

YACHTS

A PAC NW PRODUCTION

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GRAND BAHAMA YACHT
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\$6.99US \$8.99CAN

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WESTPORT 164'



Brownie's

D I V E R D O W N

Third Lung

A HOOKAH IS USUALLY IMAGINED AS A SMOKER'S CONTRAPTION, WITH AN AGGREGATION OF BEARDED INTELLECTUALS PUFFING ON HOSES, BLOWING WHITE SMOKE RINGS. HOWEVER, IN THE YACHTING WORLD, THAT IMAGE MORPHS INTO A BRIGHT NEW EXPERIENCE — BREATHING UNDERWATER.

Story **Captain Chuck Gnaegy**
Photos **BTL & Reatha Murray**



“I came to Fort Lauderdale from Hendersonville, North Carolina, for a two-week vacation and got so involved I never looked back,” says Brownie’s Third Lung CEO Robert Carmichael. The cause of this sudden transformation was ocean diving, which quickly became an addiction. At 18 years old and just out of high school, he took a job with the system’s creator, whom he still refers to as “Mr. Brown.”

The ocean’s lure, and diving, roared in his blood. In 1980 he became Brownie’s first full-time employee in the cottage industry Brown started in his garage, some years before.

“There was a Johnson-Evinrude product called AirBuoy,” Robert says. “Which is similar to what we created.”

Brown, a tropical fish collector, developed a design to avoid the carbon monoxide puzzle, which dogged previous models. Robert’s job was building hookah units and testing equipment while diving and modifying components. His innate technical skills encouraged him to complete his education with night classes in engineering and business law.

“My dad was an excellent mechanic and I think I inherited a lot from him. I love mechanical devices and understand them. I also love diving, so it was natural to bridge the mechanical element with diving.” At 6’2”, with closely trimmed brown hair, Robert retains the athletic build of a practiced diver.

Six years after that beginning, Robert Carmichael took on ownership of Brownie’s. His design talents and business acumen began to expand the small company into a multi-faceted conglomerate with a diverse product line. Today, seemingly endless horizons await, augmenting the concept of ocean diving and breathing underwater.

“In the past we sold equipment to treasure divers like Mel Fisher,” he relates. “We’ve worked with Bahamas’ lobster divers to upgrade their gear; now it’s a long list of famous people, yachters, boaters and fishermen; from smaller RIB’s to the largest private diving yacht in the world.

“Today we are original equipment manufacturers, with OEM associates including Westport, Christensen, Nautica, Rayburn, Shadow and more, for diving systems.”



BROWNIE'S THIRD LUNG CEO
ROBERT CHARMICHAEL NOT
ONLY RUNS THE BUSINESS
OF DIVING, HE ALSO LIVES
THE UNDERWATER LIFE IN
THE BAHAMAS



The hookah has been Brownie's mainstay for years. It features a round floating station—like a strongly reinforced, nylon-covered inner tube, holding the 4-cycle engine and air compressor—plus a 60' downline and three 20' diver's hoses. This larger system supports three divers to a depth of 90'. Brownie's offers a host of other models, accessories, commercial hookah systems, mixed-gas diving solutions and NitroxMakers.

Robert explains Brownie's secondary market, now almost 40% of its volume: "People came, asking if we could fill scuba tanks. After the zillionth query we said: There's something we should look into—a system to fill tanks.

"We found a product line we could adapt; made it automatic, marinized it, to be mounted in a small area on any yacht; pump room or engine room. The yachtsman can have complete freedom with a dive plan."

"My kids and family are my life," he says. "We're a boating family, we use our couple of boats about 300 hours a year. Our children, 11 and 15, have their own boat. We like all kinds of diving: shallow reefs, deep ocean, free diving, re-breathers. We know how boaters feel.

"Cruisers want to dive and tour the Bahamas' 69,000 square miles without returning to fill scuba tanks. Owners of smaller yachts want products to make this possible, but need a ready source. Tank filling systems are commonly found at dive stores and fire departments, but yacht owners want one on their sportfishing boat, their 45' trawler. Brownie's is providing the solution to this through our products."

Different from PADI or NAUI-controlled scuba diving, which primarily utilizes a traditional classroom setting for academic work, Brownie's online training program offers a means for independent study and awards a certificate of *Diving Academic Training* upon course completion.

Brownie's Built-in Boat Hookah Systems and new E-Reel upgrade are being used by Fountain, Mangusta, Leopard Sport and Nautica. Its YachtPro Tankfill systems will fit almost any size yacht; and its Nitrox Maker is becoming the gas diving system of choice, worldwide.

What's next for Brownie's Third Lung?

Robert smiles, "You know, I'm co-inventor of the world record holding Halcyon re-breather; but people still walk in the door and ask if we can fix an AirBuoy!"