

STYLED ⁱⁿ fiberglass

Winter 2011

THE CHRIS-CRAFT COMMANDER CLUB'S OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

FOUNDED 1999

From the Chief COMMANDER

General Musings

This issue of Styled in Fiberglass “hits the streets” just after the beginning of the holiday season. We start with Thanksgiving, and end with Hanukkah, Christmas, and finally New Years. At this time of year many of us reflect on and give thanks for our blessings. We often take for granted the very things that most deserve our gratitude. Despite the turmoil we see daily in the world, the Commander Club as a group is incredibly lucky, especially when compared to our more unfortunate brethren. We own superb power boats, in itself an indication of disposable income, a luxury many people in the world do not have. Even better, either experience, research, word of mouth, luck, or something else led us to purchase one of the finest models of fiberglass boats ever built, plus, after 45 years or so they still look stylish and are very seaworthy, a tribute to their designers and engineers. When someone stops in front of your boat to admire it, it really gives one a sense of pride in ownership.

From a personal standpoint, our new 47' is located on “big boat row” at our marina. There are a lot of really big, expensive boats here, including one that cost 25 times more than we paid for our “little 47.” When people who are walking our dock walk past the high end boats and stop in front of PATTY WAGON and say “Wow! Is that beautiful. What year is it?” I thank them and casually mention it is 41 years old. They are amazed, and I feel like a king ! I’m sure most members have had the same experience, probably similar to a golfer hitting a hole in one.

Another of our collective blessings is the Commander Club itself. Where else can you get rock solid advice on just about anything

related to Commanders? Where else can you make so many new and wonderful friends? As we age, we start losing friends, but if one truly avails themselves to all the club has to offer, your circle of friends expands. Our National and Regional Rendezvous’ are a place to learn more about your boat, get new project ideas, meet and make new friends, and generally have a good time.



Patty & I have attended every club rendezvous, starting with the first one in 2001. We have enjoyed everyone, and will continue to attend as long as we are able. Please join us next August in Detroit, MI for the latest National Rendezvous. You won’t regret it!

In closing, Patty & I wish all our CCCC friends a happy & healthy holiday season plus best wishes for the New Year. (and perhaps something new for your Commander as a holiday gift)

*Dick Morland
Chief Commander*



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COMMANDER CLUB MISSION STATEMENT

The Commander Club is a 'virtual club,' existing on the Internet. The club is a non-stock corporation dedicated to the preservation, study and appreciation of the classic fiberglass Commander boats built by Chris Craft Corp. Our goal is to inform and enlighten owners or enthusiasts about these classic fiberglass boats. Members shall be Commander owners, enthusiasts or other persons who support the mission of the club.

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From the EDITOR

My love for all things Commander dates back to my father's 31' Commander. He had encouraged me to get the 38' when I was looking for a boat for the NYC area. When I moved to the suburbs, I downsized to the super cool 19' Super Sport ski boat. Now I'm back in the big boat business with a project 55' (wondering when I can stop calling it a "project" boat?). But one thing was common with all those boats, each needed engine swaps or re powers, and complete make overs. So I have enjoyed reading Bill Smith's posts for the last year and appreciate his ambitious plans and zeal for doing all the work himself.

The story is a blow by blow of Bill Smith's journey from new 38' Commander owner, through the ups, downs, and all the way to splash! One very consistent theme is that - from reading his 'good ol' boy' humble posts - you'd never know the extent of his talent, experience and accomplishments - until now.

This amazing story is brought to you by Dick Morland, who interviewed Bill, gathered all his posts and organized them in one

place. It's a fun read, hope you enjoy it.

I'm very proud of the next feature. The first part of my interview with Fred Hudson, Chief Stylist of the original 38' Express. A couple of years ago, I spent a weekend filming him but only used about 30 minutes of the hours of footage. I've decided to include the entire interview in the next few issues of STYLED. This issue's cover art is a photograph of Fred Hudson's copy of the 38' shop drawing. The photo was taken in Fred's home studio that was swimming with renderings of years of automotive renderings, boat designs and memories.

This was an experience that I will never forget and I'm proud to be sharing it word-for-word with you.

And, Brian Barton gives us a recap of the "Commandervous" and Clyde Caron provides some great photos.

Whitney Pillsbury
PR Chair
1974 55'
FAA-55-0035-F



RENDEZVOUS 2012

"COMMANDERS IN THE D"
August 2 - 5, 2012

Where: Kean's Marina, Detroit, MI
Known the world over for hosting GM, Ford, Chrysler and being the birthplace of Motown, Detroit will

now host The Chris-Craft Commander Club's 2012 Rendezvous!

With so many local Commanders and members in the area, this rendezvous is sure to be one of the best yet. We look forward to seeing new faces and old friends at the event.

Kean's (<http://keansmarina.com>
and facebook.com/keansmarina)

What a COMMANDERVOUS!

By **Brian Barton**
with photos by **Clyde Caron**

The summer was passing by. All of July was spent on the hard with repairs to our Commander. When Shelly and I launched we wanted to actually use that boat! We started looking at the calendar and the Air Show was just around the corner. We discussed it could be a lot more fun if we invite some other Commanders to join us. I made a post to CCCC.

There were a few responses but almost everyone was busy. There were 3 Boats that showed that day, Jeff Brown, Craig H. and us. We toured each other's vessels and mostly hung out in the water enjoying the day.

The talk turned to a second gathering, Jeff was the first to bring it up. There were a few different

locations brought up with Metro Beach being the most convenient. It was the end of August and time to make a post to the CCCC for one final summer gathering. One of the first to respond was Clyde Caron. He suggested that we gather at the Algonac Harbour Club. We talked on the phone and he explained that his boat was injured and would not be able to travel and he wanted to be a part of this gathering.

The other reason he wanted to use AHC was it the historical significance of AHC. This was the birth place of Chris-Craft and many

members like going there. I thought it would be a nice ride up the river as well. We talked quite a while that evening mostly boats and some history of the CCCC. I ended up asking Clyde if we do come to AHC would he help with the event. Without hesitation the partnership was formed. What were we getting ourselves into? Work and fun, or fun and work, which would this be? We split up duties quickly. Clyde would handle the Club and facilities. I would handle the members, email and the menu. Let the fun begin! Clyde

to see the Garwood museum and the other historical sites of the boating rich community. Dinner was easy, Clyde thought a potluck would work and I concurred. So another post was made this time a good ole summer BBQ menu list asking the members to bring their best!

After a few days, Clyde and I spoke again and we estimated that we could see maybe 10 Vessels and about 20 Commanderites. He was shaking the bush at this end and was starting a roster. I had received a few more

emails and calls. Jeff Brown contacted me and suggested that we email the members at large so everyone would have the opportunity to share in the fun. This email was a great idea! I promptly put together a list of local members that could drive or arrive by Commander. The response and interest almost doubled. I even received a few calls from Commander Owners that never heard of the club. Friends

were emailing friends.

Clyde and I talked a lot during the last week. Each of us would run through what we were doing and double checking each other so we did not forget something. Clyde and I were quite excited. The list was growing and our new estimate of attending Commanders was up to 25 and 40-50 people. This was turning into a good sized gathering. The weather forecast was supposed to be cool and clear as final preparations were completed. There was a lot of excitement coming from everyone. We named this special event: "The Commandervous."



A spectacular turnout for a two week notice! 18 Commanders an over 70 attendees, (over 40 CCCC members)

contacted Pete from AHC and set the dock fee. We also set the date for September 15, 2011. A post was made to the CCCC inviting everyone to a potluck dinner and a weekend at the historical Algonac Harbour Club.

The emails started coming in showing an interest in our gathering. After Clyde and I spoke again I felt that another post was needed to keep this at the top of the list on the CCCC. We talked about dinner plans and other activities to enjoy. In the end we wanted this to be a simple uncomplicated event. AHC made an offer to shuttle people around Algonac

Shelly and I traveled up the Clinton River in our 38' Sedan. The sun was shining and visibility was outstanding as we entered Lake St. Clair. Another beautiful trip across the lake was in store. The sun started dropping and the air cooled fast. Our jackets got zipped but we refused to leave the bridge. The trip up the North Channel is always a great time. It has some of the most beautiful scenery around. We enjoyed an amazing sunset.

As we approached Algonac we encountered the tell tale ferry crossing. We arrived at the harbour in no time and I called Clyde. He was waiting at the docks to help us locate our slip. I finally met Clyde for the first time. As I looked around I could see he had been busy setting up canopies and arranging tables. Clyde and his family did a great job with all the logistical arrangements. There were several boats already at the Algonac Harbour Club. We met several people and I kept looking at FLOYD'S FANTASY and thinking "I know this boat." It was a beautifully maintained 35' hard top. This is my personal favorite; the styling just floats my boat... I was introduced to Floyd and he also looked very familiar. After talking for a while the lights came on and I realized where I met Floyd. The previous fall we were both inspecting the TEM-TA-SHUN'S when she was

for sale. Almost a year later we both got great vessels and were enjoying the Commandervous. A couple more boats arrived and it was time to retire. The weather took a turn for the worse and was cool with a breeze and gloomy.

Rise and Shine! The morning was a continuation of the weather; it looked like it was going to rain. Everyone started the morning nice and easy. The boats started to arrive and the weather broke. Many of us spent some time washing and drying our Commanders. The sun was warming it up and the activity increased. This day was truly a blur of activity. We ended up with 19 boats and too many people to count. We also had our share of Golden Retrievers. Mark and Denise had their 2, Shelly and I had ours. Dick and Patty Morland made the trip and brought Queenie and Bailey. This is our attempt to get all the goofy dogs lined up for a picture. Everyone cooperated except for Bailey.



I cannot remember all the people I met that day. The vessels all lined up looked spectacular (Can you tell I had never been to one of these). I can only imagine what a full blown Commander Club Rendezvous would be like. The day passed rather quickly and it was time for dinner. Everyone helped setting up for the feast. Before we opened up the buffet everyone there all lined up for a group photograph. Mr. Morland was asked to offer a blessing and we bowed our heads in thanks. Let's eat! The food was as good as the day. Life was good and our bellies were full of fine old fashion food.

After dinner there was more boat goggling, more conversations on tips, tricks and experience sharing. As the sun settled that evening the activity relaxed and a few of us ended up sitting in a circle telling stories. Some of the others went into the restaurant to have a few drinks and watch the fight on PPV. It was time to retire for the evening; the weather had cooled of quite a bit.

Sunday morning the dew was heavy and the Commanderites started moving. Clyde and I were exchanging pictures over coffee. The Commandervous was almost over and was slowly being dismantled. The Commanders started to leave one by one. Nearly every ones last word were: "It was nice meeting you and I'll see you at the next rendezvous!"

Our gathering also won the Commander Club's Regional Raft-up contest and each of the captains received a Chris-Craft Commander Club "Styled in Fiberglass" tote bag, which was a nice bonus!

Brian Barton
 FDA-38-4008R
 TEM-TA-SHUN'S



CHRIS-CRAFTS RETURN HOME: A great gathering at an historic location.



Just another RESTORATION..

By Dick Morland

Over the years Commander Club members have been witness to many great Commander restorations. These have run the gamut from the smaller Commanders to very large Commanders. Most of them have at one point had some professional help, or in fact were done completely by the pros. There have been a few done almost entirely by the owner, but these are few and far between, and have been done by younger members in their physical prime. A complete rehab on one of these old girls is a daunting task indeed.

Club member Bill Smith of Winchester, TN just recently launched O'Tawanda, his 1967 38 foot sedan. Before we go into the real story, a little background on Bill helps put things in perspective.

Bill has been married to his wife Judy (a saint) for 54 years. He's currently 76 years old with a 30 year history of heart problems. He's had 6 heart attacks, plus an open heart surgery in 1982. He had 4 stents put in during the 3 year restoration of his 38, plus just after the Huron Rendezvous in 2010 he had some "tune-up" on his pacemaker plus a defibrillator was installed. As Bill says, he's got "electronic ignition with a backup!"

As to professional background, in his early days he was a state trooper for 20 years. Somewhere in this time frame he picked up some carpentry skills, which led him to start doing small odd jobs on the side till one day a customer asked him to build him a house, which Bill did. This led to his final profession: home builder.

Fast forward to 2006. Bill was semi

retired, a sprightly 71 years young, and was looking for something to keep him out of mischief. Although he already had a 23 foot John Allmand in the backyard, he found on eBay a 1984 Chris-Craft Catalina that had been sunk in one of the Florida hurricanes. This was a total project boat, so of course Bill bought it, had it trailered to his home and began a two year restoration.

After completion of the Catalina, in October of 2008 he was just "casually surfing the net" (eBay) when he came upon his 38 Commander Sedan Flybridge, which was located in Deal, MD. The seller said it had no engines and was partially stripped inside. This seller was a Ford automobile enthusiast who had bought the boat from someone in Boston who had started an interior restoration by stripping everything, and then just

quit. The Ford enthusiast who wanted the 427 engines bought the boat and removed engines, props, and just about anything mechanical that had any value. Bill bought this boat from this owner, sight unseen, for \$950! At this time Bill had only seen one exterior picture of the boat. Bill knew he had to go north to Deal, MD to prepare the boat for road travel, which includes removing the flybridge. In the true spirit of a do-it-yourselfer, on his way north, Bill stopped in Virginia and took a test to get certified for oversize load escort, thus saving him some money on the trip home, where indeed he was the escort. His previous state trooper experience helped in this endeavor, and he got his escort certification. Even with Bill providing escort, the 700 mile trip home cost 4 times as much as he paid for the boat itself.

After escorting his new baby home he had to hire a large hydro crane to off-load the boat into his back yard. This wasn't too difficult as the boat was pretty light at this point, having virtually being stripped of all mechanicals! After the boat was unloaded & properly blocked, wife Judy casually reminded him he still had both the John Allmand and the Catalina and really didn't need any more boats! At that point 51 years of experience with Bill, plus true love prevailed and the restoration began. Bill built a permanent set of steps to facilitate the thousands of trips up & down he would make in the next 3 years. Close inspection revealed empty bilges except for a totally junk generator, no pumps anywhere in the boat, no AC's, no reefer, stove, oven, etc. The boat had no headliner anywhere, the genuine mahogany interior was badly stained for water ingress over the years, & everything in the V-berth & head had been totally stripped & removed.

The toe rails were a disaster, as was the gelcoat on the entire boat. The bridge seats collapsed into a pile of rubble during removal. The wood on the bridge, and the wood panels around the sliding glass doors were completely dry rotted. In other words, just your run of the mill restoration for a do-it-yourselfer!

Bill began by 'surfing the net' for information on this boat and immediately found the Commander Club, which he immediately joined and began asking technical questions and posting progress reports on the boat. His first posts commenced in 2009, the beginning of an almost 3 year odyssey. At this point we should mention that save for one \$25 labor expenditure (more on this later) and some help from his son Scott installing the engines and doing the spraying during the re-gelcoating, Bill did everything himself, right down to & including upholstery. He began by

- Stripping and refinishing of all existing interior wood surfaces
- New headliners, both cabin & wheelhouse.
- Hardwood sole for lower cabin & V-berth.
- All new lighting fixtures.
- Re-gelcoat the entire boat, not just the hullsides & transom.
- Install new hydraulic steering system.
- Fabricate, install & varnish all new toe rails.
- Re chrome almost all exterior fittings & metal parts.
- Complete rebuild of bridge. All new



“ROUGHING IN THE BOW”: Bill's work on his bow - far finer than he describes it!

finding on eBay a pair of Crusader engines located in Ohio. Next came a pair of Velvet Drive transmissions, again from eBay. With some help from son Scott, the engines and transmissions were sitting in the proper place, at the proper angle on newly modified engine stringers. During the ensuing 2 ½ years, some of the projects included:

- New bilge pumps, AC units, AC pumps.
- Fabricate & install complete head, toilet, holding tank, shower, cabinets, vanity & counter top with basin.
- New counter top for galley, plus new basin, stove/range/oven, and refrigerator

wood parts, new instruments, re-gelcoat, & new seats.

- New (used) generator.

Although Bill claims not to be a mechanic, a friend gave him a 6.5 Onan that had been sitting outside for 5 years. Bill disassembled it and took it to a machine shop where they bored & sleeved one rusty cylinder. Bill reassembled, and after one minor mishap with a gasket missing an oil hole, it runs perfectly.

- Fabricate / install pulpit for anchor and install new electric anchor windlass.

During some times in winter when the weather kept him inside, Bill



NEW HEAD Bill's work rebuilding his head caught the Club's attention.



STEPS: Bill built steps next to the boat to make the many trips onboard easier.

built all of the furniture in the boat including rebuilding & upholstering a wheelhouse barrel back chair. This also included a slick drop leaf coffee table that expands and raises into a dining table. He also built and upholstered the couch in the wheelhouse that expands into a double bed. Winter projects also included lamps for the boat, plus another end table for the wheelhouse.

- Fabricate & upholster all new cushions for V-berth, lower cabin, and wheelhouse couch.
- Complete rebuild of wheelhouse sliding door assembly, including all new wood panels surrounding the doors.

We could go on & on, but you get the idea. The only labor charge Bill incurred on the boat was labor to replace the fuel tank fill hoses. On a 38' sedan, in order to get at these, you have to be 6 feet tall, weigh about 110lbs, and have very long arms,

nether of which describes Bill or son Scott. A local "beanpole" managed to reach and replace them for \$25!

As fall of 2011 approached, O'TAWANDA was finally almost ready for launch. This involved hiring a 35 ton hydro crane and getting his buddy who owned a semi tractor and low boy trailer over to the house. Bill describes it best in some of his posts to the club:

7/18/2011 -- "Well the Old Gal is done on the outside! All I like to do now is some small stuff on the inside, getting A/C compressor replaced as well as carpet for the salon area. Boy it's been a long time getting this far but now have to get ready for transport and that will be a big deal as I need a heavy crane come out and load it as well as the travel lift to get it off the trailer and into the water. Lots of costly items! Ha! Guess that is boating."

10/27/2011 -- "Well at last we got the Old Gal loaded and ready for transport to the river. Having some problems with the trailer she is on and those will have to be addressed prior to hauling. When the trailer came on to the lot to get the boat he drug the air bleeders off the air tanks for the trailer so no brakes! Gee we do need

brakes to cross Monteagle Mountain! Will be a few days delay to get that fixed and after loading we determined the boat had gained considerable weight during the restoration and the trailer had a little too much flex so that must be addressed also."

* Editors note – this involved two days of welding on the trailer, with the boat on the trailer, to reinforce the fifth wheel deck connection to the trailer deck.

11/04/2011 -- "Well we got the trucks ready with the wide load signs and ready to hook up to the trailer with the 38 loaded on it. I called the marina to give them some lee way as to when we were coming and make to make sure the travel lift was available to unload upon when we got to the marina. Well, the manager said the lift was tied up all day today due to a boat sinking in the marina last night. Seems like I will never get her bottom wet!! Ha Oh well another day won't really matter as she has been on dry land for 3 years plus several before I got her. The marina was really questioning about the hull?? They won't allow any more woodies. We will be on the way in the morning as we can pull wide load till 12 noon on Saturday.

11/06/2011 – "Well we made it to the marina and they still had the



FREE TIME. Bill saw a similar table online for \$1100.00 and decided to make one.

sunken House Boat in the slings of the travel lift. I spoke with the travel lift operator and he said they didn't have any blocks to set the boat on so here I sit with the boat and no lift available. After a lot of discussions, some not too kind, I happened to think about the blocks I had here at the house and then thought of a sawmill operator I know as well. The truck and trailer guys know the sawmill man also. I suggested we call him as he has a mill just off the Interstate. So we called him and he told us he had a mill lots closer to us than the one mentioned. I jumped in the truck and went for the blocks as they were about 20 miles away from the marina. We finally got into the water at 4PM.

Problem #2 – “Neither transmission would do anything, no forward or reverse, NOTHING!! Had to get a friend on my slip row to tow us to the slip which went well. Got into our slip and noticed the shaft packing glands leaking badly. After tightening them down that leak stopped and thought all was well. All my helpers, son and truck driver had gone. Everyone in the marina coming to see the boat even people who were staying on the cabins came for an inspection.

Well got the inspections over with and decide to look in the bilge for water check. There was more water than I like there so I spent big part of the night looking for the leak. I closed all sea cocks, etc checked strainers, packing glands, rudders, old thru holes that I had filled and couldn't find the leak.

This morning when daylight came I continued my search and found the leak. It is leaking either from the base of the fiberglass shaft log that the hose fits on or I have the hose too far down on the log in some rough stuff and tightening the hose clamps seems to slow it but never stopped completely. I have 3 bilge pumps and one had lost its ground and the other switch was bad so I spent the day making sure I had pumps that would work. When I left the boat all was good with pumps working, etc and the leak slowed a lot so I have a friend at the dock who will check on her.



Dick Morland visiting and viewing Bill's great work.



The previous owner had gutted the v-berth, Bill replaced it.



Bill and Dick on his visit last summer.

Through all this I never made the first photo. I was so busy never even thought about photos it was a very busy day in the life of this old Dude!!!

No Problems with the trailer and height!!”

11/12/2011 – “I didn’t have a lot of time to do any thing but I called a Velvet Drive rebuild guy who I know and he said probably I had put the wrong tranny on the wrong engine. Well that will be a lot of labor but I hope that is the case because rebuild cost is 1500 to 2 K for two trannies.

I am headed for the marina this afternoon the work on the flybridge getting it in the correct position as it is just sitting somewhat in place and all the railing must be dealt with also.

Well I guess this is the life of this Old Boater!! Funny thing is I don’t get all bent out of shape if it is a problem. I guess it will work out. Don’t look like I will make the fall color cruise this year! I will keep you posted of the progress...Bill”

**Editors note: As of this writing, O’TAWANDA is sitting comfortably in her slip at Hales Bar Marina on the Tennessee River. Bill has yet to switch the transmissions as winter is approaching (even in the south), plus he’s doing some side carpentry work plus oversize load escorting for his friend who moved the boat to the river!*

Seems like some people just don’t understand what the word “downshifting” means.

Congratulations Bill on a magnificent accomplishment of epic proportions!

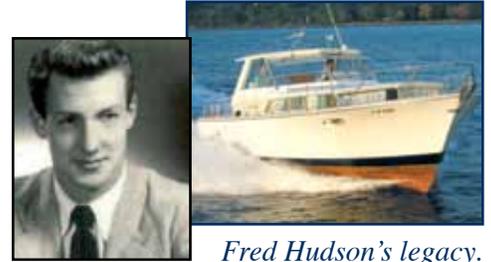
(Hmm --- Seems like I just saw a very reasonably priced 47 Commander project boat down in Florida. Running for cover now! It was a joke, Judy!)



Almost every part of the boat received Bill’s attention to detail.

Fred Hudson

INTERVIEW *part 1*



Fred Hudson's legacy.

By Whitney Pillsbury

In March of 2010, I was lucky enough to sit down to interview Fred Hudson, Jr. at his home in Florida.

Among many industrial design accomplishments, Fred designed Chris-Craft's 38' Commander Express. A.W. MacKerer did the bottom, and from a full-length quarter-foil up, Fred "Styled in Fiberglass" the boat that started this club and inspired many of the future Commander designs. This was a high point of Fred's designing career.

Scott Anderson, who had maintained a friendship with Fred, made arrangements so I could fly down and visit Hudson. I made a short film from the footage called: HUDSON, BY LAND AND SEA. I hope you have had a chance to watch it. The Commander Club produced and paid for this entire project.

*The 33 minute film can be seen at:
<http://youtu.be/ltobanQjDtg>*

But I felt the hours of footage left on the cutting room floor deserved airtime and the following is a transcription of the interview.

This is part one, and I will spread out the rest through the following issues.

W: What is your name?

F: What the hell do you want to know my name for? My name is Fred Lenox Hudson Jr... what's left of him.

W: Why in the world am I filming you?

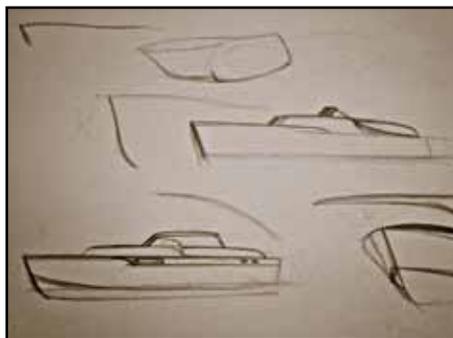
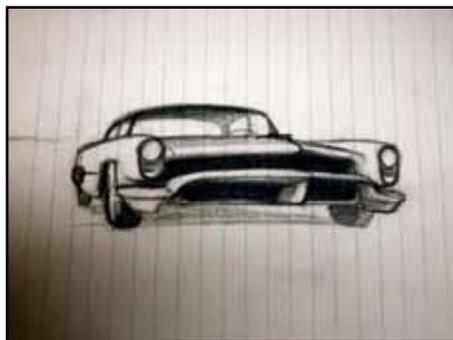
F: I guess because I had something to do with Chris-Craft.

W: What did you have to do with Chris-Craft?

F: I was their first Chief Stylist starting in 1960 through 1964, in house, that is.

W: If we could just back up and do the whole 9 yards. What was your background, how did you get there, what did you study in school?

F: I guess from my earliest memories I have always drawn things. And I loved cars and I loved boats. And my dad had a – first of all he always drove Buick Centuries which were the road car of the 1930's. And in 1936 he bought a 32 foot Maine-built converted motor sailor and kept it with a partner in Essex, Connecticut. I went on to Loomis School, where my Dad also went, in Windsor, Connecticut. Earned the Art Prize upon graduation. Went on to Cornell in the School of Architecture as a



Early Hudson Sketches

fine arts major. And graduated with Bachelor of Fine Arts. And was there presented with a problem: what the hell am I going to do to make a living with a Bachelor of Fine Arts.

W: And how old were you then?

F: I was 22 when I graduated from Cornell in '51.

W: And where did you go from there?

F: Well, I foundered, first of all, I got a job... actually we can skip the job in Chicago... loved the city, hated the job and came back home. Ended up getting a job at Packard Syracuse which was formally Fonda Motorcar company, selling cars. In the summer of 1954 I spent the entire weekends and nights in my Dad's basement drawing up a portfolio to take to Detroit. And I did so in September of '54. And got a job and went to work the very next day. Had a little entrée to James Nance, who was President of Packard at that time through a guy in Syracuse near where I grew up who was the President of Easy Washer Company. So, I sort of went through the front door but ended up feeling very gratified that I literally started work the next day. And that lasted through 1956 when the unfortunate news came down that the 1957 New Car Program was not going to get financed. So at that point, it was a sad time... there were a lot of older guys who were just sitting around waiting for their pensions and final paychecks to clear. I took off for California and got a job at CBS Television Center moving bulkheads around. And then came back to Detroit and went to Chrysler Corporation in January of '57 and landed in the Imperial Studio as Chief Stylist Exteriors. And that '61 front end up there on the bookshelf is one of the 3 front ends I did, '59, '60 and '61. It's a '61 Chrysler Imperial

and that time Virgil Exner was the Vice President of Exteriors. And my immediate boss by the name of Cliff Voss, who we irreverently referred to as the 'Christ Child' whispered in my ear that "Ex" would like to see a front end for the Imperial that had a coffin-nose, gull-wing fenders and floating headlamps. I drew the thing up and they put it into production.

W: When you look at that, do you see your style, your touch on there?

F: Yeah, I do. I can see things that I think are good form and shapes. A collection of design characteristics that please me. Anyhow, to go on...



Fred Hudson and editor during our weekend interview, he passed away 8 weeks later.



FLOATING HEADLAMPS: Hudson's front end on Chrysler's 1961 Imperial

I found myself in the middle at Chrysler. The former VP of Styling who had come from Ford, one Bill Schmidt had moved into Chrysler Corporation and was vying for territory with Exner. To the extent that...

"Ex" had had a heart attack and had his afternoon nap at 2 o'clock, and Schmidt would show up on the design studio floor and change everything that he could. It was very uncomfortable. Not only that, I was itching to work for myself.

W: Can you just paint a picture of this – it's Chrysler styling – is it a certain department or what?

F: It was the Imperial Exterior and Interior Studio at Chrysler Styling, just Imperials.

W: How many people worked in the Imperial Studio?

F: I think first of all it was Cliff

Voss who was Exner's understudy, Bill Brownlie, who was the studio manager. Myself as Bill's assistant. Allan Kornmiller came later plus about 6 other stylists plus across the hall in the clay modeling studio at least a dozen.

While I was at Chrysler, in 1958, there was a gentleman named Bob Bingman, who was in the Advanced Studio, an older guy, but also a boat stylist. And he introduced me to Harry Kaul who was then President of the Roamer Division in Holland Michigan, the aluminium and steel boats over in Holland.

And we did moonlighting for Roamer designs in Detroit and went over a couple of times to visit in Holland. But thereupon, I met Harry Kaul.

W: So you did your time at Chrysler Imperial Styling...

F: Yes, I was working towards getting my wife and my baby son and myself out of Detroit for the first time. So I went back to Syracuse and hung up my shingle as an industrial designer in 1959. And that lasted for about the worst year of my life. I was vying for work against a University of Syracuse designer/teacher who was literally using his students to do design work, and it was highly... highly... not good stuff.

In Syracuse, I started whipping up a Portfolio for Chris-Craft. I was doing a collection of boat renderings/sketches. And called Harry and he said fly down, and to make a long story short, landed the job and my wife and 2 sons got in the New Yorker



'56 "Golden Hawk" Packard Styling Sketch and Rendering

and drove through the snow to Florida in January of 1960. And that was the beginning of my time in Pompano Beach designing Chris-Craft.

W: Wait. How did you get the job at Chris-Craft? Who gave it to you and how did you get it?

F: I wrote Harry Kaul a letter at some point during 1959 when I had some stuff completed that I could show. I don't remember the exact date, but he got back to me and said "come on down." So I got a plane ticket, flew down with my drawings and presented my drawings and he said "you're hired and when can you start." I got things together and we hit the trail south with month old second child.

W: Why boats?

F: I love boats.

W: But you were working on cars.

F: The answer to the progression from cars to boats is very simple. You've got Raymond Loewy and Brooks Stephens. And those are the only successful independent car designers in the country. There was no room. All the major manufacturers have extensive in-house design staffs. And I loved boats and it was just a natural progression. I wanted to do it.

W: So you got down to Pompano and who was there?

F: Well, I'm Pompano Beach the first choice for me to make camp was with the Engineering Department. A.W. MacKerer was the 'bad boy' VP of Engineering – beloved – a gruff, feared, wonderful guy. I adored him. We got off to great start.

Getting situated at Chris-Craft in 1960: our new department was put under engineering and MacKerer was the boss. There was a guy there by the name of Jim Medsker who was doing interiors, colors, primarily just fabric and color stuff. So he became part of my team. Then we got another guy named Ray Leturko, a good little industrial designer, who ended up marrying Mack's secretary Muriel. At some point then also I got Dick Avery in there. That may have happened

later, maybe the next year in '61 or '62.

In 1961 a gentleman by the name of Don Mortrude had been – for years – the Exterior Design Consultant doing primarily the Chris-Craft line of boats. He didn't do the Ski-Skiff's, didn't do the Cavaliers. But I was put into competition with him for the 1963 37' Connie. I won. At that point I became officially Chief Stylist and Mortrude was out. So at that point we did everything, the '63 Connies,



Imperial Sketches

the Ski-Skiffs, the Cavaliers primarily with Ray Leturko and Dick Anderson, who was an engineer in charge of the Cavaliers. Ski Skiff was Ron Reilly, and I did the styling on those. The Connies, all at that point, including the sport boats started to come from our little design studio there in-house – and through that progression up through the '64 boats.

We were on the 3rd floor of the engineering building right directly above MacKerer's office. At some point Jim Medsker who was lots of fun kept badgering me about a raise – 'gotta talk to Mac about a raise.' So finally I went down and left word that I'd like to see if I could get Jim a little bit more money. It was after 5 o'clock

one afternoon and I'm still there chugging away, and all of a sudden the intercom goes off: "Hudtho! Are you upth there?" "Yes Mac, I'm here," I said. "I'll be righth there' Mac had a little bit of a lisp. So, I hear this stomping up the stairs and I got up when he came in and he started hitting me in the chest saying "whath the hell are youth doing atkhing for a raise for methker?" Well, I couldn't keep a straight face and started to laugh and he broke up and from that point on we were the best of buddies. It was hysterical.

Then came the onslaught from Hattaras.

Here we have Chris-Craft in 5 different wood-oriented plants; Salsbury, Maryland, Algonac, Holland, Cadillac, Chattanooga, and Pompano Beach... is that five? At that point I think Algonac was out... but anyway, all of these plants were wood producing product manufacturing plants. It was very plain to see, it was a sticky wicket. Hattaras, in Hyde Point with one fiberglass boat plant and a furniture factory making all the furniture right there under one city's banner. When Hattaras boats came out, of course Chris-Craft had to do something. And it was decided first of all to do the 36' – Harry Kaul's favorite boat size was a 36', don't ask me why – so the first express boat was supposed to be a 36'. And a wooden plug was made and I was invited to go for a sea trial by Mike Potter who was Harry's Assistant. We went on a 42' Roamer out off Lighthouse Point, and Jim Poe was the test driver in this black 36' running plug that's filled with oil drums filled with water as ballast. The thing would not get out of the water. Mac was on the 42' with us, of course, and he became mad. Actually the first thing he did was say to me "Hudthen, whath the hell are youth doing here?" And I said I was invited by Mr. Mike Potter. Mack got in the little boat and went over to Jim Poe to raise hell with him and try to figure out why the thing would not plane. It was either overloaded, or – my own feeling – it was under bottomed. To make a long story short, Mac went

back to the drawing board and the boat got wider and it got 2 feet longer. And thereupon came the 38' Express, and it's a delightful hull. Despite the fact that it was and is a concave V bottom which, of course, has pretty much been displaced by convex V bottoms because they obviously immerse themselves in water better and are far more buoyant. It was decided the boat would be built in Holland. Primarily because of size and because of the fact that it was largely a fiberglass boat put together very much the same way as a wood boat, out of very similar components except the components were fiberglass not wood. Also Chris-Craft had a height problem. There was no place, except for Pompano Beach, where they could have taken a hull mold and retracted the hull vertically out of the mold and proceed to run it down an assembly line. They didn't have the height clearance. So it was designed as a split mold which laid apart, nice and easy lay up, put it together, whack the seam together, and it was quick and easy as can be.

One of the design details on the 38' is pretty much explained by that split mold and that was Mac's V transom which delights everybody, but he did it for reason. The center line split was much easier where it didn't have to come together in a completely faired arc. Same as the bow.

Because of the 2 piece mold, I was able to get that full length quarter foil, which you could never have pulled out of a mold with a vertical release. And

I love that thing. It was neat, and still looks neat.

Frankly, I don't know where the production ended up. I know the big boats were at Pompano, but I'm presuming most of them stayed in Holland.



Hudson Connie Renderings

W: My 1966 38' Commander was made in the Roamer plant.

F: Ah ha! See Roamer had height! Roamer had plenty of overhead height. I remember that plant well.

W: I want to back up. Who was working on this 36' project originally, how did it get to the point of being a wooden plug and then did they test a fiberglass plug or what?

F: No, it was a wooden boat essentially, painted shiny black, and

it was to be the form from which the fiberglass molds would have been made. But that was not the case because the thing had to be done completely over.

W: And was this planned to be the Commander series?

F: Yup. I think the Commander badge was out of use at the time. I don't

ever recall doing a wooden commander out of all the boats that I remember doing on the carvel plank senior line of Chris-Craft boats. I'm presuming that the Commander name was on the shelf and ready to be used.

W: This 36' 'plan' was a response – an attack – and was going to be Chris's big entry into fiberglass cruisers?

F: Absolutely. I remember being told about the project and what we were going to do. I remember being called down to Mac's office, where we had the meeting about the boat.

I was looking over Mac's shoulder at the lines drawing that was on his drawing board for the hull. And this was typical, MacKerer would do the lines drawings for the hull and then they would go upstairs to the loft which was a big wooden platform where they were drawn full size. From there to templates and wooden forms and a wooden plug constructed. Or in the case of many of the wooden Connies, the boat would be built and go out to production.



Fred Hudson in his home studio at the time of this interview.

W: So what was Mac's contribution to the 38'?

F: Mac did the hull lines and I believe that as of the 38' express he delegated further hull development to his underlings. Which would have been Phil Carveth and Don Shut in the Chris-Craft engineering bailiwick.

W: So when you say hull lines, you mean the bottom of the boat up to the sheer?

F: Yes. I'll show you a hull lines drawing later if you want to see one. When I started doing them myself, I'm not a naval architect but that's what I did, and it's not that difficult. If you know how to make a mechanical drawing, how to look at something in different views and then in sections. Profile, plan view and develop dimensions either from the baseline or the center line, out. That gives the distance in feet and inches the dimension from either station, center line or baseline... and that's how things are built. It's a fascinating process.

W: It's cool, I have a copy of the shop drawing of the 38'

F: I have the shop drawing for the 38'

W: I'm thinking somehow someone shared it with someone... who...

F: Dick Anderson smuggled it out of Pompano, actually a copy.

W: So the 36' hull lines were done, what were you working on? Was this your only project? Was everyone working on this project?

F: Lord no. No. Once I had the specific requirements and basically a rough arrangement plan which was basically a Constellation layout widened lengthened – a 37' Connie grown up. Of course it was much wider. A 13' beam, it's enormous. Then it was a matter of knowing what I was doing. I was building a wood boat out of fiberglass.

W: So what was your job?

F: My job was on the drawing board to figure out what it looked like. To draw it up. Design the boat!

A lot of things happened. Because of the split mold and the fact that it didn't need to be withdrawn from a mold, things were possible. For example, the sheer has a reverse flange which goes inboard and thereupon the deck can land on top of the reverse flange and the seam is covered all the way around the boat with a teak cap. Can't see it. And it's neat and tidy and unlike the normal shoebox of a normal hull to deck joint, it was pretty neat.

W: Sorry if I sound stupid, but what parts of the boat were you working on?

F: I'm working on the whole exterior of the boat from the waterline up. MacKerer's transom was a given, the stem rake was pretty much a given – it was Constellation – except for the fact that it had a nice radiused bow which was part of the styling resolution that it wasn't going to be a pointy bow, it was going to be a nice smooth faired rounded bow on that boat, tapered

of course, down to the chine. And the quarter foil – which is what I call it – which ran the full length of the boat and around the transom. And the hardtops, the windows, the side shield treatment below the side windows of the express bridge.

I wanted a faster windshield rake, but Harry Kaul would not buy anything faster – laid back - than a 45 degree rake. "It's got to be 45 period. No way. You're not touching that." Today we have almost 60 degree and more.

W: What was his reasoning?

F: Vision! He also insisted we have ventilating panels. When you can't see out of the front end, you gotta be able to open those windows. Things that are largely overlooked today, but they made good sense and they were part of his mandate.

W: So you're also working on the roof line and the hardtop...

F: The whole thing! And the contours involved. Sections and as the boat look and styling was approved which involved the sales department and feasibility through engineering, then I would go with my input to Phil Carveth and Don Shut and they would start detailing it. In this instance Dick Anderson was involved in it too, and as you know, he did the shop drawing.

W: What are the highlights of your design of the 38' Commander.

F: Well, I've mentioned the sheer molding and its hull to deck joint, the quarter foil. Everybody loved Mac's transom. The styling of the hardtop and the cabin roof were airfoil shapes with some nice convexities. And the side shields where I chose a linear relief pattern, and the motif carried up the pilaster on the side. This was repeated again on the sedan later by Dick Avery which essentially took the proportions and the style cues of the express and reproporioned them for the larger deck house and the shorter cabin front on the bow of the boat. One final thing was the Chris-Craft Medallion on the bow....

To be continued next issue...

Archivist REPORT

Treat yourself and your beloved Commander! Buy SuperDisk 6.0 to learn about the many projects on your "TO DO" list. The Complete Edition and the Resource Collection Vol.1 can now be ordered directly from the Club (shipping included). Upgrade Edition is no longer available.

See the contents of Super-Disk 6.0 by clicking on the link and scrolling down to Superdisk Master Index 2000 – 2010 by subject. A big thank you goes to Colleen Dogariu for creating this master index that can be sorted by year, subject, author and post number.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cccommander/files/>

Over 10,000 posts! Read about it and buy yours here: <http://www.commanderclub.com/Archive/Superdisk.htm>

SuperDisk 7.0 is being scheduled for release in April of 2012. Delivery formats are being investigated by the Archive Committee. Even with two months left to archive in 2011 there have been 3136 posts, 1116 have been selected to archive with 281 attachments.

The Club Business Forum (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cccbiz/>) will post the monthly minutes in the files section, annual financial reports, Bylaws, and Articles of Incorporation. This is the place to discuss topics regarding the running of the club.

- Char Pike, Archivist

Treasury REPORT

We've been working on a few changes for the Club. The most significant change is that of the Club's tax status. The IRS recently approved the Club's request for tax-exempt status. This will make our tax reporting much easier, eliminate our tax compliance costs, and more importantly eliminate our federal income tax expense. We've also made some changes to our bank and paypal accounts to provide multiple EC members with access to both and to make transitions from one Treasurer to the next easier. As of the end of November 2011 the Club's total cash balance is approximately \$11,500.

For those of us in the North, our boats are high and dry and we're settling in for our winter boating hiatus. But that doesn't mean boating isn't on our minds and we aren't already looking forward to next summer. In fact, planning is well underway for the 2012 Commander Club Rendezvous in Detroit, Michigan.

As part of the local planning committee, I'd like to encourage all of you to consider joining us. This year's event is sure to attract many boats and friends alike, so mark your calendar for August 2-5, 2011 to be part of "Commanders in the D." Look for more details over the coming months.

- Mike Schrage, Treasurer

Membership REPORT

Here is a report from The Commander Club's Member & Boat Registry. Here you can see visually how many Commanders are in US states, Canada and the world.

- Marcia Elkins, Membership Chair

