



Member Article

Commander Remembrance Story

By: Scott Anderson August 2017

So, Twenty three and some years ago I was on the market to trade up (boat wise) from a 23' Chris Craft Lancer.... (the esteemed vessel "My Mistake II") Decided I'd like a 27' or 31' Commander. I started searching thru old magazines, clipping old Chris * Craft ads.... this one was amongst the first I found. Looking back now, all these years later, wow.... quite a story behind this one. A quest for info that led me on quite a journey, to say the least.



A few comments about large yachts and Fiberglas by three men who know:



Harry H. Coll, President, Chris-Craft Corporation (center)
Richard D. Avery, Chief Stylist (left)
Charles E. Burgess, Vice-President, Marketing (right)

Harry H. Coll: "By using Fiberglas*, we molded a hull form for our Chris-Craft 37' Commanders with high performance characteristics. It's immune to dry rot, marine borers, and doesn't corrode. With minimum maintenance provided, salt water, the sun, temperature changes and gasoline have little effect on the hull. Color can be molded in which lets us simulate a handsome wood-grained teak deck with black deck teases."

Richard D. Avery: "The freedom of form of Fiberglas construction permits us to create some of the most beautiful cruiser designs on the water. And Fiberglas construction allows complex curves and provides increased interior space."

Charles E. Burgess: "There's strong customer appeal in Fiberglas construction because it increases durability, reduces maintenance and upholds resale value."



Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corporation, Industrial Materials Division, 717 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10017

So, the three men pictured in the bottom of this magazine ad for Owens-Corning Fiberglas. The first pictured is my dear friend, the late Dick Avery, Chief Stylist at C*C from 1964-1988. The second gent is the legendary Harry Coll, President of C*C. Third gent is Charlie Burgess, once CFO, and later, Marketing VP. In a chat one day here at FYC around 1996 or so with Mr Jack Telnack, he was admiring my newly acquired 1969 31' Commander, and commented that his buddy Dick Avery, retired in So. Fla now was the one who designed my boat, along with the full C*C lineup back in those yrs. He suggested i look him up, and even gave me his phone number. A few weeks later, i got up the nerve and called him one eve... Gracious and hospitable to say the least... He recalled several stories from his days at C*C, and encouraged me to pursue finding some of the other retired C*C executives in my quest. Now keep in mind, at this time, there was NO Commander Club, no nothing. After several phone chats after a couple years, I called Dick one day to inform him I would be down in his area soon, and would love to meet up for a few drinks and lunch maybe. He graciously accepted and in Jan of 1999, we met at the Sarasota YC, and spent several hours there visiting, libating, and fixing the world. Unbeknownst to him, I had a surprise for him, His old

boss at Ford Styling, (the late) John Najjar, lived five mins from the YC, and i had established a dialogue with him a few years before as well. John hired Dick at Ford in 1958, and upon Dick's departure in 1962 to Chris Craft, they had not seen each other since. It was quite a momentous reunion to say the least.



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Upon our parting ways that afternoon in Sarasota, Dick presented me with a 3 ring binder that he had assembled many years before, with photos of many of his Commander designs.... He said "Hell, i haven't looked at this stuff in years, You take it, and put it away, someday it may be worth money!!"

This began a friendship that would last until his passing, just a few years ago.... Dick, and his lovely bride, (the late) Maureen, treated me like a son, we visited many times, at various shows and Commander Club Meets. She always called me her "other Scott", as their own son was also named Scott.

The second gent in the aforementioned ad was the late Harry H. Coll..... who spent most of his career at Chris Craft, later to be wooed to High Point, NC to take the reigns at Hatteras. The one thing that sticks in my mind about Mr. Coll..... Somewhere in my archives i have a copy of a letter from Owens-Corning to Mr. Coll, dated 1959-ish. The letter is pitching the company's latest strides in developing their new plastic based material, called "Fiberglas" and they wished to set up a meeting with execs and engineers at Chris Craft to discuss the uses in large yacht construction. The second letter i have in this series, is a reply from the office of Mr Coll, who states, rather emphatically, that "At this time, C*C is eyeball deep in wood, aluminum, and steel yacht construction, and has no interest at this time in discussing "Fiberglas" as a yacht building material..... Yikes, talk about dropping the ball.... The same basic letter was drafted and sent to Willis Slane, in NC, who took up O-C on their offer, and very soon thereafter, founded the Hatteras Yacht Corporation.

The third gent is Charles Burgess.... One time Chief Financial Officer at C*C, later promoted to Marketing VP. The interesting thing I recall about ol' Charlie.... Fred Hudson (Chief Stylist at C*C 1959-1964) told me that his hasty departure from C*C in Jan 64 was mostly attributable to Burgess. Fred and Bill MacKerer had just completed the (now legendary) 1964 38' Commander, and Freddie went to Burgess to ask for a salary increase. Burgess flatly refused Freddie, and incensed, Hudson hastily called his old buddy in Detroit, Dick Teague, at American Motors, and asked for a job. Teague told him to pack his stuff, and that his new Company Car will be waiting at Metro Airport upon his arrival. When Harry Coll found out about this, he was furious with both gentlemen. He told Freddie.... "I was the guy who hired you....Why didn't you come to ME first"??? But it was too late, Fred had his mind made up, and departed for Bloomfield Hills and his new home on Orchard Lk Rd and 15 mile.

Dick Avery told me he and his bride Maureen were on this particular vessel here pictured that day, for the photo shoot... That's Hillsboro Inlet Light in the background... Pompano Beach, Florida