

During the 1950s and very early '60s, Healey Marine made around 1,400 high quality sports boats. Powered by various types of inboard and outboard motor, all were capable of towing a water skier and were much sought after today by boating and classic car enthusiasts alike. (A professionally renovated version was sold at Bonham's for £14,720.) The Healey Sprite was 13ft 6 inches LOA..Beam 6ft 2 inches..Draught 6 inches.. Weight 385 lbs. Cost new £275, plus engine of choice.

The success of these boats led to copies being produced called the Thunderball and Thunderski. The sea keeping abilities of a sub-14ft boat hull, with 52mph hull speed and designed in 1959, are largely unsurpassed 50 years later. They were priced at the Boat Show at £235.

It appears that these were all produced by Interglass (at least in 1966) at the same address as The Birchwood Boat Company which was producing the 16ft Gemini. This was advertised at the International Boat show at £320. It was promoted under the Interglass Marine Ltd name from the Huthwaite, Sutton-In-Ashfield address.

There was an ad around this time for a Vanguard Spectre, a 19ft 6in, 2 berth family cruiser for use off-shore cruising with up to twin 40hp outboards, and inland waterways when a single 5hp motor is recommended. It was priced at £495.

In the late 1960's the Birchwood Boat Company was a prolific builder of cruisers starting with 18ft to 20ft boats. But the company's most significant build period was in the 1970s with the 22ft, 25ft and latterly the 27ft and 29ft cruisers suitable for the inland and estuary markets. In the 1980s the company went into production of larger cruisers, the 31, 33, 35 and 37.

There was a change in ownership in the late 80's early 90's but not much is known about this operation except it went into receivership in December 1996. At that time the original moulds for the TS range were sold to an Egyptian company called Shama Yachts based in Cairo. The brand name was sold to Richard Oddie who continued trading but with a new range of moulds and models that concentrated on high quality, high performance, sea going boats for the Mediterranean and USA markets.

In 1996 there had been 2 office staff and 20 people on the shop floor. In 1999 there was a staff of 10 and a workforce of 100. It had a network of dealers throughout Europe and over the preceding three years had attended most of the major boat shows held in Europe

During this period Richard Oddie introduced five completely new models to the Birchwood range, the most ambitious being the Commando 510. As an engineer he also introduced some interesting ideas to boat construction.

The company went into voluntary liquidation in 2002 and was bought by a consortium – including Ernie Vick - which re-employed some of the staff, over a period of time continuing with the range. Richard Oddie retained ownership of some of the molds held during his ownership and, we believe, was paid a royalty on each boat. Alongside this range the company secured a contract to build rental boats for the rivers in Europe. Aquafibre produced the moulds in Norfolk and these were fitted out and completed at the facility in Huthwaite. Wroxham Marine hold the mold tools for the Birchwood 290 and the Birchwood 350 but have never done anything with them.

In 2012/13 the company, Birchwood Marine International Ltd, formed a 'partnership' with a Chinese company to produce the 380. This was manufactured near Shanghai with Birchwood staff supervising the build but, due to the economic downturn in China at the time, it did not continue with this project.

Today, according to the internet, Birchwood Marine International Limited is an active company incorporated on 24 January 2003 with the registered office located in Berkshire. However, at July 19, 2017, Vick Marine Ltd, (the Group Holding Company) and the owners of Birchwood Marine International Ltd, were seeking an investor/purchaser for the International Property Rights (IPR) of the Birchwood brand.

In 2018 Birchwood Marine are in negotiations with investors to relaunch Birchwood through a Joint Venture Manufacturing Association. This will provide the wherewithal to allow them to develop and build boats that match the needs / fit for purpose of prospective boat owners.

For the interest of Birchwood lovers, the range of Birchwood boats from the 60's to today are listed on leaflets that can be downloaded from the website.

The good news is that the classic Birchwood's we all love are still being well looked after on our inland waterways and offshore. Due to their age, some are being renovated and upgraded and many are for sale. The Birchwood Classics website aims to assist owners and aficionados in their enjoyment of this range of boats. It is also hoped that similar marques will benefit from the comments, advice and case studies published on this site. www.birchwoodclassics.com

References:

Birchwood Marine International

norfolk.broads.org.uk/wiki/index.php5?title=Birchwood_Boat_Company...Notts

25 years of motor cruisers 1960-1984 by Alex McMullen

Wroxham Marine

Jones Boatyard