

Wooden Boat Builder Revives the Storied St. Lawrence Number Boat

By Buzz Lamb

In 1909 a group of members from the Thousand Islands Yacht Club commissioned 20 identical launches with identical engines. The idea was to encourage the sport of gentlemen's racing on the St. Lawrence River without having to spend a lot of money.

They hired well-known naval architect Chares D. Moyer to develop a design suitable for occasional racing and yet comfortable enough for cruising with the family. By

Smith said these "numbers" were actually painted large on the hull sides at the bow so that the boats could be readily identified when racing. Over the years the 28-footer became affectionately known as the "Number Boats".

In August of this year the "Number Boats" will be 100 years old. Back then only 20 were built but Smith has assembled #21 and #22. On June 29, 2010, Smith had #22 on display at Hall's Marina in Lake George Village. He also gave a talk on the origin of the sleek, long-decked launch and its



(\$107,974.50 in today's dollars). "So, they came up with the idea of having a one-design class of racing motorboats," he said.

Smith said at present he knows of six of these boats remaining which might be capable of running. One is a wreck which was burned to the waterline in a fire several years ago and is in need of total restoration. One boat, "Knight Rider", is still running on the St. Lawrence, according to Smith, and two are owned by the Antique Boat Museum (ABM) in Clayton, N.Y. "Knight Rider" was owned by Andy McNally of Rand-McNally fame," Smith said. The two remaining boats are currently in the process of being restored.

Smith said the original boats were powered by a single Jencick 4-cylinder engine which weighed 850 pounds and produced a meager 30 horsepower. "They were T-head engines...never seen before," he said. Smith said Leyare Boat Works eventually switched to Red Wing engines which produced the

same 30 horsepower but were 200 pounds lighter. Top speed was approximately 20 m.p.h.

According to Smith, Robert O. Cox, 92, owner of Fort Lauderdale Marina and co-founder of the Antique Boat Museum in Clayton, N.Y. bought and restored #13 which was originally purchased by Robert Boldt, manager of the famous Waldorf-Astoria hotel. Cox eventually donated the boat to the museum. Boldt actually purchased two of the sleek craft...#3 which he named "This" and #13 which he named "That". Both boats are on display at the museum.

A few years ago Cox thought some of his customers might like a more elegant way to travel back and forth to their yacht clubs on the intercostal canals in Fort Lauderdale and so began the "Number Boat Project".

Smith said Cox hired Northend Composites to build a mold and Shaw Yachts in Rockland, Maine to make the first fiberglass foam-core hull...#21. Cox then hired

Smith to install the engine, deck and interior. Smith said Cox has decided to keep #21 for his own personal use but #22 is for sale and #23 is in his loft awaiting deck and interior. The two men are now partners in The Number Boat Company.

The new boats mirror the launch-style design with the engine located under the long foredeck just ahead of the helm. The cockpit is large enough to accommodate four passengers. Powered by a 4-cylinder 140 h.p. GM engine, it is capable of speeds over 35 M.P.H., according to Smith.

Smith said he is trying to organize a 100th year celebration of the "Number Boats" in August during the Raceboat Regatta which is held every other year at the museum in Clayton. For more information, contact Smith at 315-386-2817.

Top: Everett Smith's St. Lawrence Number Boat. At Left: Mason Smith, Reuben Smith, Everett Smith. Photo by Ed Scheiber.

insisting on identical, one-design boats the emphasis would be on the driver's skill rather than spending huge sums of money on high-priced race boats and engines.

According to Everett Smith, owner of Everett Boats Works in Canton, N.Y., the original one-design boats were built by Leyare Boat Works in Ogdensburg and sold on a subscription basis, each boat given a number in the order it was purchased.

incarnation today.

"What started this off was that there was a lot of interest in racing on the St. Lawrence," Smith said. "The Gold Cup Races were started in 1904 in New York City and the second year the race came to the St. Lawrence." Smith said the race stayed on the St. Lawrence for quite a few years.

Smith said that back in those days it cost about \$5,000 to build a new race boat every year

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