

# MAKO INFLATABLES

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## Setting course for success in the boat-building industry

FORMER boat racing champion, Mark Louw, started Mako Inflatables in 1995, after being involved in boat racing in the USA, Australia and SA in the early 90s.

SA champion from 1992 to 1995, Louw was prompted to start the business when his boats generated interest at racing events.

He already had extensive experience producing fully-inflatable boats alongside his brother Rob, who had started a similar business 10 years earlier. While working together, the brothers were actively involved in the research and development of a unique South African racing boat.

In the beginning, Mako produced fully inflatables, and then about six years ago, moved to the manufacture of semi-rigid craft with fibreglass bottoms.

Recently, after going through a huge growth phase during which production tripled, the company needed larger premises, and moved from its original 1 200m<sup>2</sup> rented factory in Paarden Eiland to its own 3 000m<sup>2</sup> facility in Lansdowne.

Mako currently employs more than 50 staff members who have a wide range of skills gained in Cape Town's localised boat-building industry.

Mako produces everything completely in-house. "Having everything under one roof means that we can control quality on all our boats and clients aren't let down on delivery," says Louw.

The company's internal production management systems are all computerised, and it has a qualified in-house marine architect who can adapt standard boat designs to suit individual client needs.

With a shift in design from inflatable to semi-rigid, the



company's target market has changed from leisure to commercial, with a strong focus on local and international military clients, particularly special forces applications.

Mako's boats range in size from 3m to 9.5m, with the larger size boats ideally suited for gunship rigging, so that these can be used as military and coastguard patrol boats.

Virtually the company's entire market was initially local, but with an improved exchange rate, Mako now has 23 agents worldwide and about 90% of their boats are exported to the US, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, Africa, and Asia.

Due to its success in an industry that is seen as having

enormous growth potential, Mako has received a lot of support from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and DTI-affiliated companies such as CAPEMAC, which assists South African manufacturing concerns with their growth.

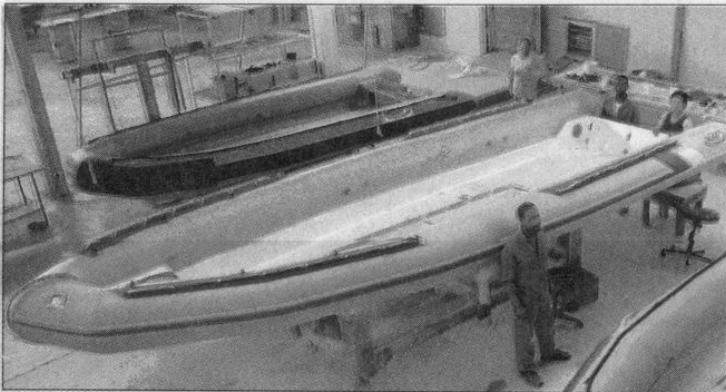
Catering largely to international clients, Mako's marketing material is in electronic format, and the main marketing tool used in promotion and sales of its boats is the internet. Mako has found this very

effective and has been using this medium since the internet was introduced in South Africa.

CAPEMAC assisted Mako with developing promotional material and in gaining its ISO 9001:2000 accreditation and certification, the implementation of which has led to a 30% increase in productivity.

Mako's products are also DTI-SAMSA-approved, CE-approved, US coastguard-approved, and the company is about to receive international SOLAS approval for its 4.35m semi-rigid boat to be supplied to ships over 50 tons as life rafts.

The Mako team take pride in constantly developing its product range. Says Louw: "The latest edition, of which we are exceptionally proud, is the 9.5m semi-rigid monohull. This boat is the largest registered semi-rigid in South



Africa, and the first 9.5m will be used by Atlantic Adventures as a high-speed charter boat based at the Waterfront.

"Demand for this size boat over the past two years has been enormous, and this boat has been eagerly awaited. We take great pride in launching the 9.5m at the Waterfront this December.

"Mako is flourishing because the manufacture of semi-rigid craft is the fastest growing area of the maritime industry in the world," comments Louw.

"Also, due to South Africa's offshore sea conditions, we have adapted our products to be strong, hardy and reliable."

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