

# Johnson CD Series - Part 2

## Report & Photos: Adam Gibb

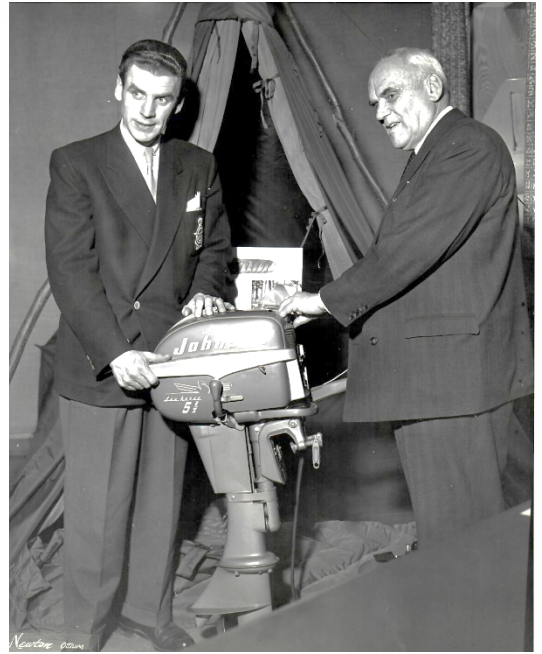
In the previous installment of the CD series, I covered the early motors from 1954-55. In this article, I will cover the 1956 to 1958 models.

Going back to 1954 & 55, the CD series was the signature motor for Johnson's marketing and advertising thrust that was focused on "QUIET", "Purrs Like a Kitten", "The worlds first really Quiet Outboard Motor." The claim was supported largely by Johnsons new "Suspension Drive" which absorbed the vibration created by the motor and prevented it from vibrating the boats transom. The CD also had resonating-type silencers in the air intake and in the exhaust relief, thus dampening sound at the source.

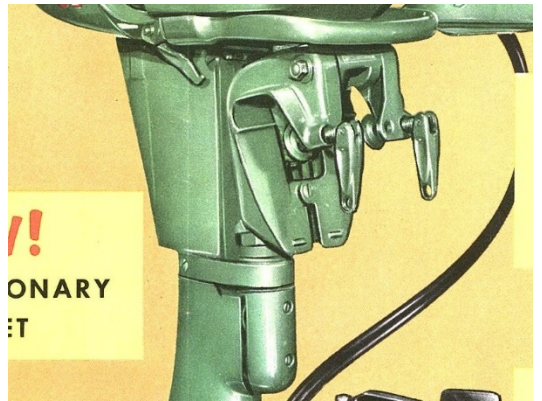
Johnson's innovation was recognized in the United States in 1954 when the Johnson CD 5 ½ became the first outboard motor ever to win a Citation Award from the National Noise Abatement Council. In Canada, in 1955, the Johnson CD 5 ½ received recognition from the Ministry of Trade and Commerce for Engineering Excellence. The presentation was made in Ottawa by C. D. Howe, the Federal Minister of Trade & Commerce.

The midsection of the 5-1/2 hp CD motors was further improved for the 1956 model year. Johnson made similar changes on the 10 hp QD between 1954 and 1955. The 1954-55 CD, "Suspension Drive" used springs to suspend the motor in the transom bracket and reduce the vibration transferred to the boat. This spring suspension was replaced by rubber shock mounts in 1956 and would become the standard for the CD and all other motors going forward. Three rubber mounts were used between the top of the driveshaft housing and the carry handle. Two more mounts were placed on the sides of the driveshaft housing, just above the water pump. The mounts were placed under clamshell style castings that are seen on most OMC and other motors for several decades. Moving the mounts to the sides of the housing rather than the front as found on previous designs gave the motor more stability and reduced the tendency for it to move around when applying load or shifting gears.

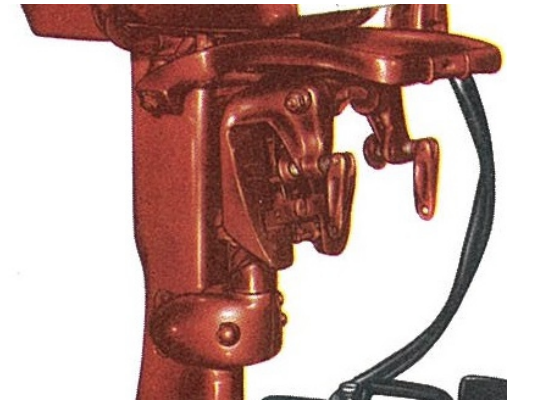
The carrying handle was redesigned to incorporate a mounting point for remote steering connection. This eliminated the need for an adaptor kit and became the standard for all motors in the future.



L- R: OMC Canada Executive Russ Bear with Award Winning Johnson CD and C.D. Howe, Minister of Trade & Commerce



1955 "Suspension Drive" utilizing vertical springs



1956 "Suspension Drive" using rubber mounts, 3 upper & 2 lower, inside clamshell casting

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For the 1956 model year, OMC hired internationally renowned industrial designer Brooks Stevens to completely redesign the shrouds and colour schemes for all outboards manufactured by OMC. This included all Johnson Sea Horse models for 1956. The two shades of green that had been used in the 10 years since the end of WWII were replaced by Stevens' new burgundy colour he dubbed "Holiday Bronze".

The 1956 Johnson full line catalogue reflected Johnson's marketing strategy now emphasizing styling as well as technology and reliability. The cover claimed, "The New Bronzed Sea-Horses, America's most beautiful outboards." The cover photograph was shot in Copenhagen harbour with the "Little Mermaid" sculpture in the foreground and three beautiful women in the boat. The iconic and beautiful 1956 Johnson Javelin, also designed by Stevens, is hardly visible.

Johnsons new approach in marketing and advertising is summed up best in this one line from the 1956 catalogue copy, "Holiday Bronze now does for the appearance of your boat what Johnson quality has always done for its performance."

The colour scheme did change for the 1957 Javelin but "Holiday Bronze" remained as the signature colour for all other Johnson models thru the 1958 model year.

1956 motors were Holiday Bronze with Cream wings on the cowling and trim around the control panel. The motor had stamped metal emblems on the side of the cowl to indicate the horsepower. The tiller handle grip was black and carried over from the 1954-55 models. A ribbed segment was added to the rear of the cowling, between the two side wings. This served as a handle to help with tilting of the motors.

1957 motors were still Holiday Bronze with Cream wings and front trim. The top portion of the cowl was also painted Cream. This was the first year for the oval Sea Horse medallion on the front of the hood. The 1957 medallion had vertical lines on the face. A new white tiller grip with four ribs was designed for 1957.

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**1957 Johnson CD 5 ½**

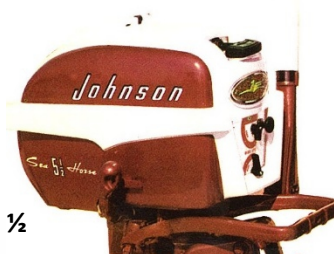


**1956 Johnson Full Line Catalogue Cover.  
It was all about beauty & style.**



**SEA-HORSE 5 ½ HORSEPOWER**

If there ever was a motor bearing the name "fisherman's friend" the 5½ is it! This was the pioneer of all *quiet* outboards . . . and a motor that's been takin' 'em there and bringin' 'em back for years! When you talk fishin', you're talking about the great 5½! This motor is Johnson through and through, with superbly dependable performance. Slip-clutch protection, full-range silencing, full gear shift, Twist-Grip Speed Control, easy manual starting, up-and-off motor hood, and fitted for Ship-Master Remote Control. Equipped with 4¼-gallon Mile-Master Fuel System.



1958 was the final year for Holiday Bronze. The motors had a Cream cowling with bronze wings and front trim. The lower section remained bronze. The 1958 color was more of a copper color than the 1956 and 1957 versions. The Sea Horse medallion on the front of the hood has horizontal stripes.

There were no major mechanical changes between 1956 and 1958. The changes made on the 1956 model were enough of a modernization over the 1955 model, that I believe OMC was confident in simply making cosmetic changes for the next two model years to help sell motors. Those years were well into the horsepower race between manufactures and bigger boats were becoming more common. I believe that efforts were focused on developing the larger horsepower motors while the 5-1/2hp CD remained a good seller for fishermen and small boat owners.

The Bronze and Cream CD series motors are certainly not rare or even uncommon. They were produced in huge numbers and are often found at swap meets or yard sales. While they don't have a strong collector value, they remain a great running engine and are enjoyable to run. These motors are excellent conversation starters at club displays and boat shows. Many people have fond memories of a "red and white" Johnson that someone had when they were young. These model years are what come to mind for many people when they think of classic era Johnson motors. They are easy to service, parts are available, and they are a great way to introduce people to our hobby.



The choice of fishermen everywhere is the famous Sea-horse 5½, a motor that has broken record after record, year after year. It was the first small motor to boast big-motor features, such as full gearshift . . . it was the pioneer of all *quiet* outboard motors, and thus changed the entire sport of outboarding in just one summer. Then it became the *most popular outboard in history* . . . preferred by more people than any outboard model ever made!

It's quiet, smooth as silk . . . light enough to go anywhere . . . is remarkably sturdy, and outstanding for dependability. So easy to handle, so comfortable to use . . . so easy to start . . . so suited to the fisherman's needs.

For 1958, a new premium automotive paint makes this handsome Sea-horse look better longer. Try it this summer when you want a famously quiet fishin' partner!

**1958 Johnson CD 5 ½**