

AS WITH MANY THINGS, DREAMS OF JEEPS PREFERABLE TO REALITY 08/08/00

Since the reaction to my column on boats was far better than I had anticipated, I have decided to continue on in the same vane in this week's discourse. The object, however, will not be boats, but something that has caused me as much anguish, expense and frustration as boats ever could.

Before I transport you faithful readers into that realm, I would be remiss in not relating one last parting episode of my boat fiascos.

I inadvertently failed to include this debacle in my account of experiences with boats. How that was possible, I will never know, because it so typifies my boating history.

It began with the purchase of a sleek fiberglass runabout that had languished in storage unused for years. It was launched after an additional \$1,200 and several hours of cleaning, scrubbing and eliminating mouse residue.

She purred away from the dock a sight to behold and hear. Accompanied by a friend, I began to expound upon my good luck and brag about my business acumen. As I gave her full throttle and we planed ever further from the dock, I chortled, "This is really living."

The words were no sooner uttered than they were echoed by a horrendous bang from the motor and we came to an abrupt halt.

The air was blue as we limped back to the dock taking turns with the single canoe paddle. Months later I was lucky and relieved to pass that burden on to another whom, I sincerely wish, derived more pleasure from it than I did.

Naturally, I made no money on the deal. My companion on that ill-fated voyage was quick to remind me of my lapse of memory.

My first obsession was with the basic military style jeep. I long dreamed of the wild lands and backcountry haunts I would conquer with one. The urge lingered on for a good many years before the reverie became reality. The first jeep was a gift from a friend.

An older machine, it had been stored for most of the year and only used seasonally. It needed a lot of work, but who looks a gift horse in the mouth?

It turned out to be not exactly free, but served me well for many years. It, like all older vehicles, plagued me with problems. One was particularly perplexing and troubling. It took to refusing to start after the motor was warm and left me stranded several times. Bob Harwood's and Al Brussel's best mechanics had tried their best but to no avail.

After rebuilt carburetors, new plugs, fuel pump, points and who can remember what else, I was at my wits end. The solution came about innocently and like the initial cost of the vehicle – free.

We were sitting at the supper table and I was lamenting yet the latest letdown. Son Marty, age 12, spoke up and said, "Dad, I know what the problem is. When you painted it you painted the vent on the gas cap shut and it air locks."

I got straight up from the table, went up to the garage and sure enough, he was right. When I told Al Brussel about the incident he said, "Send him in and I'll give him a job."

It was the first of four jeeps and it was all down hill from that point on. They all had something in common – expensive to maintain, lost money on their sale and was happy to see them go.

The last was only a year old and I laid out the most money for it. It had one more distinction: I became disenchanted with it more quickly than any before it.

A friend went with me to pick it up from the dealer's and drive my other vehicle home. I wheeled it out of the dealership directly onto a limited access highway. The oversize lugged tires tested its engine to the limit to get up to the highway speed and the noise they and the cloth top made drove me to distraction.

My first words to my friend as I extricated my bruised and battered body from behind the wheel were, "I am getting rid of this baby."