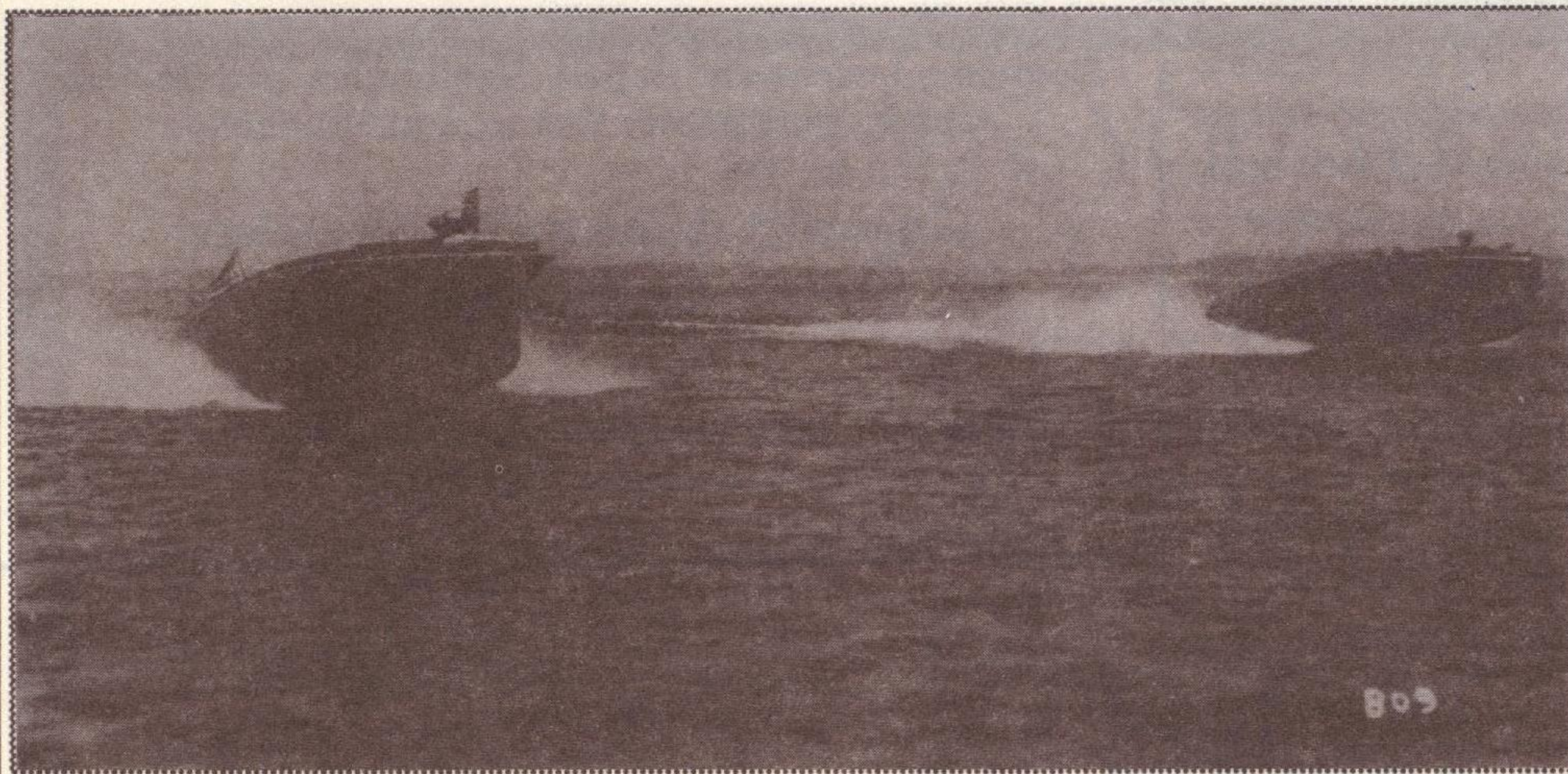


# The Moonahontas Comes Home

by F. Todd Warner

The call came on the 29th of March, not unlike many other calls I receive on a daily basis. Someone had left a message about an old boat that we might be interested to buy. This one was unusual in that the year they quoted their boat was 1927 and they called it a "Fury". The Fury name meant nothing to me, but later would weave itself into this story. So I returned the call and asked if they had any pictures, as the boat was some distance away and I thought it would be easier to see it this way. The one thing that really peaked my interest was that they said their dad who passed away last year, had this boat in the barn for 50 years and it had a big airplane motor in it. Of course, this really got me excited! I went over and met with Bev and Kurt Greenley and she brought out 3x4 black and white photographs that had been taken when she was just 3-5 years old (sometime around 1947-48). I looked at the pictures and the first thing I said to Bev was, "I think there's something very magical going on here and I'm not sure what it is." The pictures allowed me to immediately identify this boat as a Ramaley.



Ramaley Boat Works was a very large boat-building firm on Lake Minnetonka and White Bear Lake, Minnesota. Gene Ramaley and GarWood were fierce competitors in the racing boats of the 1920's. The boat in the pictures was one of 6 boats that were known as the Miss Liberty Ramaleys. The reason I was able to identify this particular boat was because I have a photograph that came from the archives of the Ramaley Boat Works. It had a Ramaley stamp on the back and it pictured two boats racing. One of the boats was the Moonahontas, which was driven by my grandfather Harold Warner, and

the other was a picture of the Roweda, which was owned by Dan Bull, chairman of the Cream of Wheat Co.

Harold and Dan Bull were neighbors and they both had identical boats.

As I dug a little deeper on the story of that photograph, I talked to my dad Frank Warner. Frank shared a story about this race that's kind of

special. Every Sunday, weather permitting, Harold and Dan would fire up their Miss Liberty Ramaleys and go for a boat race. Both boats were equipped with 220 hp Hispano Suiza, Wright Aviation, 90 degree V8 engines. The race would ensue beginning in 1928, when my grandfather acquired this boat, and went on for some time. It turns out that Dan Bull would always win with his boat, and he'd always give a little gentlemanly salute to

Harold (which was a little like rubbing salt into the wound!) Harold, being the competitive sort that he was, didn't like losing. When my father, was 15 years old, they went to Gene Ramaley's boat shop on a Monday (after losing the Sunday race). They pulled out the 220hp Hisso and installed a Wright Aviation HE Hispano Suiza, 1127 cu. in., 365 hp engine. This was done under great secrecy! As my dad tells the story, he even got paid a little hush money (about \$25, which was a substantial sum in the 30's) to keep the lid on that they'd

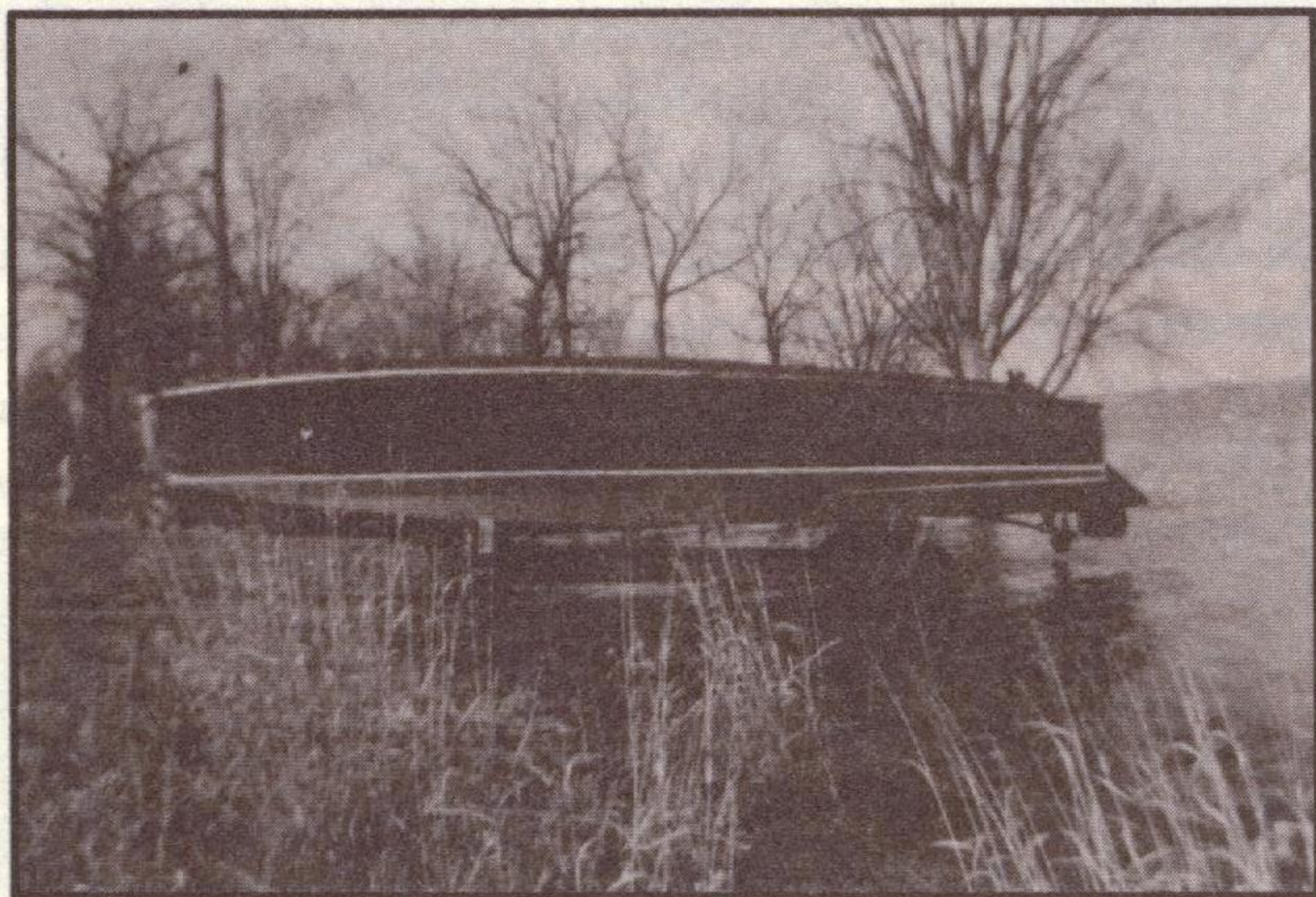
managed to sneak a new motor into the boat. When Sunday's race came around, Dan Bull and Harold Warner fired their engines. Harold planned and bided his time; it was a moment he had waited for for years. As soon as Dan Bull gave the special little salute to Harold in the next Sunday race, Harold got a glint in his eye and poured the coal into the H-3! Dan Bull's eyes were as big as toilet bowls as the "Moonahontas" roared and leaped, twisted and turned up to its 65 mph unsafe speed and left Dan in the dust. Evidently, this was a moment of immense satisfaction to Harold. My dad tells this story with great reverence today.



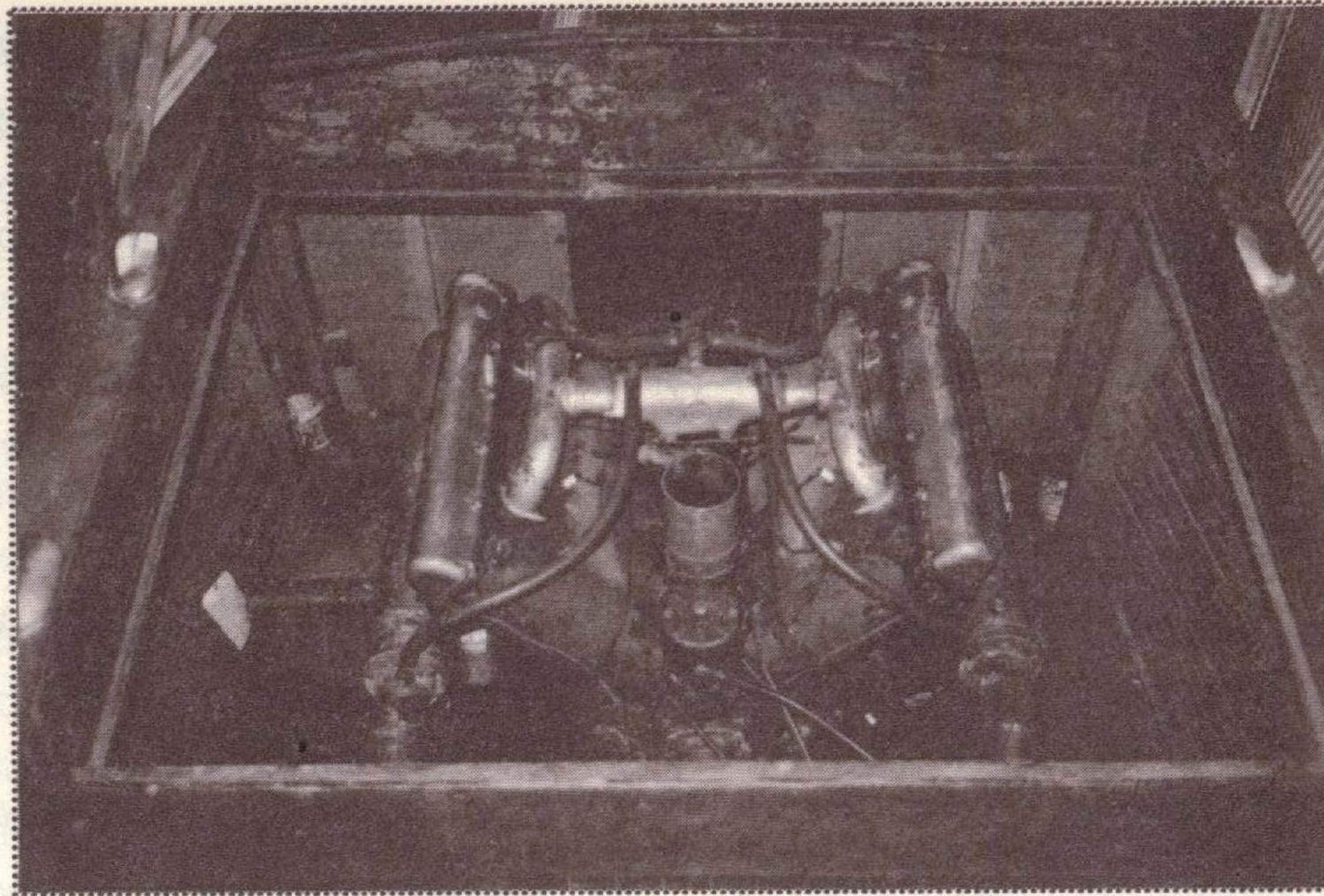
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So, as I sat down and continued my first look at the pictures of the Ramaley boat, I couldn't help but think about the fact that my grandfather had owned a boat like this. As we discussed the timing to go view this boat, it was obvious our schedules were not going to mesh since it would take an hour and a half each way. When I came home and shared with Dana that I'd seen these photographs and that it would take a few weeks before we could see the boat, she promptly informed me that she had no intention of sitting around with me anxiously awaiting to see this boat for 2-3 weeks. She insisted that I call back that night and make arrangements to see the boat the very next day. She was absolutely right! I called the Greenleys back and said we've got to go tomorrow and see this boat!

On Saturday morning, we drove towards the St. Croix river, down to Mahtomedi and pulled into a fairly unimposing two-story house with a Butler building in the back. We went through the door and there stood a **MONSTER** of a boat. She had twists, curves, depth and beam like I'd seen in no other boat. I removed the 50 year old canvas and found a leathery, bubbled varnish affected by being in a hot barn for 50 years. I looked fur-



ther and found the keys still in the ignition, the original stern pole, and the original Hispano Suiza operation book. I opened up the three-piece engine hatch and saw a monster V8 engine! The plate on the transmission said, "The Capital Hispano Suiza 220 hp built by the Auto Engine Works of St. Paul, MN." I'd seen Hisso's before,



but wasn't quite sure what I was looking at. Everything had been untouched. I couldn't really believe I was standing in a Ramaley boat that to the best of my knowledge, was the only one known to exist. Consequently, after spending a couple hours with the boat, I heard stories about

Bev's Dad and how he ran this boat, put it into storage in the early 1950's and always promised to restore it. Unfortunately, his lifetime passed and he never got to it. It just didn't happen. Bev shared with me that a couple of other people had been to see the boat. Of course, my heart started to beat a little faster because I didn't want anyone to invade this territory I was in. Consequently, we came to an agreement and I bought the boat. Upon going through all the paperwork, I came to understand why the name "Fury" came up. Here I found the original Coast Guard documentation papers, dated 1942, that Bev's dad had registered the boat on and called it the "Fury". From every story I've heard about the boat's performance, that name was also warranted.

It's April 1st (April Fools' Day) and I had this absolute pleasure of calling my dad and telling him the story of this Ramaley I'd found. I went into great detail and description, which set the hook, and truly built and embellished the story about the "Old Ramaley in the barn" for my dad. When I was through, I then said those two joyous words, "April Fool!" There was a deafening silence. I could feel my father go into complete free fall. As I waited for him to bounce (a term used for parachutist's whose chutes don't open), he said "Ahhh, you got me!!" It was not very often that I got one up on my dad, but this one felt good right down to my toes! So after he went on and on about how I really got him going on April Fool's Day, I went back in to resuscitate him with the magic sentence, "No, dad, the story is true. Tell me more about the Moonahontas. Consequently our discussion brought us around to the Hispano Suiza engine. I said it had the 220 hp plate and he assured me it was not the Moonahontas because it had the small Hisso in it. My father even remembered that when they were in Gene Ramaley's shop, the Hisso (the H-3) was so big that they had to extend the engine compartment 15", move the seat in back of the front cockpit forward 15"

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just to make the engine fit, but still look like the original.

The next day I returned to the barn because I had to touch and feel this boat again; I needed to get to know her. As Dana and I were finding more archival treasures, paperwork, etc. we started looking a little closer. Lo and behold, the engine compartment was extended 15", the engine hatch covers were extended 15", and the seat frame had been moved. I looked at the letters of the engine and it said H-3. I called Danny Acierno in Long



Island and said, "Danny, it's an H-3, what do I have?" He replied, "God, it's one of the big ones! It's the big 365 hp!" It was then that I was assured that I had in fact found the Moonahontas. Not only did I find her, I owned her! I bought back my grandfather's boat that was in our family from 1928 - 1938, the boat Harold had purchased from Ralph Burnet in 1928 for \$5,000.

At this point, my dad was pretty excited to know that I had found the boat, purchased it, and was absolutely positive it was Harold's boat. On Wednesday morning, my dad and I drove out to the barn together, and went in and looked at the Moonahontas. My dad was 15 years old when the boat was sold so his tentative years were very attached to the thrill of this speedboat. We climbed up into the boat together and something very magical and special happened. My father started telling stories about his dad, the grandfather I never met or knew and was now getting a very special peek at. For two and a half hours, my dad told stories about his dad, stories I had never heard before; stories about his character, the nature of his personality and his competitiveness. I could tell how special my dad's dad was to him and now it was becoming special for me too. The time warp that we fell into is something that only fathers and sons can share. As we ripped the vinyl off the seat back with a knife and revealed the original 5" channel burgundy leather underneath, Frank said "burgundy - Harold's favorite color." It was also

the color of the pair of Auburn Boat Tail Speedsters that he owned. When my dad saw the engine compartment and the great bit intake for the carburation system, he said "Yeah, that's where I put the board over to choke it to get it started!" More stories ensued which included the Piper Memorial Trophy Race of 1938 in Wayzata Bay. At this point, the other Ramaley boat, the Roweda, had been retired and Dan Bull had moved up to a much more conservative 19' Chris Craft with a small 6 cylinder engine. Harold sat on the sidelines with my dad and observed the smaller 30 mph boats going around the course. He fired up the Moonahontas, poured the coal to it, bucking, rolling, snorting, 60+ mph and put on a show for the thousands of spectators on the shore. After the show was over and was heading back to Huntington Point, he passed Dan Bull again (in Dan's new modest, slow-paced Chris Craft) going full speed ahead! Once he went around Huntington Point, all of a sudden the smoke started coming from the engine compartment. With the four Warner boys in the boat, Harold said, "Hit the water boys, she's on fire!" Harold was back there with the pyrene squirting the fire out. Luckily she didn't blow and luckily she didn't burn. But as the story turns around, there's Harold dead in the water, the big old Moonahontas smoking - and who comes around the corner in his 1938 19' Chris Craft but Dan Bull. "Need a tow, Harold?" shouts Dan. This really was a good cap to the story.

The mystery that surrounds the resurfacing of the Moonahontas continued on July 20th as I arrived at Clear Lake, Iowa for their Antique and Classic Boat Show. I had photos to share with old friends about the Moonahontas and sat down to tell the stories. The first photo in my binder came from Bob Speltz' Real Runabouts. As an older gentleman sat down beside me, the first words to come from his mouth were, "Oh, that's the Roweda." Very stunned, I asked how he knew that. Rance Lane (the older gentleman) proceeded to describe how he used to own the Roweda and run the speedboat concession on Clear Lake. It turned out that the Roweda became the very famous



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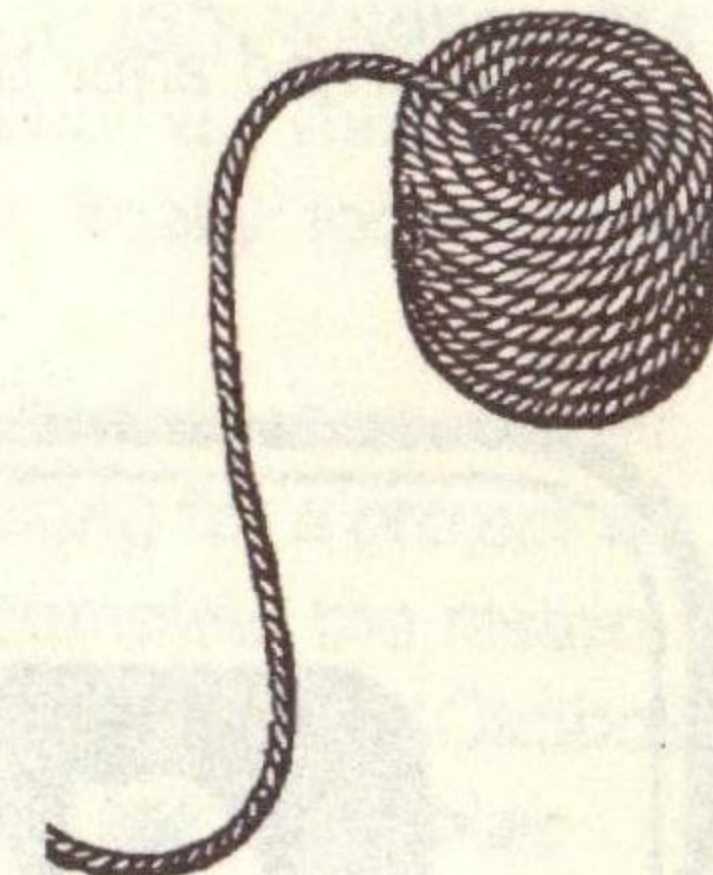
"Rocket" of Clear Lake, Iowa. It seems that Rance Lane had owned and worked for Curly Lewis, operator of Lewis Boat Lines. He couldn't believe that the sister ship to the Roweda was still in existence and I couldn't help but enjoy his bright eyes and racing memory that had come back to life over one of the most famous Clear Lake attractions.

In conclusion, I believe that higher powers were at work reuniting me with my grandfather's boat. It is something that has joined three generations of wood boaters together and has given a link unlike no other for the rest of our family to come together. Everybody has a story to tell about the old boat. This entire experience has given birth to something even more important. As a result of finding the Moonahontas, I was able to join together John Palmer, President of Minnetonka Boat Works for 40 years, Bill Ramaley, grandson to Gene Ramaley, my father and myself. We have formed the Minnesota Speedboat and Boat-Builders Preservation Society. It is our hope this might be the vehicle to join together the people who owned or worked for Minnesota-based boat building companies and their stories to be preserved and record-

ed, both in audio and visually, for future generations. It's my intention to show the Ramaley as found for the next couple of years so people can enjoy this great find just as I found it. After that time, we'll give her a complete restoration - wicker chairs, black and white checked flooring, burgundy leather and a powerful H-3 Hisso to again grace the waters of Lake Minnetonka. There are not many high points in a lifetime; they need to be savored; they're special and they are few and far between. This was truly a highlight in my life.

*I would enjoy hearing from anyone who might have ridden on the "Rocket" or recalls any stores that should be preserved. Please feel free to contact me. As time passes, more information is surfacing in this unique series of events. Watch the Dry Wrought for the continuing saga.*

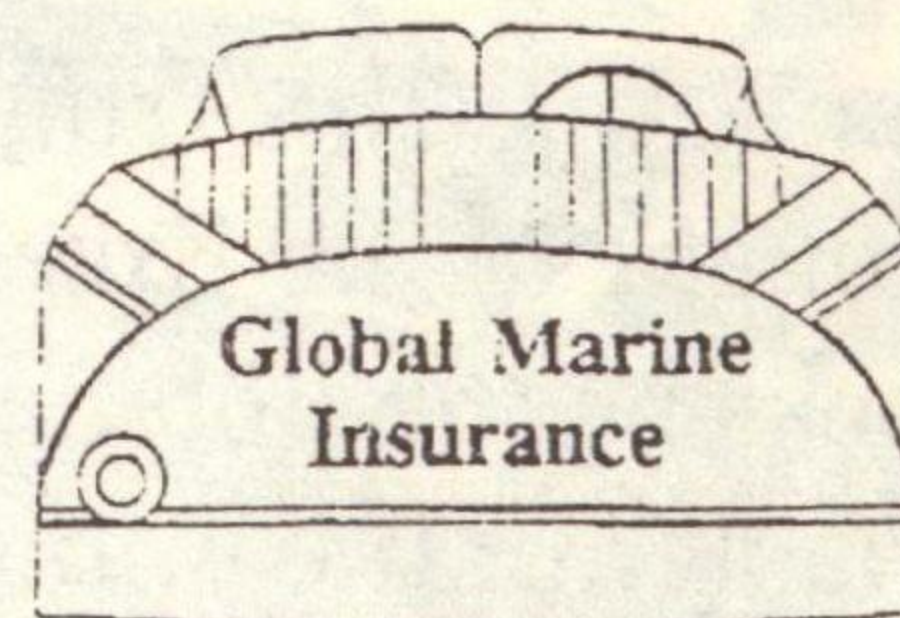
**Editor's Note:** F. Todd Warner, owner of Bristol Classics, Ltd., was one of the "Founding Fathers" of the (then called) Land-O-Lakes Chapter of the ACBS and has served as President in 1993 and 1995. He was instrumental in organizing the Minnetonka Boat Show, now in its 21st year.



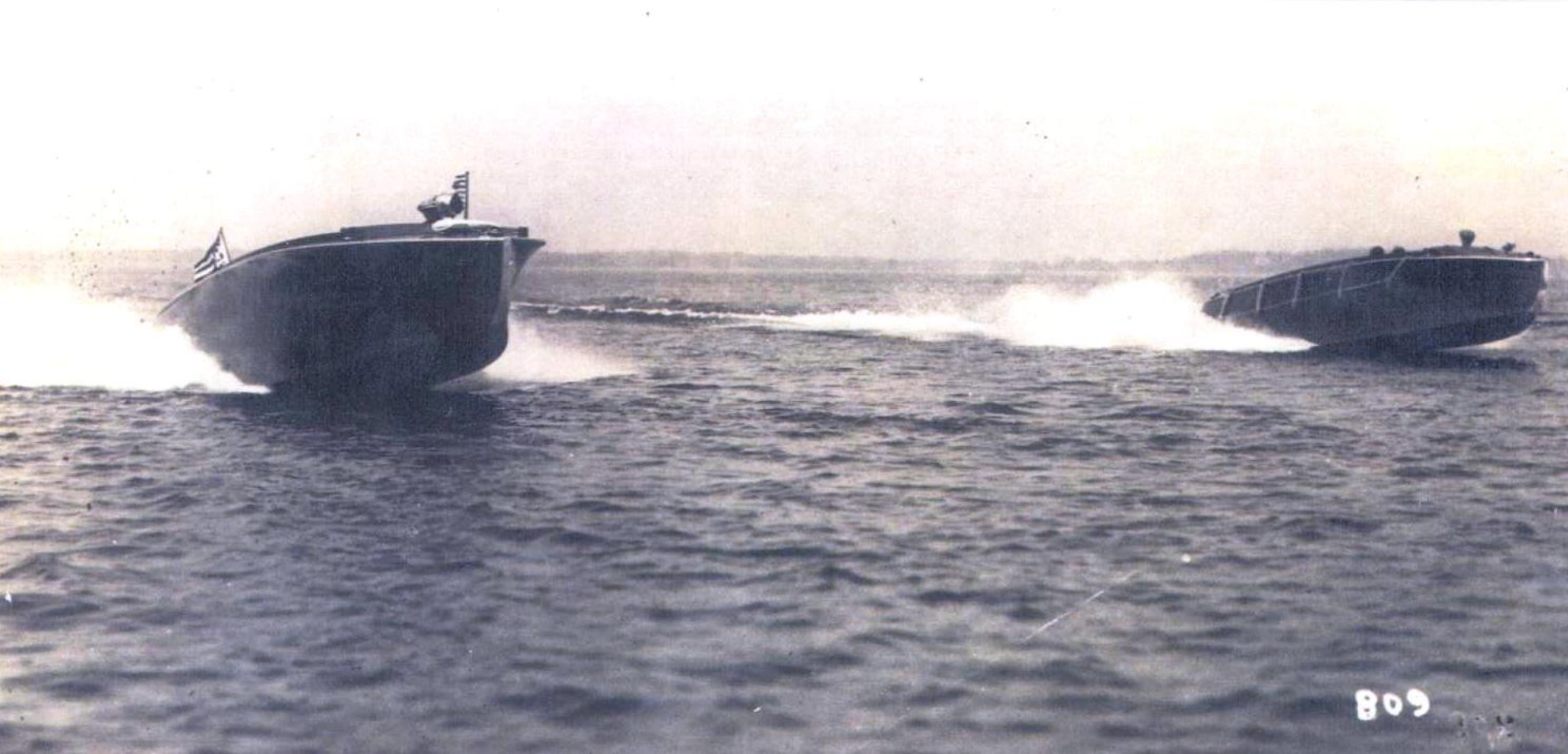
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