

The Man behind the Name

HMS interviews Slava Rodionov, the founder and MD of Brig RIBs...

Pic: Paul McCarthy (left) Slava Rodionov (right)



How did Brig begin, and what was the motivation behind starting a RIB-building company?

It is a long story, but in short, it was about a group of graduates and students 26 years ago trying to find their place in life and apply their knowledge in aeronautics to real business while the USSR was collapsing.

During the Soviet era, the city of Kharkov, where Brig HQ is today, was the capital of industrial production in Ukraine and the third-largest centre of industry and commerce in the USSR. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the largely defence systems-oriented industrial production of the city decreased significantly, leaving many highly qualified people out of jobs. The founding team at Brig was made up of

highly educated physicists, mathematicians and engineers who were formerly employed in USSR space and military programmes. When we started the business we had three core pieces of knowledge: we understood fibreglass, we understood manufacturing and we understood aeronautical engineering. Although we did not know a lot about boats at the time, the transition from aeronautical engineering to naval (or marine) engineering was not hard. We learned very early on that we needed to clearly establish a vision of where we wanted to take our business. We carefully decided upon a plan of what we wanted to build and how we wanted to evolve.

Was your initial goal to simply service your home market or was it always your plan to have international representation?

In the beginning, it was just a small production of little foldable inflatable boats to sell inside the country. Ukraine does not have too many areas of water and the marine culture is not very developed, so when the company started exporting boats it became obvious that the only option was a constant evolution. At one point we just realised that we had to go global.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced in those early years?

Definitely the biggest challenge was information. We literally had to absorb every piece of knowledge we could get. We had



to learn a lot about technology, logistics, marketing, administration and business itself. And the second problem was a lack of resources, but I think this is a common situation for most newcomers.

Were there any other builders that influenced your designs and the market sector you chose to target?

The whole RIB market is the influence. Almost every brand has its own highs and lows concerning design, marketing and customer care, so we have to be aware of everything that's going on - to feel the

pulse. That's why you can see us at most boat shows around the world. We still absorb so much information in order to improve ourselves and our boats.

What made you believe you could succeed in this already very competitive market?

If you ask me what word would summarise everything about Brig, I would say 'efficiency'. We are striving to be efficient in every activity we undertake, and it is the solid foundation of our success. Our scale of production is unprecedented - with all aspects of the design and build carried out





Top right: Paul McCarthy, MD of Brig UK. Below: The Ukraine factory team.

in-house, and no elements outsourced to third parties, we have total control. These efficiencies and economies of scale allow us to bring a high-quality product to market at realistic prices that help make boating accessible to all.

How important have engine partnerships been to Brig over the course of their history?

You know, a RIB without an engine can't go too far, so a beneficial partnership with engine producers is vital. And I believe it is mutual - we help each other to survive in what can be a turbulent market.

To date, what has been your most successful model, and why do think it has proved so popular?

Without doubt the Eagle 650. It is an

absolute best-seller worldwide, and as a manufacturer we see its consistency in every feature. Actually, it is the perfect family boat - whether you go relaxing on the coast or plan a voyage to some hard-to-reach destination, its appeal is universal. I should also mention its beautiful design and reasonable price.

Among all the products/models you have produced so far, which are you most proud of, and why?

Every model is like a child - we love all of them. They play their own particular role in the Brig line-up. We just let the customer decide what to choose in terms of measurements, features and options. So when a new model is ready, we anxiously wait for the feedback, and usually it is good. And for now, we are proud of our new

flagship, a giant leap for us as a team - the Eagle 10, the ultimate 10m leisure boat fully packed with features. You should ride it, it is absolutely fabulous!

How challenging is distributor and dealer representation for a company such as Brig?

It is a big challenge, because we have to count on every local aspect of the market we enter. It takes a lot of effort and time to understand what the possibilities and hidden threats are as well. After all, business is just a relationship between people, so human qualities are also very important, and we are so proud to have the best people in business to be part of our international Brig team, to share our values and visions.

How many people do you have working in your home factory, and how much of the build process do you subcontract?

We have got almost 250 people working at our production facility, where we manage everything in-house, so we do not have subcontracts. Our people are the reason why we are so consistent in terms of quality and efficiency as a company. Both our staff and distributors are part of our core values as a company. I like to think of our team as the key to our business success - many of our employees have been part of our team since the beginning of the company. We put an enormous amount of effort into training our employees, increasing their capabilities and improving their working conditions. Our staff on the factory floor and in the various office sections, our management team, our distributors and our customers are the most important part of the Brig story and our core value. 'People' are the reason that we are in the boat business.

What gives you the greatest satisfaction, and what aspect of your work do you find most rewarding as head of Brig?

Visiting the different beautiful places around the world is a great pleasure in itself, but seeing your country represented



in harbours and marinas all over the world as a result of your efforts and contributions spanning 26 years. Our country has gone through hard times, and we want to support Ukraine in this way, to destroy some old stereotypes and encourage people to broaden their horizons.

If you could position or relocate Brig anywhere in the world, what would be your number one choice?

I have never thought about that. It seems that we appeared in the right place at the right time, and Ukraine has all the possible benefits to make our company successful. After all, geographical influence on business is fading nowadays, so it's all about people and ideas.

Which market is most important or, in terms of units, represents the largest order book?

Brigs are sold in over 60 countries worldwide, so every market is important without exception. Over our 26 years in operation we have seen different markets rising and declining, so we care about everyone despite their instant results. By the way, every year in July we host our global distributors' conference in Ukraine, where we reward the current year's largest distributor and the biggest increase year-on-year distributor. This year's winners are Australia and the United Kingdom, respectively.

What was your first end-of-year turnover, and what was your last financial year's turnover figure?

The difference between the first and last year is overwhelming - we started with £1,000 in the first year, and now the Brig production facility and distribution network turns over in excess of £60 million. Hopefully we can sustain that

growth rate in the future.

You have just launched your latest flagship, a 10m model. Tell us more about this boat, including its hull design, and what markets are you targeting with this model?

The first definition of the Eagle 10 that comes to mind is 'luxury'. It is equipped with a lot of features to satisfy even the most demanding client. It is a highly capable offshore boat, and your longer-haul family trips can be exceptionally comfortable and safe, giving you the opportunity to enjoy a ride like you never had before. It contains at least three zones, so every member of your family can find a place to relax on the same boat. We believe that the Eagle 10 will be popular all around the world - we have all got families, right? The design and construction are flexible enough to meet the demands of any environment and climate across the globe. We're really excited about it!

What does the future hold for Brig, and what areas of expansion do you foresee making in terms of both new models and facilities?

Constant movement forward is a part of our philosophy. We introduce new models annually, whether it is a major update of an existing model or a completely new one. Last year we introduced five new models, this year we've only got one, but it is the biggest launch for Brig to date - the Eagle 10. Also, this year we expanded our production facility to over 15,000 square metres, increasing our overall capacity by 40%. And last but not least, we also completely redesigned our website and improved our global information service strategy. So we are positive about our future and ready to meet any type of challenge. **PBR**

WE HAVE GOT ALMOST 250 PEOPLE WORKING AT OUR PRODUCTION FACILITY, WHERE WE MANAGE EVERYTHING IN-HOUSE, SO WE DO NOT HAVE SUBCONTRACTS.



FACT FILE

www.brig.co.uk

www.brigboats.com

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Brig were founded in 1991 in Kharkov, Ukraine, by Slava Rodionov.

Brig have been at the forefront of innovative design of inflatable boats for 26 years.

Brig are the world's largest builders of RIBs, producing 5,500-6,000 inflatable boats each year ... and growing fast!

Brig's production facility in Kharkov, Ukraine, has recently been expanded to over 15,000m2, enabling production to increase by over 40%.

Brig employ over 250 permanent team members in Kharkov, Ukraine.

All elements of the design and build are carried out in-house to military precision at their production facility in Ukraine by a dedicated team of highly skilled, ex-military aeronautical engineers.

Brig RIBs are sold in over 60 countries around the world.

Brig are currently the best-selling brand in Australia and across Europe. They have also recently launched in the USA to great acclaim.

Brig have a majority 65% share of the RIB market in Australia and Sweden.

Despite Brig being established for 26 years, the brand was only introduced to the UK in 2008, so is still relatively young.

Brig UK are based at The Wolf Rock Boat Company in Churchstow, near Kingsbridge, in South Devon. There are 10 dealers UK-wide - including The Wolf Rock - which are based near all the major UK boating locations.