



**GARLINGTON LANDEWEER
61 EXPRESS**

THE STUFF OF LEGEND

By Marilyn DeMartini

Nestled between the St. Lucie River and Indian River Lagoon on Florida's east coast, Stuart is known as "The Sailfish Capital of the World." The city, with a history built upon commercial and recreational fishing, stands in contrast to its luxurious neighbors of Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami. Stuart's legacy is so intertwined with angling that a 19-foot-tall sailfish sculpture stands prominently downtown. While Rybovich and Merritt built boats in Palm Beach County, commercial fishermen settled in Stuart, enjoying the quiet countryside and more economical real estate. In 1917, charter Capt. Addison A. Whiticar brought his family to Stuart via steamship and train, and his son, Curt Whiticar, went on to build a 33-foot fishboat that started a legacy. The custom sportfish builder retired at 75 after turning Whiticar Boat Works over to his son and nephew. Today, the yard has locations in Stuart and nearby Fort Pierce.

Other family-owned custom sportfish builders, including American Custom Yachts, followed suit. Dominick LaCombe has been building boats since 1984 and now runs his Stuart yard with his brother, son and daughter. They have a 68-foot sportfish build in progress.

A whole support economy of electrical, carpentry, paint, instrument, upholstery and mechanical companies grew around the builders, so if it's marine-related, you'll find it in Stuart. "The people here are warm and friendly — anglers help each other out," says Brent King, owner of Fish Heads at Sail Fish Marina. "On any day, I have all the Captain of the Year award-winners at my counter. I can't believe the fishing talent that we have here."

The sportfishing boats that those captains — and many serious anglers — covet have a classic appeal, with their broad bows, flowing lines, outstanding woodwork, mezzanines, roomy aft decks, towers and fighting chairs. And when it comes to customization at Stuart yards, just about anything goes. "You don't go to school for this stuff," says Rich Scheffer Sr., who founded Tribute Boats in 1992 as a tribute to legendary Stuart builder Jim Smith. "You might study the topics, but you learn hands-on from building boats over the years."

Here are a few other builders that have done just that — the heart of Stuart's boatbuilding community.

Stuart claims to be the Sailfish Capital of the World.



The Gamefisherman 46 comes from a yard that does custom builds to 65 feet.



GAMEFISHERMAN BOAT YARD

Mike Matlack came into custom building after returning from the Navy and going to work with his father, who had started a boatbuilding company in Stuart. Matlack then worked with Dick Bertram at his repair yard and later went to Rybovich. When Rybovich merged with Spencer, Matlack left to start his own firm in 1987, brokering and building boats. Having established relationships with many clients, he found that when people could not find a production boat to their liking, they started looking at custom boats with a singular purpose: fishing.

Naval architecture firm Erwin Gerard Designs has helped to create an international following for Gamefisherman's 34- to 48-foot express, flybridge and walkaround boats, with custom builds up to 65 feet. Gamefisherman boats have an S sheer instead of the typical sportfish drop sheer, so their lines flow smoothly.

While much of the construction previously was done in-house, Matlack now has a small crew, with subcontractors doing electrical, upholstery and cabinetry work. He is building a 50-footer powered by 1,000-hp Caterpillar C12.9 diesels. Its bell-shaped bottom is designed to give the boat additional lift. Tricel core with teak veneers keep the interiors lightweight yet luxurious.

"People who know what they are looking at know our boats," Matlack says of the Gamefisherman profile. "Our customers know."



Stuart has old fashioned charm and a deep fishing heritage.



L&H's 33-footer was born of a client's desire for the perfect sportfish.

L&H BOATS

Richard Garlington passed his experience to some young boatbuilders, including Glenn Muller, an avid New Jersey fisherman who worked on commercial boats in New England before attending the Florida Institute of Technology. He worked as a carpenter under Garlington and, as a backyard project, built his own 30-foot sailboat. After living aboard with his wife in the Bahamas for a year, the couple faced dwindling finances that led Muller back to Garlington, where his experience in wood and fiberglass kept him busy.

In the early 1990s, customer John Meyer wanted to build his perfect 33-foot sportfish. Muller signed a three-year contract with Meyer's company, L&H Boats. Word of mouth led to sales: L&H is now on hull No. 36 of the 33-footer. Meyer eventually sold the company to Muller, who today juggles building new boats with restoring classics, including Bertrams.

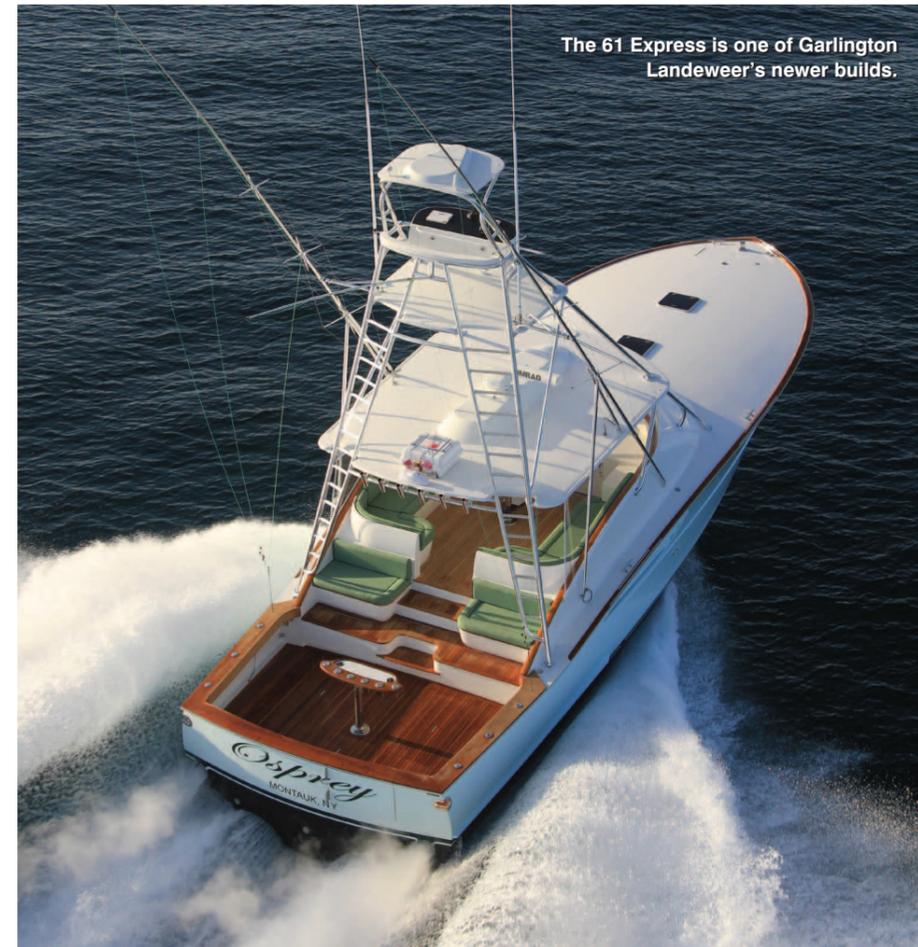
"L&H had the first walkaround; now everyone has them," Muller says. "The 33 makes you feel like you're in a bigger boat, and the cost of operation is remarkable, with diesel engines using less than a gallon of [fuel] per hour. We only build one or two boats a year, and there is no rushing or cutting corners."

Muller has made mechanical and electrical improvements, but there is no infusion or vacuum-bagging. The hulls are hand-laid using vinylester resins. "We don't build an ultralight boat. It runs better as a heavier boat. It's more stable," he says.

A 43-footer is in the works as the latest 33 is readied for delivery, but L&H is flexible and has even done a one-off 17½-foot flats boat. "It doesn't make us a lot of money, but we do a couple of big custom projects, renovations and keep building the 33," Muller says.

ROSA IRENE BETANCOURT 7/ALAMY STOCK (TOP LEFT)

The 61 Express is one of Garlington Landeweer's newer builds.



TOM CASSIDY/ALAMY STOCK; DREW WRIGHT (FROM TOP)

GARLINGTON LANDEWEER

In 1980, Richard Garlington engaged a U.S. Navy submarine designer to help him create a sportfish hull with a soft ride that could handle rough seas. Garlington's reputation for building tough tournament boats caught the attention of Dutchman Peter Landeweer and his family, who had brought their Dutch-built aluminum boat to the United States to fish. The Landeweers purchased the company in 1993 and transformed the cold-molded boat, building the first composite 61, along with a 44 and a 49.

Having recently delivered a 61 Express and a 49 Walkaround, Garlington Landeweer is now building a 61 sportfish with 1,800-hp MAN V-12 diesels, and a 71. All are vacuum-bagged, Corecell construction with Kevlar and carbon-fiber reinforcements. The yard's craftsmen hand-build traditional teak interiors and decks to custom specifications. "We have a very loyal following," Landeweer says, "so we don't deviate from our proven hulls and look."

BONADEO BOATWORKS

Harry Bonadeo moved his family with five children to Stuart from Michigan and got hooked on fishing after retiring from the fiber-optic-communications business. He wanted a mini-me tender for his 63-foot North Carolina-style sportfish, so he and his sons started building a 30-footer in 2004. With the help of locals, the Bonadeos produced their first boat in 2006, appealing to fishermen who wanted a smaller sportfish that mimicked the lines and purpose of larger boats.

"We really didn't know about the business of boat-building," says Bonadeo, who is now in business with his son Tony.

Bonadeo builds a custom 34 and a 37 using resin infusion and vacuum-bagging to keep the hull light and stiff. The boats run at speeds in the low 50- to 60-knot range and have graceful lines, adapting a Carolina flared bow to the Florida style and developing a "wish-bone" top-support system.

Like most builders, the company has increasing requests for gyroscopic stabilizers, along with joystick controls and bow thrusters. The latest 37 Walkaround, hull No. 18, is powered by triple 350-hp Mercury Verados. A 45-footer is in the works.

CHARLIE CLARK (2)



The Bonadeo 37 Walkaround cruises at 50 mph with triple 350-hp Mercury Verados.



The Jim Smith 48 Walkaround was designed for ease of use, safety and 360-degree fishing.



SCOTT PEARSON (2)

JIM SMITH TOURNAMENT BOATS

James Claude Smith was a man's man who loved speed and raced hydroplane boats and motorcycles. After retiring, he moved from Georgia to Florida to enjoy offshore fishing. He admired Rybovich and Merritt boats and decided to build his own — only faster. In 1959, he built his first 35-foot cold-molded boat using double diagonal cedar planking with epoxy resin. Incorporating his knowledge of airplanes, hydroplanes and fishing, his creation was stronger, lighter and at 44 knots twice as fast as other contemporary boats. It changed the course of boatbuilding.

Smith has since mentored many aspiring builders, including John Vance, who in 1989 bought the company. Having built a range of boats from 43 to 105 feet, the latest addition to the Smith fleet is a 48-foot center console with quad 350-hp Mercury Verados. A departure from the traditional sportfisher, this boat was built as a tender for an 86-foot Jim Smith. Hull No. 3 is in production. ■

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