One of the most internationally respected names in sailing yachts has found its perfect match in South Carolina.

In the heart of the Pee Dee, just 50 miles due east of Myrtle Beach and 30 miles east of Interstate 95, Beneteau USA is building on its stellar reputation for superior design, quality and value. And for nearly 20 years, this company has staked this reputation on the business climate and workforce it has found in the Palmetto State.

Beneteau’s rich history dates back to 1884 when Frenchman Benjamin Beneteau began building sailboats for commercial fisherman. After a
All Beneteau boats more than 37 feet long are designed and equipped to cross oceans. The spinnaker is an option. Designed to be sailed by one person, the mainsail is furled into the mast.
century of success in Europe, the company crossed the Atlantic in response to North American demand for its products.

Beneteau chose South Carolina as its home away from home. In 1986, the company opened its state-of-the-art production facility in Marion. Within four years, Beneteau had become one of the top three sailboat manufacturers in America. By 1990, the company celebrated the making of its 1,000th boat in Marion.

Then in 2001, Beneteau USA nearly doubled its size and investment bringing its total to about $25 million of capital invested in the U.S. Today there is almost a quarter of a million feet of facility space in what is undisputedly the most advanced American sailboat plant in use.

The productivity of that facility and its staff led Beneteau to later move its U.S. operations entirely to South Carolina, establishing a headquarters office in Charleston.

The result has been even more accolades and rewards for the company. The Beneteau 423 was named “Boat of the Year” by *Cruising World* magazine and also won *SAIL* magazine’s Top 10 Sailboats for 2003.

Winning awards begins with innovation and excellent workmanship. From the beginning of its Marion facility, the company has invested in the most sophisticated production machinery and methods and has attracted one of the greatest teams of craftspeople anywhere.

Today, a loyal team of 240 American families living in South Carolina craft 400 to 500 “floating dreams” each year. These sailing high-end sailing yachts range from 31 to 46 footers.

Beneteau is the third largest industry in Marion. Already, the tradition of boat building is being passed down from one generation to the next – much as it has for more than 100 years at Beneteau’s European sites.

A team of sailing enthusiasts leads the company. President Wayne Burdick, a Connecticut Yankee, is currently sailing his 26th boat – a Beneteau 411. He has been actively involved in the boat business for more than 30 years. Meanwhile, South Carolina native Michael Lecholop, vice president of sales, has been with Beneteau USA for more than 15 years.

Among the secrets to Beneteau’s success, company officials cite the strong work ethic found in Marion County. In addition, they point to South Carolina’s central location on the East Coast with quick, easy access to the country’s interstate system.

“Beneteau is very fortunate to be in Marion County where there are many citizens that still hold the traditional values of wanting to work for the betterment of their families, their community, and their country,” Burdick said. “Though a fast-paced industrial attitude might not be native to the Pee Dee, with the help of a work values training program
The keel on a 47-foot boat weighs 8,000 pounds. “They just don’t turn over,” an employee said.

supported by the state, our team at Beneteau USA is showing progress towards our goal of building world-class yachts in the most efficient way with the best quality in the safest environment. We are very proud of the Beneteau USA team’s dedication and ability.”

Burdick also points to Beneteau’s choice of a South Carolina as key to the company’s far-reaching accomplishments. “South Carolina has many programs which Beneteau USA has found very valuable for the training and selection of team members. As one example, the great crew at Florence Darlington Technical College has designed a professional development skills program for our management staff under a generous state grant at a very reasonable value. Our experience has been that many state agencies are truly wishing to promote the best atmosphere for positive business conditions while carefully considering the impact on the public’s best interest. Case in point is the proposal to have South Carolina adopt the MACT standards for emissions for boat builders, which will protect the environment while also allowing the many boat builders in our state to have a known achievable technology available.”

For the company, though, the goal isn’t merely quantity. Beneteau has been so successful in the U.S. market because of product quality. That’s what the workforce in Marion has truly delivered.

Their production process is also leading edge, increasing efficiency and output through the use of a manufacturing model similar to an automotive assembly line. The innovative process relies upon the use of cranes suspended from ceiling tracks, which transport hulls and decks between workstations. Workers and their tools remain in the same location and actually have the boats brought to them. Beneteau claims to be the only boat builder using such a system.

The materials used in a typical Marion-built Beneteau are sourced through hundreds of the finest OEM suppliers, the vast majority of which are American companies.

The Marion facility houses more than just production space, it also includes on-site engineering facilities and even a testing pool to make sure everything checks out before the craft leaves the premises. Boats produced in South Carolina are then sold through a dealer network consisting of more than 40 dedicated sales offices throughout the country.

“We are proud to be a US company involved in the greatest freedom of expression – sailing,” Burdick explains. “If there is one thing that is the secret for success at Beneteau USA, it’s our people and their passion for reaching the goal of carefully creating floating dreams. From the designers of the boats to the management at our plant onto the whole wonderful team that actually crafts them, a passion for the exquisite
Finished boats at the Marion plant ready for shipping. The masts are installed later by the dealer. At the lower left, boats are being water tested, just to be sure there are no leaks.
beauty of a Beneteau is the difference between just doing a job and the excellence of delivering a boat that truly brings joy to the owners and their families. This passion for the sea and boats has existed since Beneteau began in 1884 and it continues today in Marion."

The company’s commitment to South Carolina is evident. And in Marion, the Beneteau team is manufacturing some of the highest quality sailboats on the market. Today the company is nearly twice the size of its nearest competitor, supplying sailboats that have logged more off-shore miles than any other builder in the world.

Beneteau is the only foreign sailboat manufacturer to operate a production plant in the United States, which has helped the company establish long-term relationships with its North American customers. As a result of this investment in customer relations, Beneteau was recognized with the Marine Industry CSI Award for Excellence in Customer Satisfaction last year. It’s a testament to the South Carolina craftsmen and technicians who build the vessels, as well as the outstanding service the company provides before and after the sale.

And the company continues to grow. In 2003 Beneteau introduced its first step into a new market: powerboats.

The Swift Trawler 42 is “a natural progression for Beneteau USA,” says Wayne Burdick, president, and vice president of sales Mike Lecholop, right, show off one of the company’s most popular models. Burdick is from Connecticut, a lifelong sailor, while Lecholop grew up in Conway. Burdick says the Beneteau boats all have an interstructural grid system that provides exceptional strength. “Strong and light is what we are looking for,” he says.

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Burdick. “As our market continues to grow, we have seen an increasing demand for sailors and power boaters alike ready to make a switch to a new generation of passage makers. The Swift 42 fulfills that demand by offering a performance safe, seaworthy hull in combination with a sumptuous interior highlighted by the lustrous joiner work that Beneteau is so well known for.”

While the powerboat line is new to Beneteau USA, the parent company has been making them for years. The Trawler Swift 42 made waves with its introduction, garnering praise from around the boating community. Power & Motoryacht referred to it as “a powerboat that’s as romantic as an old Bogart flick” and Boater’s Life suggested Beneteau would “steal the show and our hearts with this one.”

Quality service and an excellent product lead to a different kind of problem for the company.

“Beneteau’s biggest challenge will be to make enough units to fulfill the demand,” said Burdick.

And with that kind of craftsmanship, service and dedication, there’s no reason to think Beneteau won’t continue to enjoy a flood of accolades and awards. 🌿