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Exhibitors coming to the special edition of Interboot from September 19 to 27, 2020, in Friedrichshafen with the wind in their sails

Boom in water sports despite COVID-19 pandemic

Friedrichshafen – Water sports in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland are experiencing an upsurge in popularity like never before. Despite the ongoing coronavirus crisis, the industry is seeing strong growth in areas ranging from SUP boards to sailing and motorized yachts. While the lockdown at the end of April put some companies at the brink of insolvency, the summer months have now more than made up for the losses in many places. “The exhibitors that registered for our special edition are coming to Friedrichshafen with the wind in their sails,” Interboot Project Manager Dirk Kreidenweiss confirms. A total of some 200 companies will be represented in six exhibition halls. The trade fair gates will be open from 10 am to 6 pm daily for nine days starting on Saturday, September 19, but only for visitors who have registered and purchased a ticket online in advance.

Something that is indicative of the run on local bodies of water is the enormous demand for Lake Constance boat licenses. “We don’t have the time to keep precise track of the statistics at the moment, but there are certainly 30% more testtakers than we usually see in the middle of summer,” says Claudia Bucher of the Lake Constance District Administrator’s Office. Since mid-July, 90 theoretical and more than 100 practical examinations have been administered at the test appointments scheduled twice per week. There are no more spots available for taking the exams until the fall. “We are also experiencing a huge rush in terms of new boat registrations,” Claudia Bucher continues, “and around 100 vacationers ask to take their boat to Lake Constance each week.

As you can imagine, the marinas on Lake Constance are currently being used at close to capacity – and this after we saw yawning emptiness during the stretch of dream weather at Easter. “Since July, we have only been able to occasionally offer a boat slip to day guests in Kressbronn,” says Clemens Meichle, Managing Director of Ultramarin Meichle + Mohr, “and this new demand is also seen in terms of a noticeable uptick in boat sales.” There is new interest in all sizes, with Ultramarin mainly offering new and used sailing yachts that primarily have lengths between 34 and 42 feet (13 meters). He adds: “Some boatbuilders, such as Bavaria, will not be able to offer any new deliveries at all this year. There is now an order backlog going through 2021.” At Interboot, Ultramarin from Kressbronn will be presenting itself with Ultramarin World at a compact large stand that will cover the entire range of products and services. Boats, sails, and accessories will be consolidated due to the increased effort required to comply with the safety and hygiene plan by the exhibitors’ personnel and others.

A Bente 24 is also to be among the exhibited boats after Ultramarin took over the Bente shipyard, which had fallen into economic difficulties despite brisk demand. The boatbuilding enterprise has completed six sailboats since mid-May. “We are convinced of the concept of the low-priced Daysailor and are looking to the fall season with confidence,” says Clemens Meichle.

One of the beneficiaries of recent trends is Europe Marine of Budenheim near Mainz, which builds and imports motorboats on the Rhine. “Trust in German products has increased considerably,” Managing Director Peter Nürnberger explains. The Viper series launched in 1999 has more backorders than ever before, and certain models will not be available again until early summer 2021. The inexpensive entry-level brand Oyster, for which hull shells are prefabricated in sufficient numbers in Poland, is also enjoying great popularity. At Interboot, both will be on display along with all other models, totaling 13 in all. Europe Marine is looking to exhibit some 20 different boats on 650 square meters of stand space, an increase of 20 square meters over last year. These boats include the 2020 world premiere of the Quicksilver 675 Weekend, a trailerable motorboat almost 7 meters long with a fixed roof and sliding door. “The visitors deserve the complete commitment of the exhibitors,” says Peter Nürnberger. “We expect a trade-specific fair and are looking forward to this one with a great deal of anticipation.”

The mood in the neighboring countries of Austria and Switzerland seems similarly optimistic. "We are seeing a record-breaking number of new boat sales. The used boat market, which had been inundated with stock that was difficult to move for years, has reversed course, and the boating license schools are fully booked," reports Vinzenz Batt, Managing Director of the Swiss Boatbuilder's Association. "For many manufacturers, the bump in the road caused by the coronavirus crisis seems to have already been more than compensated for." Zurich-based trading portal Boat24.com, which operates throughout Europe, has been seeing 120% more inquiries than in 2019. The urge to seek out individual freedom on the water, induced by restrictions on travel and thus vacations, is also strongly reflected in smaller-scale recreational water sports. While the season initially looked to be a total loss, stand-up paddling (SUP) has now not only become established as a sport with mass appeal but is also experiencing an unprecedented boom. "At the end of April, we were very close to becoming insolvent," explains Bernd Flügel, head of Water Colors of Hof (Saale), Germany, to which the F2 brand belongs. "Nobody wanted to buy our products." SUP boards have now become such a hot item that families travel all the way from Munich to Hof to get their hands on a board. "Some dealers have pre-ordered four times more than usual," says the expert, "and a small dealer from Schweinfurt even placed an order for 300 instead of the usual 30 to 40. The entire industry expects good sales to continue beyond the end of the season and up until Christmas. After 65,000 F2 boards sold in the previous year, the forecast was raised to 70,000. In order to satisfy the rapidly growing demand, 16 containers were brought in from the seven production sites in China by airfreight in addition to the normal shipping channels. Bernd Flügel explains: "Now it's 120,000 boards, and we're looking at having our best year ever."

However, he also warns the industry not to be just euphoric. For example, snowboard sales and winter sports in general are expected to take a hard hit. Water Colors is represented at three stands at the fair. "There are good reasons for participating in Interboot, because we want to present product innovations in a broad spectrum," Bernd Flügel says. Inflatable bodyboards that you ride lying on your stomach to surf down the waves are very much in vogue. There will also be a wingsurfer on display, which is a kind of inflatable kite with a size of between three and seven square meters, with which it is possible to achieve propulsion on the board in the lightest of breezes. In addition, the company will be exhibiting a tiny electric motor for SUP boards.



Interboot will be presenting the world of water sports from 10 am to 6 pm daily from Saturday, September 19, to Sunday, September 27, 2020. Tickets that are specific for a certain day are available exclusively online. Further information is available on the Internet at www.interboot.de, www.facebook.de/interboot, www.instagram.com/interboot.friedrichshafen and #interboot.