



# HOME | WATERS

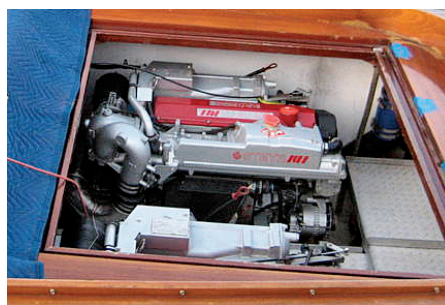


CONNECTICUT & NEW YORK

## Conn. yard creates a 'boat of dreams'



(Clockwise from left) Calabrone can run on either diesel or 100 percent biodiesel with a pair of Steyr 236 BH engines; work included creating an interface between the engines and the new GPS display; the launch's European heritage presented a challenge to the team. Pictured are Bob Butler, left, of Noank Village Boatyard, and Charlie Marques from Mystic Stainless and Aluminum.



By Steve Knauth  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Looking over the 29-foot express that owner Joe Bastianich had dropped off last October at his Noank, Conn., boatyard, manager Ron Helbig knew he had a real project on his hands.

Not only was the boat in question built in Europe, but it was a high-end vessel, somewhat neglected, that would demand the best in craftsmanship to restore. To Helbig, the combination of power and propulsion was unusual, though not unfamiliar; the vast expanses of teak deck and brightwork were in poor condition; the canvas was shot; there was a lot to be done throughout.

He'd also found out that Bastianich was a busy, world-traveling restaurateur and winemaker, son of PBS television chef Lidia Bastianich and partners with well-known chef Mario Batali, and a businessman with high standards and expectations.

But it was now January 2009, a new year — and time to get the project rolling. Still in the process of getting to know his client, Helbig sent off a series of e-mails to Bastianich, outlining and suggesting upcoming work on the 9-year-old express, along with projected costs — in excess of \$100,000. "I was not sure of what his response

would be," says Helbig, who runs the boatyard his father, Robert, founded in 1973. "We were still getting to know each other."

He needn't have worried. Bastianich's reply was, "Rock on."

And that's what the yard and the owner did. During the next four months, while keeping the owner informed with constant updates, the crew at Noank Village Boatyard and a host of local artisans transformed the used Dutch "express launch" into Joe Bastianich's signature vessel, the 40-mph "rocket" launch, Calabrone.

The express with the light blue canvas, dark-blue hull and gold-leafed transom was launched on a windy, overcast Saturday in late May, and Bastianich and his family were on hand to take delivery. "It looks beautiful," he said, standing at the dock, fresh off a train from his Greenwich, Conn., home. Judging by the way the three Bastianich kids were climbing over the boat, they were happy with it, too.

Calabrone is a 29-foot Beaver Express Launch, designed by Peter Bosgraaf and built by Joop Diepenbroek's Beaver Yachts in The Netherlands. Power comes from a pair of updated, upgraded Steyr 236 BH engines,

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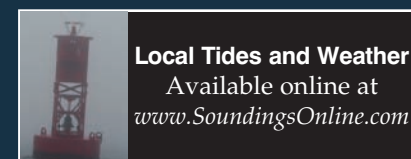
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STEVE KNAUTH (LEFT)

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made in Austria, and ZF 2:1 reduction gear V-drives. At the owner's request, the 212-hp power plants, original to the model-year 2000 boat, are now capable of running on either diesel or 100 percent biodiesel.

Named for a vine-pollinating Italian hornet — and a line of Bastianich's wine — Calabrone will run at or close to 40 mph on its modified-vee, all-fiberglass hull, depending on sea conditions. Cruising speed is 28 to 30 mph. The boat's jack drive uses an Evolution Marine Shaft System with an oil-lubricated section of shaft housed in a shaft log to reduce engine and shaft noise and vibration. The custom center console control pod has room for the usual display of engine gauges along with Uflex B302 single-lever twin-engine control, made in Italy, and a new Furuno NavNet 3D GPS. NMEA cabling now provides an interface between the engines and the GPS.



The hornet on the transom was of great importance to Bastianich, who also produces a wine called Calabrone.

Bastianich plans to use the boat as a commuter between his Greenwich home and his New York businesses, as well as a pleasure craft for himself, his wife, Deanna, and their three youngsters, Olivia, Miles and Ethan. The cuddy cabin forward has a V-berth and a VacuFlush head, and there's room for coolers and storing boat and beach gear, too, giving the express the necessary family-day amenities.

Bastianich fell in love with the look of the Dutch 29-footer when he saw it for sale in New York. While the vessel had suffered from being stored outside, it fit Bastianich's vision of a "vintage-style commuter/picnic boat with a Venetian patina to the look and feel," a boat with classic lines and cutting-edge technology. He found Helbig's yard through the Steyr Motors North America dealer listings, and dropped the boat off in Noank in October 2008 with a short list of fixes. But Helbig could see more was needed.

"The brightwork was a given and

we knew the mechanicals were going to need addressing, even though they weren't on the original list," he says. With the yard busy during haul-out, the Dutch launch sat through the fall.

A Jan. 14 meeting with Bastianich at the Noank yard started the ball rolling. "I felt very comfortable at our first meeting," says Helbig. "Joe Bastianich came across as knowledgeable about boats and very focused. He seemed like a practical owner who knew what he wanted — and didn't want — and why."

Work performed during the next 16 weeks included:

- Modifying vintage 2000 212-hp Steyrs' ECUs and running NMEA 2000 cabling to create an interface between the engines and the new GPS display.
- Changing the fuel filtration system to use Seaboard Marine Seamax fuel filters, which will filter both diesel and biodiesel.
- Installing new wiring and adding a battery charger.

• Making a new canvas cockpit cover with standing headroom, per Bastianich's instructions. "This was critical to the 'look' of the boat," says Helbig. "We knew we had to nail this one."

Renovating and restoring the decks and brightwork required more than just stripping and refinishing. Much of the deck joinery had suffered; hatches wouldn't close, hinges didn't work and screws were pulling out. "All this had to be taken apart and put back together before we could even begin to refinish it," says Helbig.

Then there was the transom, which had to be taken down to bare wood and the varnish built back up. A name and hail port and an image of Bastianich's vineyard hornet were called for, as well. "Obviously, this was another of those things we had to get 'just right,'" says Helbig.

The result is impressive: the name is rendered in script in 24-karat gold leaf, with a dark blue outline. The hornet highlights the layout.

In fact, the Internet was instrumental throughout the project, used to develop contacts with outside sources and to stay in touch. "I think we had maybe four hours of face-to-face meetings during the whole project," says Helbig. "Every Friday, I would send Joe 20 or 30 pictures covering what we did that week."

What really made it all work was the element of trust between owner and yard.

Bastianich was willing to give the yard plenty of room to make deci-

sions, but the crew knew he demanded results, says Helbig. Their goal was to produce the kind of boat that people would recognize as "Joe's boat."

"I think we delivered the 'look' that he was trying to achieve, a classic look married with a successful introduction of cutting-edge technology," Helbig says. "Joe has seen some nice boats in his travels — I think we

met his best expectations."

Bastianich concurs. "I first got to Ron because he was the only authorized Steyr dealer on the East Coast," he says. "But I quickly grew to like and respect him. He brought a level of dedication and passion to the product that I have rarely seen in any field. He was able to share and direct my vision to re-create the Calabrone as a boat of dreams." ■

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