

GEAR**Boat Show Finds**

Producers and manufacturers turn to boat shows for getting their wares out in front of buyers' eyes

Companies and manufacturers often use boat shows to launch new products, make announcements or help create buzz around what they do. It's part of the allure of boat shows, to see the latest and greatest stuff, and get a taste for what the state of the art of the industry is. It's also a chance to see, touch and try products before you buy.

At the Miami International Boat Show this February, for example, electronics maker **Flir Systems** invited the press and guests aboard its boat for a nighttime cruise to check out the latest in thermal imaging equipment. Flir's line of deck-mounted, thermal-imaging video cameras lets sailors navigate in the dark or in reduced visibility, letting them see other

boats, unlit markers and other floating objects. And while these high-end night-vision cameras probably are not high on the fitting-out lists of most budget-minded sailors, the technology is undoubtedly eye-catching.

Glacier Bay was also at the Miami show, unrolling the red carpet for the media to showcase its diesel-electric propulsion system using the company's OSSA Powerlite technology. Glacier Bay conducted demo rides aboard a Crowther 47 catamaran outfitted with the cutting-edge hybrid-type engine.

"Feedback was very positive," said Glacier Bay CEO Kurt Gallo of the demo rides aboard the big cat. "The group was amazed at the quietness of the propulsion system and the ease in which the boat was maneuvered."

According to Gallo, the company exhibits at nine shows a year, including international shows, with shows geared toward boatbuilders being the "most critical."

"We view boat shows as an important part of our marketing strategy," he said. "It is essential that we provide our customers—boat-



Billy Black photo

Visitors check out the goods at the Maine Boatbuilders Show in Portland, Maine, above. Below, Glacier Bay takes out a few guests for a quiet demo ride aboard a Crowther 47 catamaran fitted out with the company's electric propulsion system, inset.

builders and consumers—hands-on experience with our products."

Back in January, a week before

the start of the Strictly Sail Chicago boat show, a brief and somewhat cryptic e-mail arrived from **Ronstan U.S.** President Scot West. "Please

join Ronstan for an exciting announcement at Strictly Sail Chicago as we introduce you to the newest big cat in the sailing industry."

A big cat? Was the venerable maker of

high-performance sailing hardware getting into the boatbuilding business, coming out with a new cruising catamaran? This we had to see, so we headed to Navy Pier, site of the show, early to make it to the pre-show meeting.

Walking into the assigned conference room overlooking the show floor we were met with a large banner for **Puma** footwear, along with displays of bright red shoes and foul weather gear. Were we in the right room? There was Mr. West, but what about the big cat? That's when it occurred to us that the big cat was actually a "big cat," in this case a puma cat. Ronstan was using the Strictly Sail show to announce its partnership with sportswear maker Puma, which this year is launching a new performance sailing line of outerwear, apparel, footwear and

