

SHIPPING & MARINE

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Rising from the deep

Tom Chant talks to Will Daynes about the dramatic changes occurring within the superyacht market



COMING OF AGE

What opportunities will the development of the electric ship bring?



SAFE JOURNEY

The safe transportation of wind turbines is under increasing scrutiny



FRESH INSIGHTS

Joining forces with universities can help with technological advances

Fitting in

• Soon launching stainless steel sliding yacht doors

• Cheap costs with high-end quality

• Hugely successful over the last seven years

“Just a few years ago, Kotniz employed 84 people; today we have 210,” begins Sebastian Nietupski, managing director and son of founder Zdzislaw Nietupski. The company was established in 1978, initially for the implementation of installations and gas grids, before applying its skills to a variety of industries including boilers, electronic control units and automobiles and finally, in 1988, it started marine hardware production. For the first half of its life, under Poland’s Communist government, Kotniz was required to remain no larger than 15 employees. Following political changes in the early 1990s this restraint was withdrawn and the company grew steadily until 2004 then rapidly since.

The company’s first contact with the maritime industry was in 1998, producing acid-resistant steel accessories, but it was in 2005 that Kotniz focused on the sector exclusively. Today its product portfolio includes a wide selection of yacht and motorboat accessories, sliding and fire doors, steering wheels for yachts and furniture. One of the most recent additions to its range are stainless steel sliding doors. “During 2008 we launched our sliding doors range, initially in aluminium suited for standard boats up to eight metres in length,” Sebastian elaborates. “We noticed, though, that nowadays stainless steel products are quite popular for luxury yachts of 50 metres or more yet there are only a few suppliers of them in Europe, and often they are very expensive. As we already have experience with aluminium sliding doors and have a good production capacity of up to 200 doors monthly, we decided to produce a stainless steel version. It will be launched at Marine Equipment Trade Shows (METS) in Amsterdam next year.”

Kotniz attributes its success, particularly over the last six years, to three key performance targets. The first of these is its quality, which the company expects in its suppliers as much as its clients expect from Kotniz. It sources stainless steel tubing from Italy, for example, which despite requiring more capital cost guarantees more consistent durability. Moreover, its location in the east of Poland means it has received a great deal of funding from UAE-based investment, thereby enabling it to purchase the best CNC laser cutting, CNC bending and CNC milling machines. The success of this decision



to focus on quality can be seen in its annual guarantee claims statistics: of the 10,000 sets of items it produces per boat per year – from 500 kilometres of tubing amongst other raw materials – only 0.01 per cent result in guarantee claims.

The second key performance target is to offer clients a fair price for the high-end quality with which Kotniz has established itself. Its situation in Poland is once again a great benefit in this respect because labour prices are much lower than those of many west European countries, reducing overall cost without compromising on quality. The third key area where it has succeeded is that it offers timely delivery using just-in-time production methods, meaning its standard turnaround time is 60 days but it is also able to create units for emergencies within a few days.



Zdzislaw Nietupski, founder



"Our strategy is to improve our production processes, possibilities and range of products every year," says Sebastian. "For example we recently began working to implement lean manufacturing processes so that we can produce goods faster without losing out on product quality. I have also opened a new department: a production and logistics team made up of four people whose only responsibility is to look for cost savings throughout the manufacturing and delivery process. It's already discovered ten per cent in cost reductions; that's a big amount from my point of view and enjoyed by our clients too."

Given the speed with which Kotniz has grown - nearly tripling its employees over seven years to keep up with production demand - its business has been generally good, even throughout a recession that saw its turnover shrink by 50 per cent. In 2008 the company found it necessary to reduce staff but careful management and a commitment by Sebastian and his father meant only ten per cent of jobs were lost in the end. Catastrophe was also prevented by Sebastian's choice of not allowing more than 30 per cent of

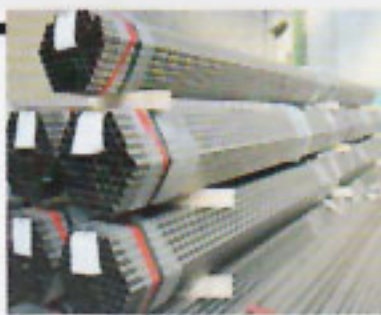


total production capacity to be represented by a single customer. Now, with the market picking up once again, the company is in an ideal position.

A long history of experience in various industries has taught the company that flexibility and adaptability is crucial to long-term success and so the introduction of its new sliding doors, as well as fittings such as leather covers for various furnishings, attempts to broaden Kotniz's product portfolio. Yet, as Sebastian points out, the future also depends on expanding the reach of these products: "Our target is to grow our staff roster to 250 people and our client list to cover most of the important customers throughout Europe. This is the first step of my strategy. The second step is to find good customers globally, particularly in the countries where many maritime companies are looking toward, such as Brazil because the country has been recession-proof. Poland has been similar thanks to its cheap costs so, as a Polish company, this is the time now for Kotniz." ❖



Sebastian Nietupski, managing director



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