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SEPTEMBER 2012

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40 Years of Industry Innovation

New Categories and Major Influences

I've been messing about in boats for more than 40 years—even before the first issue of *Southern Boating* was published. When I set out to write a brief retrospective of the industry highlighting major innovations, achievements and people who have made a difference, I was careful to note that my list could never be all-inclusive, as I have seen the industry mostly from the eyes of a cruiser, on both sail and powerboats. But even within this somewhat limited perspective, it was easy finding a dozen subjects that have changed our industry forever. Here are my 12 favorites.

Trawler-styled powerboats

Grand Banks may have started it all with its 36-foot *Spray*, but Marlow Yachts, Nordhavn, Kadey Kroger, Fleming, Great Harbor, DeFever, and others soon helped develop this new category of power cruising boats. Designed with salty looks and powered by dependable diesel engines that drove these full-displacement or semi-displacement hulls at fuel-efficient speeds, diehard sailors were finally able to make the switch to power without apologies. In fact, much of the market consisted of couples that had grown weary of the physical demands of sailing and were attracted to the comfort and safety of these seaworthy vessels. Today, the category remains strong, and several builders have introduced a sub-category of "fast trawlers" to satisfy the market's increasing demand for higher speeds.

Grand Banks' 36-foot *Spray* was considered to be the first prototype for its trawlers.



GRAND BANKS YACHTS, LTD. PHOTO

Jim Leishman

While his company, Pacific Asian Enterprises (PAE), was building the highly respected line of Mason sailboats, it designed the Nordhavn 46—a vessel that dramatically changed the trawler market. Leishman not only read Robert Beebe's famous book, *Voyaging Under Power*, but he rewrote it. More important, Leishman was one of the few boatbuilders of the time who actually went to sea in his boats. Accompanying two of his early Nordhavn 46 fans, Jim and Suzy Sink, on parts of their circumnavigation, he saw the huge potential of well-founded, long distance powerboats. His

By GEORGE SASS, SR.



creative vision promoted the ambitious "Around the World" voyage by a Nordhavn 40 in 2002 and the successful "Nordhavn Atlantic Rally" in 2004, inspiring a new generation of offshore powerboats. Today the company builds several Nordhavn models from 40 to 120 feet, and Leishman and his partners, Jeff Leishman and Dan Streech, are continuing to develop new models.

Networked, one-brand electronics

The best helm stations used to incorporate electronic components made by several different brands, but it wasn't always easy to get them to share data and talk to each other. Along came proprietary protocols like NavNet, SeaTalk, SimNet as well as the new industry standard, NMEA2000 (a major improvement over NMEA 0183). Eventually, helms began featuring a wide variety of components—chartplotters, radars, fish finders, VHF radios, autopilots, and more—all made by the same manufacturer, and all happily networked together. Installation of these one-brand systems has also become much easier, as the simpler ones are often "plug and play." I particularly like the visual aesthetics and the improved operating intuitiveness that comes with a single brand installation.



Center console boats

While there may be an argument between AquaSport and Boston Whaler fans about which boatbuilder actually invented the center console boat, there is no denying the immense popularity and growth of this segment, which now includes boats 45 feet and up. Positioning the helm on the boat's centerline not only allows easy movement of passengers and crew, it puts the helmsman where there is the least amount of motion and spray. The basic center console design has evolved into luxurious family cruisers complete with enclosed heads and fast, sophisticated fishing machines with over 1000 horsepower that can venture far offshore in the worst of conditions. Seaworthy,



fast and functional, center consoles have improved the boating experience for an entire generation of family cruisers and serious fishermen.

Catamarans

There is a joke among sailors that if the Polynesians discovered America we all would have sailed multihulls first and discovered the benefits of monohulls later. But thanks to Columbus, we've only recently learned how stable and spacious multihulls are. Indeed, power and sailing cats are now a popular choice of charter companies and serious cruisers because of their superior accommodations and comfortable ride. While there are pros and cons to every hull design, catamarans offer greater static stability than monohulls. Under sail there is far less heel, and at anchor there is less rocking and rolling. But their biggest attraction is their spacious accommodations, spanning