

October 2015

Boating INDUSTRY

CANADA

MARINE BUSINESS MATTERS

Impact

Mark Bruckmann

Highlights from

IBEX 2015

Made In Canada

- MarsKeel
- Voyager

www.boatingindustry.ca

Canada Post Mail Agreement 40065481 ISSN 0384-0999
Return postage guaranteed A KERRWIL PUBLICATION

Exceptional Quality Since the Dawn of Fiberglass



BY ANDY ADAMS

I admit this profile of Bruckmann Yachts and Mark Bruckmann is long overdue in *Boating Industry Canada* magazine because this business and its original founder, Erich Bruckmann, were at the heart of Canada's greatest boatbuilding success, literally since the dawn of fiberglass construction.

During the summer of 2015, we travelled to Mississauga, Ontario to spend the morning with Mark Bruckmann. We talked about the present business, the company's history and his own impressive boatbuilding resume. We also talked about the substantial currency exchange shift that we've all experienced recently and some other factors that are likely to impact the boat business going forward.

When you go to the Bruckmann Yachts website, www.bruckmannyachts.com, one of the first things you'll notice is a boat called Red Jacket. It occupies a very special

The 50 MK II is a great example of the specialized yacht that Bruckmann Yachts can deliver. The Mark Ellis design is a new version of the acclaimed Bruckmann 50 pilothouse cruising sloop.

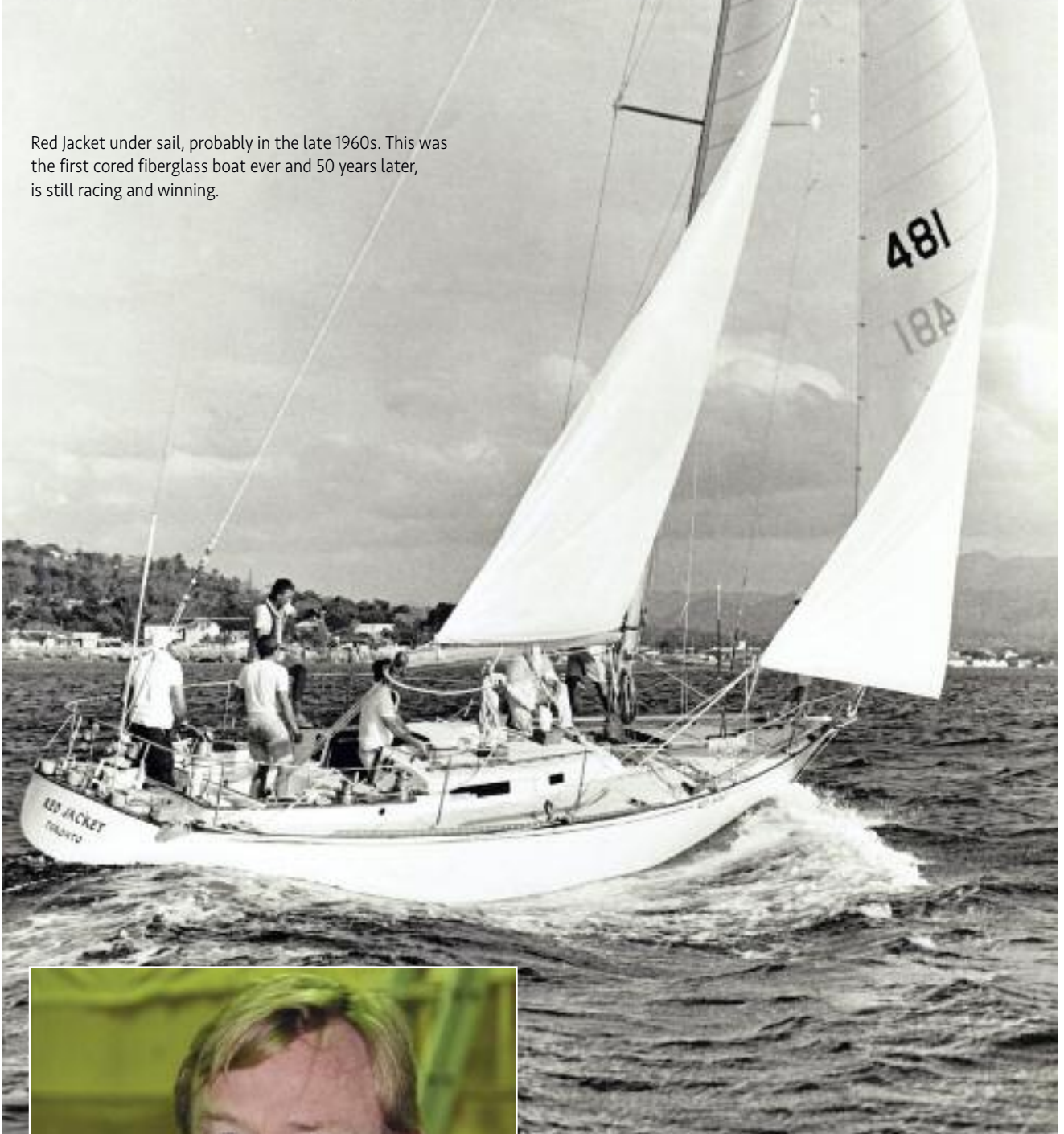
place in the Bruckmann story and, therefore, in this story.

Mark's father Erich Bruckmann came to Canada from Germany in 1956 arriving in Bronte where he began working at Metro Marine for Harry Greb building and repairing wooden boats. Erich was a European-trained cabinetmaker and in 1962 he left to open his own cabinetmaking company doing kitchen cabinets.

His skills had become known and appreciated though. Starting in 1963 and through 1964 he was asked to build Red Jacket from a design by George Cuthbertson. It was a connection through his earlier relationship with Metro Marine.

Red Jacket brought considerable notoriety. Canadian yachtsman Perry Connolly commissioned George

Red Jacket under sail, probably in the late 1960s. This was the first cored fiberglass boat ever and 50 years later, is still racing and winning.



Cuthbertson and George Cassian to design a custom 40-foot (12m) racing sloop. Connolly requested “the meanest, hungriest 40-footer afloat”. The boat, named Red Jacket, was built by Bruckmann Manufacturing in fiberglass with a full hull and deck balsa core; the resulting structure was (and still is) strong, stiff and significantly lighter than the wood or solid fiberglass yachts then sailing. Red Jacket is considered to be the first sailboat engineered with a cored hull. She was launched in May 1966 and took 11 of 13 starts that summer. That winter, Red Jacket headed south and won the famed SORC (Southern Ocean Racing Circuit), competing against over 85 of the best racers of the day. Red Jacket was the first Canadian boat to win the SORC.

C&C Yachts with George Cuthbertson, George Cassian,



An example of Bruckmann Yachts' fine wooden boat work is seen here on the recently refurbished Dragon belonging to 97-year-old David Howard. The owner continues to race it

George Hinterhoeller, Ian Morch and of course, Erich Bruckmann, went on to become the world's largest producer of sailboats earning a reputation globally as well built, well designed and highly competitive pleasure craft.

The years through the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, were an absolute boom time for yachting and in particular fiberglass sailboats.

Mark Bruckmann was born in 1961 and by the mid-1970s, at 13 or 14 years of age, started to work in the custom division for Martin Klacko doing metalwork. The company is now known as Klacko Marine. This was part of what C&C Yachts called the Custom Shop.

In 1980, Mark graduated from high school and went on to the University of Western Ontario where he studied Commerce. Following his graduation, Mark went back into the boat business [he told us with a chuckle].

By 1984 Erich was getting ready to retire and the new graduate went overseas to work and train in the boat industry in Europe, starting with Royal Huisman in Holland and later working at Dubbel & Jesse in Germany and finally Baltic in Finland where they were building some C&C designs.

On Erich's retirement, Mark returned to the Custom Shop with his father still doing some consulting work for C&C Yachts in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Mark stayed at the Custom Shop until it was closed in 1986. In fact, he was really the one who had to close it down. Mark was the last to leave the Custom Shop. It was a profoundly sad moment.

But then in May 1986, Mark decided to reinvent Bruckmann Manufacturing and if you go back to the early days of Red Jacket, the company has now been in business for 60 years.

An amusing fact is that Mark reopened the company in the old Metro Marine building - the very same place where his father started so many years before, and Erich helped Mark to

set things up again in 1986.

Naval architect Mark Ellis was located on Bronte Road right across the street and Mark helped by designing boats and bringing in clients to get things going. Their first project was a big one; Archangel, a 67 footer came back in for a refit. Archangel was the biggest boat C&C Yachts had ever built and it literally filled the entire building. Plus, it gave Mark Bruckmann a great start back into the business.

He started building new boats beginning with the Mark

Signal Mate LED Navigation Lights

Recreational - Commercial - Military
Certified ABYC A-16 & 72 COLREGS

Automated Horn & Light Signaling
• Be Safe • Be Seen • Be Heard

Now Distributed by Western Marine & Transat Marine

Supplier to the Marine Industry

Specialty Marine Hardware

See us at the
Western Marine & Transat Marine Trade Show
October 16 th - 18th



The timeless design of the new Abaco 40 is a stylish yet practical day cruiser with accommodations for longer adventures.

Ellis designed Bruckmann B28, a boat that was similar to the Limestone 24 that Mark Ellis had designed and that was being built by George Hinterhoeller.

A fortunate customer connection was the company's long-standing relationship with Fred Eaton who tooled the B28 with Mark Bruckmann to get things going. The company also continued doing repairs and building some larger sailboats in Bronte with 42, 44 and 47 foot models.

They also tooled and built a 40 foot motor yacht that became the Legacy Line later built in Rhode Island by Freedom Yachts (at the old C&C plant). Around the same time, they were approached by a Connecticut Grand Banks dealer who wanted a Grand Banks type of boat, but in a smaller size. They had seen the Bruckmann B28 and they came to an arrangement to produce the Blue Star 29.9 for Boatworks in Rowayton, Connecticut. This was good business for Mark Bruckmann.

They were an active dealer ordering three boats at a time which sounds like good news but in fact, the volume was too much for the old Metro Marine building in Bronte. It was just not an adequate space and in 2000, Mark moved Bruckmann Yachts to its present location on Royal Windsor

Drive in Mississauga.

They continued producing the Blue Star 29.9 and then went up in size to the 36.6 while also building new custom sailboats. They were also commissioned to build a 50 foot motor sailor, all designs from Mark Ellis.

Between 2000 and 2008, it was still a very active time for the boat industry but starting in 2009, the business went into a steep decline, especially among US customers. Bruckmann was still able to get out one more 50 footer for a US buyer in 2008 / 2009 but the American business was coming to a standstill.

Luckily, they had the opportunity to start the tooling for the 40 foot Abaco model for Canadian buyer and when the turnaround started coming, they had a new product to sell. The first Abaco 40 hull was launched in 2012 and they are now on their third Abaco 40.

During that time, Mark tried to develop more repair and refit work, but it was difficult when his team was so busy building boats.

Today, the economy is really coming back. Mark is looking forward to a better future but, he still feels that economic and



market conditions are precarious and some buyers are staying on the sidelines. He observes that even important shows for him like Newport or Annapolis, have only returned to perhaps 60% of their pre-2009 levels and it was just this year that the show seemed to be crowded again, which Mark feels is a very good sign.

The main focus of Bruckmann yachts is the timeless East Coast design which Mark Ellis captures so well, built with the knowledge, skill and quality that 60 years of experience has brought to Bruckmann Yachts.

The company is essentially a custom builder however, buyers can choose from their book of established designs which now includes most of the Mark Ellis boats we have mentioned, plus a 40 foot day sailor by Doug Zurn. All of the designs from Bruckmann Yachts build on their reputation for timeless design and also for unique performance.

The Abaco 40 is a good example of that. It's a very efficient single-engine design with a full skeg for protection and tracking. The boat has no real direct competitor but that also means that Bruckmann needs to seek out that discriminating buyer who appreciates a boat like the Abaco 40.

At that point in our discussion, Mark and I were commenting on today's boom in high-end and custom-built items such as luxury homes and exclusive vehicles like Bentleys and Lamborghinis. We both agreed that there's plenty of money out there and that people do indeed want something special, something that is a unique expression of their own ambitions or tastes.

At the same time, fewer and fewer regular builders are willing to customize their designs while that is a core competency at Bruckmann Yachts. Mark's team are all very experienced with some going all the way back to the days when his father Erich was running the C&C Custom Shop and it's a natural inclination for these professionals to go for perfection. As Mark said, "it's what makes us different."

Red Jacket is probably 50 years old this year and what makes it particularly unique is that it was one of the very first cored fiberglass boats ever. The boat has always had caring owners and it was brought back to Bruckmann for a refit 10 years ago. What is more remarkable is that owner Peter Milligan and his crew continue to race the boat and win. It's an amazing testimony to both George Cuthbertson's original design and Bruckmann's skill in construction.

Those qualities have long attracted great clientele like Fred Eaton who has been a great supporter of the company, helping with the tooling for several boats. Arthur Labatt tooled and purchased a custom 56 footer from the company. Bob Krembil purchased and tooled their Legacy motor yacht.

For a custom builder like Bruckmann Yachts, those important clients who are looking for a unique or special boat make new designs possible when they create the tooling. Sometimes, the buyer becomes an investor, guiding the design, getting exactly the boat they want and then later, they can get some of their investment back if other boats are made from the same tooling.



The beautifully organized engine room aboard the Abaco 40.



The Abaco 40 helm shows the handsome and practical white interior finish accented by elegant glossy varnished mahogany trim.

After a long run of being at parity levels with the American dollar, the Canadian dollar has again dropped back to the \$.75 range and we asked Mark if that would be a major benefit to Bruckmann yachts.

As it turns out, Mark said that Americans are not really focused on the exchange and also, since many of the materials needed are of US origin, the difference in price is not nearly as dramatic as we might expect.

Like many in Canada's yacht industry, their boats are always priced in US funds anyway. Every boat, and particularly a custom build, is negotiated and so the bottom line is that the Canadian builder may be somewhat more competitive, but this hasn't been a dramatic change.

We also wanted to ask Mark about his team because with such a depth of experience, there comes the issue of an aging workforce and people preparing to retire. For now, this isn't hurting Bruckmann Yachts but as demand increases, so will the demands of the team increase.

Mark admits that it's hard to find young people who want to come into the business and he has even gone as far as Europe looking to find boat or cabinet makers. Woodworkers

and particularly furniture workers come with the ideal skills, but it's hard to attract them into the boat business unless they have a personal interest.

At least Bruckmann yachts is a year-round business and in fact, winters are their busiest time because so many boats are in for repair and refit that the shop floor will be packed. In July, the shop has emptied out and it gives everybody at Bruckmann Yachts an opportunity to take a breather, have a little time off and clean things up in preparation for the boats coming back again in September.

For Mark, the sense of nostalgia at the rich history of boat building that his company has become famous for, is bitter-sweet because there's not much left of the Canadian boatbuilding industry, especially for boats 40 feet and up.

Keeping the shop busy without being overburdened is a balancing act and he comments that the future of the business is to offer a combination of both new construction and refit because fewer yards are now qualified to do the type of full refit on a yacht that Bruckmann Yachts is famous for.

Looking back, the impact that Bruckmann Yachts has had over such an extensive period of time, is certainly impressive. Their reputation for quality and performance sets an enviable standard for all Canadian builders and continues to bring us international notoriety.