



# CATS

rather well-informed businessmen. To prove this John had invited along to our meeting: Schaunn, the representative of Capital Works, a recent and important shareholder in Robertson & Caine, as well as Gwen Bernard, the marketing director of Tui Marine. Tui is a long term partner of the shipyard, and has become not only its exclusive distributor, but also its number one client with the Moorings and Sunsail accounts. John Robertson is in his element: he's courteous, professional and humble. He's also loyal to the memory of his friend Jerry Caine, who was taken too soon, but whose name will always stay linked to the shipyard, and who John talks about with emotion.

Discreetly but surely, Robertson & Caine has become the world's second largest builder of sailing catamarans. "Number one in the US and the Caribbean, and the largest catamaran builder in the southern hemisphere!" beams John proudly. Enough said. It's worth remembering what has been achieved over a quarter of a century. Over 1,400 catamarans have been produced and delivered by sea all over the world. At 63 he can be proud of what he has done. The kid from Cape Town. Trained as a mechanical engineer, he could have made his career in the diamond mines, which is where he started out. However, his real passion was sailing. Passion is a word which keeps cropping up in his story. Passion for building boats. Passion for racing. Passion for big, custom-made yachts. For those that know the business, we can also add his passion for detail, tech-

nology and innovation...

Between 1968, the year he built his first boat, and the creation of Robertson and Caine, he had seen it all as the boss of a shipyard. The first incarnation was John Robertson Yachts. He produced small One Design boats and was subject to any market fluctuations and changes in fashion. After signing a contract to build two 63' monohulls, his emotions went from the euphoria of getting the business to the stress of being stuck with empty assembly lines once they had been delivered. With all the attendant problems and the need to recapitalize the business, his stake fell to just 10%. He preferred to start from scratch and have control. Fortune favors the brave, and that includes Jerry Caine of course. This new departure would be full of wonderful encounters. Humble as ever, John credits those people that he has met with the notoriety and success that has made Robertson & Caine the company that it is today. Firstly there's Ellian Perch. A one off, according to John. A unique visionary and financier all rolled into one. Whilst the shipyard was chosen to produce the Mumm 36 one-designs (and what a success that was), it was another encounter which would influence the destiny of the company: Lex Raas. He too is a visionary, and at the time was the head of the Moorings charter company. He had a hunch that catamarans would take over the charter market and especially if they could be perfectly adapted to the expectations of the clientele, which was first and foremost North American. Fear of losing control? Lack of vision or too conservative? While European shipyards didn't want to know, Robertson & Caine saw an opportunity and the chance to generate the kind of volumes which could give long term stability to their project. The first contract was signed in 1996 with the Leopard 45. That was all that was needed. 10, then 20, then 30 boats a year came out of the Woodstock boatyard. It's a partnership that has never wavered. Today it's more like 200 boats per year, 4 per week, leaving 6 shipyards employing almost 1,300 people! Since then, John has moved to the States to be closer to The Moorings, who have become more than clients. It's more like a partnership, still together after 20 years, weathering the good and not so good times together. This partnership gives him perspective, but also a huge amount of feedback from thousands of charter clients around the world. Simon Scott is the Managing Director, which allows John to happily concentrate on product development. He underlines that this is always carried out in close cooperation with Franck Bauguil of Tui Marine, the owners of Moorings, and not forgetting of course the ten in-house designers and the two architect partnerships which have been involved since the beginning: Morelli-Melvin and Simonis-Vogdt. That's the way John is: always giving credit to his teams and shunning the limelight himself. He's so passionate about what he does that the idea of retirement doesn't seem to be on the table. Testing out the products also helps to fulfill his sailing needs. Just like racing in the old days, going on a cruising holiday would remind him too much of the office! He's a happy soul...

When he allows himself a little downtime, he does a bit of sailing on his modest Sea Ray, and proudly watches as his daughter takes over on the water. Sailing is a family affair! There's no doubt though that he will be leaving his own paw print on Leopard designs for some time to come!

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