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INSIDESTORIES

The golden age of Chrysler-on-Sea

It wasn't just Chrysler's muscle cars that made waves in the 1960s and 1970s. The company also had a Marine division with designs based on the Apollo spacecraft

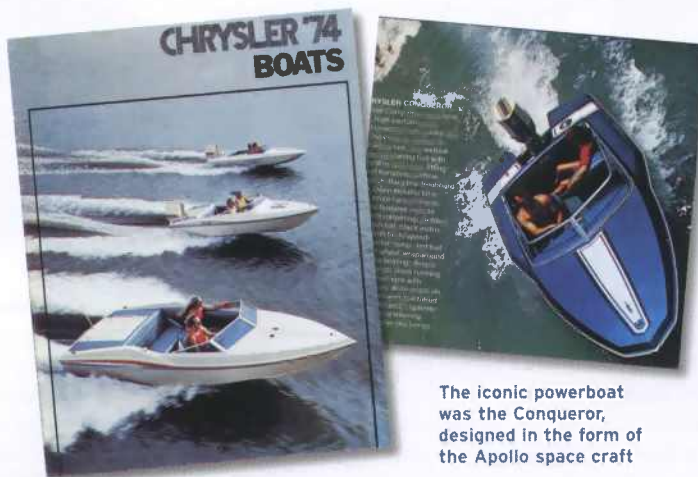
As soon as powerboat enthusiast Dave Kain saw the Super Bee III decals on the V8 engine, he knew this boat was something special.

A Chrysler man since his first car (a 1964 Barracuda), Kain was looking to buy a Chrysler product, but he didn't know the model he'd found in the classifieds was a legend in its time. He was about to enter the lost but once hugely successful world of Chrysler Marine.

Kain's boat was a Conqueror S-III. The bumblebee signature meant it was from the top of Chrysler's performance line, and it ran like smoke on the water. It also had a futuristic design from a time when the future was a destination you were beamed to by Scotty and Captain Kirk. But where did this look come from?

Chrysler developed its first marine engine in 1927 and by 1931 its new Marine and Industrial Activities division was producing a range of six- and eight-cylinder engines. Chrysler Marine bought up West Bend Outboard in 1965, and with it grabbed 29 per cent of the US marine-engine market.

Chrysler then commissioned its first original line of powerboats. Add in its



outboard production and Chrysler Marine had 45.5 per cent of the US marine engine-market.

But if the boats of Chrysler had Mopar genes on board, then the Chrysler muscle cars of the 1960s and 1970s had Marine DNA in them too. The famous motors in those cars – such as the 340 six-pack, the 440 six-pack and all the 426 Hemis from 1964-71 – were Chrysler Marine and Industrial assemblies.

THE CONQUEROR HAD A FUTURISTIC DESIGN FROM A TIME WHEN THE FUTURE WAS A DESTINATION YOU WERE BEAMED TO BY SCOTTY AND CAPTAIN KIRK

But where had Dave Kain's Conqueror design come from? In his bid to find out, he began a website that has grown into a group of enthusiasts (www.chryslercrew.com). He found that Bob Adair, a Chrysler designer, had been tasked with creating an icon to reflect a key part of Chrysler's identity: performance. And so the floating symbol of Chrysler Marine power and style was born – the Conqueror.

"Chrysler at that time played a major part in the Apollo moon mission," Adair wrote to Kain. "If you stand a Shallow Vee model Conqueror on its transom, you will see the profile of the Apollo space craft."

Sadly, in its restructuring of the 1970s, Chrysler sold Chrysler Marine. But it remains an essential part of the present for enthusiasts like Kain. And just like their muscle-car cousins of the 1960s and 1970s, high-performance Chrysler boats are now becoming sought-after collectors' items.

