

Electric boats making waves without the noise

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This photo provided by Jeff Helmkamp/LakeExpo shows Vision Marine Technologies' Vision Marine Bruce 22 boat with one of their E-Motion motors. The electric boat is capable of reaching speeds of 49 mph. Credit: Jeff Helmkamp/LakeExpo via AP

The auto industry has raced ahead on an electric wave with more manufacturers joining the race seemingly every day.

The boating industry has sputtered far behind, bogged down by low-horsepower engines and batteries that take up nearly half the boat.

That's in the process of changing.

Bolstered by new technology, the electric boats are now faster, have smaller batteries with longer ranges and are still zero emission.

"Electric boats used to be good for just cruising around," said Alex Mongeon, CEO of Montreal-based Vision Marine Technologies. "Now they have more power and last a long longer."

Vision Marine has helped lead the charge in more powerful electric boats. Other companies riding the electric motor wave include Swedish luxury boat builder X Shore and Arc, started by former SpaceX employees.

An avid boat racer and electrician by trade, Mongeon and Vision Marine began working in 2015 on developing a more powerful yet still efficient electric outboard motor.

They created the E-Motion 180, the first electric boat engine to use lithium batteries.

The electric outboard boasts 180 horsepower and can reach speeds of 60 mph, a first in electric boating. The E-motion 180, which costs about \$5,000 more than a standard internal combustion engine, can be used with any boats that use a 180 HP outboard gas engine, typically between 18 to 26 feet.

The engines can fully charge overnight and all that's needed is a 220-volt outlet—a boating version of plug and play. Maintenance is far less than ICE engines because there are fewer moving parts.

The electric engines are noiseless, odorless and smokeless, so there's no more yelling at each other while onboard or leaving a layer of smoke in

your wake.

Sales of the E-Motion 180 started in May with delivery expected later this year.

"It is so cool because nobody has gone to this comparable horsepower," said Randy Truesdale, chief operating officer of SBX Marine, a Florida-based custom boat builder and brokerage company. "You see some of the electric motors, you might get one that says it's, you know, 50 to 70 horsepower equivalent, but nobody's done what we're doing with the new 180."

Electric boating has been embraced by celebrities like Drake, Robert De Niro and Greta Thunberg, according to Vision Marine. Many tour operators have turned to electric boats, and so have cities for rental and water taxis.

Many waters have been designated marine protected areas—26% in the United States, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration—which ban motorized boats. Many allow electric boats because they are cleaner and emit no sound.

"The only sound you'll hear is the water hitting the hull and people enjoying themselves," Mongeon said.

And a lot more people have been enjoying themselves on the water during the pandemic.

According to National Marine Manufacturers Association, sales of powerboats were up 12% in 2020 with more than 310,000 new sales, the highest numbers since before the recession of 2008.

Boat rental companies have seen their numbers soar as well, including a

700% growth year-over-year growth for GetMyBoat, the world's largest boat rental company.

"In the rental cycle, it has become hugely popular because of the great activity for people who don't necessarily want to buy a boat," Truesdale said. "You can kind of relate to what's going on with COVID and allowing people to get outside. Boats are kind of like the perfect tool for social distancing."

The new era of electric boats, with the added power and limited environmental impact, are making it even more enjoyable.

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