





# LEGACY

After 40 years, the Grand Banks 42 leaves behind a rich history and a solid pedigree

BY GEORGE SASS JR.

It seems hard to believe today that two brothers working out of a shanty waterside shop in Hong Kong would create one of the most successful cruising boats in yachting history. You can apply a variety of qualifiers to assign such a pie in the sky statement to a boat. Maybe it's the number of units built, or a technological breakthrough of some sort. In the case of the Grand Banks 42, the fact that the model endured for more than four decades certainly earns it a place in boating's history books.

In order to be a responsible editor, I should disclose that I worked for the company for several years. I believe I may even have a few shares of the public company stashed in some stock portfolio lying at the bottom of a drawer. However, this story is such a great tale and testament to the company's founders, as well as subsequent and current management teams, that I wanted to share it with you.

The builder launched the first 42 in 1965 and delivered the last this past summer to a Connecticut boater. Although the stout cruiser endured a fuel crisis, financial woes in the 70s, company management changes, new production facilities, and a host of other issues, production churned along until 2005. The 42's molds were only recently moth balled and replaced with a new Grand Banks 44 designed around a Sparkman and Stephens planing hull.

The story has its beginnings in Southern California. While most kids were building tree forts and swapping baseball cards, brothers John and Whit Newton were playing around with boats. Eventually they built a variety of craft for their family ranging from small catamarans to a 40-footer. After graduating from Berkley in 1956, John and his father Robert set up shop along the backwaters of Hong Kong. The Newtons paid \$100 per month for 2 acres that clung to the shores of Junk Bay. Whit soon joined the team and American Marine Ltd. was born. (The company has since been renamed Grand Banks Yachts under a broad branding initiative.)

Before developing the Grand Banks series, the Newtons built an eclectic mix of boats to the designs of well-known naval architects such as Ray Hunt, Nat Herreshoff, and Sparkman and Stephens. The bustling yard soon earned a solid reputation as a quality custom builder in an era where, unlike today, Far East boatbuilding was still a mysterious part of the market.

The family was also building a 40-foot trawler on a semi-production basis. This design enjoyed marginal success, but after building about 20 boats, American Marine realized it needed to make some changes before beginning larger scale production. Their search brought them to Connecticut in 1962 where they poured over *Spray*; a Rhode Island built 36-footer designed by Ken Smith. They decided to scrap the 40-footer entirely, and *Spray* became the foundation for the future Grand Banks, spawning a series of trawler yachts well before the trawler craze. (*Spray* continues to cruise on the Great Lakes today.)

With *Spray* as the base, the company worked with Smith and tweaked the design, primarily altering the cabin house and the interior layout. The Grand Banks 36 was born and almost immediately afterwards the Grand Banks 42 was introduced. It may be tough to imagine now, but at the time American Marine was a pioneer, introducing a boxy, slow cruiser during a period of faster, gas guzzling cabin cruisers.

The Newtons expanded the Grand Banks line to include a 32 and the apartment sized GB 50. The first 42 was launched in 1965, and what's remarkable is that the basic design remained unchanged for



**Chairman Bob Livingston is flanked by his team in front of the last GB42.**

the duration of its production cycle. There were no Mark II versions or major interior changes. (Different deckhouse models like the popular Europa and Motoryacht versions were introduced to complement the Classic version.)

One of the most significant alterations was the switch from wood to fiberglass construction in 1973. To my knowledge, there are not too many boat designs that made the transition from wood to glass construction.

American Marine had since expanded to a second factory in Singapore to accommodate the increasing sales demand. The new factory would handle the fiberglass production while the yard in Hong Kong would continue to build the Alaskan series of raised pilothouse designs out of wood.

"We wanted to wait to tell the dealers we were introducing fiberglass boats," commented Bob Phillips, a Grand Banks veteran who began working for the company in 1972. The 36 was the first model to change to glass construction.

"We put a wood 36 and a glass 36 side by side," Phillips said. "Then we flew a salesman over to the factory, and said 'this is an updated 36, what's different?'" According to Phillips, the salesman scratched his head while crawling over the boat trying to break the code.

"He walked inside, and of course, everything was still the

same," laughed Phillips. "He couldn't figure it out. When we finally told him he was standing on a glass boat, he was blown away." One of the tricks was that the company molded in planking lines to maintain the appearance of a wooden hull.

The layout of the GB 42 Classic remained straightforward throughout its life span. It featured two staterooms at opposite ends of the boat, separated by the galley and saloon. The interiors of all GBs were finished with teak joinery and teak parquet floors that became the builder's trademark.

After the switch to glass, it would be misleading to say that the 42 only went through minor changes until 2005. What's remarkable, however, is that the changes in equipment and engineering never altered the profile and style of a Grand Banks.

"It's similar to an old ad for the Porsche 911," said Phillips explaining GB's philosophy. "The ad shows two models ten years apart looking almost identical. But the copy explains that there were 50,000 changes made to the newer model. That's the GB." Besides quality, this is one reason why GBs enjoy such a high resale value.

Underneath the saloon sole, the designers incorporated a spacious engineroom housing twin Ford Lehman diesels. For the most part, these naturally aspirated workhorses were the engine package of choice on the 42 through the early 1980s. By the middle of the 80s, however, demand increased for higher horsepower engines. By the 90s, most 42s delivered in the U.S. were powered by Caterpillar engine packages ranging from twin 300 hp 3116TAs up to twin 435 hp 3208TAs.

Eventually, the demand for these higher horsepower engines forced the company to make significant changes in the 42. The first came in 1992. New molds were created with an increased beam and a slight nip and tuck on the bottom. The stem was also given an additional four degrees of rake. The engineers incorporated a stouter stringer system to accommodate the increased load of the bigger engines. Although only six inches was added to the beam, the expanse of the interior was a huge hit—literally.

A post 1992 GB 42 powered by 375 hp engines can achieve a speed in the high teens, and a top end of about 20 knots. It's not a bad ride at these speeds, but it can be a little wet. If you back down to a speed of around 12-13 knots, it settles into a sweet spot. I've delivered a 42 to St. Thomas and we cruised all day long in this speed range, just sipping fuel. It's a great ride, and demonstrates the versatility of a semi-displacement hull. But the market continued to demand even bigger engines. This demand pushed the GB 42 beyond its original design parameters. The decision was made to start with a fresh model. With a total of 1,560 hulls and continuous production since 1965, I think you too will have to admit it was a remarkable feat.

I'm looking forward to my sea trial on the new GB 44 in December. But it's going to have to be a hell of a boat to take the place of the Grand Banks 42. I'll let you know.

## Sneak Preview



The first of the new GB 44s will be the Europa version, shown here, powered by 500 hp Yanmars. Find out in our February issue how she compares to the venerable 42.