

10 BEST AMERICAN CARS • WINNING AT PEBBLE BEACH

Robb Report

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AUGUST 1995

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\$6.00 U.S. \$8.00 CDN



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Custom-made in Michigan

Looking for something in a fast boat? Own a Mays-Craft, and you'll own a unique boat that looks like fine furniture, rides like a limo, and handles like a sports car.

The latest Mays-Craft is a 36-foot formal runabout being built for a wealthy Detroit industrialist. The runabout, scheduled to be launched in late July, is the third boat the owner has had built by the Mayea Boat Works of Fair Haven, Mich.

Like the more than 400 custom-built Mays-Craft boats preceding it, this will be unusual. The bow is raked. Most of the foredeck, except the covering boards at the gunwales, rises as the lines flow aft and down to the transom. The raised deck forms the coaming for front and rear passenger compartments (six people can be carried comfortably) and engine bays. The coaming is finished in an ebony mahogany stain, giving the appearance of a black racing stripe.

The pilot and front passenger sit in mahogany bucket seats covered in green leather. The helm includes a Mayea-designed, custom-made stainless steel wheel and low-effort throttle and shift

controls by Morse. The dials are in matching green built by a firm that makes instruments and controls for large ships and locomotives.

Move aft and you understand what makes this a formal runabout. The 11-foot beam allows passengers to move about



Among the features that mark this as a Mays-Craft: rear windshields.

easily. There is no clambering awkwardly over the engine hatches or tightroping precariously on the gunwale. Instead, you walk through a passageway between the engines. The rear compartment contains a bench seat covered in green leather. Floor-ing is varnished teak inlaid with ebony.

All of the fittings and hardware are stainless steel, designed by the Mayeas and custom-made for the boat. A refrigerator is built into the forward bulkhead. An access hatch opens on a forward cuddy containing a portable head and a cushioned sleeping area. A foredeck safety hatch is hidden so it doesn't mar the lines of the boat. The rear windshields—yes, windshields; they are Mayea trademarks—are mahogany-framed and split for fore and aft passage.

The runabout is powered by twin 750-hp, V-12 engines by Botta Purricelli Milano of Verona, Italy, that put out a whopping 885 ft lbs of torque at 3,000 rpm, allowing speeds that exceed 70 mph. B.P.M. specializes in high-horsepower gas engines for marine use.

But power aside, what makes this boat and other contemporary Mays-Crafts so fast are the epoxy-encapsulated bottoms, in this case laminated with two 3/8-inch layers of aircraft-spec plywood. The design was not developed through water tank or wind tunnel testing (this is a small family enterprise, not a cosmic corporation), but through a lot of trial and error. The Mayeas liked the

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deep-V of the ocean-racing powerboats for their speed and stability in rough seas. They also liked the smooth ride and stability offered in the bottom design of some of the more sophisticated Florida sportfishermen: the modified-V with a reverse curve, or flat area, at the chine for stability. So they combined the two.

From a deep-V forward, the bottom flattens out to a modest 12-degree angle of dead rise aft. Along the chine at the waterline, the bottom does a reverse curve. No breakthrough stuff yet, but it's the tricky thing they do at the chines—where the bottom meets the hull side—that distinguishes Mays-Craft boats. The chine's reverse curve starts near the bow out of the water and is marked by an abrupt break as it runs down and aft into the water. The result is a "drop chine" configuration. At speed, this helps trap air and allows the boat to get on plane quickly. The strakes jog upward out of the water at the bow to knock down spray. All of that results in breathtaking performance that Larry Mayea likes to tell customers "won't foam your beer."

The price of this boat is approximately \$400,000. That's not too bad when you consider that it took more than 4,000 hours to build and that the engines were \$50,000 each.

The Mayea Boat Works, which goes by Mays-Craft because it is easier to pronounce, was founded by Louis T. Mayea in Detroit in 1908. In nearly 100 years, the family-owned and -operated company has built floats for the Wright Brothers' seaplanes, built seaplanes for the U.S. Navy in World War I, survived the Great Depression by building and repairing speedboats for Prohibition rumrunners and the Feds that chased them (including patching their bullet holes), and designed and built experimental diesel launches and landing craft for the U.S. Navy in World War II.

Today, Herbert Mayea, 74, son of the late Louis T., designs Mays-Crafts with his sons Larry, 45, and Don, 40, who handle most of the construction. Brother-in-law Norm Plettl, a skilled mechanic, concerns himself with the engines, the power trains, and the hardware. Today, about 60 percent of

their business is in custom projects; the remainder involves the restoration of classic wooden boats.

"All boats are compromises," says Larry. "As far as new stuff, if a guy comes to us and wants us to build a boat, we'll only do it our way," he continues. "We've been around a long time. We know what works. And we use new technology wherever possible. That's why traditionalists don't like us. We're not stuck in the past. We execute our own contemporary designs. We use epoxies and resins. We use laminates. We create our own hardware. We experiment with paints." The Mayeas mix their own colors and stains, and work with a major marine paint company in testing new formulas.

"Our boats have our name on them, and we build them so their looks and performance make them stand out over time. It can't be any less because we just can't sell out a reputation we've been working on since 1908."

For more information, contact Mayea Boat Works, Fair Haven, MI 48023; telephone (313) 725-6111.

—Bob Pearson ♦