

Classic **BOATING**



The Premier Magazine of Vintage Boating

MARCH/APRIL 2024

ISSUE NUMBER 238



A Race Boat's Homecoming

By Keith Brown

Photo by Unsinkable Mary Behr

I'm hanging on for dear life, and I'm only 10 years old. I'm yelling "SLOW DOWN!" at the top of my lungs, and my voice doesn't stand a chance over the whine of the engine clamped to the transom. It must be the roughest day of the summer and we're going faster than any boat has ever gone. Excitement and terror fight for my attention.

Neither of these were true, most likely, but I still remember how absolutely thrilling it was. It helped fan my enthusiasm for race boats that is still with me today. The boat that day was a vintage Raveau outboard racing boat. These were purpose-built for one reason, to go extremely fast. And it went fast, with me grinning ear to ear.

Lake George in upstate New York has a deep history in racing boats, including the Annual Hague Marathon, when the town of Hague hosted an annual 90-mile-long race for stock utility outboard race boats. From 1954 through 1964, boats from around the country would complete six 15-mile laps around the lake in the pursuit of trophies, honor and mere survival. Boats, campers and others gathered at Hague's public park and beach to prepare for the race, and to stop mid-race for more fuel. The boat I had ridden in as a kid was one of those boats. However, she didn't use the public beach as her pit stop. *Gingerly's* own pit-stop was at her owner's beach, not far south of the town's.

On one side of this private beach lay a small wooden boathouse which held *Gingerly* and other outboard race boats in the off-season. On the other side was a larger, grand stone boathouse that had been the home of many vintage inboard race boats. The roster of that boathouse included race boats with names like *Chloe*, *Juno*, *Hawkeye*, *Baby Bootlegger*, and *Whip-Po-Will Jr.*

It seems that soon after my fateful ride, *Gingerly* was packed up and brought to the Pacific Northwest by her owner's son, awaiting her next call to duty. As it sometimes happens with old boats, *Gin-*



Photo courtesy Ginger Henry Kuenzel

gerly sat far longer than expected, and her condition started to fall by the wayside. Plans for sprucing her up turned into thoughts about restoration, but without a cool fresh-water lake calling, she waited.

Fast forward a decade (or four), luck would have it that a plan between one man and his relative was proposed and negotiations ensued, with the goal of returning the boat to her spiritual home and undergoing a restoration that would bring *Gingerly* to a pristine state. Arrangements were made for the boat to be restored in her hometown, and so she returned.

So, on a beautiful calm evening in June, there were speeches and toasts, all the while a boat lay under a sheet. After the final toast, the sheet was removed to reveal the newly-restored *Gingerly*. The work of Mountain Mo-



Photo by the Author

tors in Hague has made the nearly 70-year-old boat appear brand new, and completely authentic. The details are beautiful. There were many oohs and ahhs, and photos snapped.

Then the moment of truth had arrived, and the boat was carried down to the water. Our intrepid pilot, (we'll call him Ed) hopped in and gave the engine's pull cord a couple of yanks. A sputter, maybe a hint of a spark ... and nothing. Nothing unusual for an engine over sixty years old, and so she was lifted back out of the water.

Some fiddling with the engine overseen by a vintage racing engine expert, hushed tones, maybe an expletive, etc., and she was in the water again. This time, after a number of false starts, the whine of a Mercury 55H filled the air. Cheering ensued, and Ed and *Gingerly* passed the dock at racing speed. And



Author's collection

more passes were made. Others took their turns as passengers, sitting in the same spot I did forty-three summers ago, hanging on for dear life with grins on their faces. The author felt a small tinge of jealousy.

So, last June, a party was thrown, and a boat was re-christened. Eventually, the boat was resting in her new cradle in the last slip of the boathouse. Later in the evening, I walked around the boathouse and thought of its history, and mentally added a new name to its illustrious roster: *Gingerly*.

Postscript: Soon after I had finished writing this article, I was given a photo of *Gingerly*, driven by our intrepid pilot Ed, with this author as passenger. I had always remembered I was riding in the front compartment. I stand corrected.

Keith Brown is co-owner of Padanaram Boatworks in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. He restores, repairs, and builds wooden boats, and sails as much as possible. He is currently working on a book about the "Gentlemen's Era" of Gold Cup Racing.

Photo by Unsinkable Mary Behr

