

Chrysler Outboard Motors

A condensed history of the Chrysler Marine Div.

By: Joe Fossey

Joe Fossey is a former Service Representative – Chrysler Canada Outboard Ltd. Barrie).

The Marine Division of The Chrysler Corporation Headquartered in Detroit Michigan had an early beginning in 1927-28 when its then President Walter P. Chrysler decided the Corporation should enter into and compete in the rapidly expanding Marine Motor Industry.

In 1928, Chrysler introduced a new design six-cylinder L-Head marine motor with attached marine transmission and freshwater cooling system. It was a well designed strong and dependable motor that immediately caught the attention of the Chris-Craft Boat Co. in Algonac Michigan and was used as a popular power option in their 26 ft. triple cockpit runabout series.

As all marine motor manufacturers eventually found out, it was not cost effective to produce a specially built motor to supply a relatively small marine market. In the early 1930's, Chrysler began converting their well proven, and more economical to produce, six-cylinder automobile and truck engines to marine use. The 90 hp Chrysler Ace and Crown series of inboard marine engines were used by many leading American recreational boat builders and hundreds in East and West Coast commercial fishing fleets.

During the 1950's and early 60's the Chrysler Corporation with its large Wartime profits in hand, began a very ambitious Worldwide expansion program. This program led to the purchase and control of approximately 600 subsidiary companies in America such as Chrysler Air-Temp. Worldwide takeovers included the Simca Automobile Company, and many other leading International Industrial Trade companies were purchased. The future was looking very prosperous for Chrysler Corporation and its shareholders as the post war economy and the pent-up consumer demand flourished.



In 1965 Chrysler purchased the Small Engine Division of the West Bend Aluminum Company with plants in Hartford Wisconsin and small Barrie Ontario assembly plant. With this sale successfully completed, the 1965 production West Bend motors were marketed with combined West Bend & Chrysler Pentastar Logo on the motor covers as identification. In 1966 a change was fully made to display Chrysler Outboard ID only under the Corporate name of Chrysler Marine & Industrial Products.

An aggressive International marketing plan by President Donald A. Milton and USA Sales Manager John Schueller took hold. American and Canadian boating public, already loyal to Chrysler Automobile Brands, soon came onboard as customers. It was a good beginning, and the product was well accepted by the rapidly expanding Outboard Motor Sales and Dealer Network across the USA and Canada. At that time the newly designed Chrysler 105 was the largest horsepower outboard motor produced in the industry.

Personnel of new (1966) Barrie Office as follows,
Canadian Sales Manager: R.H. (Rudy) Marth
General Manager: D.J.(Don) Critton (Hartford Wisc.)
Plant Manager: D. L. (Don) Wesson. (Motor & Boat Plants)
Service Manager: George O. Mosier
Service Representative: Joe Fossey. (Ont & the West)
Service Representative: Lionel Bourke. (Que. & Maritimes)
District Sales Manager: Central Ontario: Douglas Cowan
District Sales Manager: Northern Ontario: Frank Geis.
District Sales Manager: Western Ontario: J.M. (Jerry) Rice
District Sales Manager: Quebec: Larry Lauzon
Motor Distributor British Columbia: Homewood Marine
Vancouver BC.

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In Canada's Recreational Marine Industry, it was a known fact that more than 50% of the Marine Products sold in the Dominion of Canada, were sold within a 100-mile radius of the City of Toronto. This is the reason for the stronger Ontario sales representation to cover this important marketing area.

In Canada the Muskoka Lakes boating area was historically a very important location to generate acceptance and to promote the sales of Chrysler Marine products. Its large population of "Boating Savvy" cottagers was well served by an abundance of Chrysler Outboard Dealerships in "Key" locations who all had excellent long-established reputations for providing good service to their many customers. Port Carling was served by Duke Boats (Aud & Barry Duke), Bracebridge by Allport Marine (Don & Helen Jones). Minett was served by Wallace Marine (Erv, Richard & Bubs) and Lake Joseph by Hamer Bay Marine. (Hamer family). Huntsville Marine (Vern Festing) and Gravenhurst was served by Robson's Marine (Robson Brothers). Bala was served by Prince Marine (George Prince). The Lake of Bays had Port Cunnington Marine (Charlie Cunnington) and South Portage Marine (Rudy Rutch & family). Kawagama Lake had The Mountain Trout House Marina (Joe Latvala)

By 1967 Chrysler sales & marketing executives wanted to be able to sell a complete boat, motor and trailer package to the customer. To accomplish this, they purchased the popular Lone Star Boat Co. of Plano Texas along with the Dilly Trailer Company also conveniently located in Texas. A completely new line of Chrysler boats were designed and marketed that included popular sailboats in 10 to 22ft. models. Aluminum and fiberglass boats, 10 to 26ft. in length, were offered. The newly developed Chrysler "Charger" series of high performance "Hydro V" hulls in 15 to 26ft, models topped the list. Their rough water performance was unequalled.

In Barrie Ontario, Chrysler Canada Outboard Ltd. Sales & Service Offices at 92 Davidson St. shared the new 30,000 sq. ft. motor assembly plant with 125 full time production employees. A new state of the art fiberglass boat plant was built in Barrie at 80 Lorena Street. Its 85,000 sq. ft. of floor space was the most modern and technically advanced fiberglass boat manufacturing plant in Canada and employed 125 people.



Chrysler used their strong automotive brand reputation to gain consumer acceptance for their entry into the outboard market.

With rail shipping facilities, Chrysler leased 80ft. enclosed Automobile Rail Cars to volume ship ready to run boat, motor and trailer combination products anywhere across Canada to individual Provincially located dealers and Regional distributors.

The Chrysler Outboard Product Line produced over the years consisted of the following horsepower motors available in Short or Long shaft models and all equipped with magneto ignition. 3 ½, 6, 9.2, 9.2 AE, 9.8, 9.8 AE, 20, 20AE and 35 hp. in Manual or Electric Start. *AE designated models had Silent Electric Start with a built-in generator.

The 45, 50 and 55 hp. models were available with the option of magneto or battery ignition. The 60, 70, 75, 85, 90, 105, 120 and 140 hp. models had battery or "Manpower" CD ignition systems. As a special item Chrysler Outboard Engineers developed a custom heavy duty 35 hp. motor for use on "Log-Bronc" boats in BC. Forestry Industry. It utilized a standard 35 hp. powerhead mated to a 75 hp. lower unit for greater thrust and durability.

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Chrysler Canada Outboard successfully franchised 300 dealers across Canada and was more than competitive with Mercury Marine, outselling them in sales volume several years in a row. This figure included Private Brand products produced for the T. Eaton Company under the name of Viking Outboard Motors. Outboard Marine, located in Peterborough Ontario, had approximately 1600 dealers in their separate Johnson / Evinrude Outboard franchises located across Canada.

In 1967 Chrysler sales & marketing department came up with a catchy new logo design trademarked as "The Chrysler Crew". It was named after a successful Unlimited Class Hydroplane race boat the Chrysler Corporation had sponsored named "Miss Chrysler Crew" # U77. It was powered by a V 16 motor consisting of two high performance Keith Black Chrysler Hemi V/8 engines bolted together in a front to back tandem configuration.

The new Chrysler Crew logo became a pet sales slogan and its clever design helped unite Corporate and dealership levels of people everywhere. Chrysler Marine in house magazine formerly published as "Prop Talk" was changed to be "The Crew's News" and was distributed to dealers worldwide.

Chrysler Outboard International Sales Personnel had also established new and successful markets in many other parts of the World such as England, France, Germany and other European Countries. Outboard Motor markets were established in South America, New Zealand and Australia. Ambitious worldwide advertising programs by Chrysler were the order of the day.

The Chrysler Corporation and the Marine Division were always proud of their leading engineering accomplishments and strict adherence to Industry Standards. For this reason, Chrysler Engineers always participated in Safety Standards practices and testing procedures formulated, applied and inspected by the USCG United States Coast Guard, BIA Boating Industry Association and OBC The Outboard Club of America. By any measure, Chrysler Outboard Motors and the Chrysler Boat Company were very successful and became a formidable and recognized entity in all of the North American Domestic and Overseas International marine markets.

Chrysler outboard motors set many competitive speed and endurance records with racing activities sponsored by the local dealer level of participation.

In Canada the "Yellowbird" Chrysler "Courier" race boat powered by two Chrysler 105 stock outboard motors was the Canadian Boating Federation U2 "Sportscraft Division" High Point Champion for three years in a row from 1968 to 1970. The "Yellowbird" was driven by District Sales Manager Jerry Rice with District Sales Manager Ross Mounsteven as co-driver and the Crew Chief was Chrysler Service Representative Joe Fossey of Barrie.

These were not small closed course five-mile races. Sportscraft Races were normally grueling open water 100-mile nonstop Marathon Races and were generally run with throttles wide open. "Yellowbird" was a very consistent performer and early on set an official CBF measured mile speed record of 72 miles per hour on the Henley Rowing Course in St. Catharines Ontario.

In order to enter and gain additional world market share, Chrysler Marine made several excellent arrangements to partner with other World leading Inboard Marine Motor manufacturers. The Volvo/Chrysler motor and out-drive combinations and the Nissan/Chrysler Diesel applications were both readily accepted and very successful examples of this partnering.

It should be noted here that the Chrysler Inboard Motor Division was a part of the Marine Products Group but being long established it was considered to be the "Senior Service" of the Marine Division. It was structured and operated completely separate from the newly established Outboard Motor Division. With Sales Offices located in Detroit Michigan, the Engineering department, Inboard Motor assembly plant, Service and the Service Parts Department were located in its Marysville Michigan Plant.

In the mid to late 1970's there were rumblings in World stock markets that indicated a Worldwide recession was quite possible if not inevitable. This financial unrest was due in no small part to the looming Middle East OPEC Oil crisis. By closing down and strangling the World's Oil supply, OPEC countries had hoped to greatly increase the price per barrel of crude oil. The result was catastrophic for many Domestic and Worldwide companies.

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Chrysler Corporation unexpectedly found itself very vulnerable and greatly overextended in many shaky world markets. It responded in the only way possible by having a massive sell off of its extended world holdings. Nothing was spared as the crisis deepened.

In America in 1979 Chrysler sold their Outboard Division to Bayliner Boat Company of Arlington Washington who was the world's largest producer of recreational boats. The Bayliner Company continued to produce the full line of Chrysler Outboard motors in the Hartford Wisconsin plant under the new name of "Force" Outboard motors. Bayliner Boats used these motors very successfully on their Bayliner Boat and Motor combination offerings.

Unfortunately, in 1979, the Barrie Chrysler Outboard Motor and Chrysler Boat plants were closed down permanently, and all remaining personnel were dismissed. This Corporate "Downsizing" gave a sad ending to years of hard work by many loyal and dedicated employees.

In an ironic twist of the times, the Brunswick Corporation, wealthy parent holding company of Kiekhaefer Marine, Mercruiser and Mercury Outboard Motors, surprisingly purchased the #1 boat producer Bayliner Boat Company along with the #2 boat producer Sea-Ray Boat Company. This was cleverly done at a very opportune time in order to secure a much larger market share for their expanding marine products division. It was a natural follow up for Mercury Marine to close down the Force Outboard Motor Plant in Hartford Wisconsin to eliminate competition.

There are countless numbers of Chrysler outboard motors still in service today. Over the last forty years, since production ended, they have become a recognized outboard motor collector's item.



"Yellowbird" 766 was a Chrysler Hydro-V hull powered by twin Chrysler 105 outboards. Driven by Jerry Rice, this combo was Canadian High Points Champion, U2 Sportcraft Division, 1968, 69 & 70.



This early Chrysler "Prop Talk" Newsletter was published in 1965 when the motors carried both West Bend & Chrysler ID.

CHRYSLER OUTBOARDS EARN TOP U.S. AND CANADIAN RACING HONORS!

CHRYSLER POWERS THE WINNERS!

- Longtime winner Jim Umberger captained an Umberger "Hunter" Deep Vee, powered by two stock Chrysler 105's. He also for 1967. And it was Umberger and Chrysler all the way—with his winning total 484 points ahead of the nearest competitor. Jim's racing record: 65 wins and 3 seconds in 12 races, and his big '67 triumph contributed to his recent admission to the Gulf Hall of Fame.
- Another 1967 High Point Championship—this one, the NOA U.S. Unlimited Pressure Craft. The Champ: Bill Hill (shown) driving a custom Powercat, powered by three stock Chrysler 105's. And with the same kind of rig and same Chrysler power, Jim LeVine won the 1974 National Championship Unlimited Pressure Craft Race in August, 1977, at Lincoln, Nebraska.
- Jerry Rice won both Chrysler races and power (a stock Chrysler 229 Hydro-Vee with two stock Chrysler 105's) to take the Canadian High Point Pressure Craft Championship in the Unlimited Class for 1967. Jerry also walked away with the new Canadian Kilo Record and the honor of being named Canada's Unlimited National Champ!
- The Chrysler 35's had their moments of glory, too—lots of 'em. Examples: Stan Pitts (shown) took the 1967 APBA Class 35 Closed Course Outboard High Point Championship with his Chrysler 35-hp motor. Another victory went to Chrysler when Tom Spedding took the 1967 APBA Class 35 Marathon Outboard High Point Championship, also with a Chrysler 35.

... just a few of the many triumphs powered by Chrysler outboards in '67. Every 105 Outboard used was a straight, stock, showroom model with Chrysler racing lower unit. Chrysler 35's were stock all the way. Positive proof that Chrysler means performance, championship-style!

Makes yours a Chrysler powered rig this year! See the complete line of record-breaking outboards at your dealers. Today!

MARINE PRODUCTS CHRYSLER CORPORATION