

CLASSIC DRIVER

Handmade in Canadian wood: The boats of Muskoka

Lead

Greavette, Duke and Ditchburn are famous names in Canadian boat-building – and they all hail from the Muskoka region which, in the 1930s, was central to the wooden boat-building industry of the north American continent.

The beautiful scenery of the Muskoka region had become popular in the 1920s with timber barons and industrialists, who built their summer vacation homes on the shores of the sparkling lakes. This meant there was an illustrious clientele for an elegant and sporty style of locomotion on the water – first satisfied by elegant American runabouts, and then by the small local boatyards that had previously built canoes, but now turned their attentions to motorised water transport.



Some of them still exist today, such as the shipyard founded in 1924, Duke Boats in Port Carling. Behind the white wooden façade, handmade wooden boats are still built here, although the majority of the work undertaken today is restoration.

In the 1950s, water travel was still a fairly tranquil affair but it wasn't long before the peace was somewhat compromised by the arrival of the new, fashionable hydroplanes. Later came racing boats, many with 300bhp-plus engines, that seemed almost to fly across the water: but all was not lost. Today, almost every weekend sees meetings of wooden boats on the clear water of the Muskoka lakes.

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