



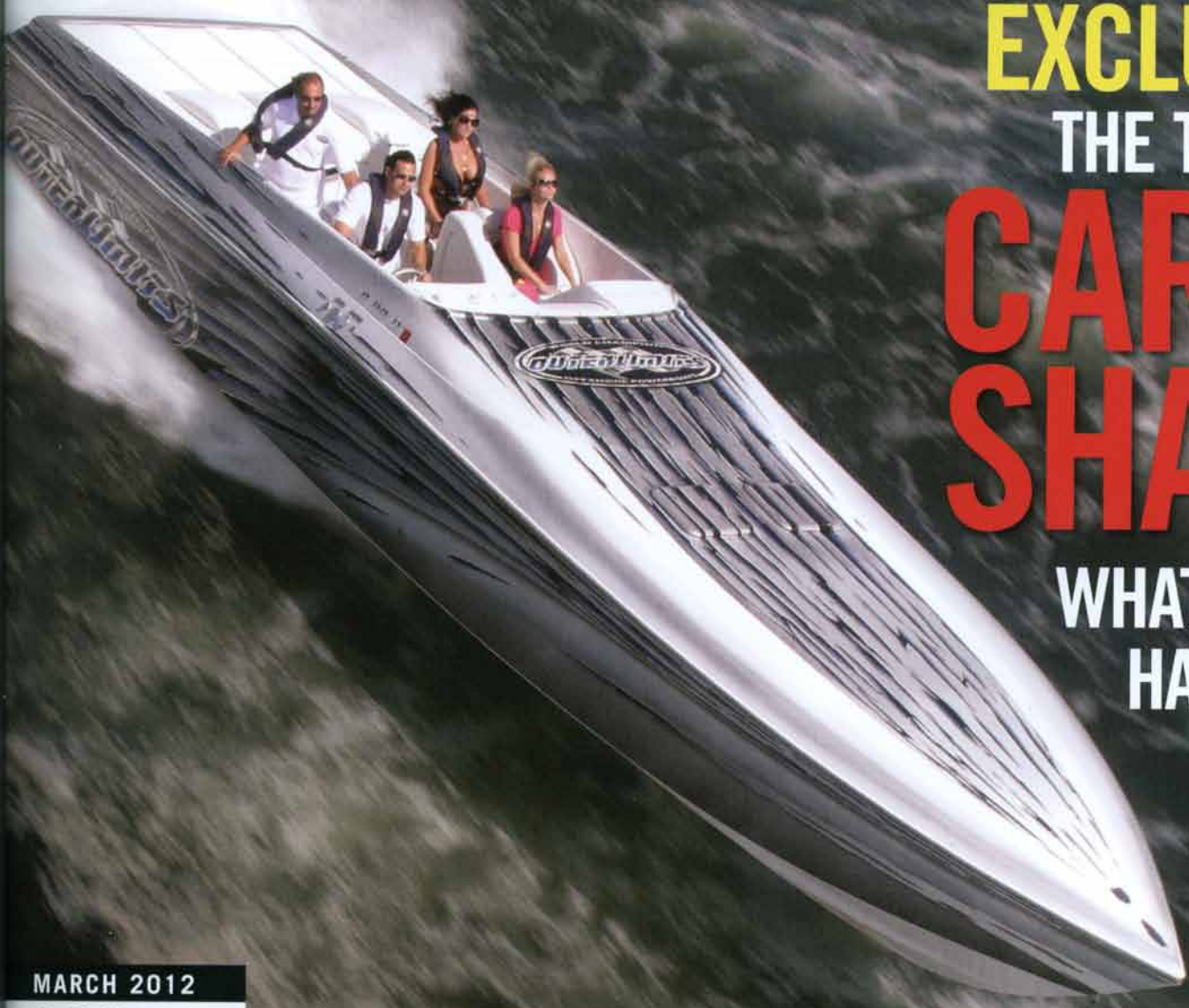
CATCHIN' AIR!



Performance Boats

OFFSHORE EDITION

www.performanceboats.com



EXCLUSIVE:
THE THEFT OF
CARD SHARK

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED
SEE PAGE 18

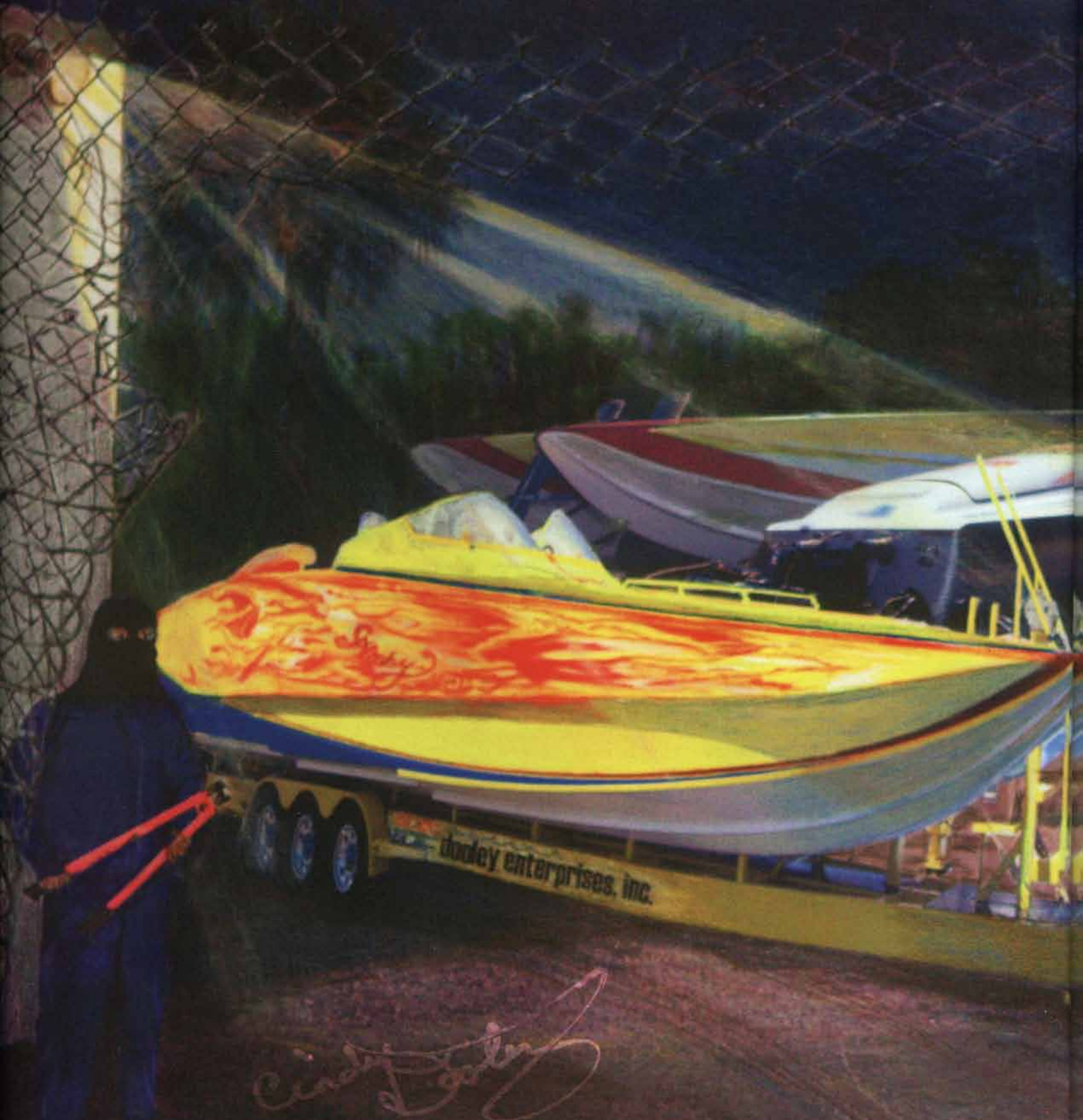
MARCH 2012

\$5.99US/CAN

03>



Rich Antonucci's
37' Outerlimits, Incognito



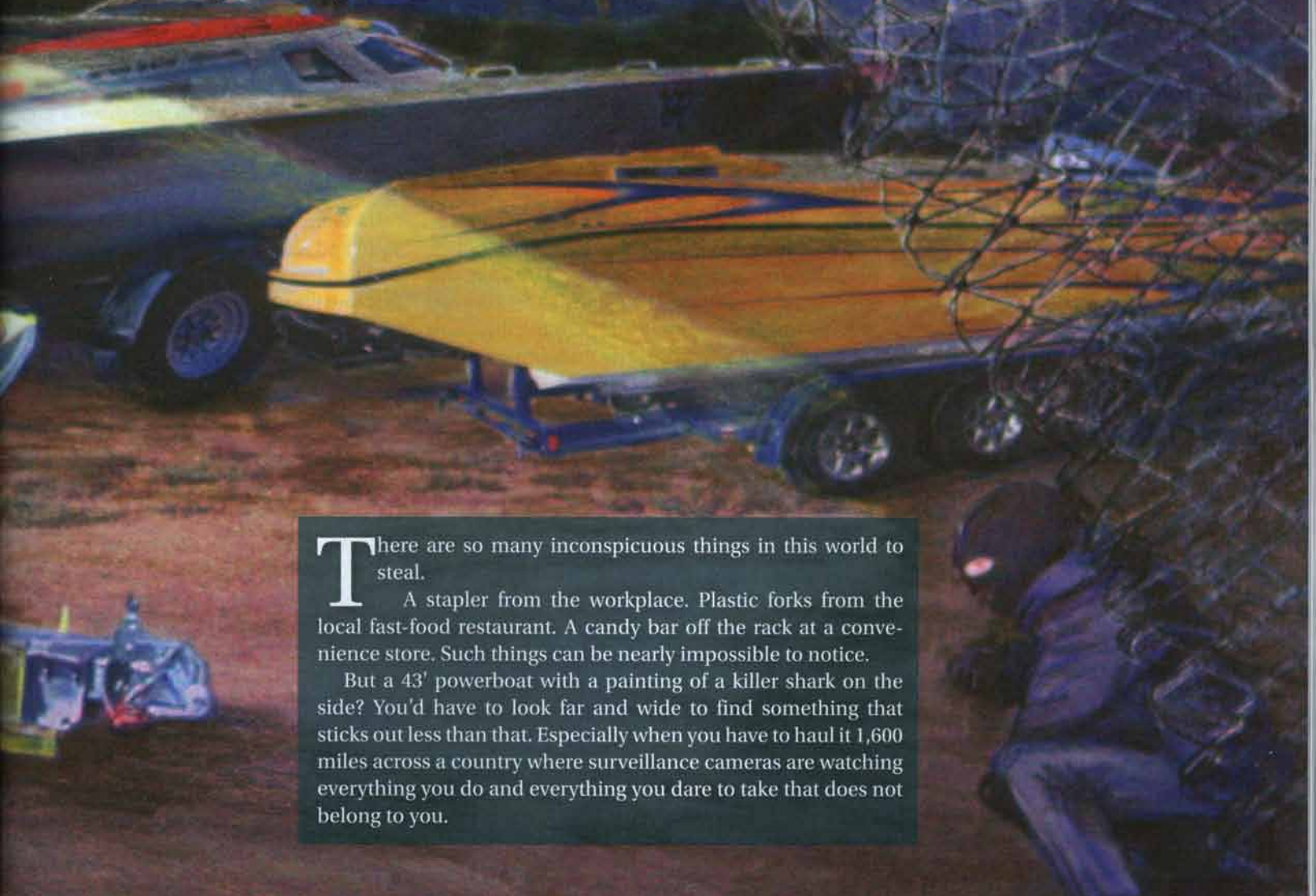
Cindy Dodley



shark hunters

by Brett Bayne
Illustration by Cindy Dooley

Behind an infamous boat-theft insurance scam—
and how investigators cracked open the truth of the
marine industry's “dirty little secret.”



There are so many inconspicuous things in this world to steal.

A stapler from the workplace. Plastic forks from the local fast-food restaurant. A candy bar off the rack at a convenience store. Such things can be nearly impossible to notice.

But a 43' powerboat with a painting of a killer shark on the side? You'd have to look far and wide to find something that sticks out less than that. Especially when you have to haul it 1,600 miles across a country where surveillance cameras are watching everything you do and everything you dare to take that does not belong to you.



Left: the original *Card Shark*.
Below: owner Dennis Hall's new version, the *Card Shark II*.

And yet, it happens—more frequently than you might expect. Boats disappear all the time. And when a theft occurs, it's generally the insurance company that's expected to mail a check containing many zeroes to cover the loss.

This is the story of a performance boat that some people made disappear, and the insurance underwriters who got fed up with the situation and weren't going to take it anymore.

The Theft

Before it was stolen and chopped up into little pieces, the *Card Shark* was a 2005 Nor-Tech 4300 vee bottom that sat atop a white 2005 Myco Trailer in an outdoor lot owned by Derebery Performance, an engine builder located in Pottsboro, TX. The boat's owner, Dennis W. Hall, had asked his friend, shop owner Leon Derebery, if he could store it there with a "For Sale" sign on it, and Derebery agreed.

The boat sat there for months, guarded by an Akita dog known as Brodix (named after the cylinder head company), without so much as a nibble from a prospective buyer. Then, on Nov. 21, 2007, a dually truck backed up to the gate and a man accompanied by two women exited the vehicle. Using a bolt cutter, the thief sheared the lock off the gate and entered the yard. Working hastily, he then hooked the boat up to the truck and pulled it out, fastened a new lock to the gate, fed Brodix, and departed with the boat.

The shop's owner, Leon Derebery, later told police he had returned from a deer hunting trip with his son Peyton to find the boat had disappeared. "I went up to the gate to put all my stuff back inside



the yard, got out my key and immediately noticed that it didn't work," Derebery said. "I thought, 'What the hell is going on here?' Then I noticed that something looked different. Then it dawned on me: The *Card Shark* was gone."

The entire incident was caught on Derebery's surveillance cameras, and police began to study the crime, scouring the images for clues. The figures were shadowy with few definitive leads pointing their way to the guilty parties. The theft was reported to both the police and the Markel American Insurance Company, responsible for reimbursing the owner of the *Card Shark*.

The disappearance of the boat represented a sizable loss for Markel, which had endured a string of similar boat thefts for several years.

"When a meaningful theft occurs, it adversely impacts insurance rates for the entire group," explained Tom Conroy, Markel's managing director of marine underwriting. "We feel it's important to aggressively investigate and return the property back to the rightful owner, if at all possible, and put the wrongdoer behind bars."

Full-scale investigations can be quite expensive, especially when a boat is hauled to a different part of the country (as it was

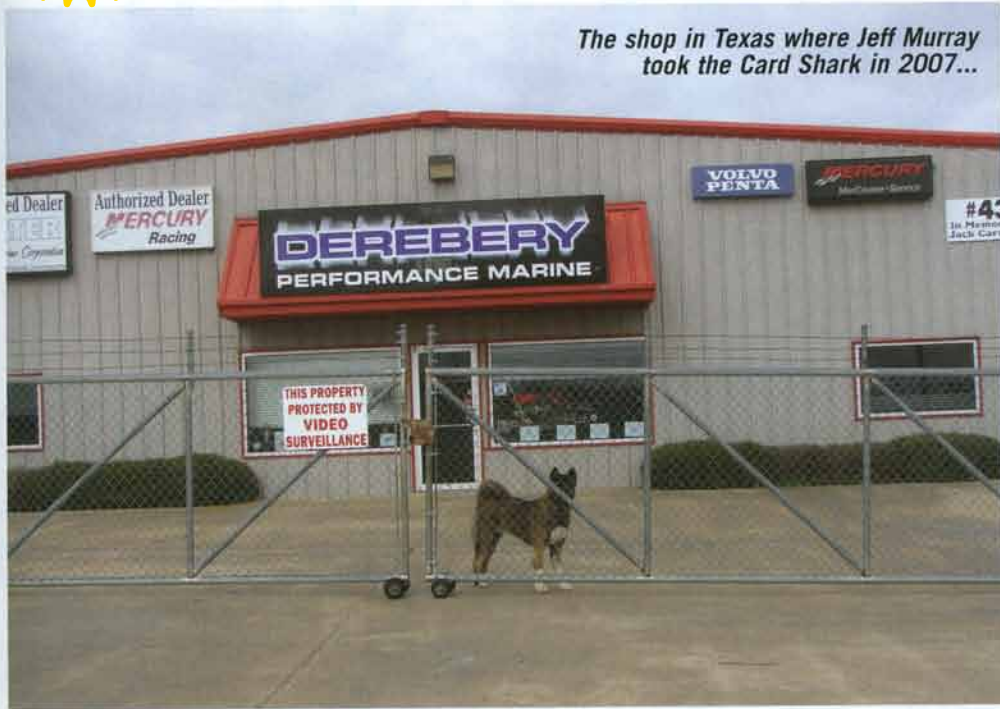
in this case). Nonetheless, Markel decided to pursue it. "The best opportunity to recover the boat was to assemble a great investigative team," Conroy said. Markel's Watercraft Claims Supervisor Casey Matthews, who directed the case, enlisted a crack team headed up by Todd Schwede (of Todd and Associates, San Diego) and Charlie Meacham (owner of ICL Investigations, Jacksonville), two of the best investigators in the country, to take on the mystery.

The Investigation

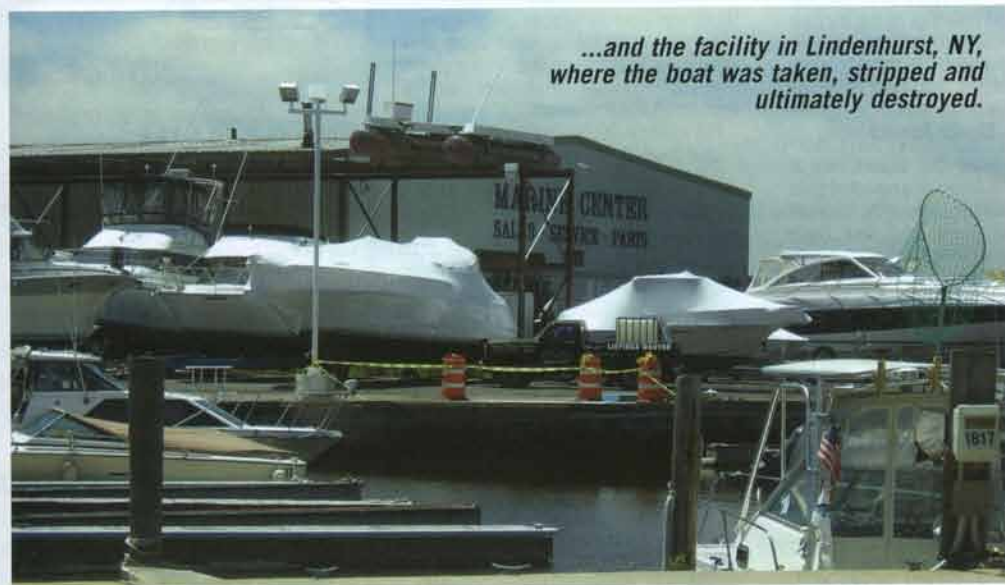
Although no single person's face is clearly identifiable in Derebery's surveillance video, "its very existence gave us confidence that we could have a chance to make some sort of recovery here," Matthews said. "You don't always get that lucky."

One of the first, and ultimately most rewarding, strategies was to offer a \$50,000 bounty for information leading to the safe return of *Card Shark*, a reward tailor-made to "help loosen lips," Conroy said. It was an aggressive move designed not just to help find *Card Shark*, but to help the insurance industry as a whole.

Helping get the word out about the reward was the responsibility of investigator Todd Schwede. Historically, when a boat has been stolen, posters are produced



The shop in Texas where Jeff Murray took the Card Shark in 2007...



...and the facility in Lindenhurst, NY, where the boat was taken, stripped and ultimately destroyed.

Note the Grady White that's shrink-wrapped in the center of the photo. At the time this photo was taken, it had been reported stolen from Grover's Marina in Freeport, NY. A few months later, one of the culprits was arrested in Nassau County, NY, towing this same stolen boat.

and mailed out. But Todd & Associates innovated a special "fax broadcast" system that got the information out more quickly and efficiently, to both law enforcement and members of the marine community. In addition, he posted about *Card Shark* on the website OffshoreOnly.com, which has a thriving online offshore powerboat com-

munity. Soon, thousands of people were on the hunt for the infamous Nor-Tech.

"Everybody wants to play *America's Most Wanted*", Schwede said. "People feel violated when somebody steals from their fellow boaters."

With such a large reward involved, the interest level in the crime began to sky-

rocket, chat rooms came to life, and tips started to flood in. Through information they received, they were able to ascertain that the boat was headed in the direction of New York. On the Sunday following the theft, it was determined that the boat had arrived in Long Island, New York. At 11 p.m., Schwede's cell phone rang. On the other end of the line, someone with a heavy New York accent informed him that the boat was in the process of being cut up.

"What do you mean 'cut up'?" Schwede asked.

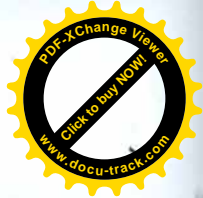
"It's being crushed as we speak," came the reply. "How do I get the money?"

What immediately became clear to Schwede was that a participant in the disassembly and destruction of the boat was calling to rat out his associates for the reward money. He and Conroy tracked the boat from the call to a Long Island industrial park marina and eventually narrowed it down to the most likely spot on the premises. A local marine surveyor was contacted and instructed to scope out the location. Law enforcement from Suffolk County was also contacted.

Meanwhile, the marine surveyor also drove to the marina, and spotted what he believed to be the boat's trailer sitting in the parking lot off to the side. He phoned Markel at once. "I'm looking at what I'm absolutely certain is the trailer the boat was sitting on," he said, a sense of discomfort growing in his gut. "I have to get out of here." The police were called and a car was dispatched to the scene. But by that time, the trailer was nowhere to be found.

Meanwhile, Charlie Meacham was sifting for clues at Derebery Performance, the scene of the original theft. After conducting interviews with shop personnel, he stopped at an Exxon gas station on US-75 in Grayson County to use the restroom and to put up one of the reward posters. To his delight, the attendant on duty recognized *Card Shark* from his poster. "I remember seeing this boat the other day!" she informed Meacham. "There were two women and two different trucks traveling with it. One was red and one was black. They came in looking for a piece of 2x4."

Adding to this lucky break was the fact



This is the “Annihilator,” a giant shredder where some of the stolen boats were destroyed. Police believe that sections of “Card Shark” were shredded here as well.



that the Exxon gas station had their own surveillance video footage, which revealed the face of a woman who had been traveling with the *Card Shark* boat. She was eventually identified as a friend of the man later revealed to be at the center of the caper: Jeff York Murray (*see interview, Page 28*), a trucker who regularly transported boats to and from poker runs for his clients. Murray reportedly paid the woman on the video a check for \$400 to use her truck to “repossess” the boat. The 2x4 turned out to be a tool to assist in jacking up the trailer off her dually so that it would fit on his Peterbilt hauler.

A warrant was promptly issued for Murray, who failed to surrender himself to authorities. Eager to locate him, police contacted Markel’s investigators in February 2008 for help. “I was able to track him to Fort Lauderdale, but missed him by two hours,” Meacham recalls.

Murray was driving north on I-75 in Florida, so law enforcement started watching the roads there, eventually issuing a BOLO (Be on the Lookout) along the entire East Coast. Murray—who authorities say was in the process of hauling another boat insured by Markel for over \$1 million—was ultimately nabbed by Maryland State Police.

“We tried to get him to cooperate while he was in Maryland, but he refused,” Meacham says. “He was put into the back of a van and transported back to Texas.”

In September 2008, Meacham contacted Murray personally and sat down with him for the first of several interviews, during which Murray described how he orchestrated the disappearance of boats. It was no surprise to anybody that Murray proved to be little more than a cog in a much larger conspiracy—one that eventually led to the arrests and punishment of key players in an ongoing scam that has

cost Markel and other insurance companies millions of dollars.

In his early conversations, investigators say Murray was not completely honest with them, and was therefore not considered particularly credible. “I sat down with Jeff and told him, ‘You’re going to go to jail for a long time unless you cooperate and are totally open and truthful.’ I asked him if he would be willing to talk to the Suffolk County Police, and he agreed. At his own expense, he went to New York, was interviewed and determined to be truthful and credible. “He gave up the names of the individuals involved,” Meacham said.

Using the valuable information Murray provided, as well as leads from other sources, police were able to solve at least 15 other cases of stolen boats from coast to coast, including California, Arizona, Nevada, Texas, New Jersey and New York. The string of thefts date back 20 years; four