

Washington Post Dec. 8, 1991

SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY: A book about the building of boat

By Louis D. Rubin, Jr.

Atlantic Monthly Press. 394 pp. \$21.95

Louis D. Rubin, Jr. has launched some prestigious things in his time, most notably Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill and the distinguished creative writing program of Hollins College. His boating career, however, he humbly confesses, has been lifelong amateurism, an activity done purely out of love.

A half-century ago in Charleston, South Carolina, 13 year-old Rubin and a friend built a porous paddleboat and christened it with grape Kool-Aid. Caulked with tarpaper, *First Boat* filled with water faster than the boys could bail, but Rubin realized, "It was the first time I had ever done anything of my own accord to *change* my life." The dozen-odd boats since, right up to his present wooden cruiser, have "represented an attempt to reproduce that one early experience."

More bookwright than boatwright, Rubin provides not only a sprightly paean to life on the water but a wistful meditation on risk-taking and a longing for a place where time never runs out. He regrets a Depression-era ethic that rendered him reluctant to "throw over my work, buy a boat, and steer for the West Indies." Salted with allusions to Keats, Gertrude Stein, *As You Like It* and Middle English lyrics and a cogent lecture on Mark Twain's craft, Rubin's erudite volume winds up being about a great deal more than boats.