

Outboard Powered Tournament & Water Ski Show Boats

By Ken Kirk Photos: Ken Kirk Coll., Terry Jones Coll., Steve Adams

Outboard motors have been used to pull aqua boards and water skiers as far back as 1929. However as water-skiing became a more sophisticated and demanding competitive sport and as professional scale water ski shows were organized, in the post WWII era, inboard boats became the tow boats of choice for the heavy lifting. Greater pulling power and stable, constant speed retention was required.

Century "Resorters" were the official tow boat of the American Water Ski Association and were used for all AWSA sanctioned competitions. Most Canadian Water Ski Association tournaments also used "Resorters".

Century "Resorters", supplied by A.E. Brown, were the tow boats used for the "Aquarama" Water Shows at the Toronto CNE for many years. And Correct Craft inboards were used at the Water Skiing Capital of the World, Florida's Cypress Gardens.

However in the late 1950's and early 1960's the switch to Outboards was underway. Larger horsepower outboards were emerging. Duel installations of outboards were beginning to appear. In 1958 a pair of MERC 75's set a World Record pulling 31 water skiers at once. This was a game changer.



This 1957 Peterborough Cedar Strip powered by twin Johnson Golden Javelin 35's was one of the first purpose rigged Water Ski Show boats in Canada.

This rig was the tow boat for the twice weekly Water Ski Shows and competitions at Kirk Kove Resort plus other venues in Eastern Ontario. I learned to Barefoot Ski and to Kite Fly, (flat kite), behind this boat. Lots of pulling power.



Our 2nd Generation tow boat at Kirk Kove was this 1960, 18' Arkansas Traveller, built in Peterborough, powered by twin Johnson V-4 75's. That's me driving with Canadian Women's Jumping Record Holder, Bonnie Weese beside me.





Boats of the "Revue Nautique", the Water Ski Show at the Worlds Fair in Montreal, Expo '67. These boats performed four Shows a day, seven days a week for a six month period, more than 735 Ski Shows plus plenty of practice and rehearsal time. Top left are the two main tow boats.

1967, 18' Crestliners with twin 1967 Johnson V-4 100 hp Golden Meteor outboards. That's me at the controls of the boat top left. The four white runabouts are 14' Crestliner "Mustangs" with Johnson 40's. This was the Sea Horse Precision Boat Team that I was also part of. The clown boat is a Flying Fliver with 20hp Johnson.



The Evinrude X-115 was not a tow boat but was a spectacular part of our Expo'67 Show. A Crestliner hull with twin Evinrude X-115 motors it could do wheelies and prop walks with ease. There were three designed drivers, Johnny Robertson, the late Bill Bonney from Peterborough and myself. That's me in this picture. Crazy fun and we got paid to do it.

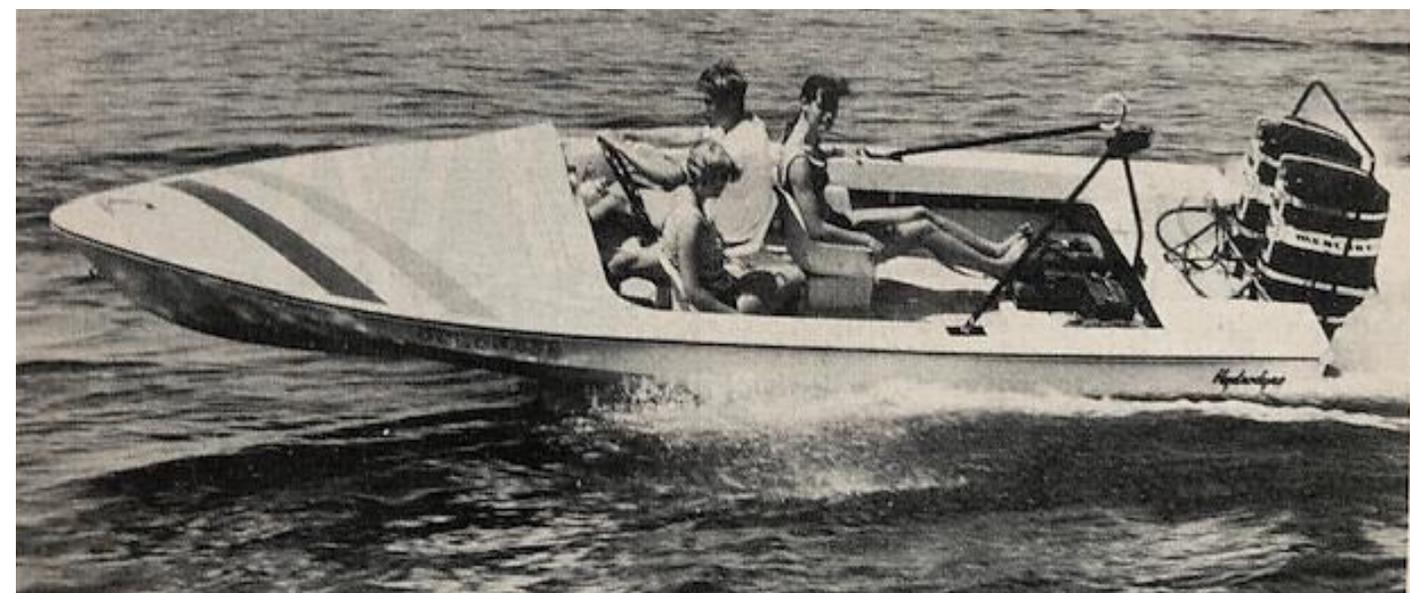




1974 J-Craft powered by twin Johnson V-4's was the tow boat for the Molson Canadian Ski Show. This was a travelling show that performed at Bala and more than 30 other venues in Ontario. Dave Northcoat is at the wheel, Paul Roberts on slalom. Similar J-Craft/Johnson rigs were used at the CNE "Aquarama" Ski Shows in the '70's. Photo from the Terry Jones collection.



1980 Muskoka Summer Ski Team with their impressive lineup of Johnson powered J-Crafts & Sidewinders at the Cleveland's House Dock. This group performed Ski Shows throughout Muskoka and operated a Ski School at Cleveland's House. Thanks to team member Steve Adams for this photo.



In 1967 the 10th World Water Ski Championships were held at Sherbrooke, Quebec. The official tow boat was this Hydrodyne hull powered by twin 6 cyl. Mercury 110 outboards. These rigs were the official tow boats of both the American and Canadian Water Ski Associations for many years. The shallow draft Hydrodyne hulls had low wakes at speed and were very popular with competitors for double cut jumping and slalom competitions. The towering twin 6 cyl. Mercs were intimidating to ski behind.