

Trinity Yacht's most influential consultants: captains

By Lucy Chabot Reed

A prospective buyer touring a new Trinity Yacht some years ago asked simply, "What's new?"

When Trinity Vice President Billy Smith told him it was bigger, the buyer told him that wasn't enough.

"He said he doesn't buy a new Mercedes every couple of years just because it's newer, he said he buys it because of all the new features and the new technology," Smith said during a presentation to yacht captains in St. Maarten. "That was a real eye-opener for us."

Since then, Trinity has adopted a pretty open line of feedback from yacht captains, encouraging them to suggest improvements or alterations that would make operating the yacht easier and better.

"The way we feel about it, if someone doesn't tell us how to build these things better, we'll keep doing it the way we've been doing it," he told about 75 captains, senior crew and industry professionals.

"There are only two ways to improve: One is through warranty, but that's like driving a car backwards, fixing things after they're wrong; or from suggestions from operators. We prefer the suggestions."

Smith spoke about the role of the build captain, from a builder's perspective, at an evening reception for captains and senior officers. It was the first of two events produced by the U.S. Superyacht Association for crew in St. Maarten in mid-January. (For coverage of the other event, a panel discussion that included U.S. Coast Guard and immigration officials; see page A1.)

"We want feedback," he said. "We may not give you credit for it, but that doesn't mean we won't use it. If there's new stuff out there, you always want



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to be on top of it. A lot of this stuff we can't keep up with, but the operators can. Captains, engineers, you are our eyes and ears."

Smith urged captains to get involved in a new build as soon as possible.

"The friction that occurs is because the captain comes in too late," he said. "The sooner we get a captain involved in the plan review and the spec review, the better. ... Even if the captain can't be there all the time, at least he can still be in contact through e-mail."

Smith recognized that some captains might never have acted as an owner's representative before and

might feel the need "to justify their existence by making fights with the shipyard."

Those situations don't help either side and only work toward making the owner's build experience an unpleasant one, Smith said.

"We don't look at it as a single boat, but the start of many builds," he said. "We want to make sure the owner enjoys the process so that when it's over he'll say: 'That was so much fun, let's do it again.'"

Yards tend to favor captains who can "lean on the owner to not make changes," because change orders not

only increase cost, they interrupt schedules and cause delays on not only the yacht in question but others behind it.

"We always want to be improving the boat," Smith said. "When we improve the product, that keeps the owner happy. For everybody here, this is a job. But for the owner, it's a pleasure."

"If we take out the pleasure, they'll find something else to do with their money."

Lucy Chabot Reed is editor of The Triton. Comments on this story are welcome at lucy@the-triton.com.

