

Hydroplane History

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What Became of Miss Canadas III & IV?

By Harold Wilson (1990)

In 1939, feeling that new, better engines were needed for the 225-cubic-inch class, Charlie Volker and I designed and built a twin overhead-cam racing engine that was very light and developed 225 horsepower at a fantastic speed of 6,000 rpm. The idea was that these engines would be built at the Ingersoll Machine & Tool Company and would be for sale to all interested boat racers. We had one highly satisfactory test run with the engine installed in **Little Miss Canada VI**, then WWII broke out and racing was suspended. After the war the rules governing the 225 class were altered, and the use of overhead cam engines was forbidden. End of project. I sold the prototype Wilson engine to a good Detroit friend, Harold Mistele, and today it has an honoured place in his private marine museum.

[After my retirement in 1949,] (a)ll of the Wilson racing equipment, ten Merlins, the old Miller engine, the tractors and trailers, and the two boats, **Miss Canada III** and **IV**, were sold to Mr. James Thompson, president of Supertest Petroleum, a London, Ontario, firm. **Miss Canada III** was immediately put aside. **Miss Canada IV** was renamed **Miss Supertest (I)**, and with her the two Thompsons, James Sr. and Jr., set out to learn what unlimited hydroplane racing was all about. After a year of racing, the old boat was shelved and a new three-pointer, **Miss Supertest II**, designed by son Jim, was built. With her successor, **Miss Supertest III**, they challenged for, and won, the coveted Harmsworth Trophy. My congratulations to them for bringing the trophy to Canada and the British Commonwealth the thing that I had not been able to do. It is very sad that their skilful and daring driver, Bob Hayward, was later killed when **Miss Supertest II** capsized in a race at Detroit. **Miss Supertest III** is now on permanent display at the Science Centre in Toronto.

Miss Canada III was sold to Bill Morgan of Silver Bay, New York. He rebuilt it to almost original specs, powered it with a Merlin and used it as a show boat at antique boat shows. On two occasions I was asked to drive it for the

crowds at these shows. She was still capable of very high speed. Mr. Morgan then presented **Miss Canada III** to the Marine Museum at Clayton, New York, where it is on exhibit today.

A replica of **Miss Canada III**, authentic in every detail except power, was built by Duke Marine Services in Port Carling, Ontario, in 1986-87 to the express order of my good friend Murray Walker. It was launched at the time of the Antique and Classic Boat Show held at Port Carling in 1987, and I was honoured by being asked to drive the new boat for the filming of a short TV documentary about the fine wooden boats built by the famous Muskoka boatbuilders. The show was headlined by this new **Miss Canada III**. This beautiful racing boat is currently being used by Murray Walker as his "gentleman's runabout." Some runabout! Even with her relatively low power (a 500 horsepower Chrysler Hemi instead of the 1650 Merlin) this replica can do a very creditable 75 mph.

Miss Canada IV, damaged somewhat in a disastrous marina fire at Thompson's boatyard, was scrapped. She was rescued from this unhappy ending by my friend Harold Mistele of Detroit. He restored her to a beautiful, if not completely authentic condition. He asked me to drive her for her first public run after rebuild, at the Gar Wood Memorial Races at the Detroit Yacht Club. For several years he took her to all the antique boat shows, along with his recently rebuilt **Miss America IX**, one of Gar Wood's old racers. Mr. Mistele had always felt that **Miss Canada IV** should be back in Canada as part of Canadian heritage, so in 1986, after some complicated arrangements, **Miss Canada IV** came back home to Muskoka, the property of the Port Carling Museum. She was taken to Duke Marine Services, where she was rebuilt for the second time. This time the rebuilding was authentic in every detail. Even the original designer, Doug Van Patten, was on hand to supervise. The work was completed early in 1988. **Miss Canada IV** was exhibited at three boat shows that summer, in Gravenhurst, Orillia and Port Carling, then she was put in mothballs awaiting completion of the new Marine Hall at the Port Carling Museum, where she will be part of the permanent exhibit of fine wooden boats, all the products of the world-famous boatbuilders of Muskoka.

(Reprinted from Boats Unlimited by Harold Wilson [Boston Mills Press, 1990])

[**Note:** the Port Carling Museum was renamed the Muskoka Lakes Museum in 1989 and is located in Port Carling, Ontario, Canada. It is unclear whether or not **Miss Canada IV** was ever exhibited there; she now resides at the Ingersoll Cheese Factory Museum, Ingersoll Ontario. --LF (1999)]