

Light but handy in the turns

A superyacht designed to go with the perfect hidden lagoon is being built in WA, reports Barry Wiseman

The chance discovery of a beautiful hidden lagoon in remote outer islands of the West Indies has led to the naming of the latest range of production superyachts to be built in WA.

The first Secret Harbour 46 is now under construction in a purpose-built facility in Rockingham. Plans have been drawn up for a 56 version and a 66 is also in the pipeline.

At a time when some Australian boat builders are feeling the strain of a tight economic climate, the managing director of Australia Yachts, Michael Antalec, is confident his Secret Harbour series of lightweight fibreglass luxury vessels will be well received.

The hull design is from respected Fremantle naval architect Mark Ellis and is a refinement on proven rock lobster fishing boats built to suit West Australian ocean conditions.

Using vacuum infusion for a uniform glass-fibre and resin ratio, the Secret Harbour range is built to survey 11B, which allows for 12 commercial passengers up to 200 nautical miles off shore, well within the bounds of recreational use.

The SH 46 is 14.5m in length, has a beam of 4.4m and a very sharp entry flattening to a deadrise of 17 degrees at the transom. Full details of the complete aft section are still under wraps, a secret Australia Yachts says will be revealed come the launch at the end of the year.

But it's no mystery what's happening under water. All the Secret Harbour boats are being built to take the Cummins pod drive Zeus propulsion system, which gives improved handling, more fuel efficiency and negates the need for rudders, shafts, fabricated exhaust or bow thrusters.

The SH 46 will be fitted with twin Cummins QSB480 engines providing a top speed in excess of 32 knots, cruising at 25 and a range of 1000 nautical miles at 12 knots. Vacuum infusion will be used on the hull with a fully engineered high-strength, but lightweight, laminated core for the bulkheads. The SH 46 has a displacement of 18 tonnes, including 3000 litres of fuel.

The Ellis touch of a sharp entry, acute reverse chines and a rounded-out bottom increases efficiency.

Mr Antalec said the Secret Harbour range of mini superyachts would perform like sports cars but still take the rigours of a crayboat. The 46 has three staterooms, two bathrooms, a saloon, alfresco dining, retractable awning, barbecue and fishing and diving area.

The use of the Zeus direct drives means the engines and propulsion units are kept at the stern, reducing noise levels and vibration while freeing up more room for live-aboard comfort.

Australia Yachts has recruited a team of 14 qualified builders, many from highly respected luxury boat manufacturers in England. Project manager Steve Rogers has 28 years experience as a shipwright and is in charge of production development.

The use of CNC computer-controlled cutting machinery assures a highly accurate product and a plug for the fibreglass mould can be built in just six weeks.

Mr Antalec has an impressive history in yacht building. The former US Navy navigator and Merchant Marine officer was previously the co-founder and managing director of Hanseatic Marine at Henderson. He helped build the company to 120 full-time employees and it recently completed the 74m yacht Silver, the world's longest aluminium-hulled

luxury vessel.

While the new range of Secret Harbour boats is being built using the latest techniques and fully engineered light-weight laminated core products, old-fashioned hands-on boat-building skills are being used on the classical lines and well-appointed interior. Safety and quality have a high priority.

"We use the latest environmentally friendly method of construction in a well-illuminated workshop using natural light as much as possible," Mr Antalec said.

"Bench scaffolding is used around the outside of the vessels, plus a purpose-built gantry into the interior. Our boats also focus on safety and include an escape porthole near the galley in case of fire. Our aim is to build the best of the best handcrafted products, creating 20 per cent more interior space.

"As a superyacht captain in 1996, I was cruising in the West Indies islands known as the Exumas.

"Manoeuvring between several reefs I came across an anchorage in the lee of Cambridge Cay and dropped anchor in the turquoise blue water. It was when I was sitting on the most perfect beach that inspiration for the Secret Harbour range of vessels was struck.

"It became my destiny to build a boat that was as beautiful as the scenery and perfectly equipped to explore such locations without disturbing the tranquillity.

"The West Australian coastline has these places and our boats will provide the means of getting there."

The Secret Harbour 46 will cost about \$1.3 million. Mr Antalec will be at the Australia Yachts booth at next week's Club Marine Perth Boat Show, or can be called on 9528 7555.



Destiny calls: Australia Yachts chief executive Mike Antalec with a model of the Secret Harbour 46.



Handling: The Cummins Zeus drive offers excellent manoeuvrability.