

The Haunting By: Rob Abbott

I was warned. I was told it was an abomination against engineering. I should have listened.

I run a 1957 Evinrude *Big Twin* on a similar vintage cedar strip runabout. Despite having a propeller shop re-pitch and cup my 3-blade prop as much as it could, the motor turns at about 5,000 rpm at full throttle. I have a really nice high-pitched 2 blade bronze prop that brings the revs down to about 4,800, but I worry that the inertia of that heavy bronze prop is going to damage the clutch dog. So I picked up a 2-blade aluminum prop from my local marina's junk pile that I estimate to be from a mid 60's era Mercury in the 50 hp range. An aircraft mechanic friend modified it to fit on my *Big Twin*. Time for a test run. Merc prop on an Evinrude!!!

My *Big Twin* has been a very reliable runner for 20 years; I don't think it's ever let me down. So I wasn't worried about the motor when I launched the boat, with its modified Mercury prop, at the local landing. As always, it started right up and after idling away from the dock I opened it up and it took off. My GPS said I was doing 43 kph and my tachometer read 5,000 rpm, so it really wasn't an improvement, but it was working fine until I got to the middle of the lake. The motor suddenly over-reved

and the boat slowed. The prop had fallen off. I'd told my friend to make a stainless shear pin, but his boss told him to use brass. I guess it just couldn't handle the torque.



Mercury prop on 1957 Evinrude "Big Twin"



Bitter rivals, Carl Kiekhaefer (left) and Ralph Evinrude. (right), in a rare photo together. The occasion, Charlie Strang's (center) retirement. Strang held senior executive positions at both Mercury & OMC during his long career.

Fortunately, I'd brought a spare prop and tools, but there was no way I was going to put the spare prop on leaning over the *Big Twin* in the middle of the lake.

So, I broke out the paddle and headed to the nearest dock. After about 20 minutes of paddling, I reached the dock where, after a rest, I tied up and installed the spare prop. When I went to start the motor, it wouldn't start.

I was yanking and yanking on that cord like a pubescent boy with a Playboy. I noticed a lot of gas on the water so I figured it must have flooded with the motor having been tilted while paddling, so I checked the plugs only to find they were dry.

Some more yanking and it fired up; sort of. It was running rough on one cylinder and when I went to adjust the throttle, I got a big shock; literally. Then flames shot out from under the hood. At that point I decided to give up, walked to the stranger's cottage who's dock I had marooned on, and interrupted their dinner to ask for a tow back to the landing. Peter, my new friend, was very kind to agree and quickly finished his meal.

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While walking back to the dock, I got to thinking, I'd left one of the spark plug leads off. So I put it back on and eventually got the motor to start. So I went back to the cottage and told Peter his services would not be needed. I eventually got the motor started again and headed towards the landing. However, the motor was running well so I decided to turn around and head back out into the lake to check the speed with my old prop and, to fiddle with the high speed jet. I was back to where my Merc prop had fallen off when the motor just died again. I yanked and yanked risking a third heart attack when I noticed the low speed jet laying in the bilge.

I put the jet back in and adjusted it to slightly richer than its usual spot, but as many times as I yanked between periods of rest, it would not start. After another 20 minute paddle back to my new friend, Peter's, dock, I interrupted his desert to ask for a tow. Peter obliged and gave me the tow of shame back to the landing while I pointlessly continued to pull on the starter cord. While loading the boat onto the trailer, I tripped over a rock and fell under the water. My car seats got soaked on the drive home. I think the spirits of Carl Kiekhaefer & Ralph Evinrude exacted retribution on me for trying to put a Mercury part on an Evinrude motor.