

MADE TO ORDER



Ken Rodeck always wanted a new wood boat. When he moved to Fontana on Geneva Lake in southeastern Wisconsin eleven years ago, he became aware of the 130+ locally-built Streblovs plying the lake.

Knowing he wanted a new boat, the local fiberglass boat dealer ordered a model with all the options he thought Ken wanted and delivered it unannounced one afternoon, even knocking over three posts backing into the driveway. Arriving home from work, the surprised Ken, already the owner of a classic, declined the unordered boat.

When Ken took his Century Coronado to Streblov Custom



Text and photos by Jim Wargard

Boats, also in Fontana, for refinishing, he was impressed with the flawless workmanship.

Ken often bumped into Randy Streblov around town and, three years ago, decided to order a 26-foot Streblov. He had a choice of three basic hull styles in lengths of 23, 26, or 28 feet.

Ken spent considerable time with Randy on the design, but didn't stop there. During the construction, Ken typically spent two days a week at the shop, from the time the first board was laid to the launching of the boat. Anytime Randy called saying they needed a measurement for the customized in-

terior, it was only a 5-6 minute drive for Ken to Streblov's Fontana countryside location.

The Streblovs build only one or two boats a year. As Kris Streblov says, "Our customers wouldn't want our boats if they were made in mass. When boats are mass produced, something gets lost."

A 23-footer can run \$250,000 up to \$450,000 for the twin-engined 28-footer. The family-owned company and fifteen employees work at ca-

RIGHT: September, 2008, Sue Rodeck observes the build progress of her family's 26' Streblov, shown above running on Geneva Lake in 2010.





*Our people want user boats.
Our boats aren't used for suits and cocktails.*

— Randy Streblow

capacity, maintaining the existing locally-based Streblow fleet and performing vintage boat restoration services. The waiting list before construction begins can be two to three years.

Streblow Custom Boats traces its lineage to the late Larry Streblow, who got his start in 1947 when he assembled a 20' kit boat. The twin forward cockpit runabout was well received by fellow members at the Kenosha Yacht Club. They encouraged Larry to turn his hobby into a business.

In 1951, Larry Streblow, an engineer and designer who had a special talent for working with wood and a love for boating, founded the company in a rented three stall garage in Kenosha, Wisconsin. The first models

were small outboards, then runabouts and an occasional cruiser.

As the industry was making its momentous transition to glass, the Streblow inboard runabout hit the height of refinement in 1968. That's when the prototype for the modern Streblow emerged. Streblow lore has it that the design came to Larry in a dream. By 1973, Streblow offered customers the option of either the standard inboard with mid-ship engine or a V-drive with engine aft. The V-drive with its horseshoe interior configuration gained favor. Wood construction remained Larry's passion. "He never considered changing," Kris explains, defending Larry's undying determination to produce high-quality boats. "For him, it would be



ABOVE: Mitchell, a fourth generation Streblow, learns the craft from his grandfather, Randy.

LEFT: *Rodan* is planked and tested for its customer-specified brown stain.

BELOW: Joints are sealed and bedded in fungicidal mastic.



wood or nothing.”

In 1987, the family moved to the area where they had established a loyal following, Geneva Lake, known as the Newport of the Midwest for the wealthy Chicagoans who settled there after the Great Chicago Fire.

Larry's son, Randy, 65, started working in his father's shop when he was 12, and has never held any other job. He spends seven days a week in the shop, often 10-12 hour days. "I'm blessed," says Randy. "I enjoy my work life so much." The same could be said of Larry, who built boats until retiring at age of 82.

Though Streblow boats may be considered contemporary classics, they trace their design lineage of

staunch construction to Larry's original specification. Framework is white oak, ply inner bottom and 5/8" outer planking. At boat shows, Streblows seem to swallow traditional classics with their wide beams and tall freeboards. As Randy says, "Our people want user boats. Our boats aren't used for suits and cocktails." It doesn't take long to recognize the sound of an unmuffled 8.1 High Output-powered Streblow either. Ironically, the one customer that wanted silencers was a Harley Davidson dealer.

"Ken's boat was totally different from any other 26 we ever built," says Randy, "with custom cabinets, the L seat and a lot of wood on the interior." Ken wanted something different from the normal Streblow red ma-



We are one of the only manufacturers from the 50s who continued making boats with wood throughout.

— Kris Streblov

hogany stain, something more brown. Ken and Randy spent hours doing samples of stain to get it right. Some were too dark, others too green, some didn't go well. *Rodan* does feature red stain decks.

The greatest attribute of a Streblov boat is something the customer takes for granted—they don't leak. They are not epoxy encapsulated either. Randy has seen too many cold molded hulls with ten years, or less, life expectancy. Exactly how they make watertight rot-free bottoms is their highly guarded secret, but there is reference and credit

LEFT: Kris Streblov checks lumber water content with a moisture gauge. **Right:** *Rodan's* hefty 8 quarter covering board sits on a 7/8" shelf.



given to a "fungicidal mastic" embedded in a canvas inner layer. "We have a special, unique method," says Randy of their Douglas fir plywood inner bottom with 5200 on all the paid surfaces. "It's a secret, a system my dad developed years ago."

Nearly all boat components are of Streblov design and manufacture, including ladders, cockpit ceilings, and swim platforms. The instrument panels and the wiring harness for the motors are also made by Streblov.



Streblov's Proprietary Bottom



Gary Hugé had Streblov built him a 26-footer with the popular V-drive and U-shaped seating configuration in 2000.

LARRY STREBLOW called it "The Streblov Special Bottom." His son Randy calls it "The Streblov Double Planked Bottom." Whatever you care to call it, there's no denying that it works.

Many wooden boat aficionados know that wood boats must swell tight before use. This means they must be introduced into the water gradually so that the wooden bottom will swell, naturally tightening the seams to prevent leaking. This swelling process may take from hours to days depending on the age and quality of the bottom.

Design improvements have always helped set the Streblov runabouts apart. Larry Streblov's innovative double-plank bottom, for instance, eliminated the need to swell the hull at the start of the season. A plywood inner bottom with sealant adhesive around the edges prevents leakage. Streblov bottoms stay tight and rot free for decades.

— Gary Hugé



The secret green stuff. Fungicidal mastic embedded in canvas between bottom layers.

The new boat is named *Rodan*. That's what Ken's college roommate called him. Rodan is a flying monster, a giant pteranodon, from the 1956 film *Rodan*, portrayed as a rival and enemy of Godzilla. Ken used to be an aggressive pilot who would scare his passengers with wild maneuvers.

"I've been calling him Rodan for years," says his wife Sue. "He wasn't going to do it. He came up with all these other boat names, but I said do something that's at least a little meaningful."

"Flying monster?" said Ken.

"Yeah," replied Sue, "that fits you perfectly."

"The whole experience of working with Randy, Kris and Steve was great," Ken says. "Their knowledge is incredible, and I appreciated the fact that they allowed me to participate in the design of the boat. It was a fun process. The boats are truly well-built and solid. They're all personal endeavors by Randy."

The entire process took fourteen months, and Rodeck received his new Streblov on Father's Day. He celebrated by running *Rodan* fifty hours last summer.

See *Rodan* at the September ACBS Blackhawk show at The Abby Resort.



Streblov Custom Boats is located 5 miles north of the annual Blackhawk ACBS Abbey Resort Geneva Lake boat show at 2672 County Road F, Walworth, WI (262) 728-6898. Look for the farmer's chicken on the right. Shop tours and Streblov boat rides available during the annual meeting.