

Outdoors: Apex Marine spruces up pontoons for angling

By Lydia Lohrer, Special to Detroit Free Press 3:34 p.m. EDT July 4, 2016

The St. Louis-based company provides innovative designs for those trying to fish



(Photo: Photos by Lydia Lohrer)

Michigan's waters inspire innovation, especially for anglers.

Engineer Brad Dupuie used to fish with his brother, Mark, on Saginaw Bay in the 1990s. His obsession with walleye fishing led him to one of the most dramatic recent advances in boating — a hardcore fishing pontoon.

Mark's company, Apex Marine in St. Louis, Mich., does a booming business manufacturing pleasure pontoons, employing upward of 100 people.

"Apex Marine specializes in niche pontoon boat manufacturing. We started in the compact pontoon industry. I came up with a big-paddle boat that's also a little pontoon boat, then branched off to Angler Qwest," Brad Dupuie said.

"I spent a lot of time thinking up a pontoon specific to walleye trolling and about how it should be designed," Dupuie said. "I finally designed and built it a couple of summers ago."

Design it he did. It gives fiberglass and fishing boats a run for their money and then some. His creation took the 2015 innovation award at the Miami International Boat Show.

It also attracted the attention of local fishing legend Lance Valentine.

"I call it a hardcore fishing boat with pontoon features," Valentine said. He was initially skeptical when talk show host Mike Avery gave him the idea.

"I went through a stage of 'good idea, but I doubt I can fish out of it.' Then I looked at it and thought, eh that could probably work. Finally I fished out of it. After six hours fishing on it, I was a convert. This is something I could look a guy in the eye and tell them it's something you should absolutely consider as an option," Valentine said.

Apex makes four models: the Fish, Pro Fish, Troll and Pro Troll. You can also choose between 18-foot and 20-foot lengths for the Fish models, and 20-foot, 22-foot, and 24-foot lengths for the Troll models.



Angler Qwest offers several specialty pontoons and other designs. One model won an award at the Miami International Boat Show. (Photo: Picasa)

Each of the four models has a center console. The console seat contains tackle storage.

“One side has drawers. The other side is set up for six tackle boxes. On the double wall, one of the options is a tilt out tackle storage,” Dupuie said.

Anglers can choose from a T-top or a full canvas roof to protect them from the sun.

“One unique thing is a double wall gunwhale system in the rear of the boat, which allows you to put tracks, rod holders and downriggers,” Dupuie said.

“We troll pretty fast using spoons 2.2-2.8 mps for trolling spoons. We have a trolling motor up front in some models with a wireless remote, and you can use that to steer. But a lot of people use the big motor and trolling bags to steer.”

“Tricking the boat out with triple tubes, lifting strakes and a trolling motor up front, what more could you want?” Valentine said.

The trolling version is a party in the front and business in the back. A reverse mullet, if you will.

Luxury couches custom-made right at Apex grace the front. Plenty of fishing space for serious anglers in the rear makes it a family party, as well.

“It’s ideal for children and getting kids out there. If you force them to be in a little fishing boat they’re trapped. Here they can get out and move out and take a little nap as it gets a little slow. Everyone has fun. A lot of people get ski tows, or go tubing for half a day. It crosses over into all areas of recreation,” Dupuie said.

Valentine says when people think pontoon they think of grandpa’s old getup.

“This is not it. It will change your mind entirely about the concept of a pontoon. This is a hardcore fishing machine that can accommodate up to 14 rods.”

Prices range from \$20,000-\$55,000, depending on how far you trick it out. Pro-troll two tube and a base Troll 60-horsepower runs in the lower \$20,000 range. A 150-hp with a triple tube can set you back up to \$50,000-\$55,000.

For information, contact Apex Marine at 989-681-4300 or qwestpontoons.com.

