



Covid-19 fails to blow niche tender and toys sectors off course

The tender market is one of the most diverse and innovative of all boating sectors. *IBI* spotlights some of the latest trends and dips into the similarly dynamic world of superyacht toys

WORDS: ED SLACK

YOU ONLY HAVE to glance at the brokerage ads for 10-year plus old superyachts to see how the market for tenders has evolved in recent years. The once humble ship to shore vessel has spawned one of the most dynamic markets in the leisure marine business as motherships get bigger and owners get increasingly adventurous and forensic with what they want and need to complement their leisure experience. Key trends shaping the tender landscape today include the rise in electric propulsion; the desire among owners of larger superyachts over 40m of having numerous, specialist craft rather than a solitary workhorse; increased customisation; and the often overlooked, but most critical component – value.

“Superyacht owners and crews seem better informed and well-researched,” says Dave Cockwell at UK tender specialist Cockwells. “They are coming to us with increasingly specific requests.

Some are looking for simple, low-tech working boats whilst others are looking for more automation, but whatever the specification, tenders must seamlessly mirror the aesthetics of the mothership.”

Superyacht tenders are also getting bigger and faster, he says, with more and more intricate customisations required. “Owners and crews seem to have a much clearer idea about what they want to use their boats for and with the increasing size of motherships, there is more flexibility for them to house multiple crafts for differing purposes.” The yard is currently working on a number of projects, including high-speed multihulls, 13m-high comfort limousine tenders, as well as its new semi-custom beach lander and Air-Sport 7.0.

Customisation, or rather, innovation is king for Dutch tender and motoryacht specialist Steeler. It’s currently working directly with a superyacht owner on a new project that encapsulates a multitude of

SACS’ 15m Strider was launched this spring

design challenges, such as an innovative folding roof with rollable canvas, dropping windows and flip-out beach ladder.

“This is what Steeler owners are all about,” says director Hans Webbink. “They want to build a boat their way. For them, the purchase of a yacht or tender is not an impulse, but the realisation of a project that they have spent themselves an awful lot of time on and they know what they want.

“Up to now, we have been able to deliver 101 boats and we are proud of a 100% customer loyalty score. No client has left us to date for another yard. They keep their Steeler, order a new one... they don’t leave the Steeler nest.”

Its new line – the custom-built Bronson 50 – is also selling well, says Webbink, with one boat on order for St Tropez, another destined for Ibiza, and a third on its way to Mexico.

MARKET TRENDS

“Bow ramps, retractable convertible tenders and the rise of the catamaran landing craft are the number one owner requested tenders on large builds,” says Josh Richardson, founder of UK firm Superyacht Toys and Tenders (SYTT). He also identifies ‘value’ superyacht tenders as a big growth area. “We are also finding that designated boats fit for purpose are required. Large yachts are not looking for boats built to compromise and do multiple jobs but more able to do their job well.” He cites Nautique tenders that are designed to kick up a good wakesurf wave, catamaran tenders doing 30 knots in a 2.5m swell and limo tenders being in fully enclosed comfort. “One boat cannot tick all these boxes. Anything that foils is a goer,” he adds.

Richardson’s colleague, Richard Booth, SYTT’s senior sales and project manager, says the major trend at the moment revolves around beach landing. “There is a huge focus on the crew being able to use a tender to quickly and easily set the beach up and then utilise that same tender for the transport of guests to the beach as well. Beach landers come in many different forms from a small RIB with a fold-out step, to a full custom catamaran tender with hydraulic bow ramp even now amphibious tenders. With almost every enquiry we’re asked to include some form of beach landing capability. As the yachts



New Italian brand Nerea unveils its tender vision

ITALY'S NEREA YACHT brand was introduced to the market at the Düsseldorf boat show in January 2019. The NY24 is the first boat moulded and built in the Nerea Yacht facilities in Fano. Born as a day cruiser, it's also showing its potential as a top-end tender for superyachts, thanks to a construction height that has been kept deliberately low in order to easily enter a motoryacht garage. In the course of the year the NY24 Limo has also been developed, with a specific tender use layout: a real walkaround that is presented without a forward bridge or cabin.

The first NY24 was bought by the owner of a large sailing yacht who uses the boat for wakeboarding and ship-to-shore excursions to shallow bays and favourite lunching spots.

life after Covid-19 and claims to have registered strong client interest since June.

UK builder Williams Jet Tenders offers a full tender range from its lightweight MiniJet series to its top-end EvoJet line for boats from 38ft up to 131ft-plus respectively. A significant factor in tender requirements remains height and length flexibility as even on the largest superyacht garage space can be tight and owners look to maximise the size of their tender. "We can reduce the length thanks to automatic tube inflators fitted onboard (through a small compressor in the engine bay) and on the EvoJet we have a folding carbon fibre hardtop to bring the overall height to just 1.25m," explains sales director Mat Hornsby. "The yards are also requesting the tenders to be truly multi-function, stylish enough to be a guest tender but functional enough to be suitable for crew. This is especially true as customers of 40m-50m yachts are expecting much more from the single tender they have on board – space is at a premium."

Williams' jet drive system allows the manufacturer to achieve a very small envelope size for any given tender length. "We don't have anything hanging off the stern or under the hull, meaning we could fit into very tight yacht garages. The drive for ever-tighter yacht garages is relentless, so producing the biggest tender whilst

taking up the least space onboard is key to the yacht/tender relationship. The added benefit of jet is the safety element. With no exposed prop in the water and the inherent manoeuvrability jets benefit from, you can turn in your own length which comes in very handy when operating very close to your multi-million pound yacht." Building more than 900 boats a year has also allowed Williams to refine its production processes, increasing its quality and so cutting warranty issues. It's resulted in a win-win when it comes to securing repeat business from many of the top yards. Williams is seeing an increase in business, particularly through Italian yards such as Ferretti, Sanlorenzo and Benetti. It also boasts an extensive service and dealer network.

For the bigger superyachts (over 40m), where space on deck is not such a premium, Hornsby concurs that the drive has been increasingly for a variety of specialist craft for specific purposes, but for the sub-40m owners are after a "Swiss Army knife craft", he says. "The EvoJet moves more into the specialised tender territory. However, we saw a gap in the market for a short lead time, customisable option that didn't cost the earth," he says.

Making a strategic move in the sector is Highfield, which has seen its vessels being used as crew tenders on superyachts for a number of years but is now targeting the 'guest' tender market with its new Sport Range. "We have taken a huge amount of time and added some Italian flair to improve the interior of the entire Sport Range so that we can now offer a credible 'guest' experience," explains Highfield's European brand manager, Steve Harrison. That means more luxurious diamond cut upholstery, sleeker console and seating options, as well as shower, bathing platforms and EVA teak decking being fitted as standard throughout. "The ergonomics have been improved and all the luxuries expected, such as sun deck, cup holders, tables have been given extra thought," he says. "The smaller SP models have been designed as 'low profile' boats that will suit tender garages and stern platforms, whilst the Flagship 800 is based on the same hull used as rescue vessels in various locations. Of course the fit and finish has been improved but this has been a continual process for Highfield. We put the same effort into the finishing quality of all of our boats, not just the

get bigger the storage capabilities are growing and in turn we are seeing more owners opting to carry a landing craft/utility tender dedicated to this purpose."

Another major growth area is custom tenders. "They have always been there but now more than ever it is becoming the expectation to have one if not a pair of custom guest tenders on board, unique to that yacht, designed and styled to the owners exact taste. These are usually some form of sports open tender and then a fully closed luxury limousine tender."

Chase tenders have also really taken off in the last year or so, with owners not wanting to compromise with space on board the yacht and wanting to maximise the use of a single tender. "The best way to do this is to operate with a standalone chase tender and these can range from a production 10m RIB all the way up to a custom 50ft open tender or a 60-70ft+ sports cruiser," says Booth. "This enables the owners to get all the luxuries, comfort and space they expect on their tender and it helps the crew to offer the guests the best possible experience. A chase tender allows them to go further afield and carry more kit and, more importantly, more toys!"

Ride and comfort are also key. The stability and performance of Maxi RIBs such as from Italian builder SACS, make them a favoured choice for some SY owners, with the RIB's tubes playing an active role in both static and dynamic cruising. A wide variety of customisation and equipment options, coupled with expansive decks, also add to the appeal. SACS builds over 50 units a year over 10m and says the impact of Covid-19 has been limited. "We've seen no cancellations, only in just a couple of cases with buyers deciding to postpone the delivery to the following autumn or spring 2021. Our forecast for 2020 will see still a growth of revenues vs 2019 that was the best year ever in SACS' history."

SACS expanded its Strider range with the launch of its new 15m this spring, while two more models are expected to join its Rebel line later this year, including an outboard version of the Rebel 47 that will feature a new dedicated hull, a different deck layout a new style of hardtop. There are also plans to launch a bigger Rebel model in the 55ft range that will hit the water before the end of 2020.

The builder remains positive for

Sport Range.” A key feature is Highfield’s aluminium hull and structure that makes it lighter, easier to maintain and more rugged than GRP and allows for built-in lifting points.

“The new SP range will run from a low profile 3m runabout up to an 8m, high speed, chase RIB. For me, we will appeal to the owner of a 40-footer all the way up to large Expedition yachts. We come back to our core. Lightweight recyclable hulls, easy to maintain, excellent sea-keeping, lifting points integrated, a global service and repair network.”

“Our years in the industry have taught us many things about what our clients look for,” says AB Inflatables’ marketing manager Jaime Cristancho, “but there are two things that we have found to be the most important: quality and innovation.” AB Inflatables claims to be the only boat manufacturer in the world today that produces all of its aluminium and GRP boats and jet tenders from scratch in its own 10,000m² facility.

“We build every piece and part that goes into making our tenders – from beginning to end,” says Cristancho. “This includes everything from the moulds to the hulls, the inflatables tubes, and the upholstery, among others. This ensures we maintain our desired levels of quality across all steps of the manufacturing process.”

“Generally speaking, the demand on the yacht and superyacht markets has been stable across regions and is forecasted to increase. In terms of Superyacht segments, our Nautilus and Oceanus lines, specifically in the 4.5m-8.5m range, are showing an increase in demand (most likely due to versatility, comfort and the

unique design of these lines. In our Jet Tender category, all of our ABJETs have been very well received, specifically our 4.3m jet tender has been our most popular. On the aluminium segment, the Alumina from 4.5m-5.5m and the Profile XHD line in 6.5m and 7.3m are the preferred ones.” AB Inflatables recently added the Nautilus 17 DLX to its range and an Abjet 465 XP will be launched later this year.

VERSATILITY

Axopar doesn’t market its boats as tenders, but has seen a surge in demand from big boat owners who like the versatility and relative low price point of its Axopar 28 and Axopar 37. According to Jan-Erik Viitala, its 28-footer is finding favour particularly among owners of 80ft-90ft yachts in the crowded waters off the Balearics, where finding a mooring for a big boat in high season can be a challenge. The Axopar’s cabin boat comforts – refrigerator, toilet, plenty of seating sheltered from the weather – mean big boat owners can moor up further offshore and transport their guests for longer distances to favourite restaurants and nightspots. A sleeping berth option also potentially allows superyachts to carry an extra member of crew if desired, while avoiding any potential classification issues.

The competitive pricing of an Axopar has appeal too. For owners of small superyachts, Viitala says buyers are trading their Axopars annually, getting the benefits of upgraded engine and electronics kits, for only a modest increase in cost against the sale of a year old model. Despite the increasing popularity of the Axopars being used as tenders, the builder is sticking to its business model and resisting the urge to enter the market

formally, leaving any customisation work to be carried out by its specialist dealers.

TECHNOLOGY

As in all sectors, innovation plays a fundamental part, and increasingly it comes with an ecological edge. Holland-based builder DutchCraft, sister company to Zeelander Yachts, launched its new DC25 fully electric carbonfibre tender at the Düsseldorf boat show earlier this year, answering a growing customer trend for electric propulsion. “We’ve got a lot of interest. Low noise is important; so is low maintenance and multipurpose use. The DC25 ticks all those boxes,” says marketing manager Rene Markus.

DutchCraft developed a low and compact electric drive train, freeing up significant deck space that it optimised with a modular deck system to support a wide variety of uses – from tender to dive boat, sport fisher, toy carrier and family cruiser. The maximum battery capacity is 134kWh, while the continuous power is 100kWh. DutchCraft says the boat is able to cruise fast at 32kt for up to 75 minutes, more than enough to deliver guests from a superyacht to the shore and back several times, or even to go waterskiing. At the same time, it can cruise for up to six hours at 6kt, for a day trip with no fumes or noise.

A limousine version of the DC25, which will offer guests added protection from the elements, is currently in development.

Domani Yachts, which began life three years ago selling its S30 daysailer, hit upon its E Boat concept a year and a half ago following a chance encounter between Domani’s founder Michael Goddaert and Jaap de Jonge, a former employee of Royal Huisman and Damen shipyards. De Jonge had had an idea for an electric boat and was looking for a boatbuilder to get it off the ground. Domani had been doing well with its sport day sailor – it sold two boats in year one and six in year two (2019), but was looking for a way of broadening out from the small sailboat sector. “There’s a real trend for electric. The brokers are telling us there’s competition between the superyachts to be the most eco-friendly. They also have DC power on board which is needed for fast charging – there are also safety plusses as they don’t want gas/petrol onboard.” The concept was launched at Düsseldorf in January and the first boat, featuring a direct driven axial ➡



Photo: Andrew Wright Photography

Cockwells’ 9.5m limousine tender. The builder says it received several enquiries during lockdown

SUPERYACHT TOYS:

Just when you thought you had everything



Inflatable docks are a real growth trend

TWO MAIN SECTORS are driving development in the superyacht ‘toy’ sector – electric products and custom products, according to Mark Peak, head of the Toy Department at Superyacht Tenders & Toys (SYTT). “Electric technology has improved massively over the past few years and is now capable of providing near similar performance. This eliminates any issues with complex maintenance and carrying petrol onboard,” Peak explains. “With regards to custom items we are seeing huge growth in custom jetskis along with slides, docks, Seabobs, paddleboards and much more. If we can achieve the same high-quality finish and image of the mothership, this is often favoured. Also having all items ‘on brand’ is a real asset to both private and charter yachts,” he says.

“Inflatable docks and ‘SuperDocks’ are incredibly popular and are considered the best value retail estate in yachting,” adds SYTT’s founder and director Josh Richardson.

Founded just four years ago and employing five people, today SYTT has 15 full-time employees, giving perhaps an indication of just how the sector has ballooned in recent years. As for Covid-19, initially Peak says there was a “blip” as clients, suppliers and the SYTT team focussed on their safety, family and friends. “With the industry being so well setup to work remotely, things resumed to a degree of normality within a matter of days once everyone had settled. Supply issues have been a challenge with various factories hit hard by government lockdowns and logistics becoming a key factor. Luckily we are very well setup with a broad array of manufacturers, so there has always been many alternative options available to supply if we did encounter any issues.”

When it comes to toys onboard, the crew often has a significant say, and it’s the charter sector that is driving trends as boats scramble to have the latest must-haves onboard as a key selling point for guests. “Seabobs were the rage a few years ago,” says Nina Anderson, director and co-founder of Nautibuoy Marine, “but electric foiling surfboards are hot right now. Charter boats see them as a way of staying ahead of the competition. The more toys on board the better.” Sea pools – inflatable rings that hand off the stern and stop jellyfish – have recently joined the list of must-haves.

“Climbing walls and slides are popular with owners, less so with the crew,” admits Nautibuoy’s Anderson. “They weigh 200 kilos and present big storage issues onboard. They also take a long time to put up and to pack away, which is ok if you’re at anchorage for an extended period, but they take all the crew to set up. Even the chef has to down tools to help! You also need to have a crane on board. Then two hours later the owner wants to change location, so it can be a big hassle.”

Nautibuoy was founded back in 2012 off the back of an idea that Anderson’s partner Clay had had while the couple were working as crew on a superyacht – the need for some sort of inflatable platform to help when cleaning the side of the hull. Two years later the couple left the yacht and spent another two years turning their dream into a reality – to create a multipurpose platform with a range of accessories. “The platform becomes a beach club, with loungers, getting you closer to the water. In the bigger boats owners often complain about being disconnected from the water, we reconnect them.” she explains. “It’s also a place to change batteries on the foils etc – being at water level it’s a lot easier than hauling them out, up the transom and onto the deck. It’s easier for guests to use and less intimidating than a large transom.” It also acts as a bumper too for the myriad of toys – and a convenient place to store them. The company recently developed its C-Dock, a specially designed place to park Seabobs and other water scooters, complementing its jetski docking solutions. Neat, innovative ways of storing the growing array of superyacht toys is becoming a niche product sector of its own, it seems.

flux engine with a power output of 50kW continuous went into the water in May. A range extender/hybrid option of the E32 for autonomous operation or charging support is available. The consumption of the hybrid drive system is less than 4 litres per hour at 15kt. A hydrogen generation system is also under development.

“We can offer lots of customisation, so we can adapt each boat. Every superyacht has different lifting cranes so we can integrate the lifting points accordingly, for example,” he adds.

Innovation extends of course beyond drive trains and customisation. “We’re putting more features into our superyacht tenders but being clever about how we design them so that it doesn’t drive the price up,” maintains Williams Jet Tenders’ Mat Hornsby. “Other features we’re promoting are improved electronic control systems for better and quicker manoeuvring, and greater connectivity/simplification of the electronic systems.”

ALONG COMES COVID-19

Whereas much of the industry has experienced major disruption because of Covid-19, tender builders supplying some of the builders of the biggest superyachts have seen modest impact on bottom line sales, thanks to the long lead time of projects, but there’s been some disruption of supply chains, though minor in the case of Cockwells. “We have not experienced any supply issues as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, just occasional extended delivery times, but that has not caused us any problems,” claims Dave Cockwell. “Access to some specialist electronics and upholstery services has been limited but we anticipate that normal service will resume soon.

“We are fortunate to have projects in the pipeline and are at the start of a number of builds, which will carry us through the next couple of years. We have received a number of new enquiries during lockdown, and have even signed an agreement for a new project, so it is business as usual for us.

“We have retained a small number of key staff throughout. Production is slowly increasing as we bring back employees in small groups to work in the designated spaces that we have created to enable social-distancing and ensure their safety.

He adds: “As we have all missed being out on the water because of government restrictions to halt the spread of

coronavirus, we think that 2021 will be a great year for boating and that there will be increased demand for beautiful bespoke boats.”

“So far, CV19 has not had a major effect on our supply chain,” says Williams’ Mat Hornsby. “It’s still early days but since restarting our reduced production after a month’s shutdown, on April 28, we have managed to supply the production line without issue.”

However, he concedes: “We saw a ‘re-shuffle’ in our order book fairly quickly as our dealer network looked to reduce their exposure, resulting in a number of cancelled orders. Demand is certainly down compared to the previous five years as customers can’t get to, or use their boats, so our peak delivery period of March-May has been quiet. Our order book indicates 2020 will be a challenging year for Williams. We have reduced our production in line with the new level of demand. Looking forward to 2021 we hope there’s a bounce back ready for spring deliveries. It’s too early to tell what this will look like, but we remain hopeful and

ready to meet whatever demand there is.” The yard has pushed back delivery dates for all its ongoing projects and is now looking at unveiling new product at Düsseldorf 2021.

Prior to Covid-19, Hornsby says the strongest growth was in DieselJet sales for yachts 90ft-plus. “Smaller tender sales have remained stable over the last few years, but the main growth was all coming from larger tender sales.”

DieselJet orders have remained stable through the crisis, with orders now extending into August. “Certainly the long lead time nature of the parent yachts these tenders fit on has protected this particular segment from cancellation.”

With a healthy order book and a successful 2019 and start of 2020, DutchCraft marketing manager Rene Markus is confident about the future of the yard, despite the current uncertainties in the marketplace. “The ‘intelligent lockdown’ (as the Dutch government calls it) allowed us to keep the facility open and at full capacity. From the beginning we have been taking precautionary measures

to safeguard the health and wellbeing of our workforce and we were able to maintain our high building standards and delivery schedule. At the moment there is no reason to put any of our future plans on hold. Obviously, we keep monitoring the global situation very closely and can adapt to the situation if necessary,” he told *IBI*.

“This is certainly a challenging time for all businesses, regardless of industry,” admits Jaime Cristancho of AB Inflatables, which prior to Covid-19 had been registering growth in its key markets of Europe, the Americas, Pacific and Caribbean. “First and foremost, our top priority has been to ensure the health and wellbeing of our partners, clients and employees... We are optimistic about the future and know that we will all get through this as a community. Regardless of the hardships we are all facing, we plan to continue procuring the highest quality materials, partnering with the most reliable and respected suppliers in the marine industry to bring forward the best product we can.” **IBI**

U-Boat Works – takes SY toys to the next level



Weighing just 2,500kg, NEMO is said to be the lightest submersible on the market

SY OWNERS ARE increasingly looking for adventure – witness the growth of the Expedition yacht segment – and exploring the unknown is the ultimate big thing. Step up submersible manufacturer U-Boatworks, which recently launched its NEMO – an owner-operated sub that takes onboard SY toys to the next level. “It’s the lightest submersible on the market. Weighing

only 2,500kg, it can be placed on a larger variety of yachts as well as being placed on a boat trailer and towed behind a car,” says marketing manager Roy Heijdra. According to Heijdra, being series-built makes NEMO the most affordable submersible on the market, starting at just under €1m for the base model. It will also be available from stock or delivered at a much

shorter lead time than regular submersibles.

“We’ve already sold a number of NEMO submersibles, and have a lot of interest from potential clients thus far,” says Heijdra. The firm is currently building 5-10 vessels a year for commercial applications. “With the NEMO being the first series-produced submersible, we are doubling our output.”

Overcoming the challenge of creating a submersible that is truly pilot-oriented was the hardest part, the marketing manager admits. “Added to that the fact we will not be building this submersible on an ‘on-order’ basis but approach it from a series production perspective, makes this one of the more difficult submersibles we have designed to date. The end result is a submersible that is pilot-oriented, built to the highest safety standards and built to the U-Boat Worx quality standards the industry has come know us for.”

Pilot training is included in the purchase of each submersible, and involves a few days for the owner or one of his crew at the U Boat Worx new pilot training facility on Curaçao. “We will train him to become a certified submersible pilot in less than a week.”