

Leisure Boating Market Sees Signs of Recovery

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Burevestnik Group, the largest boat importer in Russia, has seen sales growth of 20 percent since January. **Khristina Narizhnaya**

Russia's pleasure boat market is showing signs of recovery after a two-year lull.

The fourth annual Moscow Boat Show, a week-long exhibit that opened at the Crocus Expo center Tuesday, features 166 Russian and international participants, compared with last year's 124.

Russians are spending more money on leisure, the State Statistics Service reports. And some of that money is apparently going to boating and yachting.

Sales grew by 20 percent since the beginning of this year for Burevestnik Group, the country's largest boat importer, according to co-owner Andrei Boiko.

"The market is slowly coming back to life," Boiko said.

While there are no figures on the boating industry in Russia as a whole, Burevestnik made \$137.2 million in sales last year.

Finam analyst Dmitry Baranov said somewhere from 2 percent to 4 percent of Russians have a sophisticated boat.

Boating is no longer the exclusive domain of the super-rich. The typical customer is a middle-class family man aged from 30 to 50, according to the companies exhibiting. The most popular item is a modest-size family yacht or motorboat, priced anywhere from \$30,000 to \$500,000.

The numerous speedboats, cruisers and yachts that dot Moscow River boating clubs and marinas in the region attest to the popularity of the sport. So do the roughly 20 yachting schools that have popped up in Moscow in the last two years.

While boats made in Europe and America are considered superior and far outnumber Russian-made vessels, the country's nascent boating industry is growing.

Velvette, a Kazan-based yacht builder under the supervision of Yamaha, opened a new factory in 2010. The factory makes yachts from foreign-made parts and adds specifically Russian touches, like plush seats, to the often austere Japanese design.

Vladimir Ovdiyenko, general director of Rusboat, a manufacturer of budget aluminum motorboats in the Moscow region, said it's not easy to compete with established foreign providers. Ovdiyenko said the government's initiative to help small businesses needs to include the neglected Russian shipbuilders as well.

Nikolai Lyelyekov, owner of Ninth Bank, a boat company in the Tver region, said he was so busy with customers on the first day of the show that he barely sat down. Last year he sold 20 boats, but this year he looks forward to big business.

Vyacheslav Smirnov, 33, owner of a small custom furniture company, kept coming back to the Ninth Bank stand. He said he fell in love with the cream and burgundy R-Craft-175, a compact speedboat with a windshield. Smirnov bought it for 320,000 rubles (\$11,000), not including accessories, after several hours of wandering the exhibit.

"The price, the quality, all of it is right," said Smirnov, who plans to use the boat for fishing and joy rides with his wife and daughter.

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