

Whitehall Rowing & Sail

Whitehall Case Study: Westcoast Lifeguard Patrol Boat - City of Vancouver, BC Lifeguards

In 2000, when the City of Vancouver embarked on replacing inventory in their fleet of wooden lifeguard patrol boats, they contacted Whitehall Rowing & Sail in Victoria, BC. Whitehall was asked if one of their models could be adapted and customized for use as a replacement for Vancouver's aging wooden lap strake (clinker style) fleet.

These customized patrol boats are in use by the Lifeguard Service annually at 11 lifeguard-supervised beaches, including the waters of iconic English Bay, from Victoria Day (late May) through Labour Day. Used mainly for rescue and beach patrol, the boats also get used for water sampling and maintenance work in some of the local ponds and lakes. They are also deployed in support of the historic annual Polar Bear Swim on New Year's Day each year.



Whitehall owner and marine designer Harold Aune was happy to work with the City of Vancouver, to modify the Westcoast 11' 6" model to fit the bill. Keeping their requirements front of mind, he added side buoyancy tanks along each gunnel to make the boat unsinkable, a notched transom to accommodate an anchor chain or rope, and a raised keel and side slats on the hull's exterior to protect it from the abrasive effects of sandy and stony beaches.

The fiberglass hull requires little maintenance, and is much lighter than its wooden predecessor even though they are virtually the same size. The gunnels were also reinforced for rowing under high loads and for extensive daily use - equipment failure is not an option in a lifesaving situation! The Westcoast model was modified to be a true "working boat."

In an interview with Sean Healy, Supervisor of Aquatic Services at the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, he said, "our initial fleet of lifeguard patrol boats was of wood construction and lasted many years, however throughout their lifespan they required regular and careful upkeep." According to Sean, the new boats had to be "easy to launch, row, and trailer. They also need to be a stable platform for rescues, and must be maneuverable and nimble in shallow, sometimes crowded, choppy waters. The Westcoast is an excellent fit in all regards."



Image courtesy of City of Vancouver

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Built using only premium materials, the Westcoast Lifeguard model is not an inexpensive boat. When asked how they justify the initial outlay for one of these boats, Sean replied "These boats are incredibly durable. They have taken a beating and require little maintenance."

In 1900, Vancouver created the Vancouver Lifeguard Service with the hire of Joe Fortes, and it has been in existence ever since. The lifeguard team has grown over the years to a staff of 200 beach lifeguards with 25 boats deployed in 11 locations. How times have changed!

To learn more about the Classic Whitehall Westcoast Lifeguard model, you can contact us at info@whitehallrow.com. You can also contact Sean Healy at Sean.Healy@vancouver.ca at the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation.