

THE MERCURY STORY

Back in 1939 Carl Kiekhaefer found himself the owner of a run-down manufacturing plant with little capital, and only his ability and ideas as a nucleus for future success. Several wars later, as head of one of the largest outboard and two-cycle engine producers in the world, he looks back proudly on his effort and prepares to produce still better outboards in the years ahead



A. C. Kiekhaefer, co-founder and first president of the Kiekhaefer Corporation

IT is fitting that Wisconsin, a veritable boating paradise with its thousands of lakes and streams, should be host to some leading manufacturers of the boats and motors necessary to the enjoyment of such recreational delights.

There are days in Wisconsin, though, when thoughts of boating are far removed, when the raw winds of January come blustering in on the icy waves of Lake Michigan and wither the winter-gray landscape with their chilling blasts. Those are times for all true boatmen to be snug in front of the home fires, dreaming of cruises made and travels to come.

On a bitter cold day like that, one January, a man sat hunched in brooding silence, alone in the dark emptiness of an idle plant. Around him were the haunting signs of failure . . . row on row of rusting, broken machine tools, dust and cobweb covered drafting boards, a time clock with frozen

hands, broken windows, radiators with ice in their veins . . . all the derelict remains of a once active business, and now it was his, newly purchased from his unfortunate predecessors. Here was warning in advance of the consequences if he did not possess the vision, the talent, the judgment, the tenacity and the driving urge to succeed where others had failed. Nor was this a favorable time to start any business; war clouds were gathering in Europe. Military preparations were forcing almost daily hikes in the tax rates and the main target was business. If war was to come there would be keen competition for skilled labor and a fledgling business in a farm community could suffer because of its inability to compete, for labor or materials, with old established businesses with long accumulated financial reserves.

The year was 1939 . . . the place was Cedarburg, Wisconsin . . . the man was Carl Kiekhaefer, and in his

hand was a charter granted by the State of Wisconsin authorizing "the Kiekhaefer Corporation to engage in the manufacturing business."

The grim prospect of that semi-ruin and the enormity of the job to be done may have weighed upon his mind, but it neither depressed nor discouraged him. On the contrary, this was a dream come true, a chance, at least, to begin translating the pent-up ideas into mechanical reality, to transform stored up mental blueprints into flawlessly designed and produced machinery.

Carl Kiekhaefer had left the comfort and security of a job as chief engineer at a leading manufacturer of electric clutches, brakes and magnetic separators. That was a business he knew from the ground up, having started as a fledgling draftsman and worked his way up to chief engineer. Now that the Kiekhaefer Corporation was organized surely that seemed the way to point; certainly it was obvious that far more "know how" could be put into a line of Kiekhaefer designed electrical equipment than in any other business.

But any new business requires operating capital. Funds must be available to start the wheels of industry turning . . . money for payrolls, material, heat and light. And while Carl Kiekhaefer had organized the corporation and acquired the physical facility, the treasury of the company held precious little cash for anything but the bare necessities.

Included in the assets of the defunct company which previously occupied the newly acquired premises of the



Fishing enthusiasts in this 14-foot Norseman runabout find their Mark 5 Mercury ideal

Kiekhaefer Corporation, was a stock of outboard motors that had been built but rejected by the purchaser for a very good reason—they wouldn't run. Contact with the buyer indicated that he would accept delivery if the engines could be made operable. Here was the opportunity Kiekhaefer was looking for, here was the chance to acquire operating capital with little expenditure other than in talent and energy.

Now the pattern of growth of the company begins to unfold. Kiekhaefer made the engines run—the buyer accepted them—reports from the field were enthusiastic—the buyer ordered more—and the die was cast. To this day, Kiekhaefer has never pursued the tentative plans he made on that January day in 1939. Outboard motors and light-weight, high output air-cooled engines for specialized applications have been his company's products ever since.

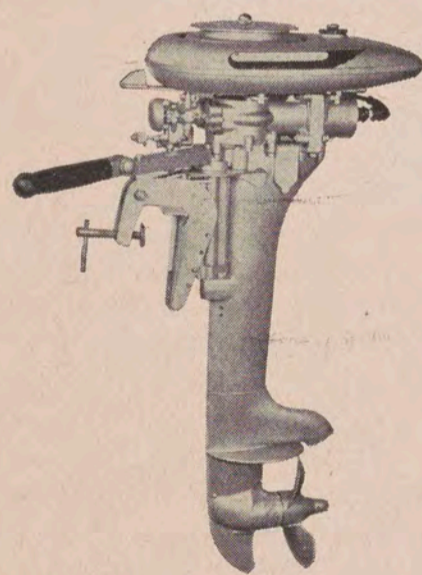
By late '39 and early '40 the Kiekhaefer Corporation was beginning to roll; in addition to the private name for a mail order house, the company introduced its own brand name, and the Mercury Outboard Motor was exhibited at the New York Boat Show for the first time. Against the well entrenched competition of the time they didn't set the world on fire, but the very first Mercury models did incorporate a number of basic engineering features that have since been adopted by the entire industry, and served notice on the competition that this was a manufacturer with new and workable ideas, capable of improving the quality of his product.



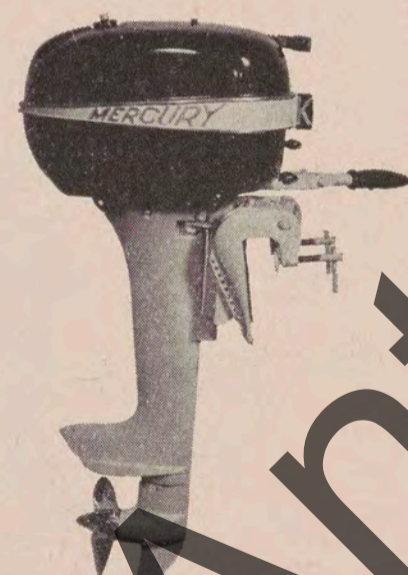
All Photographs by Kiekhaefer Aeromarine Motors, Inc.
For thrilling speed, a fast runabout such as this 14-foot Yellow Jacket is driven along with ease by a Mark 20 Mercury



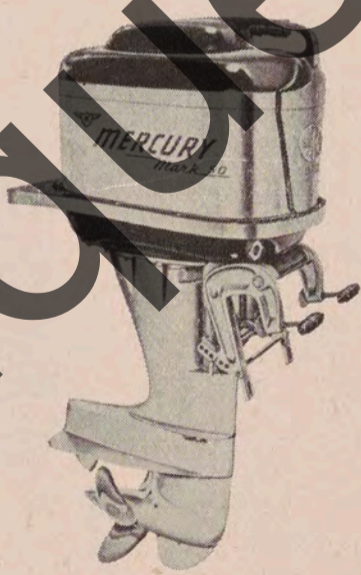
One of the earliest model Mercury twin-cylinder outboard engines undergoing a service test in Mercury pioneer days



One of the earliest single-cylinder Mercury engines bears the marks of the fine streamlining which has been carried on through the last 15 years



The well-known Mercury Lightning outboard engine 10 h.p. which did much to establish the company's reputation for reliability and power

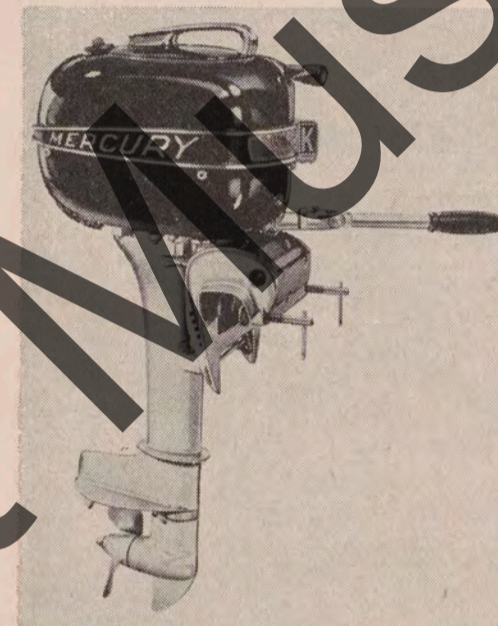


The latest Mark 50 of 40 h.p., to be introduced in 1954, will set new standards of speed and power for outboard cruisers and runabouts

The rubber-rotor water pump was perhaps the greatest improvement of the pre-war era. It ended the days when one grain of sand could cause water-pump failure, and was the first in a long and continuing series of technical improvements aimed at making outboard motors safer and more reliable.

Another early innovation of Mercury Outboards was the one-piece, drive-shaft housing. Outboards of the time were a plumber's nightmare. A tube housed the drive shaft, another tube or hose carried the cooling water to the powerhead, and another emerged from the muffler to carry down the exhaust gases. The very first Mercury had a one-piece, cast-aluminum drive shaft housing that contained all three of these in sturdy hydro-dynamically correct shape.

These new features, as well as the fresh, new-look of the Mercury Outboard, attracted considerable attention and the nucleus of a distributing organization was signed up. Orders began to roll in . . . a demonstration would sell a Mercury engine then as now . . . and Kiekhaefer hurried back to arrange for expanding production. The Mercury Outboard was launched and ready to roll.



The Mercury Mark 7, a 7 1/2 h.p. twin, meets the needs of a wide range of boats

starter made its first appearance at the '41 Show; the same simple, magnetically actuated starter in use today.

Then, in March of '41, disaster struck. The war lords of Europe were already at their evil task and the demand for aluminum for defense necessitated the L 80 Government order restricting the use of aluminum to essential items for civilian and military use. To a young company without a broad base or a complete line of large outboards, this situation could have been the end.

Two courses were open to management, and Kiekhaefer never hesitated. Rather than turn his production facility into an engineering job shop and comfortably "ride out" the war, he was determined to make an even greater contribution. With the accent on light, portable high-performance equipment, surely the Military could use the engineering facilities of the Kiekhaefer Corporation to greater advantage. In Washington he learned of a great need for a light-weight, high-output, aircooled, rugged engine to power a chain saw for the Corps of Engineers. An engine was to be selected from the results of tests to be conducted within six weeks. None of the then available engines met the requirements.

Back home in Cedarburg, Kiekhaefer and his staff met the problem head on. Five weeks is not enough time to design, build and test a completely new engine. Impossible! Yet when the tests were held on schedule it was a Kiekhaefer-built Mercury engine that won the laurels, against a field of six competitive engines, and throughout World War II the Army bought Mercury engines to power its vitally needed chain saws . . . and the company became a mass producer of power chain saws. As in the outboard field later, it blazed a trail of quality, performance, originality of design, and built a reputation hard to equal. Mercury engines are still the by-word of loggers around the world. While the air-

Mercury Outboards were again exhibited at the New York Boat Show in 1941 and the Show issue of MoToR BOATING for that year carries a story about the thirty new improvements incorporated in the '41 models, and comments—in particular—on the sleek, simplified under-water structure already typical of Mercury. It also describes in detail the value of the Rotex pump, particularly to fishermen and clambers who appreciate its ability to pump at low r.p.m. and with a low-level water inlet. The Magna-Pul automatic rewind

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cooled engine was being tooled for mass production the company built thousands of 6 h.p. outboards for the Navy.

Before the war was to end, the Army and Navy E flag with four stars was to wave proudly over the company plant and Mercury engines were to serve with distinction in every theater of war. From the blazing, humid jungles of the South Pacific to the mountains of Italy, Mercury engines cut bridge timbers for the engineers, pumped water, ran compressors for camouflage spray units, powered generators for the Air Corps, powered hoists for the mountain warfare divisions, powered radio-controlled target drone aircraft for training aerial gunners plus a host of other vital military chores and won the commendation of all who used them for their rugged reliability under the most adverse operating conditions.

Branch after branch of the Services found new uses for these sturdy engines, and before the war was over more than fifty different sizes and types had been produced, ranging from small 2 1/2 h.p. single-cylinder grinder engines to 90 cubic inch radio controlled target aircraft power plants. Every conceivable style and type of light-weight, 2-cycle engine was produced, and Kiekhaefer and his engineering group emerged from the war period recognized as one of the outstanding two-cycle engine authorities in the nation.

Peace in late '45 did not bring about an immediate reconversion to Mercury Outboard Motors at the Kiekhaefer plant. The Military insisted upon the completion of several contracts calling for production of the target drone aircraft engines, so despite the pressing demand for civilian products, primarily Mercury Outboards, military production had to continue. One after another the new post-war outboards appeared on the market, all tooled for high production and obviously prepared to capture a lion's share of the tremendous post-war market. Prewar distributors who had watched the progress of Mercury during the war found it hard to understand the lack of outboard production, but the company had no alternative.

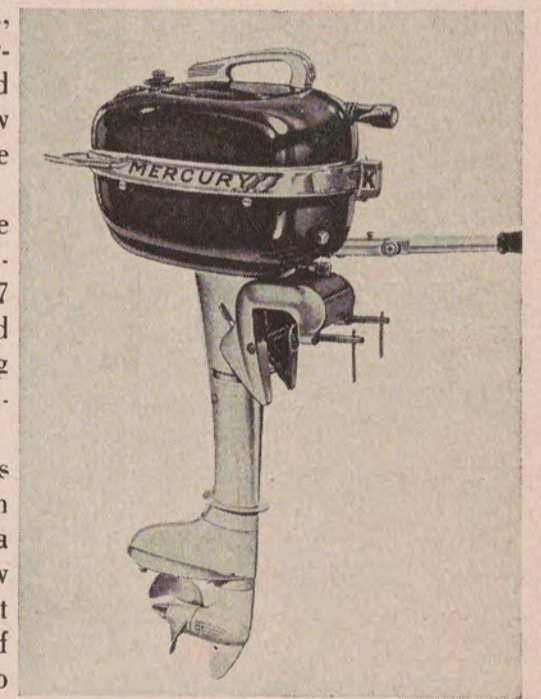
As a result, 1946 was a rather lean year—from a production and sales standpoint—but a fruitful one for the Kiekhaefer engineering group. For they were busy . . . preparing the avalanche of green tanked Mercury units that hit the market in '47. And, when the all new Mercury line was introduced at the New York Show in 1947, the buying spree was on.

Spearheaded by the new 20 cubic inch Lightning model, the 1947 line firmly established Mercury as a leading contender in the outboard field.

The Lightning was new from top to bottom in appearance, had a new starting ease, a new horsepower to weight ratio, new in scores of features too numerous to mention. This was truly the embodiment of many of Kiekhaefer's dreams of what an outboard

should be . . . dreams that began in those early prewar years . . . that were carefully nurtured during the long war years when all his talents were given to the development of military engines. But it was only the fore-runner of greater things to come.

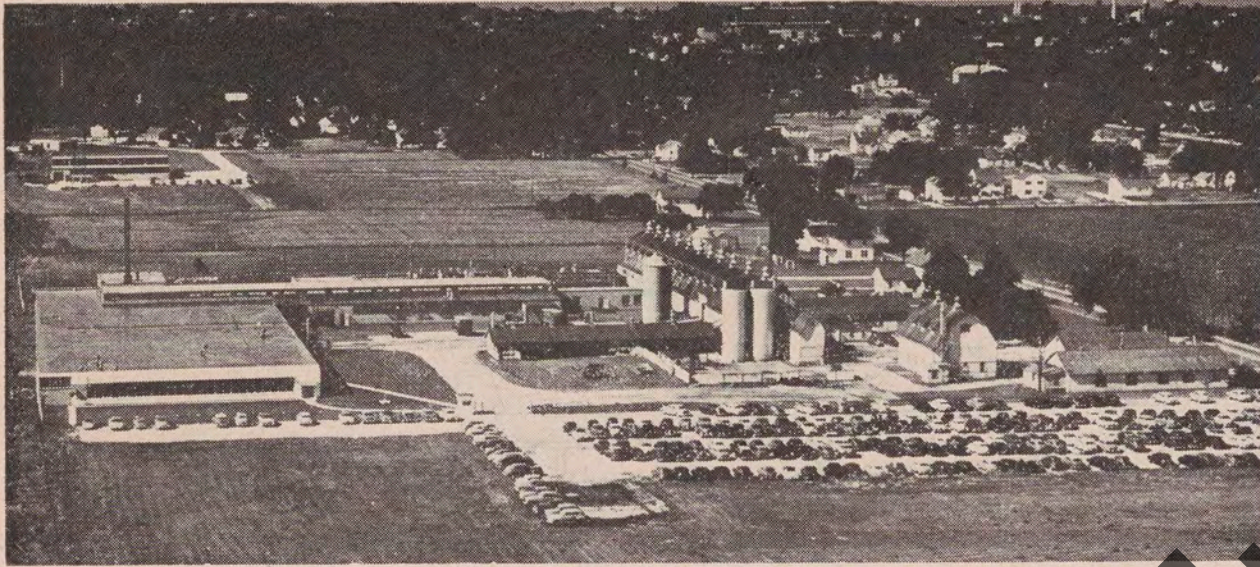
This period, too, marked a time of great physical expansion by the company. The property at Fond du Lac was acquired and addition after addition went up to keep pace with a growing demand. The original plant at Cedarburg had been expanded again until the physical limits had been reached. Development laboratories were active in both plants and a year round testing station was established in Florida. Always, everywhere, the accent was on engineering and research. . .



The Mercury Mark 5 has push-button neutral in the handle so that motor idles while fishing

The year 1949 saw the introduction of the Thunderbolt model, a four-cylinder, in-line, alternate-firing, two-cycle engine . . . lighter in weight, smoother, faster and easier starting than previous large outboards.

The Korean incident in 1950 threw another block at the progress of the company; production was restricted right at the time when the demand for Mercury was at its peak. And once again the Military called upon Kiekhaefer for specialized, high-performance, light-weight engines. Even as this is written after the Korea truce, production of the target drone engines continues.



Kiekhaefer facilities at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

The year 1950 brought sadness in another form to the Kiekhaefer Corporation. A. C. Kiekhaefer, co-founder of the company and its first president, passed on. Although he had not been active full time in the management of the company, A. C. somehow had come to exemplify to all who knew him the sturdiness, faith and character of the company, and his friends were legion. His passing meant that more of the management duties had to be shouldered by Carl Kiekhaefer.

Mercury advertising slogans were becoming pretty well known around the world. Of all the catchy phrases that really meant something, the term "Full Jeweled" power was by far the most effective. Since 1947 all Mercury engines have been built with anti-friction ball and roller bearings on all revolving parts . . . on crankshaft main bearings, driveshaft and propeller shaft bearings and connecting rod crank pins and wrist pins.

Other important safety features developed by Mercury include the waterproof magneto, waterproofed spark plugs, forged-steel connecting rods, multiple-disc propeller clutches, multiple-disc co-pilot clamp, Uni-Cast one-piece gear case, drop-forged aluminum clamp and swivel brackets and the backfire proof Vari-Timed reed valves.

Indeed, Kiekhaefer engineering and research has paid off; paid off in better, lighter, safer and more powerful outboards for the public.

The Mercury line for 1954, the 15th Anniversary Line, features four new models designed to carry on the tradition of quality and performance. Spearheading the group is the Mark 50, a 40 h.p., four-cylinder, in-line motor weighing only 110 pounds. With its integrated remote controls, forward, neutral and reverse, remote fuel

tank and "Hi-Thrust" lower unit geared for power efficiency with heavy loads and smart compact styling it is ideal for outboard cruisers, big fast family runabouts, water skiing and commercial workboat applications.

The Mark 5, with push-button neutral, is the lightest model in the line. Weighing a scant 40 pounds, this high performance little 5 h.p. alternate twin has established itself as a favorite of fishermen because of its power and reliability.

The Mark 7, 7½ h.p. alternate twin has long been the choice of fishermen on bigger lakes with heavier boats. It has a record of years of rugged trouble-free service.

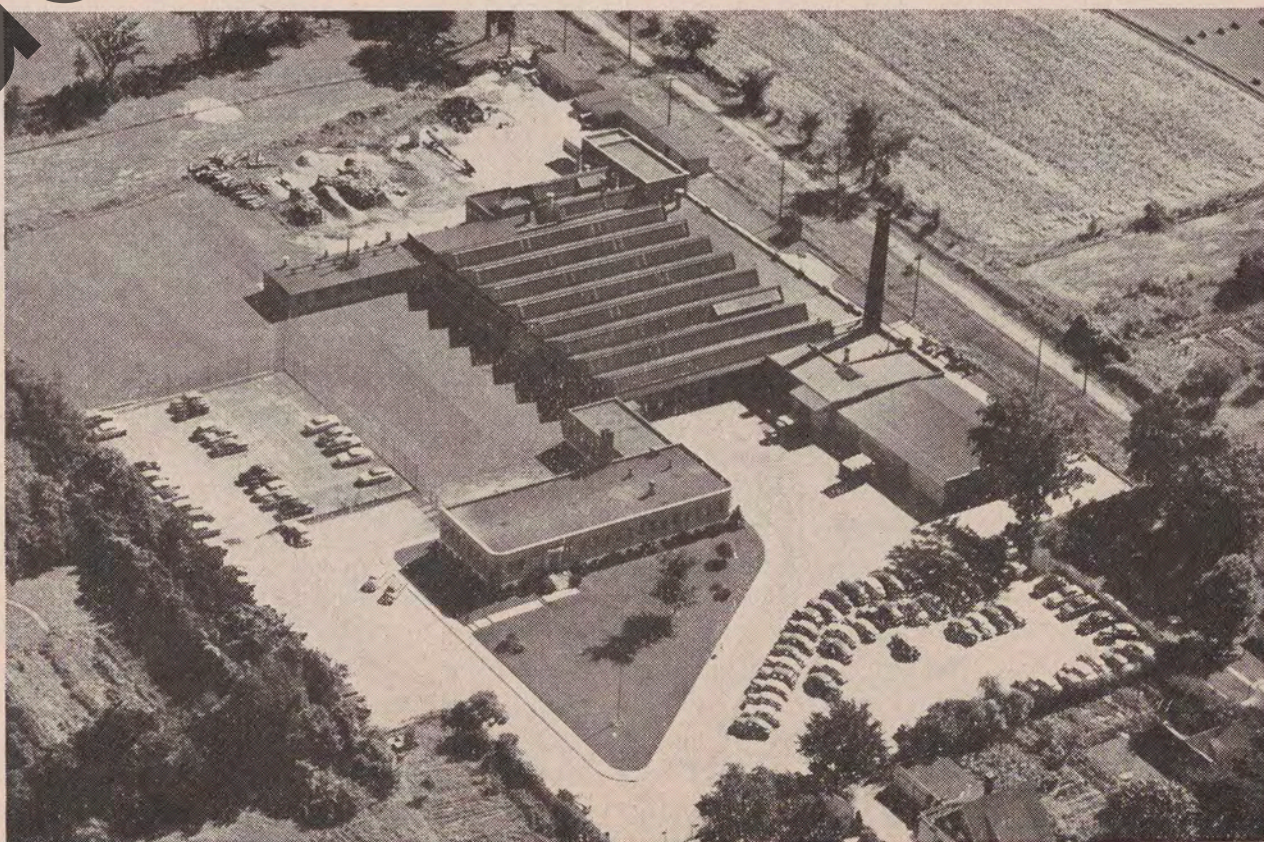
The Mark 20, a 16 h.p. alternate twin, is a versatile engine with a speed range from the slowest trolls up to a thrilling 30 m.p.h. pace. Light, compact, powerful and quiet, the Mark 20 is popular with fishermen, water skiers, workboat operators and just plain pleasure boat riders.

An additional model for the stock boat racers and the high speed enthusiast will be available in March of '54. The new Mark 20H, with the hydro-short drive shaft housing and the famous Quicksilver gear case, is a next step in the continuing development of the 20 cubic inch engine. For the Class B race driver, the new Mark 20H offers tremendous new acceleration, new higher top speed—from 4 to 6 miles faster—and convenient new controls.

Progress and growth possible only in a free enterprise country like the United States has been accomplished by the Kiekhaefer Corporation. When an infant company with meager financing can, by the quality of its product and the determination, talent and energies of its management, rise up to become one of the leaders in a fiercely competitive industry, in the short span of fifteen years, through one hot war and one cold one . . . truly this is America.



The Mercury Mark 20 has reverse gear, neutral and remote fuel tank



Kiekhaefer Corporation plant at Cedarburg, Wisconsin