THE AMANDA STORY

Ted Davis ***MPH 553*** ***Page 14***

Once again my almost dormant memory has prompted me to respond. Particularly, in this case, as most stories and rather sad pictures (see *MPH* 551 cover) do nothing for Vincent's Amanda water scooter's image - 40 years ahead of it's time - see your TV and seaside activities for 1994 versions.

The picture opposite shows the 200cc twin cylinder model doing 20 mph on test (note rooster's tail distance behind, which indicates speed) on the River Ouse at Bedford.

Photo supplied by Ted Davis.

Early models were powered by the 75ce and 100cc single cylinder engines and were ideal for children, with speeds of five and seven miles an hour. Some 2,000 were exported to the USA, Europe and Australia - and even New Zealand, see one at the rally!

Five years' war-time naval experience as an engineer officer, plus a year's training at General Motors Marine Division in the States, armed me with the necessary knowledge to redesign the hull and propeller which, with my other personal baby, the twin cylinder engine, trebled the speed and gained an order for 5,000 from Arnolt Corporation USA.

Alas, very high engine and air temperatures experienced whilst I had six Amandas on test at Miami, Florida, reduced the load-carrying strength of the upper seating section of the hull. This problem we solved with the introduction of an aluminium hot air exhaust trunking, which also shielded the upper deck from the exhaust expansion chamber, but not before hundreds were in transit.

Our experience with the Series 'D' enclosure had not indicated that we would experience engine or climatic heat problems. Even to this day no enclosed 'D' has suffered from loss of glass fibre structural strength due to heat, or to anything else come to that.

In spite of the Amanda's stability, unsinkable design and very low price, £120, including wooden shipping crate, the project received a double blow. The first was when the Aero Marine sales team, who came to Stevenage with the original idea, were all killed flying to the Isle of Man.

The second blow, which coincided with me exhibiting the Amandas at the New York Boat Show, was the death of John Penn, my assistant development engineer. He was drowned whilst testing an Amanda at Mersea on a bitterly cold day in January. Although the Amanda was recovered afloat and the engine restarted, the incident was reported in the *New York Times* and cast a shadow over the safety aspect, which was certainly not justified.

I guess the moral of this story is, if you have a good idea, just sell it. Whatever you do, don't get involved with making and selling it, even if you have, as we had, run two Amandas at full throttle, full load, for 1,000 hours without failure of any sort, day and right, through the weekend unattended in a test tank.

When we approached Atco, the lawn mower people, with our £9, 1000-hour life, two-stroke engines, they said "no thanks, we rely on the engine wearing out to sell mowers? and continued to fit the £6 JAP engine - 40,000 a year!

Production of two-stroke engines soon surpassed four strokes at Stevenage and included single, twin and multi cylinders. Engine cases and castings were pressure die cast and every part was produced in house expect pistons, bearings, plugs and carburettors. At one stage we even made our own wick-type carbs - hence the saying turn up the wick.