

Swordfish racing dinghy no. 196 built c 1947 by Fairey Marine Ltd. in Hamble.

During the war a new technique had been developed to produce parts, including the fuselages for aeroplanes such as the Mosquito, out of preformed moulded plywood. This involved a solid mould of the shape which was then covered with three layers of 2.5mm veneers glued together. A thick rubber sheet was stretched over this before sliding the whole thing into an 'autoclave', which is basically a large oven. Heat and pressure from steam helped to cure the glue to make an extremely strong but lightweight structure. At the end of hostilities what had been the Fairey Aviation Company became Fairey Marine and switched this technique to mass produce some of the finest, lightest and most durable dinghies of the day. They also recycled the names for their new dinghies from their highly successful aircraft. The Swordfish and Albacore were torpedo bombers (biplanes). The Firefly was a carrier borne monoplane.

Uffa Fox, one of the most successful designers and boat builders of the day was asked to design the 12ft Firefly and the 15ft Swordfish dinghies and went on to design the 18 ft Jollyboat and the diminutive Duckling all produced with these hot moulded hulls. The Swordfish was a powerful sailing and racing dinghy with a heavy steel, pivoted centreplate and a large sail area which included a spinnaker. Just over 200 were built before the design was modified and turned into the Albacore which has remained a very popular and successful dinghy to this day.

The WWMHS owns a Firefly and a rarer Swordfish which is currently being restored to sailing condition. Some holes in the hull have been repaired using three layers of 2.5mm veneer; old paint and varnish has been stripped off ready for a new finish. The old deck, made from 6mm plywood, was in a very poor condition and has been scrapped and removed ready for a new deck. The lowest part of the mahogany transom was rotten so new timber has been spliced in there. I'm currently waiting for the warmer, drier weather before varnishing and some other work, which will ensure the buoyancy tanks are watertight again.

Chris Barlow

Some restoration pictures below.....

