

Curly Heads For Different Waters

For 33 years, Arthur ("Curly") Croch has been manufacturing "Curlycrafts" at his Northwestern Boat shop at 10 Mile and Evergreen in Southfield.

Now, the last "Curlycraft" is up for sale, as Curly changes the orientation of his business from building boats to producing boat kits for "do it yourself" assembling and finishing.

"It takes too many man - hours for us to continue to build the whole boat," Curly reported. "It will be more economical to manufacture the kits, and let the buyers do the building. They don't count the man hours in their costs."

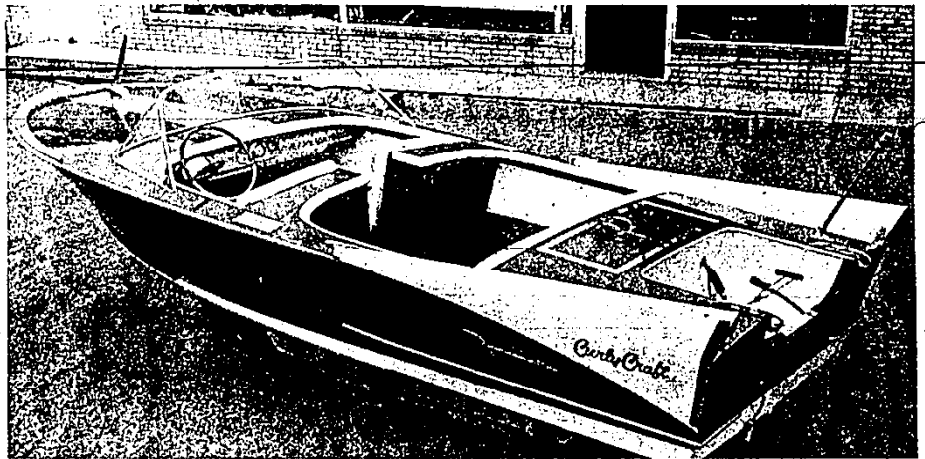
Now, people have the leisure time to spend building boats, he feels. Also, they can get just the particular design and type of boat they want from a kit. According to Curly, there was a kit building boom back in the early '50s. "It died out because there weren't enough models to choose from, and then along-came the fiber glass boat."

CURLY REMEMBERS with nostalgia a period during the mid-'50s when Northwestern Boat was producing finished boats at the rate of 30 a month. "But nowadays we can sell more of the unfinished product than we can of the finished, so that's where the economics are."

The kits which Curly manufactures contain the plans, patterns and pre-cut wood for a variety of small boats and hydroplanes. Eight-foot prams and 10-foot sailing dinghies can be built for under \$100, and then sailing kits added to them later if desired.

Larger sailing boats are proportionately more expensive, and come complete with dacron sails and hardware.

To go out and buy a 20 or 30 foot factory-built sailboat costs a large amount of money, Curly offered. A person can save one-half to two-thirds of that by building it himself. "And, if he has any



THE LAST CURLYCRAFT, such as the one depicted here, is currently for sale at Northwestern Boat. The company will now only manufacture kits for the boater who wants to "make it himself."

degree of skill and has the time and patience, he can end up with a better product than a factory built job."

Born and raised in Detroit, Curly began building boats from his garage. "Then I bought 800 square feet right where the shop is today," he recalled. "There were woods and fields all around us then." Now, a large office building and modern motel surround the boat shop.

Presently, Curly has 6,000 feet of space divided between his manufacturing and sales areas. He has two full-time employees and one part-time, "though in summer we may have to hire more." Curly's younger son works with his dad in charge of the service department and helps out with the sales.

NORTHWESTERN BOAT supplies several

local school boards with boat kits for their junior high and high school woodworking classes. When the boats are completed, they are sold to the students or put out for bids. The school board uses the funds to buy more kits for the next semester.

Curly acknowledged that in the last few years, several small boat dealers have gone out of business but feels that his business should do well. "With the increased interest in boating and Detroit moving out so that Southfield is really the center of Detroit, I am optimistic."

"My own boat didn't go in the water last year at all," Curly said. "My boating was done on a vessel going from Italy to Greece."

"I do really love sailboats. I just don't have enough opportunity. I'm looking forward to having more time."

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