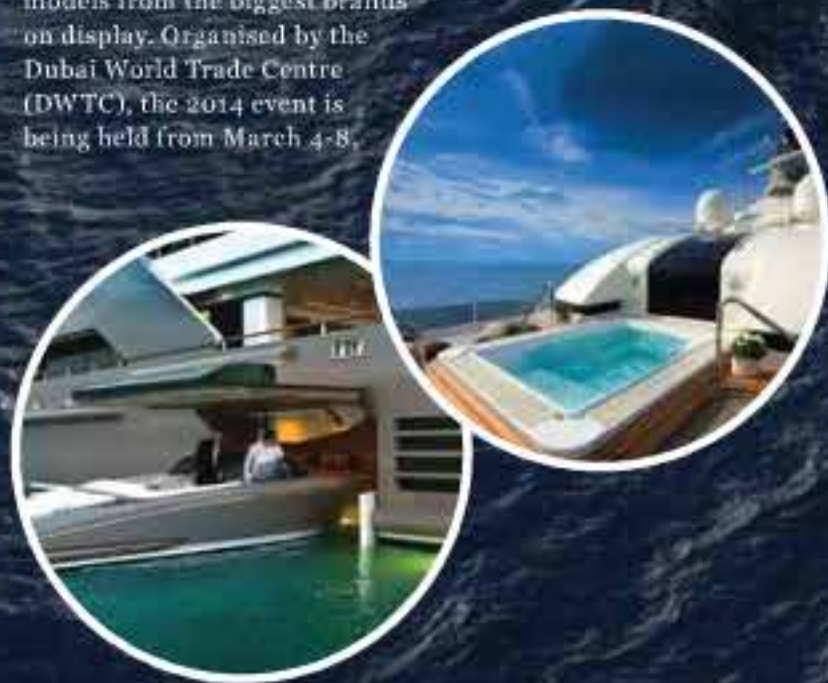


Boats have always played an important role in the region. Long before there were roads, it was easier to carry goods along the coastline than the desert, with large wooden dhows a familiar sight, often bringing their wares from far away to sell in the local souks. These could be seen navigating the different harbours, weaving around much smaller fishing boats or those taking pearl divers out to sea – the Gulf's main source of income in the days before oil.

These days the water remains just as much a cause for celebration, although increasingly as a means of demonstrating wealth, with grand superyachts that help its owners to relax or entertain. The Dubai International Boat Show (DIBS), held every spring and now in its 22nd year, is the place to see the very best of these, with the latest models from the biggest brands on display. Organised by the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), the 2014 event is being held from March 4-8.

Some like it yacht

Next month will see the region's largest gathering of luxury yachts in Dubai for the city's annual boat show, with plenty of visitors eager to make a purchase



in its usual location of the Dubai International Marine Club, next to Le Meridien Mina Seyahi.

A company at the forefront will be ART Marine, which is also one of the show's sponsors. Recently-appointed CEO Greg Stinner explains why this year's event will be of particular importance for this 360-degree leisure marine enterprise, as well as the four brands it oversees. "It is a chance to showcase the new business model we have been working on, focusing on a high-end product for our client base of VIPs, celebrities, trendsetters and royalty," he says. "Our spectrum is large enough to cater to every need, and we will demonstrate this in the models we are launching - our main focus is Riva, a name in the yachting industry on par with Rolls-Royce for automotive, and we will have a couple of examples there, from 27 up

Sunseeker will show its 80 Sport Yacht for the first time in the Middle East

to 75 ft. The Ego Super 68 is the star of the Boat Show for us, and we will also have designs from our Itama, Custom Line and CRN brands."

For Stinner, this will be an exciting, busy time. "We are at the beginning of a new era in boat-buying terms," he says. "It was stale for a couple of years, there was the economic crisis, and the yacht market wasn't as popular as it should or could be. But in Dubai especially, it is a place where people are not afraid to show what they have - there are big spenders - and with the pre-owned market now



exhausted, people are turning to new yachts once again where they can specify exactly what they want. But it isn't bigger and better that is popular, it's more about exclusivity, which is why we offer niche products, with high quality, and as we make them in low numbers they retain their value for longer."

A more buoyant market will no doubt please some of the show's other exhibitors. Local boat builders Gulf Craft and Al Suwaidi Marine will both be present, offering the latest models to emerge from their workshops, while other international names will include Sunseeker.

For the first time in the Middle East, Sunseeker will show its 80 Sport Yacht, designed for high performance and available with a number of engine options, with an elaborate stateroom and intimate guest cabins below deck. Its design - with large, hullside windows and full height sliding doors as part of the main saloon, where guests can dine in the open air or spread out and enjoy the sun - seems to follow a current trend in the market for helping passengers form a closer connection to the outside world, and of course the water. "People are asking for beach club-style areas at the rear, with swimming pools and all of the features you might expect," adds Stinner.

The world of boating has changed since the time of dhows and pearl divers, and can now see big sums changing hands in the hope of finding the perfect vessel. Even if you are not planning to buy, and curious to see what your money could get you, the best advice is to get on board.

Dubai International Boat Show runs from March 4-8 at Dubai International Marine Club, next to Le Meridien Mina Seyahi. boatshowdubai.com