

Fairey Marine - Powerboat Era

16th February 2012 - Memorial Hall

The Memorial Hall was full to hear an illustrate talk by Charles Lawrence on 'Fairey Marine - Powerboat Era'. As well as Society members, former Fairey employees attended and a large number of the audience were Fairey Owners' Club members, some of whom had travelled a considerable distance to enjoy the talk.

Last year David Henshall spoke about 'Faireys at Hamble' but he did not cover very much about the last few decades of the company. Therefore the Society asked Charles, who has written an excellent book on Fairey powerboats, to cover this period.

Charles started by recapping how the Fairey Company came to Hamble Point in 1916 to assemble and test seaplanes. At the end of the Second World War Fairey Aviation found it had to diversify, so set up Fairey Marine and the first boat produced was the 'Firefly' sailing dinghy. It developed other sailing boats and became the biggest boat builder outside of the United States in the 1950s.

In 1957 Fairey decided to build powerboats and started to develop its own designs. These were based on American Ray Hunt's deep V hull shape. Bruce Campbell helped sell the initial Fairey designed boats and he had his own boatyard at Hamble where he built his 'Christina' powerboats based on Fairey hulls. The hulls were built by Fairey's special hot moulding process which produced strong and durable boats.

The first to be made and sold in significant numbers was the 'Huntress' followed by the renowned 'Huntsman'. The first Cowes to Torquay powerboat race was in 1961, where Fairey hulls and boats were very successful, and this was the start of the golden age of its wooden boats. Charles gave the following reasons why he believed these wooden powerboats were great 1) Hull form 2) Hot moulded construction 3) Competitive diesel engines 4) Racing pedigree 5) Lust factor – the desire to own one.

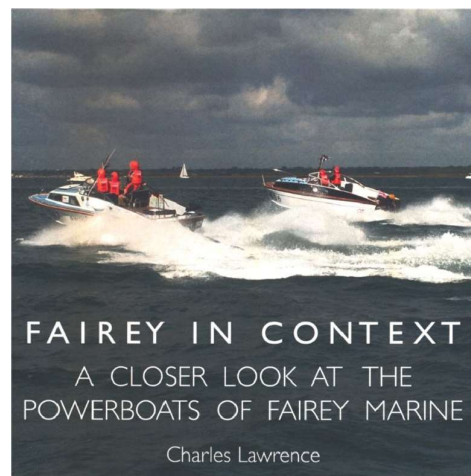
The main people who contributed to this success were Dick Fairey, Charles Curry, Alan Burnard and Peter Twiss. In 1963 they built a larger powerboat the 'Swordsman' to extend the range and provide more accommodation. Fairey also produced hulls for Dell Quay Yacht Yard which built its own less sporting 'Ranger'.

In 1969, following boatbuilding trends and customers demands, they started to build GRP powerboats with the 'Spearfish' being the first produced. With the introduction of VAT in 1973, demand for pleasure powerboats decreased so Fairey decided to concentrate on military/patrol powerboats.

Charles also mentioned non powerboat projects such as the boat park opened in 1961, where boats were stored ashore on their own trolley and launched by a tractor. The old lobster pond remained until the late 1960s and in 1973 Hamble Point Marina was opened. He also mentioned the company buying Groves and Guttridge on the Isle of Wight and Allday Aluminium of Gosport to form Fairey Allday which built 'Victory 83' America's Cup yacht.

Fairey Marine closed in 1983 and Cougar Marine took over at Hamble Point. Charles as a postscript noted the formation of the Fairey Owners' Club in 1986 to encourage interest in the preservation of the Fairey legend and the production of the Swordfish powerboat designed by Alan Burnard along the Fairey lines.

It was a privilege to have an expert such as Charles to give this very successful talk.



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