The Evinrude Brand - Part II

By: Ken Kirk

In our June Issue of the MLAOC NEWSLETTER we presented "The First 25 Years of Evinrude". Now here is the rest of the story. You can find , "The First 25 Years", article on our mlaoc.ca website in the Archives Section under Historical Archives.

The years 1933 & 34 were pivotal for Evinrude. Major disruptions to the economy, a significant decline in sales for the entire outboard industry and changes in the company leadership, had all challenged the Evinrude brand as it approached its 25th Silver Anniversary Year …1934.

The Stock Market crash in Oct. of 1929 had sent the consumer market into a downward spiral. Bess Evinrude had passed away in 1933 and Ole Evinrude passed just 14 months later. All major blows to the Outboard Motors Corp. & to the Evinrude Brand . Amazingly Evinrude would be the strongest outboard brand to survive this turbulent economic period.

Evinrude was benefiting by being under the corporate umbrella and the broader financial base of the Outboard Motors Corporation created by Steve Briggs in March of 1929. Evinrude was also benefiting from the R&D leadership provided by a brilliant young engineer, Finn T. Irgens who became part of the Outboard Motors Corporation group when it acquired Lockwood Outboards.

And not to be understated…. Ralph Evinrude had emerged to be an energetic and effective leader both on the engineering side and on the business front. With the continued backing of Steve Briggs as Chairman of the Board, Ralph Evinrude took an aggressive leadership stance as President of the Outboard Motors Corporation.

At the end of 1933 Evinrude was strong enough financially to tool up for a major design change for their 1934, Silver Anniversary Year. This entailed a complete aluminum shielding for the powerhead and carburetor and integrating it with the gas tank.

Front cover of 1934 Silver Anniversary Sales Catalogue featuring "Hooded Power".

The marketing name for this new design was "Hooded Power". The 1934 Evinrude 5.5 hp Lightwin Imperial and the 9.2 hp Lightfour Imperial were the first with this design concept. Ole Evinrude had worked on this design which flowed from the design of shielding on his 1929 and 30 Quads. Ole had worked together with Irgens on this project and lived long enough to see it be a marketing success. In spite of the economic depression and the loss of both Ole & Bess, the Evinrude brand had led the way for the Outboard Motors Corporation to show a profit for the 1934 fiscal year. Amazing.

Meanwhile….Evinrude's primary competitor, Johnson, was struggling. By mid 1930 Johnson was already suffering cash flow problems as a result of lagging sales caused by the depression. In 1932 Johnson was placed in receivership. By 1935 the Johnson Motor Co. was put up for sale. Steve Briggs and Ralph Evinrude moved quickly and in November, 1935 the Outboard Motors Corporation bought 66% of the Johnson Motor Co. stock. On Sept. 30, 1936, Johnson Motors formally became a division of OMC.

The acquisition of Johnson now brought the assembly and manufacturing of Evinrude outboard motors to Canada. Johnson had established the Canadian Johnson Motor Company and set up assembly, manufacturing and distribution operations in Peterborough in 1928.

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Now in 1936 with the acquisition of Johnson, the Outboard Marine and Manufacturing Co. of Canada Ltd. was formed and production and distribution of Evinrude and Elto outboards began in the Peterborough plant. The Canadian production of all Johnson outboard products continued. Evinrudes long legacy of manufacturing in Canada had now begun.

The world was now moving on the road to recovery from the economic depression but world events would soon throw yet another challenge at all consumer product industries including outboard motor production .
It was World War II. By mid 1941 aluminum, copper and alloy steels were already in short supply in North America. By February of 1942 all production of civilian outboards was halted. Much of OMC's production capability was utilized to make a range of non marine assets for the military. However Evinrude took the lead in building military outboard motors for the Armed Forces of the U.S., Canada, England and other Allies .

The roster of Evinrude outboard power developed for the Armed Services was led by the legendary 4 cyl, 50 hp Storm Boat Motor. Evinrudes experience and success with this opposed firing, four cylinder, two stroke platform allowed them to develop this reliable and powerful motor quickly. Also produced for the US Navy was the Evinrude landing boat motor that used the same powerhead but had a longer tower and was designed for use on ocean going 32' long troop carriers.

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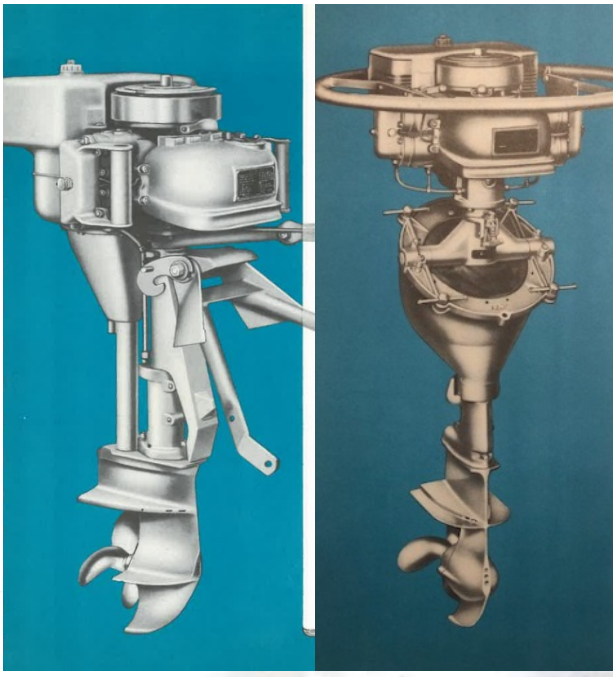
Evinrude also built heavy duty military grade versions of their 33.4 hp Speedifour, 22.5 hp Speeditwin, and the 9.7 hp Lightfour, (long shaft reversing). Evinrude secured contracts for these motors with the U.S. Armed Forces and most of the Allied countries. Evinrude was able to stay in the outboard business during WW II.
This put them in an excellent position to satisfy the pent up consumer demand for outboard motors once the war was over.



**Evinrude 4 cyl., 50 HP Storm Boat Motor on left.
4 cyl. 50 HP Landing Boat Motor on right.**

1936 Artist drawing of the former Canadian Johnson Motor Company Plant on Monaghan Road in Peterborough after the take over by the Outboard Motors Corporation. The Canadian subsidiary was named, Outboard Marine & Manufacturing Co. of Canada Ltd.

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During the 1950's OMC was the dominant outboard producer in the world. Their two main brands, Johnson and Evinrude, were friendly competitors. Evinrude was the market leader in the U.S., Johnson in Canada. The Elto Brand did not reappear in the U.S after WWII but continued in Canada through 1958.

Together Evinrude and Johnson perfected and simplified electric starting, full gear shift, and a universal remote control system, "Ship-Master Controls". Through the 1950's, as outboards grew in horsepower, these advancements brought outboarding into a whole new world of fast runabouts with front or centre deck steering and a boating experience only previously realized in the more expensive inboard boats.

During the 1950's however….the competition from a new emerging competitor, Mercury Outboards, was intensifying. The horsepower race was on and this would lead to head to head racing and speed record competition between Mercury and Evinrude for decades to come. Both Mercury and Evinrude recognized the marketing and advertising advantages gained by racing victories and speed records. Mercury dominated the outboard racing scene during the '50's but as engine sizes grew Evinrude became much more involved. Mercury threw down the gauntlet in 1958 by setting a new world outboard speed record breaking the previous world mark held by an Italian Lesco outboard.

Evinrude launched the V-4, 50 HP in 1958.

The record went back and forth between Mercury and Evinrude for the next 40 years culminating in the current record of 176.5 MPH set in 1989 by Bob Watinger with a 3.5 litre Evinrude V-8.

Although Evinrude would trail Mercury in the horsepower race they were very aggressive in their exploration of engineering breakthroughs and new technologies. In 1958 Evinrude introduced the first V-4 outboard. The "V" platform proved to be extremely successful for Evinrude and in 1985 they were the first to introduce a V-8.
Also…for 1956, Evinrude engaged the services of one of America's top industrial designers, Brooks Stevens.

The Evinrude "Lark" Concept Boat made the cover of every Boating Magazine in 1956 & gained significant publicity for the Evinrude Brand.

Stevens assignment was twofold. First… redesign the motor shrouds for the entire Evinrude and Johnson Outboard lines with a totally new look.

Second….design an Evinrude boat that would be equivalent to the "future cars" or "concept cars" produced by automakers for presentation at major auto shows. This approach was a great success and revolutionary to the marketing of outboard motors.

The Evinrude "Lark" Boat designed by Stevens got great exposure in the press and was the star attraction at major Boat Show throughout North America.

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Brooks Stevens designs for OMC outboards and his futuristic concepts for boat designs brought excitement and cache to the Evinrude brand. This automotive approach to design and marketing was very successful for Evinrude through the late '1950's.

Other innovative ideas and technologies were not as successful. In 1960, NSU in Germany had moved forward with the development of the Wankel Rotary Combustion Engine. OMC acquired the rights for use in marine propulsion and in snowmobiles. In 1972 Evinrude introduced their 35 hp Rotary Combustion Snowmobile engine. In Feb. of 1973, after nine years of testing, Evinrude introduced the first Rotary Combustion Outboard.

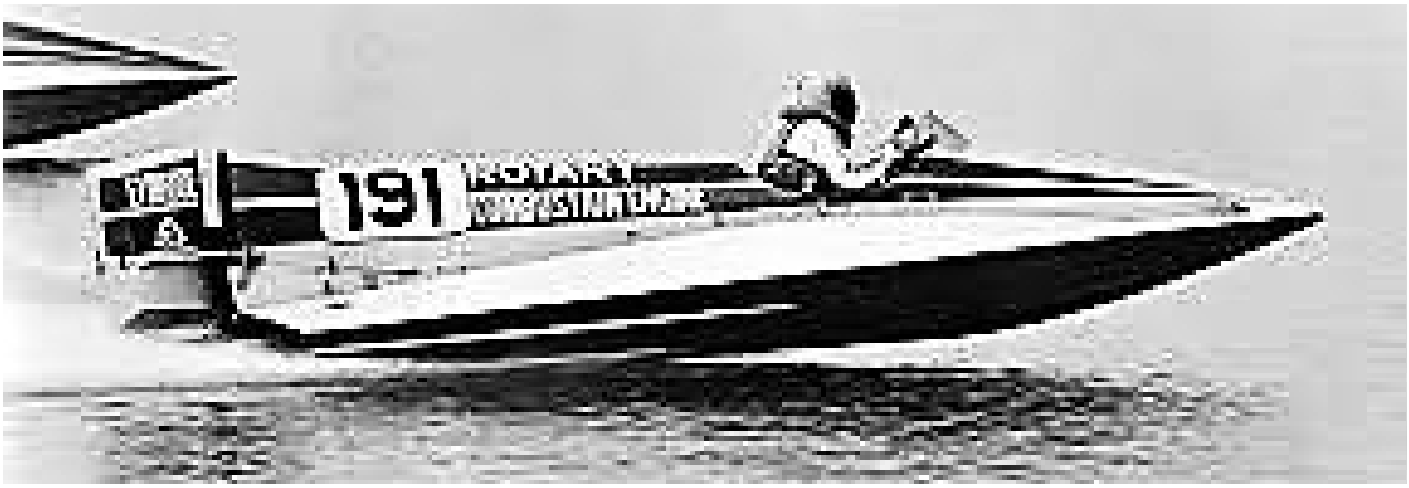
The Evinrude RCO race motor was demonstrated at the Miami Marine Stadium on a tunnel hull boat driven by Evinrude factory race team driver Jimbo McConnell. Ralph Evinrude was on hand for this important introduction. The Evinrude RCO was a four rotor, two litre motor that developed 265 HP at 7,000 RPM.

The RCO motors were raced by Evinrude in the U.S. and in Europe with mixed success for the 1973, '74 and '75 seasons. The project was abandoned and the development of RCO engines for the consumer market was brought to a halt. High hydrocarbon emissions, poor fuel economy and high production costs were cited as reasons for discontinuing the development of the RCO.

Ralph Evinrude with the Evinrude Rotary Combustion racing engine at Miami in 1973. Four rotors, 2 litres, 265 Hp at 7000 RPM.

There were those at OMC who felt the development of the RCO technology should not have been discontinued .

Ralph Evinrude had continued to have an important "hands on" role within OMC during this entire time. He had served as President since 1927. In 1953 he was elected Chairman of the powerful OMC Executive Committee and in 1963 he was elected Chairman of the Board. Ralph Evinrude retired in 1982 and passed away in May of 1986.



Jimbo McConnell demonstrates the Evinrude Rotary Combustion Outboard at the Miami Marine Stadium in Feb. 1973

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The downward spiral of OMC and the Evinrude brand began as the corporation struggled with how best to comply with clean air regulations being established by the EPA in the U.S. in the late 1990's.

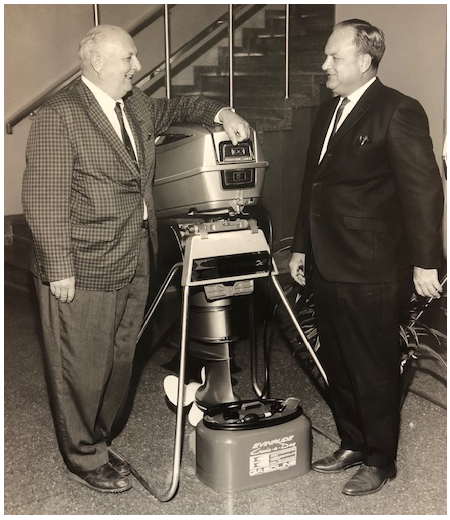
Evinrudes answer was to develop the German FICHT two stroke direct injection technology for outboard motor application. Evinrude became locked in to preserving the advantages of the power to weight ratio offered by the two stroke motor. They believed they could significantly improve fuel economy and control the emissions with development of the FITCH technology.

Unfortunately they were wrong. Evinrude made a critical error in judgement. They rushed the technology and brought the FITCH Evinrudes to market before they were fully tested and proven. The results were devastating. Widespread engine failure resulting in out of control warranty claims and total engine replacement resulted in significant financial losses. There was also a loss of consumer and trade trust and confidence in the Evinrude brand. A loss of trust and brand reputation that Evinrude had built for more than a 100 years.

This failure was just one of several engineering failures & other corporate management misdirection's
, that led to the bankruptcy of OMC and Evinrude in late 2000. The Evinrude and Johnson brands, along with other OMC assets, were sold at Auction by the Creditors and were bought by Bombardier Recreational Products, (BRP), in Feb. 2001.

Evinrude outboards were rebranded as Evinrude Etech. BRP stuck with the 2-stroke approach and further developed the FITCH technology. The result was impressive. Ironically, in 2004, the Evinrude ETech outboards won the EPA's prestigious Clean Air Excellence Award. It all came together a little too late. The consumer had turned the page…4 cycle outboards were the markets preference. The Evinrude brand and the two stroke outboard technology they had pioneered for 111 years were no longer what the consumer wanted. A tragic end for a proud, powerful & resilient brand.

In 1946, Ralph Evinrude (Centre) announced the new Canadian Executive Team:
L- R: Hy Wood, VP Manufacturing
L.L Tremblay , VP Merchandizing
Hugh Campbell, President
C. B Neal , Sec. Tres. & Asst. to the President
C. B Neal would become President in 1950.



Ralph Evinrude with Canadian President Tom McMillan in 1967 at Peterborough.

Finn T Irgnes , (center) at his retirement from OMC in 1970. "Irge", had worked for both Johnson & Lockwood. He came to OMC when they acquired Lockwood in 1929. He worked closely with both Ole & Ralph Evinrude. Became OMC, VP of Engineering & Research in 1932 & remained in that position until he retried. "Irge"held 92 patents.

The Haunting By: Rob Abbott

I was warned. I was told it was an abomination against engineering. I should have listened.

I run a 1957 Evinrude *Big Twin* on a similar vintage cedar strip runabout. Despite having a propeller shop re-pitch and cup my 3-blade prop as much as it could, the motor turns at about 5,000 rpm at full throttle . I have a really nice high-pitched 2 blade bronze prop that brings the revs down to about 4,800, but I worry that the inertia of that heavy bronze prop is going to damage the clutch dog. So I picked up a 2-blade aluminum prop from my local marina's junk pile that I estimate to be from a mid 60's era Mercury in the 50 hp range. An aircraft mechanic friend modified it to fit on my *Big Twin*. Time for a test run. Merc prop on an Evinrude!!!

My Big Twin has been a very reliable runner for 20 years; I don't think it's ever let me down. So I wasn't worried about the motor when I launched the boat, with it's modified Mercury prop, at the local landing. As always, it started right up and after idling away from the dock I opened it up and it took off. My GPS said I was doing 43 kph and my tachometer read 5,000 rpm, so it really wasn't an improvement, but it was working fine until I got to the middle of the lake. The motor suddenly over-reved

and the boat slowed. The prop had fallen off. I'd told my friend to make a stainless shear pin, but his boss told him to use brass. I guess it just couldn't handle the torque.

Mercury prop on 1957 Evinrude "Big Twin"

Bitter rivals , Carl Kiekhaefer (left) and Ralph Evinrude. (right), in a rare photo together. The occasion, Charlie Strang's (center) retirement. Strang held senior executive positions at both Mercury & OMC during his long career.

Fortunately, I'd brought a spare prop and tools, but there was no way I was going to put the spare prop on leaning over the Big Twin in the middle of the lake.

So, I broke out the paddle and headed to the nearest dock. After about 20 minutes of paddling, I reached the dock where, after a rest, I tied up and installed the spare prop. When I went to start the motor, it wouldn't start.

I was yanking and yanking on that cord like a pubescent boy with a Playboy. I noticed a lot of gas on the water so I figured it must have flooded with the motor having been tilted while paddling, so I checked the plugs only to find they were dry.

Some more yanking and it fired up; sort of. It was running rough on one cylinder and when I went to adjust the throttle, I got a big shock; literally. Then flames shot out from under the hood. At that point I decided to give up, walked to the stranger's cottage who's dock I had marooned on, and interrupted their dinner to ask for a tow back to the landing. Peter, my new friend, was very kind to agree and quickly finished his meal.

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