

Currently, in terms of sales, approximately 55 per cent of foreign suppliers of motorboats are represented by trading companies, 35 per cent use specialty importers and only 10 per cent deal directly with marinas and other retail sales outlets.

Although relatively new to the marine sports and pleasure-boat industry, large trading companies have used their market position to secure the better sales outlets. Trading companies usually handle a full line of marine-related imports, from sportswear to luxury yachts.

Yamaha even imports motorboats which it sells through its network of Yamaha and independent dealers. Specialty importers, depending on size, may have their own sales outlets.

Manufacturers of large boats are probably best served by direct importers, boat specialists who know the market better than most trading companies. Finally, personal contacts ease access to sales channels as do unique services or products.

Price

Foreign motorboats are usually more costly than similar Japanese models. The importance of price varies according to type of motorboat. Buying a fishing boat, price is everything, whereas the price of a cruiser is often secondary to design.

Group Buyers

Groups account for 8 per cent of all motorboat sales. Companies find ownership attractive because:

- foreign motorboats are now more affordable due to a stronger yen and reduced commodity taxes;
- motorboats can depreciate over four years;
- company-owned boats can be used for hospitality and employee recreation; and
- a motorboat can improve a firm's image.

Who Buys What

Generally, individual motorboat owners are older, wealthier and less demanding than yacht owners. Some 48 per cent of motorboat owners are salaried employees, who form over 70 per cent of Japan's workforce. Independent business owners and doctors account for another 20 per cent of owners.

According to *Kazi* magazine, the factors considered in buying a motorboat are, in order of importance, price, size, operating ease, interior comfort, speed, durability, engine and maintenance. Buyers are influenced most by magazine articles and advertisements, and then by advice of friends and dealers.

In 1988, more than 500 types of boat were offered for sale, including 88 new models. Unfortunately, opportunities to inspect models prior to purchase are limited because boat shows are few and dealers have insufficient showroom space.

Instead, magazines and product literature are primary sources of information for most buyers. Magazine advertisements do not give details but serve to reinforce a boat's image. Manufacturers' pamphlets with photos, details and statistics are part of the hard sell. Dealers should be able to answer questions on performance and maintenance.

Runabouts. First-time motorboat buyers account for 90 per cent of all runabout purchases, while extra boat buyers account for the remainder. A first-time purchaser buys on the basis of price, style and ease of operation, including maintenance and serviceability. The extra boat buyer is more knowledgeable and is concerned about engine performance and image.

Sport Fishing Boats. This category has the largest selection of motorboats and accounts for 80 per cent of all motorboat sales. Fishermen base a purchase on price, ease of repair and maintenance costs; style is not important.

Sports Cruisers. These boats are not popular in Japan. Buyers look at performance first, then style and brand name. High-speed performance in waves is a priority for Japan's choppy sea conditions.

Fly Bridge Cruisers. These cruisers are rapidly gaining popularity in Japan, especially with companies. Selling features are size, comfort in the party area, and image; price is a secondary factor.