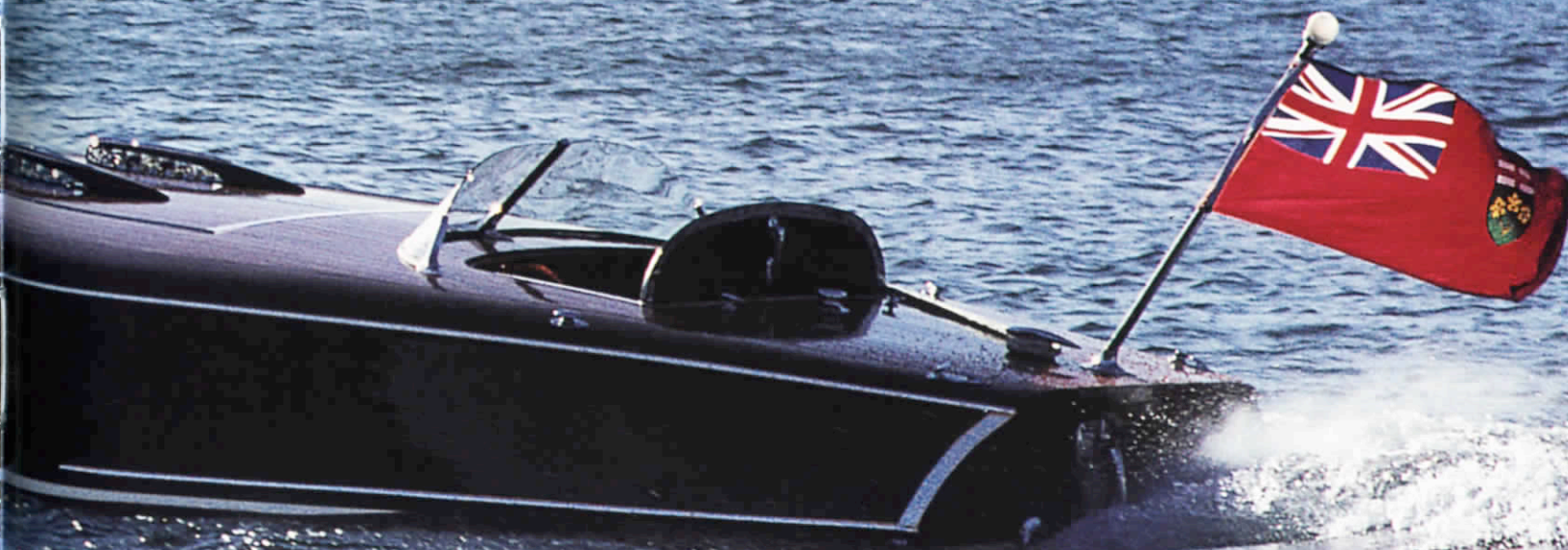




Chapter Eight

AGAINST THE CURRENT



In retrospect, it is easy to mark the warning signs, but to Herb Ditchburn, who had never known anything but growth and success, it was difficult to foresee that the economic depression now underway was to last throughout the 1930s.

Previous pages: *Miss Lindy*, photo courtesy Bill Patton.

In August of 1930, Tom Greavette resigned from the company. This was a terrible blow to Ditchburn Boats, as Tom had been employed there pretty well all his life. He had started as a youth, learned the boat-building trade, become a director when the company had been incorporated in 1907, and for many years had been their chief salesman. But times had changed dramatically. The stock market crash in late 1929 had almost immediately ended the market for custom watercraft and luxury goods of all kinds.

Greavette envisioned a new kind of boat building—production-line methods of smaller craft that would bring a lower-cost product to the customer. He was supported in this vision by his financial backers, most of whom were past customers, owners of Ditchburn boats. His directors had even suggested that the new company be named “Rainbow Boats,” in a clumsy attempt to capitalize on Greening’s racing success. This provoked a predictable response from Herb Ditchburn, whose company had been totally identified with Greening’s *Rainbows*, and the idea was quickly dropped.

In fact, Tom Greavette was wrong, or at least ahead of his time. After several years of producing the Dart boat under licence from the Toledo, Ohio, builder, it became obvious that what market existed in Muskoka was for limited numbers of custom or semi-custom boats. The newly formed Greavette Boat Works never achieved the envisioned production-line method of manufacture.

The swift collapse of orders for large and small boats was an immediate concern for Ditchburn, and by July of 1930 it became necessary to lay off workers. By 1931, the situation was desperate, with two thirds of the workforce laid off. The only significant work for the winter of 1931 was at the Orillia factory—the 85-foot houseboat for the Lake of the Woods, and a 117-foot patrol boat for the federal government, which was likely to be a money loser, taken on in desperation.

In retrospect, it is easy to mark the warning signs, but to Herb Ditchburn, who had never known anything but growth and success, it was difficult to foresee that the economic depression

now underway was to last throughout the 1930s. In thirty years, the company had progressed from simple rowing boats to sophisticated 100-foot yachts, from a small local industry to Canada's most significant boat builder, from a handful of workmen to a major employer in both Gravenhurst and Orillia.

In 1929, the Gravenhurst plant had been doubled in size, and the *Orillia Packet and Times* reported on November 21 that "the prospect for the future of the Orillia plant is most encouraging." This was one month after the October crash, but few people in Muskoka were important traders on the New York Stock Exchange. The stunning reversal of fortune was hard to accept, and no one anticipated that the entire 1930s would be a depressed decade.

Past success and growth undoubtedly clouded management's vision of the future, and expansion of facilities had placed a financial burden on the company. Reluctance to lay off workers, who were all personal friends, knowing that alternative employment did not exist, delayed management's action. The failure to

diversify into other products less susceptible to market downturns, and the dependence on wealthy customers were also factors that played a role. But the most damaged by these unbelievable changes was undoubtedly the man at the helm. Herb Ditchburn, who had failed to secure his own financial position by selling stock in his company, lost his home, his company, his self-respect, and some friends. It was a crushing blow for a self-made man.

After a decade of growth, Ditchburn Boats Ltd. had no orders for new craft, and on May 26, 1932, the proud company was declared bankrupt. The suddenness and the extent of the market crash can hardly be imagined today, but it has been calculated that between October 1929 and January 1932, the New York market lost 81 percent of its value.

A year later, it was reorganized as the Ditchburn Boat and Yachting Co., and a line of smaller boats, from 18 to 24 feet, was introduced—more realistic for the reduced market. These modest craft were still built to Ditchburn standards of quality construction

The Bankruptcy Act

IN THE ESTATE OF DITCHBURN BOATS, LIMITED, of Gravenhurst Ontario, BANKRUPT.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that Ditchburn Boats Limited of Gravenhurst, Ontario, was adjudged bankrupt and a Receiving Order made on the 26th day of May, 1932, and that William J. Reilly, Registrar, has appointed me to be Custodian of the estate of the debtor until the first meeting of the Creditors.

NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN that the first meeting of Creditors in the above estate will be held at the office of the Official Receiver at Osgoode Hall, Toronto, on the 16th day of June, 1932, at 2.30 o'clock in the afternoon (Daylight Saving Time).

To entitle you to vote thereat, proof of your claim must be lodged with me before the meeting is held. Proxies to be used at the meeting must be lodged with me prior thereto.

And further take notice that at such meeting the Creditors will elect the permanent Trustee.

AND FURTHER TAKE NOTICE that if you have any claim against the debtor for which you are entitled to rank, proof of such claim must be filed with me, or with the Trustee when appointed, within thirty days from the date of this notice, otherwise the proceeds of the debtor's estate will be distributed among the parties entitled thereto without regard to your claim.

DATED at Toronto this 2nd day of June, 1932.

G. T. CLARKSON, Custodian,
Co. E. R. Clarkson & Sons,
15 Wellington St. West,
23a Toronto 2, Ontario.

Despite thirty years of growth and development
the Depression found another victim.

but lacked the luxury details of previous models. But the Depression market was spotty at best, and the company soon failed again.

Reorganized one last time in 1936 as Ditchburn Boat and Aircraft Ltd., the company now had shareholders who envisioned wider markets and an expanded range of products. Airplane construction under licence was investigated but never undertaken. Several larger vessels were built, including *Birch Bark*, a 52-foot cruiser delivered to Georgian Bay, and *Duchess*, a 40-foot cruiser delivered to Montreal. Three 64-foot hulls were built for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, apparently at a small loss. In all, company records show that while 44 vessels were completed in 1937, an operating loss of \$1637.10 resulted.

Advertisements published during the 1930s emphasized value and practicality. Quality was maintained but simpler, less expensive vessels were featured.



New standardized designs for 1936 to meet an urgent public demand for better values, new features and more efficient performance.

RUNABOUTS



17' Six-passenger Runabout, speed 28-30 MPH. Price, \$1050.00.



17' Sports Model, speed 28-45 MPH. Price, \$1350.00.



17' Utility and Fishing Model, speed 2 to 36 MPH. Price, \$625.00.

CRUISERS



20' Family DeLuxe 8 Passenger, speed 25 MPH. Price, \$1850.00.



22', sleep four. Price, \$1850.00 up.



23' Sedan. Price, \$1650.00 up. 25', without top. Price, \$1850.00 up.

A limited number only of these new models available this season. Orders should be placed well in advance of delivery date. Can be purchased on new Convenient Payment Plan.

DITCHBURN BOATS & AIRCRAFT
(1936) LIMITED
GRAVENHURST, MURKOKA, Ont.
ON DISPLAY AT
TORONTO OFFICE, 22 SHEPPARD ST.
M.R. W. O'DILVIE. Sign 8478.



INTRODUCING The "SEA BOY"

19' and 23'

The Big Water Runabouts

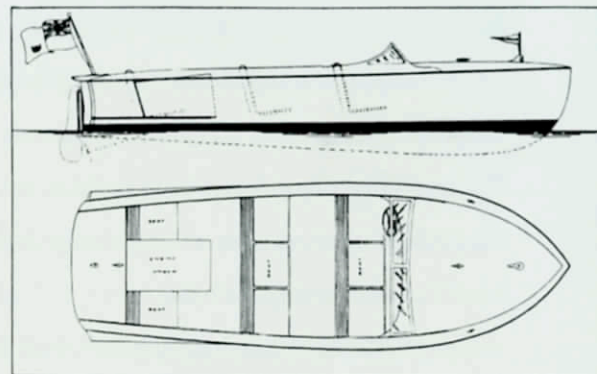
IN response to the insistent demand for a really BIGWATER boat, we offer our new SEA BOY runabout in two popular sizes.

NOTHING has been spared in making the SEA BOY water safe beyond comparison with the average SMALLWATER runabout.

FULLY a foot and a half wider of beam, much greater of depth and freeboard, with plenty of flare forward to throw off the spray, the SEA BOY is a safer, dryer and more seaworthy craft than many runabouts twice its length.

THAT you can go right off into the BIG WATER and ride it out in a SEA BOY is assured by one glance at its generous proportions.

IT is the ideal family boat for such rough waters as Georgian Bay, Lake Simcoe and the Great Lakes, where smart styles, high speeds, fine finishes and deluxe appointments do not mean half as much as does a substantially built craft in which you can go and come in safety regardless of weather conditions.



19' SEA BOY Open Model

Powered with 50 h.p.
\$975.00

Powered with 85 h.p.
\$1075.00

19' SEA BOY Sedan Model

Powered with 50 h.p.
\$1275.00

Powered with 85 h.p.
\$1450.00

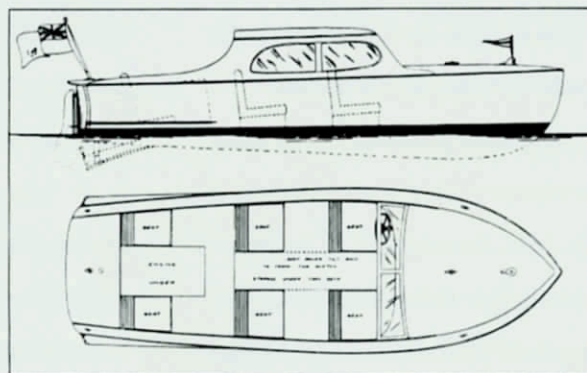
23' SEA BOY Open Model

Powered with 85 h.p.
\$1375.00

23' SEA BOY Sedan Model

Powered with 85 h.p.
\$1675.00

Sales Tax Extra. F.O.B. Works.



SPECIFICATIONS

DESIGN AND BUILD

Ditchburn round bilge, carvel build, soft riding.

DIMENSIONS FREEBOARD

Length—19' Bow—5'6"
Beam—6'10" Amidships—2'4"
Draft—1'8" Stern—2'0"

CONSTRUCTION

HULL PLANKING—Cedar painted. Colour optional.

FRAMES—Bent 7/16"x1" spaced 5".

COVERING BOARDS—Comings and trim varnished Phil. mahogany.

DECKS—Painted colour optional.

SEATS—Slatted requiring no cushions in open model and upholstered plywood in sedan convertible to berths.

MOTORS—Optional makes from 25 H.P. to 90 H.P. Motor installed beneath removable box at stern. Speeds from 15 miles to 28 miles.

STANDARD EQUIPMENT—2 mooring lines, 2 flag poles, 1 boat-hook, paddle, 3 fenders, 1 pump and bilge bailer, 1 electric horn, complete set running lights.

EXTRA EQUIPMENT—Skeg \$18.00. Cushions for open model, kapock, per set \$32.00. Navy top for open model \$75.00. Searchlight on windshield \$18.00.

Prices of SEA BOY 23' open and sedan models furnished on request.

DITCHBURN BOATS & AIRCRAFT (1936) Ltd.

Plant, Gravenhurst, Ont.

Toronto Showrooms, 22 Sheppard St.

Montreal Office, Room 21—486 St. John St.



The company had been profitable from its incorporation in 1907 until 1929, the last year having been its greatest period of both sales and profit. In 1930 and 1931, sales slipped to 79 percent and 55 percent of the 1929 record, but profits disappeared entirely. The short-lived second incorporation never achieved profits, operating as it did in the depths of the Depression, and with no working capital. The

third company had not made any profit, but sales volume was growing. If they could have survived another year or two, the war work that arrived for all boat builders would probably have saved the day.

Time ran out in March 1938, when the final incorporation was forced to declare bankruptcy. It was the sad end to a glorious chapter in Canadian boat building.



Above: The 1933 *Evangeline*, a 20-foot utility model, has seen seventy years of service.

Left: Launched as *Birch Bark* in 1935, this handsome 52-foot cruiser first sailed in Georgian Bay. Later, in Muskoka, she was christened *Jogwendi*. Now at harbour in Toronto, she is owned by Gordon Russell and named *Wind swept III*.
Photo courtesy Gordon Russell.

Below and right: The white-hulled, 25-foot, 4-inch *Kemah II* dates to 1934. With a semi-displacement hull, she is not typical of Ditchburn production of the period, being much more elegant and built to the highest standards of custom work. Designed by Earle Barnes, *Kemah II* exhibits many details of his style, such as the three-piece raked-back windscreen, the moulding treatment around the “mother-in-law” seat, the wider beam, and the sloping rear deck. Restored in 1994, *Kemah II* proceeded to win many show awards including Boat of the Year at Gravenhurst, Best in Show at Lake Tahoe, Best Launch at Clayton and Captain's Choice at Manotick.



Below and right: Glenelda II was built as a 37-foot cruiser and launched in 1935. Her lines reflect the art deco style of those times. (Remember the Chrysler Airflo and Streamliner trains?) Her present owner, Bryan Rowntree, had her foredeck removed and seating installed, as the vessel is only used for day cruising. Beautifully restored, this vessel turns heads every time she is out of the boathouse. We have been unable to determine who was responsible for her design, but we should thank him.







Above: The 1936 *Alice* is a 24-foot triple cockpit runabout powered by an 8-cylinder Chrysler marine engine. Owned by Stan Meek, she has her home waters in Muskoka.

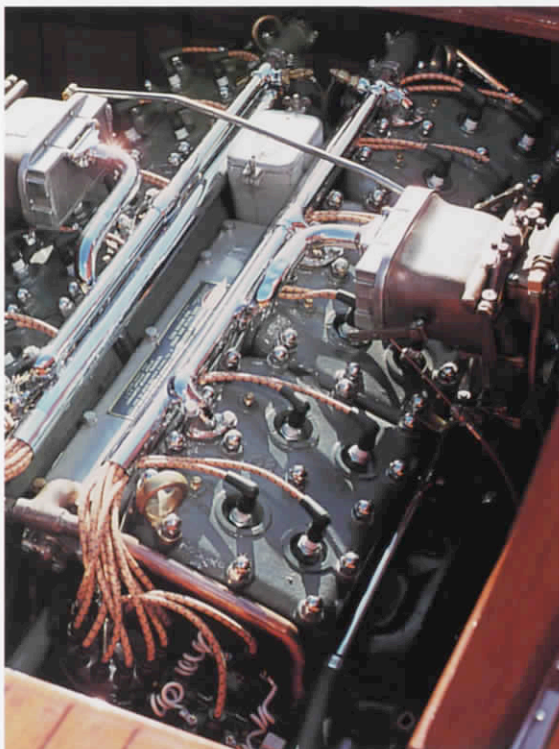
Opposite: The 1936 *Arequipa*, a 22-foot triple cockpit runabout offers proof positive that Ditchburn quality was still a priority of the builder. Owned by Ian Bruce, this beautiful vessel is on Lake of Bays.
Photo by Tom Thomson, Kenora, Ontario.

Right: A happy participant, Lindsey Hopkins of Atlanta, Georgia, enjoys the boats and people at the Muskoka show in Gravenhurst.

Opposite: The 20-foot *Top Hat*, a 1937 triple cockpit deluxe runabout, was trailered from Georgia to visit home waters in Muskoka. Restored in Florida, this streamlined hull carries the builder's plate 37-42, the third-from-last hull number recorded by Herb Ditchburn.







*Above right: Miss Lindy is described in Herb Ditchburn's notes as a "special" runabout and most boaters would agree. Her hull number is 37-9 and she was launched in 1937 for Joseph E. Atkinson, longtime publisher of the *Toronto Star* newspaper. In his biography, Atkinson admitted that his favourite recreation was "driving a high-speedboat." He must have been a shrewd negotiator, as Ditchburn claims to have only made \$8.05 on the transaction. Times were really tough for custom boat-builders.*

Above left: A fold-down hatch cover covers the rear seat.

Below left: Power is supplied by a V-12 Scripps engine.

*Opposite: The 40-foot cruiser *Duchess* carries hull number 37-3 and is the last Ditchburn cruiser built. Delivered to John Henry Molson in Montreal in May 1937, she spent her early years in Quebec waters. Acquired by Toronto owner Harvey Morris, she has been well maintained and extensively cruised on the Great Lakes.*

Photos supplied by the owners of Miss Lindy and Duchess.

