

February 20, 2002

Cutts & Case

“Corsetier to yachts”

Mr. Eddie Cutts explained the repair work being done on *Isabelle*:

The original mahogany planking was replaced and repaired. Approximately half of the planking was replaced. Then according to a process patented by Cutts & Case the hull will be reinforced. The hull was scored or grooved, approximately every 4 inches along the hull perpendicular to the keel. These grooves run all the way around the boat. Into these grooves kevlar (sp?) cord will be placed. This cord is manufactured according to specifications from Cutts & Case by DuPont. The cord is epoxied into the grooves. The epoxy soaks into the end grain of the wood in the grooves, attaching the cord by “threads” of epoxy throughout the wood. The epoxy also seals the wood creating a “dam” impenetrable by water so that water, or any other liquid, will not be able to soak into the wood between the grooves. The cord is placed into the grooves wrapping around the entire hull. This cord is extremely strong, stronger than steel, and has tremendous tensile strength in particular. This strength is doubled when the cord is wrapped around the hull, just as the a line run through a block and sheave can lift twice the weight it could lift on its own. The cord is non-biodegradable, and DuPont’s testing on the cord indicated that it could be expected to last at least 1,000 years, and that 2,000 years might even be possible. Though very few chemicals will break down the cord, sunlight will degrade it, but these cords will be encased between two layers of planking, so won’t see the sun. Cutts & Case did tests on the cord with the epoxy and found that it is stronger and lasts better than DuPont’s tests indicated, because the epoxy actually holds the filaments in the cord apart from one another. The filaments are so strong and sharp that they actually “scissor” one another as the cord moves, but the epoxy holds them apart and prevents this from happening. So now DuPont uses Cutts & Case’s methods and data. The cords support the shape and strength of the hull, like a corset. “We are the corsetier of yachts.” After this process, a skin of thinner planking will be put on top of the cords and inner planking.

Cutts said that the length of the life of the boat is not solely determined by the new strength of the hull, but by the work being done on the topsides, especially where the deck and deckhouse join. If these joints are not made watertight, rainwater will seep into the interior of the hull and begin rotting it from within. Cutts said they’d worked on *Isabelle* a couple of times before but lots of different people had worked on her. And some problems she’d had “since her inception, since she was new.” When asked what these were he said several things, for example that she’d had several different kinds of hardware put into her over the years, so she had copper and iron and other metal fittings which degraded because they created electrolytic problems which corroded the metals.

When asked if he enjoyed having *Isabelle* there, Mr. Cutts laughed and then said he’s a boatbuilder, it’s his business, so he likes having work, but they’ve never been short on work. When asked how many boats they build each year, he said sometimes they take 17 years to build one boat, like the one they have building in the yard, because they build it in “down time” But they always have orders. They have several boats—sail and power on order or under way, all using the method above to build the hulls, and have never laid off a single man in 75 years of business, “and I think that’s a record in the country. I’d like to talk to anyone who can beat that. Never laid off one single man in 75 years. I’ve fired a few. If I find them sleeping under a boat, I fire ‘em. But not for lack of work. We’ve always had plenty of work.” And when he hires people he looks for good guys— “The first thing I want to know, when someone comes here looking for work, the first thing I want to know is Does he love his mother and father. And did he like his grandparents. I don’t care if he can build a boat.

I don't care how big his tool box is. Sometimes that's the worst. All these guys— none of them could build a boat, but we taught them that. You can teach them that. And I want to know if he's got ethics. If you have a guy who's got ethics and will work hard, you can teach him anything and he'll learn it. He'll try to learn it and work hard. And we take care of them. We help them out if they need something, if they get into trouble or want something. We'll try to help them out if they get into trouble. Not marital trouble. But the other kind. Or if they want to buy a car, we'll loan them some money, or whatever."

The Cutts & Case method allows power boats to be built lighter, which makes them go faster, and sailboats can be built with more ballast and the same overall weight, which also makes them go faster. "Everybody wants to go faster." And a boat is not the fastest mode of transportation, even a horse can go faster. But a boat, it's got beauty and people love a boat. I remember I read an article in a magazine recently and a man (Cutts may have given a name) wrote and "he damned the wooden boat, but that's a shame, because he should have damned his own ignorance."

When asked "what kind of people buy boats like these? Beautiful wooden boats." Mr. Cutts said, "What kind of people buy jewelry?" He then told a story about buying a bracelet for his wife for Valentine's Day which she had wanted. Before she said she wanted the bracelet, he had bought her for Valentine's Day a 24 karat gold cross with a "widow's penny" set into it. He told the story from the Bible of the widow who gave her last two pennies which Jesus said was worth much more than all the riches given by wealthy men. In Jerusalem "they found 160 of these pennies. They found them in a box or something" and sold them "for more than two pennies each" and he bought one and had it set into a gold cross for his wife. "And now she doesn't want to wear it, because it's a widows penny and she doesn't want to be a widow, 'cause I'm a nice guy."

(Anything I've put in quotes I feel I can remember enough of Mr. Cutts's own words to be very close to a direct quote. Elsewhere, I've tried to use his words or phrases wherever I can remember them, but much of it is just my words for the ideas he conveyed.)

Lindsley Hand