Since expanding into semi-custom motoryachts, Galeon has gained a strong international following. Since starting operations in 1982, Galeon has grown from a small facility in Straszyn outside Gdansk — which originally constructed sailboats for Beneteau and Jeanneau — into Poland’s largest powerboat and motoryacht builder. The Galeon brand and its smaller-boat line, Galia, have earned a strong following in Europe, particularly in Scandinavia, where the company carved a solid presence by building smaller, utilitarian motorboats specifically designed for northern waters.

However, Galeon expanded its market reach eight years ago by working with UK designer Tony Castro, who added a more contemporary style to its line of motoryachts, which has now grown to 24m (80ft). Within five years of launching the Castro-designed boats, Galeon was viewed as a legitimate and less costly alternative to its Italian and UK competitors in the luxury motoryacht segment.

Despite the global downturn in boat sales, the company has continued to push ahead with new-model launches amidst a slower, but steady, flow of production. It estimates it will build between 80-100 boats this year.

Galeon has more than 26,000m² of production space in two facilities, one of which is its headquarters in Straszyn.
where Galeon and Galia models from 4m-13m (13ft-42ft) are built. The second, more modern facility near the Wisla Channel, concentrates on larger Galeon yachts up to 24m, though it has the capacity to build up to 30m (100ft). The company also has a marina for service and open-water testing in the nearby Baltic sea.

Maciej Mizgier, Galeon’s production manager, took EB on a tour of its original facility in Straszyn. The production facilities were a marked contrast to its modern offices, with an enormous conference table and Bose speaker system in the boardroom. The first machine EB saw in the metal-working area was a Brown & Sharpe turret lathe from Providence, Rhode Island, circa 1901.

“It’s very precise,” says Mizgier, noting my inspection of the lathe. “I wouldn’t want to get rid of that machine, it still does an excellent job.”

It was quickly apparent that the precise joints and clean welds on the stainless and aluminium pieces that defined the boats we’d sea-tested earlier that day are what give Galeon its strong international reputation. Those pieces come from a skilled workforce that does much of the work the old-fashioned way, rather than by computer. The pieces of the plugs, for instance, are cut by hand, rather than by CNC router. The teak floors and insets made in Galeon’s Teak Corridor come from carpenters who specialise in the wood, many of whom have been with the company since it was founded. Some are even father and son teams.

BUILDING IN-HOUSE
Back in the stainless shop, about 40-50 workers are busy fabricating custom stainless steel pieces and aluminium extrusions that will be installed aboard the Galeon line.

“We’re unlike some of our competitors in that we make almost everything in-house,” says Mizgier. “We do everything but build the engines and wind screens.”

The shop fabricates hundreds of metal pieces, from bimini tops to door frames. Even very intricate designer showerheads for the larger models are built in the facility.

Galeon’s tendency to refrain from outsourcing — a temptation for any boatbuilder during these lean times — means that the builder retains a much better handle on quality control in the workplace. Galeon’s location,

**“Precise joints and clean welds on the stainless and aluminium pieces are what give Galeon its strong reputation”**
YARD VISIT Galeon

just outside Gdansk, means that the builder can draw from a large pool of welders and carpenters that learned their trades in the famed shipyard that gave rise to Solidarity.

“There’s a good market here for skilled workers,” says Mizgier. “We don’t believe in outsourcing and instead try to treat our workers like they’re part of a family company.

“The skeleton of our labour force is about 300 and always the same, though we have 200 other workers who are flexible in the summer.”

Galeon’s workforce this year totaled between 500-600. During the pre-2008 boom years the workforce extended up to 800. There is somewhat of a myth that Galeon, and other Polish builders, can keep the quality high and prices lower than competitors because of the cheap labour rates in Poland. There is some truth to that but Mizgier says it’s more complicated.

COMPETITIVE LABOUR RATES
“According to official figures, 15 years ago the average wage in Poland was US$150 per month,” he says. “Now, it’s closer to $700.

“It’s gone up every month during that time, so the impact has been deep, meaning that for the next four or five years we’ll still be competitive with our labour rate.”

The shipyard has dramatically changed its method of operations in the last three years, focusing on semi-custom models rather than the production boatbuilding it followed during the boom years.

“I would say that now 50 per cent to 60 per cent of the parts are customised for each boat,” says Mizgier. “One owner might want more of an oval window or a third cabin.

“Sometimes we offer 20-25 custom options that you cannot find in other shipyards. That is how we are gaining a market share, because afterall, we are all fighting for the prize these days.”

In the woodshop, there are half a dozen hardwoods laid out next to each other. A CNC machine cuts out some of the larger, more intricate shapes, but most of the cabinetry, furniture, and detailed work is done by Galeon’s carpenters. On one of the cabinets, the grains are so well matched that the piece looks almost fake, like a plastic simulation. The fit and finish on the boats we tested earlier that day were also of a high quality, with no rough edges or fraying.
“I really believe that in the last two years we have made an immense improvement in our quality, says Mizgier. “Some of our competitors have allowed quality to slip in order to control costs, whereas we’re taking the opposite approach.”

In the building across from the cabinet woodshop, the Teak Corridor is divided into work areas by boat models and specific projects. Teak decks, floors, grates, and other pieces are laid out for the specific models on the production floor. A staircase made of teak and stainless steel is ready for assembly on the model 550.

While the furniture across the hall is often started just after the shipyard confirms an order — typically three months before the boat is delivered — the teak work comes closer to the final assembly of the boat, and is one of Galeon’s proud points on its boat.

But Galeon, like other shipyards, is working under the constraints of the teak importation embargo from Burma. Mizgier says the yard has experimented with other non-teak options for decks and joinery, but so far they have not produced any satisfactory results.

“We are slowly changing to other woods, because teak with the right quality and thickness is harder to get,” says Mizgier. “Also, some of the owners are asking not to have teak, but we will continue to offer it, even though the price is going up each year.”

In the sheds behind the Teak Corridor, Galeon builds its plugs and prototypes. It also has a water-tank for testing the models at the end of the hall. According to Mizgier, the test tank, which is capable of holding boats up to 16m (53ft), eliminates most post-production issues. A Galeon 530 can sometimes be tested in the tank for five days before it’s released.

PROTOTYPE DEVELOPMENT
A handful of plugs are scattered around the room, while behind a locked door, Galeon’s new 390 is hidden from view. The climate-controlled area allows Mizgier precise control of the building of the moulds and other parts. About 40 workers are involved in building the plugs and moulds, as well as a development manager who oversees all prototype development and any necessary retooling of existing models.

In the final shed at the rear of the complex are the lamination and assembly areas. There are six hulls and superstructures being laminated, most notably the new 550 that will be launched at the Cannes boat show in September. Galeon started vacuum infusion about three years ago, and as each new model comes on-line, the company uses its resin infusion process. That includes models 325, 340, 350, 385 and 420. Everything else is laid up by hand, using woven roving and biaxial glass.

The lamination process takes about a week, and during that time, bulkheads, stringers and other structural supports are installed. When lamination is complete, the boat enters an enclosed room where it is trimmed. Then it moves to the final assembly hall where most of the work is completed. Mizgier admits that the stairs and scaffolding leading up to cabins and superstructures seem a bit dated, and says that the new shipyard has balconies for quicker worker access.

Across the large hall, Galeon works on boats from its outboard-powered 4m Galia Open to the Galeon 420 motoryacht. The larger boats are completed at the newer facility.
“We do a lot of the customisation work here,” says Mizgier. “Many of our owners want to personalise their boats to reflect their own tastes.”

Tucked away at the rear of the building is a computer-generated water-jet that cuts shapes as part of the customisation process. Logos, images and names can all be cut in seconds by the German-manufactured water-jet.

Of all the Polish yacht builders, Galeon has been the most ambitious in trying to gain international following. Its newer yard in Wisla came online during the boom years, and with hindsight it may have been an ill-timed investment. But Galeon, like all of its competitors, is waiting for the large yacht market to return. When it does, the company says it will be ready.

In the meantime it will continue to produce boats largely for export at its Straszyn facility, turning out the old-fashioned way. Certainly the quality of the boats speaks volumes about the skills of Galeon’s workforce.

**FINISHING TOUCHES**

Above the assembly hall is the upholstery area where workers sew upholstery, leatherwork and finish off furniture. There are a handful of exotic hides for a Russian client who owns a 780. They will be used as leather accents in the salon and are going to Lebanon, while others are bound for Russia, Italy and China. The Galia’s range in size from 4m-7m, are all outboard powered, and either sterndrive or inboard models. The sterndrives use either Volvo or Mercruiser power, while the inboards span across the horsepower spectrum. Its largest powerplant installation to date is a pair of 1,600hp V12 MANs on its Galeon 780, but the shipyard says it will soon install MTUs as well.

**YARD VISIT Galeon**

The boats in the main assembly hall demonstrate Galeon’s geographic reach. A 420 is headed for Miami, another is going to Lebanon, while others are bound for Russia, Italy and China. The Galia’s range in size from 4m-7m, are all outboard powered, and either sterndrive or inboard models. The sterndrives use either Volvo or Mercruiser power, while the inboards span across the horsepower spectrum. Its largest powerplant installation to date is a pair of 1,600hp V12 MANs on its Galeon 780, but the shipyard says it will soon install MTUs as well.

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