

A Bit Of History

General Boats was born in 1959 and celebrated its 40th in 1999. Stan, the father, had just been thrown out of Nautica Corp. for his unconventional approach to the then very conservative world of sailing.

The first boat was the PICNIC 17, a combination sailboat and water skiing craft. Roger MacGregor saw it and filed it away in his ingenious mind. But, after 350 sales, it was dropped because in those days new boat buyers came to the shows with their experts who said that you can't do that. And, as soon as they said that, the skiers in back of the boat, who were doing just fine for the photographing we were doing, fell off.

So, for our next number we decided to build a boat that, while it would be different for the nautical minds of the times, would be hard to knock, because it would have been designed by one of them.

We discovered that all the design geniuses of the day charged the same rate. So we naturally started at the top with hat in one hand and sketches in the other. What was the worst a NA could do to a BS boilermaker? Luckily, Phil Rhodes, who was a gentleman from the old school, took one look at our monstrosity and said "yes", that he had not done a small boat for a long time and would like to give it a try and we were in his Lexington Avenue offices for a year. It took his staff a year to get acclimated to the 505 flare I put on the table.

So, the Rhodes was a commissioned design and is wholly and exclusively owned by General Boats International, unless anyone wants to buy it.

The design then went to Ten Eyes Associates, a noted industrial design team doing airplanes in Wichita, KS. And, from there, to users who are still working on it.

The first boats were built for us by Lofland Sailcraft, Snipe and Lightning builders in Wichita. And then by an endless array of builders from Ohio to Connecticut and finally Long Island, New York. It eventually became clear that we were not going to be able to get the quality or implementation of all of our ideas to or from these people, who by definition, had to be on the opposite side of the fence. So, reluctantly, (Rhodes had nicknamed us the "Promoters") we became the manufacturers in a 1,500 square-foot plant on Long Island.

Whenever we got together with the workers to discuss the problems, the bottom line was 'not enough space'. So we took over the Tanzer plant when their operation sunk and not a single space-hungry NY worker would move to North Carolina. Nevertheless, working on the figures (3 out of every 4 businesses fail), we, being the third boat builder in this former Marine Base, felt the odds with us. The numbers turned out to be wrong. We failed. But just don't know it yet.

We have been misquoted. We had said that the most boats we ever built (and that was on Long Island, with double shifts) was 50 a year. Nowhere near that in North Carolina. .

Counting all of our contractors' production, there are about 2,000 Rhodes out there somewhere. When the big boat recession hit and all the big names passed into history, we started recycling, so it seems like there are thousands more out there because some boats have now been sent back into the game two or three times.

In the beginning, all boat builders tried to tie sail numbers into hull numbers and that proved impossible. Now sail numbers are merely racing numbers.

Coast Guard hull numbering did not exist in the early days and today they do not necessarily reflect the truth. Most builders put on next year's number starting in the fall. The American way.

The Edenton plant is on 9 industrial acres with 3 broken down Marine buildings housing a motley crew of about 10, 5 bathrooms where at least 2 workers can be found anytime you need one, and one worker. Anyone who wants to check all this out further can come to beautiful Edenton and examine the books.

How to interpret the hull number

You can tell the age of the hull from the serial number plate on the transom.

It looks like "GBX220138K88"

GBX is General Boat's 3-digit code as a boat builder

22 is the overall length

0138 is the sequential production number of the hull

K88 refers to the month & year the vessel was built.

(Months are labeled A = January, B = February, C = March, D = April, etc.)

So, this boat was built in November of 1988, the 138th boat of the total production run.