

Railway has a weight problem

Chesapeake Marine Railway in Deltaville, Va., on Fishing Bay, specializes in large wooden boats and can haul vessels over 100 feet. In its time, a lot of fishing boats have been hauled out on the railway. But last winter when the 114-foot Ring Andersen (a one-time cargo and fish carrier) came in for major repairs, the weight of the boat cracked several of the 40-year-old white-oak crossbeams on the railway's cradle.

Replacement 12" x 14" white-oak crossbeams 20 to 30 feet long are not something commonly found in a Lowes or Home Depot warehouse. So Chesapeake Marine hired Bob Vargo, owner of Hopewell Hardwood Sales

in Hopewell, Va. Vargo went into the woods to find the necessary trees and then milled timbers to the specified size. He found the white oak trees on forestland he owns in Prince George County.

"They are a logging firm and mill and are able to accommodate special requests," says Rick Farinholt, president of Chesapeake Marine Railway. Since the timbers were freshly cut and green, Farinholt says the ends were "waxed" to keep the timbers from drying out and checking. The Hopewell crew used a standard oil-based marine paint as a sealant.

The crossbeams are installed by driving 3/4-inch-steel drift pins through the tim-



bers and into 4" x 16" runner beams that the cradle's wheels are attached to. There are more than 100 wheels inside the rail tracks.

Some boatyards use angle iron to hold the crossbeams in place, says Farinholt. "We use drift pins because it allows the beam of the cradle to flex a little bit when we are hauling a heavy boat.

"Angle iron is a little rigid," he adds. "You want the beam of the cradle to flex because you don't want the cradle to toe in with a boat on it."

A year ago, the yard had to replace an old wooden foundation under the donkey shed that houses the gears and engine used to haul boats out of the water. The term "donkey shed" is still used in the Chesapeake region. It goes back to when 1- and 2-cylinder gasoline engines (called donkey engines) provided the power to operate the railway.



LARRY CHOWNING

The railway cradle at Chesapeake Marine Railway was having white-oak cross beams installed after the original timbers broke.

"We took the old foundation out and drove steel pilings down 15 to 20 feet to support it," says Farinholt. "Then we welded up steel I-beams on top of that, then layered rebar all over the place and poured concrete under it. It's got a hell of a foundation now."

The Ring Andersen was a Baltic sailing trader built in 1948 at Ring Andersen Boatyard in Denmark. She was converted to a yacht in 1962.