

Equipment: Strong growth looks set to continue

Renewed boating engagement promises to pay dividends, while manufacturers look to diversify to hedge against future headwinds

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Herm Sprenger has been making boat fittings at its production site in Iserlohn since 1872

It was a year of mixed fortune for Germany's marine equipment and accessories manufacturers in 2020. While many reported record sales – particularly those who cater to the aftermarket, buoyed by the perception of boating as a 'Covid-safe' activity – others struggled with lockdowns, yard closures and disruptions to the global supply chain.

Florian Kannengießer at boat fittings specialist Herm Sprenger told *IBI* that some of these disruptions actually worked in the company's favour. "As a 'Made in Germany' manufacturer with no dependency on the Far East, we were able to reliably produce and deliver product to our customers and partners throughout the pandemic," he says, adding that growth last year was in the double digits. "Long delivery times, hugely increased freight costs and the need for a reliable supplier worked in our benefit."

Herm Sprenger has been producing blocks, tiller

extensions, tracks & slides, and cam cleats at its production site in Iserlohn in the Sauerland region since 1872, exporting around 40% of production. Best-selling items include pulleys in various designs for rope diameters of 8mm, 10mm and 12mm, and Micro XS blocks made from high-quality stainless steel and UV-resistant plastic. Small to medium-sized sailing vessels are the company's main target, with most product sold to the aftermarket.

"At the moment we're working intensively on the expansion of products in the paint and care segment," Kannengießer says. "After making a name for ourselves in the industry as a reliable distribution partner and wholesaler, this year we successfully launched our first own products under our own brand."

Kannengießer told *IBI* that investments in production, IT and logistics should lead to further growth in 2021. "It is our intention to maintain and expand our position in the market," he says. "However, despite all our optimism, we are also aware that we may have to deal with the effects of corona on society as a whole. In some areas there will be less purchasing power, and the demand for

certain products will decrease due to restrictions in daily life, etc. In order to continue to operate successfully in 2021, we are trying to expand our brand and our business by improving the automation of our processes, diversifying our product portfolio and increasing our focus on internationalisation."

Torqueedo, the electric propulsion specialist and Deutz subsidiary, has also reported a record year.

"Ongoing travel restrictions and lockdowns impacted positively on many leisure activities, including boating," says Michael Rummel, joint MD. "While the industry got a lift, Torqueedo grew faster than the industry average. This shows that more and more boaters are switching to electric and choosing carbon

“Ongoing travel restrictions and lockdowns have impacted positively on many leisure activities, including boating”

HS SPRENGER High quality boat fittings - MADE IN GERMANY - SINCE 1872

neutral engines,” he says.

Torqueedo recently announced a raft of new products and developments for 2021, including two new saildrive options – the Deep Blue 50 SD and Deep Blue 100 SD – and a new addition to its Travel outboard range. “The Travel 1103 has reached record-level sales and this spring we will launch the new Travel 603,” Rummel says. “These best-selling small outboards have converted whole segments of boaters to electric propulsion since their debut in 2005,” he claims.

The Travel 603, a 2hp-equivalent electric outboard, is a lightweight, easy-to-use, emissions-free motor suitable for dinghies and daysailers up to 1 tonne. “We have exciting new products for sailors of larger vessels, too. The first integrations of our Deep Blue 50 and 100 SD saildrives that we developed in cooperation with ZF will be hitting the water in the next few months.”

Meanwhile, Torqeedo has expanded its sales and distribution footprint by establishing new sales offices in Italy and Norway to provide faster response times and better technical support for its growing customer base of builders, fleet operators, shipyards, retail dealers and end-users in these key markets.

EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES

“While our domestic market is still important for us, we export the majority of our products today and the percentage share is growing rapidly,” Rummel says. “The past 12 months were particularly good in the EMEA and US markets and we expect these markets to continue strong growth in 2021. We are also exploring opportunities in new markets and we are very pleased with recent developments in the African and South American markets.”

Rummel expects strong growth to continue in 2021 in both the leisure and commercial sectors. “High demand continued over the winter months and all indicators show that this will be another record year for Torqeedo.”

Fischer Panda reported a 20% drop in sales of marine diesel generators for pleasure boats last year, a blip that MD Stephan Backes partly attributes to lockdown measures forcing yards to temporarily



A true best-seller: The 4kW Panda 5000i.Neo marine generator from Fischer Panda

halt production for several weeks. Since then, however, business has swiftly picked up. “Since last summer, we’ve experienced very strong demand for marine generators,” he says, adding that sales in 2021 should return to the high last seen in 2019.

“Covid-19 has changed the attitude of many holidaymakers,” Backes explains. “They want to spend their time in a safe environment, and it’s easier to do that on a yacht than in a crowded hotel. Instead of travelling abroad, many people are deciding to explore their own country, its rivers and canals. And they need a reliable onboard power supply for a relaxed and comfortable cruise.”

Fischer Panda’s variable-speed generators have remained best-sellers throughout the crisis, thanks to their compact size and low noise levels. “Our compact 4kW model, the Panda 5000i.Neo marine generator, is a true bestseller,” says Backes. “Its water-cooled, single-cylinder diesel engine is an in-house design. We have complete control over the whole production process and can offer this generator at a very favourable price, so it’s a high-quality product which is affordable for many. Besides the variable-speed feature, our customers also appreciate the quiet operation of our generators.”

New products introduced over the last 12 months include the Fischer Panda 1.7kW/24V electric motor which is also available with an output of 3.8kW (48V), and an 8kW parallel hybrid system that allows diesel engines to be set to ‘silent’ or ‘zero-emissions’ mode. “This gives our customers the option to operate their boats in restricted areas or enjoy the sunset while silently cruising,” Backes says.

After reporting a 15% drop in business last year, Jan Olfenbüttel at H+B Technics told *IBI* that demand for the company’s platform lift systems saw a complete turnaround in 2021. “Our order book is more than full,” he says. “For the next 10-12 weeks we have no free production slots at all and that’s not normal – usually it’s around 6-8 weeks.”

REVERSAL OF FORTUNES

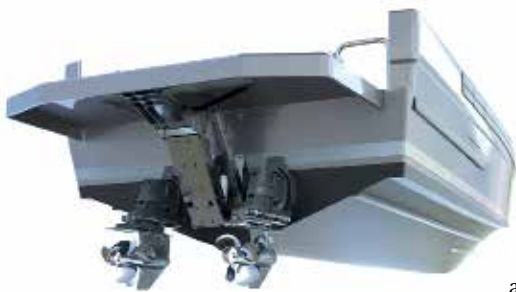
“We’ve received many, many orders from shipyards as well as from private customers for retrofit installation,” he adds. “I can’t speak for everyone, but most shipyards are more or less sold out for this year. People want to get out on the water.”

While much of H+B’s custom work is confidential, Olfenbüttel told *IBI* that the company worked closely with shipyards in Italy, France and Britain over the last 12 months on lift combinations that included side balconies and fold-downs, together with garage door hinges.

Many of the bigger yachts, he says, are installing side fold-downs at platform level in order to maximise the ‘beach space’ area. As for smaller yachts, H+B has just developed a single-arm lift system for boats from 30ft-40ft in length with



Torqueedo’s best-selling Travel series of small outboards has converted whole segments of boaters to electric propulsion since their debut in 2005. This is the Travel 603, new for 2021



H+B's single-arm lift system for small boats

double sterndrives. The lift arm and all stern-mounted components are made of electropolished, 316 Ti-grade stainless steel, and the entire system is shipped pre-assembled for easy installation.

“We’re seeing greater demand for retrofit installations but demand from shipyards is also growing,” Olfenbüttel adds. “There are lots of new projects at the moment, so we’re very confident for this year and for next year too – although in this industry you never know.”

Reckmann Yacht Equipment, the rigging and hydraulics specialist from Rellingen, near Hamburg, is also reporting a strong turnaround after ending 2020 in what managing director Marcus Schuldt described as a “challenging” year. “Implementing all the Covid-19 measures took a lot of time,” he told *IBI*. “Another disadvantage was the fact that there were no boat shows in which to meet clients in person, and we couldn’t travel either because of all the regulations.

“There were some problems in the supply chain too – several projects were postponed or even cancelled – but we still managed to end the year with almost the same level of turnover as 2019.”

As for 2021, Schuldt told *IBI* that Reckmann has more than made up for lost business, thanks to unfinished projects carried over from the previous year and several new enquiries. “If anything, Covid has helped the sailboat business because there’s no better way to self-isolate than on a boat. We can already say that 2021 could end with a 15-20%

increase in sales. We have some new products this year in different sectors which also helps, and we have further diversified our portfolio. We’re getting stronger in the powerboat sector with new sun awning products and we have new headsail reefing systems and hydraulics for the sailboat market.”

Last year Reckmann introduced a new code zero storage system for superyachts that enables the crew to safely operate a large, code zero sail with just two people. The company also developed a new sun awning pole system in cooperation with Porsche Design, and is currently in the process of unveiling its latest innovation – the paraSOL sunshade for superyachts. Available in square or octagonal form, its unique design means that it can be mounted in just a few simple steps and is stable in winds of up to 25kt.

GREEN REVOLUTION

Like many German firms, Reckmann sees the trend towards ‘green’ boating and sustainability continuing well into the future. “There are many cheaper products on the market, but they don’t last as long as ours do,” Schuldt maintains. “For example, our headsail gears work fine on boats for decades, with little maintenance required. It’s something our clients really appreciate.”

Claudia Adamczyk at Bremerhaven-based propeller manufacturer SPW notes a similar trend. “We’re getting more requests for electrification – and not just for light boats but for larger yachts too,” she says.

SPW makes Variprop and Variprofile feathering propellers for cruising and racing sailors, Varifold folding propellers, and custom fixed-pitch propellers for motoryachts. The company also offers a range of shaft seals, propeller shafts, couplings, shaft bearings and stern tubes, and serves as a subcontractor for OceanVolt in Finland, producing parts for its ServoProp variable pitch propeller.

Responding to the trend for electrification, SPW has been working hard on a new range of specialist propellers to meet the demand for lighter, smaller-sized feathering props for electro pods. Its first unit, the GP80-e, was designed especially for electro pods in the 3-9kW range to fit ePropulsion units.

Adamczyk told *IBI* that SPW’s sales to the leisure marine market were up by around 5% last year – mostly on account of its Variprop XLS feathering propeller for commercial sailboats. Like the Variprop Blue Water, the XLS offers a large blade surface for high thrust, excellent sailing properties thanks to low drag, and perfect handling during harbour manoeuvres. It is available up to a size of 62in (almost 1.6m in diameter). ➔

Claudia Adamczyk, general manager at Bremerhaven-based prop maker SPW





The MTU 12V 2000 M96 engine from Rolls-Royce Power Systems

SPW has also introduced a new range of automatic feathering propellers for sailboats, the Variprop GP (Grand Performance). According to Adamczyk, the design of the Variprop GP allows for a 10% reduction in fuel consumption while also delivering high thrust. “Less fuel consumption equals less CO₂-emissions and extended cruising range,”

she says. “Now that’s climate-friendly!”

Rolls-Royce’s Power Systems division ended the 2020 financial year with an underlying operating profit of €200m (2019: €418m), despite suffering a 17% drop in underlying revenue to €3,088m. As a result, Power Systems, with its core MTU engine brand, remained well in the black during the 2020 pandemic year. “Our yacht business has proven to be very positive throughout 2020,” says Denise Kurtulus, head of marine.

“The concept of the yacht as a ‘safe island’ actually boosted our business after May 2020,” she adds. “In total, this allowed us to close the civil marine

segment with losses in the range of approximately 20% compared to the very strong prior year 2019. However, this decline is largely based on the commercial segments such as passenger shipping and tourism, where the global lockdowns caused operators to experience a decline of 75% on average.”

Kurtulus told *IBI* that Rolls-Royce Power Systems is preparing for a shift in its business model towards integrated solutions for propulsion and energy needs in the post-Covid era – with special focus on sustainable, climate-friendly technologies. This is being aided by a reorganisation featuring a special business unit for ‘Sustainable Power Solutions’.

The company is also working hard on ways to exploit hydrogen as the fuel of the future. “We’re convinced that hydrogen has a key role to play in the green energy revolution,” Kurtulus says. “Developers are working on concepts for hydrogen engines, fuel cell systems and engines using methanol based on climate-neutrally produced hydrogen.”

In the meantime, the Power Systems division provides SCR systems which are especially adapted to suit MTU engines, allowing the customer to benefit from the reliability of a package solution. “Three 80m yachts compliant with the IMO III directive are currently being built at Turkish shipyard Bilgin,” Kurtulus says. “They are powered by MTU Series 4000 M03 engines of the previous generation ➔

Allpa GmbH: Covid fuels ‘tsunami’ of orders



CEO Mark Rutgers: “Even if there had been a Düsseldorf show this year, we wouldn’t have had time for it”



Stock at Allpa’s warehouse in Kleve flew off the shelves

Mark Rutgers, CEO and owner of Dutch wholesale distributor Allpa, told *IBI* that the company’s German subsidiary grew sales by 20% last year. Border closures and the subsequent boom in the number of people taking their boating holidays at home has been great for business.

“In April, we posted a small loss in turnover but from the 1st of May we had a tsunami of orders,” he says. “There were lots of requests for technical equipment and small chandlery items started flying off the shelves.”

Staff at Allpa’s warehouse in Kleve, just over the Dutch border in Nordrhein-Westfalen, had no time to rest, with August and September being particularly busy months. “I hate to say it, but even if there had been a Düsseldorf boat show this year, we wouldn’t have had time for it. It was that busy.”

Allpa has around 10,000 products in its catalogue – everything from steering and control systems, shaft lines, generators and electrical equipment, to windlasses, gearboxes, water pumps, propellers, hatches, seats and more – and over 25,000 items are stocked at its German warehouse. Gensets and associated electrical gear have seen tremendous growth, says Rutgers, along with anything to do with propulsion. This momentum is expected to continue well into 2021 with another 20% gain in sales. “At the moment we are taking orders only,” he says.

linked up to suitably adapted SCR systems. The Bilgin yacht propulsion solution has already received IMO III certification, making these yachts the cleanest in their class.”

Rolls-Royce also recently received EPA Tier 4 certification for its MTU propulsion systems based on its Series 4000 M65L 16-cylinder diesel engines for yachts and commercial vessels. Through further developments in the engines’ turbocharging, combustion process and fuel injection, combined with the new MTU-SCR exhaust aftertreatment system, Rolls-Royce reduced nitrogen oxide emissions by 75% compared to IMO II requirements and particulate emissions by 65% compared to EPA 3, without the use of a diesel particulate filter. Fuel consumption has been reduced compared to the previous generation of engines (to as low as 190g/kWh), and so have CO₂ emissions.

CHANGING HABITS

“Generally speaking, 2020 was quite difficult – not only for us, but for the whole leisure marine market. The reduction of watersport activities and the change in people’s habits made many of the usual sports more difficult,” Eddy Tseng at Ölbox GmbH told *IBI*. “Our turnover in the marine market dropped by around 20% last year – the first time the company’s turnover has fallen since its establishment.”

Ölbox has been making pumps and service tools for the exchange or handling of operating fluids for more than 30 years. With a warehouse in Mörfelden-Walldorf, and with several EU patents under its belt, its products are marketed under the Oilbox brand and are widely used in the marine, automotive and agricultural machinery markets. “The German market has always been our strongest area,” Tseng says, “but we also do very well in export markets such as Spain, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Czech Republic, Poland and the UK.”

Earlier this year, Ölbox launched a wave-powered bilge pump and a new 3-in-1 paddle with hook and pump in an attempt to expand its marine market presence. The wave-powered bilge pump is powered by natural wave without additional force, and the 3-in-1 paddle is said to be the world’s first paddle that combines the pump function on the paddle. Both products are patented in Germany.

Tseng told *IBI* that Oilbox manual pumps with 2.7-litre, 4-litre and 6.5-litre capacities for oils and similar liquids are currently the company’s best-selling marine items, as they are easily portable and don’t require power or a compressed air connection. They can also withstand temperatures of up to 100°C. “Our manual pumps are perfect for oil changes and ridding excess fluid from hard-to-reach areas on the boat,” Tseng maintains.

SUPPLY CHAIN ISSUES AND OTHER CHALLENGES

Yachtlite’s Kristin Schädel described 2020 as a “crazy year” – but one in which the company “bravely held its own”.

“As well as delivery delays – our LEDs, for example, come from Asia – we also had to deal with an acrylic shortage, because suddenly everyone needed spit guards, as well as closed harbours, travel restrictions, customers not getting to their boats... We got through the year quite well, considering.” ➔

“As well as delivery delays, we also had to deal with an acrylic shortage because suddenly everyone needed spit guards”



Oilbox manual pumps are easily portable



50^{kw}

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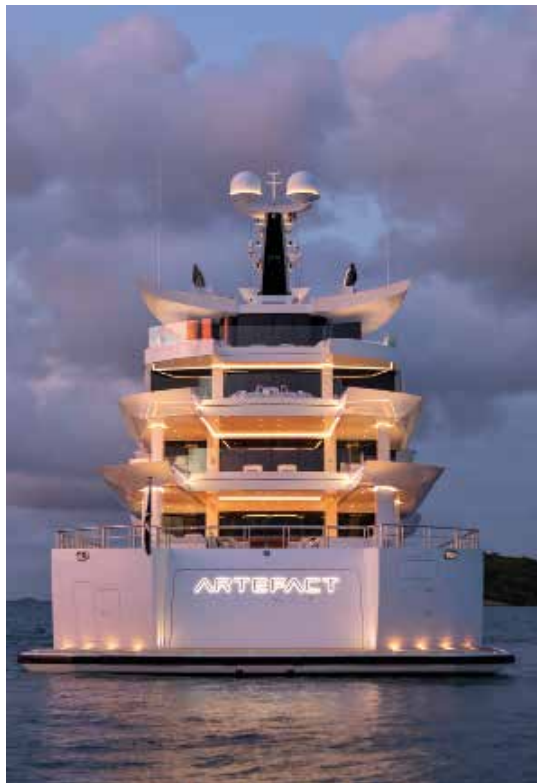


Photo: Alexis Andrew

Yachtlite specialises in unique, one-off illuminated LED lighting solutions for superyachts

Yachtlite makes LED-based illuminated lettering for yachts of all sizes, specialising in one-off, unique solutions for superyachts.

The company offers illuminated lighting for everything from onboard helicopter decks, to pools, steps, furniture and more.

“One trend is definitely for lights with RGB/W diodes,” Schädel says. “With these you can display all colour nuances.

“We’re also seeing a trend towards special geometries, special shapes and new materials. Some lettering is implemented in highly complex shapes, and there are some really elaborate design details. We do everything we can

to make our clients’ dreams a reality.”

Going forward, Schädel says Yachtlite is working on some “large and sensational” superyacht projects for 2021/22 that are strictly confidential. “Some of these projects are 100m-plus, but our clientele remains as broad as ever,” she says.

“Unfortunately, everything here is subject to NDA. What we can say, however, is that everyone who can, wants a yacht to go out on the water – and as far out as possible. And many want an illuminated Yachtlite name to go with it.”

In a time when travel opportunities are limited, Webasto’s worldwide presence and network of local partners in more than 50 locations has been key to its success. Laurent Cerutti, sales manager for RV & Marine, told *IBI* that 2020 was a good year for the climate control specialist from Stockdorf. “The market was extremely fragmented depending on country and segment, but we continued to grow our market share with our roofs, shading solutions, air-conditioning units and refrigerators in this segment,” he says. “In the USA, we are also proud to have been selected as preferred supplier for our entire product range by the UMMA (United Marine Manufacturers Association).”

Webasto is also reaping the rewards of earlier

investment. Last year the company expanded its product portfolio with a focus on new, innovative features. One example is BlueCool Connect, a handy device that connects the aircon systems in Webasto’s BlueCool series to a network, enabling easy operation off all devices via smartphone, tablet or PC.

“It is customisable, brings plug-and-play connection to the boat’s multifunction displays via HTML5, and allows remote services via the BlueCool Expert tool,” Cerutti says. “We also focused on the management of our global production and supplier network in 2020 to ensure high-quality service to our customers despite Covid-19.”

NEW BOAT MODELS

As for marine roofing products, 8,000 units had just left the company’s German production facility as *IBI* went to press. “We’ve noticed a change in customer habits but also a change in boat models... they’re asking for very large, customised roofs or smaller standard ones, skipping the middle range,” says Cerutti. “With the change of boat models, sales of Webasto shading products are picking up rapidly.”

Meanwhile, Webasto’s heaters, particularly its fuel-operated air heaters, are still strong sellers – particularly in northern countries where they are valued for their robustness, ease of installation and usability.

“The self-contained marine air-conditioning systems have also been selling very well, not only to boat manufacturers but also in the aftermarket,” Cerutti adds. “Here, customers understand the importance of a modern, reliable air-conditioner on board to provide perfect comfort levels. They definitely make the precious time on board even more relaxing, particularly in the times of the ongoing pandemic.” **IBI**



Webasto’s BlueCool Connect

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