'Piercing' persuasion

ORKNEY PLASTIC-HULLS BUILDER ON TOUGH MISSION

By JIM KINNAIRD

PIERCE WEBB, 32-year-old general manager of Halmatic (Scotland) Ltd., the new Orkney-based enterprise producing moulded glass-reinforced plastic hulls, has a tough job on his hands this week.

He's touring Scottish boatyards with his parent company's sales director, Derek Lee, trying to persuade traditional builders to help him break into their market!

It's going to be a "hard sell," as Mr Webb readily acknowledges, but he is fairly confident that the breakthrough will come.

GRP construction is widely accepted in the pleasure-boat industry, but is only beginning to make an impact on fishermen, understadably cautious about the type of craft in which to entrust their money — and their lives.

A few small GRP hulls are now in service with the fishing fleet, however, and, as confidence inn the material grows, Mr Webb expects the demand to accelerate.

That's why he has embarked on his present mission to sound traditional builders on their readiness to co-operate.

Only the basic hulls and deckhouses are moulded at Halmatic's workshop — a giant hanger on the former naval air station at Hatston, near Kirkwall.

These have to be outfitted by traditional craftsmen to individual specification.

In Aberdeen yesterday, Mr Webb said the sealed hulls would be towed from Orkney to be fitted out at the yard of a prospective owner's choice.

At present Halmatic are geared to turn out fishing boat hulls ranging from 36ft. to 54ft., but Mr Webb has set his sights on the "big boat" market, hoping eventually to gain White Fish Authority approval for GRP hulls of up to 85ft.

The company, one of the international Hunting Group, set up shop at Hatston with Highland Board help in mid-April.

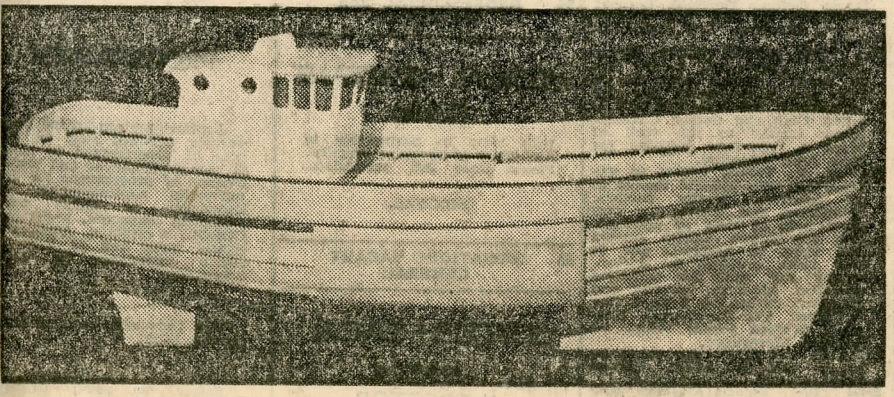
Their first 36-footer — one of four on order — is due to be delivered in a fortnight to Duncan's Boatyard at Burray for fitting out.

The boat is for an Orkney owner, Skipper William Rendall, of Holm.

Mr Webb reckons that once fishermen are persuaded GRP hulls are fit for the job, business should boom.

The price was reasonably competitive, he said, but the main advantage claimed for GRP construction was a substantial reduction in maintenance costs. No painting was needed and GRP was immune to rot, rust and marine borers.

"That alone can amount to a terrific saving," said Mr Webb, "and we expect it to be one of the main attractions, with maintenance costs rising steadily."



THIS scale model of Halmatic's 54ft. multi purpose fishing boat is "on tour" with Mr Pierce Webb during his visit to Scottish boatyards. It fills the back of his estate car. impromptu displays at different ports has created a lot of interest among fishermen on the quayside. "The response has been very encouraging," said Mr Webb.

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