



CHASING A DREAM

Al Copeland Jr. hopes to break the propeller-driven water speed record.

By Gregg Mansfield

With 12,000 horsepower from four turbine engines, *Phenomenon*—a 56-foot catamaran—was unveiled at the 2009 Key West World Championships.

It was Thanksgiving Day 2007 when Al Copeland, who was battling a rare form of cancer, stood up in front of his family and announced that one of his last wishes was to break the propeller-driven speed record.

Unfortunately Copeland passed away a few months later at age 64 and never attempted his dream. But now Copeland's son, Al Jr., is pressing forward with the effort by completing the 56-foot catamaran *Phenomenon* his father was building.

"That just goes to show how important that (record) was to him," Copeland Jr. said. "He had only two things he wanted to accomplish in his life at that point in time."

The elder Copeland, who founded the Popeyes chicken chain and was an avid offshore racer, started building the custom boat about two years before his March 2008 death. Work on the boat was being done under a cloak of secrecy in a building near New Orleans.

The catamaran, which was unveiled at the Key West World Championships in November, features four T-55 turbine engines capable of making 12,000 horsepower. All of the power is being

channeled through four Ameson drives.

A four-turbine boat will burn plenty of Jet A fuel—approximately 1,000 gallons an hour—so the catamaran was built with a 1,960-gallon fuel capacity.

Weighing in at nearly 26,000 pounds dry, *Phenomenon* was built without a large section of the front deck between the sponsons. The full-canopy boat featured thick acrylic windows and custom-made seats.

Scott Barnhart, who oversaw construction of the boat and will throttle it in the record attempt, said the catamaran was built with safety in mind. Originally they wanted to create a 65-foot boat, but after wind-tunnel testing, they scaled the boat down to 56 feet with a 13-foot, 6-inch beam.

"I wanted the hull to be able to withstand a 325-mph impact," Barnhart said. "At the speed we're going, we want more weight to keep us in the water. Going over is not going to happen."

Bob Latham, owner of Latham Marine in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., was brought in on the project to design the boat's controls and steering system. Because of the quad engines, 12 throttles would have been required to

accommodate N1 shutoff and transition to N2. He was able to reduce it to eight throttles—still a substantial number for Barnhart to handle.

But Latham's greatest concern was building a rudder that could withstand the forces at speed, especially if the boat left and re-entered the water while at high speed. The rudder was machined from 1 1/2-inch-thick proprietary stainless steel.

"We had to come up with something massively strong," he said, "but still be very aerodynamic at those speeds."

Copeland hopes to take a run at the water speed record of 220.43 mph held by *Miss Budweiser* early in 2010 in Sarasota, Fla.—although the boat still hadn't been in the water by mid-December.

Copeland's wife, Liz, said she is proud of her husband but knows the offshore boat will be running in uncharted territory.

"I know my father-in-law was an innovator and he wouldn't have taken a risk he couldn't handle," Liz said.

For more photos of *Phenomenon*, go to www.powerboatmag.com.

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