

Nothin' *finer*

... than a Carolina hull —
except maybe the luxury
of a Jarrett Bay

Conditions at the Mid-Atlantic 500 fishing tournament out of Cape May, N.J., this summer got pretty rough at times, but that didn't stop Walter Kuhn's 41-footer. The Jarrett Bay express with its Carolina-style hull cut through the sloppy conditions, keeping up with the 60- and 70-footers — in some cases, passing them.

In fact, when Kuhn stopped his boat to allow crewmembers to use the head, a 70-footer slowed to see if he needed help. When Kuhn answered that they were OK, the skipper of the larger boat expressed his admiration for how well the smaller craft handled the seas. "Man," he said, "that thing's pretty good."

Though Jarrett Bay Boatworks of Beaufort, N.C., is a relative newcomer in the long line of yards building boats with Carolina hulls, it has set a pretty fast pace in recent years. With an experienced work force using the latest technologies, the company is building some of the most innovative, practical and attractive boats on the market.

Jarrett Bay specializes in custom sportfishermen for serious anglers, with boats ranging in size from the mid-30s to about 74 feet (more later on a new semicustom 32-footer). Prices vary greatly because the boats are custom, but typically run from about \$450,000 up to \$4 million.

Owning a Jarrett Bay is a bit like having a luxury home meant to take you to the fish. "Not only do we build the finest home," says Jarrett Bay CEO Randy Ramsey, "we shove it through the ocean at 40 knots."

Looks and ride

The Carolina-built sportfishing boat with its signature bow flare is a pleasing sight for those who appreciate the true art form represented by a custom

fishing vessel. The "duck-bill" flare, as it is sometimes called, turns bow spray downward, keeping it pretty much off the bridge, as well as the captain, crew and guests. The innovation began with North Carolina boatbuilder Warren O'Neal years ago and has been used since by many others.

This is Kuhn's second Jarrett Bay. (His first was a 27-footer.) Powered by a pair of 660-hp Cummins QSMII diesels, he says the 41 cruises at 28 to 30 knots with a top end of 37 knots.

Kuhn previously had fished 27- and 29-foot Blackfins but gave up boating for a couple of years because he had small children. When he decided it was time to get back on the water, Kuhn was determined to find a boat with a good Carolina hull because of their reputation.

"A lot of my friends I fish with have Carolina boats," he explains. "I'm going out 70, 80 miles. I wanted a Carolina boat because they have a good ride. Plus, I like the look."

A yard of support

Jarrett Bay Boatworks is located just north of Beaufort in a 175-acre industrial park that sits on mile marker 198 off the Intracoastal Waterway. In a former life, the Jarrett Bay Marine Industrial Park was used to build superstructures for steel tankers, which were then barged to Norfolk, Va., for installation.

In the early 1990s it was more or less abandoned for about eight years before its new incarnation under the eyes of Ramsey and Don Kirkman, director of economic development for Carteret County, N.C.

Ramsey's vision was to create an industrial park made up of support companies that would complement each other. Today the Jarrett Bay Industrial Park is home to three boatbuilders — two producing custom Carolina boats,

and the other building in fiberglass — an MTU distributor, Covington Diesel engines; a Caterpillar Diesel distributor run by Greg Poole; and a ZF Marine facility, the world's largest manufacturer of marine transmissions, props and marine propulsion systems. Additionally, an upholstery shop, two aluminum tower shops, a machine shop, marine salvage operation, and a sailboat rigging and restoration company are on-site. There also are 220- and 50-ton marine lifts that can handle yachts to 120 feet.

"We're not simply a boatbuilder," says Ramsey, 42. "We're the largest re-

pair yard in the Mid-Atlantic." That means customers who need repairs can not only take their boats back to the yard, they can go straight back to the person who did the original work, which gives the owner peace of mind.

In the beginning

The origins of Jarrett Bay reach back to December 1986, when Ramsey and Jim Luxton, both charter boat captains at the time, decided to build their own boat. Like so many Carolina builders before them, they looked to such respected builders as Myron Harris and

Omie Tillet of Manteo, N.C., for advice.

Ready to jump in head first, Ramsey and Luxton rented an old shed in Williston, N.C., on Jarrett Bay (hence the name) and built their first boat, a 52-foot juniper strip-planked hull with pine frames that still runs charters out of Morehead City, N.C. She was recently repowered by the Jarrett Bay yard with a single 1,400-hp Caterpillar.

The company tries to keep track of all of its boats, even the ones that change hands. "We make a real effort to know who the new owner is," Ramsey says.

For a while Ramsey and Luxton alter-

nated between taking parties fishing and building boats when fishing was slow. In 1990 the two moved their operation to a 5-acre lot in Marshallberg, N.C. Ramsey had a metal shed built on the site, purchased a 60-ton marine lift, and Jarrett Bay Boatworks had entered a new phase as it expanded to repairing and refitting boats, in addition to new construction. Ramsey bought out Luxton shortly after the move, who subsequently went to Virginia and started J&L Boatworks.

Jack Huddle, who leased out the Marshallberg property, had known Ramsey for several years and got in line for a

Jarrett Bay boat. He was customer No. 3 and took delivery of a 43-foot sportfisherman, Builder's Choice. The New Bern, N.C., resident knew Ramsey's father and says he had faith in the son. Plus, the local kid was honest and a hard worker, Huddle says.

"He didn't mind getting up at 4 in the morning to go fishing," says Huddle, now 76 and on his third Jarrett Bay, a 55-footer.

Once in the Marshallberg yard, charter fishing became a thing of the past for Ramsey, as two to three boats were being built each year.

Jarrett Bay 48 express, hull No. 46

BY CAPT. BILL SMITH

“Not only do we build the finest home, we shove it through the ocean at 40 knots”

In 1994 charter skipper Dew Forbes ordered hull No. 14. Forbes had been fishing out of Atlantic Beach and Morehead City since 1984, and knew Ramsey's boats by sight and reputation. The boat that Jarrett Bay built for Forbes was Calcutta, another 52-foot juniper-planked sportfisherman that is still running charters.

That year Ramsey was preparing to build his first cold-molded boat. He had hooked up with naval architect Glenn Haught — today still part of Jarrett Bay's design team — and they were ready for this next step in the company's evolution. The cold-molded boat, hull No. 18, went to Forbes, who subsequently became an investor in the company. Forbes is now senior vice president of Jarrett Bay.

Today with a new facility and an experienced crew, Jarrett Bay is working on its 50th boat. Hull No. 49, a 53-foot fly-bridge model, is being built for golfer Curtis Strange, another repeat customer.

The company also has begun building a semiproduction 32-foot express with a center console that gives a walkaround configuration. Hull No. 1, already sold, will feature twin outboards on a bracket for an expected top end of up to 40 knots. Future models will give owners the option of inboard diesels. Plans are to sell between 12 and 20 of these boats annually at a starting price of \$185,000.

Keeping its roots

The work force at Jarrett Bay has increased to 140 employees from the two it started with 18 years ago, including the boatbuilding operation and the yard. They are turning out twice the number of boats as the nearest competing custom builder, with the same number of employees, according to the company.

Even through its expansions, Jarrett Bay has tried to stay true to the roots of Carolina boats, Ramsey says. Part of that is the pride that he says he and all his workers have invested in the boats.

"It's not necessary to compromise on the things that got us here," Ramsey says. "It's quality — a lot of attention to detail. ... We try to build them as if they're our own."

Almost all of the fabrication is done in-house, which gives the company greater control over the details. And it's those details that can sometimes be overwhelming for an owner putting together a custom boat, says Kuhn, who owns the new 41-footer. For years Kuhn had been writing down all the little things he wanted in his next boat, from a big fish-box to teak decks. When it came time order his latest Jarrett Bay, he decided to check off all the items on his list.

"The sky's the limit," Kuhn says. "You can kind of go overboard, there are so many options."

The players and process

Gary Davis — no relation to well-known Carolina builder Buddy Davis — heads the boatbuilding operation and is responsible for the design and construction of all the systems on the boats. A longtime and highly respected



JARRETT BAY AT A GLANCE: Jarrett Bay CEO Randy Ramsey; comfort and luxury below deck; signature Carolina bow flare; the 175-acre Jarrett Bay Marine Industrial Park.

builder, Davis was once Jarrett Bay's competitor, running Sleepy Creek Boatbuilders. In 1998 Davis and Ramsey agreed to a friendly merger.

"Gary Davis is an absolute genius," says Kuhn. "He knows more about boats. ... He's a gifted artist."

Also part of the team is Vince Russell, who started at Jarrett Bay in 1988. He heads up the hull construction department. Tommy Smith is in charge of electrical systems. Tate Lawrence works alongside Davis in the design office and spends an equal amount of time in the sheds managing the last half of the building process.

Early on, the boats pretty much stayed in one location, and crews, often with multiple duties, came to them in the construction process. Today, with the new and efficiently designed facility and four modern buildings, the boats can be moved to the crews, creating one of the more efficient custom boat facilities in the business. Today, Jarrett Bay has the closest thing to an assembly process seen in custom boatbuilding.

With six to eight custom boats under construction at any time, the work force is operating pretty much at capacity. But they are always looking to add well-trained people. "Any time we find a certain level of expertise, it doesn't matter if we're at capacity or not, we hire them," Ramsey says.

The company is always looking to its employees for new ideas, too. "Everybody has input," he says. "It's not one

guy sitting in an office. We're always evolving, changing. It gives our folks pride in what they do."

For Kuhn, the team pulled together the boat he'd been dreaming of. "I wanted this boat to be everything I always wanted," he says.

That's typical of Jarrett Bay's customers, says Ramsey. Most have owned a number of boats and have a good idea of what they want. "They've owned production boats and are trying to make a move to the [ultimate] boat, their last boat. The largest or the best."

Keeping up

By his own admission, Ramsey is not a boatbuilder but, as some would say, a visionary able to have kept his company on the cutting edge of expansion, quality and art. The people he works with say he has an uncanny ability to know when to push to the next level without losing control.

One of the changes he's had to adapt to over the years is the increased demand for speed. In the last decade a customer's minimum expectation for speed has increased by about 10 knots, he says. He attributes that to developments made by engine manufacturers and the fact that anglers are making longer runs to the fishing grounds, 120 miles and farther.

Increased expectations combined with increased available horsepower has challenged Jarrett Bay to continually adapt. At the same time, boats are getting bigger, too. "Now the standard is

60 feet," Ramsey says. "The majority are in excess of 58 feet. That's the average."

Though he says he has no "crystal ball," Ramsey believes the numbers will keep increasing. Those customers who now have 60-footers will be looking to step up. Right now Jarrett Bay is constructing a 70-footer with a 4-1/2-foot draft that's expected to run in excess of 40 knots. "We feel we are pushing that envelope," Ramsey says.

Tastes and demands have evolved over the years, too, Ramsey says. Those coming from high-end production boats want the seakeeping abilities of a Carolina hull but don't want to give up the amenities.

Customers like Huddle view Jarrett Bay's interior work as quality craftsmanship. "They're very good at woodwork. They're more like furniture builders," he says. "You can come down and watch the craftsmen make you a table."

By all indications this company will continue to be on the leading edge of custom boatbuilding, turning out high-quality, well engineered sportfishing boats one at a time. Also, with a rapidly growing repair and restoration business, a new aspect to Jarrett Bay's corporate and artistic makeup is evolving. And with the addition of the 32-foot semiproduction model, it will be reaching a new boater.

"It's fun," says Ramsey. "You want every [boat] to be better."

Jarrett Bay Boatworks, Beaufort, N.C. Phone: (252) 728-2690. www.jarrettbay.com; info@jarrettbay.com ■