Factory Tour

A view of the Livorsi factory based in Grayslake, IL.

Livorsi Marine

How **Mike Livorsi** reinvented his marine company to survive through tough times—and came out on top.



In the late 1990s, Livorsi raced this 10-meter un-stepped Fountain in the offshore circuit.

Above: One of six Haas machines used to cut billet aluminum parts, which is all done in house. Right: Mike Livorsi with his LED indicator in a special display case.

aunched over a quarter of a century ago, Livorsi Marine Inc. got its start making liquid-filled speedometers for speedboats. Founder Mike Livorsi built his reputation around the speedometers, tachometers and other gauges that have graced the dashes of performance boats. Livorsi Marine, based in Grayslake, IL, has become recognized worldwide for its products.

Things have changed considerably in 25+ years. In fact, practically the only thing that has remained the same is Grayslake. These days, Livorsi is known for a lot more than merely gauges. The technology it uses has changed dramatically; performance boating is just one segment of the marine market it services. Livorsi was purchased by CompX Marine in 2006, and the original Grayslake 22,000-square-foot shop has been integrated into a 120,000-square-foot factory.

All of these changes have been a boon for the company, and some of them were even necessary for survival through a worsening economy that severely impacted sales of performance boats. "When the recession hit in 2007-08, we had to reinvent ourselves," Livorsi said. "If you didn't, you'd be out of business. Those who did reinvent themselves—and continued to research new products and engineering—were the people who would survive and succeed."

Livorsi Marine's business model depends on accuracy. As standard equipment with industry leading boat builders and the primary choice of instrumentation and throttle controls for race teams worldwide, accuracy and dependability have and will continue to be Livorsi Marine's number one priority.

"2006 was a game changer for Livorsi Marine," said

Livorsi. The acquisition by CompX Marine, which had previously purchased industry leading exhaust system manufacturer Custom Marine Inc., brought extensive resources in engineering, quality control, product development, research and development, manufacturing and purchasing. This has provided the necessary resources to grow the company In 2011, John Wendt, Vice President of Product Development, was brought on board to ensure speed to market with durable, validated products. "Attention to detail is paramount," said Wendt. "We have products at all stages of the development cycle, from concept all the way to product release, which must pass a number of critical tests prior to launch. Our move to launch new electronic and mechanical products has and continues to bolster our product portfolio and open our company up to new markets. This includes products such as ski boat throttles, CAN Bus gauges, trim tabs, Platinum Series performance controls, LED lighting and indication." John, a 20-year veteran of the marine industry, has worked with Mike and the CompX Marine team to develop and launch these key products.

Livorsi Marine's new LED position indicators do not use any cables, resulting in improved accuracy. "There are no cables to fail, and you can see a quarter-inch movement



on a tab or a drive," Livorsi says. "It's an all 'plug and play' system, achieved with an electronic sender on the tab or the drive." The user merely plugs a harness in and calibrates the up and down. "You can calibrate your sweet spot," Livorsi adds. "Where they can be very important is on catamarans, because a little trim means a lot on a cat. On a cable, there's about an eighth to a quarter inch of slack, so you have to move that cable up to a quarter inch before you see the indicator move. With this, you can see any movement from a quarter inch on up."

One item that has been around for at least 50 years is the classic analog tach, which operated via air-core movement. "There are millions of boats out there that still use that technology," said Livorsi. "I sell that product to this day, and analog gauge replacement continues to be a large segment for Livorsi Marine." Livorsi Marine's analog gauges are offered in a variety of styles. The dials can be completely customized, or customers can choose platinum, black, white, black carbon fiber or silver carbon fiber. Mega and Race Rims, as well as bezels, are offered in polished As technology advanced, however, a segment of analog gauges were replaced with CAN-Bus gauges. These operate under three main protocols: SmartCraft, NMEA 2000 (employed mostly by outboard engines) and J1939 (largely used by

Above left: A Haas machine cuts billet parts. Left: Employee Erik Olson calibrates an LED indicator. Below left: A view of Livorsi's vast inventory. Below right: Mike Livorsi and John Wendt with a trim tab.





IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO START DRIVING Your boat under the influence of the best ignition available!

CHEVY

MARINE

DIII

OLDS

FORD

MARINE

D.U.I.

DODGE

MARINE

DUI

Increase performance and simplify the ignition system in your boat by installing our Marine DUI Distributor! The Marine DUI (Davis Unified Ignition) is a one-piece distributor that is virtually waterproof and will withstand the severe vibrations of a marine engine. The DUI is a complete ignition system in one simple unit. No external coils or ignition boxes are necessary! Just one 12 volt hot wire hooked up to the DUI is all you need to get your marine engine running with more power and torque. Improved performance comes from our 50,000 volt coil and high dwell Dyna-Module. The coil allows spark plug gaps to be opened up to .055". The increased dwell within the module makes the coil produce a longer duration spark. The combination of the two will provide the most complete burn of the fuel mixture possible. Performance is also enhanced from the super smooth advance curve tuned into the DUI. A special weight and spring assembly is hand fitted and dialed-in using a distributor machine for a precise timing curve that will match the specifications of your engine and boat. The custom tuned advance provides instant throttle response and maximum power throughout the rpm range. Our Marine DUI is available in two versions. The Marine 7000 version is designed for stock to mildly modified engines that will not turn more than 7000 rpm's. The Marine 10000 version is built for high performance and racing applications that turn up to 10,000 rpm's. Both versions are blueprinted and precision built by polishing, lubing and setting exact tolerances as they are assembled. The Marine DUI also has flame arrestors installed which distinguishes it from our automotive DUI's. All distributors come complete, including the brass terminal cap and rotor and stock gear. No matter what your boat is used for, cruising, pulling skiers or all out racing, we have a DUI to fit your needs



2699 Barris Drive • Memphis, TN 38132 Phone: 901.396-5782 • Fax: 901.396.5783 www.performancedistributors.com Email: Info@performancedistributors.com Dept. SB • \$4 Catalog



diesel applications). The NMEA 2000 and J1939 systems are open to the public, while SmartCraft is a proprietary system owned by Mercury Marine. Livorsi Marine was not only granted a license to use the SmartCraft technology, but a license to use its Digital Throttle & Shift (DTS) system as well. With Livorsi Marine's VantageView system—its version of SmartCraft, NMEA 2000, J1939—the user can simply tell the gauge which of 20 parameters he wants to see on the LCD, and it becomes integrated on the gauge. "So with one gauge, you can do an analog readout of a tachometer and then the LCD gauge; you can just toggle through all of A brief tutorial on analog gauges: they require that oil pressure, oil temperature and water temperature senders be installed in an engine. That data is sent via a diaphragm or

Top left: Livorsi product development guru John Wendt. Top right: A worker calibrates a Vantage View CAN-Bus gauge.

Middle left: Billet trim tabs are assembled. Middle right: Gauges are put together and repeatedly checked for quality on the assembly line.

Above left: Billet parts are prepared for powdercoating. Left: An employee assembles Livorsi's Platinum series throttles. thermistor through two wires to the front of the gauge, which provides a resistance. Then that air-core movement displays the information on the gauge. But with the new protocols, everything is done through an onboard computer that spits out all the information. "It's very accurate and very reliable," Livorsi says. "You can get functions like fuel flow and gallons remaining, and you can calculate things that you can't get with the analog system." The result is a "plug and play" system, in which everything is shared on the protocol via one sender wire, one power wire and one ground wire. Everything comes up through that Bus, and it shares the information on the gauges.

In 2010, Mercury Marine granted Livorsi Marine a DTS Control license, allowing manufacturing of performance controls that are compatible with Mercury engines. Mercury has strict validation and quality procedures in place, and therefore the DTS license is only awarded to a select few. These controls provide consistent, precise control of a boat. The throttles are constructed of stainless steel and aluminum and are available with a contour base, carbon fiber options and an array of colors and other configurations. Controls are compatible with Mercury DTS and Last year, Livorsi Marine introduced Platinum Series Performance Controls, which included three styles in the series: Arched, Standard and Billet. These controls are designed to be more ergonomically comfortable for the operator, while being lighter and more compact to fit into tighter spaces. All the controls are finished in a two coat process to prevent corrosion and still offer the many color combinations Livorsi Marine customers appreciate. Any of the shifts or throttles can be configured for Mechanical, Fully Electric or Mechanical/Electric (Hybrid).

Part of Livorsi Marine's expansion into other markets included the military marine industry, for which it produced a hard anodized billet trim tab. "It's just a square tab that wouldn't go on a performance boat," Livorsi says. "After building it for about four years, we asked ourselves, 'Why not make improvements and manufacture a series of trim tabs for the performance and center con-



sole guys?' We now have four different styles of trim tabs to choose from." New products have also been introduced in new markets such as ski boats and large center consoles.

Another aspect of Livorsi Marine that remained constant is its commitment to creating products of superior quality, durability and longevity. Through the years, boat builders like Formula, Hustler, Nordic, Hallett, DCB, Eliminator and Nor-Tech came to rely on the products Livorsi Marine produced. "We listen to manufacturers and customers to continue to provide and develop the quality products needed," Livorsi says. "R&D and testing never ends as we strive to make a better product than the competition. Each product endures rigorous testing under the most strenuous conditions. Substantial testing takes place off the Florida coast and on Lake Michigan, as well as in CompX Marine's state-of-the-art test lab. Saltwater is one of the most damaging elements in the marine environment, and Livorsi Marine makes sure its products can endure this type of condition."



SB