

CENTURY'S ON PARADE

By Lee Wangstad

A strange thing happened while preparing a presentation that I was going to give down in Cincinnati in January. It was going to be focused on boats of the 50's, of course, but I was going to be presenting with Kevin Mueller, 50's boat collector extraordinaire.

Our presentation was to identify the styling excesses that drove the marine market during the post war 50's boating boom. While many think that the automotive market was driving the wild styling, it had more to do with the aircraft industry and the aerospace program.

In order to get an even breaking point and to ensure that there would be no overlap, we had decided to divide our presentation into inboard and outboard classifications. I let Kevin have the outboards, while I dove into inboard propelled boats. Now, anyone who knows me will tell you that I'm an outboard guy, but the research into these 50's inboard boats really turned me around. With the Arena Crafts, Dorsett Sea Hawks, and Glastrons, I was beginning to see some actual practicality to owning one of these strangely overpowered "big timber" boats.

I mean "big timber" only in relation to size and power here, because, of course, they are all non-wood boats. Not that they don't have some wood in them, but they are largely made of fiberglass. And that was part of the presentation. While I had included Chris-Craft, Shepherd, Trojan, Ventnor, and Century inboards of the 50's, our presentation was

mostly about the excesses of the 50's styling, not materials or methods. The inboards were much more conservative than the outboards, but there were enough over-the-top inboard designs to give me plenty of room to work.



This event was in conjunction with the Century Boat Club's Annual Spring Meeting, so there were plenty of Century experts in attendance. As I was working my way through the Century excessively overstyled examples, and there were plenty, it almost turned into a question and

answer discussion period. I had planned ahead and had left Century for last, knowing that the possibility of an open ended dialog might develop. I had left "modern" Century classics for last. These are the fiberglass inboards that were very much the product



of the Al Hegg years at Century.

Al Hegg had sold his interest in Larson Boats and bought Century in 1968. After ten years, off and on, as produc-

tion manager of the Larson plant in Little Falls and overseeing the plant operations of the licensee in Ontario, California, Al was geared to rolling up his sleeves and digging in wherever needed. It was how he processed the many procedures and methods involved in building a quality product. His first action at Century was to begin complete conversion to fiberglass production.

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Century had been flirting with fiberglass production and in 1968 had both fiberglass and mahogany models in the Resorter and Arabian lines, but by 1969 had dropped the mahogany models in favor of fiberglass. Some think of this change as the day boat-building stopped at Century, but it was actually just a new beginning. In 1968 the Resorters and Arabians were offered at the same cost, glass or wood. Records show that sales were almost even for the two materials, but by this time fiberglass had shown its superiority and with over fifteen years of proven durability it was going to be this "new" material moving forward.

The fiberglass Coronado would be the next Century conversion. The most distinguishing feature was its top. It was one tradition that Century brought forward with this distinctive line of boats and would be a part of Coronado styling until the late 70's. Century boats could still be ordered with whatever engine the local dealer handled, with a tendency towards large V-8's that could lift and move these big, heavy, deluxe boats with all the trimmings.

With the ACBS now recognizing boats through 1975 as classics, I began to wonder just which boats from this new era (1969-1975) would come to the forefront and actually begin to appear at shows. The early non-wood outboards are becoming almost commonplace at the shows, a far cry from when I first began to show my Thunderhawk

at wood boat shows back in '93.

There are many boats that can fit the class. A recent find brought this to mind with the unearthing of a 1971 Pipestone-Mariner tucked into the back corner of a garage that was slated for demolition. It was one of those cream puffs that you always hear about. The documentation was complete with the original

bill of sale, sales catalogs, all the tags that were wired to different mechanical parts of the engine that was clean enough to eat off of. I mean, it was amazing. But is it a classic?

To some, and by definition of the ACBS it is. But would this shoo-in for a Most Original/Best Preserved award

find happiness at an ACBS show? This blue and white tri-hull/bow-rider is completely original right down to its supple blue and white naugahyde interior.

Will it find acceptance?

Or will it be overshadowed by a 1971

Century Coronado, more "correct" with its inboard power and looking much like its wood counterpart?

While one outcome of the survey that was completed last year, or

was it the year before, the provenance of the club should be about the boats. Another thought is that it should also be about the owner, because every boat has an owner that has a story, and it's those stories that bring us all together. 

