

DEALER'S STORY

Story: Tom Prince Photos: St Kilda Boat Sales

Nothing ordinary about it

There are dealers and there are dealers. And then there's St Kilda Boat Sales...

As a dealer, you know you've hit the big time when a regular customer takes a former US president for a fish on the Bay, complete with pistol-packing security goons and well-positioned sharp shooters.

At St Kilda Boat Sales in Melbourne, some customers' names regularly appear near the top of the BRW rich list, but principal Darren Finkelstein is hardly one to brag. "No boat is too small, as long as we have the skillset," he says. "The most important customer we have is the one who is really going to appreciate it, regardless of how much money they have."

The business was founded in 2002, when Darren and his business partner, Andrew Rose, received an "out of the blue" offer for what was known as Steve Gow Marine. They changed the name to St Kilda Boat Sales and sold their first boat a month later, a 1980 Caribbean Belmont, for the princely sum of \$14,500. Eight years later, they're one of the most successful dealers in the game, having sold hundreds of boats from \$5000 up to \$2 million each.

LOCATION! LOCATION!

St Kilda Boats Sales is located at the famous St Kilda Marina. It is the only dealership in Australia to sell the entire Caribbean range, from 16ft runabouts and half-cabins to 49ft flybridge cruisers.

There's also an extensive secondhand range that delivers more than half its boats to interstate buyers, as well as a service centre that regularly lifts the likes of 43ft Riviervas out of the water.

"As a company we can look after anything from a 15ft trailerable runabout, to servicing a 50 or 60ft boat," says Darren. "A good half amount of the boats we sell end up here on the marina."



The company is also a Club Marine insurance agent, and a finance broker. "It's a genuinely one-stop shop," says Darren.

One of the big advantages is the location. Unlike many of its suburban competitors, the proximity to the Bay allows for on-water tests, in genuinely temperamental Port Phillip weather.

And if you thought that was something, wait til you see the website.

TECHNOLOGISTS

St Kilda Boat Sales may be a first-rate dealer and service centre in a superb location, but one thing that instantly sets it apart is its use of technology. Darren's background was originally in e-commerce, and it shows once you visit www.stkildaboatsales.com.au

The website is well-designed and easy to use, despite its mass of information. But best of all, it allows you to do things that you wouldn't dream of doing on other sites. And you don't even need to be a tech-head to use it.

For example, how many dealers offer high-definition video and audio of current boats for sale, complete with Darren's running commentary as he takes you inside and out of the latest offerings? Or how about the Option-A-Boat application, where you can play around with electronics, engines, and fishing gear after specifying what boat you're interested in, followed by a formal quote? Want the daily fuel pump price? Or perhaps be the first to know when a boat matching your specs is for sale?

A long-time favourite is the St Kilda lighthouse camera that transmits live video of the Bay. Now that's service!

St Kilda Boat Sales is located at St Kilda Marina, Marine Parade. Phone (03) 9525 5500 for the dealership or (03) 9534 8213 for the service centre.



This photo: You'll find St Kilda Boat Sales at the St Kilda Marina (right). Top right: St Kilda Boat Sales business partners Andrew Rose (left) and Darren Finkelstein.