

The “Yellowbird” Race Boat (1967-68-69) Canadian Champion Unlimited Outboard Sportscraft. By: Joe Fossey



“Yellowbird” Team, L-R: Joe Fossey, Crew Chief; Jerry Rice, Driver; Ross Monstevan, Co-Driver.

Note: The information in this article is presented as true and complete. All statements are made without any guarantee on the part of the author who also disclaims any liability in connection with the use of this data and specific details. Joe Fossey.

The “Yellowbird” was a U2 division “Sportscraft” outboard racing boat powered with two Chrysler 105hp. stock outboard motors. The boat was a standard Chrysler Marine Boat Company “Courier” 229 Hydro Vee model hull adapted to take the twin motors.

At the time, in Canada, all organized Powerboat racing activity was controlled by the Canadian Boating Federation (CBF), an organization founded in 1950 to parallel the American Power Boat Association racing activities in the United States. It was Canada’s National Boating Authority for recreational boating with a mandate to promote both powerboat racing and recreational boating safety.

The Sportscraft Division was formed in the mid 1960’s to encourage members of both CBF & APBA to start new classes of affordable outboard racing boats and motors using stock outboard motors and boats only. This was an attempt to bolster new powerboat racing activity that had been declining for a number of years primarily due to escalating cost of Limited Class racing boats.

“Yellowbird” and “Yellowbird II” were the brainchild of Jerry Rice. Jerry was a District Sales Manager for Chrysler Canada Outboard Ltd. in Barrie Ontario. Jerry had raced some outboard boats previously. He got together in 1966 with Joe Fossey, a Service Rep. with Chrysler Canada Outboard in Barrie. Joe was formerly a successful inboard, COD CLASS, racer. In early 1966 they started to work on Jerry’s next race boat “Miss Chrysler 105”. **Cont’d on page 11**



Testing “Miss Chrysler 105” at Barrie, 1966.

Cont'd Yellowbird by Joe Fossey

Jerry Rice and Joe Fossey both officially joined Chrysler Canada Outboard Ltd. In 1965 and began their respective new career duties January 1st, 1966. Chrysler Marine Division had just entered into the Outboard Motor business and there was an extremely busy work schedule for both Sales and Service personnel. They did however, manage to prepare "Miss Chrysler 105" for CBF Twin Engine Family Sportscraft competition in 1966.

The boat was a Chrysler Boat Company carry over model from Chrysler's recently acquired Lone Star Boat Company of Texas in 1965. It was a 259 "Westport" 19 foot fiberglass Deep Vee model of lapstrake design, powered by 2 stock Chrysler 105 hp outboard motors with a very sharp forefront entry and 23 degree dead rise, it proved to be a superb riding rough water boat and was smooth handling in rough water marathon boat races.

During the 1966 racing season it was found, in marathon racing events, that it was often out classed by more modern designs. Much time was spent in testing "Miss Chrysler 105" but it was decided to retire it in the Fall of 1966. Planning soon began to prepare a new 17 ft. Chrysler Boat Company "Courier" 229 Hydro- VEE model for competition in 1967.

There was lots of determined competition in 1967 and the Canadian Boating Federation Yearbook membership roster listed 76 drivers and co-drivers in Sportscraft racing in Ontario and Quebec that year.

Jerry's always cool and collected friend and co-driver was Ross Monstevan. Ross was also a Chrysler Canada Outboard District Sales Manger in Western Ontario and lived in London.

Jerry decided to name his new boat the "Yellowbird" and the exact reason is not known. Singer Harry Belafonte has a #1 hot song of that name at the time. A popular cocktail of the day was made from Galliano Liqueur, White Rum and Triple Sec Liqueur mixed with lime juice and served over crushed ice. It was perhaps the later reference that gave birth to the name, because the "Yellowbird" boat racing project was an intoxicating adventure for all concerned.

Sportscraft Races were called "Marathons" for good reason. The big water, open course Regatta events, were usually 100 statute miles long. It was a non stop run and competing boats had to carry enough fuel onboard to make the complete run. Starting heavy and slower at first, as the large fuel load weight burned off speeds naturally increased dramatically.

In closed course Regatta events, the minimum length of the race was 25 miles, or four times the normal closed course length. At the discretion of the Regatta Committee, closed course races could be increased in length to a maximum of 100 miles.

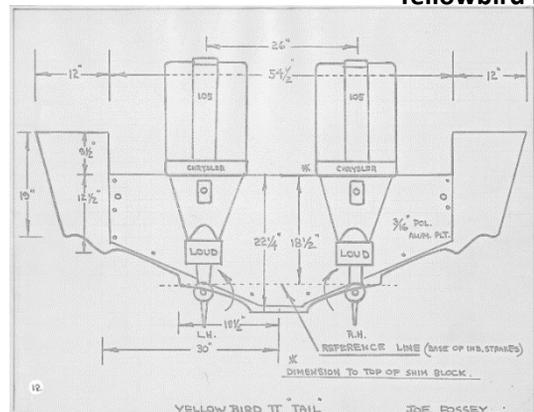
It should be noted that direct Corporate Sponsorship of motors and boats in any form was not allowed. This left the acquisition of the racing products (i.e. boats and motors) up to the racers and the dealer level. It was normal for the temporary arrangement to be agreed upon with the drivers pledging to return product in good condition for a year end or demonstrator type of sale.



**"Yellowbird" Heavy Duty
Duel Steering Set Up.**



**Twin Chrysler 105's on
"Yellowbird II".**



Plan by Fossey of transom set up for Twin 105's.

Cont'd on page 12

Cont'd **Yellowbird by Joe Fossey**

There was great competition between the major players mainly Outboard Marine Corp., (Johnson & Evinrude), Mercury Marine and Chrysler Marine. Some key competitors were Ray Fernandez in the "Orange Crate" powered with twin OMC motors and Andre Savard of Lucerne PQ with his Mercury powered boats. Bob Pickett of Cooksville and Hans Liebenau of Toronto also ran Chrysler powered entries.

All of these men were ultra competitive and successful in many of the events held at CNE Toronto, Valleyfield PQ, St. Felician PQ, Picton, Sarnia, Barrie and other locations that year.

The "Yellowbirds" steady performance in all races prevailed in the long run in 1967. With Jerry Rice driving and Ross Monsteven as co-driver, we won the National High Point Championship for the season. We also won the prestigious Lake Simcoe Marathon sponsored by the Barrie Chamber of Commerce in the 1967 Barrie Regatta.

At the seasons end, much work went into planning for the 1968 Sportscraft racing season. It was decided to change the boat from Family Class into Unlimited Class competition. Modifications were planned to lighten the boat and alter its profile to be a much shallower design with better visibility, control, accessibility and safety.

Sitting in Joe's driveway, Jerry and Joe walked around the "Courier" 229 with a magic marker and scribed a line approximately three inches below the gunwale and then lowered the bow angle profile to that of a California Ski Boat. Out came the trusty saws and in a very short time the complete deck was cut off and removed. This was the beginning of the "Yellowbird II".

It was then taken to Lorne Craft Marine in Scarborough and Lorne Pinel placed new wooden gunwales and covered the front deck with marine plywood versus fiberglass. The much lowered deck profile gave the boat an exciting new "Raceboat look".

The boat then returned to Barrie and Joe finished the alternations of installing new heavy duty dual steering, full instrumentation, a foot pedal feed for dual throttle control allowing for firm two handed steering safety and installed new custom made fuel tanks.

These alterations gave the Yellowbird II a good start into the 1968 racing season competition and increased its overall performance.

There was a lot of time spent changing and recording propeller design performance by altering the pitch and diameter parameters. Many motor angles and heights were also experimented with. In the end, HI-Johnson surfacing propellers gave the best overall performance and left a very impressive "Rooster Tail" that no overtaking competitors boat would want to tangle with.

The CBF conducted an official Mile Trials Event that year in St. Catharines Ontario on the Henley Rowing Regatta site. Jerry, on calm flat water, set a 72 MPH class record, which was truly a remarkable achievement.

Yellowbird II had developed a bad habit of "Chine Walking" when approaching 55 to 60 mph just before reaching wide open throttle. This was cured with placing a small trim tab on the hull Delta to give more bow lift at a very critical time during acceleration.

The 1968 year got off to a bit of a shaky start despite the pre-race testing that simply could not duplicate all the conditions that can occur during a long and rough race.

It took some time to work out a few little bugs such as necessary changing of fuel tank connections at wide-open throttle without starving the motors for fuel. There was also a huge safety risk for the co-driver having to leave his bucket seat and safety hand grab handles to change fuel lines while underway. A difficult task in jarring rough water.

Cont'd on page 13



Jerry Rice & Joe Fossey testing "Yellowbird II"

Cont'd Yellowbird by Joe Fossey

The competition was brutal and there were a couple of unfortunate DNF (Did Not Finish) scenarios that were discouraging for the Chrysler crew. However, strong and steady performance overall was again successful, and Yellowbird II finished off the 1968 year as the High Point Champion after a total of 13 sanctioned Sportscraft Regatta racing events.

The races were always a severe test of the drivers and equipment and as seen in the photos on page 14, the Yellowbird II and competitors were often completely airborne. This racing was not for the faint of heart because there was always another competitor right beside you or behind waiting to pass if you messed up.

In a high-speed twin application, if a motor accidentally broke loose and flipped up at any time (particularly in wide open throttle turns) it could result in an uncontrolled end over flip or rollover. For this reason, a strong aircraft quality safety cable was securely clamped around the motor legs and thrust blocks.

By now, most of the bugs had been worked out and Yellowbird II entered the 1969 racing season in good shape. The only problem was that other racing teams had been doing their homework as well and the competition was still very close and threatening at every straightway and turn of the racecourse.

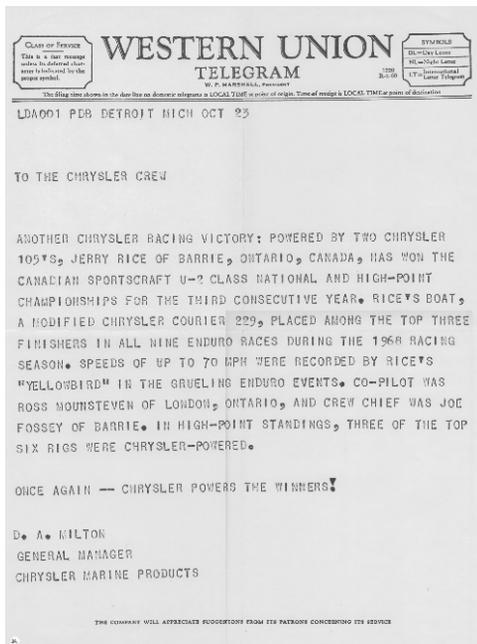
The loss of a few racing events in 1969 by the Yellowbird II was inevitable. A slight error in driving judgment “reading the water” or just plain bad luck can happen, and it did. Mechanically the “Bird” held together very well during the season and measured consistency of its performance racked up points.

With Jerry’s driving skills and Ross’s determined help we went on to win the U2 National High Point Sportscraft Championship Award for a third year in a row. This was a celebrated and hard-earned victory for the Yellowbird II crew.

Jerry Rice wanted to move on and experiment with the new tunnel hull boats, but no sponsorship was available. The Yellowbird II team got together for future planning, but it was decided that it would be a good time to disband after winning the National High Point

Championship Award, a record three years in a row. Yellowbird II was decommissioned and was reported last seen laying unused somewhere in Quebec. Its ultimate fate is not known at this time.

And so ends the story of the Yellowbird race boat and its crew. Thank you, “Yellowbird II” it was great fun and a few tears while it lasted. But life moves on leaving memories of the hard work, much dedication and camaraderie. The biggest of them all is the lasting memories of many great friends and competitors.



Congratulation telegram to the “Yellowbird” team from Chrysler head office in Detroit.



L-R: John Schueller, Sales Manager Chrysler USA; Ross Monsteven, Jerry Rice & Donald Milton, President, Chrysler Marine Products; with 1969 Canadian High Points Championship Trophy.

Yellowbird Photo Gallery by Favero, Fossey, & Chrysler Outboards



Chrysler 105 powered Switzer Craft sponsored by Secord Motors.



Jerry Rice accepting trophy for 1967 Lake Simcoe Marathon win.



"Yellowbird" in flight rounding the Island Airport turn during the 1968 CNE Lake Ontario Marathon.



L-R: Jerry Rice with fellow competitor, Bob Pickett



"Yellowbird" racing at Barrie in 1967.



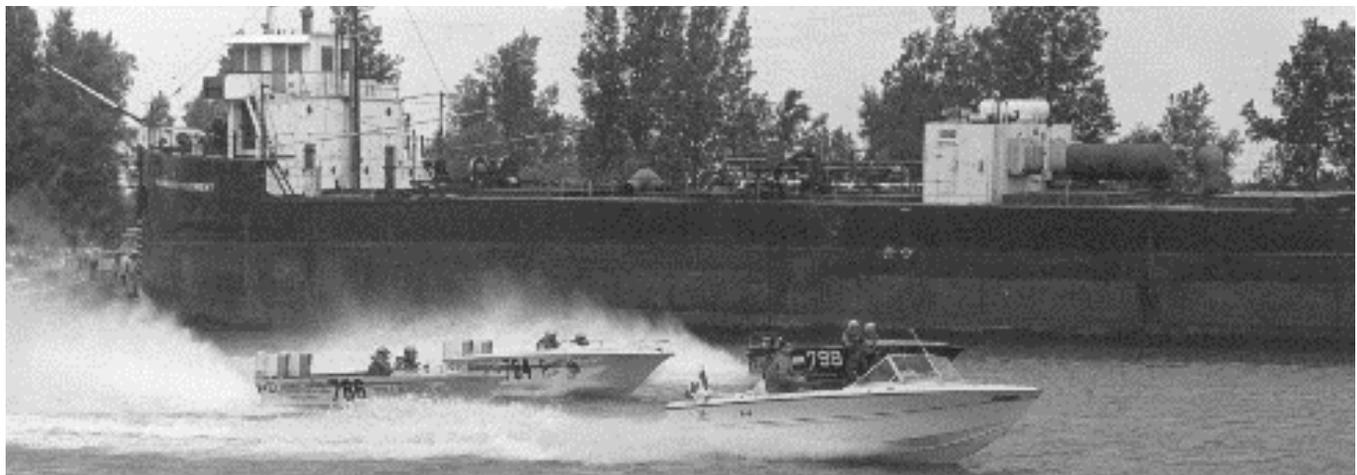
Tired "Yellowbird II" team....Fossey, Monstevan & Rice, after gruelling win at Sarnia Bluewater Marathon in 1969.



CBF Tech. Inspector Fred Shorney puts "Yellowbird II" Crew Chief Joe Fossey to work for mandatory teardown after 1969 win at Sarnia.



Chryslers patented Hydro-Vee hull.



Flying start of the 1969 Sarnia Marathon.