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Tooned Up

Hey, they laughed at the Doel-Fin. **BY RANDY STEELE**



MALCOLM "GOOFY" SOHM EARNED HIS NICKNAME IN HIGH SCHOOL, where on a dare he dressed up as Santa Claus one St. Patrick's Day and tried to take a 15-hp minibike for a lap around the inside of the building. Just as he was about to finish, he wiped out in front of—where else?—the principal's office. The principal came out and said, "Oh, Mr. Sohm. What a goofy thing to do." That was 25 years ago and the

name still sticks. One thing that isn't goofy about Sohm is his love of powerboats, especially pontoon boats. "A pontoon boat is a great family boat. It's the most fun, most affordable boat there is," he says. What's not fun about pontoon boats, however, is the way they handle. Pontoons aren't called logs for nothing. While trying to navigate Lake Winnebago, Wisconsin, in a bad storm, Sohm became convinced there had to be a better way. "The idea is to ride *above* the waves, not *in* the waves."

Sohm hauled his boat back to his auto-body shop and got to work. His answer? A patented device he calls T.A.P. (Technically Advanced Performance). He welded 3" aluminum fins along the full length of the outboard sides of his boat's pontoons. Then he attached two more fins—1'6" long and 1/2" wide—to the pontoon's inboard sides, positioned on the forward portion of the log. The result, he hoped, would be an edge that could carve through the water.

Because we test anything and everything here at BOATING, Charles Plueddeman, our editor-at-large, took the helm of Sohm's 20-foot pontoon test boat, powered by a 50-hp Merc, and gave it a good shakedown. "The handling was great," notes Plueddeman. "Instead of sliding through a turn, the boat turned neatly and with precision."

Sohm reports that his T.A.P. system has helped him squeeze 4 to 7 mph and a couple hundred extra rpm out of his engine.

He has approached nearly three dozen boat builders with his "grip-and-get" invention but says none is interested. "I told them 'Honest-to-God, you'll think you're on a different boat,' but they told me I was wasting my time," he says. Undaunted, Sohm plans to build his own boat, the Conrad Marine GS-26/26, which means it will be 26 feet long with 26"-diameter pontoons. The GS-26/26 should be completed by press time and will

sell for about \$16,000 without a motor. He's also planning a smaller model, the GS-20/23, which will be—you guessed it—20 feet long with 23"-diameter pontoons and priced at about \$13,000. Not in the market for another boat? Sohm will also sell his T.A.P. system for a 26-footer to you direct for \$1,250, which doesn't include installation.

Sohm is not afraid to stack his invention up against some serious competition. In fact, he has campaigned in poker runs against Fountains, Scarabs, and Cigarettes, to name a few. Of course, Sohm doesn't pretend it's a performance boat, but his pontoon design does run relatively fast and turn well. And because of its excellent stability, it was picked as a platform for an ESPN video crew during the filming of the Experimental Aircraft Association's annual air show in Oshkosh.

"He may be goofy, but he's not a kook," adds Plueddeman. "Sohm is a guy with an idea and the ability to assemble it."

For more information: Conrad Marine Inc., 6453 South Highway 45, Oshkosh, WI 54901, 920/688-3166.



GOOFY'S NO KOOK: A pontoon boat that can actually carve a turn? Malcolm "Goofy" Sohm has devised a system of fins that he says will improve handling, speed, and stability.