

PUBLICATION	INDIAN EXPRESS
SUPPLEMENT	MUMBAI NEWSLINE
EDITION	MUMBAI
DATE	23-02-2008
PAGE NO	06

Mongia catches second wind

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
FEBRUARY 22

ONE of the recurring sources of astonishment for a cub-sailor is that the winds around matter more than the waves below. It's a lesson for life and Shakeel Kudrolli (46) and Aashim Mongia (37) — formerly competitive yachtsmen, haven't stopped reading the winds even though their priorities are now firmly planted into terrestrial, entrepreneurial roles. Sensing a booming market for yachts, watching Mumbai dig leisure and adventure sailing like never before and reconnecting with sea-faring activities that were once youthful sport, the two will turn out as yacht-promoters at the February 28-onward boats trade-fair - Mumbai Boat Show.

Having adjusted their sails while watching the winds blow over the years, the two know which way affluent Mumbai's disposable income flows. Pink was the new black in the '80s and two decades on, the Beneteau boats are status-craving Mumbai's new Mercs.

While Mongia - a former Asian medallist - got into the business of procuring boats and locating prospective, rich clientele way back in 1994 even as he phased out his sailing-championships, Kudrolli, a successful cadets' coach in the late '80s had entered litigations and time-consuming courtrooms, but after handing over a bustling law firm to his partner, is back to dealing in boats.

Mongia's Westcoast Marine now caters to boat-buyers, also offering maintenance services - since Mumbai's first-generation yacht enthusiasts are still newbies, learning the ropes of servicing and warehousing. 10 boats were specks on Mumbai's harbour-horizon in 1994, the number now 200 - and Mongia unveils a range starting from a lakh rupees to 12 million dollars. "People have taken property in Mandwa and are buying boats to commute to and fro, while a boat's leisure value has risen with a 100 percent increase in number of boats over the last one year," says Mongia, who rues the absence of marinas in Mumbai which will effectively spike up interest in water-sports.

For Kudrolli who at 10 started sailing with the charming-bunch of school-students' Sea Cadet Corps of Colaba - the city's most carefree and amateur entry-point into the sport, sailing has taken a commercial turn with his Aquasail, a leisure boating company. "There is the super-rich class wanting to buy big 40-footer coastal-cruisers, but there's also a huge community of professionals and enthusiasts for whom there's the option of fractional time-sharing part-ownership," he says of this all-inclusive offer.

"Sailing needs to reach schools because a sustained culture of boating will be good for business in the long-term," he says, making a pitch for his sub-20 lakh dinghies and Laser boats, to go with the nouveau riche's demand for a 3-crore cruiser. Those high-end sales off-set his Splash training sail-programmes for children, which hardly breaks-even.

While Mongia recalls his heady-days at the sea fondly - especially the day his team came from behind to clinch gold at Busan's Asian meet in 2000, he knows it is the crores-worth boat sales which will now raise ripples. "I participated at a match-race event this year, but it'll be difficult to continue with all the demands required in promotion of the sport," he says wryly. Cliches follow sailing closely, and in winding down his active-career, the former sailor has set sail onto a more-lucrative, if not as exhilarating, career.

