

FALL FIND

by Howard Johnson

There are many publications for wooden boats. These days prices in the boats for sale columns make my hair stand on end. Bone Yard Boats is one of my favorites because the prices in the advertisements are in my price range. There are often stories accompanying the ads that tell what happened to the boats prior to being advertised and interesting nautical history. Late last summer I spotted an ad for a boat that was exactly like the one my father and I refinished in the neighbor's garage in 1955. Karen Hunnicutt and her family in Indiana had owned it for generations. It appeared to only need refinishing. The owner was friendly and full of helpful information, so I sent her a deposit.



1952 CENTURY RESORTER 19' – IN BONE YARD BOATS

I promised to come get the boat in the fall without considering that I was getting married. Once we decided to put on the ceremony and reception ourselves the number of tasks and preparations seemed to skyrocket. As the weeks sped by I told the patient owner that we would get the boat after the wedding. Who knew that it would take so long to clean up and write all those thank you notes! As the days ticked by on the December calendar, I realized with a shock that Christmas was on the way. Winter cold and snow approached, and the pressure to make the trip built. Finally I hit on a must go date, otherwise it would be Christmas!

We made the necessary calls, loaded our trusty 2002 Ford F-250 with overnight bags, snacks, jacks, tools, straps, blocks, maps, water, a fresh tag and a complete set of working trailer lights. My plan was to drive out to Indiana one day and drive back the next because I had done this successfully years ago. We should have gotten started at o'dark thirty, but we figured we were celebrating our first month of marriage so - it's a vacation trip.

I didn't remember how many mountains there were between Frederick, MD. and Wheeling, West Virginia. It took hours to drive over them all. It was bitterly cold, snowy gray, and not so scenic. I was becoming very tired when the white out snow storm hit. Everyone started slowing down and putting on brakes, just as I was wanting to drive across Ohio before finding a place to stay. The fast lane was soon covered with snow, but I continued slowly passing all the traffic. We phoned ahead to Karen, the boat owner, for the weather report. By the time she called back we were coming out of the snow, and the gentle hills of Rt.70 opened up before us as we passed Columbus. At Dayton we enjoyed a dinner stop at Crackerbarrel and another book on tape for entertainment. Soon we were blasting along at 68 mph on our way to the border. At last in Indiana, we decided we should stay near the interstate in case the state routes had fewer motels. We had driven a long, long way!

The tired travelers enjoyed the luxury of a motel far enough off the road not to hear the trucks. Too bad we didn't bring our bathing suits -- they had a heated pool. The next morning, refreshed and topped off with the motel breakfast, we went out in the bitter cold parking lot to our salt-encrusted truck. Shivering in the chilly seat, there was a sinking feeling

when the starter just clicked, - click, click, click. Now what? I decided to try the hammer tap fix first because the lights seemed ok. I climbed under, in the cold and gravel with the hammer while the navigator, Cheryl, tried the key. One tap and the engine roared to life! Suddenly I was warm!

Greatly relieved, we headed up Rt. 27 North into the interior of Indiana. Everything looked flat and noticeably different than our native Maryland - vast cornfields and miles of cropland, many older homes, some dating back to the Victorian era, yards mostly empty of campers and boats and plenty that were vacant and gray, bitterly cold. We passed through several small towns still nourished by American pride, but saw many empty business locations, underutilized. It was a long way to tiny, Bluffton, Indiana, near Fort Wayne.

Way out in the middle of wide open country, we found the farm address and then met Karen Hunnicutt. We enjoyed her warm home and had our first look at the huge 19 foot Century Resorter. There it proudly stood, bow in the air, full of happy old time curves. She was bigger than I had remembered, covered with dust and peeling varnish. The decks looked good and the interior was complete although cracked up. The original bottom looked great, nice tight seams, chrome all still in good shape, and an engine that powered the boat well when last run. I had found a winner.

When we left home it was in the fifties, but now on the other side of Ohio it had dropped down to 24 with a 30 mph breeze -- our first shot of winter suffering. Most of the preparations for the road took place with numb hands and watering eyes. I was greatly encouraged by the new tires and fresh wheel bearings installed by Karen's brother, Gary, who wanted to make sure that our trip was safe and successful.

We clipped on the home made portable lights, tested them, and backed the truck into the garage and hooked it up. I tied the boat down and loaded all the extra parts into the truck bed. Then, back inside for a warm-up and talk about the history of the boat and a look at family pictures in the fifties on the lake. Karen said she would miss it after 40 years in the garage. She took our picture and we said our goodbyes and piled into the cold cab and headed out, retracing our way along the back roads of Indiana to the interstate. We had spent half the day getting there and getting the boat! Luckily, we had an extra day to get home.



HOWARD & CHERYL – WITH THEIR NEW PRIZE!

The sky cleared and the sun came out. Our spirits soared at the beauty of America and the thrill of the beautiful boat behind us. How smoothly the truck rode with that welcome load. Ohio is a rich and beautiful state. Now we got to see all the great places we had passed in the dark, yesterday. Great radio stations aided our travel; we sang along together as one familiar song after another came on after sunset. By nine we reached Cambridge, Ohio and found a motel near a Crackerbarrel, assuring us of a great breakfast.

The Hampton Inn was just right for a loving newlywed couple. The richly comfortable evening was gone in a flash. Again refreshed, we had only to drive home, this time in blinding sunshine. Everything we saw outside our windows filled us with wonder and joy. We were thankful for our beautiful country, even if under the cloud of a doubtful future. (cont)