

A BRIEF HISTORY

In 1925 there were some 53 manufacturers of small semi-diesel engines along the Norwegian coast, providing power units for the fishing fleet which was at the time still working by sail and oars. Two brothers, Alf and Håkon Søyland, started one such firm near Bergen, and designed a 3HP hot-bulb engine which was produced by a staff of three in an old waterside shed. Three years later, a larger 7HP version came close to dealing a death-blow to the enterprise, as several started breaking crankshafts. The crank was modified and the engine re-launched under the name Ny-Sabb (New Sabb), the word 'Sabb' being a local synonym for toughness and reliability.

The engines found favour with the fisherman, and the firm prospered. Alf's two sons, Gunnar and Koll, joined the firm just after the war, followed by Håkon's sons Jan Anders and Håkon Jr. In 1955 a full diesel, designed by Gunnar, made its debut. It was a long stroke single cylinder water-cooled engine, with huge roller bearings for main and big-end bearings, lubricated by splash from a dipper on the bottom of the connecting rod. Easily started by hand, it incorporated a Bosch indirect fuel injection system, and could be run for days on end at a slow tick-over without sooting up. No one at the time imagined that this engine was to prove so popular, and that thousands would be made and sold worldwide. It is still production, virtually unchanged.

At the time of the Jubilee in 1975, Sabb Motor employed 170 and turned out 3,200 engines a year between 8 and 30 HP. With the recession, and arrival of cheap mass-produced high revving engines, the company wisely decided to concentrate on a different market and is now probably the largest supplier of engines for ship's lifeboats, some being their own 30HP unit, whilst larger units are marinized from Ford, Mitsubishi and other commercial engines. Now managed by Jan Anders and Håkon Søyland Jr., the firm is proud to be the sole survivor of the family owned engine manufacturers in Norway, and does not mind the countless times it gets mistaken for the similar sounding Swedish based giant corporation, as after all they make quite good cars and aeroplanes!

SABB ENGINES IN BRITAIN

In the mid-sixties, small diesel engines for boats were hard to come by. Listers usually had a long waiting list, and far eastern imports had not yet arrived. A couple of yachtsmen from Suffolk, Mike Spear and Richard Hayward, bought a Sabb, and were so impressed that they formed a company to distribute them over here in the UK. Based at Wickham Market, in an old malting shed, Hayward Spear & Co. were soon supplying engines 'off the peg' for many production boats, including Nicholsons, Contessas, Golden Hinds, Novas, Gypsies, Bowmans, and Chevertons.

In a masterly stroke, they managed to get permission to have an engine running on their stand at the Earls Court Boat Show, and many people will remember hearing the slow 'chug chug' as the Sabb ticked over at 300RPM, with an old three penny piece balanced on the rocker cover to show how steady it was.

Hayward Spear's Technical Director, Cliff Richardson, travelled the Country visiting the many customers, and set up several local Agents. One was Ron Savage, who had a Marine Engineering business in Emsworth Marina, and another Mike Challis, who was buying engines for Plymouth Pilots

made by his GRP moulding firm, Monachorum Manufacturing Co. of Plymouth, and had also fitted a Sabb in his own Bowman 26.

In Scotland, one of Cliff's customers was Fraser Muir, who had recently left the Royal Air Force as a Mosquito pilot to return to his native village of Achiltibuie and start fishing. He bought a twin cylinder Sabb for his boat, and soon started keeping a small stock of spares for other owners in the area, and eventually became sole Scottish Agent.

In 1976 Hayward Spear sold the business to A.R. Savage Ltd, who were main agents until 1990, when they became victims of the recession. Mike and Fraser, who had become good friends whilst helping on the Sabb stand at various boat shows, took over, and started trading as SABB UK (SOUTH) and SABB UK (NORTH) respectively. Frasier retired in 1997, and Mike in 2002, the sole Sabb Agent for all the U.K. and Ireland is now SLEEMAN AND HAWKEN LTD.