nicely finished double cabins, while a large swim platform is available (if inboards are used). Interestingly, the flybridge steps are located forward, while the fly itself features large sunpads, low handrails and a simple backrest; a flybridge version with a second helm station is also available.

Based in the Masurian Lake District in the northeast, two hours' drive from Gdansk, Northman has over 100 staff and produces about 200 boats a year, mainly the Maxus line of sailing yachts up to 33ft, with a 34-footer due to be launched in 2020.

**THE NEW ROMANTICS**

The Gdynia event also showcased several stylish day cruisers built by enthusiasts with a passion for classic design and primarily for use in lakes, which are common playgrounds in Poland and many countries in the region.

D-Boat is a young company, yet its striking 37-knot Diamond 550 is part of this year's Monaco Yacht Show, with nine units sold in Europe – including three in Poland – since the prototype was unveiled at Boot Dusseldorf in 2017. The 6m boat has a forward cabin, seating for five, a smooth foredeck suitable for sunbathing, swim ladder, hand-held shower and optional fridge.

Brothers Artur and Rafal Osipowicz founded White Eagle in 2015 and exhibited their 6.3m wooden Eagle One at this year's Wind and Water show in Gdynia







*Szymon Koseski (far right) says Etiuda's brand-new Musica 71 is inspired by classic Italian boats of the 1950s and 1960s*

It's easy to drive, performs well and designed for fun, with a powerful Fusion Apollo sound system, which is no surprise as CEO Szymon Zielinski, 28, is also a DJ. D-Boat designs and assembles the boats in Radzymin, near Warsaw, and outsources production of the 5.5m-long, 2.3m-beam fibreglass hull.

"We love Frauscher and Riva designs, and even Porsche, but most people don't have that money, so we wanted to create a similar type of boat but more affordable," said Zielinski, who co-founded the company when he was 26. "It's easy to use and only one tonne, so people can even put it on a trailer and take it out for the weekend."

The Category C boat has Simrad navigation and instruments and is offered with either a single 115hp or 200hp Mercury engine at €65,000 or €73,000 respectively, while colours, layout and materials can be customised. D-Boat also offers a standard bimini as an option or a more expensive system with carbon-fibre poles.

White Eagle, founded by brothers Artur and Rafal Osipowicz, exhibited the first hull of its Eagle One, an attractive 6.3m wooden boat that, like the Diamond 550, has two bucket seats and an aft bench for three. It was launched in late 2017, yet recent sea trials showed it still wasn't the finished product, with work to be done on performance-related aspects.

However, it's another example of the pioneering spirit among young Poles. Both brothers are engineers and businessmen, and decided in 2015 to set up a boatyard in Lodz, west of Warsaw. The company also produces the Zephir 750 houseboat, but believes in the export potential of Eagle One, which is fitted with a single 80hp Mercury and sells for €120,000.

"We view it as a lake boat in Scandinavia, Germany, Austria or France," Rafal said. "This boat gets a lot of attention when you drive in and out of marinas, or on the water, more than some US\$2 million boats."

On land, Etiuda Yachts displayed its brand-new Musica 71, a red-hulled 7m day cruiser inspired by Italian boats of the 1950s and 1960s, although without a cabin. The boat was still in the testing stage and wasn't ready to be shown in the water.

With an inboard engine and seating for five, the Musica marks a big design departure for parent company Markos, which actually has 700 staff working across other businesses including composites, automotive parts and rescue boats. The company has been producing leisure boats for the past 17 years, primarily for the Netherlands and Germany, but none that look like Musica.

"This is a retro style, our interpretation of those beautiful Italian boats, and is the first model of a new line," said Etiuda's Szymon

Koseski. "This is not our core business, but we do the design and production mainly for pleasure. Yes, it's also business, but not calculated."

It's another example of the passion and entrepreneurial spirit that has enabled Poland to establish itself as a world leader in the production of small motor boats.

Yet the country is much more, with local brands winning over the US market in mid-sized motor yachts, excelling in luxury catamarans and producing award-winning superyachts. And even the foreign brands are starting to tell the story of their Polish production.

"Many years ago, when foreign brands started building in Poland, they would never say 'this was made in Poland' when they talked about their boats at shows," says Polboat's Nietupski. "Nowadays, they are proud and the first thing they say is, 'this was made in Poland'."

#### WEBSITES

[www.polboat.eu](http://www.polboat.eu)

[www.sunreef-yachts.com](http://www.sunreef-yachts.com)

[www.galeon.pl](http://www.galeon.pl)

[www.conradshipyard.com](http://www.conradshipyard.com)

[www.parkerpoland.eu](http://www.parkerpoland.eu)

[www.northman.pl](http://www.northman.pl)

[www.d-boats.com](http://www.d-boats.com)

[www.whiteeagle.vip](http://www.whiteeagle.vip)

[www.markos.pl](http://www.markos.pl)

*Polish builder Cobrey shows its new flagship 50 Fly before its Cannes debut*

