

Who Really Started This Multiple Outboard Madness Anyway ???

Report By: Ken Kirk

I suspect that putting two outboard motors on a boat was probably tried shortly after the second outboard was made. The purpose of having two motors, in the early days, was primarily a matter of reliability. If one outboard broke down you still had another to get you home.

However...this was an extremely rare occurrence and there is little evidence that it was done to any significant degree. The prospect of putting three or more outboards on a boat was totally unheard of.

The madness of putting three, or more, outboards on a boat for the sole purpose of going faster was ultimately inspired by two of North America's most prominent and successful boat racers, Canadian Harry Greening and the legendary Gar Wood.

It was 1924 at the APBA Gold Cup Regatta, on the Detroit River. There were seven races scheduled over a four day period including the three heat race for the Gold Cup and a 150 Mile Sweepstake Race.

Gar Wood won the 150 Mile Sweepstake Race in Miss America VII powered by two 12 cylinder Packard engines. ★ Greening won the prestigious Detroit Gold Cup in his Rainbow IV built by Ditchburn in Gravenhurst and powered by a 620 cu. in. Packard. Large impressive race boats with tremendous power.

A new attraction at the 1924 Gold Cup Regatta was an outboard race for the Main Sheet Trophy. There were 22 outboard boats entered. Diminutive and painfully slow by comparison to the inboard boats, the outboards were somewhat of a novelty.



Boat racing legends Gar Wood & Canadian Harry Greening preparing their "Green - Wood" entry in the Outboard Race at the 1924 Gold Cup Regatta. Power is three Johnson model A, 2 HP motors.

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Whether it was a spontaneous prank or a masterful publicity stunt by the fledgling Johnson Motor Company, Gar Wood & Harry Greening entered the outboard race as co-pilots in an outboard boat they had cleverly named "Green-Wood".

The most unique aspect of their boat was that it had three 2 hp Johnson Light Twin outboards on the transom...three motors with a whopping total of 6 hp. Needless to say they and Johnson Motors got a great deal of attention at the Regatta and publicity in the press & on the radio.

The outboard race was ultimately won by A.B. Cohn with an Evinrude 4 hp Big Twin that averaged 10.5 mph over the 6 mile course. Mr. F. Kirk, (no relation), was the best of the smaller displacement outboards averaging 8.5 mph with his 2 hp Caille Liberty Single.

To the amazement of all the, "Green-Wood" powered by three Johnson outboards and piloted by two of the best boat racers in the world, failed to finish. What possibly could have gone wrong? You guessed it....they ran out of gas. Never the less...the seed was planted in 1924. Now outboard installations of three or more motors had been endorsed by two of the worlds leading boat racing champions.

The rest, as they say, is history.

★ Harry Greening and Rainbow IV were ultimately disqualified from their 1924 Gold Cup win after a protest was lodged by a competitor regarding the design of Rainbow IV's hull. The APBA upheld the protest even though APBA officials had approved Rainbow IV's hull design while she was being built in Gravenhurst.



**Cigarette Racing Team with 6 Mercury 400R racing motors. Total of 2,400 HP.
Photo by Wayne Robinson at the 2019 Miami Boat Show.**