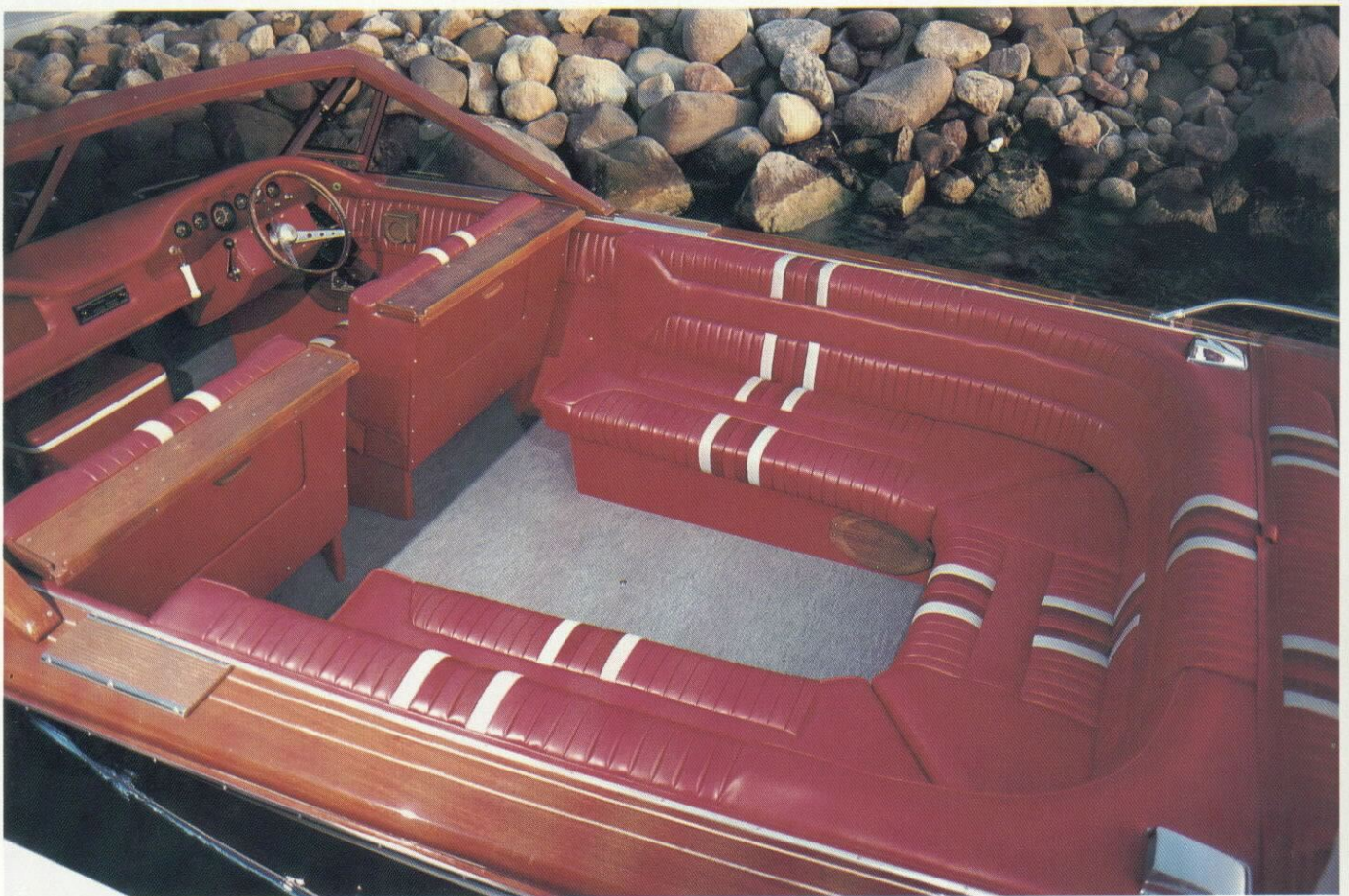




The Streblov concern is a closely knit family operation. **Left:** Members of the group include Randy on the left, his daughter, Kris, in the middle and Randy's father and founder of Streblov Custom Boats, Larry. Randy's wife and son also work in the shop. **Below:** A favorite feature of Streblov buyers is the unique wrap-around seating in the V-drive models. Customers choose or design their own upholstery color combinations. The Streblov plant is located on South County F in Walworth, Wisconsin, near Lake Geneva. Their phone number is (414) 728-6898. **Preceding pages:** Completely adept at handling a Streblov, Kathy Myalls demonstrates a power turn. Accompanying Kathy is Beth Haley (in the Coca Cola swim suit), Jayne Anderson (fuchsia & black) and Augie Shehan (white & black). The same group is also pictured on our front and back covers.



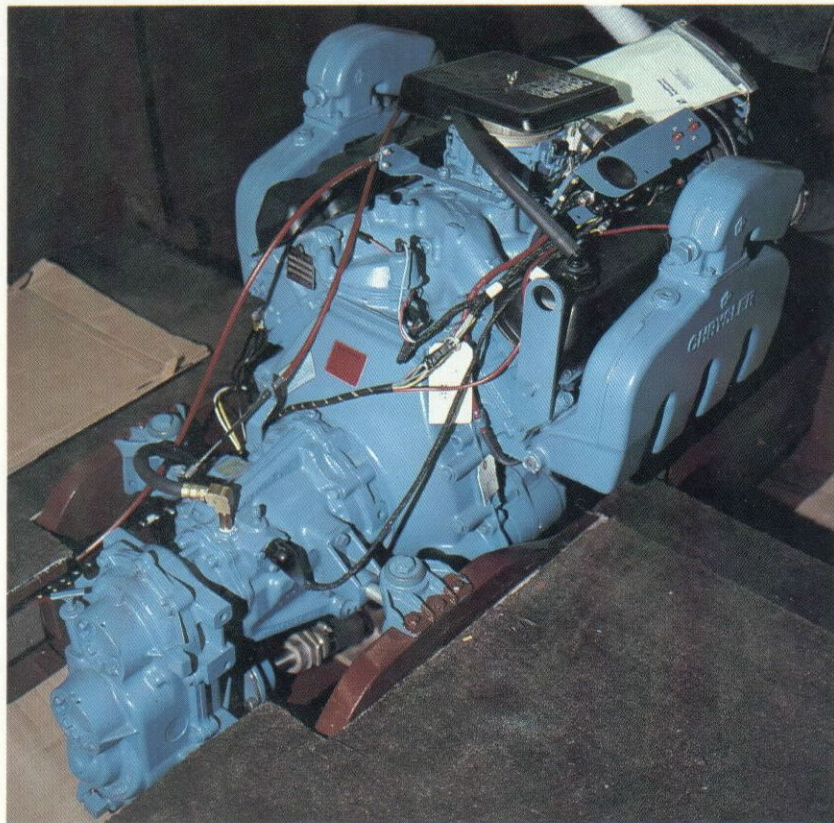


*Text by Jim Wangard
Photos by Norm Wangard*

If it could be said that southern Wisconsin's Lake Geneva is the French and Italian Riviera of the midwest, then it could also be said that Streblov custom boats are the Riva Aristons and Aquaramas of the lake. The name Streblov Custom Boats may not mean much to folks outside of this summer resort community since the biggest sellers of these boats are the Streblovs themselves. On the lake, their boats occupy a disproportionate number of the slips, reflecting the total bulk of the output staying in the region. What accounts for this following?

America's Dairyland may not seem to be particularly noted as a boat-

ing populace, yet Wisconsinites love boating. According to the National Marine Manufacturers Association, Wisconsin ranks 16th in population nationally, but is sixth in boat ownership, spending over \$100 million a year on boats and accessories. Despite the limited season, part of the reason has to be accessibility. Wisconsin has more than 15,000 lakes, 381 miles of shoreline on Lake Michigan, and 292 miles along the Lake Superior shoreline. Wisconsin's lake homes are also owned by a good share of affluent Chicago and Milwaukee area residents who, around the turn of the century, began erecting palatial estates, earning Lake Geneva the name "Newport of the



Posh, comfortable interiors are characteristic of Streblov boats. Shown above are the seating configurations available in Streblov boats: walk-thru seats in the straight drive model in the top boat and wrap-around seating in the V-drive in the foreground boat. Left: Operating at 3,000 rpm, the 340 HP Chrysler engine, equipped with a Borg & Warner V-drive, obtains speeds of 50 mph.

West." Located 75 miles from Chicago and 47 miles from Milwaukee, the 8 mile wide lake is the only expansive body of water around that offers a sporting challenge without the threat to small craft that Lake Michigan poses.

Apparently there is an aura of designer status in owning a boat with the builder's name affixed to the stern, much like the difference in a handbag that is stamped Gucci and one that is not. There is a fair amount of elitence in owning a Streblov since you can count the number built each year on your fingers and toes. Literature from the early eighties did say, "Congratulate yourself! You've just joined one of the most exclusive 'clubs' in the world - the Streblovs." Price of admission for one of the Streblov's four models of 20', 23', 26' and 28' twin engine cuddy cabin ranges from about \$43,000 to \$97,000, commensurate with the amount of required craftsmanship involved.

In the automotive world, work teams have received much favorable press because the same small group of workers follows the car from start to finish, creating a sense of camaraderie, participation, commitment and responsibility for their unit of production. This work team concept is how every Streblov is built, consisting of father, son and grandson. Larry, Randy L. and Randy W. lay the keel, mill the planks, install the wiring, instruments and engine, varnish the hull, install the upholstery, test and send off every boat while getting to know every customer in the process.

This team is the same group a prospective customer will interrupt when walking into the shop. As in the commissioning of a painting, the client talks to the same people who will be executing the *objet d'art*. And as with a painting, patience will be required. It takes about nine or ten weeks of labor to build a boat and a full year may elapse before the order is filled. A refurbished trade-in model may be the route to go while also providing a lower price of entry into the "Geneva Club."

Currently the best selling Streblov

boat is the 23' model ordered with V drive and wrap around seating options, which is the only type of its kind on the market. Hulls can be ordered with straight drives and seating like the Chris-Craft Continental, although the Streblovs say they have only built one so far this year. The 23' Streblov is similar to the 25' Continental with the same 35" forward freeboard and 28" aft freeboard. The Continental's 8'4" beam is only four inches wider, yet at approximately 3,500 pounds, it is 800 pounds lighter than the 4,300 pound Streblov. The top speeds for the Continental and the Streblov 23' are 39-43 and 50 miles per hour respectively.

The Streblov boats have a rugged look to them and that extra 800 pounds of lumber must be the reason for their staying together so well. The Streblovs are able to say that almost every boat is still afloat from the first one built over 35 years ago.

Streblovs have repeat clientele like Fred Littlestein, who at 72 is in competition to own the most Streblovs.

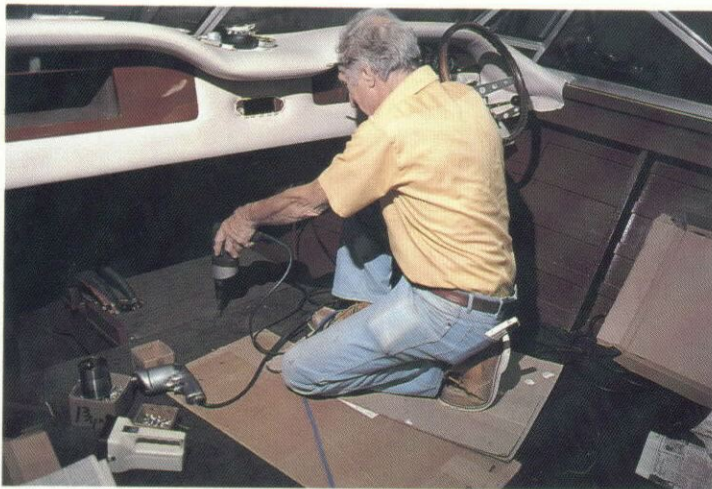
Larry Streblov was educated as a mechanical engineer, among other things, and started the shop as a full-time business in 1951. At the age of eleven, Larry was presented with a rowboat to which he retrofitted a bicycle pedaling gear to a transom mounted paddle wheel for propulsion. As a draftsman in the late forties, Larry was employed by boat and furniture companies.

Like Riva, whose speedboats of interest to us come mostly from the fifties, Streblov is a postwar concern. Larry built his first runabout in 1947, a 20' twin forward cockpit runabout that bore quite a resemblance to the prewar types with tumblehome and all. From this early one-man outfit in a three stall garage, Streblov Custom Boats was born. After just a few years,

in 1954, the company moved to a 7,000 square foot facility in Kenosha. Initially, Larry and his three full-time employees turned out 14' dual cockpit outboard runabouts. By 1956, inboards were coming on line, built upside down on jigs as they are still laid up. Inboards supplanted outboards and thirteen employees were required to build the four models then being offered. Larry's son Randy started his apprenticeship at fourteen years of age and now his son Randy and daughter Kris comprise the four shipwrights. In 1987, the Streblovs made their third move, this time to Walworth, Wisconsin. Although not on the lake, the Streblovs keep a demonstrator berthed on Lake Geneva that serves as their personal boat.

People who have been around boats as long as the Streblovs call them good honest boats, yet in the same breath, some do not feel the styling is quite up to date. The only question is, what is up to date for a traditionally built boat? Surely not the Mediterranean look that characterizes trendy boats like Donzi. Functional design is back in style now and features like the Streblov windshield frame best exemplify this - rugged enough to grab hold of without breaking and no sharp edges to impact against. If the biggest impetus for styling revisions is in a campaign to restimulate consumer buying by creating obsolescence, that is something the Streblovs do not need to do. About a half year's production is sold out. The Streblovs have repeat clientele like Fred Littlestein, who at 72 is in competition to own the most Streblovs. He is currently on his seventh. Potential buyers may have more readily available access to a previously owned Streblov taken in on trade. It may be up to a specialty builder like Mayeas to test the waters with new styling revisions.

The Streblovs uniqueness in the marketplace means they escape the criticism of having taken the name of a once great marque that went defunct decades ago and are now naming new boats after. With a Streblov, you get a boat that is designed and built by



a family owned and operated business over three decades old. Few outfits building a traditional boat today can boast of decades worth of design refinements and the Streblows themselves are careful to the extent that they play up their innovations. They are well aware of the upstarts that have come and, in some instances, gone, so they will tell part of what they are doing, but they will not tell all.

An example of the company's secrecy is their varnishing. Epifanes with Cuprinol is used with some "other stuff" added to it. Of course, Cuprinol is the wood preservative that Chris-Craft used to use. Just what ratio of the ingredients they use are up to a chemist to quantify. The Streblows will tell you just enough to impress you with the research they have done, but not enough to allow you to catch on to what they are doing. The same is true of what ratios they run their V drives at.

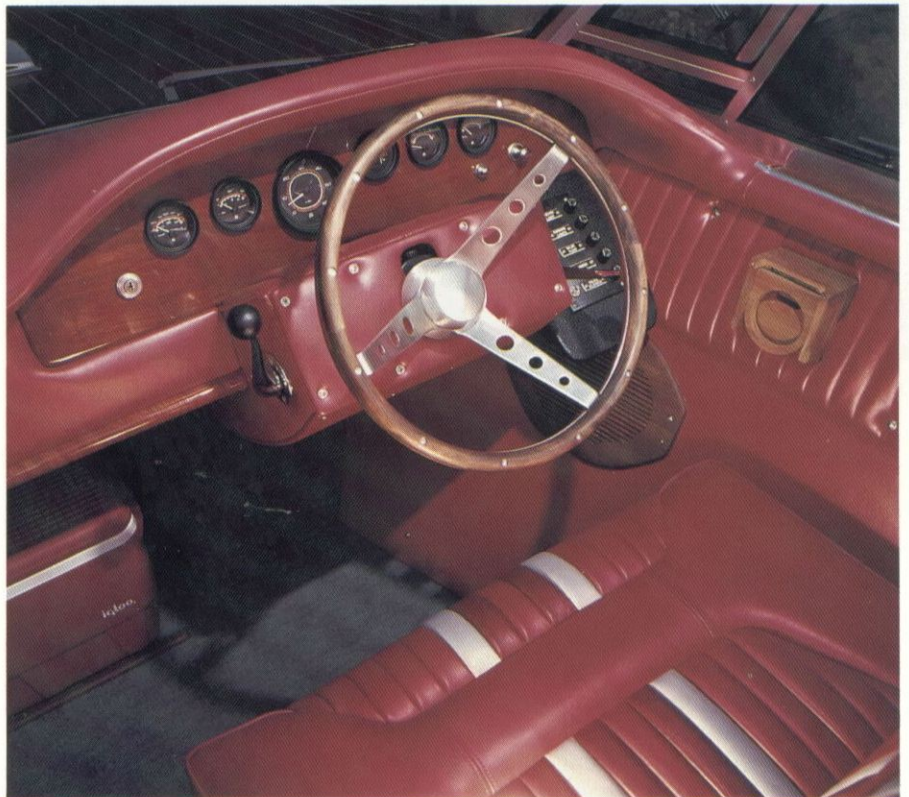
How the boats run is an innovation that dates back to 1968. "I worked on that one for a year trying to figure out how we could come up with a good rise and not lose too much efficiency," Larry said. "All of a sudden the light went on and in 1968, we had a big breakthrough. Now we're looking at 1969 boats comparing them with 1968. Anyone can see the improvement."

Lake Geneva is the test bay where natural elements and manmade wakes create some of the worst chop for a closed body of water. The Streblows are running all the V they can without needing escalators or something that will require going into a different bottom design. According to Larry, "We're

The Streblow Custom Boats business is a hands-on family operation. Shown in the accompanying photos, **from top:** Larry Streblow; Randy, Larry's son; and Kris, Randy's daughter. Customers take satisfaction in knowing that their Streblows are built by Streblows.



Lake Geneva, a short distance from both Milwaukee and Chicago, abounds with Streblow boats. The group above are all customers' boats assembled for the photograph session. A close customer and boat builder relationship has encouraged repeat purchases by numerous Streblow owners through the years. Streblows also service and refinish customers' boats in addition to selling trade-in Streblows. **Right:** Streblow instrumentation is installed according to customer preference. Standard equipment includes an hour meter, bilge blower, electric bilge pump, horns and a swimming ladder.





constantly working on changing. If we don't think we're moving ahead, we simply back off and go back to what we had. So far, we've always been moving ahead."

One change for the better was discontinuing the Chrysler 440 cid. engine that had been their mainstay. For the second year now, they've been using the Ford 460 cid. which is marinized by Chrysler. "It's just an excellent engine," Larry reports. "Very good performer. In fact, we like it better than the 440. They really act like a sports car. They really get in and go. We don't particularly like the Crusader Chevy."

The Ford 460 has been around for close to twenty years and has proven to be very durable in service as a muscle car engine and in trucks in the way the Chris-Craft Hercules were. For top speeds, the Strebblows say they were getting 47 mph with the Chryslers and are now getting 50 mph with the Ford engines.

When the wrap around or horse-shoe or U shaped seating is installed, the engine is mounted well aft and equipped with a V drive. Unlike the heavy midship mounted gearboxes of the Baby Gars, the Strebblow unit is very compact, extending no further than the engine itself. Usually, any additional mechanical accessories like gearboxes seem to be an invitation to additional problems, although the Borg Warner unit is claimed good for several thousand hours. Initially, when the Strebblows were running a 1 to 1 reduction, they were picking up a little gear noise. Now the howling is gone Larry says. "So quiet you do not know it's a V drive." The drive is cooled by a heat exchanger. There is no water intake housing. Oil is carried to a heat exchanger, in other words, an in-line heat exchanger which is an integral part of the unit with water merely passing through the unit.

Performance wise, those boats with the engine well aft have been the fastest. However, since gearboxes usually experience some negligible amount of power loss, it is difficult to prove that the V drives are superior. They do maximize the hull interior, which is

the principle reason why the Streblows are heavy on V drives across the line, with the popularity of the wrap around seating arrangement.

With the feeling of togetherness on the wrap around models, the Streblows are now installing a table as an option. It is a modern set-up that has become very popular and proves that a contemporary classic can successfully blend the new with the old. Might not the Continental look like this if it was still being built in mahogany? No matter how a customer configures the interior, the boat comes with a teak swim ladder, platform and padded upholstered engine hatch for all the same reasons that Rivas feature a prendisole.

Streblow boats are obscure enough that if a perspective customer knows about them, he usually knows about all the other boats on the market also.

When it comes to doing bottoms, the Streblows come across as being from the old school.

Are potential clients impressed most with the wood working or the hand assembly? According to Larry, "They're impressed with everything. They're impressed with the workmanship. One fellow came in here and said, 'Boy, this is a field of art.' Well, it isn't art alone. It is science and art. It's a combination of the two. Without the science, you have nothing.

"All these boats are worked out first on drawings, small drawings. In other words, lines and offsets after we've determined what we want. Then we go from there to lofting. All of our boats are built directly off our lofting, which is on a permanent material and it is heavy plywood because it works. All of our boats are built on that rather than some chincy jig or directly on the master jig itself. We like to tinker around with the boat, so to lesser scientifically orientated people, that's one thing that impresses them.

"The other thing is the workman-

ship and the material we use. It's a combination of everything. In everything we do, we try to use the best of everything there is."

For the Streblows, using the best means having their New Orleans lumber supplier trained to the point where he now takes a very light cut off the rough lumber to see if it's good enough for Streblow boats. Then the lumber is taken down to the thickness the Streblows want.

Once the lumber arrives in Wisconsin, it is still a little thicker than the planking that goes on the boats. This is so the Streblows can test stain the wood and check it for matching of the grain. This is the only way they are readily able to see what the quality of the lumber is for matching the grain, matching color, and texture. For hullsides, they do not use as close a texture as they do on the bottom.

"Durability wise, the two would be the same, but the texture would be different, more dense on the bottom. It may not get the quality of stain and it would not be necessary. We use the more rugged type of material there," Larry explains.

If Streblow topsides seem to have a slightly richer hue than other mahogany boats, it is because they use dark red Philippine mahogany for all their planking. Dark red is harder in texture and richer in figure than light red. It takes as fine a cabinet finish as any cabinet wood.

When it comes to doing bottoms, the Streblows come across as being from the old school, because fiber-glassed and epoxy encapsulated bottoms are unacceptable to them. "We found out way back that you would run into problems with epoxy coatings because it could not breathe. It may be maintenance free for a while, but what about the long-term effect?" Larry emphasizes. What the buyer gets is a natural bottom that does not require soaking or caulking. If this sounds hard to accept, it is probably because no one else is doing natural bottoms on new boats anymore.

"We're going to stay away from any of the glues of that type," says Larry. "Now we do use epoxy glues for any-

thing we need to glue together, for example, framework and where chines meet bottom. That is all epoxy glued and stainless steel thru fastened."

The Streblows build up their bottoms with Douglas fir marine plywood inner layer. Then they lay down a canvas layer like Gar Wood and Chris-Craft did. The only difference is that the canvas is not saturated with white lead or Dolphinite, but rather a fungicidal mastic. The only reason the canvas is used is to absorb the material so that it will not ooze out when the outer planking of Philippine mahogany is fastened down. "We're not counting on the mastic to keep the water out of the boat," says Larry. The mastic is an anti-dry rot inhibitor and not an anti-swelling material. This is the reason why the Streblows say they are still building wood boats. The mastic should last the life of the boat. "Just don't caulk the boat, because if you caulk the bottom, the warranty is off. You would stand a chance of buckling the planks and it's not necessary."

The planks are put on "loose" with a 1/16" inch spacing in case the boat is left in the water. "And if you don't leave it in the water, it doesn't matter," Larry says, "because you could have a seam 1/4" wide and the boat won't leak." Larry came up with the idea in the early sixties and developed it. "Solid marine plywood on a concave type of bottom. You throw that at the guys and they'll go crazy. But it's in the way we do it." Larry describes it as a Streblow Special Bottom.

Larry Streblow bought the plans for the first boat he built because he was unsure of his academic skills being able to bridge the gap to real world applications. He was not too happy with the boat in use on Lake Michigan and it was not long before he developed a problem solving approach to design. Skills that would go on to help win Class E racing heats. Now nearly forty years later, a hobby that started out for fun has become a status symbol, at least on Lake Geneva, that even Donzi can not outdo. You can almost picture the young lady walking out into the water asking, "Where's my Streblow?" 🐾



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