

INVICTVS

SHIPYARD SAGA





**PERFORMANCE & ROMANCE**

# Cigarette Racing Team

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The infamous 'Thunderboat Row' of Miami's NE 188<sup>th</sup> Street no longer exists, its valuable real estate now occupied by high-rise waterfront condos. But the legacy of the brand that turned this lore-laden, industrial road into the epicenter of offshore performance boating, still endures. Under the ownership and critical business eye of Skip Braver, the Cigarette Racing Team brand maintains its quintessential allure, while now building Cigarettes of unsurpassed quality. From bullets to billet, embezzlement to embroidery, murder to merchandising, this is the story of the development of one of the USA's leading brands.

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BY: MARILYN DEMARTINI  
IMAGES: COURTESY OF CIGARETTE RACING



*Classic Don Aronow—handsome, dashing, daring—whether negotiating a deal or a turn in an offshore race.*

**Cigarette is known as the icon of powerboating** – one of few world-famous quintessential brands whose name embodies an industry, like Xerox, Kleenex and Coke. The book, *Quintessence: The Quality of Having 'It'* had a place on the desk of former Cigarette Racing Team's president Bob Gowens. It includes pictures and descriptions of iconic brands, including Don Aronow's 38' Cigarette Hawk race boat. Perhaps that title communicates the magic that has kept the brand at the top of the performance boat food chain for over four decades. Several custodians may have steered different courses for the Cigarette Racing Team since the 1960's, but why has the name remained synonymous with fast offshore powerboats for over four decades? We dusted off the record books, bought beers for ex-racers, spoke to past presidents and visited the splendid modern facility on the outskirts of Miami, FL to discover the making of a legend.



**POWERBOATING TAKES A HIT**

A shooting was not unusual in North Miami in 1987, a time in South Florida's raucous history when drugs and criminals ran freely and 9mm shells on roadsides were as common as sea shells on beaches. On 3rd February 1987 however, on Thunderboat Row – the notorious 188th Street where legends like Formula, Donzi, Magnum, Cigarette and US Racing Team were born – Don Aronow, the legendary creator of these leading powerboat companies, sat in a pool of blood, shot in his Mercedes in front of his office. Though Aronow died suddenly and unexpectedly, the Cigarette brand lived on, built around the man who personified power. While most refer to any “go-fast” boat as a “Cigarette,” connoisseurs know it as THE brand, one that possesses its own mystique. But how does a boat brand achieve and maintain international dominance? In simplest terms: by being a step ahead and a world apart.

QUINTESSENCE: NOUN. 1.  
**THE FIFTH ESSENCE OR ULTIMATE SUBSTANCE OF WHICH HEAVENLY BODIES WERE THOUGHT TO BE COMPOSED. 2. THE PURE CONCENTRATED ESSENCE OF ANYTHING; 3. THE MOST PERFECT MANIFESTATION OR EMBODIMENT OF A QUALITY OR THING.**  
*WEBSTER'S NEW WORLD DICTIONARY.*

# INVICTVS

Despite years of rotating door-ownership, mismanagement and alleged embezzling, the Cigarette name has not just survived, but thrived. Rising above any other in the genre and maintaining its value, gravitas and machismo. An aspirational brand – one that makes testosterone soar – the company’s story is as enigmatic as its product, customers, founder and those who have propelled the brand forward, leaving other boat companies in its wake.

## **A LITTLE HISTORY...**

Known for his athletic ability, rugged, handsome looks, and hard-driving strength, founder Don Aronow was both a man’s man...and a ladies’ man. His handshake deals and sexual prowess were the pillars of his reputation. He was always making deals, either closing a sale or closing in on the wife of a customer, secretary or other willing female. A construction magnate from New Jersey who retired early to South Florida, Aronow grew restless. While enjoying sport fishing, he connected with boaters who shared tales of the 184-mile Miami-Nassau powerboat race. In the five years since its inception, the Miami-Nassau had become the Mecca for international thrill seekers, and the Muse for Aronow’s competitive nature.

He connected with the best in the business, built a 28’ semi-V-bottom boat with specially-designed racing engines and, though a faulty clutch caused him to lose his first race, the adrenaline addiction fu-

eled his quest for the perfect boat and engine that would win. He embarked on a new 25-year career in powerboat racing, proving his skill and expertise on the water by winning over 350 international races, 11 world championships, 25 US championships and numerous speed records. He also proved himself as the man who defined the brand – top-quality, sexy and loaded with brash performance – still Cigarette’s namesake qualities. And while Aronow’s other boat brands have survived ups and downs in the economy and enjoyed success, Cigarette remains the pinnacle and his most fitting legacy. For Cigarette is more than a boat, it’s a legend that’s aura started with Aronow and outlived him.

## **INTERNATIONAL APPEAL**

In the early 60’s, Aronow used racing as the proving ground for each of the boat brands he built and with which he won races: Formula, Donzi and Magnum. As each company established its reputation, he then sold it and cunningly maneuvered his way out of non-compete clauses, while all the time constantly working to create the ultimate performance boat. The first Cigarette race boat, named after a rum smuggler’s boat that Aronow admired as the renegade owner continually out-ran the law, came far before Cigarette Racing Team was formed. He even built the first ‘Cigarette’ under Cary Marine’s name, in order to evade the non-compete caveats from his sale of Magnum.

*The original Cigarette Racing Team Factory on 188<sup>th</sup> Street, the notorious Thunderboat Row.*





***Craig Barrie, former president of Cigarette, brought fashionable panache to racing and powerboat building.***

***“Sex Sells.” The adage always worked for Cigarette.***



So while “The Cigarette” carried Aronow to eight international victories and speed records, the fact that Cigarette Racing Team did not yet exist is irrelevant. The name of the manufacturing company still baffles people unfamiliar with boating, it is not a ‘Racing Team’ and has not raced corporately in years, but Aronow thrived on racing. He surrounded himself with the best and most loyal throttle jockeys, including his riding mechanic, “Knocky” House and Carl Kiekhaefer whose Mercury engines helped cement the success of Cigarettes and competitors from around the world who bought Cigarettes to win races. Though racers built the allure of Cigarette, it was the attention of Kings, Shahs, Sheikhs, celebrities, royalty like Princess Grace of

Monaco, business moguls like Bernie Little, Rocky Aoki, Roger Penske and then-US Ambassador to China, President George Bush, Sr., that elevated the brand and business. Aronow didn’t just sell boats; he built relationships. Customers were equally as fascinated with him as with his high-performance boats. With model names like “Awesome” and “Mistress”—described by Aronow to “Perform like a mistress should,” Cigarette’s aura grew and attracted those who craved a wild and daring image. Aronow was reportedly asked “What makes a boat sexy?” and he responded, “A line that never grows old. The 540-K Mercedes has it. The Ferrari has it. When you look at women, some just look sexy. They have universal appeal, like Elizabeth Taylor.”

As the line and its reputation grew throughout the US, Cigarette reached abroad. St. Tropez businessman, Marcel Biales, met Aronow and the immediate bond formed wrote Sportmer Marina’s name in the Cigarette history books. Sportmer remains the longest-standing and most successful offshore dealer to date. A Riva dealer with 50 slips in the Euro-chic town’s center harbor, Biales recognized a niche for Cigarette amongst the wealthy, image-conscious European boaters. His valuable dock space made the perfect deal-closer and became a showcase for rows of Cigarettes on the French Riviera. Europeans and racers from around the world added to the allure, buying Cigarettes of all sizes, winning races and hearts. Noted racing personalities like Vincenzo Balestrieri and Carlo Bonomi competed against Americans Bob Magoon, Billy Martin, Bob Nordskog and scores of others including Betty Cook, the first woman to win the prestigious British Cowes-Torquay-Cowes race in her 36’ Cigarette. Dealers were added, speed and racing titles sold more boats and the South and Central American market began to grow as races were held in Panama, Argentina and Uruguay. Though drugs were not known to be smuggled in Cigarettes as is commonly believed – the boats were too valuable to be shot-up in a chase or left behind in a deal-gone-wrong – they were coveted and became the trophies for those who made hoards of money from the trade. It was still the glamour of offshore racing that drew a new breed of sportsman. According to Aronow’s son, Michael, in his book, *The King of Thunderboat Row*, friend Billy Wishnick proclaimed; “I was a married, out-of-shape, middle aged businessman. Then, I attended a New York boat show where I met Don Aronow. Now, I’m divorced, an ocean racer and a swinger.” Wishnick was just one of the many infamous Thunderboat Row race boat jockeys.



*From the Virgin entrepreneur Richard Branson (above) to Hugh Hefner head of the Playboy empire, none could resist the sex appeal of Cigarette.*

**THE END AND NEW BEGINNING**

After winning it all in American and international powerboat racing, Aronow sold Cigarette in 1979, acquired it back and years later, re-sold it. The yard's craft continued to win races, sell and build on its reputation, but Aronow, who liked tight control over small companies, constantly formed new yards and brands. These included Squadron and USA Racing Team, he built catamarans, designed the Blue Thunder boat that earned a large US Customs order and pursued his race horse business. Life was good while he was building, creating and making deals.

In 1984 when Ben Kramer, a young aspiring racer and reputed-drug dealer, asked Aronow to design a boat in a factory that he and his father were about to build on Thunderboat Row, next door to Cigarette, the fiercely competitive Aronow could not resist. They created Apache and Kramer won the 1986 World Open Class Championship in the original 41' deep-V boat. Aronow sold his USA Racing Team to the Kramers who struggled with the business - somewhat predictably the US Customs refused to honor an Aronow-made deal for the Blue Thunder boats with businessmen involved in illegal trades. Buying the company back at a tidy profit, Aronow reinstated and expanded the US Customs order and was preparing to launch a new

boat when his non-compete with Cigarette expired. Sadly those plans ended on February 3, 1987. The resolution of the murder is still debated and while the convicted shooter died in a Florida prison several years ago, Ben Kramer remains in solitary confinement in an Indiana prison, never having admitted to ordering the hit. He pleaded no contest to manslaughter in 1996 and agreed to a 19-year sentence, running concurrent to a life term in federal prison for marijuana smuggling. As Aronow had contributed his last pages to Cigarette's history however, the death of a legend gave birth to a new chapter.

**FROM BAD BOY TO SOPHISTICATION**

When Cigarette's ownership transitioned in the early eighties, Ohio real estate mogul, Jeff Friedman, hired business consultant and savvy corporate turn-around specialist, Bob Gowens, to perform due diligence on the purchase of Cigarette and its waterfront 188th Street property. The company had fallen into disrepair and Gowens cautioned against the purchase, but Friedman was stoic on the buy and then hired Gowens as CEO. While he admittedly knew nothing about boats, Gowens knew business and started to put "the best team on the field" to turn the company around. "There wasn't even a procedure for delivering mail!" Gowens recalls, "No one knew the cost of

*Today's Cigarette is sleek, discreet, yet still sexy--and very fast.*





***Sir Richard Branson enlisted Cigarette to stage a recent Miami Vice-style, Virgin Atlantic press event on Miami Beach. He looked comfortable behind the wheel of a Cigarette in his Don Johnson, Miami Vice promotional persona.***

building a boat, poor resins had been used, there were no labor standards, most of the staff were Cuban criminals and gang fights on the grounds were common. There were distribution problems, sales orders were volumes long, written in poor English, and there was no space to build. It was a nightmare.”

Gowens hired highly recommended mechanic and marine specialist, Val Jenkins, as the VP of Manufacturing, and he brought in a renowned racer and engineer, Allan Brown, to create new designs. Craig Barrie, an avid boater and racer whose family owned and sold Faberge fragrances, met Gowens via his ownership interest in Hawk Engines and was tagged to handle marketing. This core team of vastly different personalities became Gowen’s “MASH Unit” as they refocused Cigarette. In the ensuing years they made the rugged, crude, yet durable Cigarette boats into a more refined machine, with more upscale design, style and elegance. The challenge however was always to achieve that goal without losing the cache of the Cigarette name.

“We were all trying to turn Don Aronow’s hobby shop into a real business. We went from a Corvette to a Lexus” says Jenkins, comparing the rather primitive Mistress which Gowens described as “fiberglass wrapped around horsepower,” to the 35’ Café Racer launched in 1985. An evolved powerboat with an aerodynamic deck, the Café Racer featured recessed cleats and a seamless, patented hatch replacing the “barn doors” that used to cover the powerful Mercury Marine engines. This Euro-sport-styled boat gave the Cigarette brand new appeal, especially as it added a covered head to please female guests, while the ergonomic design for seating, placement of controls, steering and aircraft-inspired gauge panels were all designed to please the driver. The Café Racer enjoyed market dominance for two years before being topped by the Top Gun in 1987. 26-years later the Top Gun continues today as the most popular Cigarette model ever built.

The racy name and styling of the Top Gun gave Cigarette even more momentum and was followed by other hot models, including the 42 Revolution, a line of center consoles, the 42 Tiger and the 46 Rough Rider. In the offices there was constant internal cognitive gear-grinding however. “What can we do next,” asked Barrie? “Like couture fashion, it was not really what was marketable to the masses but it set the tone of who we were.” Colorful paint jobs gave the boats fashion flair, as did the advertising, guided by Barrie’s international marketing experience in the fragrance market. Publicity material focused on speed and technology gave way to controversially sexy images, where beautiful women in seductive poses coyly remarked, “And he has a Cigarette!” or “Does this mean I get a ride in your Cigarette?” The ads fed the “Bad Boy” image which the company purportedly tried to min-

imize, despite its sensuality selling boats and capturing imaginations. The image worked for Cigarette. It could be brash, yet elegant and remain admired. “We got dirty looks at the yacht clubs, but applause when we pulled into Sundays on the Bay!” said Phil Lipschutz, a boat delivery vendor who became the Miami dealer in the late 80’s and creates special “Lipship Edition” Cigarettes for his customers. He spent most of his time on the water testing, delivering boats and being stunt driver for movie makers. Lipschutz also put in significant time as a Miami ambassador, working with the Convention and Tourist Bureau who used Cigarette rides on Biscayne Bay to lure businesses to the area. Lipschutz also recalls the successful “snob appeal” of Cigarette at boat shows where the company always had the most beautiful boats, sexy models and strict security. “When I was the Cigarette truck driver they’d let me in for a little while, but then I had to leave. You had to BE somebody to get into the Cigarette booth! Everyone wanted to be there, but they kept it reserved for ‘club’ cool!”

Miami Vice also played a major role in the growth of Cigarette, with the TV show’s Don Johnson brandishing a sexy swagger while flaunting his “Cigarette”... which was never in fact a real Cigarette as neither Aronow nor Gowens would agree a deal with the producers. Aronow disliked their smug attitudes and Gowens did not want to affiliate with the drug dealing and violence associated with the show. So while the producers used other brands of powerboats, the iconic Cigarette still reigned, maintaining the “cool” factor associated with the success of the show. The celluloid version of 80’s Miami was based on some truth however, with the pulsating music, beautiful women, boat chases and slick cars all a part of the ‘Sobe scene’. “People used to blast Phil Collins music from their boats as they ran between Turnberry, The Jockey Club and Shooters,” recalls Lipschutz, “There were rows of Cigarettes and we sold more boats during that time than ever. But everything was growing in Miami then - people wanted to come here to buy their boats and visit the factory. It might have been a dump back then, but we sure closed a lot of deals there!” Success brought recognition to Cigarette from Money Magazine which named the Café Racer among its Top 10 Best Designs as well as Gowens as one of its Top 10 CEOs. Fortune Magazine also included Cigarette in its Top 100 Companies in its Made in America issue, which led to an invitation by President Ronald Reagan to this group of CEOs to take a marketing trip to Japan. That experience expanded Cigarette’s distribution to Japan, extending its reach beyond Europe, the Middle East and into Asia. But economic and business factors prevailed and a new luxury tax adversely impacted the boat business. Gowens was frustrated by the inability to expand to meet

## THE NEW HOME OF CIGARETTE RACING TEAM—SPACIOUS, IMMACULATE, MODERN AND EFFICIENT. “THE ALLEY MAY BE GONE BUT THE THUNDER REMAINS.”

production demands and the unwillingness of the company to take lucrative offers to move to more business-friendly states. Jeff Friedman was focused on real estate and decided to sell the company to a new ownership group, headed by Jack Cabasso.

Fashioning himself in the Aronow mold, the new owner wanted to race again as the new step-bottom, 1999-2000 models were designed and built. “Cigarette was about speed, but more about the heritage and the ride - in rough water, nothing could touch it!” said Barrie. Cigarette solidified that point in the highly competitive twin-engine Factory series in the 1999 Superboat International (SBI) Racing season. With Lipschutz on throttles and Cabasso at the wheel, Cigarette ran its newly designed twin-step 38 Top Gun to the National and World Championship - the first company racing team since Aronow retired from the sport. “We put the #1 back in the Cigarette logo!” proudly proclaims Lipschutz.

As time went on, the company faltered and while the name maintained, the quality diminished. Barrie disagreed with the marketing and planned licensing ventures, and the A-team dissolved. Yet another ownership group with “delusions of grandeur” materialized, and while the company went into a downward spiral, a custodian was named to keep the pieces together. Law suits and jail terms were negotiated for Cigarette’s “top guns.” During this upheaval, Neil Hernandez, who started at Cigarette as a teenager and electrician’s apprentice, was promoted to head production and his relationship with Skip Braver began the next chapter for Cigarette.

### A NEW THUNDERBOAT ROW

Braver, a Chicago businessman with a wealth of marketing experience ranging from electronics licensing and exotic car and GM dealerships, to elite custom home building and day trading, was enjoying early retirement, boating with his family on Lake Michigan. A big man who lives large with very specific upscale tastes, Braver became dissatisfied with his Fountain Powerboat and sought to personalize a new one. When the factory did not accommodate customization, he went to Cigarette and became friends with Hernandez, who while customizing Braver’s 42’ Tiger, confided the company’s financial difficulties. Braver pondered the value of Cigarette’s name, did extensive research into the branding and relied on his marketing and licensing







expertise in his decision to buy the near-bankrupt company. In 2002, when Braver bought a boat and then the business, he was often quoted as saying, “I didn’t buy a boat company, I bought a legend.” Braver then upped the ante, adding his personal signature to the brand that continues its evolution in the luxury marketplace. Braver faced many of the same challenges as the prior ownership: an antiquated, run-down 30,000sqft factory where boat molds were stacked outdoors and ravaged by the elements. Boats were being sanded alongside lamination, spilt resins stretched like bubble gum from your shoe to the floor, and sweat poured like the Cuban coffee that fueled the plant. The only air conditioning was in Aronow’s old second level office – the one lined with racing trophies and flags and rumored to have a false wall that opened into a boudoir to accommo-

date Aronow’s frequent liaisons. During this period a zoning change on 188th Street dictated the waterfront real estate became too valuable for factories so relocating became imminent. High-rise condos and a waterfront Charter School were soon to replace rows of boat building factories and the thunderous Fort Apache Bar. Braver was weighed down by many decisions with his new purchase, but moving the factory was the most pressing. The shrewd negotiator made a deal for a new building in Hialeah, but was confronted by South Florida politics as underhanded as those in Chicago. He walked from that debacle into the old Mako Fish Boat factory near the Opa-Locka Airport, and after millions of dollars in total renovation and many long nights later, the new 150,000sqft Cigarette factory opened its doors. The new space offered contiguous progress of the building

**“I DIDN’T BUY A BOAT  
COMPANY, I BOUGHT A LEGEND.”**  
SKIP BRAVER, CIGARETTE  
PRESIDENT AND CEO



and finishing lines, including a state-of-the-art embroidery machine, commissioned to make digital embroidery for the large sun pads and customized in-house upholstery. A metal shop was added and eventually, a large paint booth. No effort or investment was spared to bring as much of the construction as possible under Cigarette’s roof in an effort to optimize efficiencies in cost, time and quality control. The space, painted white with red accents, has a glossy painted floor that is cleaned daily. Workers are given uniform shirts and the pristine new premises instill pride in their role on the Team. When a worker threw paper on the floor, he was sent home, docked the rest of the day’s pay and received a stark warning: “Next time, you’re gone.” The example worked – trashing the new Cigarette factory would not be tolerated – nor would pilferage of supplies or unneces-

sary overtime. Workers now punch-in on a biometric fingerprint scanner, not just to register their presence, but also to calculate the hours spent on each boat. Supplies and parts were organized and bar-coded, while systems were developed for timely build progression. On vacation breaks, the factory was pressure cleaned to maintain its exotic car garage appearance, while advertising and boat show artwork were hung to add color and appeal. Overhead, large windows from the upper level executive offices meant The Boss could be watching at any time, so efficiency was enhanced by regular hours with regular breaks in the OSHA-approved factory. Customers visiting the shop were amazed at the radical difference and appreciated the dramatic upgrade in the boats’ quality. New molds and tooling were created, finishing was perfected and details became



***The Cigarette Design Center provides a gallery of options for the buyer to customize each new Cigarette. “If you’ve seen one, you’ve seen only one.”***

paramount. Rigging was artistic and scrupulously neat, hatch and parts were finished inside and out, painting when done outside the factory was tightly scheduled and when done in-house, sharply supervised. The factory ran like clockwork though often on “Latino time,” much to the frustration of Braver’s micromanaging check lists. Braver and Hernandez were polar opposites yet with the same goal in mind – building the best boat. Hernandez rattled off Spanish at 100mph with factory staff, some of them relatives, most Hispanic and all of them in awe of the man who achieved the American Dream – from apprentice to minority partner in the Cigarette business. He ran on caffeine and nicotine, but had suave, Latino appeal. In fashionable jeans, shoes and sunglasses, and with a real Cigarette hanging provocatively from his lip, Hernandez possessed the Cigarette mystique.

In contrast, Braver’s sarcastically abrasive style is part of his persona. If he isn’t busting your chops, you are in trouble—or don’t matter. He sees everything with a cost-accounting and liability eye. Anything that could save a penny or avoid a law suit is noticed and addressed, and someone is held accountable. A “love him or hate him” guy, he

doesn’t care for personal approval, as long as he gets what he wants out of each deal and each staff member and the boats are as perfect as humanly – or even inhumanly – possible. Braver’s first Miami International Boat Show set the stage for the focus on technology and excellence. New models were introduced, including the 46’ Stealth concept boat, featuring an ethereal paint job of a stealth bomber pilot seen through the plane’s window, thermal imaging, a glass cockpit, new interior and a classy image. The 600th Top Gun built was also featured and with each boat show, more new models, increased technology and design excellence were noted.

BusinessWeek Magazine has acknowledged the value of the brand, as have segments on CNBC Squawk Box, History and Discovery Channels, A&E Network and Wealth TV. Cigarette has got its groove back and Braver is the force. While lacking Aronow’s charisma, Braver has proved he has strength, business acumen and is recognized as the first owner to ever put money into Cigarette. In return, he has rebuilt an empire on NE 128th street in Opa-Locka. Recent renovations have included a custom Design Center where clients can select materials, finishes and see a 3D animation of their custom boat. “The Alley May Be Gone, But The Thunder Remains” a T-shirt stated, commemorating the achievement.

As well as creating a new facility and global representation network, Cigarette also began new tooling for the new models, including the 42’ Huntress, capitalizing on the popularity of the center console trend, which Braver spearheaded in 2006 with the introduction of the 39’ Top Fish. “A ‘fish’ boat that evolved into the performance center console that featured cup holders, not rod holders.”

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*The 42 Huntress “preys” upon the new proclivity for luxury center consoles in the US market. Amenities abound above and below deck.*

“Strategic partnerships” also became a priority for Braver, initially with Mercury Racing to ensure reliable engine delivery and service on all Cigarettes worldwide, then with Garmin and JL Audio. Each is designed to bring the top technology, innovation and customization to each Cigarette model. Hernandez and Braver eventually parted ways amicably, presumably due to differing management styles. Hector Rodriguez, who came to Cigarette as a computer consultant, proved his business and sales abilities in the overall running of the factory and Middle Eastern sales. As Braver’s right hand man, his calm and easy-going nature has proved to be the perfect foil for Braver’s volatility.

#### **DRIVING FORWARD...**

Over the past four years, a marketing alliance with Mercedes AMG has given Cigarette increased clout in the automotive market, an enigma to some but a clear strategy for Braver whose roots in the performance auto industry created the partnership. The two companies share a mutual respect and admiration as well as a customer base that relishes the luxury and performance of the ideologically aligned brands. Cigarette took inspiration from AMG in upholstery, accessory and paint details, a fact portrayed at the Miami Boat Show when they debuted models that wore the “Inspired by AMG” moniker. Braver takes special pride in the affiliation, especially in the use of the AMG brand name on “his” boats. “It is the first time that AMG ever loaned its name to another brand’s product and we are very proud that this world automotive leader thinks that much of a small company like Cigarette,” Braver told us.

At the 2013 Miami International Boat Show, Braver stood smiling next to Mario Spitzner, AMG’s Director of Branding, Marketing and Sales as the matching Electric-Drive AMG SLS Supercar and Cigarette Top Gun made their joint US debut. The car was on display before going on the European market for the 2013 summer season, while the boat was a concept prototype. The joint unveiling cemented the partnership and demonstrated for the first time the possibility of sharing technology—that the Mercedes innovation could theoretically be transferred from land to a Cigarette Top Gun on water. The striking metallic green duo was the talk of the show, heavily photographed, reported and commented upon. Practical? No, but topical yes – true to Cigarette’s persona. “He is the master of pizzazz,” says Allan Brown, who has seen all the Cigarette leaders come and go. But Braver has outlasted them all in his 11-year tenure.

“The quality of Cigarette is better now than ever and the image is still extremely high,” says Lipschutz, “People from all around the world call for Cigarettes and wouldn’t consider anything else. The recession weeded out a lot of pretenders and now, only the strong survive. Anyone who knows anything about boats knows Cigarette – it is still the essence of ‘cool.’” Concurring with Lipschutz, we recall the book on Bob Gowen’s desk: Quintessence: The Quality of having ‘It’. Flicking through a recently acquired copy we discover a quote that encapsulates the ephemeral charisma that the Cigarette Racing Team brand possesses and thought it a fitting way to conclude.

“The power of quintessential things – however simple or sophisticated, however carefully designed or accidentally apt – is imponderable but undeniable... For while we may use quintessential things for commonplace purposes, they serve as talismans and guideposts, touching our souls with the souls of their own.”

