

MOTOR BOATING & SAILING

IN-USE BOAT REPORT

MATTHEWS 56'

The latest
from the oldest—
A very refined boat

by Pete Smyth



Matthews 56'
shown underway.
In-Use Report,



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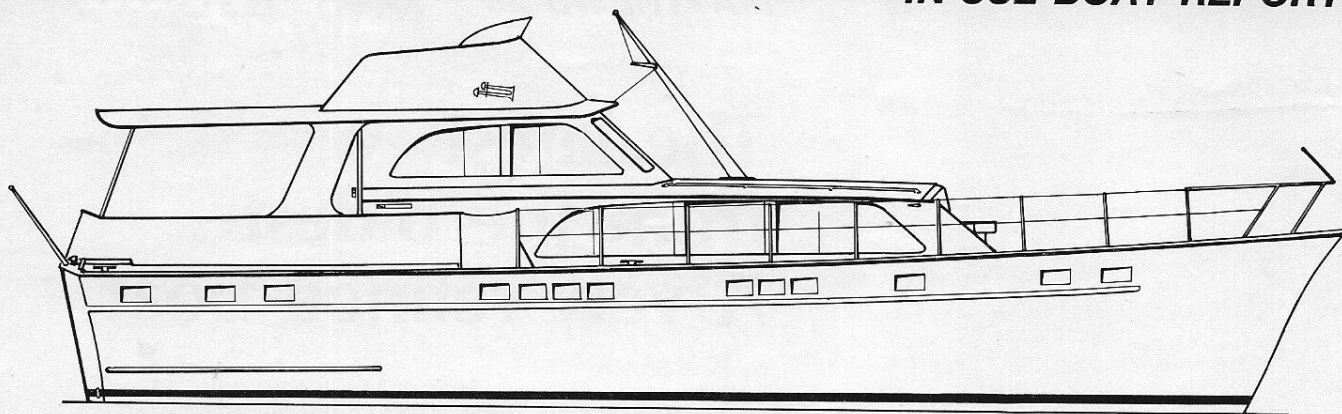
This is a very odd In-Use Report. It is normal for these reports to go on at considerable length, detailing the pluses and minuses of a particular boat until we are bored writing and you are bored reading. Boredom or not, though, the length is usually necessary to describe and comment on a boat fully; this is not the case with the Matthews 56. In fact, if you look at the photos, read the specifications and decide that this is the kind of boat you're looking for, then you might just as well call up Matthews now and put your name on the list for the next available boat. You would hardly be making a mistake.

That of course leaves you, the reader, hanging and breathless with anticipation as to why I make such a flat-footed statement. The Matthews 56 is that good? That bad? Why?

There are two reasons primarily, and both of them are inter-related. The first is that the boat herself is available on a semi-custom basis. There are four basic forms: The Flush Deck Cruiser (illustrated), the Sportsfisherman, the Offshore and the Motor Yacht, and within each configuration there are nearly infinite variations possible. There is, therefore, little sense in discussing interior arrangements when those can be adjusted to suit everyone's taste. The main bulkhead locations are fixed of course, but beyond that Matthews is quite willing to produce a specific boat to suit specific tastes.

This leads directly to the company itself, which is factor number two why detailed comment isn't necessary: Matthews is really dedicated to producing semi-custom boats that will thoroughly satisfy specific people. Producing only twelve 56 footers a year, Matthews treats each person as an individual, an individual with specific likes and dislikes . . . and with very definite ideas about what constitutes a good boat. For example, a resident decorator stands ready to assist each buyer in selecting the right materials and colors for their boat. (They do, however, discourage the ready-to-decorate way of selling boats feeling that normal interior decorators without marine experience are very likely to make a botch of the whole thing, and cost the owner far more than they're worth in mis-cut materials, materials which were probably wrong for seagoing use to begin with.) In short, buyers who are used to the mass production induced methods of salesmanship, methods which preclude treating anyone except as one of a large herd, will be dumbfounded by the amount of personal attention they will find lavished on them by Matthews. In setting up this story, we found that Dave Sutherland, the marketing VP, knew every boat and where she might be found, and he was quite obviously on a first name basis with every owner. Just as obviously, the owners had become more than just customers.

*The 56-foot Matthews Flush Deck Cruiser Our Lady
at her cruising speed of 20-plus mph on Michigan's Lake St. Clair.*



Above, control console of the 56. All instrumentation and controls, including electrical service panels are within easy reach of the helmsman. Right, the 56 at cruising speed illustrates the low planing angle and clean running common to all Matthews' hulls. Drawings (top) illustrate standard Flush Deck Cruiser layout.

photo above by Rilon Bourgeois

They were friends of Matthews as well, and this says a lot about the company.

One of the things it says is that the quality of Matthews is top-notch. While I could nitpick and say that I have seen better joinerwork (some boats from other countries where top craftsmen still earn only pennies a day are somewhat more polished), the sheer guts that Matthews insists on building into each boat is nearly unbelievable. I don't think anyone can successfully argue that there is a stronger hull of this size available anywhere. In truth it is probably considerably stronger than it needs to be; when Matthews began producing in fiberglass they insisted on maintaining the same hull weight as their wooden model, but that is in line with Matthews' stated policy of ultra-conservatism. To paraphrase Chuck Hutchinson, the President, "We know they're overbuilt, but as prudent men we believe that in time to come the extra laminations will pay off."

Time will tell, but so far the company reports no trouble of any kind with the 56-foot hulls, a hull that was tested at

MATTHEWS 56'

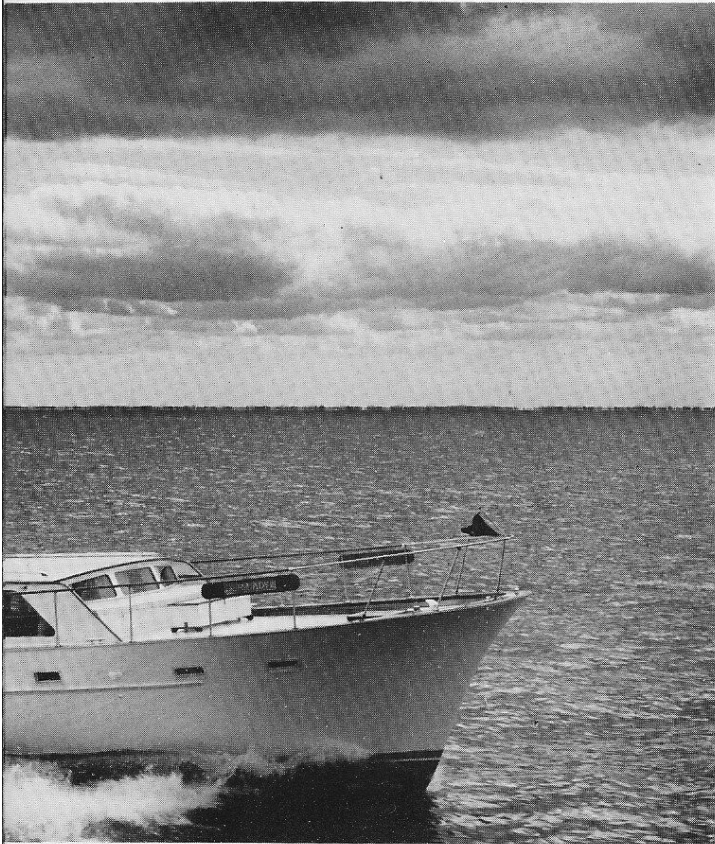
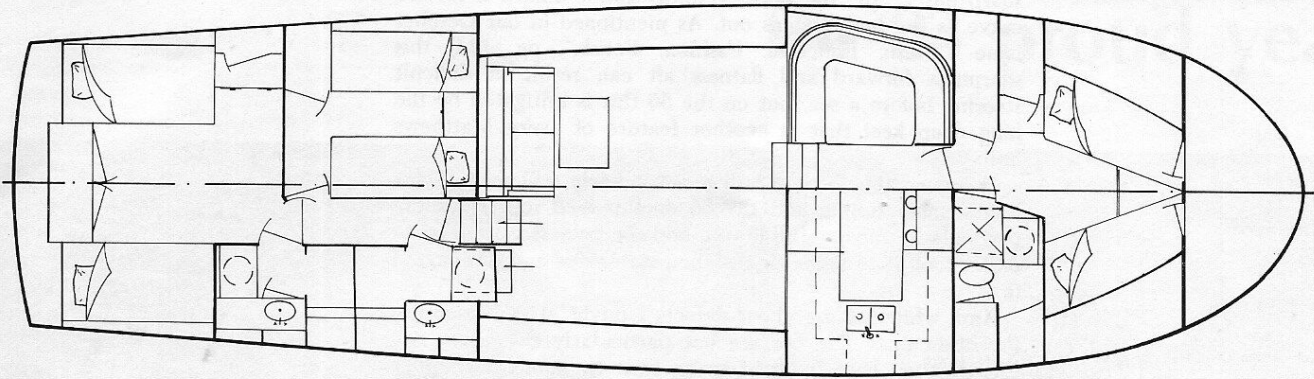


photo above by Bradford Photographic



the University of Michigan test tank, a hull that was a direct development from their wooden 52 footer and a successor in interest to the famous Matthews 38, a type built continually from 1926 until after World War II.

All of these boats have been well known for their easy driving qualities. They plane easily at a low angle and they are very economical boats for their type to operate. The new 56s for example cruise at 21 mph with full tanks when equipped with a pair of GM 8 V-71 engines. And remember that these boats are anything but papier mache party waists. The Flush Deck Cruiser, for example, weighs in at 62,000 pounds, while the Motor Yacht tips the scales to the tune of 68,000 pounds. In terms of ton/miles per horsepower, they are very impressive boats.

The form of the hull is the reason why the 56 is so efficient, and all Matthews boats have been products from the same single design concept. The concept marries a very easy lined boat with a flat run for planing efficiency. The

LOA: 56'0"
Beam: 16'0"
Draft: 4'1"

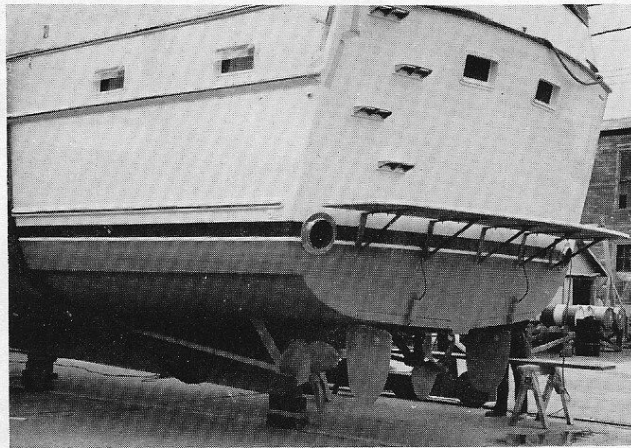
Displacement: 62,000 lbs.
Tankage: 700 gals. fuel; 300 gals. water
Power options: GM 8V-71; Cummins NT-380

easy lines are obtained by keeping the midship section deep and slack and carrying the lines forward into a deep sharp entry. Aft, the buttock lines exhibit almost a reverse curve as the hull flattens out. As mentioned in our October issue ("Form, Function, Fashion, Fetish," pg. 124) this sharpness forward and flatness aft can result in difficult steering before a sea, but on the 56 this is mitigated by the long deep keel that is another feature of every Matthews hull.

However, this form of hull is not entirely a blessing. Slack bilges mean rolling and the 56 does indeed roll. It isn't a particularly uncomfortable roll, and the owners we talked to either took it in stride or installed stabilizers and eliminated it.

And, while talking about defects I might as well mention the other one: The 56s are not particularly dry boats. Although they have built-in spray rails to knock the spray down, more stuff comes aboard than on other similar boats. This is not, I hasten to say, anything remotely resembling solid water, just spray, and there isn't much anyone's going to do about it if they wish to enjoy the other advantages of easy driving and economy. With her easy hull lines carried all the way forward to a sharp deep entry that slices so nicely through the water, she has no way of eliminating the spray thrown up by that same sharp entry.

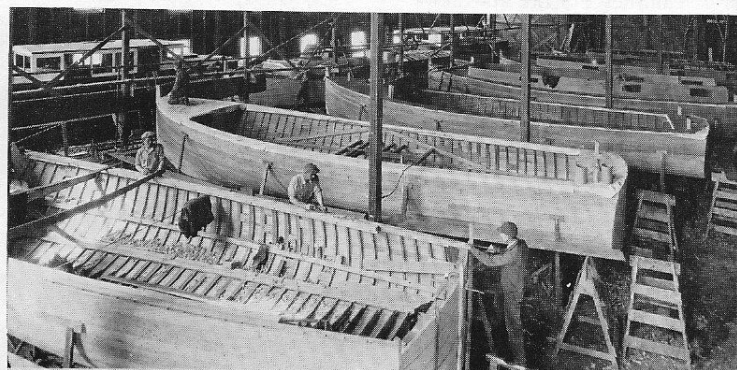
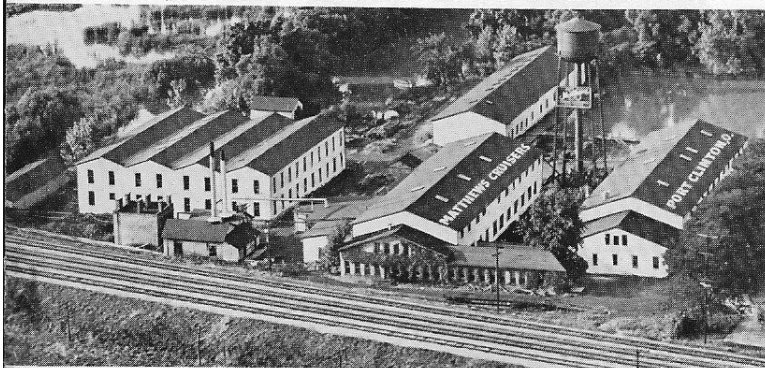
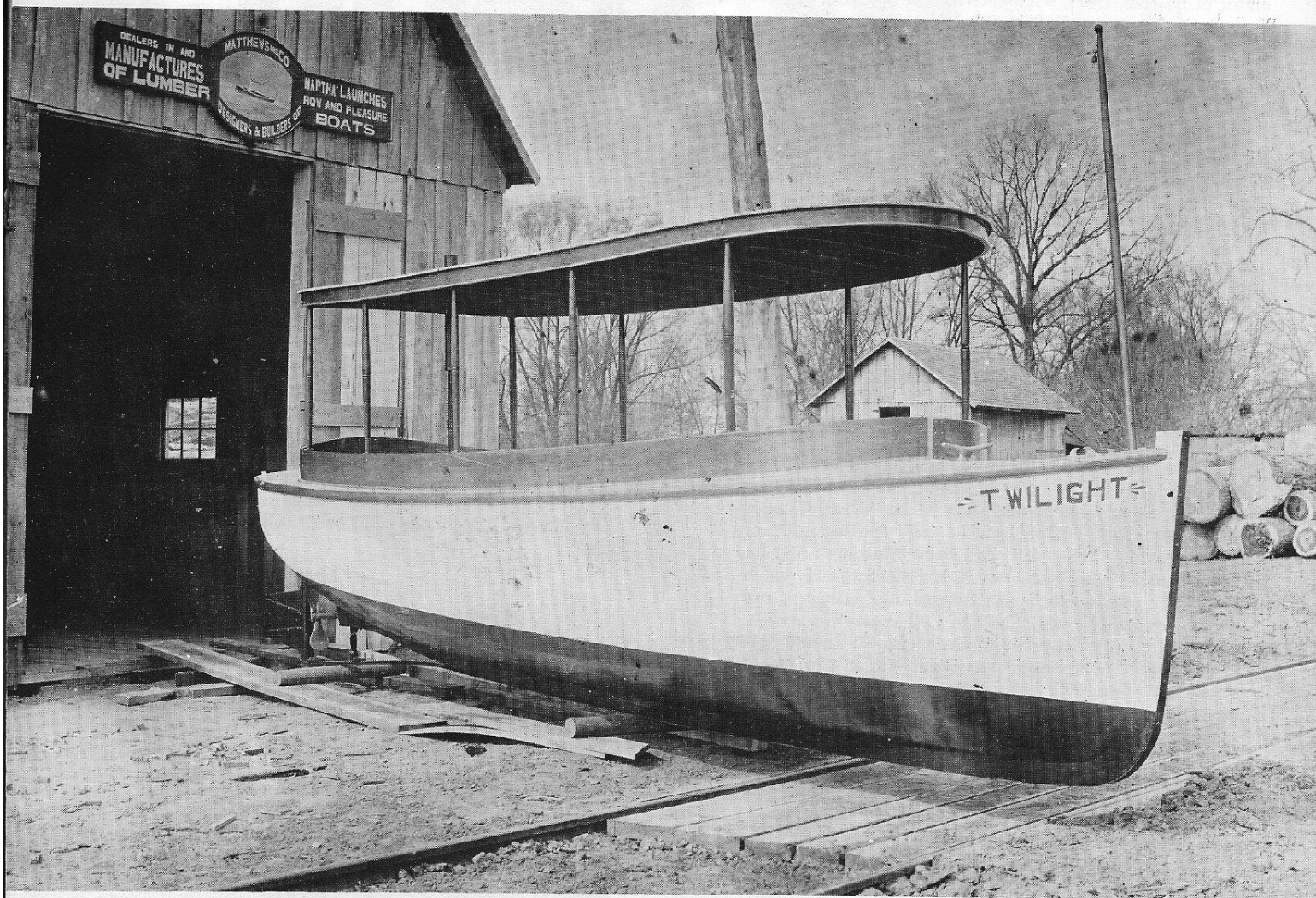
Summary: There is very little to criticize on a boat where everything but the basic hull can be changed to suit the whims of an owner. If the 56 we were aboard had been at last year's cruiser rally, she'd have earned her Blue Pennant in a walk. In the Safety category she'd have earned a 10 since she meets all applicable ABYC, and other applicable standards. In the construction and maintainability category



A fish's eye view of the Matthews' underbody discloses several interesting details: The integrally molded trim tabs and the apparent reverse curve in the buttock lines as the deep easy sections of her hull flatten out near the transom. Note also the deep keel that both enhances control and protects the props.

she'd earn a 9 since I could find no substantive way of improving on what they are doing already except for my already recorded nitpicking over joinerwork. In the engine and drive train category, she leaves nothing to be desired while anything left to be desired in the owner's viewpoint category is possibly the owner's fault since Matthews will do anything within reason to please him. In sum then: If you happen to be looking for a 56-foot fiberglass cruiser—and you have the \$200,000 plus to do it—run don't walk to the nearest telephone and get your name on the list—there's quite a few on it already. ‡

The Matthews Company—boat builders for 83 proud years



From naphtha launch to luxury yacht production, Matthews has reflected the changes of the 20th century and progressed accordingly

by Nancy J. White

Top, "Twilight," one of the first boats built by Matthews, sits in front of the original plant in Bascom, Ohio. To the right of the boat are the heavy oak logs which were used in building. Bottom left, the 27-acre Matthews plant in Port Clinton, Ohio has been the company's home since 1906. The picture of the hull-building department (bottom right) was taken in 1930 when wood was king.

The year 1890 was a watershed year in American history—the frontier was closed, rural life was giving way to urban living, and the powerful industrialists were forming trusts and corporations that would lead America into 20th century corporate life. It was a time when a small-town boy could, with drive and Yankee ingenuity, establish his own legacy in the American business world. And so it was in 1890 that Scott Matthews, son of a saw mill operator in Bascom, Ohio, boldly started his boatbuilding company. In its 83 years of production, the Matthews Company has witnessed many changes and much growth in America and in her boatbuilding industry; never stagnating in her proud reputation, the Matthews Company has continued to grow along with the 20th century.

When Matthews first began building boats in 1890, he had to suit his designs to the shallow waters by his plant in Bascom. He built 16 to 26-foot naphtha launches which he shipped to the H.A. Lozier Company, a Plattsburgh, New York bicycle dealer who, through its agents, sent the boats all over the world. Matthews' launches gained international acceptance and his business boomed.

In 1905 he designed an elegant 72-foot family yacht which required deeper waters than Bascom was able to provide. Matthews' business had grown too large, the time had come to move onwards (coincidentally the name of the 72-foot yacht). Matthews relocated his plant at Port Clinton, barely 70 miles from Bascom, where he was welcomed by the townsfolk who had heard of the promising company and its enterprising founder.

The new location ushered in a new lavish era for the Matthews Company. In 1906 production of luxury cruisers to 120 feet began and in that year Matthews exhibited at the first New York Boat Show, the only existing company claiming that milestone. Although Scott Matthews had had no formal engineering background, his reputation as an expert designer and builder flourished and inspired young men came to learn his theories. The late well-known naval architect John Wells worked as a designer under Matthews. A.W. (Bill) MacKerer, now Senior Vice-President at Chris-Craft, also served his time with Matthews.

As America moved into more advanced technology and experimentation, the Matthews Company followed suit. W.E. Scripps, head of Scripps Motor Company, Detroit, Michigan, was determined to show the world that his gasoline engines could be used as a marine power source equal to any sea. To prove his idea he planned a 6,308 mile voyage from the U.S. to St. Petersburg, Russia. The year ? 1912, just nine years after the Kitty Hawk experiment. The builder Scripps chose to create the boat capable of this epic journey ? Scott Matthews.

The *Detroit*, the ship Matthews built for the voyage, was made from Ohio oak with every possible measure taken to insure strength. She had such form and weight she could ram an iceberg without incurring any permanent damage.

To the amazement of many, Captain Thomas Fleming Day—founder and for 25 years the editor of *Rudder*—and his 3-man crew made it to St. Petersburg in 62 days aboard the 35-foot, 16-horsepower *Detroit*. The era of the powerboat had come; Matthews was aboard.

During WWI the Matthews Company devoted its production to defense. Squadrons of 110-foot subchasers came out of Port Clinton.

In the 1920s a feeling of optimism and fun-loving extravagance pervaded the land. This feeling was mirrored in the luxury cruisers from 65 to 120 feet that Matthews produced during the Gatsby-era. Scott Matthews, however, along with other industry leaders foresaw the need to standardize and in 1924 launched the Matthews 38—a single-cabin cruiser with an auxiliary sail. The special design feature of the 38—a reverse curve in her underwater lines aft which minimized drag and encouraged planing—became a prototype for later models. John Wanamaker, Sr. of Philadelphia owned a 46-foot sport cruiser. William Randolph Hearst had three 38s. Charles F. Chapman founder and long-time publisher of *Motor Boating* bought one of the first twin-cabin 38s.

When many other companies and businesses were folding because of the Depression, Matthews did not cease operation. As an alternative to their luxury yachts Matthews offered a 25-foot sloop designed by William Atkin. The Matthews Sailer was discontinued after the '30s as it wasn't considered to be profitable.

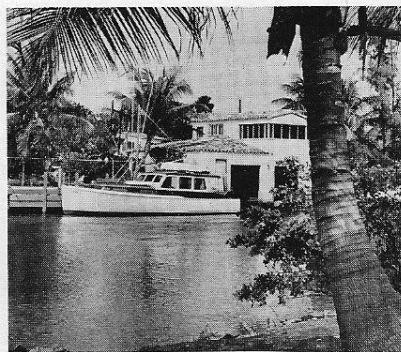
New developments such as the conversion to twin power and the introduction of the 34 footer preceded WWII. When War was declared the 30-acre Matthews plant was again translated over to defense production. The 38 model was adapted for patrol boats.

In 1956 company patriarch Scott Matthews passed away and a new corporate look was adopted by the Company. Charles L. Hutchinson, former owner of the Pioneer Steamship Company, bought controlling stock. The tradition of the Matthews family, however, stayed with the Company: Carl Matthews served as Chairman of the Board and A.W. Matthews as Miami branch manager.

Since the War Matthews has developed a variety of different size boats. In the early Sixties there were four popular sizes: 36 feet, 43 feet (five different models), 53 feet and 60 feet.

In an interview for a 1965 *Motor Boating* article, Matthews then Vice-President R.E. (Salty) Reynolds insisted that "wood is our preferred material for strength, safety, beauty." Time has proved him wrong. With the introduction of fiberglass as a material for boatbuilding, wood, which demands much more maintenance, became obsolete; Matthews converted to fiberglass production in 1969.

Today Matthews is known for its 46-foot and 56-foot fiberglass luxury yachts. They maintain that the "Matthews Tradition of Excellence" still holds valid after 83 years. †



Both boats pictured here are examples of Matthews' late '30s production. Left, this 38 footer belonging to Ralph Evinrude was photographed in front of his Florida home. With New York's Riverside Drive as a stately backdrop, this 50-foot Matthews (below) cruises the Hudson.

