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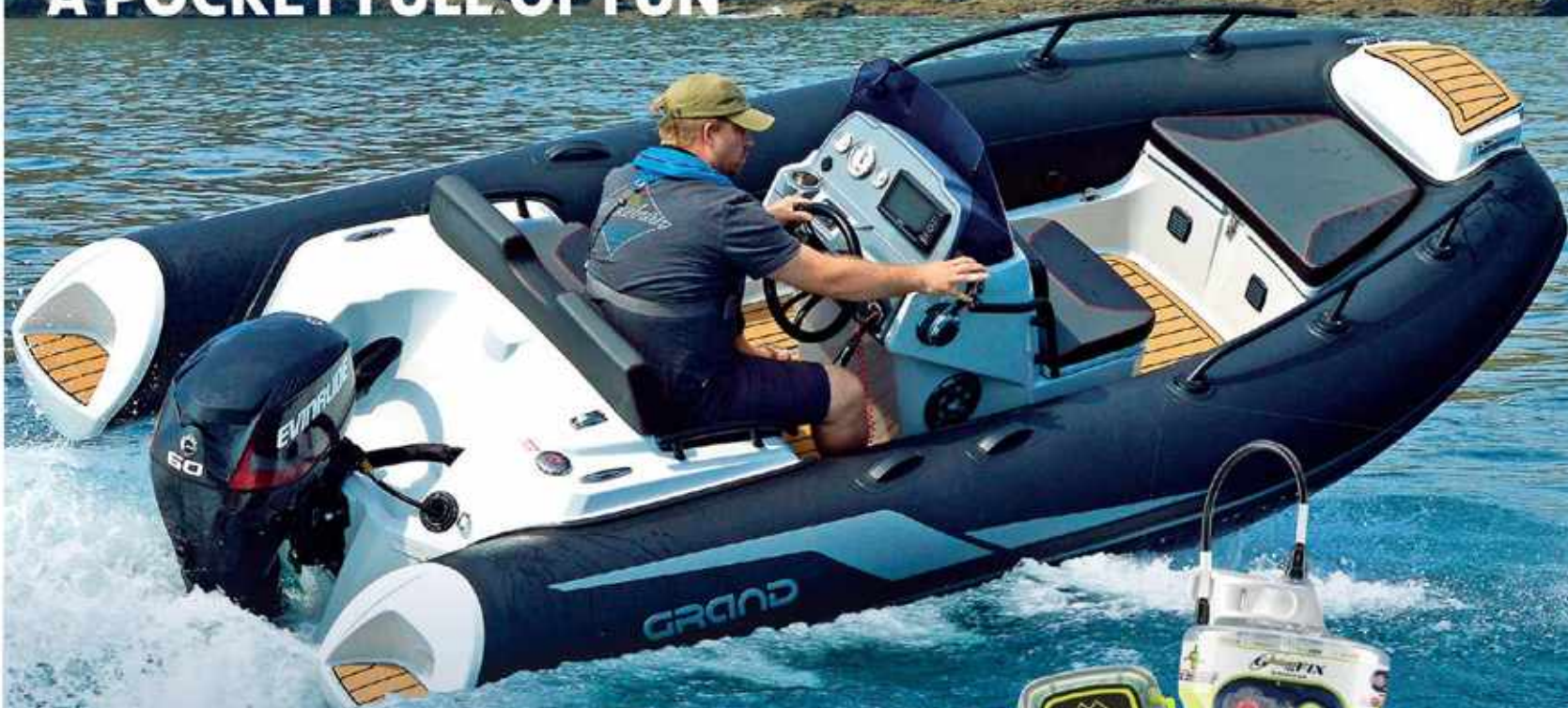
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Breaking with **TRADITION**

The sharing industry is growing in every area, including holiday homes, planes, cars, offices, tools and much more. Boats are no exception. HMS interviews Alexandre von Heeren, MD of Mandaris Marine, a company that has recently launched the MemberBoats Club of Malta - an initiative responsible for offering a modern-thinking and creative alternative to traditional boat ownership ...



think I'm right in assuming that the basis for a successful boat club and/or charter operation surely has to be its location. What makes your particular location so special?

The MemberBoats Club is all about being able to enjoy the essence of boating with none of the hassle typically associated with ownership. Being a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean, boating is as natural for Malta as skiing is for Switzerland. An important part of that experience happens at the marina. Our offices overlook the beautiful Grand Harbour in Valetta with its historic fortifications, the ideally located Laguna Marina and the surrounding restaurants and shops. It was therefore the logical choice for the club's base, and the fact that this marina operates as an exclusive private members' club makes it even more of a perfect fit. Each member gets complimentary access to the restricted Laguna Marina Club, even when not boating. Hence, our discussions with the management and the owners of Laguna Marina quickly led to the decision to join forces and start the club together - in essence, merging



the experiences and knowledge of both. I have always been a firm believer that Malta and Switzerland are an ideal fit in many ways, and not only because we both share the same colours in our flag and the cross. We can now prove that the traditional Swiss service approach and the Maltese marine experience create something unique.

In terms of your clientele, is it mostly made up of Maltese nationals or do you attract overseas boaters as well?

The MemberBoats Club primarily targets Maltese residents as members. While Malta is very

touristic, the tourism can't be compared to that in the South of France or in the Balearics, at least not today. Also, tourism is very seasonal and potentially volatile, even in normal times without corona. This doesn't mean that overseas boaters wouldn't be welcome - they are more than welcome - but that for the club to make business sense, we believe in the local market. Also, the MemberBoats Club is a year-round operation. Enjoying a beautiful day on the water in winter is something exceptional. Not many overseas boaters are likely to be around in wintertime.

We can help potential members to get the necessary training to obtain a licence.

That said, we already have some ideas to launch a MemberBoats Club based in Switzerland and possibly elsewhere. Any potential base will, however, have to offer a solid local market, overseas boaters being a plus. Still, I don't exclude the possibility that we may be surprised about the attraction of our offering to overseas boaters or similar clubs elsewhere in the world, should we

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Every member will need to have proper nautical qualifications to join.

come to the conclusion that some kind of a reciprocal offer would make sense.

What are some of the key benefits associated with the type of ownership and service you provide?

The key benefit is simple: we buy the boats and the equipment, we deal with the marina, we register the boats, we insure the boats, we clean the boats, we fuel the boats up, and we maintain and repair the boats. The members enjoy just

the essence of boating, with brand-new, safe and exclusive dayboats that will be replaced approximately every two years. Every boater knows that the two happiest days in a boat owner's life are the day they buy the boat and the day they sell it, after reality has set in. It is our objective to solve this problem by offering our members the excitement of joining the club, using these great boats over and over, and looking forward to additional boats or new boats to replace the existing ones, but





Boats fully prepped and ready to go on Pinto Wharf



Purpose built marine facilities for club members

The MemberBoats Club is about sharing.

without the hangover effect. We will also listen to the wishes of our members when ordering new boats.

Can you tell us why you have chosen the XO and Axopar brands as your primary craft?

We wanted cool-looking boats that are extremely seaworthy and of high quality, boats that are as versatile and multi-purpose as a Swiss knife. Every boat is a compromise, but we believe that these models come extremely close to the perfection we seek. At the same time, the two brands remain sufficiently different to offer our members distinctive experiences. It was also a coincidence that the shareholders of the Laguna Marina are also the local dealers for Axopar (and for much bigger boats), while Mandaris Marine secured the dealership for XO Boats in Malta. We obviously share a similar taste when it comes to boats. It was just another perfect fit. We will have T-top boats and cabin boats, something for every taste and weather. Also, both brands will be enlarging their range with

new models, which will enable us to grow our offering. Boating is about passion and we have a passion for these boats.

Part ownership associated with club-style membership is becoming increasingly popular. How effective is it, would you say, in terms of bringing new people into the pastime of boating?

The sharing industry is growing in every area, including holiday homes, planes, cars, offices, tools and much more. Boats are no exception. The concept of the MemberBoats Club, however, is not based on part ownership but on prepaid use on the basis of an annual membership. Boat ownership is generally expensive and associated with its share of trouble. We have no doubt that our offering will not only be a valid alternative to ownership but also a gateway to boating for new people. We will therefore also offer training so that potential members can obtain a boating licence and the necessary competences, so that we will feel comfortable letting them use the boats in safety. We are also already considering an entry-level offering for younger people that would otherwise not have access to boats, for example through renting, because

We wanted cool-looking boats that are extremely seaworthy and of high quality, boats that are as versatile and multi-purpose as a Swiss knife.



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The Axopars are a very popular addition to the fleet

of their age. We will further offer a 'Just Jet Ski' membership. It is our clear intention to lower the level of the entry barrier to boating and at the same time raise the level of nautical competence.

Do you have overseas clients who are existing boat owners but who join your scheme in order to give them access to a foreign boating experience?

While we have clients that are boat owners, at this stage we are focusing on the Maltese market. We will obviously promote our offering across our clients and professional network. This is another reason why

we believe in this offering, since it enables us to promote boating outside of the traditional channels. Besides this, we may also explore possibilities for entering into agreements with similar boat clubs so that our respective members can enjoy new boating areas, should our members be interested in this. Obviously, when the MemberBoats Club has added other locations, the members will be given access to these too.

Can you describe the coastal cruising that your destination has to offer?

Malta consists of three islands: the

main island of Malta, Comino and Gozo. There's plenty to experience - exploring the different natural harbours of Malta, enjoying time in an otherwise not accessible bay, or having fun at a beach club or popular anchoring for those that prefer buzzing areas. Malta offers it all. Comino and Gozo are in dayboating distance and also offer something for every taste. Comino offers fantastic bays like the Blue Lagoon, where many private boats (and also touristic excursion boats) anchor in crystal-clear water, but also calmer bays. Gozo's main harbour has many restaurants, and small bays can be explored around the island



Biog: Alexandre von Heeren

Alexandre is the owner and managing director of Mandaris, a trust and consultancy company that focuses on providing asset structuring services to corporate and private clients out of Switzerland and Malta. The Mandaris Group recently added Mandaris Marine Ltd to their group of companies. Mandaris Marine represent XO Boats in Malta.

After having worked for several large banks, Alexandre joined Mandaris in 1998 and chaired the Swiss Association of Trust Companies (SATC) from 2012 to 2019. Even though boating has been a passion since childhood, this background and his education as a lawyer do not typically lend themselves to the establishment of a boat club. In fact, it is rather the result of a coincidence - Mandaris having their Maltese offices overlooking the Laguna Marina in Valetta and Alexandre having come across a similar project abroad. In reality, however, the activities of Mandaris and the boat club have more in common than it might seem at first glance: both are all about high-quality services and the members are often professionals with whom Mandaris would otherwise work.

Members will benefit from the strengths each can contribute.

while following the cliffs that drop vertically into the water, leading to various caves.

What sort of qualifications and levels of experience are necessary to join your ownership scheme, and what training are you able to provide for clients?

Every member will need to have proper nautical qualifications to join. We can help potential members to get the necessary training to obtain a licence. Also, we require an initial assessment drive to ensure that a member is able to safely use the boats and has the required knowledge. However, we are also offering the option of hiring a skipper

on very reasonable terms for those that don't have a licence (yet) or just wish to be entertained.

Are there any specific matters that people should be aware of before committing to a scheme such as the one you offer?

The MemberBoats Club is about sharing. Even though the number of members per boat is limited to ensure availability and we offer the opportunity to each member to reserve a couple of boating days ahead, it may happen that the preferred boat model is already booked on a specific day, or exceptionally that all boats are booked, primarily at weekends or on public holidays. This is the downside. Otherwise, bookings can be made up to 48 hours in advance. Spontaneous after-work boating is also possible.

Finally, the regulations and the types of boats we offer limit the

use of the boats to Maltese coastal waters. Spending a weekend in Sicily is unfortunately not an option, at least not until we will have expanded our fleet with larger boats.

Can you describe what makes your club ownership unique, and why you would recommend it to our PBR readers?

The combination of a marina that is itself a private club with access to fantastic boats through the MemberBoats Club membership is exceptional, and not only in Malta. We also offer to organise the catering, be it sandwiches or something more exclusive. It is all about service. In Malta there is currently nothing comparable. Boaters that aren't boat owners will not be able to rent comparable boats, since most dayboat charter firms offer RIBs only. I personally love RIBs, especially when strongly

motorised, but while these are a lot of fun, this is something different. Boaters that are boat owners will usually not have a brand-new boat, fully equipped, every couple of years. And finally, the combination of the partners of the MemberBoats Club with their wide experience and track record in the marine industry on the one hand, and decades in the financial services industry on the other, is definitely unique. Members will benefit from the strengths each can contribute. ■

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