

Basic Detail Report



Ski-Bye

Vessel number

HV000031

Date

1954

Primary Maker

Hammond Craft

Description

SKI-BYE was built to order for Les O'Neill in 1954 by Hammond Craft which operated out of Brookvale on the northern beaches of Sydney. Hammond Craft were recognised as builders of the top of the range for craft of this type. Harry Hammond only made one boat at a time, and they were always built to order. SKI-BYE is 5 m long and 1.6 m wide, clinker or lapstrake planked in Queensland maple and it has a 'hockey stick' profile bow. The deck is plywood. The owner Les O'Neill chose a 52.5 kw (70hp) Lycoming engine originally from America to power the SKI-BYE. It is believed the engine is a 1925 vintage model that had probably been in Australia for many years. Import restrictions in the 1950s would have made it very difficult to purchase such an engine from outside of Australia. The layout features a 'walkabout' arrangement whereby the aft compartment had a passage between the engine box and the side decks. The other typical arrangement was a centre mount, which had the engine decked over from side to side. Two other interesting details concern the painted finish. The deck edge and trim are an off-white rather than black, and it has a blue bottom and white boot top, whereas most other Hammond Craft had a red bottom. It is understood that the bottom finish is the original colour scheme but the off white trim is probably a recent change as it was originally finished in a dark colour when launched. According to Garry O'Neill, the son of the owner, who was quite young when SKI BYE was in the family the O'Neills were keen on water skiing. Over the years they owned a number of ski boats along with big American cars to tow them. SKI-BYE was towed behind a luxurious black Packard with automatic suspension, and this was a typical scene that 'turned heads' in the 1950s. Les O'Neill's brothers also had Hammond Craft built for their own use, including one of the largest Hammond Craft ever built, a 5.63 metre long hull that was almost 2 metres wide called MISS AUSTRALIA. It was built for Laurie O'Neill. SKI-BYE was used on Sydney Harbour and then later on Pittwater for many years by Les O'Neill and two subsequent owners. At one point it was lucky to survive, when the second owner considered scuttling the craft as it lay in a deteriorated condition at the Royal Motor Yacht Club. A friend bought it sight unseen and proceeded to restore it to working order again. With assistance from the mechanic HT Smith, they discovered that the engine had probably had a fault from the time the block was cast, where a piece of slag blocked the cooling water flow at one point, causing overheating problems. Once cleared the engine ran without any further problems. SKI-BYE was acquired by the Australian National Maritime Museum late in the 1980s and it is now part of the National Maritime Collection.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 5.02 m x 1.68 m (16.5 ft x 5.5 ft)