

The year was 1922 and the newly formed Chris Smith & Sons Boat Co. was taking shape at a rapid pace on Algonac's waterfront. Chris Smith had been building boats for years, but the goal of this new company was to produce a line of standardized 26' runabouts and create an inventory of affordable, quality-built boats for the general public. This had been done successfully in the automotive industry, but up to this point, boats were built to order. In addition to the new 26-footers, Smith and his sons planned to continue producing the high-end 33' Baby Gar runabouts for Gar Wood and build racers that competed nationally, earning Smith his nickname "The Wizard of Algonac".

During this first year of operation, the company continued to build custom runabouts while developing the Standard Runabout design. Orders came in from prominent Detroit citizens who could choose the length, front or rear-drive configuration and the type of mahogany used, and boats were powered by the 4-cylinder Hall-Scott A-7-A, a surplus WWI aviation engine. A. W. MacKerer, the production manager, oversaw the building of these prototypes and kept a notebook detailing design, construction, performance, cost of each project and used this information to manage the labor and material cost for the Standard Runabout. At the same time, Jay Smith was developing and marinized another WWI aeronautic engine, the V-8 Curtiss OX-5. These surplus engines could be purchased for half the cost of the Hall-Scott engines and would power the new line of boats.

Henry Ritter, president of H.G. Ritter Cigar Box Co. ordered his 26' rear-drive runabout in early 1922. The hull design was based on Smith's successful 26' Gold Cup race boat, a design that would be used for the Standard Runabout as well. Ritter's boat shared construction details with the Baby Gar's such as the use of steam bent intermediate ribs, back-fastened intermediate ribs on the sides and decks, a red lead painted bilge, and wider ceiling planks with beaded edging in the interior cockpits. It is not surprising to see these shared details, as the Baby Gars and Smith boats were built side-by-side; however, these details were discontinued in the Standard Runabout design as a cost saving measure to produce a more affordable boat. Company accounts show Ritter's boat going back to the factory for additional work in the fall and the following year, Ritter traded up for the new Standard Runabout.

Fifty years later, Bruce Barnard and Mark Mason, two seasoned collectors, discovered an early Chris-Craft in a Detroit boatyard. It was a front-drive design with a windshield and looked like one of the Standard Runabouts. They brought the boat home and discovered the original dash hidden behind a panel in the rear cockpit, evidence that it was an earlier rear-drive model. They began a restoration, replacing the oil-soaked bottom and broken planks, but then put the project aside.

John Allen, an avid Minnesota collector, had two marinized aero engines, a Hall-Scott A-7-A and Curtiss OX-5, both used in the early Chris Crafts, and was looking for an appropriate hull for these engines. He purchased the unfinished project and commissioned Muller Boatworks to complete the restoration. The narrow width of the stringers in the boat matched the Hall-Scott perfectly and determined that this was one of Chris-Craft's earliest boats. With extensive research using early photographs and MacKerer's notes, the restoration of the rear-drive model was completed with original gauges and controls and seating layout. Company records and notes linked this boat to Henry Ritter, the fourth boat produced in 1922. Christened *Miss Algonac*, for her original port of call, she is the world's oldest surviving Chris-Craft.

*Never before in the history of boating has it been possible to obtain a boat of this type, speed
and quality at such a remarkably low price.
(Power Boating advertisement, 1924)*

1917 Hall-Scott A-7-A Aviation Engine
"The Capital" Marine Conversion
100 hp at 1450 rpm
4-Cylinder: 5 ¼" Bore, 7" Stroke; 606 cu. in.

Miss Algonac is owned by John and Rebecca Allen, Gull Lake MN and Naples, FL. She was restored by Muller Boatworks, Sunapee, NH and engine was restored by Scott Boyes, Brainerd, MN.