In 1938, when Mike Brennan was 12, he helped his dad build a sailboat. "Ever since, I've dreamed of building my own boat," said the youthful-looking father of six. "I've toyed around with models for years, and one was almost finished when one of the kids fell on it."

Last year, Mike started scale model work in earnest, drawing plans from his father's Gulf One design. Sloop he had helped build as a youngster. "We tested the model in the swimming pool, and she sailed herself perfectly, so we began construction in January (1965)—in our backyard."

Mike and his wife Joel first collected wood in the garage of their home at 6900 Carmen in Airline Park. "For $75 we collected enough wood to build a 2-foot plug (mold for the hull) like his father's Gulf One, except he modified the

At this stage, the backyard boat was a little less than half finished; of construction, the deck still remained to be built.

Kelly Brennan, age 5, sails model in pool. Brennan has "toyed with models for years."
plans to permit glass fiber construction.” Mrs. Brennan explained.

“The only real differences are rounded chines, keel and increased waterline. I decided on glass fiber a long time ago; wooden boats just seem to rot here in New Orleans,” Brennan explained.

“Our 1,700-pound keel is for stability and performance,” the experienced sailor added. “You see, Dad’s Gulf One has a centerboard and was named “Eastwind,” because she wouldn’t make good headway against strong, easterly breezes. I collected old tire weights and just melted them down and cemented them into the keel.”

The mast is a piece of aluminum—originally a rail on a highway bridge. Mike found an old motorboat rudder shaft, and used it for a rudder post. “My partner Bill Boudreau financed the construction; my job was building the boat—we tried to keep costs down.”

Brennan’s first major operation: building the wooden plug (a mold on which he applied the glass coating). He drew plans on the walls of his garage, sawed the wooden plug frames to specification, nailed the mold together.

He used two types of glass fiber—mat and woven roving—to coat the plug. “I sandwiched them together for stronger lamination.”

After forming the hull on the plug, Mike spent 10 weeks sanding it smooth. He then painted the glass coating with white primer. “Even though I’m all for plastic boats, a glass transom leaves me cold, so I glued a piece of natural-finished mahogany plywood onto the stern.”

Since the hull was formed in an upside down position, it had to be turned over so the deck could be mounted. Using pulleys and slings, Mike and neighbors tried to invert the hull. But one side wouldn’t clear the ground; a ditch had to be dug before the boat could be righted. The plug was then removed from inside the hull; work began on the deck.

“I used wood from the base (the deck area) of the hull mold to shape the deck mold—this gave me the correct curve and crown.” Deck construction began in February, when the mold was made of scrap plywood, nailed together.

The temperature was in the 50s most of February and March, but work had to hurry on—because the mold was cracking. Mike protected the deck by hanging a large tarpaulin across his yard. “I was really worried about mounting the deck on top of the hull because it had to be lifted nine feet above the ground, but the neighbors all helped hoist, and it slid right on.” The deck is bolted every eight inches, and is glassed—making the cabin completely watertight.

Mike rose at 5 a.m. every morning prior to the launching on June 4 to work on the boat before going to his job. At night, he worked until 1 a.m.

On the eve of the launching, the boat had to be moved from the backyard to the street. “I was afraid to put her on the trailer because I thought the wheels might have gotten stuck in the soft ground. So I put her cradle on some pipe rollers and rigged a block and tackle.” With the help of about 40

Continued On Page 8

Here’s the Brennan “backyard bomb” in action. Cruising in the Easterly are Mrs. Brennan; Brennan; Roy, 15; Larry Roussel, 19, and Tim Brennan, 18.
Continued From Page 7

neighbors, the homemade sailboat was moved to the street. Then it was put onto the trailer.

The next morning, the sailboat was towed to the lake and 28 members of the Brennan clan gathered at the Southern Yacht Club to christen her “Easterly.” With one bottle of champagne (that somehow went around) and $3,600, the backyard boat was launched.

An enthusiastic racing skipper, Mike was hurried to launch Easterly in time to enter the Pensacola Ocean Race. “I had never made the big race and was determined to do it.”

Mike not only “made the race” to Pensacola, but he was eighth to finish in the 50-boat fleet and won third place honors in Class B. Competitors with $40,000 yachts have dubbed the homemade sloop, “Brennan’s Backyard Bomb.” But Mike insists her name is Easterly, because she is designed after his father’s Eastwind.

“The only real difference,” he smiled, “is that MY boat sails against those strong east winds.”

Sailboat Easterly is designed after Brennan’s father’s Eastwind. She made good showing in Pensacola race.