

Birchwood CLASSICS

BIRCHWOOD HISTORY

Birchwood

I have not been able to record a date, but apparently Ted Andrews started building boats in his garage and called them 'Birchwood' as this was the name of his house. Were these the progenitors of the Interglass range? (Let us know please.)

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 in that year at £235. Sean Connery took delivery of a Thunderball speed boat fitted with a Penta E30 outboard.

It appears that these boats 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

| | |
|--|---|
|  <p>£320</p> <p>16ft Gemini</p> <p>GENERAL SPECIFICATION</p> <p>Large design built with optimum safety and extra fittings. Provision for a cabin and cooler. Wide speed performance, with reserve. Large ventilating hatch in cabin roof. Large fuel tank and seat in cockpit. Remote steering. Back fire kit and speed trap. Plastic life line and grab rails. Hull finished with anti-fouling paint. Self draining motor well available for single or twin long shaft outboard motors.</p> <p>HP TERMS 1/3 Deposit Balance over 2 years</p> <p>For further details send stamped addressed envelope to:</p> | <p>£235</p> <p>THUNDERBALL and THUNDERSKI</p> <p>13 ft 6 ins SPEED BOATS</p> <p>TOPS THEM ALL FOR SPEED AND SAFETY</p> <p>This is a clean line 4 water skiffed runabout with superb sea performance, capable of high speeds, combined with maximum stability for safety at the cheapest of terms. In fact an ideal craft for any fun loving member of the family.</p> |
|--|---|

the Interglass Marine Ltd name from the Huthwaite, Sutton-In-Ashfield address.

The magazine, Light Craft, printed the editorial shown right in its February 1966 issue. The copy reads: "A new firm called Interglass Marine are



Interglas range

A new firm called Interglass Marine are manufacturing high speed glass fibre runabouts based on the old Healey Marine range. Star of the range is the Thunderball which will take outboards of up to 60h.p. while others in the series cover a small cruiser and a general purpose outboard craft.

manufacturing high speed glass fibre runabouts based on the old Healey Marine range. Star of the range is the Thunderball which will take outboards of up to 60h.p. while others in the series cover a small cruiser and a general purpose outboard craft."

There was also 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. (Does anyone have info?)

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.

The picture right is of a range of boats in final production at the Huthwaite factory.

Left, hulls are being laminated.

Right is a range of molds.



Birchwood History p 2

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. It is believed that Wroxham Marine hold some mold tools for the Birchwood 290 and the Birchwood 350 but have not done anything with them.

BIRCHWOOD

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, Birchwood Marine International Limited is an active company incorporated on 24 January 2003 with the registered office located in Berkshire. In 2018 Birchwood Marine are working 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 demands of prospective boat owners.

Birchwood now

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. This information is constantly updated as new data is received. Please let us know if you spot any errors or can add to the info provided.

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 aficionado's 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
Jones Boatyard

Birchwood

CLASSICS

38 BRAMLEY DRIVE OFFORD D'ARCY CAMBRIDGESHIRE PE19 5SF
E: JOHN@BIRCHWOODCLASSICS.COM TEL: 01480 536562 MOBILE: 07734049870