

The Great Outdoors

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Santa Cruz boating industry still above water

Boating/Arnold Wechter

HOW GOES SANTA CRUZ' BOATING industry? Not as bad as might be expected...and not as good as could be hoped.

Bill Lee, who must rate the title as "father of the production sailboat industry" in Santa Cruz, has cut back and changed his operation in Soquel — but he believes the worst is over. But he also believes sailboat production will not return to the good, old days.

The same story seems to be repeated at all the major builders. They are surviving. Business is improving — but none expects it to return to the period of prosperity experienced by the local industry in the past.

Over at Pacific Boats, Sales Manager Bill McMurray reports that the firm is turning out an Olson 40 a week, and is attempting to building Olson 30s in between the production schedule.

"It must be admitted that Olson 30 orders fell off, but they are again coming in," he said.

Lee reported that he currently has orders for two Santa Cruz 40s, and no longer is selling boats directly.

"We have established our former sales manager, Jack Otis, as our first dealer," he said. Otis

will be working out of the Santa Cruz Yacht Sales office on Fifth Avenue.

Lee also reported that he expects a second dealer to take on his line of Santa Cruz 50s and 40s in the San Francisco Bay Area.

He said he is making the switch from direct sales to dealers because a dealer is able to take in a used boat as a trade, and to offer other advantages which a direct sales operation cannot offer the potential buyer.

It is Lee's opinion that the boat market has been hit not only by the recession, high interests rate — but also saturation.

Unlike autos, Lee says, boats do not wear out. There are many owners who are satisfied with the present craft, and there are a limited number of new buyers. He points out that the shortage of slips throughout the nation limits the number of new prospects.

Terry Alsberg of Alsberg Bros., who build the popular International Express 27, reports that they are currently turning out one boat a week. "We've just sold our first boat outside the U.S.," Alsberg said. "It is going to the British Virgin Islands.

"I'm particularly excited because I plan to get to the Caribbean to commission the boat — and, more importantly — to race it in the

upcoming CORQ series, which culminates with the Antigua Race Week."

Alsberg said his business suffered a bad third quarter, but business improved in the fourth quarter and appears to be continuing upward.

"We are considering both bigger and smaller boats for future production — but we are holding off to see what the economy will do," he commented.

Ron Moore of Moore's Sailboats admits business has been slow — but the popular Moore 24 remains in production — and a new 37 is due to be built by the fall or the first of the year.

The big news is that Moore's Sailboat is currently building a new deck mold for the popular 24. It will include a small cabin and cockpit. This will do away with one of the main criticisms of the Moore 24. Many consider it the finest of the small ULDBs, but it lack of cockpit and cabin space make it a one-purpose boat.

C&B Marine, which is more of a custom boat builder than a production shop, also reports that business is improving.

It is currently completing a 73-foot schooner, and expects to build a second model in the near future.

Owner Bob Thomsen said that its one production boat, the Tiffany Jane, remains in prod-

uction, but that business has not been booming. Thomsen said the firm is attempting to build a dealer network for the racer-cruiser.

Wilderness Yachts has disappeared from the local scene, but its Wilderness 21 is expected to continue to built locally as the Burns 21 by the Hoge Brothers. The other Wilderness molds are reportedly held by a Coos Bay, Ore., builder and are expected to resume in production in the near future.

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Outgoing Secretary of Transportation Drew Lewis has reported that the administration has decided to spend in fiscal 1984 the \$15 million Congress authorized for boating safety programs under the recently amended Biaggi Act. The department will not, however, administer the additional \$150 million Congress directed be spent on boating facilities development projects for fiscal years 1983-88.

The decision sets the stage for a new round of conflict, between the Administration and the boating community over the disposition of nearly \$450 million estimated to be collected from boating in marine fuel taxes over the next five years.