

Very few people have influenced Australia's boating community as much John Haines (Snr). Many of his boats enjoy legendary status; thousands are in regular use on waterways all over Australia; millions of people have been introduced to boating and fishing in one of his craft over the best part of fifty years. In this special report, two generations of boating photo-journalists - Peter and Jeff Webster - combine to reflect on the special genius that was



# Hainesy

**Born in 1937 in Gosford NSW, John Haines became a Queenslander in his late teens - and stayed a Maroons fan forever. Fiercely Australian, he was a tough, but fair, man whose handshake was set in concrete. He understood Aussie boatowners like few others - and spent his very full life determined to build a better, safer, softer riding and more stable boat for us to use. For his achievements he was awarded the Order of Australia - and the lasting respect of the thousands who called him a mate.**

To appreciate the significance of John Haines' work in the field of boat building, we have to go back to the 1960's and consider the standard of boats that were being made at that time.

Back then, plywood or "bondwood" boats were the norm, although the very first aluminium boats were starting to make an appearance.

"Pleasure" boats then were very crude. They were usually hard riding, uncomfortably wet and commonly quite dangerous. The word "floatation" didn't exist in boating parlance, and it was considered a major feat just to cross Sydney Harbour, Melbourne's Port Phillip Bay or Brisbane's Moreton Bay in a small boat.

But Australians coming out of the 1950's had newfound wealth and freedom - and a determination in the post war years to exploit this new freedom to the full.

Australians embraced boating in spectacular fashion, and demand was very high.

In 1959, a young Queenslander with a passion



**Yep - this is the very first "Haines Hunter" to grace our waterways, and as a young Canberra-based fisherman in the 1960s, the writer (PW) still recalls studying it in awe - compared to the bondwood Hartleys we had then, it seemed miraculous.**

for water skiing and boat racing, built his first fibreglass speedboat. It set an extraordinary precedent.

To begin with, the new "fibreglass" material was unbelievably strong and completely waterproof - a far cry from the leaky riveted aluminium boats of that era, or the often amateur-built plywood boats.

In 1965, the first of the truly generic Australian trailerboats started to make their presence felt when John and Garry won their first Sydney-Newcastle Race in a boat they'd built.

They were soon known as "Haines Hunters".

A new standard of safe, comfortable and user-friendly fibreglass recreational boats had arrived.

For most boatowners, this was the beginning of Hainesy's purple patch. Between 1966 and 1973, thousands of the new boats emerged from the old Goodna, Ipswich factory in southern Queensland.

Through this period, John Haines and his brand "Haines Hunter" were dominant in the market place. They enjoyed a standard of excellence in building and design that was the equal (even then), to any in the world.

Needless to say, Australian boating families loved the product, and the order books were full. So much so, brothers John and Garry Haines decided to seek additional outside capital to fund their burgeoning business and underpin its growth into the next decade.

In 1973 they went into on a partnership with an Asian group, significantly expanding their financial base, with a visionary view towards future export activity being developed 'on our doorstep' in Asia.

It proved to be a disastrous move, and launched a decade of high drama and intense legal struggles.

It transpired that the Asians had a hidden agenda. They had no real interest in exporting boats at all - they were primarily looking for a means of opening up in Australia at a time when overseas investment and migration was severely curtailed by the government's restrictive policies.

It soon became clear their Asian "partners" wanted the Haines brothers out of their own business. This

culminated with the Asian interests engineering a financial re-structuring (tipping more and more money into the capital structure of the business) that the two young Australian brothers simply couldn't match. The outcome was calamitous, as they not only lost control of the business, it became impossible to even work there.

So they left, determined to start again, but it wasn't that simple. They'd signed agreements with Asian interests before the money went in, agreeing not to do just that - and the Asians took action to enforce the agreements.

As events transpired, the industry was so angry about the forced take-over, the dealers refused to work with the Asians (which they doubtless encouraged) and within 12 months, they had on-sold the Haines Hunter brand in the first of several ill-fated transactions. But the damage was done, and the brothers were out on the street.

For four years, between 1980 and 1984, the subsequent legal orders against the Haines brothers forced them to sit on the sidelines, unable to build the boats which were their lives.

It was a very dark period for the Haines family. Indeed, John's brother, Garry Haines, left the boating industry altogether in frustration and despair, not to return for more than 20 years.

John Haines was forced into other activities too, culminating with the successful development of Double H Transport, and Leeda boat trailers, but to John, this was never more than a necessary diversion.

With the grit for which he is renowned, "Hainsey" finally broke-through the first stage of the legal

dramas against the Asians, and in 1984, he started again, ironically, in opposition to the company - *Haines Hunter* - that still carried his family name.

With the new brand name *Haines Signature*, John Haines started the slow process of building the new business back up to the top.

It wasn't easy, with a legal minefield brewing in the background.

The giant American multinational - Outboard Marine Corporation, makers of Johnson and Evinrude outboards - ended up buying the 'old' Haines Hunter business after it had gone through a convoluted series of take-overs and business failures.

*Time Out: This is when - and how - many of the original 'classic' Haines Hunter moulds started to be sold off to other boat builders around south eastern Australia - and to this day, a variety of boat builders can genuinely claim to have boats that DID start life as genuine Haines Hunters, even if the transactions were - in most cases - subsequently ruled illegal by the courts.*

When OMC stepped into the ring and purchased the Haines Hunter wreckage legitimately, they did their



level best to restore some semblance of order and organisation back into the famous - and still valuable - brand.

Apart from pursuing the 'under-market' builders to prevent them from building designs they didn't own (from moulds they did), in 1991 OMC also sued Hainesy for what they believed was *their legitimate right* to use the name "Haines Hunter".

Worse, they took out a crucial injunction to prevent Hainsey from going into business against them, using the name *Haines Signature*.

Once again, Hainsey was forced back to court, to fight for the right to use his own name, on his own boats.

However, just as the case was about to start in the Federal Court, OMC suddenly capitulated. They agreed to the conditions then laid down by the Court allowing the case to be dismissed, and agreed to pay all legal costs on both sides.

OMC were mollified by the Court's (and Hainsey's) agreement to let the name of "Haines Hunter" go on forever with whoever formally owned the business name - whilst Hainsey was allowed to use his name on anything he chose to - obviously including the

brand Haines Signature.

This situation continues to this day, and is in part why there is a brand called Haines Hunter made in Victoria (now), and the brand Haines Signature made in Queensland.

By 1988, he was again building the top selling GRP trailer boat brand in Australia - a position Haines Signature has held ever since.

Hainsey didn't know the meaning of the words "give up" and it's to his credit that he overcame so many hurdles and obstacles put in his path over four decades, to sustain his position as the pre-eminent fibreglass trailerboat builder in Australasia.

He has been one of Australia's foremost boat designers, and easily one of the most experienced fibreglass boat builders in the world.

He created the designs of a whole range of boats that have taken (literally) countless thousands of Australians to sea and back safely. For more than 40 years, his boats have provided the benchmarks for the Australian Boating Industry safety and performance standards.

## Sporting Career

Throughout his life, John Haines played a dynamic role in numerous powerboat racing events, and won just about every major ocean and inshore racing event on the Australian powerboat racing calendar.

These include such well known events as the original Sydney-Newcastle races, the Cairns-Pacific 1000, Bridge to Bridge Ski-Races on the Hawkesbury River, and countless lesser-known state and national titles.

There is no doubt his racing success impacted on

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