

Company History

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The history of McLaughlin Boat Works (MBW) dates back to the 1960's in San Diego, California with two passionate sailors, Earl Elms and Herb Shear. Operating under the name Chubasco (storm on the water), Elms and Shear designed the original Snipe mold used to build the famous McLaughlin Snipes that dominated the World Championships for over 30 years.



Eventually, California Snipe sailor and veteran boat builder Mike McLaughlin, who had worked at Chubasco most of his life, purchased the Snipe molds and moved the operation to Tennessee. This move was in response to the relocation of the International Snipe Headquarters to Chattanooga.

Steve Sherman, Indiana lake sailor, and father of three boys (two of whom presently work at McLaughlin) purchased the company from Mike McLaughlin in '86. Thus began the materialization of his life long dream of contributing to the sport of sailing.



Steve Sherman, owner and head engineer from McLaughlin Boat Works, working with Luis Horta, IODA Chief Measurer.

Steve's commitment to innovation and continual improvement, combined with his natural curiosity and "hands on" approach, led the company to successes in many classes. At one time the company built the Snipe, Lightning, Day Sailor, Windmill, Highlander, Thistle and Tanzer 16. MBW has always taken pride in pushing the forefront of foam/composite technology, such as being one of the first, outside of the aerospace industry, to use vacuum bagging in performance sail craft back in the early 1970's. That history of innovation and continual improvement are evident today in our new dust and climate controlled production facility.

Beginning in 1990, at the request of families from the St. Petersburg Yacht Club, Mclaughlin began a new tradition building its first International Optimist Dinghy. Today, McLaughlin specializes in the Optimist and has become the world leader and the only US builder.

As Steve Sherman puts it, "the Optimist is the single most important element in keeping sailing alive and healthy in the world today. From the tens of thousands of children that learn to sail each year will come the sailors, Olympians, instructors, coaches and commodores of tomorrow's Yacht Clubs. My dream of contributing to sailing has come true by a hundred fold."



Spencer Wiberley, Tom Coleman, and Steve Sherman posing with the 2500th IOD95 hull built at McLaughlin. As of 2009 the count had grown to over 7000.

Holding true to the original ideas of Elms and Shear, MBW continues as a business run by sailors for the benefit of sailors. You cannot build a successful company without good people. MBW has assembled a group of like-minded sailors who believe that if you provide the finest in customer service and the best product money can buy the rest will take care of its self. This is why MBW is the premiere partner with the United States Optimist Dinghy class organization (USODA) and supporter of the International Optimist Dinghy Association (IODA).

McLaughlin's reputation has been built upon the principles of: Customer service, Exacting quality standards and Engineering fast durable racing yachts.

Over the last 10 years, MBW has also built a strong financial foundation by diversifying into other product lines that require high quality fiberglass work. These include: Architectural ceiling domes, Play ground equipment, Enclosures for computer controlled industrial robots, Jeep hardtops and doors, Race car bodies, Bumper boats and bumper cars to name a few.

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