

In the Land of the Dippies

By Tim DuVernet

BERT HURST

In the Dispro Owner's Association, Bert Hurst was a legendary character. His love of dippies and wooden boats filled

many people's lives and owners of Greavettes can feel his handiwork in them.

This edition of "In the Land of the Dippies" is the first in a series

dedicated to Bert Hurst and all the builders of our special boats.

It was no contest, Bert's Greavette Dispro could go the slowest and the fastest of all the

dippies. During one of the annual dippy regattas, Bert's boat was the best tuned of any of the fleet.

D.O.A. member Joe Fossey remembers that "the first time I met Bert I saw this dispro speeding by at the Gravenhurst Centennial boat show where Bert was a judge. I had been trying to get my boat running properly and I had asked Bert to look at it."

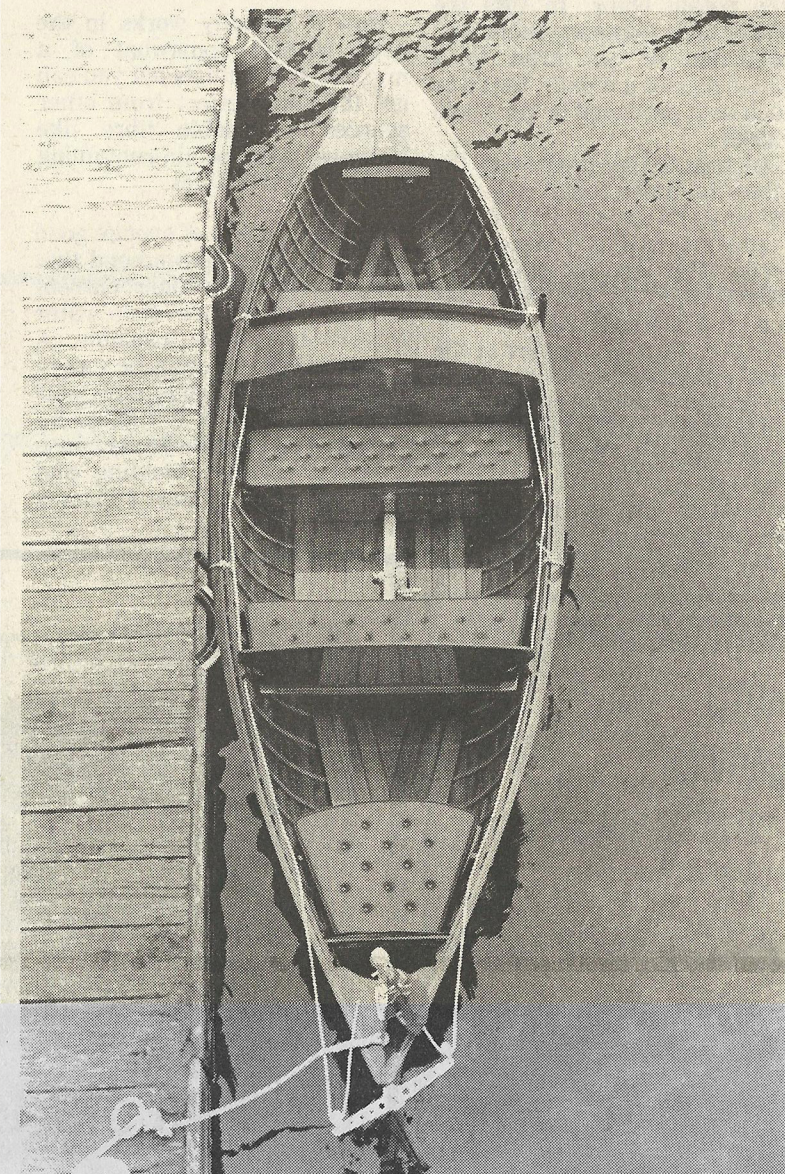
"He found my boat had the wrong points in it. Bert said, 'Oh!, we sent those things back to England years ago.'"

I am quickly learning that tall

tales, adventures and a hard life are synonymous with Bert Hurst. Joe believed that even at 90 years of age, Bert still had his driver's licence and was driving.

His daughter, Bev Nation, of Roselawn Lodge in Bala, said "my father was a great story teller. He could really spin a story and there was no age limit to the people he could enthral with his tales." Bev described how he could get off the train and soon have a group around him as one of his stories unravelled.

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THIRD LAST: This 1956 Greavette Dispro is believed to be the third last one ever built. It has just been completely restored with the wood work by Rob Haggar and the mechanical work by Paul Dodington. The boat had sat for many years half sunken in a lagoon on Toronto Island. The result was a bath tub like ring around the inside of the hull. Rob Haggar was able to remove this during its restoration (Tim Du Vernet photo).

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In retrospect, it is not surprising that Bert could tell such adventures because his life was full of activity.

"We all lived Greavette and we learned to appreciate good wood" and for Bev's father "Greavette was his whole life, he would come home and just gulp down his lunch" to get back to the shop.

Bert Hurst's association with boats, especially dispros, began with the "dippy factory" when he returned from the First Great

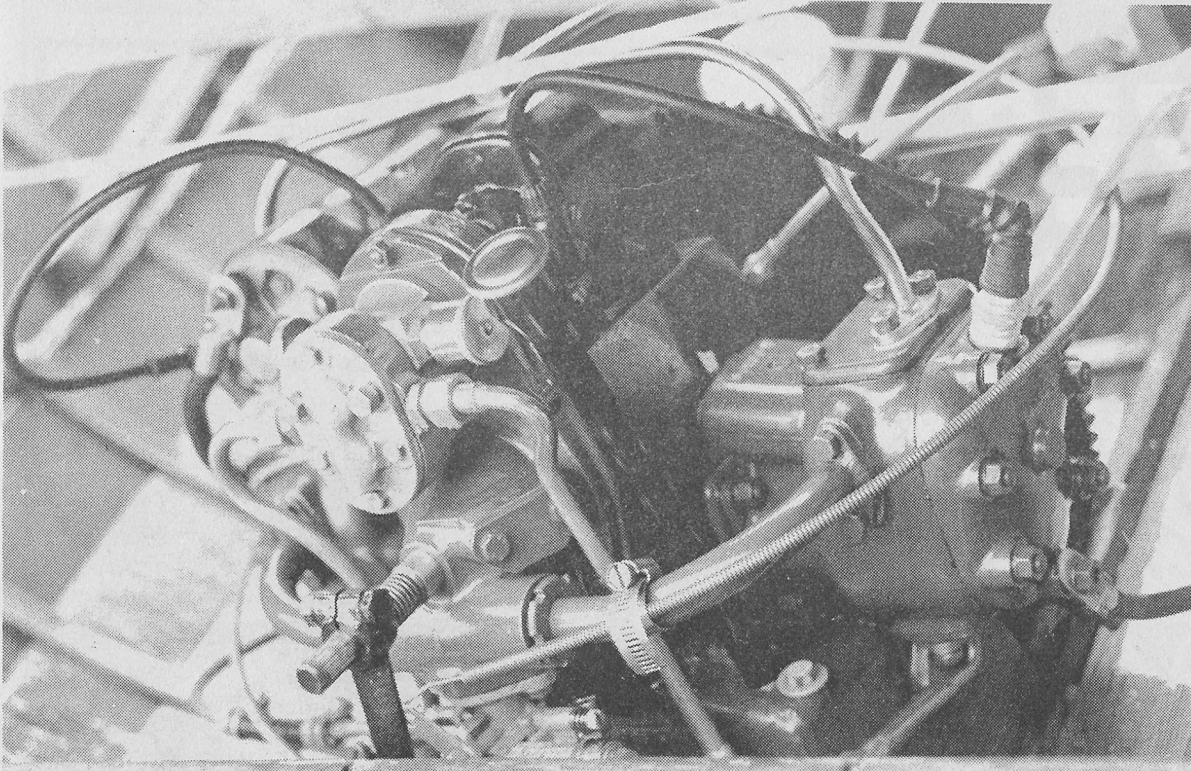
War. Bert worked with the Port Carling Boat Works until the early 1920's. According to Greavette co-worker Peter Miller, Bert was a nailer in the dippy factory and he always had a hand in mechanical installations.

The dates are not well known, but Bert left the dippy factory to work for Ditchburn boats in Gravenhurst and he also spent some time working at the liquor store, but according to Bev, he couldn't stand it inside so he went back to boat building. Peter Miller believes Bert arrived at Greavette by about 1935. Peter, who came on as a woodworker

with Greavette in 1939, remembers that "Greavette started making about 10 dispros a season and after the Second Great War, they were making about a 100 a year. The numbers petered out when the outboard came and 1956 was when the last dippy was made." Peter explained that the Greavette dispro hull was changed a bit in 1950 when Coventry Victor engines were installed.

Harold Wilson also explained that "Greavette bought the rights to dispros after the D.P. Co. went bust. Dispros never became a

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ENGINE DAMAGE: The Coventry Victor engine of this third last Greavette suffered terrible water damage. Rust and frost had taken their toll on what was a relatively little used boat. The engine literally had to be squished back together. (Tim Du Vernet photo).



INSTALLING THE HAND CRANK: Paul Dodington has chiselled out spaces in the engine bed to support the hand crank mechanism of a Port Carling dispro. It is important that all the components be secure and accurately lined up to ensure smooth operation and to avoid premature wear. (Tim Du Vernet photo).

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large part of the business. They much preferred building large luxury launches."

On average, there were 25 men working at Greavette Boat Works, according to Peter Miller and Bert was foreman for 20 years. As a result of this responsibility and his mechanical skills, he gave many new boats

and repaired ones their first test run. It is common to see him at the steering wheel in old photographs.

Bert's experience with mechanical installations also got him involved with the Miss Canadas. Harold Wilson explained that "it would be safe to say that Bert had a hand in the installations of practically all the large boats that Greavette Boat Works built."

Installation included not just

the engine, but all its accessories and components such as the steering system and wiring, etc. It quickly becomes apparent that while "Ernie and Tom Greavette may have owned it, but Bert carried the responsibility on his shoulders", Bev explained.

"He had ulcers on his ulcers", remarked Bev about her father's concern for the business. She described how somebody wanted a "boat built out of teak, like a Miss Canada, and the owner

wouldn't take it unless it went 70 m.p.h." Teak is a very heavy wood and this challenge was a further strain on her father.

Describing Bert's life and his association with boats and dispros is not a simple affair. There are so many stories and he was in to so many things. "What do you do!", Bev exclaimed about all his memorabilia and trophies. "He

was not an educated man by today's standards", she said, but despite that he was "citizen of the year", his achievements and contributions were recognized by the Progressive Conservative Part, The Lions Club, the school board, the Masonic Lodge and on and on. This article is just the first of many about Bert Hurst that will be published as historical details are gathered.