

Peabody escapes final heat carnage to win Columbia Cup.



Chris Denslow

BY CHRIS TRACY

The summer heat came early to the Tri-Cities in Eastern Washington, and the heat stayed. It was predicted that the temperatures would be in the 90s on Friday and Saturday and be over 100 degrees on Sunday of race weekend, July 23–25, for the HAPO Columbia Cup.

H1 Unlimited offers several options for race sites to pick from. The Water Follies selected the three-day package with eight boats. Each boat races in four

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preliminary heats with two sections in each preliminary heat (1A or 1B, 2A or 2B, etc.) before the final heat. It's often referred to as the Gold Cup format.

Friday

All eight boats were in the pits by Friday morning. U-1 *Miss HomeStreet*/Jimmy Shane, U-3 *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware*/Jimmy King, U-8 *Miss Tri-Cities*/J. Michael Kelly, U-9 *Pinnacle Peak Consulting*/Corey Peabody, U-11 *J&D's*/Jamie Nilsen, U-12 *Graham Trucking*/Andrew Tate, U-40 *Beacon Plumbing*/Dave Villwock, and U-440 *Bucket List*/Dustin Echols.

The Miss Madison Racing Team brought the newer blue and white U-1 *Miss HomeStreet* hull to the race. In the previous two races they had used the older black and gold boat.

Making its first appearance of the season was the piston-powered U-3. Several teams were anxious to test on Friday. The U-1 and U-3 had not been in the water for two years. The U-40 had some ride issues in previous races that they had worked on. The U-440 had gearbox issues in the first two races and never raced. The U-11 had significant sponson

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TOP: J. Michael Kelly in the U-8 *Miss Tri-Cities* exits a turn on the outside of Andrew Tate in the U-12 *Graham Trucking*.

MIDDLE: Jimmy King prepares to take the U-3 *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware* onto the Columbia River.

ABOVE: Corey Peabody and the U-9 *Pinnacle Peak Consulting* round a turn behind Jamie Nilsen aboard *J&D's*.

damage at the Gold Cup that had been repaired.

Although many boats were on the cranes at various times during the day on Friday, not a single boat went on the course. Problem: Sago pondweed on the Pasco side of the Columbia River.

The water operations crew had seen it on Thursday, but according to the *Tri-City Herald*, “it wasn’t bad and didn’t look like a problem.” But on Friday, the football-field-size patch of pondweed was an issue.

Some speculate that the river was much lower on Friday, causing the trouble. Others say the exceptionally warm summer created a perfect storm for the pondweed to grow. In any case, the water operations crew had to harvest the pondweed from the river and did so until dark.

A casualty for Friday was the Dash For Cash, which was significant as it is broadcast live on local TV and provides extra money for some teams.

Saturday

Because Friday was a lost day for all boats, the Saturday schedule was revised and was full. Testing, qualifications, and Unlimited heats one and two—with two sections for each heat—were run. The air show had to be run at a specific time as that is when they had the approved air space, plus there were other classes of boats testing, racing, or running exhibitions, such as the Grand Prix, E-350 class, and vintage unlimited boats.

The Unlimiteds were ready to run at the 8 a.m. testing session and there was non-stop boat action or air show all day long. All boats went out to test, except the U-440 and they did trailer fire their engine.

The U-1 looked exceptionally fast, although the boat’s laps, like the one at 164.834 mph, had fuel violations. Slight amounts of pondweed were on the prop shafts and/or skid fins when several boats were taken out of the water after testing.



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TOP: Jimmy Shane in the U-1 Miss HomeStreet. **MIDDLE:** A group of boats prepares to leave the dock and head out onto the Columbia River racecourse during the HAPO Columbia Cup. **ABOVE:** Dave Villwock in the U-40 Miss Beacon Plumbing.



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ABOVE: The start of Heat 3B, with Corey Peabody and *Pinnacle Peak Consulting* getting the inside lane (far right), J. Michael Kelly and *Miss Tri-Cities* in lane two, Jamie Nilsen and *J&D's* in lane three, and Andrew Tate and *Graham Trucking* on the outside lane (far left).
RIGHT: From the left, the U-8 *Miss Tri-Cities* (in the spray), U-9 *Pinnacle Peak Consulting*, and U-11 *J&D's*.



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All boats were able to go out in the first qualification period and all qualified except the U-1. Again, the U-1 *Miss HomeStreet* was exceptionally fast, but the laps had fuel violations.

The gearbox issues that plagued the U-440 *Bucket List* appeared to be fixed and Dustin Echols cruised the course with two laps in the mid-140-mph range. The U-3 only ran one qualification lap, following the team's general mantra that those old Allison engines only have so many laps in them, so laps are run wisely.

The U-40 *Beacon Plumbing's* ride appeared to reflect that the sponsons were a bit out of attitude but looked improved. I noticed some engine popping in the U-11 *J&D's* when it returned to the pits.

Somewhat of a surprise, was the bumpy ride Tate got in the U-12 *Graham Trucking*. Tate seemed to think the ride was fine, but spectators saw something different.

There was a break in qualifications after each boat went out once, so other classes could run and then there was a short period where any boat that wanted could go out one more time to qualify. A few boats improved their speeds, and the U-1 went out and posted the fastest qualification lap and two slower ones; this time the run of 163.203 mph passed tech inspection.

For complete race action, go to the H1 Unlimited YouTube Channel to view the race. H1 provides a great recap on its Facebook page, too. Here are the highlights of each heat.

Heat 1A—The draw put the U-3 *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware*, U-8 *Miss Tri-Cities*, U-12 *Graham Trucking*, and U-40 *Beacon Plumbing* in the three-lap heat. The U-3 briefly led, but the U-12 overtook to lead. The U-40 incurred damage to its wing. The U-3 jumped the gun and was assessed a one-lap penalty. The U-40 was later disqualified

for a flagrant fuel violation, so the finish was U-12/Tate, U-8/Kelly, U-3/King, and U-40/Villwock DSQ.

Heat 1B—U-1 *Miss HomeStreet*, U-9 *Pinnacle Peak Consulting*, U-11 *J&D's*, and the U-440 *Bucket List* participated. Peabody in the U-9 shot out of the first corner in first place, but Shane in the U-1 passed him in lap one. Peabody jumped the gun and had to run an extra lap, so the finish was U-1, U-11, U-440, and U-9.

By odd chance, the section heat draws for heats two, three, and four were identical, so the same boats competed against each other until the final heat.

Heat 2A—U-8, U-9, U-11, and U-12 were drawn together. Tate in the U-12 got the inside lane at the start and the U-12 and Kelly in the U-8 were nearly even at the end of lap one, but Kelly in the U-8 took the lead in lap two and kept it. Kelly won, after starting in lane three. Final order of finish was U-8, U-12, U-11, and U-9.

Heat 2B—U-1, U-3, U-40, and U-440 were in the heat. The U-3 did not start, likely a backfire cracked the exhaust distribution system and a few other parts; the team said if they had an extra five minutes, they might have been able to run. Villwock in the U-40 got the inside lane, but Shane in the U-1 went by him and on to victory. The U-440 did not finish; turns out they blew an inexpensive fuse. Final order: U-1, U-40, U-440 DNF, and U-3 DNS.

Sunday

The weather was predicted to be over 100 degrees and the heat did impact some drivers in their hot driver suits. We also learned that U-3 owner, Ed Cooper, was taken to the emergency room, suffering from heat exhaustion, but returned the course—taking it easier.

The course opened at 7:30 a.m. and several boats tested. The U-40's ride looked much improved as Villwock ran laps close to the buoys. Due to the air-

STATBOX

HAPO Columbia Cup

Tri-Cities, Washington; July 24-25, 2021

2.5-mile course on the Columbia River; 42.5-mile race

QUALIFYING (1) U-1 *Miss HomeStreet* (#1801), Jimmy Shane, 162.203, 100 points; (2) U-8 *PayneWest Insurance presents Miss Tri-Cities*, J. Michael Kelly, 158.450, 80; (3) U-40 *Miss Beacon Plumbing*, Dave Villwock, 158.191, 70; (4) U-11 *J&D's*, Jamie Nilsen, 156.559, 60; (5) U-9 *Pinnacle Peak Consulting*, Corey Peabody, 155.965, 50; (6) U-3 *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware*, Jimmy King, 40; (7) U-12 *Graham Trucking*, Andrew Tate, 154.424, 30; (8) U-440 *Bucket List Racing*, Dustin Echols, 146.056, 30.

HEAT 1A (1) *Graham Trucking* 148.549, 400 points, 430 cumulative points; (2) *PayneWest Insurance presents Miss Tri-Cities* 141.970, 300, 380; (3) *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware* 100.942 (penalized one lap for jumping the gun), 225, 265; *Miss Beacon Plumbing* DSQ – Flagrant Fuel Violation, 0, 70. Fast lap (1&2) *Graham Trucking* 149.830.

HEAT 1B (1) *Miss HomeStreet* 146.848, 400, 500; (2) *J&D's* 134.815, 300, 360; (3) *Bucket List Racing* 122.142, 225, 255; (4) *Pinnacle Peak Consulting* 108.983 (penalized one lap for jumping the gun), 169, 219. Fast lap (1) *Miss HomeStreet* 153.557.

HEAT 2A (1) *PayneWest Insurance presents Miss Tri-Cities* 151.940, 400, 780; (2) *Graham Trucking* 150.940, 300, 730; (3) *J&D's* 145.600, 225, 585; (4) *Pinnacle Peak Consulting* 143.523, 169, 388. Fast lap (1) *PayneWest Insurance presents Miss Tri-Cities* 154.628.

HEAT 2B (1) *Miss HomeStreet* 146.216, 400, 900; (2) *Miss Beacon Plumbing* 140.040, 300, 370; *Bucket List Racing* DNF – electrical failure, 0, 255; *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware* DNS – making repairs, 0, 265. Fast lap (1) *Miss HomeStreet* 154.793.

HEAT 3A (1) *Miss HomeStreet* 153.409, 400, 1300; (2) *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware* 144.037, 300, 565; (3) *Bucket List Racing* 118.496, 225, 480; *Miss Beacon Plumbing* DSQ – not maintaining 80 mph prior to the start, 0, 370. Fast lap (3) *Miss HomeStreet* 154.009.

HEAT 3B (1) *PayneWest Insurance presents Miss Tri-Cities* 150.370, 400, 1180; (2) *Pinnacle Peak Consulting* 149.525, 300, 688; (3) *Graham Trucking* 147.073, 225, 955; (4) *J&D's* 139.464, 169, 754. Fast lap (1) *PayneWest Insurance presents Miss Tri-Cities* 151.184

HEAT 4A (1) *Miss HomeStreet* 145.638, 400, 1700; (2) *Miss Beacon Plumbing* 140.392, 300, 670; (3) *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware* 136.312, 225, 790; (4) *Bucket List Racing* 117.995, 169, 649. Fast lap (1) *Miss HomeStreet* 150.514.

HEAT 4B (1) *J&D's* 149.690, 400, 1154; (2) *Pinnacle Peak Consulting* 149.100, 300, 988; (3) *PayneWest Insurance presents Miss Tri-Cities* 128.137, 225, 1405; (4) *Graham Trucking* DSQ – Flagrant Fuel Violation, 0, 955. Fast lap (2&3) *Pinnacle Peak Consulting* 154.276.

FINAL (1) *Pinnacle Peak Consulting* 145.686, 400, 1388; (2) *PayneWest Insurance presents Miss Tri-Cities* 141.909, 300, 1705; (3) *Miss HomeStreet* 141.069, 225, 1925; (4) *J&D's* 136.187, 169, 1323; (5) *Miss Beacon Plumbing* 134.825, 127, 797; *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware* DNF – engine problem, 0, 790; *Graham Trucking* DNF – broken propeller blade, 0, 955. Fast lap (1) *PayneWest Insurance presents Miss Tri-Cities* 155.671.

COMPILED BY ALLEN STILES

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TOP: Vintage boats did exhibition laps around the racecourse. Above are the 1958 *Miss Bardahl*, the *Miss Wahoo* (partially hidden in the spray), and *Blue Chip*. **MIDDLE:** The U-8 *Miss Tri-Cities* and its damaged tailfeathers during the final heat. **ABOVE:** Jimmy Shane and *Miss HomeStreet* battle side by side with Jamie Nilsen in *J&D's* during final-heat action.

show and other events, Heat 3A was run mid-morning, but Heat 3B was in the afternoon. The third heat section draws were held Saturday.

Heat 3A—All four boats participated. U-40 had lane one, U-1 lane two, U-3 lane three, and U-440 in lane four. Shane shot out of the first corner and led to the finish. Villwock was later disqualified for not maintaining minimum speed during the score up, so the final finish was U-1, U-3, U-440, and U-40 DSQ.

Heat 3B—The U-9 got lane one, U-8 lane two, U-11 lane three, and the U-12 lane four during the score up. Kelly in the U-8 was first out of the corner. Peabody in the U-9 did challenge on lap three, but Kelly in the U-8 prevailed. Final order of finish was U-8, U-9, U-12, and U-11. U-9 driver, Corey Peabody, said it was “brutally hot” in the cockpit.

Heat 4A—In the score up, the U-1 got lane one, the U-40 lane two, the U-3 lane three, and the U-440 was in lane four, and that’s how they finished. In lap two there was a good race for second and third between the U-40 and U-3. There was some backfiring during the U-3’s run and the U-40 engine was popping the last two laps of the heat. Although the U-40 was initially assessed a one-lap penalty for encroachment, it was later reversed. Order of finish was U-1, U-40, U-3, and U-440.

Heat 4B—This heat had some surprises. The start had the U-12 in lane one, but Tate was early to the start. The U-11 was in lane two, the U-8 in lane three, and the U-9 in lane four. It was the Nilsen and U-11 out of the corner first. While the U-12 took a slight lead on the racecourse, it was disqualified for a flagrant fuel violation. The U-8 was never in contention. But the big news was that the U-11 could run with the fastest boats. Final order of finish was U-11, U-9, U-8, and U-12 DSQ.

Final Heat—The winner-take-all final had seven boats in it, six plus the trailer. It is my understanding that the U-440 driver, Echols, requested not to



ABOVE: The U-9 Pinnacle Peak Consulting, the winner of the 2021 HAPO Columbia Cup.

LEFT: Corey Peabody celebrates his first victory on the H1 Unlimited Racing Series.



run in the final, as his boat is so much smaller and lighter than the others, so that opened the way for the U-40 to run as the trailer boat.

The score up was somewhat of a surprise. Nilsen and the U-11 got lane one, Kelly was in lane two in U-8, Peabody in lane three in U-9, Tate in lane four in U-12, Shane and U-1 was in lane five, and King was in lane six in U-3. The trailer was Villwock in the U-40. Noteworthy was that the U-1 had lane five and was late to the start and never a contender in the final.

Nilsen was positioned well, but Kelly was out of the turn first with the Peabody second, Nilsen third, Tate fourth, Shane fifth, Villwock sixth, and

King and the U-3 seventh. At the end of lap one it looked like it would be an easy victory for Kelly, but boat carnage would impact this heat and the final results.

Probably in lap two the *Miss Tri-Cities* suffered damage to its wing, and it started coming apart. *J&D's* incurred damage to its rear tailfeathers, too. In lap three, Tate shut down his boat due to vibrations caused by prop damage. King shut down *Griggs Ace Hardware* in lap four when the engine went sour.

Meanwhile, the rear wing on *Miss Tri-Cities* started to completely disintegrate. Due to the boat damage, Peabody was able to pass Kelly in lap four. With damage to the *J&D's* wing, Shane in *Miss HomeStreet* was able to move up to third.

So, the order of finish for the five-lap final heat was: 1st, U-9 Pinnacle Peak Consulting/Corey Peabody; 2nd, U-8 *Miss Tri-Cities*/J. Michael Kelly, held on to place second with no rear wing and a damaged prop; 3rd, U-1 *Miss HomeStreet*/Jimmy Shane; 4th, U-11 *J&D's*/Jamie Nilsen, with damage to its rear wing; and 5th, U-40 *Miss Beacon Plumbing*/Dave Villwock. U-3 *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware*/Jimmy King, DNF, engine problems and later discovered a large hull crack by the air trap; and U-12 *Graham Trucking*/Andrew Tate, DNF, prop damage.

This was the first Unlimited win for Corey Peabody, and he was overwhelmed—from hugs to tears. For Strong Racing, their boats finished first and second, and at their hometown race.

The second-place finish for J. Michael Kelly in the U-8 was also amazing, as it ran much of

the heat without a rear stabilizing wing and with a broken prop. Kelly not only battled the rough ride (with bruised ribs from the Gold Cup race, a tremendous effort in itself), but it was reported that there was some exhaust in the cockpit, too. Kelly was visibly ill when he shut the boat down at the dock.

The Strong team had a private viewing tent outside of the pits, so when owner Darrell Strong tried to get into the pits and congratulate his teams on their first- and second-place finishes, he was temporarily prohibited. He had sandals on, and open-toe shoes are not allowed in the hot pits. Strong remedied that by putting duck-tape over the toes of the sandals!

Reflection

Since Friday was called off due to pondweed issues, testing, qualifications, and races were compacted into two days. It worked well for fans on the beach as there was nonstop boat or air-show action, but it likely made for an exceptionally busy time for boat teams.

There were seven boats in the final heat, and ALL were competitive; with



Andrew Tate stands on the deck of *Graham Trucking* as it is towed back to the pits after the final heat.

seven boats running, the water was rough and there was a fair amount of boat damage. Are seven boats too many in final heats?

We saw that the score up to the final heat is so important and even the fastest boat can't win without a good start when the racing is so competitive. Jimmy Shane told the UNJ's pit reporter, Mac Clouse:

"This one was all on me," he explained. "I was out of position as we formed for the start with four boats

ahead of me. I thought about cutting across to the backstretch, but then would have to go slow. So, I decided to take lane five and try to go fast from that lane. But as we exited the turn to head to the start line, I got hit with a lot of water and couldn't see. I had to back off, and I was late to the start. The boat performed well, and I was able to move up from fifth to finish third, but it was not the result we wanted." ❖

Notes and quotes from the Tri-Cities pits.

BY MAC CLOUSE

Who gets to pit in the shade of Bernie's Tree?

The large Sycamore tree at the east end of the Tri-Cities pits is called "Bernie's Tree" because former *Miss Budweiser* owner Bernie Little paid for a tree surgeon to bring it back to health when it was in danger of being cut down. Pitting under its shade is very desirable during the usual hot days on race weekend.

The tradition now is that the winner of the previous year's race would get to pit in the shade of Bernie's Tree. In 2019, J. Michael Kelly and the *Graham Trucking* won the race. This year, Kelly is driving the *Miss Tri-Cities* and Andrew Tate is driving the *Graham Trucking*. So, who gets the tree spot, Kelly, the driver, or *Graham Trucking*, the boat?

Here are some thoughts:

Andrew Tate: "I'd say the U-12 won. The *Graham Trucking* should be under the tree. The team is the winner, and they should be rewarded. The driver is only one, but the team is many. Our goal is for the team to be under the tree next year."

J. Michael Kelly: "I won the last race, and I would like to be under the tree. But it is a team effort. It's not just one guy. The crew members are the people out in the sun. They deserve to get the much cooler spot. I just need to try to get the win for the team."

Jimmy Shane: "I won here in 2012 in the *Graham Trucking* and got the tree for 2013. Steve David won the race in 2013 in the *Oberto*, and then retired from driving. I replaced him in the *Oberto* in 2014, and that summer, I got to be under the tree because *Oberto* was the 2013 winner. So, the tree winner is the boat. If a driver wants to be under the tree in 2022, he needs to win this year's race and stay with the boat."

When the *Graham Trucking* arrived in the pits on Thursday

afternoon, it was placed under Bernie's Tree. So, the answer to the question above is that when it comes to Bernie's Tree, the winner is the boat!

The return of Dave Villwock:

Dave Villwock: "I told Kelly [Stocklin] to buy the U-40. It is a good boat, and it is fast. I hadn't planned on returning to driving. It is fun to work on a boat again, and even more fun now to do both."

"Kelly has been great to work with. We have lots of equipment and we can do a lot to the boat. We are just limited in the hours we have to work on it, and we lost testing days in both Madison and here."

"We have had some things stall our progress. We had fuel-flow issues with the motors. We fixed that and steering and rudder issues. We have been going more sideways than forward. Over the winter, we expect to do things to the boat that will make it more like the old *Budweiser* boats."

J. Michael Kelly's new boat and outboard racing:

J. Michael Kelly: "I like the new boat [the former *Ellstrom* boat]. It is a rocket ship. It is more lively, and I have to be more on top of what it is doing. I don't fly it as much as I did other boats. It has faster speeds in the straightaway than I have ever seen. There will be even more speed when I get used to it. I just need more seat time."

"I think that each year I get better as a driver. I am always learning. My right-side ribs are still sore from the Madison spin. I have to get wrapped and be careful when I sneeze or cough."

"I still do lots of outboard racing. My strategy is the same: Get the inside lane, drive smart, and don't crash. It is always good practice for me to get runs at a start clock. It keeps me sharp. I started in the outboards in 1987, and with outboards,

limiteds, and Unlimiteds, I pretty much race every weekend from April through September."

The Raney's move and J&D's Madison damage.

Shannon Raney: "We moved from western Washington to Cle Elum, a town of 5,000 people in central Washington [about 100 miles from Seattle]. We love it. It is a bit of a challenge because many of our crew members live in the Seattle area. We have added one new crew member from Cle Elum. This winter we will try to get some regional publicity for our boat team, and maybe we can attract some more local crew members."

"We had a lot of work to do after Madison. We had damage to both sponsons, one worse than the other and more than expected. We also hurt two propellers. Debris in the river took us out of the Gold Cup."

Ed Cooper and the U-3:

Ed Cooper: "We had a lot of damage from 2019 that we had to fix. It took a long time. Since then, we have been working on engines. Now we need more time on the water to tune everything and get good data from the engine. I got some more Allison's, including some that never flew. We are also developing new methods to rebuild the engines, including repairing holes if we throw a rod."

Corey Peabody's new boat and the Strong family:

Corey Peabody: "The boat is a great ride. It is a big step up for me. I have had to learn how to use a canard, The U-98 I drove didn't have one. The speed is faster, and I have to be on top of everything. Everything is crammed together this year, but we'll get where we need to be."

"Pinnacle Peak Consulting is one of Darrell Strong's companies. The Strong family are amazing people, people you want to be around. No one really knew what Darrell wanted in terms of being an owner. Now we know and J. Michael and I are looking forward to working together."

Kelly Stocklin and the challenges of a two-boat team:

Kelly Stocklin: "It is not double the work, but triple the work. I have to be a coordinator and a manager. I didn't get into boat racing to be a manager! I now have 15 crew members, instead of three."

"Another challenge is that our two boats are so different. We have to have different equipment for each boat. We have to get all of our crew members working together. They have to earn each other's respect to work well with each other. After we solve all these challenges, then we need more time for each boat to be in and out of the water." ❖



Chris Tracy

The damage to the U-8 *Miss Tri-Cities* after the final heat of the Columbia Cup.

The backstory of the Columbia Cup.

BY CHRIS TRACY

The Tri-City Water Follies, including event director Kathy Powell, the Water Follies board, and the dedicated volunteers, deserve praise for their near-herculean efforts to conduct a race this year. Staging races in Seattle and Tri-Cities are considerably more complicated than other races on the circuit, primarily because those events attract exponentially more spectators.

While the Seattle race may have the largest total attendance, due to huge number of spectators on boats on the log boom, the Tri-Cities race likely attracts the largest crowd on the beach of all H1 races—about 75,000 people over three days, with Sunday attracting the lion's share of spectators. It generally takes about eight months to prepare for the races in the Tri-Cities and in Seattle.

The state of Washington prohibited large gatherings for much of the pandemic, and reopening was impossible to predict, so the Tri-City Water Follies canceled its race. As vaccinations were aggressively rolled out and infection numbers decreased, Washington state started easing some restrictions in phases, but outdoor events were still carefully regulated. Even as Washington opened more, the officials at Seattle's Seafair decided they did not have enough time to stage a race and airshow.

But, with the cooperation of the cities of Pasco, Kennewick, and Richland, the Water Follies organizers decided that they could conduct a race, even though state reopening regulations would mean substantial changes for spectators and for Water Follies revenue. (Spectators view the Tri-Cities race from long riverside parks on both the Kennewick and Pasco sides of the Columbia River.)

On May 21, the Tri-City Water Fol-

lies board announced that the race was back on, with only two months to plan for it!

To meet phased reopening pandemic regulations, the Water Follies determined that the maximum attendance each day would be 9,000 on the Kennewick side and 9,000 spectators on the Pasco side. And viewers would be zoned

even with larger tents, no more than 48 people could be admitted. That did not make financial sense, so the private, tented areas were eliminated.

Food, snack, and other vendors were not going to be allowed, as they triggered different pandemic regulations that would be difficult to monitor and meet. This included eliminating beer gardens.

Volunteers needed to be recruited, contractors hired, equipment rented, etc., to set up the shore, pits, and more. And contracts for the various classes of boat racing and the air show had to be negotiated—and fast, as eight months of work had to be done in two months!

To recoup some of the lost revenue due to lower allowed attendance and elimination of private tented areas, the officials at Water Follies decided to sell close-by parking to the various zones for an additional fee. In the past, sometimes this parking was reserved for private tented areas.

And that was the plan, until July 1, when Washington reopened after reaching almost a 70% statewide vaccination rate. The Water Follies quickly pivoted again—eliminated the zones, so spectators could be anywhere on the shore. They quickly reached out to get food, snack, and beverage services, including the beer garden.

The Water Follies was able to bring back a few private tented areas, especially for title sponsors for various racing classes. But tents and time were in short supply. And general admission spectators had a wide range of the shore to view the race from, probably some of the best general admission viewing in decades!

So, congratulations go out to all that helped make the HAPO Columbia Cup happen this year. ❖



into several areas on each side of the river—in order to ensure spreading out the crowd and meeting social distancing requirements.

The lower attendance on Sunday, especially, would impact the bottom line for the Water Follies. Since the Water Follies board feels this is a community event, they did not want to substantially hike prices for general admission tickets.

Another significant revenue source was eliminated. In the past, sponsor, corporate and private viewing tented areas, generally with catered food and close-by parking, were organized and sold by the Water Follies. A typical tent accommodated 100 people. It was determined that to meet social-distancing requirements,

UNJ INTERVIEW:

Proctor & Gamble goes boat racing



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Dave Torrell has been a fan of Unlimited hydroplanes most of his life. He was born in Mount Vernon, north of Seattle, in 1939 and his family later moved to the Lakeridge neighborhood on the east side of Lake Washington. When he was 12 years old, he was smitten by the roar of Rolls-Royce Merlin and Allison engines. "We could hear the boats when they'd start to test," he recalls. "We'd hop on our bikes and ride five miles to the Mount Baker pits."

From his home, he also could see boats attempting to set straightaway records on the east channel of Lake Washington. "We could see the end of the Mercer mile, so when somebody was trying to set a world record, we could see the last 200 or 300 feet of it, and when they were cooling down on that side of Mercer Island."

He attended the University of Washington. Torrell later worked for Procter & Gamble and had a more direct involvement with hydroplane racing when the company sponsored Bill Wurster's team. "I was sentenced to 20 years in Portland with Procter & Gamble. I was deported as being too fanatic of a Husky fan and they didn't tolerate that down there."

The following interview with Torrell was conducted by Craig Fjarlie and Bob Senior on April 8, 2021.

UNJ: What are some of your early memories of Unlimited hydroplanes?

Torrell: The *Sudden Sunnee*, which is one of the more obscure hydroplanes, flipped one afternoon. They had come from the pits down at Rainier Beach and I saw it. I knew that if you call the *Seattle Times*, or maybe it was one of the TV stations, one of the media outlets, if you called them and you were the first to call and they used that, you'd win \$50 as the tip of the week. And so, I did it. And what happened? I didn't win. [Laughs] They didn't care about the *Sunnee*.

Now if it had been the *Budweiser* I would have won \$50. But we would go down—there were a couple of guys from Detroit that had some connection with those docks and the stuff that was down there at Rainier Beach. And the boats would go in there and would come in that part of the lake. Not like today. If a boat came out they'd have to have 14 permits and all the other things. But, we



Dave Torrell of Procter & Gamble (right) with Scott Pierce, driver of Mr. Pringle's

Dave Torrell Collection

would ride down there and see when it got close to hydroplane time. I wasn't the only one.

Do you have specific memories of things that happened in the early days?

I've never talked to a hydroplane devotee who didn't see the *Slo-mo* V flip. And I will say, I saw it, and Bill O'Mara [KING-TV sports reporter] and what not. Going into the north turn—and it sticks in my mind, I checked it out and it's true—117.391 was what *Slo-mo* IV had qualified at. He had run one of his laps at almost exactly the same speed. We saw it flip and, you know, that was the end of the world as we knew it.

Yeah.

I was thinking, at that time there

were only seven or eight boats and a couple of 'em were pretty weak. But the whole idea was, with the *Slo-mos* and the *Gales* and *Miss U.S.* and all that stuff, there was so much at stake. A lot of good old-fashioned hate, as they call it when Georgia plays Georgia Tech. They call it hate and that was Seattle and Detroit. But we would worship, just worship the time that it came, and we were not alone at that.

So, as I grew up and moved to Portland we would always go up to the Tri-Cities race and stuff, and so all those things are pretty normal. I mean, a lot of people can say exactly the same thing. But something happened to me that changed my hydroplane life. They put me in a position where I got to do a lot of things that the normal guy doesn't get to do. And that was when Procter & Gamble announced that they were going to sponsor a Pringle's hydroplane.

Yeah.

And how that kinda came about was, I think there was a feeling in the company that motorsports was a good thing, and at that time there were four or five NASCARs in all the years that Procter & Gamble—including the Tide car—but that kind of gave it a foundation.

My boss in Seattle was a guy named Duane Koberg. So anyway, Koberg was influential with people in Cincinnati, and there were some other people from here, a guy named John Lewis who was back in Cincinnati, that had grown up



Don Mock

Procter & Gamble decided to get involved in hydro racing in 1986. The boat the company sponsored as Mr. Pringle's was owned by Bill Wurster and first saw action in 1984 as *Executone*.

here, so that led to the announcement that Mr. Pringle's was going to be sponsoring the U-8. I thought that was coincidental because U-8 (you ate) and Pringle's kinda went together. It started a great number of years, not only for me but for other P&G guys, because there was tremendous enthusiasm among the people, even though there were only two or three of us that really knew the useless facts connected with the hydros.

OK, yeah.

People asked me a lot if I was the one that decided. That was not the case, but they'd say, what was Procter & Gamble's objective into coming in the hydroplane races? I think the idea is that, again, it was with motorsports, something you could leverage brands with, and it got to every day uses kind of thing, and the thing that it would do was to give you an opportunity with the trade.

Boats, you know, could get to them. They could influence them to merchandise the products. So, I think P&G was saying the number one reason we want to be in motorsports is to sell more product, and number two is to have a competitive entry. And *Mr. Pringle's* was one, I think, to become a competitive boat. They didn't want to spend millions to try and unseat the *Budweiser* or anything like that, but on the other hand, Bill Wurster won six races in the period of time that the *Pringle's* and the *Tide* were sponsored by P&G.

The thing that impressed me, I think, P&G did not cut corners when it came to merchandising and sponsoring the boat. I mean, we had first-class uniforms for the guys in the pits. We had true professionals that designed the paint jobs for the *Pringle's* and the *Tide*. Our hospitality was run by companies that did that and did a heck of a job at it. So, it lasted. It had to be somewhat successful or

they wouldn't have had the seven, eight, nine years that Bill was beholden to P&G.

He was the only owner the company worked with, right?

Yes, for the hydroplanes, yes.

And how did they select him, do you know?

Well, several people recommended him, including Bob Senior. [laughs]

You weren't directly involved?

No, not until later. And I would say my part of it would have been more—I was one of the guys that created the enthusiasm with the Procter & Gamble side. I was the "expert" on the hydros and that was great, and another guy by the name of Dan Jones, from Spokane, and of course he was a big fan of *Miss Spokane* and went to the races. He and I, before there was a Bill Wurster, would go together and see the races in Tri-Cities. So, he was knowledgeable, as well.

We had people in Seattle and Portland and Spokane that were really able to make sense of what it was going to be all about—manage the expectations and stuff. Particularly in Oregon where, you know, hydros were not a big deal. An awful lot of our customers would love to go, not so much to Seattle, but to Tri-Cities. You know, going to Columbia Gorge and to there. So, we had a great representation of those people. They did a great job of merchandising for us.

One of the things about all of that was Scott Pierce was made for that kind of job. I think he loved it and loved being able to talk about Procter & Gamble, the people and what it could do. He would go on calls, and when George Woods or Nate Brown were the drivers, with the *Tide* and stuff, they would do the same. Even in Portland, I mean, George Woods came down a couple of

"So, I think P&G was saying the number one reason we want to be in motorsports is to sell more product, and number two is to have a competitive entry."

The *Mr. Pringle's* team introduced a new turbine-powered hydroplane. It's pictured here during its launching at the Stan Sayres Pits in Seattle.



Rick Sullivan



Scott Pierce brings the U-8 Mr. Pringle's back to the dock in Seattle.

times and called on accounts for me and things like that.

I knew people that would be interested in motorsports, and they loved it, you know. George Woods is not going to win a debating contest with you in terms of being an enthusiastic salesman, but he never wasted any words, and they were all good ones. So that really was a very positive deal.

In your opinion, what made Scott Pierce perfect for that job? What characteristics did he have that helped?

I would think he was a complete extrovert.

OK.

He was a little cocky, you know, and that's OK. To me, I liked the little snappiness between the drivers. The big snappiness I even liked better. But Scott was a

good talker, and he was an extrovert, and he would buy into what we wanted to do. You know, you could take Scott Pierce in to see the head buyer at Fred Meyer and I'd say, "Scott, you come at him from this angle. Can you do that?" "Absolutely." And he would. So, he was in meetings. We would have him at a meeting and he would get up and talk and be very, very outgoing and enthusiastic.

Now, in terms of Bill Wurster, he needed a sponsor. Is that how he got hooked up with Procter & Gamble?

Yes, and after he was recommended—and I think probably Duane and other people talked to him—and Bill Wurster, you don't need an extroverted owner. I mean, Bernie's already got that covered. [Laughter] But what I think was, Bill Wurster was a team player. He would give you the impression realistically. "You sponsor my boat and I'll sell you my soul," you know?

Very genuine...

Absolutely.

...or whatever the word.

He would be like you want your grandfather to be. He was just a guy that everybody liked, and he did so much in assembling a great crew. I mean, the thing is, we had a very reliable boat the whole time, whether it was the *Pringle's* or the *Tide* with the Heye brothers, Tracy Bratvold, Scott Raney, and a few others. There were some just outstanding people that had been with *Budweiser* and other places, and he was able to get them together.

Yeah.

The first year we had three races. It was going to be two, it was going to be Tri-Cities and Seattle. And I remember Scott got penalized a lap in the finals of the Seattle race, but we ran a good race. We ran good with the old piston engine here. Then we progressed and we did the marine turbine the second year. I don't even know what a marine turbine engine is. But we won at Detroit.

Something that happened there, from the Procter & Gamble standpoint, was the *Detroit Free Press* had a picture of *Pringle's* on the front page. What happened was, the guy that was the *Pringle's* guy in Cincinnati is no fool. He bought a hundred papers and everybody who could possibly connect with a decision to sponsor a hydro had that on his desk when he came to work on Monday morning.

Ah.

I can remember that Don Poier was the announcer, and I can remember him saying, "Hey, *Pringle's* is gonna win this thing." And that, I think, kind of set the table for the fact that we got a new boat. They gave him money, or produced enough sponsorship money, to build the new boat, to run in all the races, and to have a competitive program.

What seasons are we talking about?

1986 was when we started, and so '87...

The marine turbine?

It was the marine turbine. Then '88, I went to the race in Madison that year, as an individual. P&G wasn't sending us around with a free lunch, going to a speedboat [race], but me and a couple of my salesmen went back there.

On your own dime.

Yes. And I remember *Budweiser* got penalized in the dreaded south turn there, or whatever you call it at Madison...

The first turn?

Where they got the hole in the river, so to speak. So, we won that race. And that was just a great experience. I went to Madison three times. One thing, if you go to Madison, it's either a drought or a flood, you know. But it's never just perfect.



Scott Pierce is interviewed by the press.

There are funny bumps and there's stuff in the river.

All that stuff. And when it's too high, then the logs are floatin' down the river, and all that kind of stuff. But then it really established us. Bill had to overcome a lot because that boat flew up in the air more than once. I mean, we had several flips—a couple in the south turn or whatever turn that is at Tri-Cities facing it from the shore there. I think twice we flipped in the same spot. But we work at that. The business results were there and stuff. So, it led to, really, I think, a pretty long and substantial relationship with P&G.

There was Pringle's and Tide and some other names changed a couple of times.

Well, it changed once. It was the *Pringle's*. The way Procter & Gamble runs—you know, it's been 20 years since I've been there—but probably the basic thing is brands are entities that give the company and the *Pringle's* brand or the Crisco brand, you know, in those days, or the Tide brand...

Jiff Peanut Butter.

...all of that. And all those places and products have a marketing budget. And they have a lot of leeway. There were a couple of names that a lot of people would know here. Rich George was the top-level marketing guy that handled the *Pringle's* program.

Was he from here?

He was from Cincinnati. And there was another guy named Rich Creighton,



The Procter & Gamble team with boat owner Bill Wurster (far left) and Scott Pierce (center).

Dave Torrell Collection

he was from Cincinnati. Those two guys, they fell in love with the sport. They had pictures of the *Pringle's* on the wall in their offices and things like that. So, all of those things led to—it was kind of an infectious thing. Those were some glory days for boat racing, too. There were a lot of really good boats.

Lots of TV.

All of that. And so, as I say—I keep going back—they were doing NASCAR at the time, too. You never heard, they didn't say we're really wasting our money doing this. It was a good thing.

If we can digress just a little bit, we've seen how Unlimited racing was promoted at various times. What helped best when P&G was involved? What helped best with promotion? What were

the important things that were done, not just P&G boats, but the sport as a whole?

I think, obviously, *Budweiser* was the king of everything.

Yeah.

And *Atlas Van Lines*, you know, with a picture of the *Atlas Van Lines* on the front page of *Sports Illustrated*, and things like that. And in those days, even though the *Pringle's* and stuff—the name of the sponsor—was said more than the name of the driver.

Yeah.

And I thought that was a good thing, if the *Pringle's* is gonna win Heat 2B, as opposed to Scott Pierce is gonna win, you know. Sometimes now they don't mention even the whole thing except for HomeStreet Bank, which, you know what I'm saying. But I just think that the fact, with the unique nature of the boats on the water going that fast, there isn't anything else like it. And it was very competitive even though *Budweiser* and the big guys won the majority of the races. But no more so than the NCAA basketball tournament, where if you get to the Sweet Sixteen you've done a pretty good job.

Sure.

So, if *Pringle's* comes in third in the Seafair Trophy Race, that's pretty good—that kind of thing. That and the fact that we were able to sell marketing. A pretty good example involving Bill Wurster is that we were always trying to sell a world



Sandy Ross Collection

The U-8 Mr. *Pringle's* was fitted with an enclosed cockpit for the 1989 season.



F. Peirce Williams

ABOVE: The U-8 Mr. Pringle's flipped three times during the 1989 season, including this incident on the Detroit River.

RIGHT: George Woods replaced Scott Pierce in the boat's cockpit beginning in the 1990 season.

"Bill Wurster was such a solid citizen. You didn't have to worry that Bill Wurster was gonna throw a fit on the dock."

record display of something.

Ah, OK.

And so, Lou Spicer, who was one of my sales guys down in Oregon, went to a big account. It's called Food 4 Less in McMinnville. He said, "If you put up a world record display of Pringle's"—at that time let's say it was 350 cases, that's a lot of cases at a grocery store—"I will get the owner of the boat to drive that boat down here and display it in front of your store." And this was before we had a display boat.

He went to Bill, he told me, and I said, "I'll talk to Duane. I'll bet Bill will do it." So, they call him up. And Bill doesn't even go, "Well, I don't know." He says, "I'll do it." So, here's Bill Wurster driving the truck by himself pulling the boat. Not a display boat. The boat...

The race boat.

...with the engine in it. I mean, all the way to McMinnville, Oregon, and he did not have a license to pull it in Oregon. So, he is traveling in a clandestine way. And the way he went, he had to go on the ferry across the river to get to McMinnville, because he wasn't going down I-5. And that is Bill Wurster for you.

Yeah.

And there is a picture of Lou, the guy that sold it, and John Santos, who was the owner of the store, and Bill Wurster standing in front of the boat in McMinnville. And so, that's news, so to speak. There were all kinds of examples like that.

Now, they changed divisions of the company at one point.

Yes.

What caused them to stop the first one and then change to the other? What went on inside the company, do you know?

You mean in terms of how it went from *Pringle's* to *Tide*?



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Yeah.

Well, what happened is, Tide is a monster brand and Pringle's was not, was not the same size of brand. Not that that was completely part of it, but their budget was not the same. So, my feeling is they probably made the decision that we can't afford to do this anymore. But what they did was, through contacts with the local managers here and some people in Cincinnati, and got with Bill and said, "Interview with Tide."

And at this time, the Tide guy and everybody—this is the background—everybody loved Bill Wurster. I mean, everybody. So, this guy has been so good to us, but we've got to let him down easy because, you know, this guy has been good to us and—blah, blah, blah. So, the Tide guy says, "Well, how much did you pay him?" And they said, "Let's say if we paid him on an index

of 100..." And so, he said, "I'm going to offer him 50 and he'll never take that, so he'll turn it down."

So, there's Bill Wurster with his nice suit on, going all the way to Cincinnati. Bill's in. And before the guy can complete his sentence about 50, he says, "I'll take it." [Laughs] And that's how they got the *Tide*.

OK. And between you had *Ultra Bold and Dash* at Hawaii.

Yeah, and the idea there would be that they could go to a brand and say, "Would you invest X for one race," or whatever, and they were able to do it. And here again...

Was that with a local distributor?

Well, no. In other words, if P&G doesn't have local, everybody's a P&G guy, but they're a brand that could get publicity because, you know, it had already been a successful thing. It was probably pretty easy to do.

So, it was moved within the company?

Yeah, it was moved within the company. But *Tide* became the name boat, so to speak. And then we had different drivers in terms of Nate Brown and then George Woods. And George Woods, to me, was a fabulous, strategic driver. And, you know, the greatest flip in the history of hydroplane racing is the double flip in San Diego.

Yeah.

In fact, we were there in the hospitality for *Tide*, and it was small compared to what the Pringle's used to be. But we were standing there right on the shore. We weren't very far from them when it happened. And later on, when George became our driver, he came down to Oregon to call on a trade. I said, "What was the deal on that flip?" And he says, "Well, you won't tell anybody, will you?"

[Laughter]

And here we go.

He said, "I saw that *Circus Circus*..." which, incidentally, if I could watch one boat run one heat, I'd say I want to watch John Prevost do something crazy in the *Circus Circus*. And so, what he did was, *Circus Circus* got a horrible start and Woods had a perfect start, so he's way ahead. And we all noticed that he's quite a ways ahead, but he said there was a spot right there on that straightaway where the wind created this thing and they always slow down through there. He had a piston engine, you know, and the other guys were turbines.

"He and Ron Snyder, I knew they were going too fast. So, I kept ahead of 'em to make sure they kept going that fast." He says, "I wasn't trying to make 'em flip. But I was hoping that they might get scared a little bit and slow down." And, you know, he ended up winning the heat. They stopped it.

But George was very crafty. The other example—diverting a little bit here—another example of George Woods was 1992 when we won Seafair. But the crafty driving was in Tri-Cities because Hanauer forced

Woomer's boat—you know, *Winston Eagle*—out. I think it was *Winston Eagle* at that time, and Woods could take advantage of that, and he did two or three times during the day. We came in second there and first in Seafair. So that was a great back-to-back for Bill and the *Tide*.

You've talked about Scott Pierce and George Woods, you did have other drivers.

Nate Brown. Yeah, Nate was a great driver. And there again, every driver that Wurster got was a good driver. I would say we never did have a driver they weren't happy with. I'm trying to think if there was another driver besides Nate and George Woods. We had one driver when he had the *Super Range*. Well, George Woods drove the *Super Range*.

That was the day when it was awful. You couldn't see the backstretch there was so much fog. There was some kind of vibration in the boat and when it got back to the pits, he couldn't pry his hands off the steering wheel. They had to pry 'em off because he had to hold on so tight. I think we came in second or third in that race. But I think that, you know, right down, the guys I mentioned from the crew and all that, all those guys were top-flight, in terms of P&G. They did a good job of being the recipient of the sponsorship.

Do you know what Bill did to recruit crewmembers?

I don't. I mean, the company, as much as they liked the dues, pays to make sure they're right. I don't think Rich George was down there checkin' the crew, you know.

They trusted Wurster to do the right thing.

Yes, yes, absolutely. Particularly because it was working out well.

Yeah.

And the other part is, even in those times, you don't want—Bernie Little was great for the sport as far as I was concerned, because he's interesting. Bill Wurster was such a solid citizen. You didn't have to worry that Bill Wurster was gonna throw a fit on the dock. [Laughs]

He wasn't going to embarrass the company.



Bill Wurster (left) towed the *Mr. Pringle's* to Oregon to put it on display outside a store.

Dave Torrell Collection

No, no.

Well, have you remained involved in any capacity since P&G got out of it?

No, other than just... Actually, what happened is just, Procter & Gamble re-organized a little bit of the way that the sales thing was going, and the local sales people that were calling on Associated Grocers had a hospitality for Tide.

OK.

But this didn't come from Cincinnati. It came from the local people being able to generate the funds to have it. And they would invite me, because not one of them knew anything about the race. I could bring some of my memorabilia stuff like the inflatable raft and they looked at that, but that was the end. I still have the interest in it. Always love to go down there and I do. I go on Friday and then probably Saturday and Sunday, but I like to go down there when the collectors are down there just to see what they're doing and what not.

Do you go far from Seattle? Do you go to Tri-Cities?

I've always gone to Tri-Cities.

San Diego?

San Diego about three times. Once or twice to Las Vegas and three times to Madison. The only place that I wish I could have gone is Detroit. That's the only one, but it just never worked out. In other words, it's kind of like being a big Husky fan—shall we go to the Oregon game, or shall we go to the Michigan game? You know, which game do we want to go to? You're not gonna go to every one of the games.

To back up a little, would you agree with this: Koberg said we're going to sponsor it for two races and if it sells the product we'll continue. It sold the product, so they sponsored it for San Diego and Vegas. If it sells the product, we'll continue next year, and they gave Wurster enough money for a new boat.

Yes, I would agree with all of that. It's kind of what I was saying before. The idea, again, why did P&G get in this? It's to sell product. It's not like if someone who owns a boat, and I have a lot of money, wouldn't it be fun, and we'll get a sponsor as well. This is more, we want to use this as a marketing tool, and it



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

The boat, seen here in San Diego in 1993, competed as U-8 Tide from 1992 to 1994.

worked out.

Uh, a couple of things in my association with Bill Wurster that I got to do. One of 'em was when he invited me to come down to watch the race. I sat next to Steve Raible and Chip Hanauer when they broadcast the whole race. It was one of the races where there was a big controversy over jumping the gun. I'm looking at the same thing they are, and I got a chance to talk to Chip Hanauer, not Raible, but Chip Hanauer a little bit. And he was so genuine, it was really great.

But here we are, we got in the boat from the pits and just went over to where they were broadcasting. Sat there all day and, you know, couldn't have been better. That doesn't happen to the average guy.

Right, yeah.

And one of the reasons—this was when the PGA was at Sahalee—I called Wurster and I said, "I want to take you to the golf tournament on the day I'm not working." And he came out and was there from dawn to dusk and, you know, he was eternally grateful but, again, can't say too much about that.

And the deal about [Mike] Fitzsimmons is that he was a talk show guy in Spokane and very involved in sports—the Huskies and the Cougars and very philosophical—and I thought, you know, his mind is terrific. One day we were in the pits and, as a matter of fact, Koberg was there and several others, and I said, "You know, the one boat I can't remember too much about what it looked like was called the *What-A-Pickle* and it came out here from Detroit." And there was

another boat, the *Wha Hoppen Too*, so there were two or three main boats.

So, the deal was, when did the *What-A-Pickle* run? And here comes Fitzsimmons walking down. I said, "Mr. Fitzsimmons, could you answer this question? What year did the *What-A-Pickle* run in Seattle?" And he said just in a second, "It never came to Seattle. You're confusing it with *Wha Hoppen Too*." [Laughs] Which I thought was pretty great.

Maybe I've already said this, but I liked the boats in the style of Steve Woomer, because he didn't back up. When he got mad, he got mad. I never met him, I never talked to him, but I admired him—and Jerry Verhuel. Jerry Verhuel and I went to Renton High School together. For five and a half years we rode our cars down to the ferry dock



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Nate Brown

and we were in the National Guard. There was a missile base on Vashon Island, we were both in there. I got to know Jerry. I heard all about his dragsters and all that kind of stuff.

Yeah, he worked for Jerry "the King" Ruth.

Yup, and I loved the way Woomer's boats went. They went like a rocket and God, we hope they don't conk out. And *Circus Circus* didn't conk out. They either flipped or ran into the *Madison*, you know, ran into the *Madison* or the dock and that kind of stuff. Still, Prevost was just a terrific personality for excitement. Not that I was rooting for them to win the race, I was just rootin' for 'em to get out there on the water.

To back up to the beginning, you went to the University of Washington.

Yes.

What was your major?

Economics.

OK. That fits well with the work you did at P&G.

Yes, and then they have an athletic Hall of Fame there and I have been the curator of the Hall of Fame for the last 20 years. So, I have a lot to do with the athletic Hall of Fame.

Did you have much personal interaction when Don Jones was commissioner?

No, even though I know Don Jones—I can see him sittin' there with his slicked-back hair lookin' good and all that. You know, the thing is, I thought it was all good. In other words, I loved the controversy, in terms of when Bernie would get mad, but Bernie didn't have to get mad at somebody because he won most of the races.

You were around when various people did public relations for the Unlimiteds, like Sam Cole...

I don't know him, but I certainly know, yes.

There were others who were around in those years. Scott Smith.

Well, Scott Smith was the manager of the *Pringle's* for the first three or four years, or whatever.

Did some of them have better ideas that kept the sport in the forefront of people's consciousness?



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Nate Brown drives *Tide* around the Roostertail Turn in Detroit in 1994.

You know, I think probably it's too dependent on how many good boats there are and what the sponsors are. And I think the sport itself, when they get the right participants, it works.

Yeah.

It works. And if Bill Muncey is the sportsman of the year in Seattle, that means it's working, just because the nature of the people liking the sport. And now it's harder, you know. Look at the *Seattle Times* and all the things they have to cover. And, you know, they will go and find things about Husky football when it's not football season.

Right.

You know, to fill it up, kind of thing.

Is something missing with the hydroplanes now so that they're not getting the word out about what's going on, do you think?

I don't really know. I just think, if I were the king of the hydros, I would say that what we need to do is simplify the rules and have a minimum of disqualifications. To have four guys poring over something the minute that it's over to see if anybody did anything wrong. Like, I would never have a thing where, when Jean Theoret lost the race in Wurster's boat that one time, where he got too slow and they showed the water coming over the front, well, that didn't have anything to do with who was first or who was second.

Yeah.

In other words, the minutia rules are too minutia, just in my judgment, anyway. And people want to go, "Gosh that was great, the *Tide* won or whoever

er won and now if *HomeStreet* wins... All the guys are, you know, to me it's like the drivers are all too good, you know what I mean? I would like to see 'em arguing a little bit with each other. And like, there's a potential, you don't have to tell 'em to be good sports, just let it happen.

It looks like there could be more good boats this year, though. It only takes three or four good boats, don't you think?

Yeah.

And the rest of 'em are the window dressing, but necessary. You know, it's just, there are 64 teams in the basketball tournament. There are 64 teams, but every one is excited to be there.

And the fans are excited.

And the more boats you have the more you see qualifying and all that kind of stuff.

OK, we've covered quite a bit. Is there anything else we should talk about?

Well, I thought I had one of the unique experiences. I got to go, one year, on the Admiral's Barge. And you know, you just come in underneath the floating bridge there with about 10 minutes before the first heat, or something. *Tide* was in Heat 1B and the lady who was in charge of Sand Point was the person who was doing the flags. And I said, "If the *Tide* wins, will you let me..." So, I got to do the flag for the *Tide* winning the heat. So not many people got to do that.

All right. Thank you very much. ❖

A HYDRO FAN'S PERSONAL HISTORY, CONTINUED.

BY ROGER LIPPMAN

Last month I covered my first years as a hydroplane enthusiast and pit lizard. Now, I get more involved with the boats.

By the late 1970s I had advanced somewhat from being a shorebird and button collector. I started working as a car mechanic in 1972, and eventually I wanted to get my hands into fighter-plane engines.

In 1979, I got connected with the *Miss Burien Hobby* crew. I was to meet them where the boat was kept, in a public-storage unit near the south end of what was then Empire Way South (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Way South), near

the Boeing Access Road. I showed up at the appointed time, but no one else did, and believe it or not, cell phones were not yet in common use.

That's as far as I got with that bunch, though maybe it was just as well. The following year at Seafair, the boat ran as *Burien Hobby Center*. When its engine failed to turn off as it approached the dock, it plowed onto the shore at about 30 mph, finally coming to rest when it smashed into a crane. I'm glad I wasn't standing in its path holding the docking rope.

Back to 1979, the *Burien Hobby* folks, who I don't think I ever met,

passed me on to Bob Miller's crew in Everett. He had a nice boat sponsored by Electricraft, a local stereo outfit. His shop was the garage of his house, and the backyard was his boathouse.

I liked Bob and the small crew, though we were short-staffed. He always took care of lunch for us—or usually his wife did. He would say, “Throw some weenies in the microwave, and I'll run to the store for a quart of Pepsi.” Once in a while he took us out to eat, usually at the Royal Fork—mass food for big, hungry guys. I called it the Trough.

Another time we were at some restaurant on an Everett street, sitting by the window. One of the crewmembers, a big, powerful guy, had parked his tiny Honda car out front. We watched as four teenagers cleverly lifted up the front end and set it on the curb, then repeated with the rear end. While the kids were standing there admiring their work, our guy casually walked out, picked up the car by each end, and set it back where it belonged, with a glare at the kids.

Miller, afflicted with poor eyesight, later announced (to us) that he was going to campaign for governor on the platform of “ground-glass windshields on every hydroplane.”

I drove out there regularly and helped rebuild Allison engines that were still in their World War II factory crates. You could pick them up for something in the low



Bob Miller in the cockpit of his U-29 *Electricraft* at the 1979 Squire Shop Seafair Trophy race in Seattle.

From the authors collection



The U-29 *Electricraft* in 1979.

three figures back then, while there was still plenty of war surplus. They had been sitting untouched for 35 years or more, and the Cosmoline engine pre-lube had got all crusty. So, we had to tear down the engines completely, clean them up with solvent, re-lubricate them, and re-assemble.

We worked up to the last minute getting the boat ready for the Columbia Cup. It was close to midnight when we were finally ready and trailer-fired the engine. I'm sure the neighbors had heard that before.

Then we were off to the Tri-Cities. In the pits we were located next to Chuck Hickling. He was a grump and a stone drag of a neighbor. I don't think we qualified there. The boat was plagued with oil leaks that we couldn't figure out.

The leaks continued at the Seafair race, where at least we qualified and finished one heat. I hate to think how much racing oil we spewed into Lake Washington.

Bob Miller considered it an improvement that we were parked next to Bill Muncey in the Seattle pits. Muncey was more cordial, but condescending to our small-budget operation. After we had blown up an engine and were working on another one, Miller told Muncey that we were still trying to dial it in. "You dialed one out, anyway," Muncey replied.

After Seafair, we tore down every-

thing we could think of, paying special attention to the external oil lines. Those hoses come with plastic caps, one of which got squished inside a hose, causing a pressure loss and, somehow, a leak. We fixed it, but Seafair was the first and last start for Miller's *Electricraft*, which finished 15th of 15 boats scoring national high points that year.

After that season, I was busier with work, so that was the end of my crew-member career—so far, anyway.

When I moved to Leschi in 1976, just a couple blocks from the lake, I de-

cided on getting myself a little boat. I found a gorgeous 13-foot mahogany outboard with a flat bottom. Keeping that bottom on the boat was a full-time job, but worth it, for a while anyway.

My good friend Henry Gordon wanted me to call it the *Krupskaya*, which I'm sure readers will recognize as the family name of V.I. Lenin's wife. That sufficed for a while.

In 1988 I worked on a solar energy project in rural Central America, at a place called El Lagartillo (the little lizard). That inspired me to rename the boat in honor of my friends there—and also after *El Lagarto*, the first three-time consecutive Gold Cup winner. Eventually the bottom turned to shredded wheat one time too many, and after barely making it back to shore, I finally abandoned the thing. Next time, it's fiberglass for me.

I was delighted when the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum opened up, restoring and displaying the boats of the glory years. Somehow, independent of me, Bob Senior connected with Henry Gordon, the above-mentioned Leninist-feminist, who was writing for the Center for Wooden Boats magazine. Henry had even run a display story about my beloved *Krupskaya*.



Remnants of the famous *Miss Thriftway* persimmon-and-white stripes, now in the author's attic.

On behalf of museum founders Bob and Shirley Williams, Bob Senior got Henry to edit the museum's publication, *Hydro Legends*, and my then-girlfriend did the graphic design. After a while, I became the copy editor/proofreader.

I enjoyed working on the magazine with the self-consciously unconventional Henry. We are fast friends but opposite personalities in many ways. Once, when we were in the Seafair press room at the pits, he was browsing through pictures in a Budweiser packet and proclaimed, "You'd never guess this guy had a drink in his life." From across the room someone remarked, "He must be looking at Bernie Little."

When David Williams took over as museum director, he and I became friends. My first project there was with the restoration of the third *Miss Thriftway/Miss Century 21* (1959–1963). I helped tear off the decking. After the boat was retired, someone had put blue pinstripes on it. I heard it was the National Guard when it used the boat in a publicity campaign.

Some years later I worked on the restoration of the 1958 *Miss Bardahl*, helping to assemble and install instrument panels. Someday a volunteer will remove one of the panels and find my signature on the back.

As I was approaching 60, I went to David and told him that, for my birthday, I wanted a ride in a hydro. I asked him what I could do for the museum that would be a fair trade.

He knew I could write. He thought about it and assigned me to prepare the script for a self-guiding tour of the museum. The product was recorded by noted sportscaster Steve Montgomery. In exchange for my effort, I got a three-lap ride in the restored *Miss Burien* (no relation to

Burien Hobby) on Lake Washington.

I had another interaction with Steve Montgomery a few years later. For its 65th anniversary, Seafair put on an opening-day ceremony about

a month before the race, at Westlake Park in downtown Seattle. Part of it was a race featuring bicyclists pulling wooden cut-out hydro models, just like everyone did in the '50s and '60s.

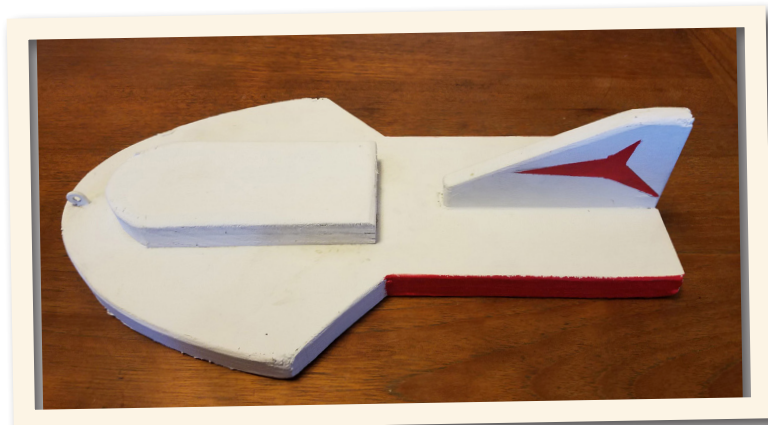
I biked downtown for it and found myself in a thick crowd of pre-teen kids. I realized I had a real chance to be competitive and pulled away from the pack to get my 400 points. I was called up to the podium to be recognized by Mr. Montgomery, the MC. But the crowd wasn't interested, and Steve lost his concentration, so I was left standing in the winner's circle twiddling my thumbs. And then Henry Gordon razzed me about

outracing a bunch of 10-year-olds.

Not long after my ride in the (real) *Miss Burien*, racer Mark Evans scribbled out his compelling life story on a scratch pad. David Williams typed it up, and I turned it into serviceable English. It was published in 2009 as *Dancing with Disaster*—though my suggestion for the title was "Running with Scissors."

For some years I did occasional race reporting for museum publications. In 2011 I was sitting on the press tower with Jack Regas and his daughter. Jack never fully recovered from head injuries in 1959, when he crashed in *Miss Bardahl* in the Diamond Cup. But he was aware and cordial.

I got him to re-autograph my copy of *This Is Hydroplaning*, right next to his signature from 50-some years before. His handwriting hadn't



TOP: Roger's competition at the Seafair wooden hydro bike race in Westlake Park.
ABOVE: The *Miss Burien II*, champion for a day.

changed a bit.

His daughter told me that in the aftermath of the Coeur d'Alene accident, owner Ole Bardahl declined to cover Jack's medical expenses, saying that the driving contract left the risks to the driver. Edgar Kaiser, in whose service Jack had been the national champ in 1957, stepped in and paid for everything. What a contrast.

In the years to come, David Williams spent many hours interviewing the colorful Mira Slovak, preparing to write the biography of the Flying Czech (who was actually Slovakian).

I was honored that David selected me to advise him and edit the book. I might be the only person alive who is knowledgeable about Eastern European history and politics, hydroplanes, and writing. David is a good researcher and a capable storyteller.

I'm delighted with the result, *A Race to Freedom*, published in 2018. (The University of Washington Press should be ashamed that it didn't grab the chance to publish it.) Like Mark Evans's book, it's well worth reading. For my efforts, I rode with David on Lake Chelan in the museum's replica of Mira's first ride, *Miss Wahoo*. (Technically, it was Mira's second ride. He had once been in a kayak.)

Hours after my ride, something went wrong with the propeller. That twisted the driveshaft out of balance and it tore from the boat, causing it to sink. Fortunately, *Miss Wahoo* was saved, but the bottom needed repair. The engine had to be torn down completely, which I participated in.

Now I'm working with David on a new book and looking forward to another ride.

I'd also love to get more time in the museum's engine room, but so would a lot of other people. When I've been there, I've had a hard time finding the chance to get my hands dirty. I hope to have another opportunity when the world is healthy again. ❖



TOP: David Williams with the author after a ride in the *Miss Wahoo* on Lake Chelan in October 2017. **MIDDLE:** Mira Slovak climbs into the cockpit of *Miss Wahoo* and takes it for a ride on Lake Washington. **ABOVE:** Mira Sloval (left) and Jack Regas together again at the Seattle race in 2011.

Photos from the author's collection

COMMENTS FROM H1

Jan Shaw, Director of Operations



Hydroplane races don't just happen. Every event is made possible only because of long hours of hard work by many volunteers. They do it because they enjoy the sport, they have a great time working together with friends year after year, and they take pride in putting on a good show for the fans.

Each race site depends heavily on volunteers who sell tickets, park cars, provide security, and do hundreds of other tasks, not only during the race weekend, but during the weeks and months before. And, H1 Unlimited also has a group of volunteers who work at each race.

The H1 group consists of about 20 people who travel from race to race to inspect the boats, referee the action on the water, manage the pits, provide rescue services, do the video production, and even fly the drones that give the referees and those at home a bird's-eye view of what's happening on the racecourse. They're the people you'll see at the races wearing blue shirts with the word "Offi-

cial" written across the back.

Among these volunteers has been a group that has seen more than their fair share of action and attention so far this season—those who work on the course in the patrol boats.

It's safe to say that even under normal circumstances, this group puts in more long hours than any other. Because our races are generally held on navigable waterways, it means that the course buoys must be removed at the end of every day. As a result, the patrol-boat folks are up at the crack of dawn every day putting the buoys into place, and then working into the evening to take them down.

On top of that, each of the three races held so far have featured additional complications for those in the patrol boats. At Gunter'sville, a huge, four-foot-thick island of grass and reeds floated onto the racecourse on the Thursday before the event. Luckily, with the help of people from the Tennessee Valley Authority, the mass was shoved to the shoreline and

pulled from the lake with a giant backhoe before it could impact the race.

We weren't that lucky a week later in Madison, however, where rising waters brought a cascade of floating debris that shut down the action on the Ohio River on Friday and most of Saturday. The situation would have been much worse if it hadn't been for the H1 rescue-boat crew and the local volunteers who did their best to clear the course.

Then on the Columbia River at the Tri-Cities came the Sago pondweed situation, which also caused a full day of action on the racecourse to be canceled. Once again, it was the people in the patrol boats who helped save the race. Many volunteers from the Water Follies committee worked late into Friday night pulling the mess out of the river so the boats could run the next day.

So, here's a tip of the hat to the patrol-boat people. Quite literally, the 2021 season couldn't have happened without you. ❖

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