



MADE IN POLAND

GALEON YACHTS IN POLAND IS WOOING AMERICAN OWNERS WITH ITS
SOLID CONSTRUCTION AND SMART DESIGN FEATURES.
STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN RATCLIFFE



If you've never heard of Galeon Yachts, you're not the only one. Despite having been in operation for over 35 years with a loyal following in Europe, the Polish boatbuilder was virtually unknown in the U.S. That all changed in 2016 when it began an exclusive sales partnership with MarineMax, the nation's largest yacht retailer. The brand exploded onto the scene the same year with the sale of no fewer than 17 units at the Miami boat show.

"Just over two-and-a-half years later and with 82 boats sold, Galeon is our most highly rated brand in terms of customer satisfaction," says Bob Burke, Galeon Yachts brand manager for MarineMax, which represents other top builders, including Sea Ray and Azimut. "We're selling around three boats a month, which is insane for a brand most people haven't even heard of."

With 15 years of experience in the industry, Burke knows how to market and sell European production boats in the U.S. It takes more than bumping up the AC and ice-making capacity. When he began his new role with MarineMax, Burke spent a few days at Galeon's two shipyards near Gdańsk in Poland to get a handle on the brand. He was impressed by what he saw.

"Like most family-run companies in the boat business, it's all about building a premium product. Counting the beans comes later," he says. "When people come aboard, they're amazed at just how well-built these boats are and recognize the added value immediately."

I recently had the opportunity to see for myself why Galeon, which is designed by U.K.-based Tony Castro, is one of the fastest growing brands in its size range in the U.S. The occasion was Galeon's first rendezvous at the seaside resort of Sopot on the Baltic Sea. I was keen to get aboard the brand-new Galeon 650 Skydeck, which had been pushed through the final phase of fitting out to get her ready for the event.

But before sea trials, Burke accompanied me on a tour of Galeon's two facilities, which between them employ around 1,200 staff. The first location dates back to when the brand was established by the Kobylko family in 1982, but a purpose-built factory for the larger

Galeon opened a second shipyard for its larger models in 2010 and last year added a new lamination hall (right). More extensions are planned.





At Galeon's new facility, the Polish builder manufactures just about everything in-house, even milling its own teak planks for the decking.



models with its own marina on the Vistula River was opened nearby in 2010. Last year, a new lamination hall with multiple mezzanine levels was added to the complex and further extensions are planned.

Galeon's lamination process is itself an eye-opener. The sides of the FRP hulls are foam-cored, but the bottom sections are fabricated with resin-infused, hand-laid fiberglass to keep the weight down low in the keel for robustness and stability. The lightweight superstructures of the 640 Fly and 650 Skydeck models are made from resin-infused carbon composite and beautifully finished pre-preg carbon fiber for the large moving panels.

Visiting the two sites—one relatively old school and the other decidedly modern with all the latest CNC machinery—revealed how Galeon combines traditional boatbuilding skills with latest-generation technology to build just about every component in-house; the company even mills its own teak for the decking.

The attention to detail is exemplary. Where hoses pass through bulkheads, for instance, most builders will simply bore a hole and add a chafe guard. But Galeon uses threaded stainless steel connections on either side of the divide. Burke points out another small but telling detail: Instead of bonding or screwing the Galeon logo to the boat, each laser-cut, polished stainless steel letter is through-bolted into the superstructure, since nothing is more annoying than a nameplate that works itself loose after a couple of years.

As the shipyard worked around the clock to finish the 650 Skydeck, I took the 640 Fly out for a spin. The two yachts share the same 68-foot hull form, as well as the interior layout and enormous windows that have struck a chord with U.S. owners. The difference lies

in their names, with the 640 featuring a full flybridge, while the 650 has a partial fly that can be closed off with two sliding carbon fiber panels for a sportier, express-style look.

Arguably the most exciting feature is the walk-through opening in the windscreen that leads from the main cabin out to the open foredeck; it's the largest and most flexible opening windscreen I've ever seen on a boat this size. The foredeck is furnished with bench seating around two height-adjustable teak tables. But here's the best part: When the tables are lowered, the seating slides outboard in one silky-smooth, electrically powered movement. Now you can create two sizeable sunbeds simply by folding away the hinged backrests.

Clever design can also be found at the stern end of the main deck, where glass bulwarks fold down on both sides to create balconies and extend the beam to over 23 feet. When the port-side balcony is deployed, the glass window to the galley can be opened and two stools slotted into the teak decking to create an open-air bar that is suspended over the water.

"These are some pretty courageous, badass features," says Burke rather proudly. "I mean, we're talking the kind of stuff you're more likely to see on a hundred-footer."

While Galeon offers various accommodation layouts, the U.S. version comes standard with three cabins (a four-cabin arrangement is available on request), all full-beam with en suite heads. Most owners choose the widest cabin amidships for themselves, but the forward cabin serves as a second master with its own stairway access from the main deck. The middle cabin has twin single beds and a bathroom that doubles as a day head.





The Galeon 650 Skydeck cruises off the beachfront in the Baltic resort of Sopot. Note the side terrace and carbon top that closes off the flybridge.

For interior finishes, MarineMax offers matte and gloss walnut veneers, or a more contemporary grey-stained oak. Soft furnishings are available in neutral shades of white or gray.

Under way, the steering and tracking feel deliberate and assured as the twin 1,000-hp Volvo diesels wind up to a comfortable cruising speed of 25 knots and a top speed of 32 knots. The shallow Baltic is often unpleasantly lumpy when the wind picks up, but even powering into a 20-knot breeze and 3-foot seas, the hull resists slamming. On the few occasions it does start to gripe, the exceptionally solid lamination absorbs much of the sound and vibration. The overall impression is of a solid, reliable and well-behaved boat that would be as much at home in the Bahamas as the Baltic—or anywhere else for that matter.

“We had one customer who took his 560 Skydeck on a maiden voyage 1,500 miles from Ft. Myers to Minnesota up the Mississippi,” recounts Burke. “That’s quite some shakedown cruise, and when I didn’t hear from him I got worried something might have happened. He never called because he had zero problems with the boat.”

Exstaza, the first Galeon 750 Skydeck that will make her debut in Ft. Lauderdale, is powered by 1,200-hp MAN engines. The U.S. version will carry the same 1,000-hp Volvos as the 640 Fly and comes with a Seakeeper tucked away under the crew cabin in the transom. The tender is carried on the hydraulic aft platform, but by doing away with the crew cabin it can be roller-loaded into a small garage, the front end of which has already been built into the engine room bulkhead.

Sadly, my time on the new model proved to be all too short. Our departure from the shipyard for Sopot was governed by building work on a new bridge spanning the Vistula. Due to lack of clearance, the radar mast had to be mounted after we had passed under the bridge. This was disappointing but not disastrous, as my factory visits and experience aboard the 640 Fly had provided some insight into what makes Galeon so appealing to a customer base hungry for innovation.

As its brand awareness grows, there is no doubt that Galeon is destined for greater things in the U.S. The news that Sea Ray is to stop building boats over 40 feet to focus on its smaller outboard-powered models could increase demand in the future. In fact, Galeon has already ramped up its production for MarineMax, which has every intention of filling the gap in the market. □

KNOTS	FUEL	RANGE	dB(A)
7.0	12	1,365	60
10.3	56	430	61
11.8	106	260	64
16.7	148	264	66
20.8	204	240	71
25.6	278	215	72
28.6	372	180	74
32.5	432	176	74

TEST CONDITIONS: Air temp: 80°F; seas: 3 ft.; wind: 20 knots; load: half fuel and water and 5 passengers. Fuel and speed taken from bridge display. Range based on 90% of advertised fuel capacity. Decibels measured at the lower helm. 65 dB-A is the level of normal conversation.

COURTESY GALEON YACHTS