

It's a car, it's a boat, it's Ca'-boat

A Pontiac Sunbird rides piggyback on a Silverton hull for this summer's Maine lobster boat races

By Chris Landry
SENIOR REPORTER

It started with a pair of 17-year-old 200-hp Yamahas. Steve Johnson's friend would give him the outboards for free — on one condition.

"He said, 'I'll give them to you if you cause a scene with them — you know, stir up some trouble,'" says Johnson. The "trouble" would take place on Maine's lobster boat racing circuit this summer.

Notorious for concocting oddball vessels for the races, Johnson did not disappoint. Over a couple of beers last spring, he and his design team — a mix of lobstermen, fishermen and mechanic friends — decided to saw off the top of a 1973 26-foot Silverton, glass a deck over it, and strap a 1994 sapphire-blue convertible Pontiac Sunbird to it.

Johnson, 54, named the vessel Ca'-Boat. And it's a real boat — registered in the State of Maine, with navigation lights, GPS and a VHF radio.



Maine boatyard owner Steve Johnson succeeded in his attempt to draw attention to the annual Maine lobster boat races with his Ca'-Boat.

You operate Ca'-Boat from the driver's seat ... of the car, that is. "We just made up a coupling and put a hydraulic steering pump on the end of the steering column," says Johnson, who has run his own business, John-

son's Boatyard on Long Island, Maine, since 1993. "We just had to run hydraulic hoses back from there. We put the shifter in where the console was. It turns beautifully, like a sports car."

Maine lobstermen have raced

against each other since 1903, when sailing lobster boats chased one another off Jonesport, says Jon Johansen, president of the Maine Lobster Boat Racing Association. Racing continued through the 1920s with the first engine-powered boats, says Johansen. The races became organized in the '40s and, as decades passed, the annual summer event grew, with more ports holding their own races, says Johansen.

It wasn't until the 1990s that the competition became truly organized, with the formation of the association, which grouped the boats into classes based on size and engine type, established rules, and offered money and other prizes. About 450 boats from 12 to 46 feet participate each year in a series of races held in such ports as Rockland, Searsport and Stonington.

"The speed record is 64.5 mph, set by Foolish Pleasure, a 30-foot Riley Beal-built boat with a 632 [cubic inch] Chevy and a blower," says Johansen,

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