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ITALY | OVERVIEW



▲ The Italian Sea Group's Francesco Carbone says the US market is stable

market is changing the fastest and now at pre-crisis levels. Hopefully, this will happen in Europe soon."

The Italian Sea Group, comprised of the Admiral, Admiral Sail, Tecnomar and Nuovi Cantieri Apuania brands, has also seen an increase in demand for yachts over 40m. "Our clients are more focused on larger sizes while the markets they're coming from remain basically the same," says Francesco Carbone, vice chairman and sales director of the group. "We've developed our fleet extensively in the last year, with models up to 145m in length. We're moving up with our sizes, developing several different styles with each hull platform."

NEW ADMIRAL SAIL DIVISION

The group also launched the new Admiral Sail division last year, comprised of a semi-custom composite line and a separate division making aluminium superyachts. Carbone says another new division will be announced later this year. "We abandoned fibreglass, except for the new sailboat line, to focus on metal," he says. "The production site we acquired in 2012 has also allowed us to become more industrialised, while maintaining the quality and customization that we're known for."

Carbone sees the US market as being most stable, but the group's strongest growth has been in Latin America. As for the Italian market, Carbone admits that there "is money around", but says problems with consumer confidence, economic stability and laws regulating yachting could keep the market in limbo for some time.

Sailboat manufacturer Grand Soleil is one of the few Italian manufacturers to report healthy domestic sales. "The Italian market is going really well," says Fabio Planamente, general manager. "We've sold many boats

domestically, especially after the last Genoa show. Our client has an upper-middle profile and that segment hasn't been too greatly affected by the economic crisis."

Grand Soleil also saw a "slight improvement" across international markets last year, with an upturn in the UK market in particular. "We're also selling in North America again, especially on the east coast, thanks to the euro-dollar exchange rate and the US recovery."

A new demand for "comfortable cruising boats" has changed the course of its R&D efforts. The company launched the Grand Soleil 46 LC (Long Cruise) as its first of a series of blue-water cruising vessels. "With this new model, we're attracting clients who want to transition from motorboats to sailing vessels, but who also want the quality, design and performance of a proven builder," says Planamente.

Unlike the other motoryacht and superyacht builders in this article, Grand Soleil has not seen Italian sales drop to single digits. Before 2009, Italy accounted for 60% of total sales. It is now closer to 40%. "We think the Italian market will be stable this year," says Planamente. "Brands like Jeanneau, Beneteau and Bavaria are stronger than us in the middle segment. But if you look at upper-middle segment, we're seeing an upturn in sales because those clients didn't suffer during the economic crisis."

PRÊT A PORTER

Custom yacht builder Vismara Marine has also launched a new series of sailboats called "Prêt-a-Porter" that will debut at the 2016 Düsseldorf show. "We're seeing new clients that are interested in improving the versatility of their yachts, so hence the prêt-a-porter series," says Michele Antonini, company spokesperson. Vismara is known for its eclectic motoryacht and sail yacht designs, so the new series will be a move more into the mainstream. The company builds its composite hulls and decks at a facility in Poland that also makes parts for automaker Ferrari. Antonini says Vismara has invested heavily in the new series to expand its reach outside Italy.

"About 70% of our sales are in the Italian market," he says. "But since this number will diminish, our growth has to come in other markets." Vismara has a strong reputation in Northern Europe and is now working to improve sales in North America. It will launch two custom yachts at Cannes and Genoa.

"This will be an important year for us," says Antonini. "We're optimistic that our resolve in the last few years will show results. We're sure that when the market gets out of this impasse, a new generation of clients will appreciate our designs."

That last sentiment sums up the hopes of every Italian shipyard. **IBI**

▼ Below L-R: The interior of *Polaris* by Rossinavi. Bottom: The *Ketos 48* was Rossinavi's first production yacht

