

INNOVATION DRIVES GROWTH FOR CANVAS AND FABRICS

The fight over market share among existing players and new products entering the pipeline should make for an exciting year in the marine canvas and fabrics industry in 2007.

Although many manufacturers and distributors predict a stagnant year for new boat builders, they see heightened demand for canvas and fabric products through the customization of new boats, retrofits of existing boats and those being readied for resale as well as sales of after-market canvas and fabric products.

"Sales were up considerably in 2006, and '07 started off very well," says Richard Hirsch, secretary/treasurer at Manart-Hirsch Co. Inc., the fabric importer, manufacturer and distributor based in Lynbrook, N.Y. "The February freeze put a little crimp in it, but January was up nearly 50 percent over January '06."

Manart-Hirsch distributes Sunbrella fabric as well as the Stamoid line of vinyl-coated fabric that's imported from Switzerland. Speaking of Sunbrella, Paige Mullis from fabric manufacturer

Glen Raven Mills says the company predicts a "quite active" sales environment for its Sunbrella products through at least 2009.

"The marine topping market has been good for us," says Mullis, marine specialist at the Glen Raven, N.C.-based manufacturer. "The boat industry in recent years has brought out new types and classes of boats ... and we're seeing more focus on those different areas."

Increased variety of boat types opens up opportunities for canvas and fabric suppliers, as does the trend toward a higher emphasis on style and performance on boats in all price ranges, says Mullis. "Boating manufacturers are more fashion-forward in component pieces, but sales on the production side are more toward the neutral," Mullis says.

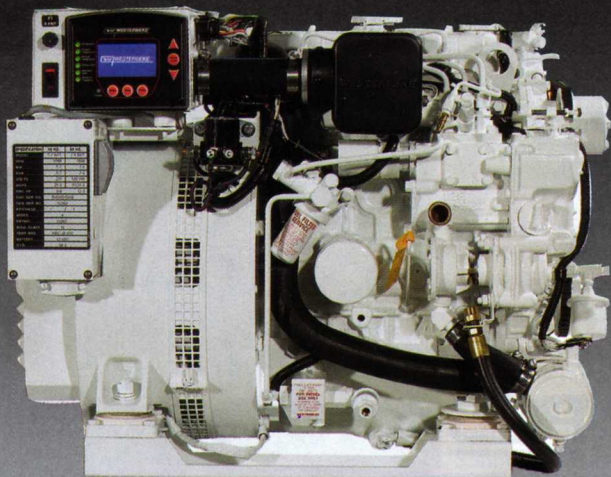
Fabric choices, custom colors and differing canvas designs represent some of the ways OEMs are looking to differentiate their boats from competing products, says John Pierce, WeatherMax product manager at Safety Components Fabric Technologies Inc., based in Greenville, S.C. Although the use of

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*Paige Mullis, Marine Specialist,
Glen Raven*

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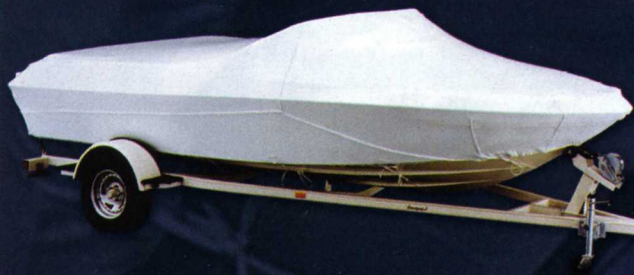


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imported fabric remains strong, because of financial and quality concerns Pierce says he's seen a trend toward companies buying domestically produced material that's shipped to Asia for fabrication.

Syntec Industries, which supplies carpeting to the marine industry, tracks trends in the automotive, apparel and home furnishing industries. Cindy Steele, textile design manager of the company based in Rome, Ga., says those markets are offering what she calls a "new luxury" to the consumer. "Options, looks, fabrics and colors that would normally be used in high-end applications are now finding their way to middle-income consumers," says Steele. "We believe that this trend will eventually reach the marine industry, which would bring a fresh new look to our market."

But at the same time, OEMs are looking to cut costs wherever possible through the supply chain, so suppliers are being asked tough questions about textile composition, construction and durability, says Jeff Jimison, vice president of sales at Shuford Mills LLC, based in Hudson, N.C.

Low price is one consideration, but at the other end of the spectrum are innovations such as nanotechnology to enhance

water resistance, high abrasion resistance and other performance characteristics, Jimison says. Just as boat buyers sometimes can be too wide-eyed about features, colors and the boating

experience in general to ask intelligent questions, Jimison believes that OEMs and custom outfitters sometimes fail to ask tough questions about the performance of any fabric they buy.

"Look at the specifications and ask questions about the claims being made," Jimison says. "So your fabric passed 1,500 or 2,200 hours of UV testing. What was considered passing? Would you or your customer be happy with this degree of fade?" He also says a company should investigate a weaver's supply chain and determine whether the weaver or distributor is engaged in private labeling.

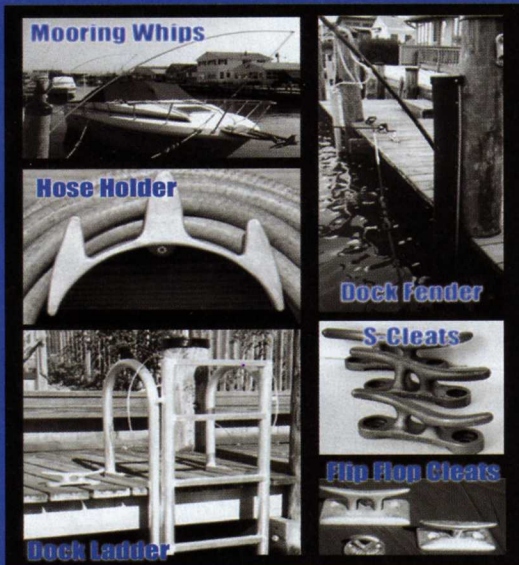
The increase in innovation should allow for a better fit between canvas and fabric products and their intended uses, says Richard Yale, vice president of sales and marketing at MarChem Coated Fabrics Inc., based in New Haven, Mo. "Dealers, fabricators and boat owners should take the time to learn the characteristics of each (product) and best match those

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Syntec Industries*

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