

# THE STUFF *of* LEGENDS



BOSTON WHALER REMEMBERS  
THE MAN WHO BROUGHT  
FAME TO THE UNSINKABLE BOAT



Story by **Jennifer Chesak**





By definition, a legend is a historical account—often one that can be hard to believe and gathers momentum like a wave.

When Richard Fisher built the first Boston Whaler in a shed in his backyard with friend and naval architect C. Raymond Hunt, they engineered a legend—a boat that could withstand not only rough waters, but also the waves of disbelief that began to circulate. His 13-footer made its debut at the Boston Boat Show in 1958, and the stories of its indestructibility began to roll around the world.

This revolutionary vessel could hold 10 passengers without sinking, people had begun to say. The stories grew. It could remain afloat after 1,000 rounds of automatic weapon fire were pumped into its hull. Really? The legend went on: It was a boat that would not go down even after being sawed in half. Come on, that can't be true!

Richard proved his boats' unsinkability to the world by being pictured in *Life* magazine in 1961, and the stunning photos made Boston Whaler famous. *Life* featured Richard sitting in the stern of a Boston Whaler while a diver used a bucksaw to cut the boat in half. He was then photographed casually using the stern to tow the bow back to the dock. A Harvard grad, Richard ran an electrical manufacturing company—also out of his backyard shed—with business partner Bob Pierce. In his spare time he had pioneered a revolutionary production process called Unibond™ that produced what is now known among boaters everywhere as the “Unsinkable Legend.”

A Whaler's unique hull design provides unsurpassed flotation, stability and rigidity, which deliver the ultimate peace of mind out on the water. Despite the unpredictability of the sea and the harsh marine environment, Whalers are truly indestructible.



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“First, the boat was pure brilliance, and then the magazine photo was pure brilliance,” says Ben Cast, vice president of sales, marketing and customer service at Boston Whaler. “It’s an extraordinary image and a testament to the value Richard had placed on quality construction and safety. Anytime someone asks me why they should choose a Whaler, I show them that photo.”

Although Richard’s 13-footer appeared lighter than air, it was in fact as rock solid as the legend he had just cemented. Unibond—still employed today—involves the sandwiching of two fiberglass skins to create the Whaler’s hull and deck. Liquid foam is then injected in between. As the foam expands and hardens, it fuses to the fiberglass pieces to form a single, inseparable unit. The confined expansion space causes the foam to become very dense, which provides strength, rigidity and unsurpassed flotation.

Today’s Boston Whalers have more than double the amount of foam required to meet Coast Guard standards. Every bit of space in the Unibond hull is filled, right up to the gunnel. This not only provides a protective, level ring around a Whaler’s passengers, but also delivers sound and vibration absorption and increased durability.

In addition to the bucksaw stunt, Richard drove his Whaler up rocky rapids to showcase its strength. The lore lived on. Stories flowed



in about a Whaler accidentally going over Niagara Falls without suffering a scratch and a Whaler that had returned from 30 miles offshore with a 3-foot hole in it—still afloat, of course.

Richard had designed his boat with three keels as opposed to a more common V-hull. The hull had slowly evolved from a two-keeled design when it was originally modeled after a boat called the Hickman Sea Sled. Testing had revealed cavitation problems, however, and Richard added the third keel. The extra keel provided better performance, maneuverability, load capacity and serious stability. A man could perch himself on the gunnel of a 13-footer, if he so desired.

“At a time when fiberglass boats were just gaining popularity,” Ben says, “Richard came along and built a vessel that had advantages on every front: The first Boston Whaler was strong, rigid and light, and to this day, the company keeps those very design footprints at the forefront when creating each new model.”

Later, Boston Whaler added a wraparound bow chine referred to as a “smirk,” which enhances handling and speed and offers an even drier ride. The three-keeled design evolved into a twin-sponson design, which is used on the current Sport and Montauk models. These models deliver superior stability, shallow draft and optimum performance with minimal horsepower. The Accutrack™ hull design of the





Richard Fisher created a legendary boat in 1958 and became a legend himself for the unprecedented ways he demonstrated its unsinkability. Each Whaler built today is constructed with the same care and quality that Richard put into that very first boat, ensuring that the merits of safety and solid engineering run from bow to stern.



Dauntless and Conquest lines has a deeper V entry for slicing through unruly chop or offshore swells. Reverse chines provide superior recovery, stability and a dry ride, and the Outrage model sports the sharpest V entry for incredible offshore adventures. “Thanks to Richard’s early efforts and the dedication of our designers and engineers today, Boston Whalers are some of the most sought-after boats on the water,” Ben says.

Almost immediately, the U.S. Government recognized the merits of Whaler vessels. The company provided military and commercial boats in the 1960s, and in 1982 Boston Whaler launched a government and commercial division to complement its recreational sector. Boston Whaler Commercial & Government Products—incorporated in 2001—eventually expanded to include other Brunswick Boat Group brands; the outfit changed its name to Brunswick Commercial & Government Products, but steady demand continues for sturdy Boston Whalers. They are used for fire and rescue, homeland security, military combat and law enforcement.

The image of men in uniform using Whalers to do their jobs showcased just how high Richard had set the new benchmark for vessel safety and reliability. Richard continued his pioneering efforts by introducing the first center-console design. Moving the helm from

starboard to the center of the craft delivered a roomier, more versatile layout while further increasing stability and control.

Whalers are renowned for their safety and performance, no doubt, but they are also recognized for their iconic style. Richard made every attempt to create a top-of-the-line boat, but he didn’t stop after building safety and performance into that very first vessel. He clearly wanted to present a boat that had style to match its construction quality. Molded, custom-fit railings and oversized, through-bolted lifting eyes provided extra strength, while mahogany seats and consoles and stainless steel fittings added a classy element to a boat that was destined to become a classic.

Whalers of today honor Richard’s tradition of top-notch finishing touches. Corrosion-resistant, 316-L stainless steel hardware, such as bow and stern eyes, latches, hinges and bow rails, stand up to the intense marine environment. Latches and hinges are molded and recessed, and hatches are finished on both sides for ease of cleaning. Even the bilge has a smooth, molded gelcoat surface.

Indeed, Whalers are nice-looking boats. It’s a shame the company keeps cutting them in half—only now with chainsaws. Richard built the very first Unsinkable Legend, but each one that comes off the Whaler line, be it a Super Sport used for family fun or an Outrage for fishing, becomes a legend in its own right. The owners at each helm make it so every time they shove off from the dock in pursuit of a new adventure.

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