

# BOATS & GEAR



## ITECH' MER EXHIBITION ROUND UP

**BUY BACK:** French deck machinery manufacturer Bopp is back in Bopp hands. Louis Bopp and Rene Boennec

### Quentin Bates

**F**ishing News International spent a day at the Itech' Mer exhibition in Lorient at the end of last year, and caught up with some interesting characters from all corners of the French fishing industry – and beyond.

#### Bopp goes back to Bopp

French deck machinery manufacturer Bopp has changed hands and is once again in the ownership of the original Bopp family that started the company to begin with.

Remi Boennec explained that back in 1979 the company was bought by Louis Bopp from his father, the company's founder. A few years later Yves Boennec

was brought in as a shareholder and in 1993 Louis Bopp sold his holding in the company to the Boennec family.

By 2005 the market had changed and the Piriou family bought Bopp as a whole, preferring to buy the company than see it divided up. During the last few years of Piriou ownership, the company has gained strength.

It has supplied large winch systems to a number of new tuna purse seiners, and established a branch in Boulogne and a subsidiary in China to manufacture electric winches for the Asian market for offshore vessels.

"Now the company has changed hands again and Louis Bopp has bought an 80% share in the company," Remi Boennec said, adding that his family

retains the other 20% holding. "This gives us back our independence. We have a working relationship with Piriou that goes back decades and we have provided virtually every fishing vessel they have built with winches.

"The parting from Piriou has been a very friendly one. But with Bopp being owned by a shipyard, it sometimes made our relationship with other yards less easy. So now we are on our own again, but with Louis Bopp as the owner once again."

He commented that although winches for the offshore business are made in China, all of the company's fishing equipment is made in France, including the big deck equipment systems for tuna purse seiners.

"We're looking at expanding further into the tuna market," Remi Boennec said. "We have deck equipment systems that have proved themselves already and we can adapt these to the requirements of other markets."

He told *Fishing News International* that Bopp continues to produce its range of trawl and seine net winches, and sees additional markets for these outside France as well.

"We have been increasingly involved in developing and producing fly shooting deck gear and we now have a good range of products for this kind of fishing, including combination seine and trawl winches, and many of our customers have opted for a Marelec management system to go with these."

### FACT FILE

■ With 22 years in business, specialist sewing machine maker CCR has produced more than a thousand machines for the French market alone. These specialist machines are adapted for rigging gill nets and trammel nets, and are bought by fishing gear suppliers and fishermen

■ The machines themselves are heavily customised when they are adapted for rigging nets



**4%** Percentage drop in fish tonnage in Lorient port in 2013

**4.5%** Percentage drop in fish landings value in Lorient port in 2013



**SORTING:** Stephanie Roos and Lorient fishing port director Yves Guirrec with the Arbor Technologies sorting machine



**DECK GEAR:** Isabelle Blancard of Vir Hydro with the company's line hauler

Bopp has already supplied a number of French seine netters, both trawlers refitted for seine netting and a pair of boats built at Piriou, with the second of these due for delivery later this year.

#### 1000 machines in 20 years

With 22 years in business, specialist sewing machine maker CCR (Couper Coudre Repasser) has produced more than a thousand machines for the French market alone.

These specialist machines are adapted for rigging gill nets and trammel nets, and are bought by fishing gear suppliers and fishermen.

"Sometimes these are individual fishermen, or often groups of fishermen buy a rigging setup between them and work it as

a co-operative," Dominique Deborde said, adding that with some practice, an operator can easily rig 1000m per day – and hand-rigging static nets has virtually disappeared in France.

The machines themselves are normal commercial sewing machines that are manufactured for sewing buttons, but are heavily customised when they are adapted for rigging nets.

"To start with, these machines have very powerful Mitsubishi motors, and we also add extra components to beef the machines up," he said, explaining that they produce both mechanical-only and electronic machines, as well as electronic machines with a measuring system that pulls the rope through a precise pre-set distance after every staple has been stitched.

"This means that the spacing is accurate every time and we can have a distance set between staples that can be anywhere from 10cm to 70cm. The machine also has a counter so it keeps track and it can be pre-set to sound an alert when a float needs to be added."

"We also supply special needles for rigging, including a hardened carbon steel needle that we have specially made for rigging lead-lines and this can go through 7mm lead."

The company has produced more than a thousand machines in over twenty years in business, initially supplying customers in mainland France and Corsica, and expanding to supply machines to fishermen and gear producers in Spain, Greece, Algeria, Tunisia and now Canada.

"It makes it a lot easier for fishermen to recycle gear," Dominique Deborde said.

"French netters frequently use their nets for only a few months, after which they strip the nets from the ropes and re-use the rope. The rope isn't cheap, can be used again and again with new nets. The ropes can have a working lifetime of ten years of repeated re-use."

#### Investment in Lorient port

The port of Lorient in Brittany continues to work on its fish handling and selling systems, and director Yves Guirrec told *Fishing News International* that the port and the local authority between them have invested in added value across the whole chain that includes the port's wholesale businesses and the processing sector.

"Recent investment includes a new set of viviers in the port area, refrigerated space for both coastal and deep-sea landings, and machine filleting facilities for sardines that both wholesalers and fishermen have access to. It's part of an overall objective to provide a complete value chain for the fish processing sector and to boost the values of co-products," he said, adding that the auction has also been updated with new fibre-optics that ensure an unbroken data flow and allowing more online buyers to take part.

In addition, a new washer with the capacity to handle 1.50 million boxes and 18,000 tubes every year has been added, as well as a press for poly boxes to be crushed prior to recycling.

Like every French fishing port, Lorient has seen a drop in both tonnage and values, and Yves Guirrec said that while this appears to be a figure of between 5 and 10% for most ports, Lorient has seen its fish reduced by 4% and value by 4.5% in 2013.

"The fleet is smaller," he said. "And the markets in Spain and Italy are both in a difficult situation. People's buying power has also fallen across the board and the whitefish price as a whole has been affected by the large volumes of cod on the market."

Local company Arbor Technologies has installed a ground-breaking sorting line for fish that incorporates an optical recognition system. This identifies fish by size and species, so they are passed to the right outlet automatically. The small percentage of fish that the system fails to

identify correctly pass through to the end of the conveyor and are held for manual sorting.

This system represents a €1.20 million investment in eight machines, the intention being to grade fish very fast. Although there are five main species it is expected to handle, the system can recognise 30 species and grade each of these into two weight categories.

"It's primarily to handle fish in volume," Yves Guirrec said. "It speeds up the sorting process and there is a very low rate of rejected fish that the system does not recognise."

#### New markets for Vir Hydro

Saint Mâlo company VirHydro has continued to expand and experiment with its range of deck equipment aimed at the small scale fleet. Isabelle Blancard commented that their electric haulers are finding new markets.

"We have supplied some of these to Mayotte for deep sea fishing and if the results are promising, then we'll be looking at a hydraulic version as well," she said.

"We have also made some minor changes to our longline system with the line hauler made more watertight and with an improved guide and roller."

The VirHydro longline tub has had a few changes made to it, with softer rubber used in the rim and the teeth altered make them less easily snagged.

"We have also been busy with equipment outside the fishing industry, but with adapted fishing equipment, such as the capstans we have been supplying to France Telecom for retrieving underwater cables, plus some to the Isle of Man for similar work, and we have supplied others to an Australian reef patrol for retrieving buoys. An adapted jiggling system has also been used for handling video cable for aircraft salvage work."

She said that they have been busy with Belletronic reels that they sell to the French

market, with some users doing extremely well with these to jig for mackerel.

"For some fishermen it's a good way to add an extra activity to what they do for a relatively modest price. It gives them something to do between the other seasons and they have been getting some good prices for line-caught mackerel," she said.

"These are electric reels and they're easily fitted. The only problem for the French market is that the reels have a menu in English, but we're hoping that will change and they'll add French with the new model they are working on now that also has more powerful motors."

#### First sale in France

Icelandic boat builder Seigla has sold its first boat to a French operator, La Réunion fisherman Jacques Delmas. The deal was signed at the Itch'Mer exhibition in Lorient last year and the new boat will be delivered before the summer, according to Seigla's Sander Nieuwstad.

"It's a 10m boat with a forward wheelhouse, and one of our Seigur E1000 Classic designs, with the beam increased from 3m to 3.20m. Jacques Delmas is not in a great hurry for the boat, as long as he gets it before the summer and it will be shipped by sea to La Réunion," he said.

"He has been to Iceland to see the yard and we took him out on our demonstration boat while he was there."

He commented that the boat will be fitted with Seigla's drop keel, powered by a 330 Yanmar engine and will have a Lindgren-Pitman longline system for tuna fishing, and although it is not expected to fish for long trips, there is accommodation on board for four people.

"It'll also be fitted with air conditioning and the fishroom will be insulated more heavily than we would do for a boat fishing in Iceland or Norway, so the sandwich will be thicker for that reason," he said.

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