

That's no lady

Many wooden canoes and kayaks are viewed as objects of art, with finishes that have been rubbed and varnished and rubbed over and over until they glow. I've seen such beauties with a note nearby that says DO NOT TOUCH. But is that beauty only skin deep?

Now eighteen years old, my cedar stripped, decked canoe no longer fits that description. Though much revered, she has not been refinished since she first hit the water. In fact, the only maintenance I've done is that which was essential for my next trip. The sun has fought through the varnish and epoxy in one spot and the spray rail carries the scar from a collision with a downed tree on the Kawkawlin during spring ice breakup. Gouges streak her bottom from ice, rocks and debris encountered on the Au Sable, Pine and Chippewa rivers. There are bruises from Canadian boulders and dragging over rugged terrain on a portage in the U.P.

Her cockpit sole is still scratched from sand and grit. Most often, there are lures hooked to the underside of her deck. I keep my boots in the aft compartment so I can always find them. In all this time I've only lent her to two people. I won't ever sell her. No dollar could express her value.

Every time we plan an outing I say, "I'm gonna fix this thing up." I've been saying that for a decade now. But I haven't. We're already planning our next trip, probably a few months from now. That's plenty of time to refinish her. —*J. R. Watson*