

Kettenburg Marine

Kettenburg Marine started from a simple set of blueprints and grew into a boating business that touched the future, yet will always hold a significant place in history.

George William Kettenburg, Sr. moved from a “noisy” suburb of Pittsburgh, to a small, quiet, neighborhood in Point Loma. He was able to retire at the age of forty because of the sale of his electric generating plant he had owned earlier in Pittsburgh.

In 1906, he purchased a \$6000 engine from an expensive car. He then bought a boat from Dr. Foster, a neighbor, and installed this engine. The boat was named “Poggy,” after his daughter, Ella. This was the first boat and the beginning of his interest in them.

In 1904, George William Kettenburg, Jr. was born. When he was fifteen years old, he and his father decided to build a boat of their own. They bought a set of plans for a 22-foot boat. When they laid the plans on the floor, George, Jr. said it would be better to lengthen it by two feet. George, Sr. wrote the architect, who responded and said, “No—it would ruin it!” However, George, Sr. decided to follow his sons’ advice and ended up with a boat that was faster and better in design.

George Kettenburg, Jr. graduated from high school and went right into his own boat building business in his father’s backyard. He got an idea to make a living building boats. “I need some money,” he told his father. “I think I can build boats and make a living at the same time, anyway, that’s what I want to work at.” So Kettenburg, Sr. thought it over and gave him the money.

He built speedboats and had a small business taking students by boat to San Diego High School and sailors to their ships docked in the bay.

The boat operation grew and moved for a short time to McCall Street, and then relocated to the front of Dicken’s Street, where George, Sr. purchased some waterfront property in 1929. He also changed the name to “Kettenburg Boat Works.”

The depression came into play, and less of the sailing yacht boats were being bought; they were not economical and not cheap. So, Kettenburg, Jr. and Sr., came up with a “reduced size” boat, and “made it a less expensive boat to build and, therefore, to buy.”

The other thing George, Jr. did while there was little business, was to rethink the standard Star. In developing the Starlet, he scaled down the Star boat. As a result, it was more easily managed and easier for kids to sail. “Also, the way George, Jr. designed it, the boat could be easily righted in case of a knock down. She’s wide, with a narrow cockpit. If she goes over, the kids just climb out on the keel and the boat comes upright; then the kids scramble back in and continue sailing. She’s rigged like a Star, except with a smaller sail plan.”

During World War II, George, Jr. built ninety plane-rearming boats, along with his new design of sailboats.

In 1935, the Kettenburg’s entered the fishing boat business. When first starting out, little did they know it would be their largest moneymaker. Steve

Prodanovich, of the "Pamela Sue," says, "I fished my boat for twenty months without a major tie up. I found it to be the most seaworthy small boat I have ever been on. The operation cost has been very satisfactory, and the payload is good, also."

They had a fleet of sixty-six specialized Albacore boats and made, in two months, over \$1,000,000. The first of these boats was made in 1944, for the Lococo Brothers. This fleet, based in San Diego, sails each July to Mexican waters to fish for Albacore. They use bait, or jig, or whichever they prefer. They make around a forty-ton catch each season. Charles L. White, the skipper of the "Kitty Lee," says "The boat has proved very satisfactory for Albacore fishing, especially jigging. It has been out in all kinds of weather."

At least half of the thirty-eight foot boats carry crew from two to four fisherman. Around seventy-five percent of these boats are equipped with radiotelephones, and around fifty percent with direction finders and automatic pilots. The gas storage is on the back and has a fuel bunkering of 640 gallons. Walter T. Vestal, of the "California Maid," thinks his Kettenburg is absolutely the best sea boat that I have ever been aboard, loaded or empty. For their size and different kinds of fishing, capacity and cruising range—and, speaking from nineteen years of experience—I say the Kettenburg boats cannot be beaten." Along with Walter Vestal, Angelo Stagnaro, co-owner of the "Two Sisters," says, "We have had our boat for almost three years, and we're proud of the fact that we own one. We fish with gillnets. In the spring, we fish for Barracuda; in the summer, Halibut; in the winter, Sea Bass—good weather or bad."

PCC stands for Pacific Coast Class, and was one of the "hottest" ocean racing sailboats. They were originally designed as a seaworthy, easy-to-handle craft used by families. The strongest and best of the PCC's was Eulalie, No. 1 of the eighteen boat PCC fleet. Eulalie was named after Kettenburg, Sr.'s wife.

They have an overall length of forty-six feet, four inches, with a waterline length of thirty-one feet, six inches. It has a six-foot, six-inch beam, and a six-foot, four-inch draft. The sail area is 740 square feet, and the boat weighs about 18,500 pounds. PCC's are usually designed to provide four people with sleeping quarters and other living accommodations. However, this boat can allow ten persons aboard without crowding.

The PCC's are called the "Greyhounds of the Sea," because of their great speed. In April of 1948, the PCC's won first, second, fourth and fifth place in the International Yacht Race, from Newport Beach to Ensenada, Mexico. PCC's had been winning races so often, that people came to watch them race and Kettenburg sail.

Here are some races the PCC's have entered and won: In 1946, San Clemente Island Race: first to finish; first, small boat division. Lipton Challenge Race: first, universal class. SCYA-Coronado Islands Race: first, ocean racing class. SCYA-Regatta: first in two out of three races, ocean racing class.

In 1947, Mid-Winter Regatta: first, ocean racing class. Lipton Challenge Race: first, universal class. Santa Barbara-Valdez and return: first, ocean racing class. San Clemente Islands Race: first, second and third, ocean racing class.

In 1948, Newport-Easter Regatta: first, ocean racing class. Lipton Challenge Race: second, ocean racing class. Newport to Ensenada, Mexico: second, fourth and fifth. The Transpac: San Diego to Hawaii: place unknown.

These are just a few of the major races in which the PCC's competed. It's amazing to believe that the PCC's had come as far as they had, considering that the first of these boats was waterborne in 1946.

While creating the K-38, so named because it sounded like the famous aircraft-T design "P-38," Charlie Underwood became partners with Paul Kettenburg. Paul developed the lines and the layout of the new thirty-eight footer, while Charlie did the styling, and George, Jr. guided it all. Paul and Charlie built the boat together—people thought it looked like a great boat, so they signed up to buy one when they came to see it. Paul raced and cruised the prototype K-38 for two reasons. First, it was a way of showing the flag along the coast and promoting sales. Second, and even more important, it meant that the designer-builder was personally analyzing product performance.

All other K-boats were built after the Korean War, and after George, Jr.'s death in 1952. (George, Sr. died later the following year.)

In 1959, the K-40 was introduced. Again, Paul Kettenburg and Charlie Underwood teamed up together. Paul created the hull and sailspin, and Charlie attended to what Paul refers to as "aesthetics." The K-40, Paul says, is a "beamed out" K-38. It was a racer and a winner along with the K-38. The K-40 won the Newport-Ensenada race in a field of 500 contestants. Because they won so many races, and were so fast, Humphrey Bogart, one of the competitors, and also known for his acting, said, "It was unfair because the best boat was too fast!"

From the time the Kettenburg's started making the K-40's, they had built, in approximately seven years, forty boats.

In 1948, the Kettenburg's set a record that the boat-building business had never made. At one time, Kettenburg Marine, hauled more boats to be repaired than any other boat yard in the United States—over 3,000 boats per year. Kettenburg Marine was also one of the largest marine suppliers in the country.

Presently, there is nothing really left of Kettenburg Boat Works. George Kettenburg, III, has retired and sold the buildings. The only remains of the boat works are the property and the memories of the past.

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