

Confessions of a Wooden Boat Addict

My cousin, on my mother's side was the fifth generation of wooden mastmakers (www.TheMastmakersDaughters.us). And as a child I played in the shavings of the Pitch Pine and Douglas Fir spars in my grandfather's shop on the Amsterdam harbor front.

My twin brother became a ship building engineer and my second job, at seventeen, was as a commercial trainee for a leading hardwood importing company in Amsterdam.

When I emigrated from Holland as a 19-year-old, to the United States, my first job was for an other hardwood importing company. And until my retirement, I spent the rest of my life in the forest products business. I started my own forest products exporting business in 1971. In 1976 I had the means to purchase my first cabin cruiser sailboat, a Ranger 29. But Polyester was anathema with the wooden gospel I preached.

On a vacation, on the beach at Puerto Vallarta, in 1979, I was catching up on professional magazine subscriptions. The British "Timber Trade Federation" monthly featured an article about a British boat yard producing a kit of a wooden 30-foot plywood hull cabin cruiser sailboat.

It was love at first sight. A convert turned addict. I bought a kit sight unseen.

I had always wanted something like a Thunderbird. The 27-foot hard chine plywood boat that became very popular in the sixties. The product of a design contest by the Douglas Fir Plywood Association to promote the use of marine grade Douglas Fir plywood. Still at this writing, these boats are kicking ass in their PHRF rating with bigger fiberglass boats. There is a large fleet in the Puget Sound. See: <https://youtu.be/X6m1DoaCKpE> But the 27 foot Thunderbird did not have the headroom and space for me and my children.

Cees Bruijnzeel won the Transpac in 1967 in the plywood hull "Stormvogel", "Ragtime", another plywood go-fast, won it in 1973 and 1975.

The kit with everything included and exceptional detailed instructions, spiced with humorous illustrations by George Whisstock, elevated the assembler into a professional boat builder

status, when done. But it was pricey. At \$25,000 one could at that time, buy a sail away 2nd hand boat of similar dimensions. So, the concept was not successful in the U.S.A. The problem was that the people with time on their hand did not have the money and the ones who had the money did not have the time to spend assembling the kit. The Europeans with 6 weeks vacations were a better target.

I did not have the time either and hired two house carpenters to build the boat. Then I got suckered into becoming the North American distributor. I bought three more kits on spec and started advertising, boat shows and trying to win races. Including the S/H 1982 Transpac. But I have never reached the levels of my competition in fast sailing skills. I could have fed a multitude with the money I spent on the propaganda and from the fruits of the time I should have spent tending my shop. But I have no regrets, only gratitude for the opportunities this article on the Puerto Vallarta beach opened to me and the road to the world beyond the horizon it opened.

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