

Portfolio

Six boats per year: Buizen quality can't be hurried



Tony Buizen, Steve Howe and Eddie Buizen of Mastercraft Marine and (below) the award-winning Buizen 48.

Sue Hoban

HAVING your yacht win the marine industry's prestigious Boat of the Year award might seem a sure way of firing up demand – and production levels.

But that won't be happening for this year's winner, Mastercraft Marine.

The company, founded by master shipwright Eddie Buizen at Terrey Hills 28 years ago, may actually double production in the next year or two, but that would still mean just six hand-built yachts leaving the factory every year.

Mastercraft currently spends 10,000 man hours building each of its Buizen 48s, the blue-water cruising yacht that won not only its category for best sailing vessel over 10m but the overall, sail boat-of-the-year award.

Company director Steve Howe, who came on board two years ago when Eddie Buizen decided to take more of a back-seat role in the company, said he and his co-director Tony Buizen, Eddie's son, had no intention of diluting Mastercraft's reputation for quality.



"We're very mindful of the company's legacy and its philosophy will remain unchanged," he said. "Our passion is for building the best boats we possibly can and we don't want to risk spreading ourselves too thinly. It can become a bit of a numbers game, where you have to sell a certain number of boats each year to keep the doors open, which a lot of

manufacturers are having to do."

Mr Howe said there was still scope under that philosophy for some growth of the firm.

"We have development approval to extend our factory premises here in Terrey Hills so we probably would be looking to extend up to, say, half a dozen boats a year but that will be it," he said.

Mr Howe said that focus on quality had allowed Mastercraft to withstand the forces that had put many other Australian yacht builders out of business. "There has been a great rationalisation in the last 10 or 15 years and that has been as a result of the influx of high-volume production boats from overseas, principally Europe and the US," he said. "We have been able to weather that

storm because we build such a high-quality boats that the mass production manufacturers can't match us."

He said in this climate, business had certainly become more challenging in recent years, but he was confident of being able to maintain customer support at Mastercraft's \$1.3 million-\$1.4 million end of the market. "Our customers are people who have graduated out of a mass-produced boat to something of much higher quality, and with a dedicated purpose of sailing the oceans in all conditions."

Mr Howe said winning the Boat of the Year Award, which was judged on criteria such as quality, stability, structural strength, standard of finish and fitness for its purpose, had been a great morale boost for the company – even if its ability to capitalise on it commercially was limited. "It's a fantastic acknowledgement of the high standards we build to," he said.

"The great advantage is that being a small company, we don't have the huge marketing budget of the big players who can spend big on ads in the boating magazines but this helps us make up a bit of that ground."