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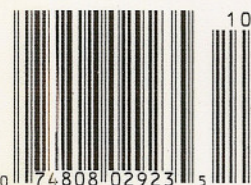
# Boating Life

THE AUTHORITY ON RECREATIONAL BOATING

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## EVOLUTION AT WORK

It's a blustery spring day in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Easterly winds push low clouds and rain across the sky, and Lake Winnebago sports a nasty 3-foot chop.

Not a day most folks would want to be on the water, but down at the ramp, a half-dozen pontoon boats sit ready to launch. They have come to participate in the Pontoon Shakedown, an event that is the brainchild of local businessman and boat-designer Malcolm Sohм.

Sohм's goal is to raise the bar on pontoon-boat performance, and in the process, test the validity of his own contribution to the genre: a patented set of spray-deflecting rails that attach to the interior and exterior surface on the pontoons. Participating pontoon manufacturers are asked to run their boats through a timed handling course, take a top-speed run at a radar gun and show their stuff in the big-lake chop.

Because of inclement

weather and a modest manufacturer turnout, the on-water trials are less than the organizers hoped for. Perhaps of greater importance is the roundtable discussion scheduled for the following morning, as it brings boatbuilders together with engineers from Mercury Marine and the American Boat and Yacht Council to discuss trends in pontoon design, performance and safety.

No doubt about it, pontoon boats are undergoing an evolution. No longer are they merely sedate floating platforms that idle across the pond at little more than swimming speed.

At a recent industry test, one manufacturer unveiled a pontoon capable of 70-mph speeds and promised to bring an 80-mph boat to a future event. While this eye-watering level of performance is not typical of the pontoon breed — or necessarily recommended — it does point to a well-documented trend toward larger engines.