

MARKS A NEW ERA IN CANADA

Sponsored
by Canada's
Industrial
Leaders ...

The Rainbow Craft is launched



Canada from its earliest Colonial days has always boasted of its ship-building but the production of boats on the lines of Rainbow-Craft constitutes an entirely new trend in the boat building industry.

Rainbow-Craft will combine the skill and care of custom-designing with modern efficiency methods. The result will be that motor boats of the highest standard will be brought within the reach of thousands who hitherto could not think of enjoying Canada's unequalled waterways.

Announcing this new industry, it may be added that Rainbow-Craft is to be built by men who have been identified for years with boat designing and who are numbered among Canada's business leaders.

**WATERWAYS ARE SPORT WAYS
ALONG THE RAINBOW TRAIL**

Canada's innumerable lakes and rivers offer recreation, health and sport—but they can only be enjoyed if you own a speedy dependable boat. Plan now for next summer by choosing your Rainbow! Though production will commence at once on the 1931 models, we anticipate such a demand for Rainbow-Craft that orders for early summer delivery should be made in good time. Your enquiries are invited.

Dealers
throughout
Canada
solicited.

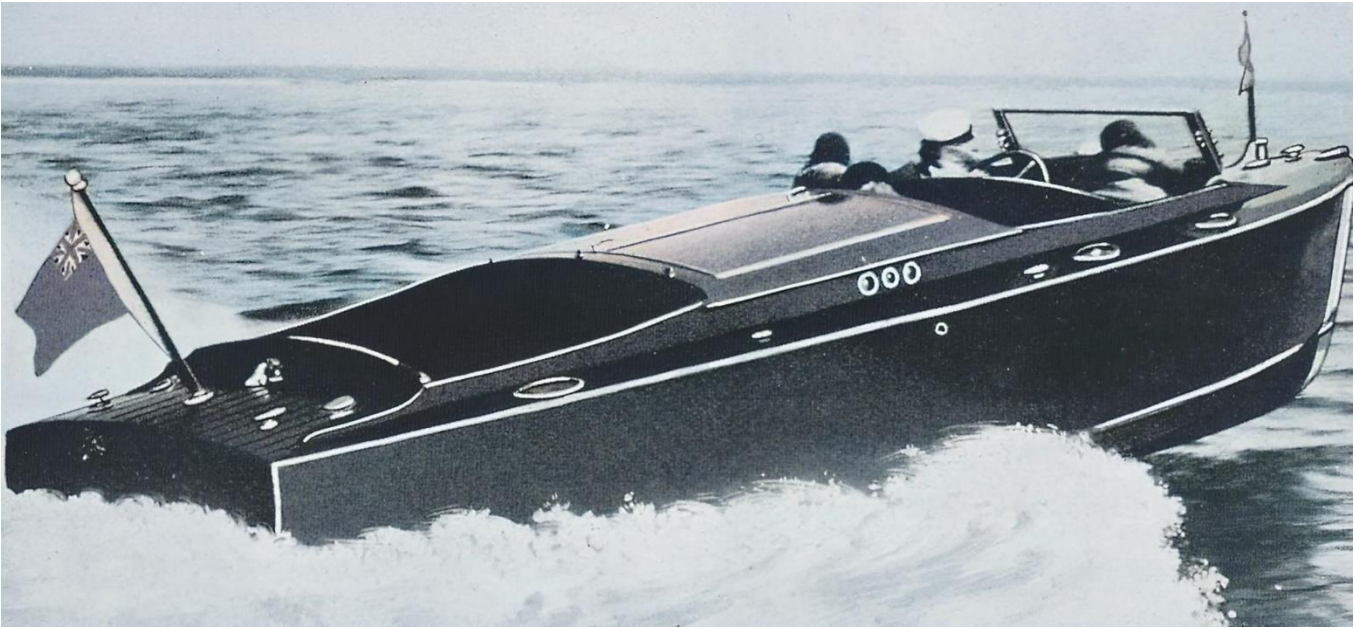
**Rainbow
Craft** LIMITED
GRAVENHURST ONT.

1930 ad announcing Rainbow Craft. Other than the rectangular windshield, the drawing didn't look much like the Dart model design.

Rainbow Craft: Big Plans, Bad Timing

By 1929 there was room in the market to produce a line of runabouts that were smaller, faster, and more affordable. While still general sales manager at Ditchburn, Thomas Greavette had been secretly meeting with a number of Toronto-based Ditchburn customers to set up a new boat company. Greavette left Ditchburn in late summer 1930 and shortly after the new company was announced in the press as the soon-to-be Rainbow Craft Ltd. Ditchburn was apparently incensed, most likely from both the loss of one of his key men and what he felt was the apparent infringement on his famous “Rainbow” series of race boats. It is possible to trademark a word in the dictionary, but only in a very specific commercial context, such as the usage of that word on a specific product, therefore you could trademark the term “Rainbow”, but you would have to register the trademark with the Federal government and specify what product (or service) the word is in reference to. In this case you could trademark rainbow as a name for a series of boat you are or intend to manufacture and sell, and the name would have to be clearly identified on the product and the invoice. Accordingly, a competitor could not also come along and introduce their line of boats with the name rainbow, the holder of the trademark could legally force the competitor to change the name. But Ditchburn never trademarked the name “Rainbow” for his company, it does not show up on the Federal registry, it was just a name Harry Greening put on his race boats; there was no legal leverage to force any branding change. But at that time Ditchburn was a powerful and dominating figure in the boat building world, and there was little to be gained in getting him angry, plus he could just as easily set his works to offering identical boats in competition with the new Greavette enterprise.

It should be noted that this company was not built around Tom Greavette, this is a mistaken impression. Rainbow Craft employed him, he was important, but not the key man. He was a director, and apparently had a small shareholding (I’m guessing as the 9th of 9 directors, it was around 9-12%. The company president was Gordon Lefebvre, former president of General Motors Canada. The superintendent of works (viz. Vice-President of Manufacturing) was to be J. W. de Beaubien, a “Major Dyas” possibly Major Arthur William Dyas, a Great War veteran who returned to civilian work as an insurance agent and financial advisor and would be the sales manager (even though this had been Greavette’s background at Ditchburn) and finally Greavette himself as “General Manager”. It’s not clear where Tom Greavette was in the hierarchy, at best he was the executive VP, managing the managers and reporting directly to Lefebvre.



Rainbow Craft Dart licence runabout, 1931 Photo illustration from magazine ad. The picture was created from a photo, and then extensively touched up and re-drawn with an airbrush.

Rather than go through the expense and risk of coming up with it's own designs, Rainbow Craft decided to licence models from Dart Boats Ltd. an American firm that had started up in 1928 as an outgrowth of Indian Lake Boat Co. of Lima, Ohio and was already selling well by 1930. But as Greavette geared up for production, Ditchburn was rapidly winding down, laying off a third of the Gravenhurst staff, about 25 of the seventy. Perhaps they went straight over to Greavette's which was going flat out with plans to start full production in the spring of 1931. Production did start, full speed ahead in spite of the economic gloom. According to Gray/Duke the backing was a steamrolling \$500,000, but that most likely authorized capital, not paid up and issued shares. The plant and storage sheds and manufacturing equipment cost \$50,000; the payroll would be \$1,000 a month for forty men. There were probably an additional \$2,000 of costs per week to run the business, as well as \$15-20,000 of lumber, engines, hardware and materials I would guess the total cost of twenty some weeks operation from the original spade turning to the first shutdown would be around \$130 to as much as \$150,000, once the costs of the advertising blitz had been factored in. Boat production started in April 1931. There were plans to open a head office and showroom in Toronto.



That never happened. There was no head office or showroom ever set up in Toronto, there is no listing in 1930-1933 *Might's Toronto* for either Rainbow Craft or Greavette. A total of 31 Dart licenced boats were built in the initial production run (four are in restored and running condition, a fifth grey hull was advertised recently for sale on the Dart Boats website; nothing further is known of it). They piled up in the storage building next to the factory. In late August of that same year, after four months, production was called off and the 35 workers were furloughed. Dart Boat Co. Ltd. itself was out of business in 1931, it's supporting bank had gone under.



Dart licenced Rainbow Craft model today Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

There was also the more basic issue of low sales. The economy was certainly an issue, most likely the main one, but the Dart look was also a problem, it was out of style. Rectangular windshields, raised engine hatch and square passenger cockpits were the runabout fashion in the mid 1920's but even as early as 1929, with Minett-Shields Wimur II the new look was airplane, with rounded cockpits, a split V-window, and flush decks. Canada, as I have mentioned was always a few years behind the U. S. in all boat matters, but the combination of problems was deadening to the company. The shutdown was not a bankruptcy, but just a means to shut off the cash losses, essentially the plant was put on ice until perhaps the spring, and presumably the traditional customer high season would begin again. But the spring was 1932, and the western economies were dead in the water; the stock market had bottomed out, even blue-chip stocks were trading for only a few dollars.



Harold and Lorna Wilson in Little Miss Canada IV

There was a very limited amount of custom work for a Harold Wilson, a racing enthusiast (and son of one of the Rainbow Craft investor-directors E. A. Wilson) who would become Greavette's version of what Harry Greening was for Ditchburn, an ultra-loyal customer who have every single of his long series of racers built there, even when one of the Miss Canada series missed the mark, no hard feelings and he would be back the next year for the next project. In 1931 the 135 cubic inch class was created for more affordable race craft and then a 225-cube class in 1933, Wilson wanted boats for both. Still the solitary annual order from Wilson was not enough to sustain any kind of business.

February, 1935

CANADIAN BOATING 1

Custom Built By Greavette



GREAVETTE FLASH

FOR 1935 Greavette brings to you a line of speedy, safe, beautiful, custom built runabouts incorporating many worthwhile features to improve your boating pleasures. And most important . . . the Greavette 1935 runabouts bring you a new conception of softer riding throughout their speed range.

GREAVETTE FLASH . . . A fast, sports 18-foot runabout, the Greavette Flash seats five. A feature is the cleverly arranged forward cockpit which can be opened or closed at will like the rumble seat of an automobile. Closed, the cockpit hatch matches the decking. Beautiful, like all Greavette boats, and a remarkable level-riding, smooth, quiet running boat.



GREAVETTE FURY

GREAVETTE FURY . . . The famous Little Miss Canada III, 225 cubic inch class design is added to the custom built line of Greavette boats for 1935 as the **GREAVETTE FURY**. The performance of this world champion racing craft is proof enough that this model is designed to win races. But not only in racing ability do they excel, for these racing craft carry the mark of Greavette quality—now considered to be the utmost obtainable in pleasure craft.



GREAVETTE CUSTOM 23-FOOTER

GREAVETTE CUSTOM 23-FOOTER . . .

At last, a positive non-pounding, fast runabout. The Greavette 23 foot runabout shown, as well as the larger 26 foot runabout, have the riding qualities of a round bottom runabout and the speed of a vee bottom. Clever designing brings this great advancement in pleasure boat performance. These Greavette runabouts are round bottom forward and a special design of vee bottom aft, with a wave collector incorporated in the chine, assuring dryness at all speeds. Speedy, safe, beautiful runabouts.

GREAVETTE BOATS LIMITED — GRAVENHURST

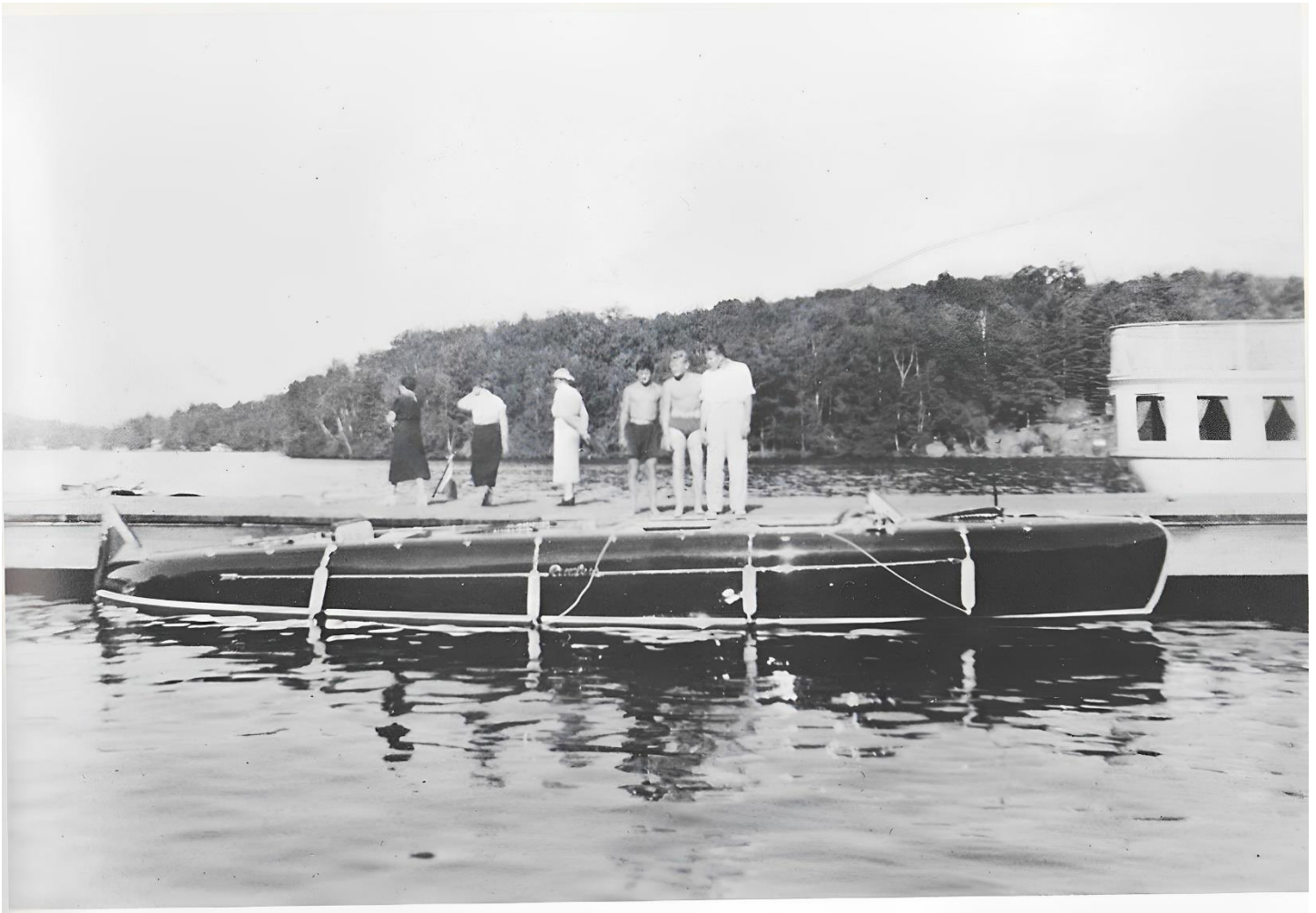
The new Greavette's 1934 boat offerings after the Dart era, the Custom 23 footer would become the Dictator



Harold Wilson's Miss Canada III.

Greavette ran the business as a sort of one-man shop, managing what there was left to manage, but mostly selling the Dart model inventory through to early 1933. The company was reorganized. There was never any work for Messrs. De Beaubien or Dyas. Rainbow Boats Limited became Greavette Boats Limited. Two directors, S. T. Terry and A. L. Ainsworth

resigned. It was clear that Greavette, although not initially anointed, was now the true key man of the company and the recognized industry name. Even so, the position of president of the new company was passed from Lefebvre to E. A. Wilson. They would keep the factory, but production was strictly on custom order. One coup was the signing of an exclusive Canada design contract with John Hacker. He was not busy, having been shuffled out of the company that bore his name; Hacker Boats Ltd was now wholly owned by its financier, the McCready family. Hacker would thenceforth stick to boat design and leave the building to those with deeper pockets and a higher tolerance for risk. The newly constituted Greavette and its star designer first big contract was for a 33-foot-long triple cockpit runabout named the Langley, built for the Wardwell family of Lake Joseph. These were rare contracts, there were only two boats over 30 feet built before the war, this one and the pioneer Streamliner, the Curlew, two years later.



The grand 36-foot Curlew, built for Fred Burgess in 1935 after his Minett-Shields burned. This would be the seed idea for the Streamliner, which would be offered in 1938.

Rainbow out, Greavette in

Cameron Peck's Astrea II U-9 Unlimited Hydro: A winner in the looks department, if not on the race course.

Actually, there was an alternative to an inboard, and that was a Dispro. Greavette had purchased the trademark and the molds (the two key patents of 1915-17 had long since expired) from Sam Botting in 1936. They kept the St. Lawrence for a time and had the company put an electric starter and ring gear (the XAE Model), which worked for a while, but the engine would always stop at a certain point and the starter would always engage the same gear teeth until they wore out or simply broke off. In 1950 they discontinued the St. Lawrence and replaced it with the British made Coventry Victor, a light twin cylinder marine engine. Greavette was the last customer for production St. Lawrence engines, when the contract was discontinued, engine production also ceased. It would be easy to say that Greavette was the last builder of motor skiffs at that time, but it's not easy to define. People were still putting small engines into rowboats and sometimes turning their Peterborough into an inboard. A low-cost solution was to put a lawnmower engine into a canoe, you could throttle it right down and use it for trolling, I

saw such a set up running on the lake, a very relaxed ride with Dad and his two kids. There was a mini-inboard on our lake that would chug by occasionally, a single cockpit with an older couple on board, it was 10, maybe 12 feet long. I saw it years later, abandoned at a local marina, very well and possibly professionally built, with a single cylinder something for power, possibly a 5 hp Kermath Sea Pup sailboat motor, although there was no boat or engine ID. Greavette took some criticism over continuing this anachronistic product, but there was still a market for small, slow, reliable low-power boats. The problem may have been that the 1954 base model sold for \$1,125, a Peterborough Aquaflyer was \$450 and a 10 hp Johnson outboard was \$400; the Dispro was not unwanted, it was simply no longer price competitive.



Greavette display at the 1954 Toronto Boat and Sportsman's Show Sheerliner in foreground, 16 foot utility next, and Dispro at the top.

But this was the only the smallest and most modest boat in the Greavette line. The principal and most popular product was the Sheerliner, a traditional looking runabout with flat covering boards. This was the successor to the problematically named Dictator. The Sheerliner doesn't

get as much attention for being a more commonsense product, but it was more affordable, and had some clever interior design ideas, one of which was a combination of runabout and utility. The 23-foot Dictator had the traditional 1930's cockpit arrangement, two seats forward, then the engine and finally the kiddie seat at the back, you got into the boat, you stayed where you were. By contrast, the Sheerliner's front, back and middle seats were set so there was a S configuration path, and passengers could easily walk to any seat in the boat, much easier than clambering over deck separations to get from one cockpit to another, if one of the kids in the back wanted to sit with one of the parents up front, they could do so simply by walking. You could party on a Sheerliner. The boat came in 20- and 24-foot-long versions. The other boats were flashier, but it was the Sheerliner that paid the bills and kept the business running.



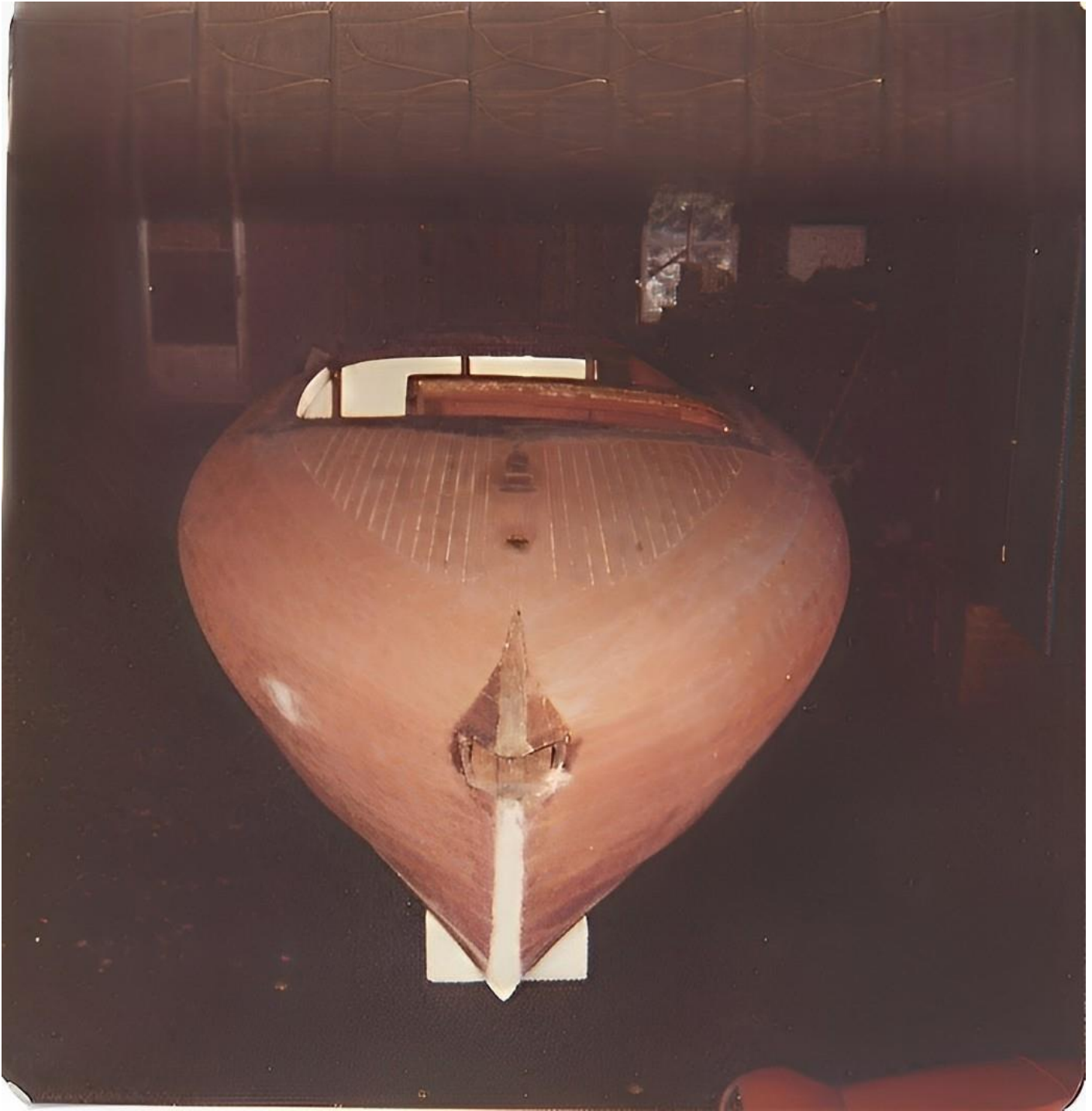
Unlimited Hydro built by Greavette in 1948 for D. Cameron Peck.

The flashy boat was the Streamliner. The Streamliner was designed by Doug Van Patten, but Van Patten was mostly relying on the original work by John Hacker on the Lockpat II, incorporating the rounded covering boards but building a much shorter craft than the 40-foot Lockpat. But Lockpat was a cost-is-no-object one-off, Greavette had to find a way to build a boat with striking curves, a custom job to be sure, but the build costs and ultimate price, although high, still had to be manageable. All the side plank boards have a compound curve,

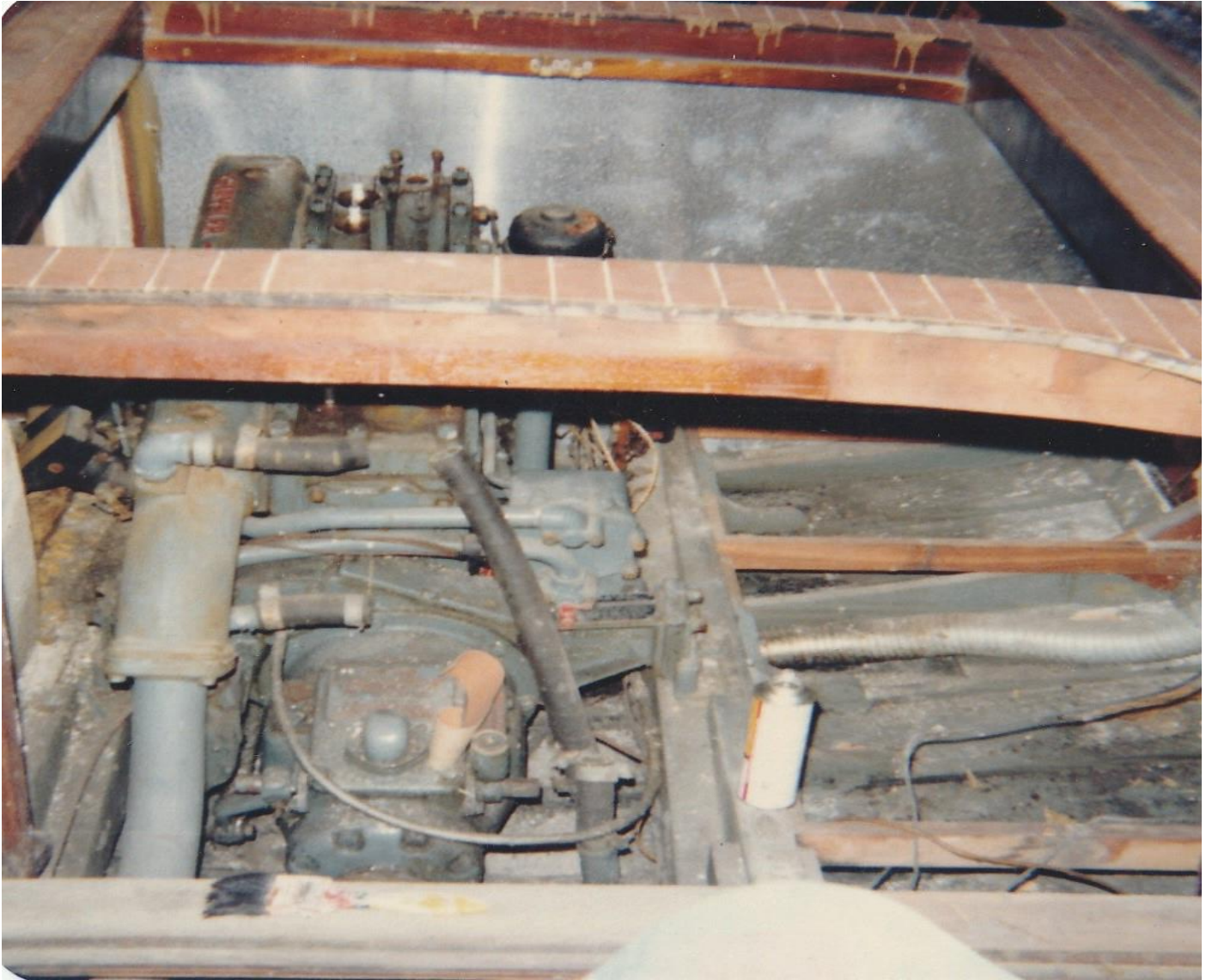
they had a c-shape from the top to bottom sides, and a long twist from end to end, sometimes as much as 45 degrees. How did they do it? For the pioneer Streamliner, Fred Burgess's Curlew, I suspect they used an adze on the interior and a plane on the exterior, but that is not really practical for a more production-oriented process. The first reality is to accept you will need mahogany blocks, not boards. You cannot steam bend $\frac{3}{4}$ inch mahogany, it cannot be done. I was able to steam bend $\frac{5}{16}$ mahogany, but it was a battle for the ages, as I slowly tightened the clamps waiting for the death snap. There are always stories of boat builders sinking boards in the nearby water and waiting a few weeks, this is mostly baloney. The wood will swell up and then once into place, it will shrink once more, leaving big gaps. It may and probably will become stained. I tried it on some air-dried oak ribs once, leaving them at the bottom on the boathouse slip for a month, they came out covered in green slime and Zebra Mussel sprat. By the time I cleaned off the organic material, I found the surface had turned dark brown or completely black, which would not come off. They all went into the fireplace, lesson learned. I keep hearing that this is being done, and it works, I would need videos, and a notarized attestation if I am to believe.



Greavette plant workers put newly built Streamliner into a power slide, I would say late October or early November given the heavy coats and huddling. Photo Speltz Real Runabouts III



1954 Greavette Streamliner in Ron Bradette's garage in Manotick in the 1980's, awaiting varnish. This was the age of do it yourself Photo by author



1954 Greavette engine compartment with I believe a straight 8 Chrysler Crown for power. Photo by author.



Greavette 24-foot 1954 Streamliner stripped for refinishing at Ron and Mylitta Bradette's house in the mid 1980's. Back then restoration meant remove the paint and varnish, reapply and hope for the best. Still this was a pretty solid boat, or at least it appeared to be. Photo by author.

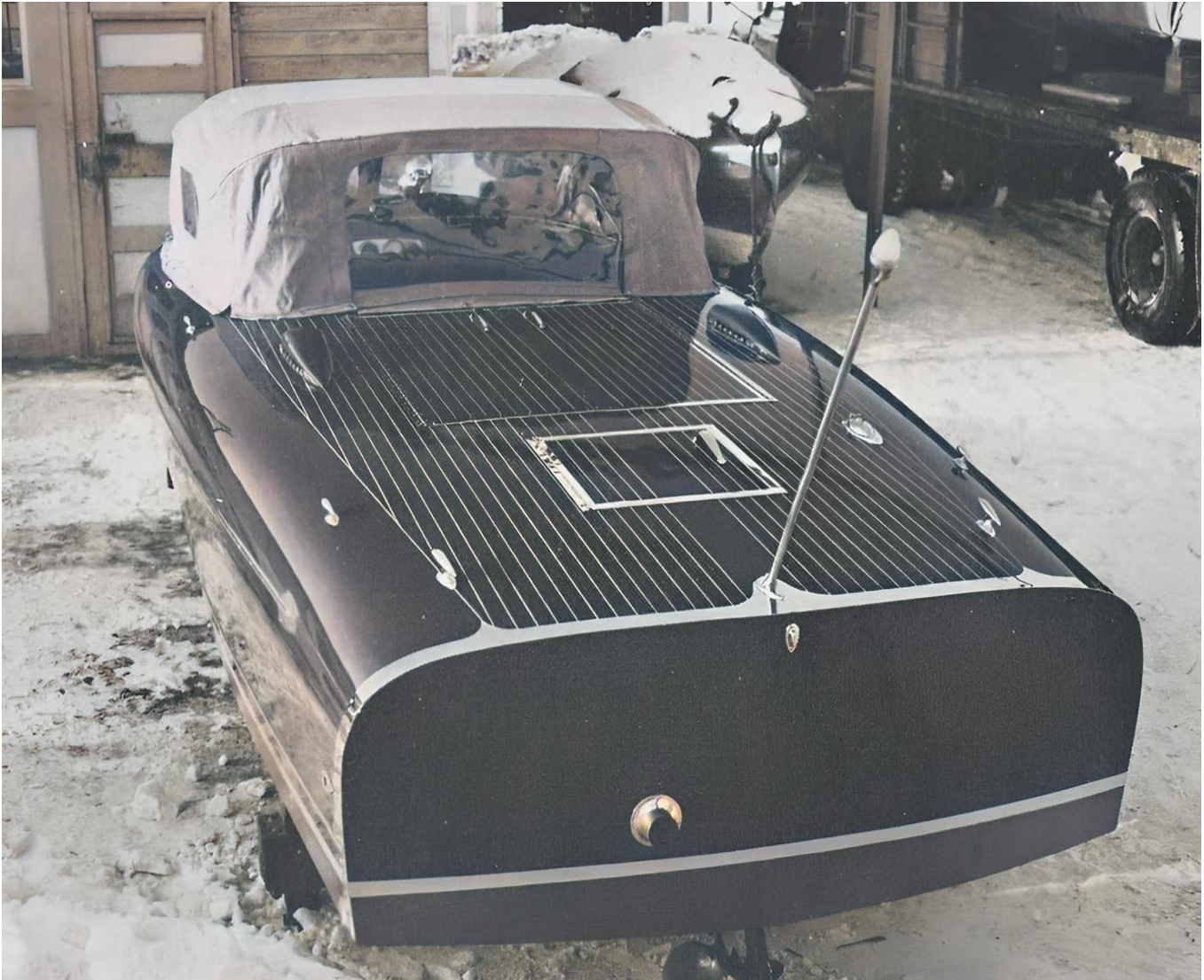
My best guess, and really the only possible way is that the planks were sculpted, carved into the desired shape out of a solid board block of mahogany, 8 feet long, or 6, 6-8 inches width and a thickness of 2, possibly 3 inches. I would assume step 1 would be set it up on its side and marked off the curves on pencil on the top and then run through the bandsaw, following the pencil line. Then you would have to set up some sort of jig, with the board on one end and a mold on the other, and then carve it out the same way you would have a key cut at the local hardware store. The cutting tool would have to be some sort of saw, or router like cutting device with infinite settings so that it would move along the area to be removed in concert with the

guide sensor on the mold. A very special tool would have mostly likely have been ordered from a tool and die making machine shop. This is all a semi-educated guess from a semi-educated wood worker, the process, as noted, was seriously guarded, and locked away but for the knowledge of the few workers that did the work. The work on the 1920's long deck launches is all of the highest quality, but that is all application of flat planks; the Streamliner is way above and ahead of anything like that, not even modern custom wood boat builders have been able (or were willing) to duplicate it. It is not the next level of wood forming, it is the last level, there is nothing after. This did not come cheap. According to John Storey in an article in Canadian Boating in 2018:

Five models were offered in a range from 18' to 28' carrying 5 to 8 passengers at speeds up to 45 mph. These luxury runabouts came very well equipped with unique chrome fittings, grated flooring and leather upholstery justifying the high price to be paid for a fine boat. According to a 1954 Greavette brochure the 22-footer was offered at \$5622, the 24-footer was \$6019, 26-footer at \$6821 and the 28-footer at \$8324 not including the price of engines. Various interior layouts were offered customized to the owner's requirements with many featuring a walk-around engine compartment.



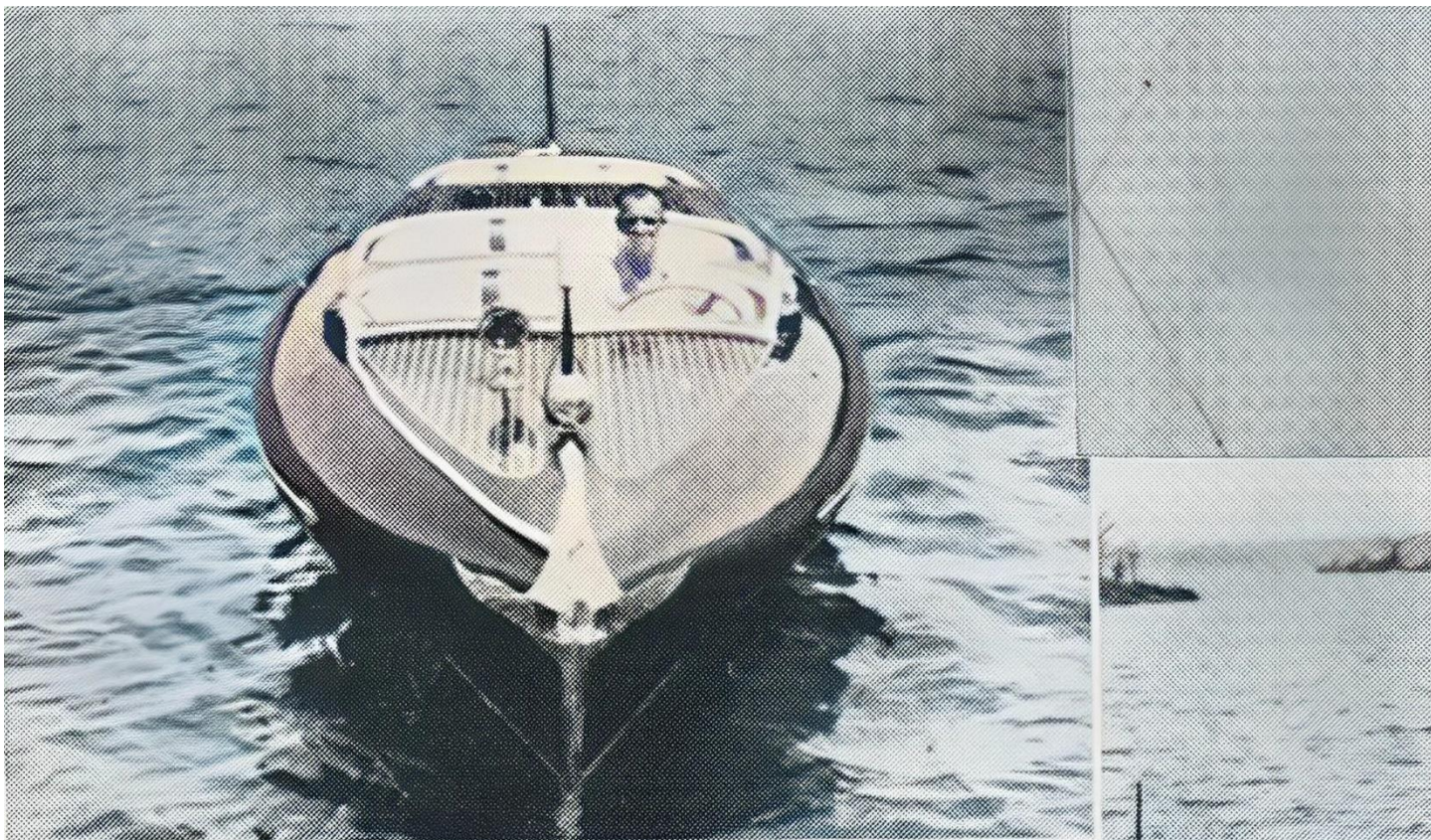
Streamliner restored Manotick Classic Boat Club photo



Streamliner ready to ship, not quite the time for launch, given the snow on the parking lot. Photo Speltz Real Runabouts III

These were custom projects only, you went to Greavette and picked the one you wanted (or could afford) out of a set of plans and Greavette would build it. You would also choose the engine, and it would be installed. A brand new 150 hp marine engine would probably need for the larger hulls, just to reach a satisfactory speed. 60 Streamliners were made, perhaps 15-20 still exist. If you wanted the big 28-foot model you were looking at over \$10,000 for a motorboat; at the same time, my parents bought our house, a suburban ranch in 1959 at \$16,500, or the equivalent of two 24-foot Streamliners, along with the selected engine. The Streamliner was really the runabout descendant of the grand 30–36-footer launches of the 1920’s, only for the very few. Still the rarest Streamliner of all would be the 18-footer, I have never seen one at a show, nor ever read an article about one. I have not seen a picture, but I did

see one in the wood, so to speak, hanging in the Quonset storage barn along the Port Carling waterfront. It was intact, a little rough, but all there. This was in the fall of 1989; I have no idea what happened to it since.

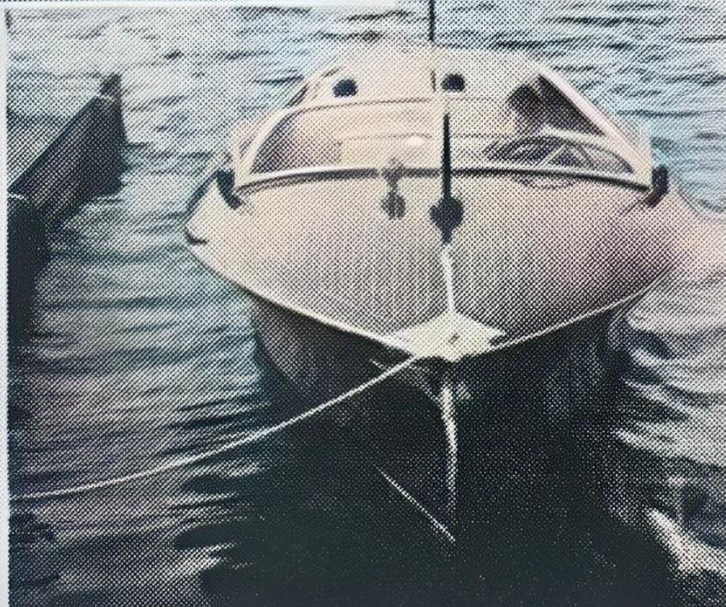


Streamliner—▲

Here is truly the finest of all Greavettes, acclaimed far and wide as the world's most beautiful runabout. Nothing in the water compares with it in beauty, finish and workmanship. Engineered for a luxury ride, you'll thrill to its dry non-pounding performance no matter how rough the sea.

Sheerliner—▶

The Greavette Sheerliner is a companion craft to the Streamliner in beauty, performance and finish. A fine example of the craftsmanship



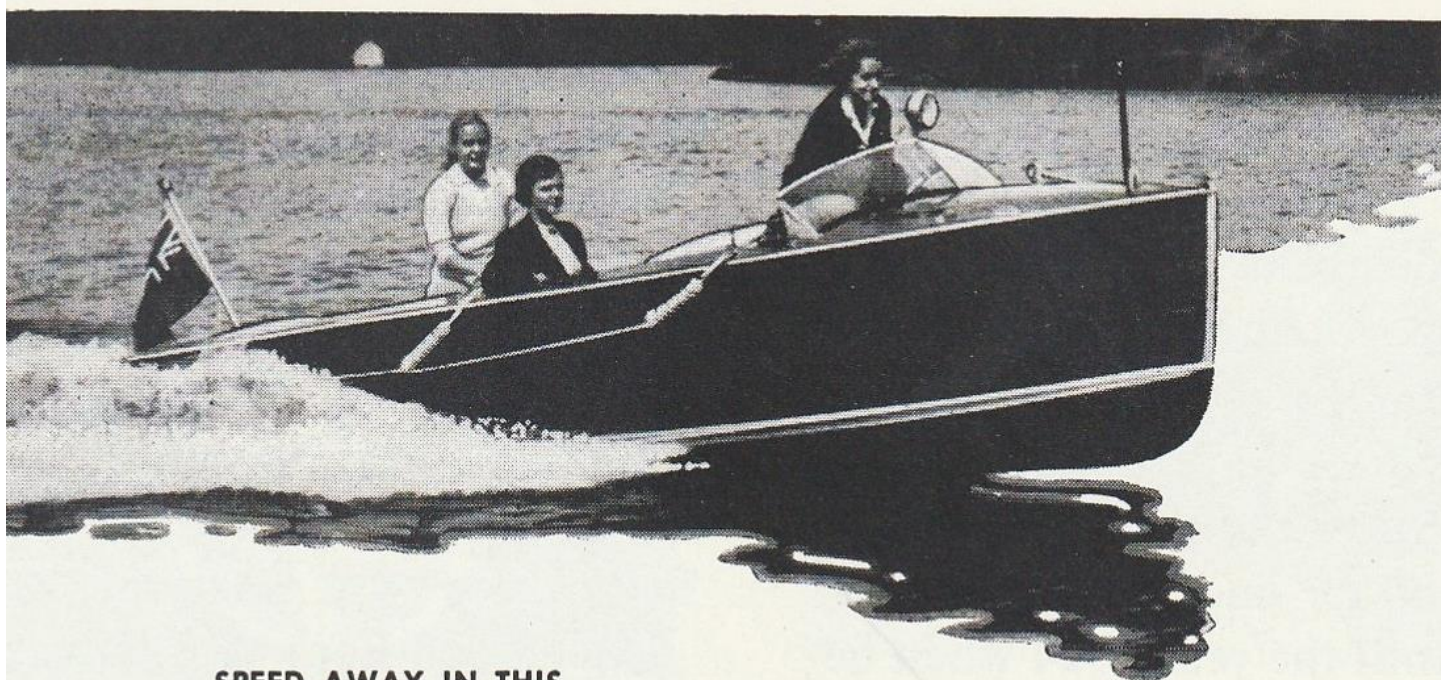
This ad really shows the difference in appearance and dimensions between the Greavette Streamliner and Sheerliner models. Be prepared to drop \$3,000 more on the Streamliner, in 1955 dollars.

Greavette & Port Carling, a toast to the future?

The original investors in Port Carling Boat Works had fallen away after the war, it was now owned by Charlie McCulley. This was the same with Greavette Boats; originally planned as a runabout version of General Motors, (even going so far as to recruit GMC Canada boss Gordon Lefebvre as it's first president, eventually the nine investors bailed out until Greavette himself was the last man standing.



A Port Carling runabout from 1954.



SPEED AWAY IN THIS
18' "LOON"

BE SURE IT'S A



SUPREME IN THEIR CLASS

Here is a runabout beauty that is as smart in appearance as it is dependable in performance. Built of selected smoothskin mahogany, "LOON" is easily-handled, level-riding, soft and dry even in rough weather. Its 57 H.P. Buchanan motor gives speeds up to 27 m.p.h. A roomy, comfortable boat, ideal for family use, and "a whole lot of boat for a very reasonable price."

Free Descriptive Literature on Request

THE PORT CARLING BOAT WORKS LIMITED
Port Carling, Ontario

*Represented on the
Kawartha Lakes by
John W. Paris,
Young's Point, Ont.
TEL. Lakefield 219R4*



The Muskoka builders referred to the 1950's as a "golden age". It was in terms of sales, productivity, relative freedom from violent economic downturns, no wars, except for the mostly compartmentalized Korean conflict. For a workman there was more or less uninterrupted employment for about fifteen years from 1947 to the early 1960's. Cottagers were getting richer as they advanced in their careers and businesses, the little Peterborough was joined in the boathouse by a 21-foot mahogany runabout, or in many cases, simply banished outside to the boathouse finger dock, with a war surplus tarp draped over it, a handy craft to go fishing in. It was good time except for designers, as the decade progressed the runabouts began to look more and more alike. Decks flattened out, sides and sterns became straight. The standout boats in the 1950's, the Greavette Streamliner, the Duke Playmate, and the Port Carling Seabird had all been designed and introduced in the 1930's. The public wanted a boat they could use comfortably, less so a floating piece of art. The wild curves of the 1930's mostly disappeared, except for the Streamliner, which was, for all it's beauty, a very expensive indulgence at several thousand dollars a hull, a Sheerliner would get you across the lake just as easily.



1969 Greavette Executive Manotick Classic Boat Club photo

Canada, as so often noted, was so often ten years behind in marine products, fibreglass boats were quickly taking over American waterways by the late 1950's (there was a short interregnum of plywood, with the hugely successful Lyman). Charlie McCulley sold Port Carling to a new owner in 1958, who transitioned it into a repair and service facility. Similarly with Duke Boats,

it kept building, but scaled down in the early 1960's and also moved into repair, and a new business, least to the baffled workmen, restoration of the older launches (What for? Why not just buy a new boat?). Hunter made the change as well; the last boats came off the slips in the mid 1960's. Greavette introduced a lapstrake outboard model, large enough to handle the big engine of the day, the 60 hp Evinrude Starflite, a V-4 configuration, at a mere 180 pounds no longer portable, and a long way from the 60 pound 2 hp 1910 model A. The 17-foot Sunflash came out in 1963 and even experimented with six boats with a fibreglass hull, and a wood deck and interior. This sounded like a good idea; however it was only an interlude, the carpenters were kept busy. It brought out the last model, the Executive, with all the modern bells and whistles, including an inboard-outboard drive. It had very much the look and stylings of a fibreglass boat, except that it was still made of wood. Greavette had pushed hard against the rising tide of fibreglass boats; Grew went all in. It was Grew that survived and prospered, Greavette called it after the 1975 Executive and tried to rebrand in the nascent wood boat repair and restoration business, but there weren't enough customers willing to spend the dollars (important note: at the time) to make it happen. Greavette closed for good in 1979.



1969 Greavette Executive Manotick Classic Boat Club photo



Greavette Sunflash runabout, 1960's. Photo by author

I often wonder why Greavette, or really any of the other wood boat shops and plants didn't invest more effort in fibreglass conversions. It was difficult but once the initial hassle of building the mould and training up the staff, the moulds could be used a few hundred times and building costs went way down in comparison to wood. Greavette, and particularly Shepherd had a skilled workforce on hand; granted there would be some cranky types who disdain change of any kind, but most were probably glad just to have a job, particularly in this sparse,

unprosperous part of the country. Part of the issue was that the owners, not to be too rough, but the reality was that they were almost all old men, many well past the normal retirement age. A photo from the 1956 Toronto Boat Show has Tom Greavette, Lloyd Shepherd and Charlie McCulley sitting together at the Shepherd display. Shepherd is 66, Greavette the oldest at 75, McCulley a mere 60, but he looks older (still he lived to an active 90). Greavette and McCulley had been building boats out of wood since their early teens. Out east, Myles Jeffrey was 71 and scaling down to one boat a year out of his little one-man shop. Herb Ditchburn, Fred Gilbert and Will Dowsett were all gone, as were their boat building businesses. Bert Minett was 75, Earl Barnes was 61 and Charlie Duke had passed the previous year. Alestair Hunter was 64, although much of the day-to-day work had been passed to his son Donald. Billy Johnston, who had knowledge and experience of high-volume production had just retired that year at the age of 75. Greavette had ordered that the company keep building Dispros right up until his passing two years later, it was a struggle to unload these living fossils, and it took three more years before the inventory was finally cleared out. By contrast, Grew had been sold to a group of Toronto investors who were willing to put the money into the business and to take advantage of the latest technology; Grew eventually prospered by being willing to do whatever the Americans were doing, and match them idea for idea, and it paid off.



The old guard: from left, Tom Greavette, Lloyd Shepherd and Charlie McCulley at the 1956 Toronto Boat Show A toast to what, I wonder? Photo scanned from Robert Speltz's Real Runabouts series