



Photo courtesy USWatercraft

The Alerion Express 33 is just one cog in a broad diversification plan that includes both power and sail.

Does USWatercraft hold the key to success?

By Capt. Michael L. Martel
For Points East

It's a sight that does an old boat-lover's heart good, as one might say: a big shop full of beautiful power and sailboats in the making, being born, in various stages of completion, by busy craftsmen toiling vigorously and with enthusiasm at their art; men and women skilled in the arts of marine carpentry, fiberglass and composite work, hardware and systems installation, engines and more. That's what I saw one sunny day in April at USWatercraft, LLC, at the former TPI plant in Warren, R.I.

It was one of those days when the air in New England is cool and fresh and redolent of spring – when the future seems bright and appealing, just because. The future is certainly bright for *this* company, building boats like there never was a recession, and reinforcing the simple fact that boating, boatbuilding, and the joy of getting out in the water in a sleek and handsome craft is not going away, not ever.

The boatbuilding industry is growing stronger, and experiencing a revival, driven by such visionary salts

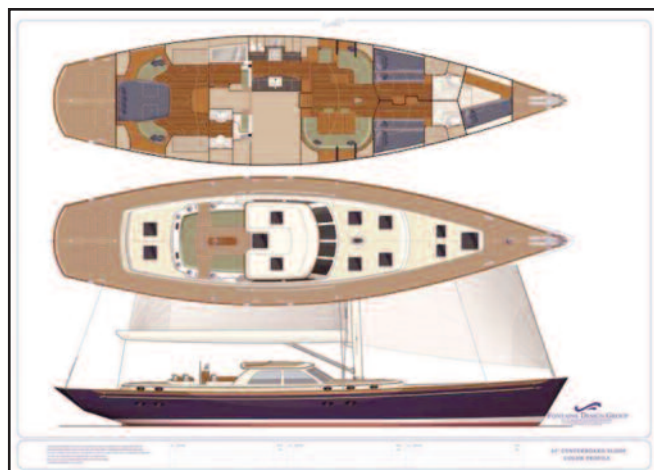
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67-foot Lyman-Morse pilothouse A2 is born of the 63-foot *Amelia*

Lyman-Morse, in Thomaston, Maine, is extending a nearly 30-year working relationship with designer Ted Fontaine with the Fontaine-designed 67-foot A2. The previous Lyman-Morse/Fontaine Design Group collaboration was the 63-foot center-cockpit, pilothouse design *Amelia*, with a shallow-draft keel/centerboard hull form. This proven hull shape has been lengthened to 67 feet, thus the moniker, the A2.

Lyman-Morse says the A2 will be fast, comfortable, and “long-legged,” meaning that it is destined for anything from high-latitude adventure sailing to island-hopping in the Med, Caribbean or in Maine. The A2 blends a low coach roof, center-cockpit design with a

LYMAN-MORSE, continued on Page 74



Rendering courtesy Lyman-Morse

Conceived as a long-distance family cruiser, the oceangoing interior can provide comfort afloat for up to six passengers.

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as USWatercraft. The formula is simple: product diversity across a range of power and sail, best-in-class brands and legacy names, and practical boats designed to appeal to the mid-size-range buyer today. Neither dinghies nor mega-yachts, but boats in the 30- to 60-foot range – cruising, racing or picnicking – they are like the bear’s porridge that Goldilocks discovered: not too hot, not too cold, but just right.

Having the right product, for the right market, with good craftsmanship and service and support to boot, is turning out to be the formula for success for this shop smack-dab in the middle of one of America’s primary boatbuilding regions.

I stopped by USWatercraft at the invitation of Sarah Fawle, the company’s VP of Marketing and Communications. Sarah, late of Morris Yachts in Bass Harbor, Maine, joined the company this past March. After a quick introduction, Sarah handed me a pair of safety glasses and took me on a whirlwind tour of the manufacturing plant – aboard a True North power cruiser, and through the familiar boatyard scents of curing resin.

USWatercraft actually began 25 years ago as Waterline Systems, founded by Randy Borges, a sailor and boatbuilder who had worked on America’s Cup defenders. He founded Waterline Systems as a J/24 and one-design customizing and modification shop, with the emphasis on enhancing speed. After a period of traveling to customers’ boats, he and partners Tim Murray and Kevin Hudner rented a shop in Middletown, R.I., and began servicing boats there, rapidly growing their reputation for good work and sound designs.

There’s plenty of room to grow in the former Tillotson-Pearson facility; it’s a cavernous 100,000-square-

foot plant. USWatercraft employs some 65 production-staff craftsmen plus another dozen or so in management.

The move to diversification and acquisition for Waterline Systems began around 2000, when Waterline Systems became a licensed J/Boat builder. From the J/24, Randy moved into other J models such as the J/22, and began, at the same time, to see a way to expand his business. Randy was deeply entrenched in

the local boatbuilding culture, working with the Pearson family, etc., partnering and collaborating with designers, other builders, and boating professionals and organizations. And, eventually, out of all of this came USWatercraft, an umbrella organization for Waterline Systems and other businesses. USWatercraft now builds Alerion Yachts, C&C Yachts, True North Yachts, North Rip Sportfishing Boats and multiple J/Boat models. USWatercraft also owns Randy’s original Waterline Systems, and builds Carolina Cockpits marine enclosures.

It would seem that USWatercraft has carefully chosen its acquisitions, in that there is literally “something for everybody,” according to Sarah Fawle. The acquisition of Pearson Marine Group brought Alerion Yachts, True North, and North Rip boats under the USWatercraft umbrella. This meant Alerion models for the daysailor and cruising sailor; elegant motoring in True North cruisers with its Maine lobsterboat-design influences (broad, low, open cockpits) and fast North Rip sportfishermen. Pearson Marine had a 50-year heritage of building both sail and powerboats – until 2012, when USWatercraft took over operations.

The USWatercraft acquisition of these brands includes all of the manufacturing assets, including the



Photo courtesy USWatercraft

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records and parts necessary to construct the wide range of boat lines, as well as the specific tooling that can be used to build and service the larger and currently out-of-production J/Boats and related parts. With its J/Boat original base maintaining solidity, USWatercraft is the licensed builder of the J/22, J/24, J/80 and J/105 lines of J/Boats as well as the Farr 30 and Farr 40.

USWatercraft clearly has a soft spot for the racing sailor. Remembering founder Randy Borges' love of fast sailing, it's no surprise that his company acquired the rights to build and market C&C Yachts and breathed new life into a builder once known for its racehorses. Two new Mark Mills-designed screamers – the C&C 30 high performance racer and Redline 41 racer/cruiser – are being launched by USWatercraft in June. The C&C Redline 41, designed as an IRC racer, is priced around \$410,000.

Naturally, I had to ask: Where do you think the

recreational boating industry is headed? How can you compete successfully against, say, hulls built for far less money in the Far East? The answer is simple, according to Fawle: "A customer's boat doesn't have to be shipped from the other side of the world, so that is a big saving. Also, the craftsmanship that goes into our boats is second to none. It's reliable, it's accountable, and you can come in here and see your boat being built if need be."

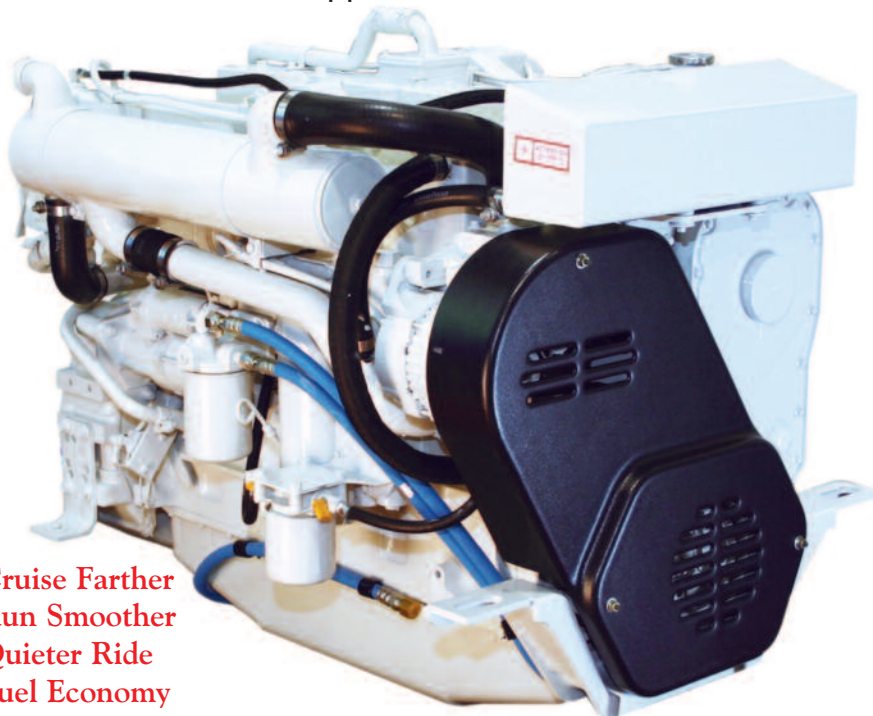
I looked around the shop; these are all local guys, I noted – mostly men around 40, give or take. It reminded me of what I once heard said about the Herreshoff yard a century ago: Build the best and you attract the best, because they will suffer to work on nothing less. FMI: www.uswatercraft.com.

Bristol, R.I., resident Capt. Mike Martel is a regular contributor to Points East, and a consummate boat-builder in his own right.



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