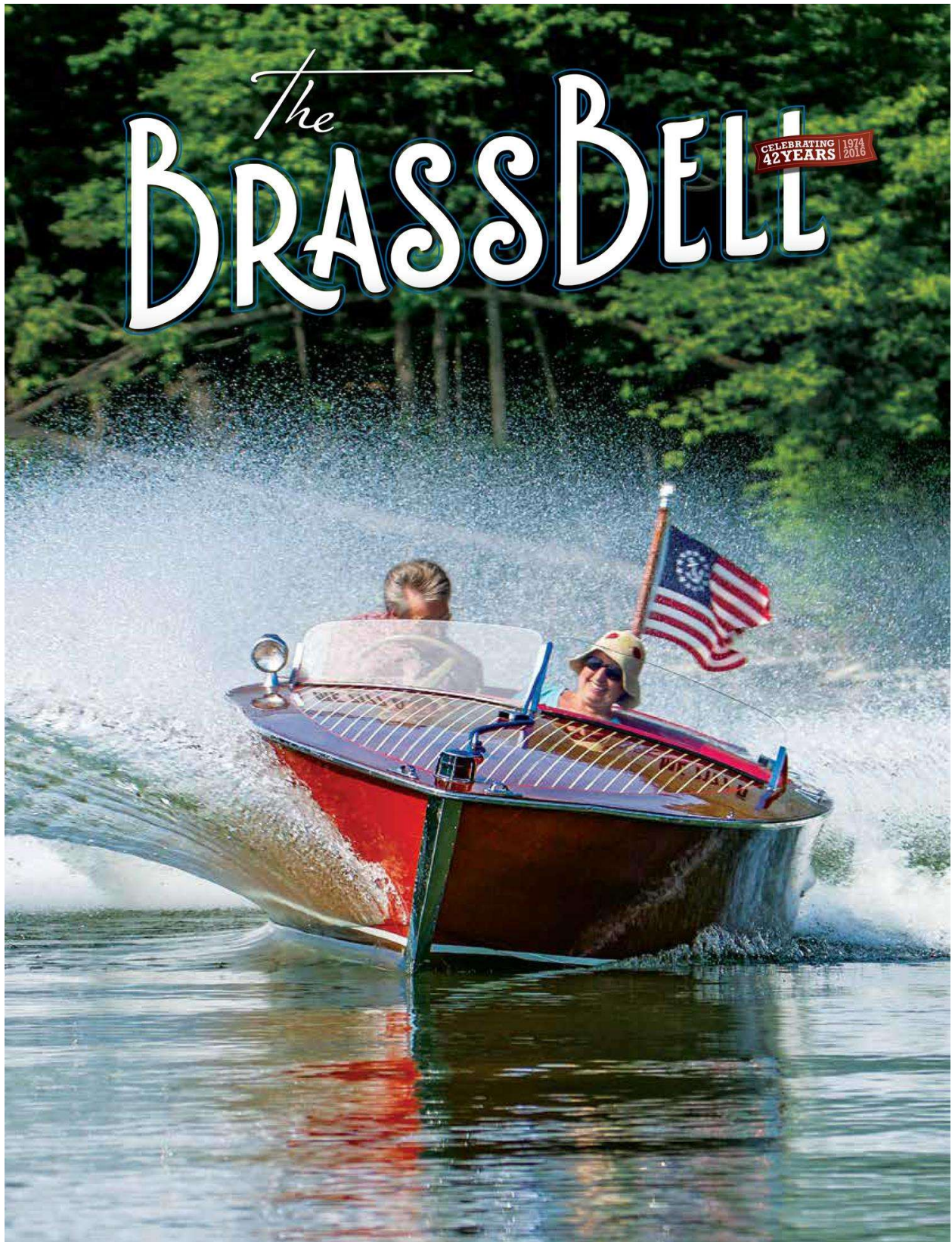
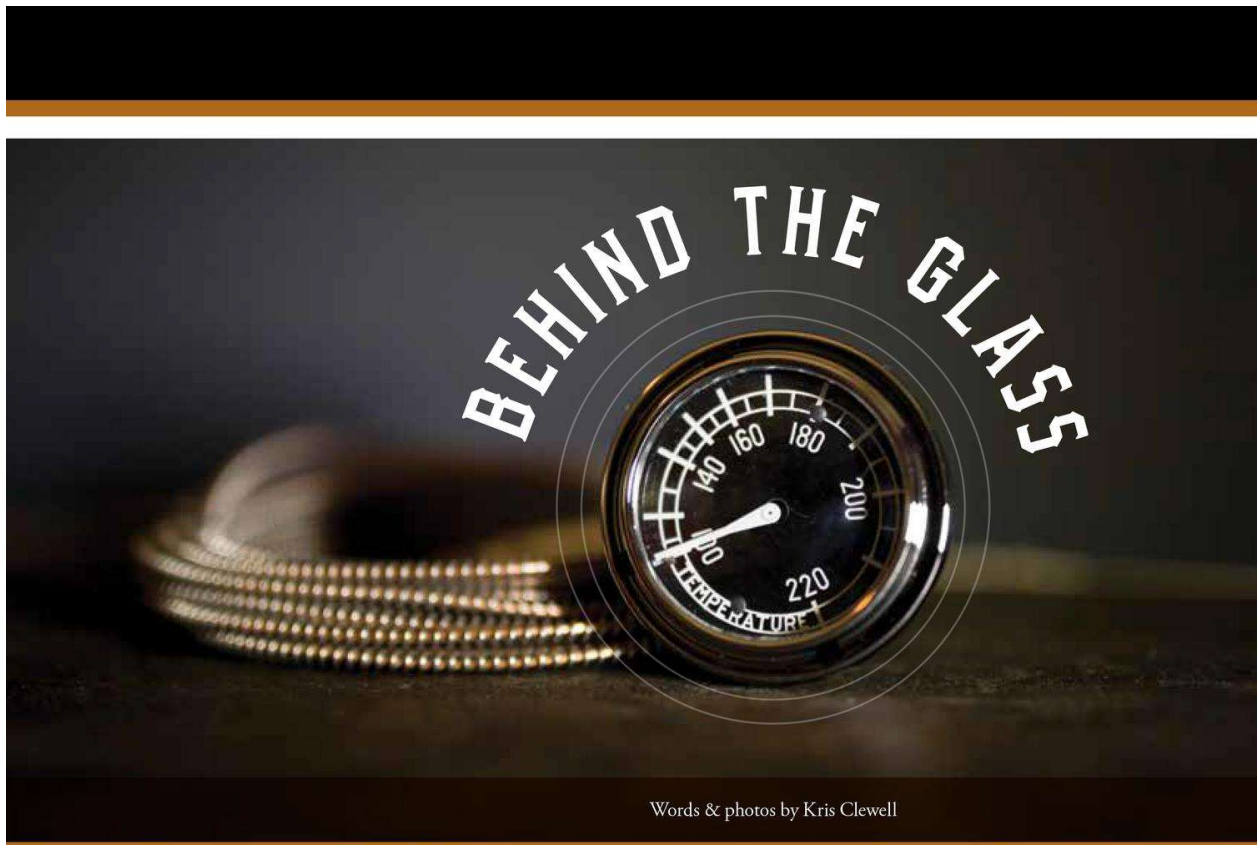


The BRASSBELL

CELEBRATING 1974
42 YEARS 2016





Words & photos by Kris Clewell

OUR MACHINES SPEAK TO US THROUGH THE FACES OF OUR INSTRUMENTS AND GAUGES AND THEY HAVE BEEN DOING SO FOR CENTURIES. POWER, VOLTAGE, CYCLES, DEGREES, DIRECTION, PRESSURES AND OTHER VARIABLES ARE TRANSLATED TO A SIMPLE TO READ OUTPUT. NUMBERS AND NEEDLES ARE TIED TO WHAT ARE ESSENTIALLY SMALL MACHINES IN THEMSELVES. THEY HAVE BECOME AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR HOBBY AND WITHOUT THEM WE ARE BLIND AND NERVOUS, BUT WITH THEM, WE HAVE A SENSE OF CONFIDENCE THAT EVERYTHING IS GOING WELL WITH OUR CRAFT, AND ITS ENGINE. VINTAGE GAUGES AND THEIR BEZELS TIED WITH PERIOD STYLING, AND CRAFTSMANSHIP MAKE FOR A BEAUTIFUL PARTNERSHIP.

Unfortunately, over time, decay sets in and the hand built instruments eventually break, wear or read incorrectly. The gauges, often being irreplaceable, must get sent away to professionals for restoration. Shauna, at Kocian Instruments, gave us an inside look at what it takes to make what's old, new again.

I arrived at a small workshop on the lake, the new home of Kocian Instruments. It was late afternoon that I found Shauna toiling away peeling the stubborn glass retainer rings off a Chris-Craft gauge set. She peered out over her glasses with focus, her hands gripping a pair of modified screwdrivers. She worked around the gauge methodically and removed the glass and then picked it up and tilted it towards window light, examining the original silkscreen.

I started to wonder why at this point in her life, she decided to move into restoring vintage marine instrumentation. Many are pinned onto a career path by our parents from grammar school for being athletic, artistic, or brimming with charisma. We're asked over and over what we want to be when we grow up. Astronauts, doctors, veterinarians are often the response. Eventually, we meander through life following a path that often leads to a courtesy of Taiwan twill covered chair that spins 360 degrees so you can reach the laser printer, file cabinet, and your keyboard. If you're motivated, you'll rediscover a passion later in your life. Shauna slipped into just that. Four hundred hours of apprenticeship under Dale, the previous owner of Kocian Instruments, has put her in a position to spend a lifetime mastering her craft. She had been inspired to begin creating something challenging, and tangible.

THE REWARD OF THE
PATIENCE INVOLVED
IS IN THE OUTCOME,
AND THE SMILES
AND GRATITUDE
WHEN THE GAUGES
ARE DELIVERED.

As she pried the gauges apart, and pulled out the glass, she reminded me there was a long way to go. She showed me a list of all the things that needed to be done. It started with a phone call. Someone's gauges are broken, worn, and faded. Shauna discusses in depth what's needed, and wanted. Factory refresh correct? Electric or mechanical restoration? Detailed restoration with newly painted needles, and a new case, or just a refresh? The restoration plan needs to be set in place well before any work is done. Silver plating, etching, chrome, clockwork, all must be carefully planned. Much of the work done is invisible, behind the glass, but the client will receive a gauge that looks and works exactly like a new old stock original. Obsolete parts coupled with modernized engine replacements in boat restoration projects means some gauge sets need to be updated. Each conversion to 12 volts means an entire case change. As many original parts as possible are used to convert, but often the whole of the guts are changed. The sweep of the needle is often different than the one on the original plate, so modification to the updated internals occurs. Sometimes even an entire new needle is created, painted, and installed. New faces, and new mounting holes are created. Wiring input and output are different, and the routing is different. Mechanical gauges can be nearly as difficult due to unavailable parts and new capillaries or drives must be installed. More often than not, the gauges come back functioning better, and longer, than they ever did from the factory. >>





OUR MACHINES SPEAK TO US
THROUGH THE FACES OF OUR
INSTRUMENTS AND GAUGES AND
THEY HAVE BEEN DOING SO
FOR CENTURIES.

I came back after a few days to check in on the gauge restoration. Everything was neatly laid out on the workbench with all parts separated into their own spots, where they would not be lost. Any gauge keepers or brackets that arrived with the gauges were saved. Shauna showed me a small room behind the workshop where she polishes up buttons, and brass bits that cannot be replaced. Some cases are cut to fit new internals. Back in the shop new light filters are riveted in and the new internals are tested for accuracy, and slipped into their newly restored cases.

One of the most delicate jobs is the silk screening. Over the years there have been many designs and the fonts and the silkscreen logos are the identity of the face itself. None of the fonts are available anywhere so the words, logos, and instrumentation marks are carefully recreated and re-printed onto screens. Lining the wall are more than I care to count but I pulled a few out randomly and held them up to the light. Each was different, special. Logos of companies long gone, showed through in reverse through the light. Shauna dragged her fingers across the wood frames looking for the number that matched the Chris Craft gauge set. She pulled it up, looked up at it like I had done with the others, and brought it over to the table. It is a relatively quick, but meticulous process and much has been invested in making sure the screens are perfect. The white is poured in, and slid through the screen and what is left is a perfect representation of what originally came from the factory.

When fully assembled, the gauges represent hours of hard work coupled with close collaboration with the customer. Shauna takes great pride in making what's old, new again. The reward of the patience involved is in the outcome, and the smiles and gratitude when the gauges are delivered. From Chris-Craft, to Garwood or Hacker Craft, and everything in-between, every owner deserves to trust what their gauges are telling them, and enjoy the identity it gives their boat. 🛥

PAGE 38: Vintage Chris-Craft mechanical temperature gauge with new capillary tube.

PREVIOUS PAGE TOP: Inventory. One of the catch-all/go-to shelves.

PREVIOUS PAGE LEFT: The newly printed glass for an early 1960s Chris-Craft tachometer.

PREVIOUS PAGE BOTTOM RIGHT: Assembling the mechanism into the newly painted case of a 1960s Chris-Craft gauge.

PREVIOUS PAGE MIDDLE: Lining up a piece of tachometer glass with a screen for printing.

PREVIOUS PAGE MIDDLE: Getting glass ready for setting.

ABOVE TOP: Gauges close to being ready for assembly in to a 1930s Chris-Craft engine turned panel.

BOTTOM: Disassembly of a 1960s Chris-Craft gauge. Sometimes a very difficult part of the process.

RIGHT: Beautiful 1928 Chris-Craft silver panel w/silver-plated fish scale gauges, upgraded to 12 volt.