

Rollin' on the River



Photo by Shawn Adams | www.rotor-head.com

MERLIN, OR - You can't whitewater raft down any American river that hasn't been already explored by an adventurer in their SOTAR. In fact, SOTAR inflatable boat owners are navigating rivers and bodies of water all over the world with their rafts, catarafts, and kayaks; built to withstand the roughest water. It's understandable why these world-class inflatables would be custom made by expert hands in a little town named Merlin, just outside of Grants Pass, Oregon. The area is known for sport fishing and whitewater rafting on the Klamath, Illinois, Umpqua, and the world renown Wild and Scenic Rogue River.

With all that opportunity, someone in Southern Oregon just had to build something for running the rivers – something that was durable and functional. And that same someone felt the need to build boats that were as impressive to look at as they were to handle. "We admit it. We are river enthusiasts who use technology to build and improve our boats. That's why they are the favorite of outfitters, river guides and whitewater enthusiasts everywhere," says SOTAR Lead Designer Chris Maitrejean. "We love to make custom products with unique color schemes and detailed specifications. That's what gives us the "edge" in our industry."

by Make It Happen Marketing

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Production of SOTAR products started in 1980, in the small Grants Pass garage of Glenn Lewman, co-founder and current owner of White Water Manufacturing. Now this homegrown inflatable boat-manufacturing firm employs 22-plus people year-round. Currently located in a commercial plant that combines the production line, warehouse, and a popular retail store, SOTAR has evolved to become a dedicated rafter's resource for outdoor river adventures.

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For the curious, SOTAR is the acronym for State-Of-The-Art Rafts. The name is apropos considering the skill it takes to design and build over 500 rafts, cats or kayaks a year, each guaranteed to provide a comfortable, safe and adventurous experience. According to General Manager Hugh Griffiths, there are good reasons adventure seekers worldwide are buying SOTAR, including clients in South America, Eurasia, and Africa. For example, he points out that the all-welded construction technology of SOTAR boats are superior to the glue technology used by other makers. And, the use of SOTAR's Lexatron 100% polyurethane fabrics makes a SOTAR inflatable 1,000 times more resistant to abrasions than watercraft using comparable PVC.

“The SOTAR brand is the recognized industry standard because we are not afraid to go first. We strive to remain on the cutting edge of inflatable technology,” says Hugh. “At the same time, we continue to incorporate traditional craftsmanship that produces a durable and lasting product.” For example, Hugh explains that SOTAR has long since switched from hand cut patterns to precision computer driven machines that cut out the individual raft parts. However, the final production (assembling the boat) is still done by hand. The result is US constructed rafts that are light for their strength, capable of withstanding the most challenging environmental rigors, known for their ability to slide over rocks and able to fold and roll easily for storage.

Continuous innovation is also at the center of the SOTAR brand, as the owner, designers and builders have a multi-year plan to branch out with additional improvements, products, and services. While catarafts and whitewater rafts remain the company's #1 products, SOTAR produced its first set of aerial water buckets for fire suppression in 2015. They also partnered to build several equipment prototypes for other area businesses, including Zipline Gear of Grants Pass.

“It's great to be part of the Southern Oregon adventure community,” says Chris, “here at SOTAR we recognize and respect the efforts SOREDI constantly undertakes to develop and attract commerce to our region and especially appreciate the fact that there's a local organization dedicated to the success of our business, and our adventure industry sector.”



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