

WILD ABOUT WHIRLWINDS

By Howard Johnson

It is November of 1945, and the war is over. The U.S. Navy decides it no longer wants the molded plywood glider airplanes being made on the assembly line at Allied Aviation in Dundalk, Maryland. The management and workers stand, looking at the five finished and tested aircraft they had built and the fifteen others in various stages of construction. No further money will be available for operations now – not even severance pay or rent on the big building. They decide to put the gliders aside and to build boats, using the veneer, glue and baking oven from the molding operation of the wooden airplanes. First, however, they would have to move everything at their own expense to a cheaper workplace, so they rented a commercial building in Cockeysville, Maryland near the Williamson Veneer Company.



STAPLING MAHOGANY VENEERS

Once settled and as soon as they could, they built a solid wood hull shape called a mandrel on wheels and fashioned a slot for the center keel and stem. The veneers were made of thin layers of mahogany, which had been coated with heat-actuated glue, and the edges of each layer of veneer were stapled to these. The layers were put on at sharp angles to each other so that the grain could provide maximum strength in both directions. Outside layers were coated with glue on one side, all the others on both sides. They were carefully trimmed and fitted together by the wives and mothers of other employees. After five layers, it was covered with a heavy rubber blanket with hoses running to a big vacuum pump. The whole affair was then rolled into the autoclave – a huge oven – and baked at high pressure and steam for an hour until reaching 345°. Really baked! Once out of the oven, cooled, and uncovered, the fresh hull was pried off the mandrel, sanded, and assembled into a complete boat with transom, rubrails, seats, etc. The boats were then finished with varnish, and only the bottoms painted a bright color.

After the first few boats were built in 1946, the owner of Allied decided that he wanted to stay in aviation and offered the operation to three of his employees: Ed Hewitt, Charley Abramo, and Charley Wingo. All three were good friends who had worked closely together on

gliders and appreciated and enjoyed boats. It was clear that they would be fully devoted to making a success of the new operation. While building the gliders during the war, they had grown to know the Williamson Veneer family. Their cooperation and fine quality sawn veneers created an extremely uniform and beautiful product. Although most of the veneer they made was for furniture production, they took a special interest in the quality of the molding veneers for the new Molded Products Inc. of Cockeysville, Md. When the Williamsons found out that yet another place to build the boats would have to be found, they even offered an unused dairy barn on a farm they owned. Many months of sweat were shed turning that barn into a small boat factory. Consistent with postwar practice, brothers and sisters, aunts, and cousins were employed from the local area.

When Ed and the two Charleys discovered that the Red Cross needed lifesaving canoes, they decided to go into the canoe-building business, too. These were dazzling to see -- beautiful wood and light as a feather, yet rigid and extremely durable. Then they offered the Air Force a boat to test. They dropped the test boat out of an airplane onto land. When it bounced and was unharmed, they won the contract! This led to the building of a 35 sailboat fleet for the Naval Academy. Early pictures of the operation show these boats on the factory floor.

The three founders each provided guidance for the different aspects of boat construction. Ed Hewitt was a CPA, office manager, and created the advertisements. Charley Wingo did a lot of the design and drawing work, set up the shop, and made constant production improvements; Charley was a perfectionist, they said. Charley Abramo was a personable, naturally high energy guy that enjoyed smoking as well as racing activities. Everybody smoked cigarettes back then; it gave them an excited, bulletproof, hard-driving appearance. Charley and his brother Lou took the boats and motors and raced and set records. They made and offered for sale cut down models of the winning racers. All three often worked all weekend.



RACING WHIRLWINDS & SETTING RECORDS

Following aircraft construction methods, all hulls were minimum thickness, and all structural members glued to provide stiffness and rigidity without extra weight. Charley Wingo and Charles Abramo slaved over the drawing boards together to come up with each new design. They experimented with many shapes, sizes and interior layouts to achieve eye-pleasing styles and to be able to offer something for everyone. Boats were leak and rattle free while being light, colorful, and well-finished. In the beginning attractive aluminum

fittings were bought from the Baltimore foundry of H.H. Whiting Co.; later on it was brass and then chrome-plated brass. Charley Abramo was responsible for picking the finest cuts of mahogany planks at the lumberyard in Philadelphia. He was a stickler for high quality, and the company put their best quality boards aside for him.



1959 WHIRLWIND BROCHURE PHOTO

The sleek designs and high quality materials made them the lightest, fastest, safest and most beautiful wooden boats ever made. The fully rounded chine assured that full speed turns could always be made without sliding or losing control. The wonderful qualities of the 15,000 boats they produced in the 15 years they built them will remain a lasting tribute to these men and Maryland boat building.

(Part 2 in the Whirlwind series by H. Johnson)



1938 TRUMPY MOTOR YACHT 71'. Beam: 16'8". Twin Detroit's. "This vessel sank while prepping for refurbishment. She is in need of mechanical, electrical, cosmetic, and hull repair. This is a major project, but there are only a few of these beautiful yachts with all their history. This is a project worth taking on. Restore a nautical treasure back to grandeur. Most of the Trumpy's still in service have undergone complete restoration. A true yachtsman with a love of the classic motor yacht can put their personal touch on this vessel and maintain her past glory."



1938 TRUMPY MOTOR YACHT 71'

"This Trumpy was designed with sleeping accommodations for six in three staterooms, plus crew accommodations for two. The interior is mahogany and originally masterfully finished. Below the decks the cabins are finished in the traditional Trumpy style. Natural light and ventilation are abundant with many ports. Shaded by an extended hardtop, the aft deck has wing doors port and starboard lead to wide side decks. The main salon is entered from the aft deck through a wide mahogany sliding door. There is a custom bar to the aft starboard side and a wonderful open