

THREE DECADES **STRONG** & COUNTING

Taiwanese shipyard Horizon Yachts appears to be sailing towards a third year of significant increase in demand for its range. Its CEO, JOHN LU, considers the success story.

Interview Andrew Dembina





What has Horizon achieved in the past few years and where is the brand heading?

Horizon Group's global sales turnover has been growing for three consecutive years since 2016, and 2018 was our busiest and most successful sales year since the 2008 financial tsunami. Sales in 2019 are expected to surpass 2018, which will be a record for our company. This positive growth is testament not only to Horizon Group's strength during an uncertain economy, but also confirms our continuous trend of growth and progress.

Horizon Group has provided the biggest emphasis for our dual business models of "build on spec" and "build to order," enabling us to achieve great results in 2018. In 2019 we will continue to invest our own funds in the efficient build and introduction of yacht models to markets worldwide.



"Our product line covers a broad spectrum of yacht types that satisfy the dreams of our clients in the US, Australia, Japan and Europe – markets in which we are enjoying a growing market share."

After reaching our 30th anniversary, Horizon started looking towards the future. Certainly, challenges continue to lie ahead, but our spirit and our pursuit of excellence will lead the way. In addition to expanding Horizon's development in the global yacht market and creating more suitable yacht models to meet owners' boating needs, we will strengthen Horizon's global sales and marketing channels and expand Horizon's brand share; additionally, we plan to establish after-sales service centres around the world to provide a full range of services that allow our owners to continue enjoying the ultimate yachting experience.

Today and in the future, we expect Horizon to not only represent the name of a luxury yacht brand, but also a way of life.

Recently, Horizon achieved the build of a record-breaking hull and our current design and technical R&D is becoming very cutting edge.

Tell us about these developments and how they might appeal to yacht owners in both in Asia and in the rest of the world.

Horizon surpassed our own world record by infusing a 140-foot hull and stiffeners in a single shot. Continuous testing over the last two decades has allowed Horizon to address any challenge encountered

and to now be able to infuse any type of mould completely. This technological improvement ensures consistency throughout all structural components, and creates hulls that are as light and as strong as possible. We believe that our professional R&D team and technology will be our core strength and give us the edge over other competitors.

Our introduction of the Horizon Fast Displacement Motoryacht series has seen unprecedented success. Innovative design and technology distinguishes this series from the competition and has attracted attention – and orders – from the global market. In the three years since the introduction of the first FD85 Fast Displacement motoryacht, we have sold 11 yachts in the FD series, including nine FD85 and FD87 models and two FD102s. The number of FD yachts delivered in 2018 alone proves that we are on the right track with our focus on innovative products.

Following the popular FD85 and FD87 models, at Horizon we continued to develop the series, and 2018 saw the new FD77 and FD102 models in construction at the end of the year. A new FD70 is ready for tooling and scheduled to launch in January 2020, while the next new model – the FD125 – is currently in the planning and design stage, and will be unveiled in the near future.

With offices in Australia, Europe and the US, which sales countries have shown the most recent interest in Horizon and why do you think your boats appeal to those particular client markets?

The recent factory takeover of Horizon Yacht Australia (HYA) has only made the Australia market grow from strength to strength. HYA now incorporates the company's overall global business structure and will streamline the Horizon owner experience worldwide through service, support, communications and branding. We have great confidence that with the resources and strength of Horizon HQ, HYA will build on these achievements and propel Horizon into new successes in the future.





Is mainland China showing much interest? Is this a market you hope will bounce back and be a good one for you, and how do you see it further developing its own international-level boating scene?

Due to China's policies and infrastructure, boating-related activities and businesses are on the quiet side, as the industry is still being developed. However we are quite optimistic because the Horizon

Above: two of the FD series: the white-hulled FD85 and the blue-hulled FD87 Skyline. Opposite, top: a white-hulled FD87 Skyline.

product range, including new projects such as the FD series, are popular with clients there. Horizon's brand power is stronger than ever, and there is an increased number of clients in this market

LIVING THE DREAM

Aged just 30, Horizon CEO John Lu established Horizon Yachts in Taiwan in 1987; this came six years after his first job in the world of yachting – as an engineer. Having majored in naval architecture, rather than going on to a career path in commercial ship design, he opted for leisure yachts “where I could be more creative and see my achievement in a shorter space of time,” he recalls. “I’m very passionate about boats, the business and boat building. And that has been a key driver for success with Horizon Yachts.

“You can see this factor in other companies that have been successful in the leisure boating business such as Azimut, Ferretti Yachts and Riva from Italy, UK-based Sunseeker and Middle



East-based Gulf Craft/Majesty Yachts; all of these builders started with a passionate founder.”

Lu's boutique shipyard that began with 30 staff in the 1980s, 32 years on is a group of five companies (Horizon Shipyard, Vision Shipyard, Premier Shipyard, Atech Composites and Horizon City Marina) and close to 850 employees. Offices in Australia, Europe and the US each have a sales and marketing director and service support.

Having weathered economic recessions and industrial process transformation, Lu's reading of these situations and his boat-building solutions have put the Horizon brand assuredly on the world map, producing sought-after quality builds, which he says he's intent on improving continually.



who not only recognise our yachts as a household name but also understand our flexibility and capability in creating yachts customised to their lifestyle.

How would you describe the boating scene in Taiwan?

There is a big difference between Taiwan and mainland China and there is pent-up demand which is just being realised, with an amazing interest in leisure boating. People are curious and being an island, I think boating will grow at the bottom end of the size range unlike China where larger boats dominate the entry-level market for status reasons. In China, many people do not live near the sea, which makes identifying with boating culture more difficult.

Where do you see Horizon, as positioned in the world of high-quality luxury yachts?

Many of our clients trust Horizon not only because we are a yacht builder with state-of-the-art facilities and professional in-house R&D and interior design teams, but also because we have sophisticated market intelligence.

Uniquely, our product line covers a broad spectrum of yacht types that satisfy the dreams of our clients in the US, Australia, Japan and Europe – markets in which we are enjoying a growing market share. Learning about the needs, preferences and boating lifestyles of each of these markets helps us to anticipate the needs and aspirations of our clients in each region of the world and incorporate them into the development of a yacht.

Horizon's dedication to prompt delivery and custom-made yachts has long been admired and recognised by our clients, and continue to be our great strengths. We build dream yachts for and with our clients, and celebrate alongside them when they are able to realise their dream aboard their yacht with the people they love. This is what we are proud of: you dream, we deliver.

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