



## Taft Marine Woodcraft Minnesota Boatbuilder

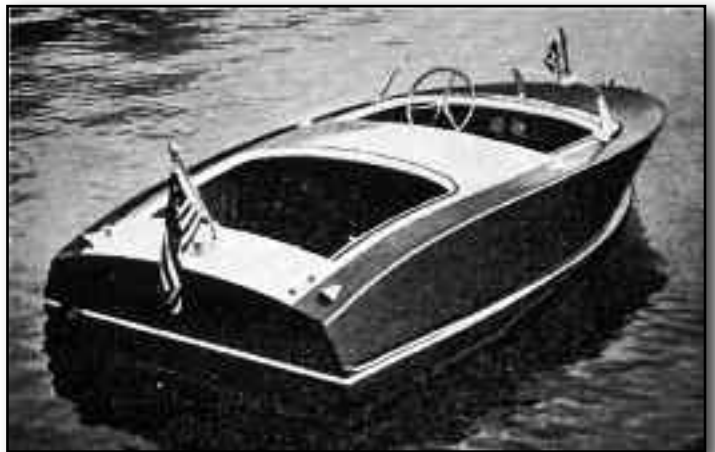
By Lee Wangstad

In 1936 Bob and Warren Taft began a long journey into untried waters when they ventured into the kit boat market. Not only were they laying the groundwork for a new company, they were helping to create a whole industry. There were other plan companies in the market, but the pre-cut kits were fresh and new.

With the improvements made in plywood production during World War II, the kits became easier to build and the boats more durable. When the recreational boating boom hit during the early 50's, Taft was poised to take complete advantage of this emerging market. To double this unique set of circumstances, America was also being taken by storm with a do-it-yourself attitude. Many thought that not only could they save the assembly costs, but with the right equipment in their shop, actually build the boats better themselves.



1958 Taft Advertisement



1957 Taft 15' Inboard

In 1947 Taft produced around 400 kits, mostly row-boats small runabouts. In 1957 Taft was operating out of a 30,000 square foot facility located in Columbia Heights. That same year they introduced their first inboard kit, a 15' Gray Marine powered beauty that was identical to the 1950 Globe Mastercraft runabout designed by Brooks Stevens.



Pre-assembling frames

Their frames were all pre-assembled at the plant on master jigs to assure easy assembly at home. The larger cruisers were completely assembled just short of planking to make sure that the at-home assembler would be able to accomplish his or her goal.

The frames were made of solid oak and a special 150 ton press would make 14 ply laminated stems, a Taft exclusive. Marine grade plywood was used for planking with mahogany plywood supplied for the decks. Mahogany plywood was offered as an option on the sides and bottom.



**Model 210 frame**

Over 60,000 model 210 kits were sold by 1958, making this the best selling Taft boat kit ever. This 12' runabout would hold up to 25hp and was advertised as a 40mph boat. Advertised building time was 23 hours.

By 1960 Taft was shipping over 11,000 kits worldwide. They were looking to expand, but were finding land in close proximity hard to come by. They made a play for a couple of city lots adjacent to their site, but were turned down by City Hall in Columbia Heights. Later that year they announced



**Taft Models 500 & 505**

plans to build a new 20,000 square foot plant in Annandale.

This new plant would house the new Taft Marine Plasticraft Division. They would manufacture canoes and "twin-hulled speedboats" along with plastic kit boats. It was in full production by January 1, 1961 employing 50 workers.

Even with this switch to fiberglass technology, Taft's bread and butter had always been in the plywood boat kits. The used boat market, along with economical models of new fiberglass boats proved too strong for Taft to compete. By the late 60's Taft threw in the towel. Another Minnesota boat builder faded into the sunset.



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