

## A tribute to Billy Schumacher

BY BILL OSBORNE

**B**illy Schumacher was born on October 6, 1942, in Seattle and died on September 1, 2023, in his hometown. According to his father, Bill Schumacher, “Billy was born to race boats. I loved water skiing and boat racing, so I wanted my son to share my passion for both sports. I taught him to water ski when he was only six years old. By the time he was eight, Billy was a good slalom skier. In that same year, I introduced Billy to outboard racing. He was a natural! In his first race, Billy won a junior runabout event in *Lil’ Bill*.”

“We bought *Dough Baby*, a 280-class limited hydroplane from Bill Muncey and Billy started winning right away, winning a national championship and a lot of races. In 1956, I joined Roostertails, Inc., which took over the *Slo-mo-shun V* and created the *Miss Seattle* race team. I could see the day when Billy would become an Unlimited driver, but who was going to give their boat over to a young kid?”

Bob Carver, the official team photographer for *Bardahl* said it best. “Look at Billy’s record. Every time he gets into a boat, he wins.” By the time he was 18 years old, Billy Schumacher owned five outboard national titles, two Canadian national championships, and an inboard national championship in the 280-class hydroplane.”

In 1961, Billy got his first Unlimited ride in Bob Miller’s *Cutie Radio*. In his first heat, Billy finished a distant fourth to Bill Muncey’s *Miss Century 21*. In the second, Billy finished third. His fourth-place in the final heat earned him third place



Bill Osborne

overall. As Billy said later, “My 280 went faster than that thing. It was embarrassing to tool around the racecourse at 70 mph. There was no future driving this thing, so I resigned.”

Two weeks later in Seattle, Billy drove Dave Johnson’s *Miss Tool Crib*, another uncompetitive boat. The 1961 Seattle race was run under the Fan Plan format, which grouped the top six

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boats into the UIM World Championship. The next group of four boats raced for the Seafair Trophy. "I was in the last group of three that raced for the Queen's Trophy," Billy laughed when he recounted that race. "At least, I beat *Cutie Radio*!"

In 1964, Schumacher drove Bill Schuyler's \$ *Bill*, another back marker. After that experience, Billy decided to wait for a competitive ride. "I was frustrated by the Unlimited hydroplane experience. I believed that, given a competitive boat, I could race with Bill Muncey, Ron Musson, and the other top drivers, but no one was willing to give me the opportunity. After talking to my father, we agreed that I was wasting my time driving boats which had no chance of winning, so I would wait for a good ride to come along."

Again, Carver recalled, "Ole hired Billy to help with the cabover *Miss Bardahl*. Leo Vandenberg, *Miss Bardahl*'s crew chief, liked Billy because he was able to get good feedback from him after test runs and it was convenient having Billy in Seattle. When it came to racing the new cabover, Ron Musson was the driver. After Ron Musson's death in the 1966 Presidents Cup in Washington, D.C., Ole Bardahl planned to retire. When Bardahl came back to racing, Billy was the logical choice to drive the new boat."

Ole Bardahl shocked the racing world when he hired an inexperienced



Photos by Bill Osborne

**TOP:** Schumacher's first Unlimited ride came aboard *Cutie Radio* in 1961.  
**ABOVE:** Though he never drove the boat in a race, Schumacher's first experience with the *Miss Bardahl* came when he tested the team's new cabover in 1965.

young man to pilot his brand-new *Miss Bardahl* in 1967. What was he thinking? Why hand over the keys to the highest-profile ride to a driver who had no major experience in one of these boats? By the time Billy Schumacher ended his driving career, he owned two APBA Gold Cups, two national team championships, three driving titles, and 17 race wins.

When the new Ed Karelsen *Miss Bardahl* made its debut on Lake Wash-

ington, a lot of the shorebird experts questioned Bardahl's logic. The boat was a departure from the norm and Billy was an unproven driver. "Billy the Kid" set the sport on fire in 1967. At the season-opener, Billy started slowly, finishing a close second to *Miss Madison* in Heat 1A. *Miss Bardahl* won Heat 2B and the final, earning Billy his first Unlimited victory.

The team, nicknamed "The Teeny Boppers," got the attention of everyone in the sport, but how good were they? Could they continue winning or was the Tampa race a fluke? The next race, the UIM World Championship, held on the historic Detroit River, caused skeptics to wonder if Tampa was a fluke. In *Miss Bardahl*'s first heat, the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine failed to start. In their second heat, Billy finished a distant third place behind *Miss Chrysler Crew* and *Harrah's Club*. Jerry Zuvich and the young crew found out what went wrong in Detroit and promised that the next race would yield better results.

After a disappointing second place

## A free special publication about the racing life of Billy Schumacher.

In early 2020 we published a four-part interview of Billy Schumacher that covered his recollections of his boat racing career—from driving small outboards when he was eight years old, to his experiences in the cockpit of boats such as *Miss Bardahl* and *Pride of Pay 'N Pak*, and to his time as the owner of an Unlimited hydroplane. In recognition of Billy Schumacher's recent passing, we have compiled that entire interview in one 39-page special publication that is free to readers of the *Unlimited NewsJournal*. To read it, print it, or download it to your computer, simply go to our website at [unlimitednewsjournal.net](http://unlimitednewsjournal.net).



in their first heat in Madison, *Miss Bardahl* won the next two heats in decisive fashion. Win number two was in the bank.

The Tri-Cities Atomic Cup was sheer perfection for the *Bardahl* team. Evelyn Manchester said it best. “Billy drove a perfect race. What I like about him is that he drives just fast enough to win. Speed records are nice, but winning races is our goal.” Billy piloted *Miss Bardahl* to a perfect day, winning all three heats and building a commanding lead in the national high-points race.

Seattle hosted the APBA Gold Cup, and that race was a microcosm of the 1967 season. “In the first heat, I was reminded how dangerous the sport can be,” he said. “I was in a good position at the start when *Notre Dame* and *Harrah’s Club* collided. *Notre Dame*, driven by Jack Regas, hit a hole and turned into the path of *Harrah’s Club*. Chuck Hickling hit *Notre Dame*, flew into the air, and crashed. Fortunately, both drivers survived, but the accident certainly got my attention.” In the re-run of Heat 1A, Billy did what he needed to do in order to win the heat, making certain to not jump the gun. “I let the boat run just fast enough to win. I knew I could beat him [Warner Gardner in *Miss Lapeer*] as long as I didn’t do anything stupid.”

In Heat 2B, Billy was matched up against Bill Muncey’s *Miss U.S.* Despite a cracked gearbox case, *Miss Bardahl* held on the win the heat. “I could feel a vibration,” Billy said, “but as long as it didn’t get worse, I kept the speed down and coasted home for the win.

“Entering the final, I had 1,200 points and Gardner had 1,100. All I had to do was stay ahead of him in the final to win the race. Warner Gardner made a great start and led into the first turn. Suddenly, he slowed a bit and I was able to pass him. I let Bill Muncey go and wound up second. Taking unnecessary chances is stupid!” Schumacher said afterwards. “The only hope Muncey had was if our boat and *Miss Lapeer* broke.”

Billy laughed when he recalled the



Photos by Bill Osborne

**TOP:** Billy Schumacher became the youngest person to win the Gold Cup with his victory at Seattle in 1967. **MIDDLE:** The “Blonde Bomb” *Miss Bardahl* in 1967. **ABOVE:** Schumacher with Evelyn Bardahl Manchester.





Schumacher in the cockpit of *Miss Bardahl* at the 1967 race in Tampa.

trophy presentation in Seattle. The owner of the winning boat received a cash prize of \$11,250.

The driver was given the keys to a gold Ford Mustang and a trip for two to Rome, Italy. "As we walked off the stage, Ole held out his hand and took the car keys from me. I never had to worry about getting my passport renewed either!"

At Kelowna, Schumacher was involved in two of the best heats of the year. In Heat 1C, Mira Slovak took the second lane and held off *Miss Bardahl* to win the heat. The second heat was a cake walk for Billy's yellow speedster, setting up an exciting final. Billy ended up in lane four in the final. He, along with Mike Thomas in *Miss Budweiser* and Mira Slovak in *Miss Chrysler Crew* entered the first turn together. By the end of lap one, it was a two-boat race between Thomas and Schumacher. In typical Schumacher style, he kept the pressure on Thomas for four and a half laps. With half a lap to go, *Miss Bardahl's* Rolls-Merlin engine broke two connecting rods. Somehow, Billy was able to nurse home his steed for a second-place finish.

At Sacramento, Billy entered the final with a 100-point lead over Thomas.

"Once again, Mike made a good start. I raced hard, but knew that if I kept him close, I would win the race." At the race's end, *Miss Bardahl* and *Miss Budweiser* were tied in points. In 1967, if boats were tied in points, the winner was determined by overall race speed. *Miss Bardahl* averaged 100.397 mph while *Miss Budweiser* averaged 97.204 mph.

In the season-finale at San Diego, Bill Muncey's *Miss U.S.* and Billy's *Miss Bardahl* entered the final heat with 800 points. "All I had to do was beat him [Muncey] and the race was mine. I let *Parco's O-Ring Miss* go and kept Muncey behind me." Afterwards, a reporter asked Billy why he didn't go for the win in the final. "Look," Billy said, "the winner of

the race is determined on total points, so my job is to do whatever I need to do to win the race. It makes no sense to risk breaking equipment, so I always try to race as smart as possible."

By the season's end, Billy Schumacher had won six of eight races, the APBA Gold Cup, and the national championship. Immediately following the season, Billy retired. He had won everything, and Schumacher recognized the inherent dangers involved in Unlimited hydroplane racing.

"Since I began Unlimited hydroplane racing, I have watched as too many good people have lost their lives racing. I have accomplished all of my goals, so now is a good time to walk away. I have other things I can do in life."

The retirement was short-lived. Billy came back in 1968 and defended both the APBA Gold Cup and the national championship. "Our boat ran well enough to win another high-point title," Ole Bardahl said, "but we weren't the dominant team we were a year ago."

The 1968 season began in Guntersville, Alabama. Billy's *Miss Bardahl* and Warner Gardner's *Miss Eagle Electric* entered the season as the preseason favorites. True to form, both boats easily swept past the rest of the fleet and entered the final with 800 points. The final heat match up never took place as *Miss Bardahl's* engine failed.

In the next race, held in Madison, Wisconsin, Billy won all three heats and took over the lead in national points. At Madison, Indiana, Billy won the Indiana



*Miss Bardahl* and its checkerboard paint job in 1968.





*Pride of Pay 'n Pak*

Governors Cup, dropping only one heat in the process. After three races, the race for the national championship was getting out of reach for the rest of the field.

The two races in Washington state were frustrating for Billy and his team. “We won both preliminary heats at Tri-Cities and failed to finish the final. Things were even worse in Seattle. Jim McCormick’s *Harrah’s Club* beat us twice in the preliminary heats and we failed to finish in the final heat again.” Billy’s *Miss Bardahl* returned to the winner’s circle at the Diamond Cup and the team felt that the DNFs that plagued them were history. Only time would tell.

Billy did his best to preserve his equipment at the Presidents Cup, but once again *Bardahl* failed to finish the final heat. Evelyn Manchester expressed her concerns following that race. “Jerry and our crew have worked hard, but some of our equipment is tired. We will do our best to win the Gold Cup.”

“I want the Gold Cup more than any other race,” Billy said entering the race in Detroit. The crew prepared the boat it and responded. “We made a statement right away, topping the qualifying ladder by almost four miles per hour.” Billy won all three heats, averaging 108.173 mph for the entire race, 12 miles per hour faster than runner up *Notre Dame*. “I can’t thank

our crew enough for all the work they did to bring us this win today,” Billy said afterwards.

“We finished the season with a pair of second places at San Diego and Phoenix. It was a disappointing way to end our time together with this wonderful team,” Billy said at the Phoenix awards ceremony.

*Miss Bardahl* won four out of nine races and scored enough points to easily win the national championship. Ole Bardahl and Billy Schumacher both retired from racing at the end of 1968.

“Dad needed help running Tasty Home Bakery in Seattle and I thought it was a good time to quit. I was reminded of the dangers inherent in the sport when Warner Gardner was killed in the final heat of the Gold Cup in Detroit in 1968.”

During the *Bardahl* years, I was accepted by all of the drivers, except one: Billy Schumacher. Wanting to be accepted, I spoke to Art Johnson, *Miss Bardahl*’s public relations director who said, “Billy is a great driver, but he is shy. If he doesn’t



Photos by Bill Osborne

Schumacher with his wife, Cyndee, and team owner Dave Heerensperger.





**ABOVE:** Schumacher drives *Pride of Pay 'n Pak* onto the racecourse.  
**RIGHT:** He had a hand in the development of the U-95 turbine-powered hydro.



Photos by Bill Osborne

know you, he can appear cold.” Years later, I would learn why Billy appeared aloof to me. It is a funny story.

Billy married Cyndee Dootson, the 1955 Miss Florida USA. Billy and Cyndee adopted a three-year old girl, Catherine. He raised her and she was a part of his life until Billy passed. Life was going well for Billy, but the competitive juices were still flowing through his veins.

In 1971, Billy teamed up with Jim Lucero, to drive Dave Heerensperger’s *Pride of Pay 'n Pak*. “I liked the potential of the boat, so when Dave offered me the ride, I jumped at the opportunity. I really liked the way the boat turned, so I thought we could win,” Billy said at the season-opener in Miami. “As I look back, my assessment of the boat was good. Unlike every other boat out there, the *Pak* held its lane better in the turns. Because it tracked rather than slid, our turn times were much better than anyone else.

We had a shot at winning the Gold Cup that year, but I was called for chopping *Notre Dame*. ABC’s *Wide World of Sports* film showed that I held my lane while Sterett [Bill, Jr.] could not hold his lane and slid through my wake. That penalty took us out of contention.” The *Pay 'n Pak* team was unbeatable in the second half of the season. “We won the last three races of the season once the boat was set

up properly. I was very optimistic about the upcoming season,” Billy said.

At Madison, in 1972, Schumacher resigned because of the horrific conditions on the Ohio River. I was at the bakery when Billy called his father. Bill handed the phone to me, and Billy shared his concerns. I said, “It’s your life on the line, so if you feel it’s not safe, don’t drive. It’s not worth the risk.” Billy walked away from the *Pay 'n Pak* and returned home. Some people in the sport supported his decision, while others branded him as a coward. His future in the sport was uncertain.

In 1972, Rick Keller hired Billy to

drive his outboard tunnel hull race boat. Bob Carver and I were there to photograph Billy’s first test session in Keller’s boat. Carver said it best. “Billy adapted to this thing immediately. I have never seen anyone figure out one of these boats so quickly.” Because he won races easily, the team was invited to the Paris Six Hour Grand Prix. Billy and his co-driv-



Bill Osborne

Schumacher drives *Weisfield's* in 1975.





Schumacher's ride was renamed *Olympia Beer* in 1976.

er Johnny Sanders won the event on the Seine River. "We came there with high expectations, but we exceeded our goals. Winning this race, beating more than 100 other boats, is certainly one of the highlights of my life!"

In 1973, it appeared that Billy would drive the U-95 turbine-powered hydroplane. "I worked with team owner Jim Clapp and helped get the approval from the governing body of the sport for this revolutionary project. The final deal fell apart for several reasons. I thought I should be paid well to bring this program along. We never settled on a number that worked, so I was out of the deal." One can only wonder how hydroplane history might have been different if Billy Schumacher had remained a part of the U-95 project.

"After the 1974 World Championship in Tri-Cities, my good friend Les Rosenberg called and offered me the chance to drive his boat, *Valu-Mart*, at the Gold Cup in Seattle," Schumacher remembered. "Unfortunately, we had mechanical problems and failed to score any points there. The rest of the season didn't go well, but I agreed to come back in 1975."

The season started well for Billy, Les, and the *Weisfield's* team. "We won all three heats in Miami, finished a close second to *Budweiser* at the Presidents Cup, won at Owensboro, Detroit, and Madison." In order to gain more power, crew chief Jerry Zuvich decided to use high-dome pistons. "When they worked, we were

faster. When they didn't work, we ended up breaking. Looking back," Billy said years later, "the high domes were a bad idea. They probably cost us the national championship."

In 1976, *Weisfield's* was renamed *Olympia Beer*. Billy finished third in Miami and won at Madison. In the third heat of the 1976 APBA Gold Cup, *Olympia Beer* hit a roller and destroyed the right sponson. "I was really lucky there. The boat was wrecked, but I escaped," he said afterwards. Billy rebounded to win his last race in San Diego. When Leslie Rosenberg retired at the end of the sea-

son, Billy knew it was time for him to retire as well.

"The boats weren't as safe back then without the protective capsule around the driver like today's boats, and I lost a lot of my friends to fatal accidents during my career. I had won a lot of races, some of them two or three times. That final season, the owner of the boat I was driving, Leslie Rosenberg, was selling his equipment and getting out of the sport. It seemed like a good time to leave as well. I thought my turn would be up pretty soon if I continued racing, and I was probably right. Most of the guys I raced against aren't here anymore, and I would probably be one of them."

Billy's life changed dramatically in 2001 when he met his soon-to-be-wife Jane Suzick. Jane explains how the two of them became a couple. "I was a friend of Billy's ex-wife Cyndee. She thought we might work well, so she introduced us. I wasn't so sure until date number three."

"We were married within a year. We had our reception at the Seattle Yacht Club. We had a beautiful ice sculpture of a hydroplane. I was really upset when



Schumacher and his wife, Jane, became boat owners in 2006.





Bill Osborne

Schumacher with his team's crew chief Scott Raney (left) and driver Jean Theoret.

they ran out of fresh shrimp! Otherwise, the reception was spectacular. Although the food at the Seattle Yacht was fantastic, Billy and I didn't eat until later that night at Dick's Drive In."

Jane continues, "During our first five years together, Billy and I enjoyed so many wonderful times. We skied at Sun Valley and enjoyed every day of our life together." They were frequent visitors at the Detroit and Seattle Unlimited hydroplane races.

For years, Billy and I talked about his desire to own an Unlimited hydroplane. He said, "I am looking for the perfect opportunity in racing." In 2004, he said, "I like the direction the sport is taking. I can see the time when Jane and I will become team owners. I am looking for a well-established, successful team to buy. I want to come in and win quickly. When Bill Wurster put his team up for sale, Billy said, "This is exactly the perfect team for us!"

Thirty years after his retirement as

a driver, Billy and Jane Schumacher purchased Bill Wurster's *Llumar* team. In 2006, I was hired to do public relations for Billy's team. When we completed the particulars of the job, Billy asked, "Any questions?"

I expressed my concerns from the *Miss Bardahl* years about his lack of friendliness towards me. I thought Billy was going to fall over laughing. He said, "Back then I had vision issues. I could see very well at distance, but up close it was hard to see, so I wasn't sure who you were. My father gave me goggles so I could see people, but they made it hard to drive, so they went away. Years later, I had corrective surgery, so I could see up close and far away as well. Question answered?"

The new team entered its first race at Evansville to honor the 50th anniversary of the 1956 *Miss Seattle*. Billy explained. "In 1956, my father was one of the members of Roostertails, Inc. They bought *Slo-mo-shun V* from Stanley S. Sayres, re-named it *Miss Seattle*, and raced the boat for several years."

At the season-opener in Evansville, Indiana, *Miss Seattle* flipped in the final heat. The team, led by crew chief Scott Raney, worked around the clock for four days to repair the boat. On Friday, the team pulled into Madison, Indiana. During the repair process, Billy was supportive of his team. "I learned many years ago, a successful team needs a strong-supportive owner. I told Scott that I will do anything I can to make this



Bill Osborne

Schumacher's Beacon Plumbing team celebrates their 2006 APBA Gold Cup victory.



team work.”

Schumacher's new team won the 2006 APBA Gold Cup in Detroit, but it wasn't easy. *Miss Beacon Plumbing* barely made the front line of the winner-take-all final heat of the race. Jean Theoret made a perfect start and held on to win the race. One of the best parts of winning was the fact that Bill Cahill, owner of Beacon Plumbing, was at the race. By winning the APBA Gold Cup, Billy Schumacher became the first person since Bill Muncey to win the oldest active motorsports trophy as a driver and as an owner.

Billy and Jane's team followed the APBA Gold Cup win with a win at the Seattle Seafair race and the UIM World Championship in San Diego. Billy and Jane's team won only one more race with him as an owner. They ran one of the top teams in the sport until they placed the boat up for sale after the 2014 season. Quite a career for “Billy the Kid!”

At the 2023 Seafair APBA Gold Cup, Billy's good friend and former sponsor, Bill Cahill, had a great conversation. As with many business deals, their relationship had its rocky moments, but throughout the ensuing years, Cahill professed his love and admiration for Billy. “I am just glad to be here with Billy to share this rare moment,” Cahill said afterwards. “Billy and I became very good friends. He taught me how to win at life! He also gave me a gift that I will never forget. After my father passed, I was extremely depressed. He called me one day and said, ‘Come down to the lake today and go for a ride in my boat.’ When I arrived at Lake Washington, he let me drive *Miss Beacon Plumbing* around the racecourse. It was the thrill of a lifetime! How many owners have ever let a sponsor drive their million-dollar race boat? Billy was, and will always be, one of my best friends. My life will never be the same without my good friend. I love you, Billy!”

Personally, Billy was the first driver that I met at the beginning of his career,



Schumacher with Bill Cahill (right) the owner of Beacon Plumbing.

Bill Osborne

and we remained friends until his passing. As a person, Billy seemed quiet, but on the racecourse, it was quite a different story. In the days that Billy raced *Miss Bardahl*, most drivers gave up if they were too far behind at the start. An example of Billy's tenacity on the racecourse comes to mind at Seattle. By his own admission, Billy said, “I muffed the start in heat two. Jim McCormick got a great start, and I was late. I really didn't know if I could catch him, but I had to try.” As the two boats exited the last turn on Lake Washington, there was Billy. “I saw him and thought that I could catch him.” Schumacher piloted *Miss Bardahl* and almost scored an amazing come-from-behind win in that heat. He pushed McCormick

so hard that Jim blew up his engine and wasn't eligible to race in the final heat.

While Billy's life ended before any one of his family and friends wanted, Billy lived a full and rich life. He was blessed to have had success in so many aspects of his life. He succeeded on so many levels, personal and professional. Billy Schumacher's racing career is worthy of the Hall of Fame as a driver and a team owner.

Becoming Billy's friend meant a lot to me. I treasure our friendship and the time we spent together. I am blessed to have known “Billy The Kid.”

You will be missed, my friend. ❖

# THE 2023 SEASON IN REVIEW

If one had to select a word to describe the 2023 H1 Unlimited Racing Series, what would it be? Competitive? Brief? Fast? Stormy?

All apply. Deck-to-deck racing thrilled race fans at every event this summer. But those fans saw only four events. Yet the boat speeds reached levels worthy of the record books. The racing was so close that six boats were within striking distance of the national title when the season's final race began, and the championship wasn't decided until the year's final heat.

And, Mother Nature made headlines, too.

As the hydros gathered on the banks of the Columbia River for the annual testing opportunity at the Tri-Cities in early June, there was ample evidence that the equity between the race teams had reached a level not seen for many years. The entire field turned in lap speeds that were within only eight mph of each other. There were also some impressive performances. Of the 100 laps recorded by the official timers on that Friday, 68 of them were over 150 mph and, among those, 17 were faster than 160 mph.

Getting new drivers qualified was another important focus of the day. Adding to laps they had both accumulated previously, rookies Gunnar O'Farrell and Dylan Runne achieved the necessary 15 laps with 10 of them over 130 mph to become qualified to drive at the highest level of boat racing. Brent Hall, striving to become the first African American driver to qualify for the Unlimited class, unfortunately had to wait until his crew

could sort out various mechanical issues in his *Boitano Homes*.

The race teams then hit the road toward Alabama for the season-opening race on Guntersville Lake. But un-

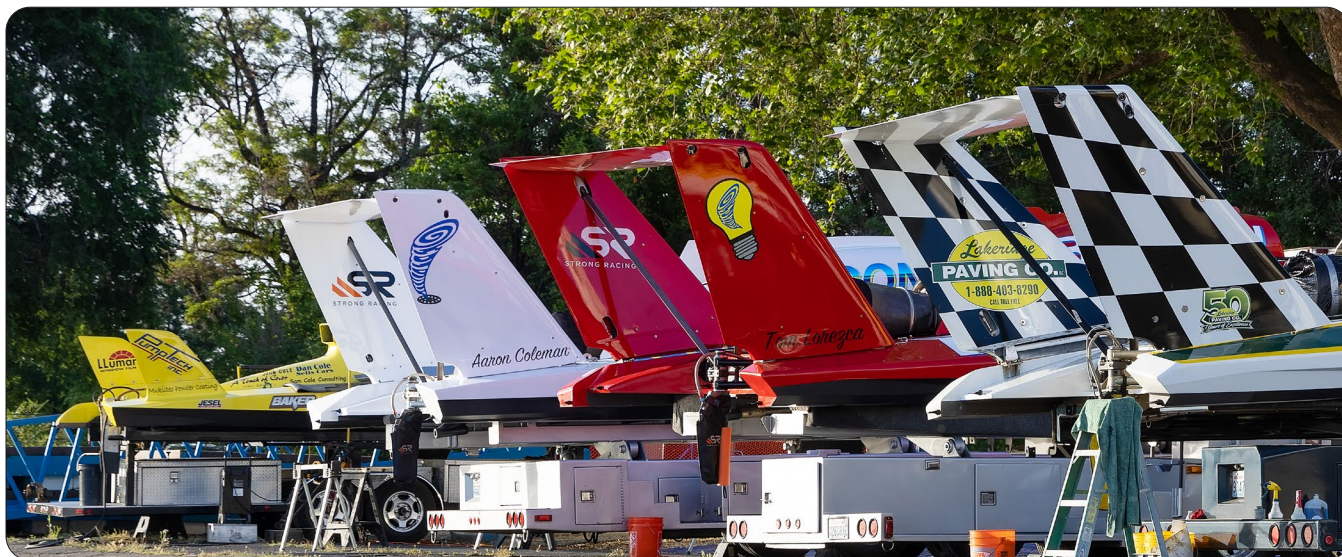
welcome news arrived days before the campaign got underway. The year's fifth race, scheduled for mid-September on Mission Bay in San Diego, was canceled. Race organizers blamed "steep increases



The *Beacon Plumbing* gets lowered to the Columbia River during the preseason test session at the Tri-Cities.

Chris Denslow





in production costs” as the reason. As a result, the season would have just four races and cover a period of only seven weeks.

It also meant that every heat would be precious. Bad starts, penalties, or missed heats would have severe consequences toward any team’s effort to win the national championship. Steady and consistent would be the best strategy.

When word came out that the race organizers in Guntersville had redesigned their racecourse to include much wider turns, it was widely accepted that the area’s claim as “The South’s Fastest Water” would be truer than ever. During testing on Friday, six of the eight boats turned in laps of over 160 mph. The fastest, a lap of over 168 mph done by Corey Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing*, was only five mph short of the all-time record.

Then, things became even faster. During qualifying on Saturday, Dustin Echols drove *Bucket List Racing* to a lap of 171.294 mph—the fifth fastest in the history of the sport and the fastest in the nearly 20 years since the sport put its current fuel-flow restrictions in place. “I’m just so glad that everyone else can see that our hard work is finally paying off,” Echols said. “We’ve known it was going to be fast for a while and it finally shows.”

When it came to racing for the



**TOP:** The boats lined up along the river bank for the preseason test. **MIDDLE:** Madison Racing teammates *Miss HomeStreet* (left) and *Miss Goodman Real Estate* in Guntersville. **ABOVE:** The H1 announcing crew, from the left, Tana Morrisett, Brad Luce, and Jeff Ayler.

Photos by Chris Denslow



**When word came out that the race organizers in Guntersville had redesigned their racecourse to include much wider turns, it was widely accepted that the area's claim as "The South's Fastest Water" would be truer than ever.**

**RIGHT:** Darrell Strong (left), co-owner of the Strong Racing Team, with Kelly Stocklin, co-owner of the Bucket List Racing Team.

**BELOW:** Part of the crowd that watched the hydroplane race in Guntersville, Alabama.

Southern Cup, the fast speeds continued. It also became a good day for the Strong Racing team, which had won the past two events in Guntersville. J. Michael Kelly won the season's first preliminary heat in the cockpit of the bright-red *Beacon Electric*. Teammate Peabody then won the next with an average speed of 162.910 mph, which established a new all-time speed record for a 2.5-mile course.

Peabody started Sunday's action with a thrilling deck-to-deck duel with Andrew Tate in *Miss Goodman Real Estate*. Tate grabbed the inside lane at the start and led the field for the first two laps, but Peabody was right on his outside and slightly behind. Then, in the final lap, Peabody pulled even with Tate headed down the backstretch, pulled ahead going around the final turn, and won the dash to the finish line.

Another close battle came in the next preliminary heat when Jamie Nilsen in *Legend Yacht Transport* took an early lead but was passed by Jimmy King in the piston-powered *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware*. King was later disqualified, however, when officials determined that he had gone too slow while setting up for the start. That gave the victory to Nilsen, who was driving a boat that his race team hadn't used since 2019. Tate and Peabody also came out winners in the third round of preliminary heats.

Weather radar showed an intense thunderstorm system approaching Guntersville as the final heat got underway, but the race was stopped only



Chris Denslow

moments after it started when Tate's *Miss Goodman Real Estate* was caught in the skid-fin spray from *Beacon Plumbing* while going into the first turn. His boat went up and over, and landed upside-down directly in the path of Dustin Echols and *Bucket List*, who had started in the trailer position behind the others. The two boats collided and up went the red flags to immediately stop the race.

Neither driver was injured, but *Goodman Real Estate* took a beating as *Bucket List's* skid fin sliced through the rear part of the upside-down boat. Then, before the others returned to the pits, the rest of the event was canceled because of the oncoming storm, which soon rattled the area with lightning and thunder, and dumped torrents of rainwater on the scene.

With the race canceled, the final results were based on the points earned in preliminary heats.



Chris Denslow



That gave the Southern Cup victory to Peabody—his second straight win in Guntersville. Tate took second-place honors and Nilsen was third.

A week later, the boats were together again on the Ohio River at Madison, Indiana. But this time there were just five entries. The crew couldn't repair the damage to *Goodman Real Estate* in time; the *Griggs Miss Ace Hardware* skipped the contest in favor of going home to Evansville, Indiana; and *Boitano Homes* needed its gearbox repaired after another failed attempt to qualify Hall at Guntersville.

Peabody went into the race with bad memories of the racecourse. Last year, his boat flipped end over end during the final heat and, though he wasn't injured, the accident caused enough damage to his boat that it missed the rest of the 2022 campaign. So, there was hope the hex had been suspended when qualifying ended on Friday with Peabody as the fastest qualifier with a run of over 156 mph.

Mother Nature was apparently not done with the hydro fleet on Saturday morning, as heavy rain and thunderstorms caused a long delay in getting the action underway. When the boats finally got on the water in the afternoon, Nilsen came away with a preliminary heat victory. He grabbed the inside lane at the start, crossed the starting line first, and held that position to the end.

Peabody passed Echols in the first turn of his heat and went on to victory, but officials postponed a third preliminary to the following day when there was too much debris on the racecourse. That ended the day's activities and left Sunday with a packed schedule—three preliminary heats and a winner-take-all final, on a day that weather forecasters said would continue to feature periodic storms.

Sunday started with Peabody's luck running out. In the first turn of the day's first heat, the *Beacon Plumbing* hooked in the swells that are always present at that end of the racecourse and came to an abrupt stop with, what the crew later



Photos by Chris Denslow

**TOP:** The boats leave the dock at Madison, Indiana, to race on the Ohio River. **MIDDLE:** Shannon Raney, co-owner of the Unlimited Racing Group, congratulates U-11 driver Jamie Nilsen after his heat victory in Madison. **ABOVE:** Dustin Echols in *Bucket List Racing*, Dylan Runne in *Miss HomeStreet*, and J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric* head for the starting line at Madison





Chris Denslow

Strong Racing teammates J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric* (left) and Corey Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing*.

discovered, was a broken propeller strut. That ended their day, which would prove costly to their hopes of a national title. After Peabody went dead, his teammate Kelly took the lead in *Beacon Electric* and went on to a comfortable victory. Kelly won again in the next heat, which featured three boats racing side by side down the backstretch during the first lap.

Dylan Runne, who had taken the seat in the defending national champion *Miss HomeStreet* following Jimmy Shane's retirement at the end of the 2022 season, won his first H1 Unlimited heat in the day's third preliminary. Runne and Echols put on an exciting show for the fans as the two traded the lead for the first two laps.

The final started with another thrilling battle. All four boats hit the starting line together and stayed that way around the first turn and down the backstretch. Runne and Kelly pushed slightly ahead of the others as they approached the end of the first lap, with Echols to their outside. That's when the orange *Bucket List Racing* suddenly went airborne and flipped end over end. The boat landed right side up, officials stopped the race, and Echols was rushed to a hospital where doctors found

that he was not seriously injured. The boat, however, was severely damaged.

As for the event, it was a repeat of the weekend before. Weather radar showed an approaching storm, so the racing was canceled—the second year in a row that racing at Madison was stopped by an end-over-end accident in the final heat. J. Michael Kelly won the Indiana Governor's Cup victory based on points earned in preliminary heats. Nilsen was second and Echols was third.

"I'm thrilled to get the win overall for the weekend," Kelly said when it was over. "It was a much-needed victory for myself and the team, especially for me. I'm just thankful that we ended on a good note and now we can look forward to going to the Tri-Cities and have some fun."

The season was already half over as the boats headed west, most of them to their home shops in the Seattle area. And, the race for the national title couldn't have been closer. Jamie Nilsen was ahead by just one point over Kelly. Their consistency was paying off, yet several boats were close behind.

Mother Nature finally cooperated in the desert climate of the Tri-Cities. In fact, though temperatures at the race site were north of 110 degrees last year, this year was comfortable in comparison. Corey Peabody, his boat now repaired, was also back in top form. He drove *Beacon Plumbing* to a run of over 162 mph to become the fastest qualifier, with Dylan Runne second fastest at 161.6 mph and Dustin Echols third at 161.2 mph. Echols's boat, repaired from the severe damage it suffered during the Madison flip almost four weeks before, also had a new yellow-and-blue paint job and a new name: *Flav-R-Pac*.

Columbia Cup racing on Saturday



Chris Denslow

Jamie Nilsen in *Legend Yacht Transport* presented by *The Truss Company* is racing side by side with Andrew Tate in *Miss Goodman Real Estate* at the Columbia Cup.





The pit area on the banks of the Columbia River in the Tri-Cities

wasn't scheduled until late in the afternoon and consisted of just one pair of preliminary heats. Peabody and Nilsen were the winners of those two contests. In the first heat, the four boats entered the first turn together—side by side by side by side—until Peabody and Runne pulled away from the others. The two nearly collided as they rounded the first turn of lap two, which earned Runne a one-lap penalty for a lane encroachment and handed the victory to Peabody.

"That was a hell of a heat, I'll tell you that," Peabody said. "What a heat! What a good time! That was one for the books. I'm glad we got to put on a good show. It was great for the fans. I had a blast! That's what racing's all about."

In the second section of the heat, Nilsen had a perfect start and pulled away from Echols going into the first turn. Despite *Flav-R-Pac* having the advantage of the inside lane, Nilsen continued to increase his lead and crossed the finish line first. "That was a race for sure," he said. I'm looking forward to the rest of the weekend."

Peabody continued to dominate on the final day. He won a battle with Kelly to win his first contest then led the field into the first turn during his second time out and took command while Kelly again followed in second. But, Andrew Tate was also a winner in both of his preliminary heats. He caught early leader Jamie

Nilsen in *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Truss Company* at the end of the first lap then won a battle with teammate Runne to win his second heat of the day. That setup a showdown for the final.

Perhaps chaotic might be the best way to describe the race? Kelly found himself way off his timing marks and in position to start so early that he was faced with a dilemma—either slow down and risk disqualification for breaking the 80-mph rule, or start far too early and accept the one-lap penalty. He opted for the penalty, and decided he'd also try to

entice others to jump the gun with him. Both Tate and Runne followed on his tail and also started too early, which meant half the field had to run an extra lap.

Spectators on the beach, many not having the advantage of a public address system to keep them informed of what was going on, saw *Beacon Electric* jump the gun by a wide margin and then hold a commanding lead throughout the contest. They also watched *Beacon Plumbing* and *Goodman Real Estate* battle side by side for "second place" through most of the race. Many didn't know that Kelly and Tate were actually a lap behind and that Nilsen, seeming to be back in the pack, was actually running in second—that is, until his boat went dead in the water from engine problems.

To figure it out, the fans had to pay attention to the signal flags that officials waved as the heat came to an end. *Beacon Electric* received a white flag instead of a checkered at the end of its fifth lap. Then, when *Beacon Plumbing* got a checkered flag and *Goodman Real Estate* got a white when they crossed the finish line, it became clear that Peabody was the winner. It completed a perfect weekend that saw him be the fastest qualifier and the win-



J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric* (left) with Dylan Runne in *Miss HomeStreet*.



## 2023 SEASON SUMMARY

Num	Boat	ID#	Driver	Guntersville Southern Cup 6/24-25	Madison Governor's Cup 6/30-7/2	Tri-Cities Columbia Cup 7/28-30	Seattle Gold Cup 8/4-6	Total Pts.
1.	U-8 <b>Beacon Electric</b>	1496	J. Michael Kelly	4th 919	1st 1395	3rd 1185	1st 1785	5,284
2.	U-9 <b>Beacon Plumbing</b>	92102	Corey Peabody	1st 1280	500	1st 1700	3rd 1720	5,200
3.	U-40 <b>Bucket List Racing</b>	0721	Dustin Echols	6th 719	3rd 999			4,181
	<b>Flav-R-Pac</b>					2nd 1064	4th 1399	
4.	U-11 <b>Legend Yacht Transport</b>	0925	Jamie Nilsen	3rd 965	2nd 1350			4,146
	<b>Legend Yacht/The Truss Company</b>					655		
	<b>Legend Yacht/The Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse</b>						5th 1176	
5.	U-91 <b>Miss Goodman Real Estate</b>	0706	Andrew Tate	2nd 1070		4th 1244	2nd 1700	4,014
6.	U-1 <b>Miss HomeStreet</b>	1801	Dylan Runne	5th 810	4th 854	5th 901	1119	3,684
7.	U-12 <b>Graham Trucking</b>	0001	Bobby King			649	603	1,252
8.	U-60 <b>The Beast Unleashed presents Miss Thriftway</b>	1999	Gunnar O'Farrell				762	762
9.	U-3 <b>Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware</b>	0203	Bobby King	330		340		670
10.	U-440 <b>Boitano Homes</b>	1218	Brent Hall	30		DNQ	30	60*

\* Boat only, driver was not qualified.

ner of every heat he entered—all with a boat that is 31 years old, the oldest in the sport. Echols finished second and Kelly was third.

“I absolutely love this course,” Peabody said. “What a heck of a run. This boat is something special. We’ve been working our tails off for a year [following the flip in Madison in 2022], so thank you to all of our crew.”

With that result, Kelly took a slim lead in the race for the national title heading into the final event of the sea-

son—the Gold Cup. With a total of 2,100 points still up for grabs, Kelly was just 19 points ahead of Peabody, 529 points ahead of Nilsen, and 717 ahead of Echols.

As racing got underway in Seattle, Brent Hall continued in his effort to become a qualified Unlimited driver. Gearbox issues had prevented him from getting the necessary laps at the Tri-Cities, so all eyes were on his orange *Boitano Homes* boat as he tried again on Lake Washington. Sadly, as he was about the begin the last lap that he needed, the

boat sputtered and came to a stop—once again the victim of a failed gearbox. The disappointed Hall is now looking forward to next year, when he hopes to get that allusive final lap over 130 mph.

Meanwhile, although Peabody wasn’t the fastest qualifier—Tate had that honor with a run of over 154 mph—he continued his winning ways with victories in both preliminary heats on Saturday. He led from start to finish in his first heat and turned a lap of 149.269 mph—the fastest ever for a Gold Cup on a two-mile course. He then had a close race with Bobby King in *Graham Trucking* in his second heat, closely edging him out at the finish line.

In the other contests, Kelly won a deck-to-deck battle with Tate in the day’s second event. “We just had a barn burner of a heat,” he said. “It’s the Gold Cup and you’ve got to collect points and do what you can to make that final.” Nilsen also had a wire-to-wire victory in one of his contests.

Going into the season’s final day, therefore, Peabody had moved ahead of Kelly in the national title race by 166 points and was 781 points ahead of Nilsen with 1,200 points yet to be earned.

There were four more preliminary



Chris Denslow

Corey Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing* and Jamie Nilsen in *Legend Yacht Transport* presented by *The Truss Company* race each other on the Columbia River.



heats before the winner-take-all final on Sunday. And, there were four different winners. Dustin Echols got a perfect start in the first heat and led the field to the finish line. The second heat featured a deck-to-deck battle between Tate and Runne, with Tate finishing a few feet ahead of his Madison Racing teammate.

Tate engaged in another close contest in the day's third heat, where he, Peabody, and Runne again thrilled the fans by running side by side through much of the early part of the race. It ended with Peabody getting across the finish line a nose ahead of Tate. Then, in the fourth preliminary, Kelly pulled into the lead during the first lap and stayed there to the end.

With the results of the preliminary heats, Peabody's lead over Kelly in the national title race had been reduced to just 91 points. The others had become mathematically eliminated from contention. So, as the drivers piloted their hydroplanes onto the racecourse one last time, there was much at stake. Not only would it decide which of the two Strong Racing drivers would be crowned national champion, it also would decide the winner of the APBA Gold Cup—the most prestigious event the sport offers and the oldest trophy in American motorsports.



Photos by Chris Denslow

**TOP:** Vintage unlimiteds *The Squire Shop* and *Pay 'n Pak* were among the featured attractions at the Gold Cup in Seattle. **MIDDLE:** J. Michael Kelly gets a fist bump for good luck before he begins a heat. **ABOVE:** From the left, Andrew Tate in *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric*, and Dylan Runne in *Miss HomeStreet* on Lake Washington.





Chris Denslow

J. Michael Kelly and the Beacon Electric team celebrate their Gold Cup victory and the 2023 national championship.

**"Absolutely, amazing, just a beautiful weekend here at Seafair. Never in a million years could I think that I'd win another Gold Cup, let alone a championship."**

There would be no holding back.

Andrew Tate in *Miss Goodman Real Estate* took an early lead in the contest with J. Michael Kelly close behind and to his inside aboard the red *Beacon Electric*. Following close behind in lane one was Dylan Runne in *Miss HomeStreet* and on the outside running strong was Dustin Echols in *Flav-R-Pac*. Peabody and *Beacon Plumbing* were behind the leaders in lane four. But at the start of the second lap, *Miss HomeStreet* was caught in the roostertail spray of the others and fell behind. Officials later determined that Runne would be disqualified for going too slow before the start.

Meanwhile, Kelly pulled even with Tate as the two boats crossed the finish line to end the second lap and then moved ahead going down the backstretch. Behind them, Peabody had caught up with Echols and the two were battling for third place—at one point even bumping into each other. By the end of the third lap, Kelly had increased his lead over Tate to about the length of a roostertail and Peabody, with the advantage of having an inside lane on Echols, moved into third.

That's how it ended. The victory not only gave Kelly his second APBA Gold Cup win, but it also gave him enough points to move ahead of his teammate in the national points race. He won

the 2023 championship with an advantage of just 84 points. Although Peabody had won 12 of the 13 heats he entered during the season—that third-place finish in the Gold Cup final being the only heat he didn't win—the three heats he missed at Madison because of the broken prop strut had made the difference.

"Absolutely, amazing, just a beautiful weekend here at Seafair," Kelly said. "Never in a million years could I think that I'd win another Gold Cup, let alone a championship. Just got to really thank my sponsor, Bill Cahill, Beacon Plumbing, Beacon Electric, Darrell and Vanessa [Strong, the team owners] for the opportunity and believing in me. Of course, I have to thank Corey Peabody, one of my best friends, and the operation that he's helped build here, and our crew chief, Jeff Campbell, and his brother, Mike, who allow us to go drive for them.

"I'm just absolutely blessed to have the opportunity and ... man, it feels really good." ❖



# FROM THE UNJ VAULT:

## Part 2 of a conversation with Mike Welsch

Two issues ago, we started an interview with Leonard “Mike” Welsch, who served as the crew chief of the *Slo-mo-shun IV*, which introduced the Pacific Northwest to the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing. Welsch led the crew through the early 1950s until a fateful day in 1956 when the boat crashed on the Detroit River. During that time the “Grand Old Lady” set two world straightaway speed records, won three Gold Cup victories and a Harmsworth Trophy, and captured the hearts of Seattle-area residents.

After his time with the *Slo-mo* race team, Welsch then became a central figure in another beloved hydroplane of that time: *Hawaii Ka'i III*. During his time with the “Pink Lady,” the boat won eight races as well as the 1957 national championship. The boat also set a mile straightaway speed record and, in the process, exceeded 200 mph during one leg of a run through a kilometer course.

When Mike Welsch wasn't working on hydroplanes, he was employed by The Boeing Company and eventually became operations manager for the program that retrofitted a 747 to carry the Space Shuttle. In December 1979, a short time after his retirement from the company, he agreed to sit down with *Unlimited NewsJournal* reporters David Greene and E.K. Muller at his home in West Seattle. The following was originally published in the *NewsJournal* in January and February 1980.



Mike Welsch (right) celebrates *Hawaii Ka'i's* victory in the 1957 Sahara Cup at Las Vegas with driver Jack Regas and the event's queen.

Bob Miller



The first half of the interview was republished in our August 2023 issue, where Welsch talked about those glory years with the *Slo-mo* team. We resume the story with his recollections of 1955—when that dynasty started to unravel.

**UNJ: Lou Fageol retired after the 1954 Gold Cup. Was Bill Muncey ever considered as a replacement?**

Welsch: Lou mentioned Bill Muncey's name to Stan and that is about all that ever happened. As you know Lou came back to drive in 1955.

**After the jet *Bluebird II* raised the world speed record on July 23, 1955, to 202 mph, did the *Slo-mo* team contemplate any efforts to exceed this mark?**

No. And the reason we didn't was because we really didn't consider it a boat. *Bluebird* was never classified as a boat by the UIM because a boat has to be driven by a propeller and steerable in the water. *Bluebird* was a jet.

**Can you give us the background of the decision to install a Rolls Merlin engine in the *Slo-mo IV* as well as *Slo-mo V* in 1955?**

After the performance in *Five*, we figured we better put it in *Four*, too. And



Joe Taggart and *Slo-mo-shun IV* approach the team's dock at Leschi.

we had no problem getting engines in those days.

**In the 14 months preceding the 1955 Gold Cup, *Gale V* had won four races and *Gale IV* three races out of a possible 10. Both entries had shown an ability to run in the same speed range as the *Slo-mos* in 1954. In the early races of 1955, both boats had shown dramatically increased speed. Did these facts or any other facts cause you to anticipate your most difficult defense of the Gold Cup in the five years the *Slo-mos* had held the trophy?**

I think we did because the other boat teams were getting smarter and they were getting closer in hull design and engine work. A lot of our expertise was getting passed on, whether we liked it or not.

**When *Tempo VII* raised the qualifying record on the Wednesday preceding the 1955 Gold Cup by 5 mph, did you feel that either of the *Slo-mos* could significantly exceed this mark?**

We thought we could beat Foster's speed. Both Joe and Lou figured they could beat it.

**After *Slo-mo-shun IV* raised the record to 117 mph, what was the reaction of Lou Fageol and the other people more closely associated with *Slo-mo-shun V*?**

It goes back to Lou's personal life style. He was just going to be the best. I was at the boathouse when he left and Stan told him, "Don't try to beat Joe's record. Just go down and qualify so we can get the boat in and go racing." I thought he would take Stan's advice.

**In 1955 the *Five* appeared different than she had in her grand slam win of 1954. Specifically, deck fences were installed over the sponsons. What was the reason for this change?**

We were trying to get the *Five's* nose down. We wanted to make her more stable and get her out of that walking attitude that she had. We just figured we



*Slo-mo-shun V* gets towed to Anchor Jensen's shop after the boat flipped over backwards while on a qualifying run before the 1955 Gold Cup in Seattle. Note the wood strips attached to the deck, which were placed there to act as spoilers to help keep the boat's nose down.



were getting too much lift out of the crown of the boat. And after we tested it, it didn't seem to run any better.

***Slo-mo-shun V* did two laps of 117 mph in her qualification effort for the 1955 Gold Cup and then flipped on the third lap. Was there any informed estimate as to what speed the third lap would have been?**

Yes. Some of the timers figured it would have been about 122 mph.

**Stan Sayers announced his retirement prior to the 1955 Gold Cup. Later he made a statement that left the door slightly ajar on this matter. When did it become clear that he would continue in the sport?**

It was really late that fall. He decided that as long as we had a boat, we ought to go racing. He felt that it still had some mileage in it. All during this period we just kept reporting for work until we heard different.

**What led to the decision to sell *Slo-mo-shun V* rather than rebuild her?**

The pressure was financial. Stan knew there would be pressure on him to make the circuit and he just couldn't afford it. He figured it would be good for a tax right-off, so he just sold the boat. He also felt it would help the sport by spreading things out and getting some other people in Seattle into boat racing.

**At the beginning of their respective careers *Slo-mo V* appeared to be faster than the *Slo-mo IV* around a closed course. Later, with the addition of**

**Joe Taggart and a Rolls engine, the *Four* appeared to catch up. The *Four* was clearly the more stable boat. However, in 1955, which boat would you rate the faster in competition?**

I would say Joe could keep up with Lou because of the way *Four* was turning. *Four* had trouble turning as I said, but Joe could take four seconds off a turn where Lou couldn't.

**Did you consider the re-installation of an Allison engine in the *Slo-mo IV* for 1956 so that she might defend the Harmsworth Trophy?**

No.

**What led to the decision to seek the 1956 Gold Cup on the Detroit River?**

It was Stan's decision. He said, "Let's go for it one more time and see if we can bring it back to Seattle." Of course, the pressure in Seattle was for us to go back there because they wanted the race back here. There was also a lot of pressure from the Seattle Yacht Club, who sponsored us in those days.

**Which boats on the Detroit team caused you the most concern?**

They all did at that time because they were all running pretty close. They all had pretty much the same equipment in those days.

***Tempo VII* won the last four races of the 1955 season while setting a heat record of 104 mph and a lap record of nearly 106 mph on a three-mile course. If she had been in the race with Danny Foster in the cockpit, were you confident that the *Slo-mo-shun IV* could defeat her?**

**"[Stan Sayers] decided that as long as we had a boat, we ought to go racing. He felt that it still had some mileage in it. All during this period we just kept reporting for work until we heard different."**

Joe Taggart drives *Slo-mo-shun IV* around a turn during the 1956 Seafair Trophy Race in Seattle.



Bob Carver Photos



Yes. But we would have been concerned about the *Tempo* if Danny Foster was the driver. Danny was a real hard driver, and he never gave up. He always kept coming. Other drivers would just take one stab at you and then would give up, but Danny never gave up until the race was over.

**Hawaii Ka'i III's bottom had been severely damaged the Wednesday before the 1956 Gold Cup. The next day *Slo-mo-shun IV* was wrecked in a trial run. When did you make the decision to help the Kaiser crew to prepare the *Hawaii Ka'i III* for the 1956 Gold Cup?**

Edgar Kaiser talked to Stan and wanted to know what he was going to do with his equipment. He was interested. At the same time, he wanted to know if he got the equipment whether the *Slo-mo* crew would come and set his boat up for him. Stan said that he hadn't made a decision as to whether he would quit racing or build another boat. He told Edgar that he could have the equipment if he wanted it and that later a price could be determined. With regard to the crew, Stan told Edgar that he would have to speak to us since we all had regular jobs and were a voluntary crew, other than Wes Kiesling and George McKernan who were paid members. So, Edgar called me and asked me to talk to the crew. I called everyone together and we decided to work for Edgar.

**Hawaii Ka'i III showed bursts of speed in Heat 1 of the 1956 Gold Cup, and gave *Shanty I*, which had won three straight races, all she could handle for a few laps of Heat 2 before giving a back-in-the-pack performance in Heat 3. What were your impressions of the boat based on what you had seen in Detroit and earlier in Seattle?**

The *Hawaii Ka'i III* was not running the right kind of wheel. They were trying to turn 21- and 22-inch wheels, which were way more than the boat could handle. We couldn't use the *Slo-mo IV*'s wheels because the *Ka'i* had a different shaft size than the *Slo-mo*. So, for the Gold Cup we

had to run Kaiser's old wheels until we got new ones.

**When was a Rolls Merlin engine first installed in the boat?**

We changed to Rolls engines before the President's Cup. We ran an Allison in the Gold Cup because of the time pressure.

**After a middle-of-the-pack performance in the President's Cup, the *Ka'i* came alive to win the Roger's Memorial. Not only did she win but she established herself as a leading contender by defeating *Shanty I* and setting lap and heat records for the event that were close to the world records that *Tempo VII* established in 1955. What factors caused this dramatic turnabout?**

As I said before, we decided that we needed some smaller wheels for the boat. We still didn't have any new wheels when we got to Washington, D.C., except for one 17-inch wheel that we were able to borrow. In the President's Cup we were still trying to run those big wheels. In the Roger's Memorial we tried that small wheel and that's what made the difference. And when they put that new wheel

on, the *Ka'i* fairly flew. Nobody could believe it. Cantrell even accused us of using a second-stage blower.

**After the series of races in Washington, D.C., *Hawaii Ka'i* was down 198 points to *Shanty I* in the high-point race. There were races scheduled for Elizabeth City, North Carolina, and Madison, Indiana, before the final race of the year at Las Vegas, Nevada. Why didn't you go to these two races to try and make up this point deficit before the final race?**

I don't think Kaiser was concerned about points at that particular time. But starting with 1957, he was very concerned.

**At Washington, D.C., the *Ka'i* set a lap record of 105.675 mph on a three-mile course. At Las Vegas, the boat turned nearly the same speed on a two-and-a-half-mile course. Were there any speed-increasing adjustments made on the boat between races?**

The big key there was Jack [Regas] just getting familiar with the boat and that engine. When we first installed the Rolls, Jack was not familiar with it. He stomped on it like he did with the Allison



Bob Carver Photos

*Hawaii Ka'i III* speeds across Lake Washington





Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Jack Regas in the cockpit of *Hawaii Kai III*

and the Rolls just couldn't take it. By the time we got to Las Vegas, Jack had just learned to handle the Rolls engine better. Also, when we were at Vegas we received some of the smaller props that we had ordered earlier. Jack was a very erratic driver, but he was a safe driver to the other drivers. But man, he was sure a pusher.

**Edgar Kaiser decided to retire from Unlimited hydroplane racing after the 1956 season. What were the reasons for his retirement?**

After the mile trial over in Hawaii in March 1956, which resulted in the destruction of the first *Hawaii Kai* and injuries to her driver, Ken St. Oegger, Henry [Kaiser] wanted out. He did not want the publicity of ever killing a man in a race boat. After the accident Henry told Edgar that if he wanted to go ahead and race the new boat, which was the *Hawaii Kai III*, for 1956, that was okay with him. He turned the reins over to Edgar.

At the end of the 1956 season there was pressure from the Kaiser Board of Directors and from Henry Kaiser for Edgar to get out of boat racing. They didn't want to spend Kaiser money because they didn't figure they were getting their money's worth out of any advertising with the boat. These were the reasons Edgar decided to retire.

**What were the terms and conditions**

**that were imposed on you when Edgar allowed you and the crew to run the boat in 1957?**

I bought the *Ka'i* for a dollar. Edgar's attorneys then drew up a contract where he paid for the liability insurance and most of the expenses to run the boat directly. In addition, we were given \$46,000 to start with. This money was to be used in our discretion as to what races we would go to. We had to account to Kaiser as to the expenditures. And any time the account got down to \$20,000, it was reimbursed. However, when we bought additional engines, Edgar paid for them directly. Also, when we would order three props, Edgar would always make sure that we would have six. But we paid all the expenses on the road. He paid the salaries for Wes [Kiesling], George [McKernan], and Jack [Regas]. We enlarged the crew for 1957 because not everyone could get time off to go to so many races.

***Hawaii Kai III* completely dominated the field in the 1957 Apple Cup while setting a world record for a three-mile competition lap of 116 mph, which raised the existing mark by 10 mph. What accounted for this dramatic improvement in performance?**

Propellers. Just plain propellers. We tested that boat until you couldn't believe

it. Jack did all the testing. He lived here in Seattle at the time.

**In spite of the fact that the *Ka'i* dominated the race with regard to speed, she also failed in the early stages of Heats 2 and 3. Could you give us any background on this?**

Jack [Regas]. Jack just had too much foot. Jack just couldn't gauge himself. It was full bore for him all the time.

**Up at Lake Tahoe in 1957, the *Ka'i* went 60 miles while winning two beats. In the final heat the boat faltered at the starting line and then in the second turn of lap one. How did you diagnose the problem?**

Jack and the quill shaft. It is like Stan Dollar told me: "If you can throttle that guy, you got the best driver in the business. He won't hurt anybody, but he just drives too hard."

**There is a rumor that the *Hawaii Kai III* did three practice laps at 120 mph on the Saturday preceding the 1957 Gold Cup race. Is this true?**

Yes, it is true. We had some problems with the carburetors during the week and that's why we were blowing engines. After we solved the problem, we went out and made that Saturday morning run.

***Hawaii Kai* followed successively *Miss Wahoo*, *Miss U.S.*, and then *Maver-***

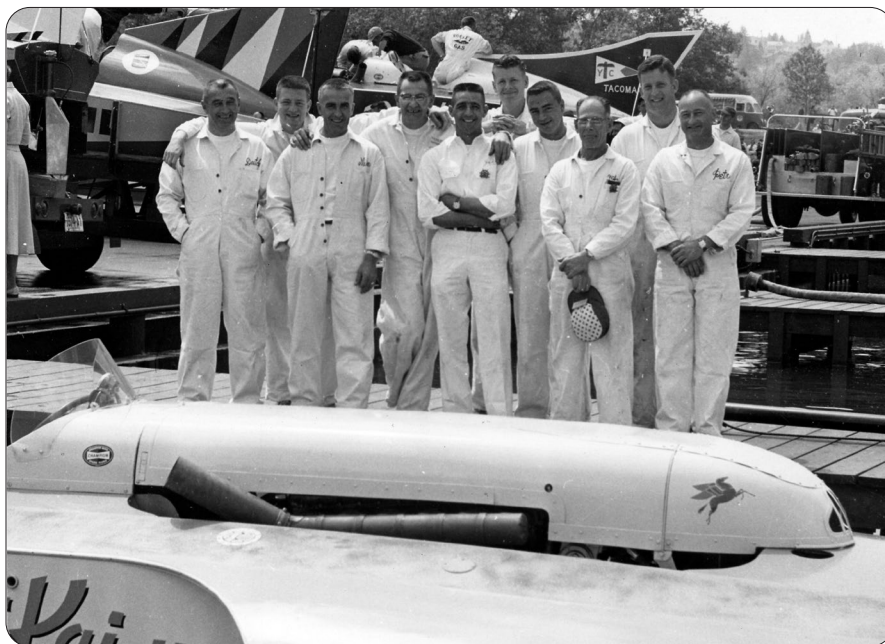


**ick around the course in the preliminary heats of competition and then defeated all the important boats in the final heat to win the 1957 Silver Cup. Was Jack Regas told to hold back in the preliminary heats or did the boat have some kind of a problem?**

The turning point for us was in Detroit. Jack thought that the only way he could win a race was being in front. He never thought he could ever catch up with anybody. In the first heat he made a lousy start. And then he went around there like gangbusters and caught them and passed them. He did the same thing in the second heat. He finally woke up to the fact that he had enough boat and the capability to go out and catch somebody. He didn't have to be in front. He was just abusing the engine on the starts because he was stuffing it clear to the hardwood. Truthfully speaking, if you have a 6-3-9 blower ratio you just don't do that too often. After Heat 1 we said we realize you can catch them and you can pass them. So don't get out there and start making a false start or jump the gun. Take your time. But in the final heat we told him not to play that game. We told him that if you can get them at the start and keep it, fine. But if you don't, don't worry about it. You



Jack Regas



The Hawaii Ka'i crew members. That's Mike Welsch third from the left.

can catch them—every one of them. So that's the way we played it. He got a good start in the final heat, and he stayed in front. His big worry always was, "I got to be in front—there is no other way. I got to start in front." At Detroit Jack got that out of his system.

**In the President's Cup, the Ka'i scored a grand slam. It appeared that the Silver Cup strategy of running behind in the preliminaries had been abandoned, yet the failures of the earlier races had been avoided. Did the Slo-mo team have a different approach for the President's Cup?**

Jack [Regas] just got to the point where he really knew how to drive. It was just education on Jack's part. To be frank with you, I think Jack just got out of the rut he got into in the preseason testing. You see we would go out and do just strictly acceleration runs. We would time our acceleration from 80 mph to 140 mph and when you do that you have a tendency to just jam your foot in it. Jack just got into that rut or habit and he figured he could do that to the engine and it would last forever. And it won't. And it didn't.

**On the first day of the 1957 Gover-**

**nor's Cup, Miss Thriftway turned a heat of 112-mph and a lap of 115 mph. Was the Ka'i team concerned that the Thriftway could now run in their speed range? Were any adjustments made to the Ka'i to obtain increased speed?**

We just changed wheels. We knew Thriftway could beat us if we didn't do something about wheels. At the Governor's Cup, Bill [Muncey] just went out and tried to win one. Bill [Muncey] is one of the best drivers in the world. He would have Jack [Regas] about half psyched out before they went out there to any race. Bill is capable of doing that on the beach, not on the course. No. You can't take anything away from Bill Munciey as far as being a capable driver. He is just smart.

**In the final heat of the 1957 Sahara Cup at Las Vegas, Hawaii Ka'i and Thriftway Too put on a stirring dual for first place. Was Jack Regas instructed to hold back to preserve his point lead or was he given free rein?**

It was legitimate that Jack was really trying to beat him. He just wasn't going to let him win that heat. It was the rough water that allowed the Thriftway Too to run with our boat. He could just handle



it better than we could. It was horrible out there. You could see the bottom of both boats.

I want to tell you that if I had gotten Jack after that heat I would have killed him. I really would have. When he was racing *Thriftway Too*, he had the race won. All he had to do was go out there and just cruise. He busted a quill shaft in the final lap and he just came in on aspiration. That's the only way he finished the race. At that time at Lake Mead, we had to wade out to get the boats and I went out to get Jack. And as soon as he saw me coming, he asked George [McKernan] to take him in. He got on George's back and it's a good thing he did because I would have drowned him there and then. I really would have.

**In late November 1957 the *Ka'i* set a kilometer record of 194 mph and a mile record of 187 mph. Do you feel that the *Hawaii Ka'i* could have topped 200 mph? What adjustments would you have made if a record run in the spring of 1958 had been possible?**

I would have made no changes. In fact, Jack was clocked on the start of the south-to-north run at 220 mph. He got about three quarters of the way through that run and he stuffed it and sure enough it blew the blower. But if he would have left his foot right where it was, we would have had 200, because the boat was stable as a rock. Our first runs were ideal. Later on in the day, the dew point got so near the temperature that we were building ice like you couldn't believe on that front end.

During the trials we had a 24-inch wheel on the boat and at 200 mph we were running about 3,900 to 4,000 rpm and pulling about 95 inches manifold pressure. We did some testing before the mile trials, and we knew what we could do. On the basis of our testing, we estimated our speed through the trap at about 210 mph.

**How was it possible for the *Hawaii Ka'i* to defeat such boats as *Miss Thriftway*, *Maverick*, and *Miss Wahoo* consis-**

**tently when these entries had the advantage of at least 1000 pounds in weight?**

Strictly propellers and acceleration. Once you got that boat cleaned out and running, it had the acceleration. It never bogged down in the turns, as long as you kept it up. And with the small wheels you could keep the *Ka'i*'s stern up. We used to change wheels when the water got rough. In fact, the rougher the water the smaller the wheel.

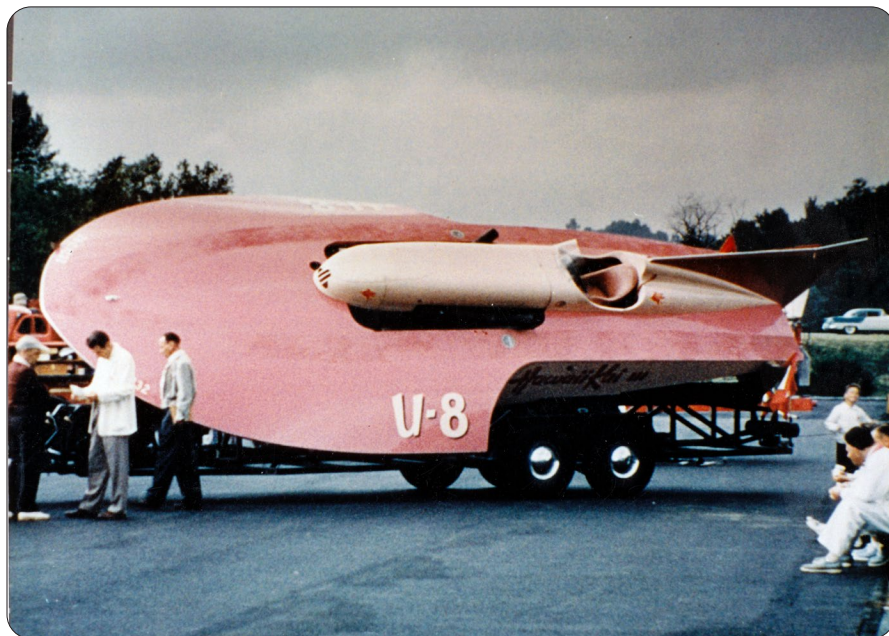
**Edgar Kaiser had retired himself in 1956 and given the *Hawaii Ka'i* to the crew for 1957. Did Kaiser leave the door ajar for a possible 1958 campaign or was the retirement of the *Ka'i* entirely settled at the end of the year?**

After the 1956 season Kaiser still had some thoughts of building another boat. In fact, he had picked up some Messerschmitt engines over in Germany that he was talking about converting to see what we could do with them. At the end of the 1957 season he discussed it with us at a dinner meeting. His family was there and our families were there. He kind of put it in this perspective, "Well, what do we really have to go after? Should we do more." At the time he had the mile record, the kilometer record, and the national high-

point championship. He also looked at the handling of unlimited hydroplane racing and figured that we would need a lawyer to handle the rule changes. It looked like the only way we could go was down. The crew felt this way, too. We had had our days of glory. We had won everything and maybe this was the time to hang it up?

**At what time did it appear likely that the *Hawaii Ka'i III* would be released for one final run in the 1958 Gold Cup?**

About three weeks before the 1958 Gold Cup Kaiser called from Athens, Greece, and told me that he would still like to win a Gold Cup. He asked me if I thought we could get the boat ready in three weeks. I called the crew together and we decided that we could do it. At the time we had everything boxed up and inventoried and the boat was in mothballs. We hadn't done any work on the boat in 1958 up to that time. When Kaiser called back, I told him that the crew wanted to run in the Gold Cup but that we would have to buy some engines. Edgar told me to get the boat out of mothballs and to have the crew together at the boat shop on Saturday when he was getting into town.



"The Pink Lady" arrives in the pits at Seattle.





Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

With the team's secret weapon in mind, *Hawaii Ka'i III* settles into the pits before the 1958 APBA Gold Cup, which it would win.

He called us all together and asked us what was the weakest thing that would keep us from winning the race. We decided that it was the quill shaft. Under the new rules we couldn't change engines, so he said, "Why can't we change quill shafts between heats?" Originally it took us two to two-and-a-half hours to change the quill shaft. And then we started practicing and working it out. Finally, we got it down so we could do it in 25 minutes. We bought two -9 Rolls engines from Bill Boeing and worked our butts off for three weeks. At the beginning of qualifying week, we were ready to go.

Of course, the press was driving us crazy to see what was happening all during this time. We told Hy Zimmerman [*Seattle Times*] and Cliff Harrison [*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*] that we were working on something that we thought could help us win the race and that we couldn't tell them because we didn't want to tip our hand. We wouldn't let anyone in the shop. We first tipped our hand on the quill shaft change during the race. Nobody believed us. They even checked serial numbers to see whether we had changed engines.

**Based on what you had seen during 1958, did the *Maverick* appear to be**

**more of a problem to defeat than in 1957?**

Yes. We felt it was the toughest one out there. And we knew we were going to have problems with it. All we knew was that if we got Bill Stead [*Maverick* driver] behind us, he would make one stab and then settle for his position.

In the second heat of the Gold Cup I saw Jack come in behind *Maverick* on the turn. I think Stead was a little bit better on the starts than Jack. He could really get to that start. And when they came out of that turn, Jack was still behind him. When they went down the backstretch and Jack passed him I said, "That's all we need." I asked Jack when he came in what rpm we were turning and he said, "4,400 the last time I looked." The last time I looked, hell, he never looked, period. Of course, once the *Maverick* people found out what we were doing with the quill shaft, Stead came over and said, "You guys got us beat."

**Jack Regas set a furious pace of around 113 mph for the first four laps of Heat 1A of the 1958 Gold Cup. Did you feel that Jack was pushing the boat too hard?**

No. As long as we were changing the quill shaft, I didn't care what he did.

The only thing was in the final heat. I told him to just stay in front of the *Cor-al Reef*. That's as fast as he could run. I said, "If you want to let him go by you, I don't care. He can't win." And, I never saw him so mad before that final heat because I told him that if he went out and did anything to screw up that last heat, there was no use for him to come back in. I told him, "If I don't get you, Edgar will. Then you've had it." He believed me and we won.

**Was the *Hawaii Ka'i III* developed about as far as possible, or do you think you could have gone faster?**

No. I don't think we could have gone faster. As far as the hull was concerned, that's about as far as it would go.

**If an *Hawaii Ka'i IV* would have been built, what changes would you have liked to have seen made?**

I would have liked to have a hull slightly lighter and that's all.

**In closing, I would like to have your impression of the following people with whom you worked during your career. Initially, Stan Sayers.**

As a personal friend of mine, Stan was a fine gentleman. His personality was so involved in business that he had very few close personal friends. He was a

hard guy to get to know. He just kind of lived in a shell that was his business. If he was up to his neck in problems, he would talk them over with me. But Stan didn't have any real outlet from his business other than the crew and the boats—that was his therapy.

#### **Edgar Kaiser.**

I can't say enough for that man. He is one of the most personable and considerate individuals that I have ever met. He is a very human person, like when you are involved with Edgar it means your whole family is involved. When he came to town to find out how the boat was running, you didn't go to dinner—your whole family went to dinner. And his family was there, too. He could charm you—absolutely charm you. He is just a fantastic man.

Edgar also is a sportsman. You didn't go out with regular equipment, you had to do better. And you never told him that you couldn't do it. That word is not in his vocabulary. He always said, "At lease, you'll try." He always asked, "How can we do better and still be safe?"

#### **Ted Jones.**

Ted's a hell of a guy. He is a very good friend of mine. He is an excellent designer and really knows boats. I couldn't say anything bad about Ted even if I wanted to.



Byron Lang

*Hawaii Ka'i on Lake Washington*

#### **Lou Fageol.**

Lou was a fantastic driver. I liked him as a personal friend. He had an ego that he had to satisfy, that was, that there was nobody better than Lou. If it killed him, he would prove it. Nobody was going to beat him. He was that way with his race cars, too.

#### **Joe Taggart.**

Joe is a fine gentleman, a very good driver and an excellent personality. He is smart about boats and he is smart about engines. He is just a fine man.

#### **Jack Regas.**

Jack is a very, very good driver, but he is hard to control. He is kind of flip-pant. He is a hard driver but a safe one. He would never hurt anybody.

**Your crew, and what made them out-**

#### **standing.**

I think the crew was outstanding from these standpoints: they were not paid, they were dedicated, and they worked together as a team. We communicated well. Sure, we had our ups and downs, and a few disagreements about what was best. But it always had a conclusion. It had to be solved, and everybody had a voice in what was going on. If the majority said, "Let's go ahead and try," we did it. It was a complete team effort. I shouldn't say it was because they didn't get paid, but it had something to do with it. They were all there because they wanted to be there. That made the difference.

**Over 20 individuals worked on the Slo-mos and the Hawaii Ka'i from 1948 to 1958—as crew members. Could you mention the more prominent members of the crew and their specialty?**

Yes. Elmer Linenschmidt, engine and hull; Joe Schobert, electronics; Fred Hearing, gearbox; Wes Kiesling, engines; George McKernan, engines; Jack Watts, hull specialist; Anchor Jensen, hull specialist; Martin Headman, gearbox; Jack Harshman, aerodynamics; Pete Bertelotti, general duties; Don Ibsen, general duties; and myself, electronics and engines. Elmer [Linenschmidt] and Joe [Schobert] traded off as the crew chief of *Slo-mo-shun V*. ♦



Bob Miller

*The Hawaii Ka'i crew and their collection of trophies.*



# HYDROFILE

## Race Team News by Lon Erickson



### Miss Madison Racing (aka HomeStreet Racing)

There is some indication of the change in the Miss Madison Racing organization. While it's been a widely talked about topic in the Unlimited ranks, no official press release has come out to date. The first indication is the absence of the light blue entrance door to the race shop in Tukwila, which previously had no markings or name. It has now been re-done in gold and black colors, along with the Miss Madison seal and a U-91 checkered-flag logo.



Lon Erickson

### Go3 Racing

With just some minor repairs to be done on the hull, the team's attention at the Go3 race shop turns to the Turbinator Allison and gearboxes.



Go3 Racing

### U-11 Legend Yacht Transport

Last month the U-11 Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse raceboat, along with some vintage hulls from the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum, spent the day on display at The Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse store in Sumner, Washington.



Unlimited Racing Group



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

# MY \$0.02 WORTH

## Editorial Comment by Andy Muntz



**T**ime and again I'll read comments on Facebook complaining about H1 Unlimited and think to myself, "I wish these people understood better just what H1 can control, and what it can't." So, as a public service, I will try to explain some fundamentals about how the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing is structured. Perhaps you might find it helpful?

There are many people involved in the sport who do many different things, but for this discussion I'll lump the participants into three primary groups: the race sites, the boat owners, and H1 Unlimited. The three are separate from each other, but at the same time are partners.

The race sites hold the events. They are typically non-profit civic organizations created by their community to produce a fun activity for residents and visitors each year. In this case, their event includes a hydroplane race. The race sites don't have much money. They depend heavily on the financial support of local sponsors as well as those who buy tickets

to their events.

Then, there are the boat owners. Cost is usually a prime consideration for them as well because operating an unlimited hydroplane team is expensive. Not only do you have the cost of the boat, its engine, the fuel, and the shop, the owner also pays for the travel, food, and lodging for the crew members at each race. Consequently, they want to be reimbursed for some of those expenses.

Finally, there's H1 Unlimited, which sits between the two. The race sites need boats for their races, and the boat owners need a place to race their boats (otherwise, what's the point of having a race boat?). So, H1 Unlimited brings them together.

H1 negotiates with the race sites to bring them the hydroplane race they desire, it organizes the boat owners under a common set of rules, and it has the officials who will run the hydroplane race itself. In some respects, H1 Unlimited is like a traveling road show that goes from city to city putting on hydroplane races

for the local residents and their visitors.

There's more to it than that, of course. There's marketing and other considerations, but the idea of that traveling road show helps me to put it all into perspective.

So, with that understanding of the relationships between the three parties, can you see how that might impact some of the sport's issues? For example, knowing those relationships, which of those three parties do you think might have the strongest influence on the schedule of events at a particular event? In terms of getting sponsors, what do you think might happen if H1 Unlimited had Pepsi or Ford as sponsors, but a race site had Coca-Cola or Toyota?

I hope you get the idea that running the sport takes a great deal of cooperation between parties that sometimes have differing interests, which means that nothing is ever as easy as it might seem—or as obvious as the "experts" on Facebook sometimes think. ❖

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**PLEASE JOIN US AT THE NEXT MEETING OF UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS**

2 p.m. on Sunday, October 15, 2023

Kingsgate Public Library, 12315 NE 143rd St., Kirkland, WA 98034