



My favorite line

By Barry P. Tuveson ~ illustration by John Papesca

As punishment for helping him repair his roof, a neighbor gave my dad and me an old 25-HP outboard engine.

We built a steering console for our 14-foot boat, mounted the tuned-up engine and went fishing. It was a beautiful morning, the engine ran great and fishing was good. What more could we want?

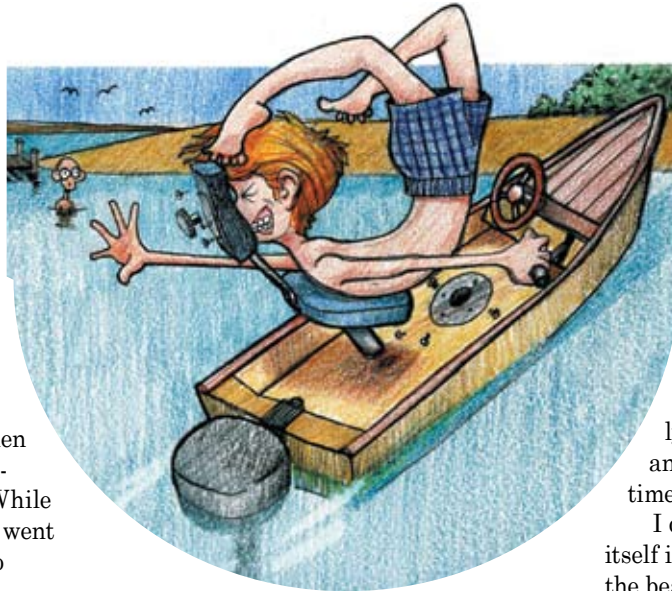
For one thing, we could want an engine that started when it was time to go home. Unfortunately, we had the other kind. While my dad worked on the engine, I went overboard and swam the boat to shore.

We established a routine. On Friday evenings we worked on the engine and got it running. Saturday mornings, we went fishing, after which, I jumped overboard and swam the boat to shore. Saturday afternoons, we worked on the engine. Sunday mornings, we went fishing, I jumped overboard and swam the boat to shore. We did this every weekend. I even fashioned a shoulder harness to make my job easier.

After several weeks, we decided to fool that engine. Instead of fishing, we would launch the boat and, staying near the launch area, run it until it stopped and started on command.

At one point we pulled up to a pier and my dad got off the boat, suggesting I see how it ran with just one person on board. Running wide open, I made one big circle followed by another. On the second time around, I felt the stern start to slide. I pulled up to the pier and changed places with my dad.

I cautioned him about the stern slide problem and my dad said, "Son, don't tell me how to run boats. I've been running boats all my life."



My dad began to circle. On his second time around, the stern slid wildly. My dad, without even touching the sides, sailed out of the boat. It looked as if the boat would run right over him. I dove off the pier and started swimming towards him. I saw Dad surface, and he yelled that he was OK. I stopped swimming and turned, just in time to see the boat run through its waves. One wave caught the bow and shoved it off course. The engine turned and locked into a left turn position. The stern began rotating around the bow with the boat cocked on its side. Round and round it went.

We stood in chest-deep water, watching the boat rotate. At first we assumed it would quit running but then recalled its problem was not running, but starting after we shut it down. We considered the possibilities. If it straightened out and went to Mexico, then Mexico could have it. If it did anything else, it was likely to run into something that would cost us a lot of money.

During the next hour, the circling boat moved slowly down the bay and closer to the beach – and piers. Our con-

cern about damage expenses grew.

The boat began edging close to an empty stretch of beach. This was good, we thought. Once the propeller hit the sand it would shear a pin and come to a stop. It didn't do that, however. The boat came within five feet of the water's edge. The propeller buried itself in the sand, the boat slowed down and then, suddenly, the stern flew out of the water and the boat rotated a couple of times, then repeated the process.

I decided the next time it buried itself in the sand, I would run down the beach, dive over the engine and into the boat and shut it down. It didn't work out quite as I planned. As I left the ground, the stern flew out of the water, the engine hit my legs and threw me off course. I managed to get my hand on the throttle and pull it back. A microsecond later, my head smashed into the seat.

After a moment, I was fine and pleased to note I had two dads. My two dads and I breathed a sigh of relief. I pulled the shoulder harness around my shoulders and began walking the boat back to the launching point. We had only gone a short distance before it occurred to us that the boat had not stopped of its own accord. We had shut it down. We gave each other a foolish look, shoved the boat into deeper water, climbed in and, to our surprise, cranked the engine right up. We laughed and headed home. Within 100 yards, we ran out of gas, I went overboard and swam the boat to shore.

I have always enjoyed telling this story, especially in my dad's presence, because I get to use my favorite line, "Son, don't tell me how to run boats. I've been running boats all my life." **FW**