

Guide for Innovation Award Entrants

by Roger Marshall, President of Boating Writers International, Innovation Award Judging Chairman

This guide is written to give entrants an idea of the process used by the judges to determine the innovation award winners.

1. When entering, make sure that you have filled in the details on the entry form. If you are not certain which category to enter, contact Melissa Skomedal at NMMA (mksomedal@nmma.org; 312-946-6281).

Please Note: *All boats entered in the Innovation Awards beginning in 2007 must be NMMA Certified.*

2. When writing up the description of your entry, tell the judges what is *innovative* about your product. If you are enclosing brochures, videos and other material, these enclosures will tell the judges how good your product is but often do not describe its uniqueness. This short description about the innovativeness of your product is often what will get it onto the short list. The judges often find that a marketing or sales manager wrote up the entry and hyped it without commenting on the innovation. In this case, unless the product is spectacularly different, it may not make it onto the short list.

It also helps to have a working prototype at the show if you do not have a finished product. Bringing a video of an idea usually doesn't get very far. However, if the product is not in production and available to consumers within 60 days, NMMA can ask for the award to be returned.

3. Check other manufacturer's products to ensure that your product is truly an innovation. Often the judges have found that a product is an innovation for a particular company, but other companies have had similar products on the market for a few years.

4. The judges generally start their work by reading about the products and researching the competition **before** they go to the show. This is why it is vitally important to get your product entered as early as possible. If you leave it until the last minute, the information you send will be read quickly and a quick decision may be made as to whether or not the product should go on the short list. Often this results in the product not making it to the final review process.

5. The Short List

At some shows the Innovation Awards committee must consider up to 200 or more entries. Each judge reads the information before going to the show and comes to the first meeting prepared. This first meeting is held one or two days prior to the show and is used to reduce the long list down to a short list of products that the judges will inspect. The short list is usually around 25 to 30 entries. Each entry on the short list is inspected by all seven judges. This is not to say that the judges will not look at other products. They may see them while they are walking around the show and inspect them at this time, but being on the short list ensures your product will get looked at. To develop the short list the

judges look at the product brochures, the short description of the product and their knowledge and research of competing products. This is where your product description is of vital importance. A good description of the product's innovative qualities will usually get the product on the short list, hype will not.

6. Inspection

Armed with the short list, the judges go from booth to booth and inspect the entries. Usually this is done the day before the show opens or opening day. If the judges do not come to see your entry, you did not make the short list. At each booth the judges expect to find someone who can give a concise description of the innovations and who can answer many technical questions. This is why a contact phone number is important. If you made the short list you will be contacted and a time set for you to be at your booth.

If the judges do not find anyone at the booth, they will return, usually two or three times, but with such limited time to inspect products, the item may be eliminated simply because the judges could not get an explanation of it.

7. After inspecting all products on the short list, the judges meet again to determine the winners. The list is weaned until only the winner in each category is left. These discussions often take several hours and products are thoroughly dissected. Eventually a winner emerges, although, if not all the products in that category are deemed sufficiently innovative, no award may be given.

8. At the award ceremony each winner gets their trophy and is asked to stay until the proceedings are over so that photographs may be taken. These photos are used for worldwide publicity so don't miss the opportunity to be photographed as a winner of an Innovation Award.

9. No products will be accepted or considered by the judges after the entry deadline!