

Q&A with Hornet Marine President David Hartmann

We asked Hartmann to talk about his company and its philosophy.

Bristol, Conn.-based Hornet Marine was established in 2009 and added its first dealer late last year. The one-of-a-kind company specializes in one-of-a-kind boats – customizable 17-foot powerboats that are made to order within weeks. The inspiration for the boats' overall design is the Thunderbird, a 1960s race boat crewed by well-known boat designers Jim Wynne and Walt Walters as well as David Hartmann's father, Hal Hartmann. In the following interview, Hornet's president discusses building a dealer network, serving his customers and what sets Hornet apart.

Hornet Marine added its first dealer in December and has been steadily growing since then. How many are you up to, and how have you managed to build a network during a time when the industry is still facing so many challenges?



With seven new dealers in the first half of 2011, we are finding success in building a dealer network. From our product to our business model, we represent something new to dealers, and this is attractive at a time when change is needed in the marine industry. While a lot of boat builders are scaling back on their product options, we provide the experience of building a custom

boat based on a customer's specifications. There is no other product like ours out on the market, so we bring an entirely new customer into the dealer's showroom. Our dealers are able to diversify their product line and take this opportunity to increase their overall unit sales while providing a truly unique buying experience for the customer. We also see a lot of other manufacturers cutting back on their dealer support. We understand that it is crucial for us to support our dealers in any way we can because the only way we will both succeed is by working together. This is why we offer things like simple payment terms and exclusive territories. We also don't force our dealers to take multiple boats into their inventory. By focusing on building a strong relationship with our dealers from the start, we continue to expand our network.



Hornet's boats are built specifically to meet a customer's specifications.



Hornet's manufacturing process allows it to deliver boats in as little as three weeks.

What are the biggest obstacles you've had to overcome as a new business?

Raising awareness about all that we have to offer is an obstacle to overcome as a new company. We not only build a customizable product, we also have an even more unique business model. In order to continue to grow, it is important we are able to make dealers and end consumers aware that everything we do as a company is about improving the experience for our dealers and end customers. For example, we use a "Built to HIN" manufacturing process that traces every component on a boat through its serial number. This not only helps streamline future service and support for the end customer, it also enables us to give a percentage of any post-purchase sales made back to the dealer. We have spent the time listening to what the boating community wants from a boat builder, and we want to raise awareness that we're continuing to listen and improve.



Hornet's model one is a 17' customizable sport runabout.

What type of boater are you going after and why do you think now is the time to target that segment?

The consumer that values premium craftsmanship and expects best-in-class features is attracted to our boat; however, it's about more than just boaters looking for a quality product. Whether it's the feel of a sports car's performance on the water, or the allure of a custom product's expression of style, this type of boater values the overall experience our brand provides. It is the ultimate luxury to let boaters decide exactly what is important to them and build a boat accordingly, and we pride ourselves on offering this experience. Our customers are a part of the process and walk away feeling like they personally built their own boat by choosing each component that goes into it. We see now as the perfect time to target this segment because there will always be customers looking for this type of personalized experience.

Hornet Marine approaches things a little differently. What would you say sets you apart from most boat builders?

Our approach of putting the customer first sets us apart from most boat builders. The ability to design a custom boat and take delivery of it in as little as three weeks is virtually unheard of in this industry, especially when most boat



Hornet Marine President David Hartmann says anyone interested in learning more about the brand is welcome to visit the factory at any time.

builders do not let you choose from more than a few options. It is this world-class manufacturing process that sets us apart from other boat builders and allows us to build a distinctly individual boat for each customer. Putting the customer first also changes how we interact with our dealer network, and we find that we take a much more hands-on approach to building relationships with all of our dealers.

How do you think your model could change the marine industry?

Hornet Marine's focus on the total customer experience represents the level of support customers deserve, and eventually other boat builders will need to follow a similar type of business model. For example, if a customer calls a boat manufacturer with a problem, the standard response is to tell the customer to contact their dealer. The boat builder should be able to understand the problem, know the customer's dealer, and arrange to have the problem solved. From a manufacturing perspective, the modern lean manufacturing principles we utilize allow for quick turnaround times, efficiently keep costs down, and still allow customers maximum options and flexibility. We believe in our business model as much as we believe in our product, and this is what other boat builders will eventually have to follow suit on.

Is there anything else you'd like readers to know about Hornet Marine?

We are all boating enthusiasts and love being a part of this industry. In the 1960s, my father was a member of the team that built the very first boat with jet engines. He worked alongside Jim Wynne and Walt Walters, the pioneers of performance boat design. This history has inspired our company and the product we build, and we continue to be motivated by the responses we receive from the market. We also invite anyone to experience the Hornet Marine brand for themselves by visiting our factory at any time or attending any of our demo events throughout the year. 🦂