

JARRETT BAY BOATWORKS: CUSTOM BOATS WITH A PASSION FOR FISHING

BY HELEN AITKEN



The newly launched Jarrett Bay 77' Blank Check awaits sea trials.

Jarrett Bay Industrial Park evokes an overpowering feeling of awe with its gigantic yachts, service craft and other vessels balanced upright on dry land. At the heart of the complex is Jarrett Bay Boatworks with enormous buildings and covered areas to create and service boats of all sizes.

The main office is located on Sensation Weigh, a nod to Sensation, the first 53' charter fishing boat that Randy Ramsey built. It all started in a shed in Williston, N.C., along Jarrett Bay with the help and advice of master boat builders like Myron Harris, Omie Tillett, Buddy Canady, Ray Davis and others. After that first success, orders for custom boats propelled Jarrett Bay into existence.

"We can trace our roots to some of the earliest North Carolina boat builders," Ramsey says. "I am proud to say we still carry on a tradition that started many decades ago and, while we strive to improve every day, we are true to that tradition. N.C. boatbuilding was born out of necessity by fishermen. The boats themselves are a product of trial and error and understanding what works best in the ocean and always working to improve each one we deliver."

In 1998, the company moved to a 175-acre location on the Intracoastal Waterway in Beaufort, becoming the first tenant of one of the first industrial parks of its kind. Other

marine businesses have since moved into the park and work independently to build or repair boats, or provide parts and services, like interior designs, electronics, diesel engines and fishing towers.

"The park has been successful because it allows marine business to work with each other providing a wide variety of services as minor as a simple haul out, to completely rebuilding the boat," says Ramsey. "Our company has built the reputation of being able to take on any job no matter how large or small."

When not working on a new built, Jarrett Bay keeps busy servicing more than 1,200 boats each year from 16'-140'.

Before a customer is ready to order a custom boat, they have usually talked to other builders and boat owners.

"While no buyer is typical, most have owned numerous boats and have an interest in building a boat that suits their specific

needs," Ramsey explains. "The process of having a boat built can be very rewarding, and our owners enjoy the process."

He adds that Jarrett Bay customers "have a genuine interest in owning a boat that has outstanding craftsmanship, performs well in the ocean, is fast and efficient and provides them with a safe stable platform. In addition, they want the stability of a company like ours and the knowledge that we will service them long after the delivery."

While their styling has a connection to the region's past, the company has improved the ride and performance through tank testing research. "The shape of the Carolina boat is unique," says Ramsey. "Flare originated in Harkers Island on commercial workboats, but has been incorporated and exaggerated in the sportfish boats built in our region. While the boats still carry tumblehome forward and an exaggerated flare, it may not be as 'big' as it was 20 years ago. I think the purchaser of a Carolina boat expects to see the shape and form builders have become famous for."

Depending on the finishes, systems installed and other factors, a boat of around 45 feet can take 12-14 months to complete, while an 80' boat may take up to three years. Jarrett Bay is capable of building boats up to 120'.

In May, the company launched the 77' Blank Check – the largest custom fishing boat built by the company to date. On its maiden voyage, it headed to the Bahamas for the Custom Shootout billfish tournament, an invitation only for custom boats. It returned to North Carolina for the Big Rock tournament.

Jarrett Bay sponsors many such charity fishing tournaments, as well as other nonprofit events and organizations, giving back to the community and the sport.

"I personally feel we all need to do anything we can to improve our industry and our community. I think we must remain true to our history, but always be looking for ways to improve our products, relationships and our community," says Ramsey.

In 2011, Jarrett Bay Boatworks received the prestigious American Boat Builders and Repairers Association award for Boatyard of the Year, recognizing the company for excellence in all facets including quality management, safety, customer relations, positive employee and vendor relationships, environmental stewardship and innovative technology.

Presently, Ramsey is concerned with regulations, tax increases and economic stability.

"The boat building industry as a whole saw the loss of many jobs through this last recession. The custom market saw some loss, but many of the companies with some history were able to sustain through the downturn," he observes. "Our industry currently isn't threatened by offshore manufacturing but rather the pressures that come from within. In today's world there is more pressure on people's time, so owning a boat needs to be an enjoyable experience." ☺



Randy Ramsey at home in the Jarrett Bay boat shed.



Jarrett Bay Industrial Park provides a home for numerous marine businesses along the ICW outside of Beaufort, N.C.