

Aust sales riding crest of a wave

Russell Fredric

McLay Boats have grown to become one of the most respected and largest aluminium boat manufacturers in New Zealand on the back of a reputation for building safe, durable and reliable craft that meet the demands of a wide range of users.

The company designs and builds its comprehensive range of boats from its 3700m² purpose-built factory in Milton, South Otago.

Owner Steve McLay says the distance from its biggest market, Auckland, is no disadvantage due to the availability of a stable work-force and lower overheads, which far exceeds the cost of self-transporting its boats throughout New Zealand.

Because of the distance to any main centres, the factory is comprehensively equipped and "virtually everything is done in-house," Steve McLay says.

The company continues to create its own wave of success after nearly 30 years of developing and building boats for recreational, commercial and government affiliated users in New Zealand, and overseas in Australia, New Caledonia and Sweden.

McLay Boats range comprises the Sportsman, CrossXover, Fortress, Cruiser Hardtop, and Premier Hardtop with various sizes and options within each range.

Launched two years ago, the CrossXover has overtaken the Sportsman as its biggest selling recreational boat.

McLay Boats has a network of nine dealers throughout New Zealand, but Australia is becoming an increasingly significant market as their boats reputation, brand recognition and dealerships expand there.

"It's really starting to ramp there now and we expect that, this year, could be 30 to 40% of our production."

"Good dealers are approaching us to sell our boats there. Our boats have got a good reputation over there and word obviously spreads."

The company is "working hard" to train new staff in order to meet the burgeoning demand and subsequent increase in production, while still ensuring existing dealer's needs are met.

McLay Boats launched three new models, the 651 CrossXover Hardtop, the 701 Cruiser Gen 2 Hardtop and the 751 Cruiser Gen 2 Hardtop at the Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat show last month.

Despite being held in Auckland, the show is a significant annual event for the company.

"It was certainly a very positive show as far as we were concerned. It effectively sets you up for the rest of the year's sales. Every manufacturer that is somebody in the industry and every marine supplier is there. It is certainly the show to go to if you're in the market for boats."

McLay Boats can supply craft as a stand-alone option, or with completely fitted out on a



The McLay Sportsman is one of the Milton-based company's biggest selling models.

trailer ready to tow to the water with single or twin Mercury outboard motors depending on the model and size.

Steve McLay believes aluminium boat sales are significantly outstripping those of fibreglass hulled boats in New Zealand as a result of improved designs, functionality, strength, comfort features and aesthetic appeal, particularly for recreational boats.

Options can include a huge number of accessories such as a VHF radio, Simrad touch screen, GPS, sounder and radar, rocket launchers, plumbed live bait tank, plumbed flush toilet and refrigerator as well as numerous standard features.

McLay Boats include air chambers for buoyancy in their hulls or under-floors and meet the NZ Marine Industry Association and Royal New Zealand Coastguard endorsed Marine Safety CPC build programme requirement that boats must be unsinkable if swamped or capsized, in addition to meeting other key safety and structural criteria.

McLay Boats are now manufacturing trailer boats up to 11 metres long by 3.1 metres wide

and are able to provide 3D design concepts before custom building to individual specifications, including to C.E. Certification, Australian 2C Survey and New Zealand maritime surveying requirements.

Despite strong sales and the company's

achievements, Steve McLay is not complacent.

"You can never say you've made it and sit back, we are well established and have got really good systems in place, but are always looking to do better and improve things."

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Congratulations to McLay boats on their expansion progress

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All McLay Boats include air chambers for buoyancy in their hulls and meet the NZ Marine Industry Association and Royal New Zealand Coastguard endorsed Marine Safety CPC build programme requirement that boats must be unsinkable if swamped or capsized, in addition to meeting other key safety and structural criteria.

Boat windscreen specialists

Christchurch business Sea Thru Limited is one of the few companies in New Zealand which specialises in manufacturing boat windscreens.

Owner Brian Casey founded the company in 1989 under the name of Boat Windscreens while working at Reflex Products Ltd.

Because the supply of boat windscreens from traditional suppliers was difficult, Reflex made the commitment to produce their own range of screens, a task undertaken by Brian.

After two years it became obvious that a specialised company would be appropriate, and with the support of Reflex Products as a major customer, Brian began manufacturing in a part-time home-based venture.

The 1988 New Zealand boat show attracted the attention of McLay Boats who then became a key customer and ultimately resulted in the business being renamed Sea Thru Ltd in 1999.

"We now supply a major portion of the New Zealand trailer boat market and continue to show growth and leadership to the industry through quality products and our best service possible," Brian Casey says.

McLay boats continues to be a major client today, along with Stabicraft, Extreme Boats, Fi-Glass and CSB Huntsman.

"We've got a reasonably good chunk of the market, probably 60% to 65 per cent."

Sea Thru's range includes high quality

marine-grade curved 6mm toughened glass front windows, a large variety of acrylic products, from boat hatches and cabin windows to centre consoles and slider windows, along with sliding and bi-fold doors with radius or mitred fully-welded corners.

"We also manufacture custom acrylic mouldings of all shapes and sizes, as well as acrylic fittings to spec."

The company was hit hard by the global financial crisis in 2008, when staff numbers were halved, but more recently production has increased to the point where staff are now back to the pre-2008 level of 12 skilled workers.

As part of a focus on continually improving processes, a CNC (computer numerical control) router is being added to the equipment in Sea Thru's purpose-built factory.

Controlled by CAD software, the router will replace a hand operated router, eliminating the need to work off any of about 500 customwood templates.

"We will be able to put all of that on to digital format. We use CAD LT for our pattern work so it will go directly to the router."

"It will allow us to work much more accurately and will be a bit of a labour saving; it will also further improve our quality."



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