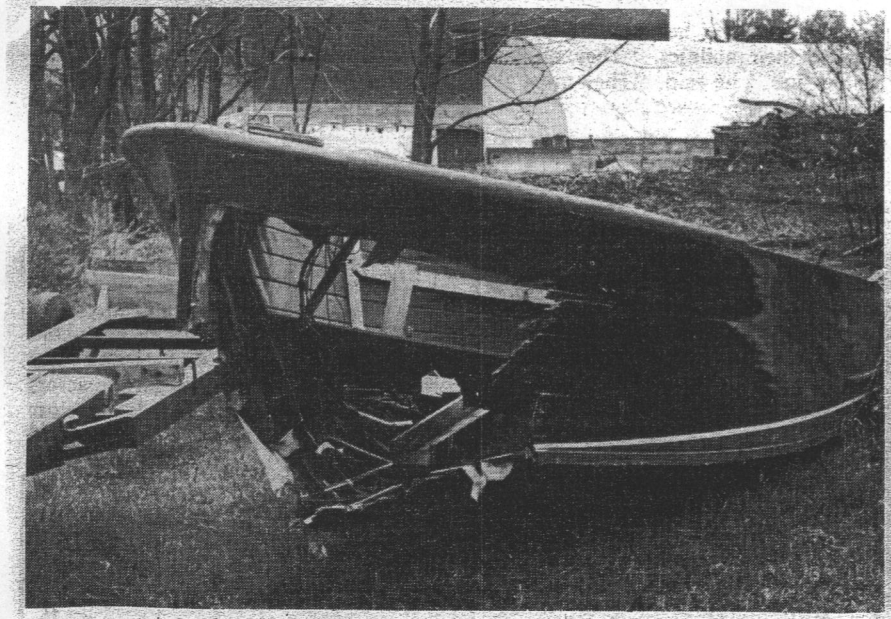

During the stunt in "On Golden Pond," where the "Thayer IV" was dashed into a rock, a replica of the craft was used. Shown here, the stunt boat was restored and run by Pat Curtin.

Pat Curtin, owner of Eastern Classics in Laconia, sits aboard the "Thayer IV," the mahogany Cris Craft he restored for use during the filming of "On Golden Pond." After the movie was completed, Curtin bought back the boat.

Laconia man provided 'Golden Pond' boats

Surrounded by shells and dismantled hulls of boats of every conceivable size and vintage, Patrick Curtin reminisces about his experiences during the shooting of the award-winning film, "On Golden Pond."

"It was a first-rate crew," he said. "From the camera and sound people to the art director. Everything was the best."

The owner of Eastern Classics, a Laconia boatyard specializing in the overhauling of mahogany speedboats, Curtin was first contacted by the filming company two years ago.

After agreeing to work on the film, Curtin and his 14 person crew — the largest working group on the picture — went to work readying the boats and other props needed.

From renovating the lakeside cabin used as the summer home in the film, to assisting in the endless hours of aerial photography of beautiful Big Squam Lake, Curtin stayed on the job for more than six months.

Since the movie script called for the "Thayer IV", a mahogany Cris Craft, a mailboat and a canoe, Curtin's responsibilities as chief supplier and maintainer of all water craft were considerable. "All the camera crews had to have boats too," he pointed out. "And they had to be ready to go at any time, for hours of shooting without interruption."

After about seven years in and around the filming business, Curtin is no stranger to the demands of the job. For about 15 years he "ran" yachts for owners who often used the huge luxury crafts for only a week or two out of each year. That line of work was hard, but lucrative and always interesting, he says.

When he isn't busy with the day-to-day running of the Eastern Classics yard, Curtin stays busy supplying props and advice to filming companies. That can mean finding vintage automobiles or building boats for stunt shots, like the one seen in "On Golden Pond."

During the film, the "Thayer IV" is shown hitting a large rock at high speed and then sinking. To portray that few seconds on film required building a replica of the boat and then sinking it.

"The big thing in this work is safety,"

Curtin explains. "When you have stunt men in a boat that's supposed to be hitting a rock and going down, you have to be sure you get the effect without hurting anyone. It's engineering, that's what it is," he concluded.

When the actual actors were behind the wheel, things got even more complicated. During the filming of "On Golden Pond," Curtin or one of his crew spent a lot of time hunched under the dash of the boats, actually doing the steering. "None of them knew much about boats," he said.

He is casual about the working relationships he formed with three of the film industry's biggest stars. Referring to "Hank" and "Jane" as naturally as he speaks of his boatbuilders, Curtin seems less than awed by the glamorous players in the film. But he doesn't hesitate to praise their abilities. "They all did a super job," he said. "They more than deserved every award they got."

The experience was not without its frustrations, however. "Out of nine hours of shooting, you might end up seeing a few minutes," he said. "And when costs are up around $2,000 a minute . . . filming is very hard work."

He said he was pleased when he saw the results of each day's filming, particularly the more "artsy" shots of the lake and surrounding wildlife. "I was glad to see that so many of those kind of shots got in the final movie," he noted.

When questioned about his future plans, Curtin admits that another film is a possibility, but stops there. "It's not kosher to let that stuff out in advance," he said with a grin.

Citing Gov. Hugh Gallen's recent attempts to interest filmmakers in coming to the state, Curtin said he admires the governor's efforts, but cautioned against expecting to hear anything much in advance of such plans.

"People in film are very careful about discussing their plans in advance," he said. "There are a lot of factors to consider with each movie—like the screenplay, the script and all the actors involved. They play their cards very close until all those things are taken care of."

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