

Lex Raas | president | Aquila

Words: Tony Esposito

RAAS HAS HAD a successful career in the yacht design and the charter industry having previously worked at Beneteau and the Moorings as well as bringing to market the South African catamaran brand Leopard built by Robertson and Caine. In 2012, experts from multiple development, design and manufacturing firms; Sino Eagle Group, J&J Design Group, Seaway and MarineMax, all collaborated to expand the Aquila range by developing a new, purebred powercat. This international team consisted of Lex Raas, a highly experienced boat developer and charter industry veteran, and J&J Design group and their development arm, Seaway, who have worked on designs for Azimut, Bavaria, Beneteau, Dufour, Jeanneau and Monte Carlo. The group began the process of designing the first true Aquila Power Catamaran, the Aquila 48.



BEYOND INNOVATION AND LUXURY,

Aquila – the unique enterprise between MarineMax and Chinese ship builder Sino Eagle – has one goal: to be the number one power catamaran brand in the world. Founded in 2012, Aquila produces between 80 and 100 hulls annually, and is fast approaching its 400th sale. The goal is 200 hulls yearly in the next two years.

“Pretty soon we’ll be there, in terms of product offerings and revenue,” said Lex Raas, who holds the title of president for Aquila at MarineMax, and was instrumental in founding the company by bringing the two key players together. Within a few months, the Aquila 44 will be the top-selling cruising powercat in the world.

The company will announce in “the next couple of months” two new boats in the fishing category, with a new yacht scheduled for next year. Raas talks to *IBI* about what drives the brand.

Who owns Aquila?

“Sino Eagle owns the Aquila brand and all the tooling and they paid for all the development. So, they 100% own Aquila. MarineMax manages the marketing,

distribution and sales internationally; Aquila and Sino Eagle build the boats, and then, my role is sort of between the two companies, to manage all the development, make sure that all works together very well, and that we’ve brought up all the right types of products.”

With a lifetime in the marine industry, you have developed a reputation for knowing what boaters want, sometimes even before boaters knew themselves.

“And the Aquila product line reflects that, ranging from 28ft outboard boats to the recently introduced 70 Luxury Power Catamaran. In addition to the 70, the past 18 months have seen the introduction of the 54 Yacht Power Catamaran and the 32 Sport Power Catamaran. There’s even a 14ft rigid hull inflatable (RIB). It’s basically a catamaran RIB that goes on a catamaran with all the specific lifting systems and cradle systems, so that it all works physically on the 54 and the 70, and we’ll probably do some smaller ones.”

While the US is your largest market, you have a growing reputation in Australia,

and you are slowly penetrating Europe?

“Our larger fleet is seeing interest from the Eastern Mediterranean – specifically Turkey and Greece – while the smaller outboard boats are gaining share in places like Spain. The company has a presence in 22 countries.”

What are the core ingredients to successful growth?

“You need innovation, you need manufacturing, and you need distribution. And Aquila has all three. The distribution is so important. Aquila wouldn’t happen without MarineMax.

“Sino Eagle’s willingness to invest in product development and manufacturing is the other key. I actually tried to find manufacturers in the US, but nobody was interested in building power catamarans back then.

“To build the 70, Sino Eagle added 70,000ft² of manufacturing to what will become just under one million square feet of dedicated space for Aquila at its Hangzhou, China yard. The facility is state-of-the-art, and environmentally friendly, with solar arrays and no open moulding. We have lower styrene emissions than any US builder and on par with EU regulations.”

What are the biggest advantages cats offer over monohulls?

“You buy a house based on square footage, and that’s really how you should be looking at a catamaran, because, you can take a 44ft cat that’s 23ft wide, that’s a hell-of-a-lot of square footage. A 54ft cat is more like a 65ft monohull, in terms of accommodation and space.”

How do you see the power catamaran market evolving?

“Nine years ago, you had a couple of small cat builders, building mostly small boats. There were a few building larger (semi-custom) boats. I believe you are going to see powercats become very mainstream in the next handful of years, you can just see the explosive growth, especially in the fishing boat segment.” **IBI**