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Home Grown & Green

The Marshall family is still building
Navigators and Californians in the U.S.

BY ROGER MCAFEE



Why would a boat builder deliberately choose to build boats in the United States when conventional wisdom says it's less expensive to make them in Asia?

An even more interesting question is, having decided to build in the U.S., why choose a jurisdiction that has, arguably, the most stringent air quality controls in North America?

If you're the Marshall family, builder of Navigators and Californians, the answer to both questions is easy. "We can build boats efficiently in the U.S. and sell them at prices less than the imports," Gil Marshall said.

The family-owned manufacturing plant is located in Perris, CA. "We're in the Southern California Air Quality Management District," Marshall said. "We've been building boats on the West Coast for half a century now, and we didn't want to pull up stakes like a lot of other manufacturers. Also, our family and all of our employees have roots in the area."

About 10 years ago, the company decided to invest about \$750,000 in Thermal Oxidizer Technology. Basically, this technology decomposes hazardous gases at a high temperature and releases them into the atmosphere, ultimately controlling air pollution.

"While the ongoing operational

expense of such a system is not insignificant, it's manageable and as an industrial builder we are proud to be able to produce in a green way," Marshall said.

With 10 years of "green" building under their belt, they would do the same thing all over again. "We made the right decision at the time and it continues to be the right decision to this day," Marshall said.

Marshall's father, Jule, began building boats in the 1950s and eventually Californians by the 1960s. Both Gil and his brother, Steve, began working in the family business right after

Navigator's California-based factory turns out approximately 25 boats per year — both Navigators and Californians — with about 40 employees.

high school. Within a decade the builder expanded its line of trawlers and long-range cruisers from 30 to 52 feet.

In 1982, Wellcraft purchased the company and the line was updated. Marshall repurchased the company in 1987 and sold it again the same year, this time to Carver, which moved production to North Carolina. In 1991, Genmar Industries purchased Carver and stopped making Californians.

After the Californian name was sold

Californian 55 LRC

The new 55-foot long-range cruiser, with a cruising speed of 10-11 mph, is designed with fuel efficiency and elegant comfort in mind.



in the late 1990s, Jule continued (along with his sons) to build under the Navigator name and reacquired the rights to the Californian name. This is when they began building Californians in the Navigator plant.

By the late 1990s, the builder was producing about 60 boats a year with an employee base of about 200. By 2006, as the economy started its downturn, production dropped to about 40 boats a year; now the company turns out about 25 boats a year with an employee base of 40.

Gil Marshall said the family is going to continue to focus on the production of boats tailored to the West Coast. "We've been a West Coast builder of West Coast boats and we're going to continue along those lines," he said.

"Our new Californian 55 LRC has been tested independently, and we compared the results of that test to the test of another similar-sized boat with twin engines producing much more power. Our boat, with a single engine, was 5 miles per hour faster than the other vessel at wide-open throttle. At cruising speed, between 10 and 11 mph, our 55 burned three gallons per hour less.

"What we have in our new 55 LRC is an American-designed boat, built by Americans in the U.S., that performs at least as well as an import, made in a green factory and that costs about \$500,000 less. The more expensive boat is a good boat, in fact a great boat, but we figure ours offers better value for the money and a U.S. buyer can easily reach us if there's a problem," Marshall said.

In response to current market conditions, the company has just launched its new Californian 33. "This new 33-footer is powered by twin diesels giving a top speed of 28 mph. At 20 mph the vessel gets 1.5 miles per gallon. It comfortably sleeps four and will sell for less than \$200,000.

"We are confident the marine industry will recover, but it won't be the same as it has been in the recent past. New buyers will be looking for value and for products that are made taking the environment into account," Marshall said. 🍷

Inside the Factory

The Marshall family and its 40 employees build West Coast boats from the bottom up on the West Coast. They do it in a green factory and sell the boats for less than many imports.

