



The Fastest Boat on the Lake

by Thomas Holmes

The Thunderbolt is the premier gentleman's racing boat from the Century Boat Company of Manistee, Michigan. Introduced at the New York Boat Show in January 1931, it proved to be the fastest boat on many a lake - a Century tradition to today!

The boat marked a turning point for Century in its progression from an outboard hydroplane maker to an inboard recreational boat manufacturer. It also initiated the popular Garwood, Crouch, and Hacker styling of the time to the Century line up.

When compared to the Ford Model A automobile price of \$475 in 1931, the Thunderbolt was truly a high priced toy for the distinguish boater at \$1,285.

Century
THUNDERBOLT

The original Thunderbolt, a mere 14 footer, limited its seating to two. Initially powered with a Universal Blue Jacket 4 cylinder engine from Oshkosh, Wisconsin it was advertised to obtain a speed of 42 mph. It was designed to compete in the new 2 litre racing class as it weighed just 950 pounds.

The original Thunderbolt is a single step hull with the patent pending air cushion ride formed by lapping bot-

tom planks of double riveted Philippine mahogany. The racer is well appointed with chrome plated lift ring, cutwater, bow plate, three ventilators, hatch handles, bow & stern cleats and bow light.

The Ross cam and lever steering system has an external, stern extending rudder controlled by a port side steering wheel. The gold colored Century Thunderbolt nameplate decal incorporates the namesake lightening-bolt in a stepped pattern.

During the mid-1930's the boat's engine hatched was raised in a hump-backed design; I would guess for more clearance for the carburetor and flame arrestor of larger engines.

The final years of production in



1938 and 1939 saw a dramatic change in styling to a more recreational runabout design that included a windshield; starboard thru-hull steering and black hull finish with natural decking. The hull was lengthened to 15ft. 6in. with a eight inch increased beam to 62 inches. The bottom was now single mahogany planked, batten seamed construction screwed onto oak frames. The bottom paint color was changed from green to red. Equipped with an optional GrayMarine Fireball Six - 140 HP of 244 cubic inches, it was advertised to deliver a speed of 50 mph. Thereafter the Thunderbolt disappeared from the Century line.

Only a few Thunderbolt boats survive today. Hard use, small size, and low production numbers contribute to a very small survival rate. An estimate of production count during its eight years is quite low due to the economic depression of the 1930's and the limited buyers market.

Today, many boat collectors desire a Thunderbolt, so much so that a few replicas are currently being produced. For example, Macatawa Bay Boatworks of Michigan advertises that they will build you one and I recently met a boat restorer in Wisconsin who is in currently in process of making a Thunderbolt replica.

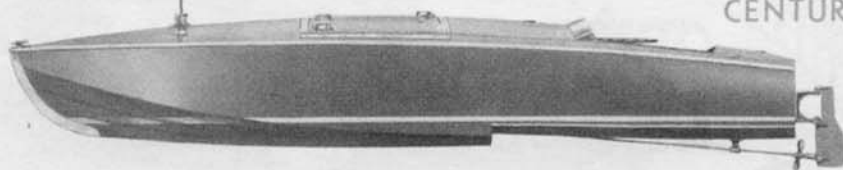
Only eight Thunderbolts are registered with the Century Boat Club or the ACBS. Club Member Richard Hickman of Pennsylvania and Peter Kreissle of Florida have 1931's; Club member Dick Werner has recently restored a 1933; Club Member Chuck Miklos of Pennsylvania and Hayden Harris of Michigan own 1934's; Club Member Stephen Stromwell of Maryland and Karl Johns of Wisconsin have 1938's; and William Munro of Michigan owns the 1939 Thunderbolt named "Chicky IV".

Happy 75th Anniversary to the Century Thunderbolt - still the fastest boat on the lake.

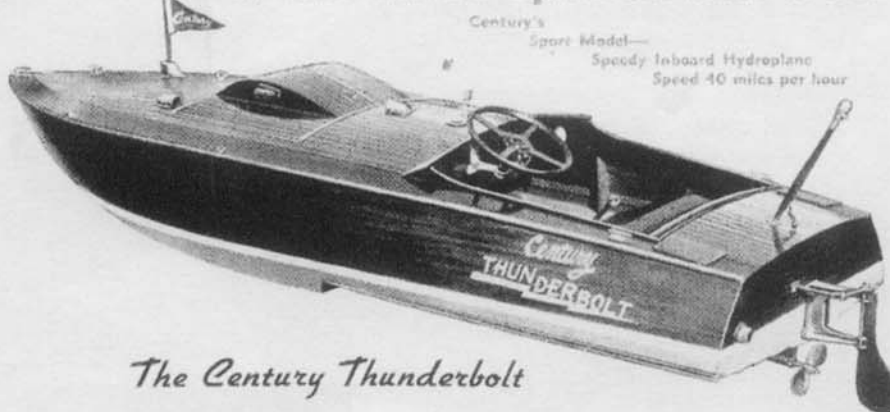


THUNDERBOLT 2 LITRE

The 1931 Sensation IN THE WORLD OF BOATING as usual by CENTURY



If You Desire Speed... Here It Is!



The Century THUNDERBOLT - A New Sport Runabout



50 Miles An Hour At A New Low Price