

Classics come out in Lake Hopatcong

The strains of '50s classics such as "Earth Angel" from the P.A. system accompanying the warm breeze, the throaty rumble of vintage inboard engines and the array of finely preserved vessels took visitors back in time at the annual show of the Lake Hopatcong Antique & Classic Boat Society Saturday.

Gleaming varnish work dazzled the eye as 48 boats brought a record turnout of visitors to the show, indicating a resurgence of interest in these motorboats of yesteryear.

"We're all just crazy about these boats," said Wayne Mocksfield, now retired but hailed as the dean of wooden boat restoration on the lake. "A lot of people knew these boats as kids, and now they have the money to buy them."

Mike Smith, president of the local chapter, said it was tough to pick the winners of the show judging, but top honors went to Seth Katz of Lake Hopatcong in the "best preserved" category with a 1955 18-foot Chris Craft, and to Bob Rice of Somerville in the "best restored" category a 17-foot 1942 Chris Craft.

The Lake Hopatcong group, organized in 1974, is the founding chapter of the national Antique & Classic Boat Society. Rice, a veteran of the Hopatcong group, explained that the common denominator of these boats, bearing classic trade names like Chris Craft and Garwood, is the highly varnished wood, mostly mahogany.

The boats are of two types: "snazzy" runabouts with two seats meant for enjoying wind-in-your-face rides, and "utilities," more useful with more room for passengers and gear.

Rice, who took two years to restore his boat, likened launching the wooden classics to "taking a finely finished piano and throwing it in the water." But, he added, once afloat the boats thrive in their element, properly supported along their hulls by the water.

Price tags can vary, with a work-

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able boat going for around \$15,000 on up to \$150,000 to \$200,000 for a show-stopper, Rice said.

Lake Hopatcong stands out as a center of interest in these craft, with

Northwood Boatworks on Henderson Cove doing restoration work, and drawing customers from around the country, said owner John Kadimak.

The Lake Hopatcong club welcomes new members, and boat ownership is not required. You just need to have the interest, said Smith, the president. The club meets once a month and activities include dinner cruises to one of the lakeside restaurants.

For information check out the club's attractive Web site (www.lhacbs.org). It's well worth the visit.