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Southland Times, Southland, General News, Rebecca Moore

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REBECCA MOORE

Being surrounded by water, and Southlanders typically being outdoorsy types, it is no wonder Southland had the most boat owners per head of population in the world.

At the weekend, boat enthusiasts came out to see a range of boats on display at the Southland Boat Show at ILT Stadium Southland, in Invercargill, as well as getting some water safety advice from the experts.

Boat show manager Peter Dawson said the show had grown over the years, with about 7000 people visiting at the weekend.

The show attracted people who were interested in boats of all sorts, but Dawson had noticed an increase in the number of people wanting boats that were versatile.

"There's a lot of rivers and lakes; no other place has got that. We've got access to different types of boating."

"Family-type boats" used for recreational, skiing and fishing purposes were the most popular, Dawson said.

The boats had got bigger and more versatile, and new materials meant less maintenance was required.

But the main customers were still families. While a man might come in for the initial viewing, they tended to have their wives or families with them when it came to the final decision, Dawson said.

Fi-Glass Boats managing director Griff Simpson said there was "a loyal and consistent market in Southland".

Fishing, picnics on the lake and skiing activities were in New Zea-

landers' blood, he said.

New Zealand had the most boat owners by population, and Southland was at the head of that statistic.

"They [Southlanders] really punch above their weight."

Stabicraft sales manager Sean McColl said by population the region also had the most boat manufacturers in the country.

"It's the southern way of doing things," he said.

Customers were preferring bigger boats that were more versatile.

The market had changed a lot with social media and customers researching before heading into stores, he said.

Hutchwilco national sales manager Andrew George said people had also become more educated on the safety aspects of boating.

"The most important thing for us is that people buy safety products and know how to use them. It's all about safe practice."

People were also looking more at more fuel efficient and environmentally friendly engines, George said.

"There's a lot of rivers and lakes; no other place has got that. We've got access to different types of boating."

Peter Dawson



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Sea Scouts Alexa Clark, Josh McGearty, and Charlotte Clark, all 13, adjust the sails of their Jellicoe Sea Scouts boat on display at the Southland Boat Show.

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