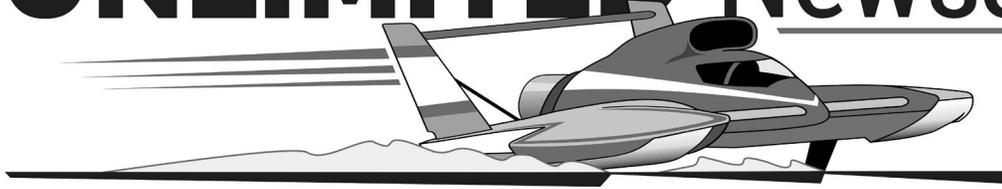


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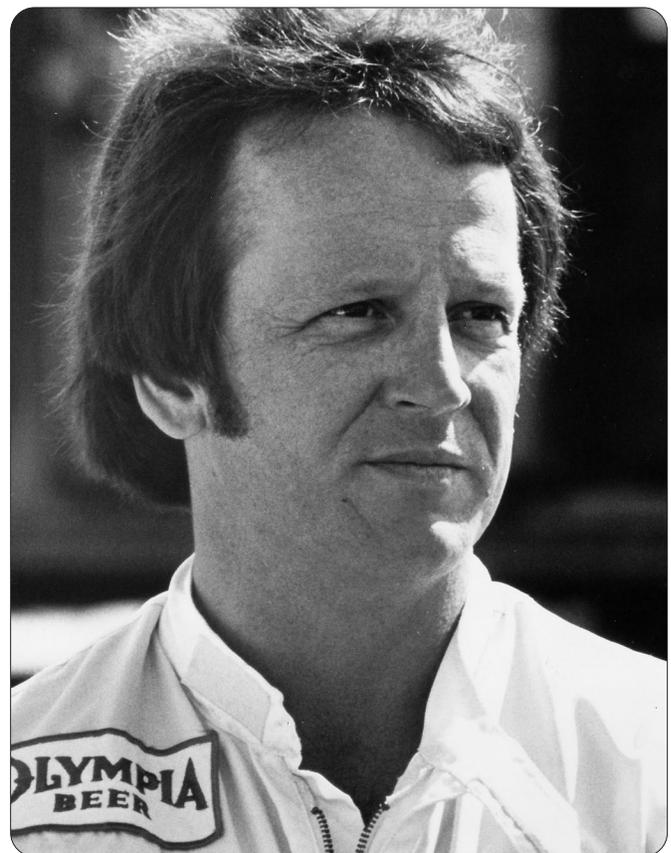
A NewsJournal Special Publication

REMEMBERING A CHAMPION:

The boat racing life of Billy Schumacher

The sport of unlimited hydroplane racing lost one of its greatest champions early on August 31 when Billy Schumacher passed away at the age of 80. Schumacher ranks among the top drivers in the sport's history. He won a total of 17 Unlimited races as a driver and another four as an owner. Among those victories, he won the Gold Cup twice as a driver and once as an owner and also earned three national driving championships.

Schumacher's involvement in boat racing spans his lifetime. The son of a pioneer in the sport of water skiing,



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

he was born in Seattle in October 1942 and started racing outboards as a child, where he learned how to win. Some of his most memorable experiences were as a participant in the legendary Sammamish Slough races held northeast of Seattle, where the racers covered the 13-mile distance down the Sammamish River from Redmond on Lake Sammamish to Kenmore on the shores of Lake Washington.

He moved on to limited inboards, driving in a variety of classes. He received his first opportunity to handle an Unlimited when he was still a teenager and still holds the record as the youngest driver to win the Gold Cup. He took time away from Unlimiteds to participate in tunnel outboard marathon races, where he continued his winning ways, then returned to driving Unlimiteds and retired from the cockpit in 1976. In 2006, he renewed his involvement with racing by becoming an owner.

The following interview was conducted by Craig Fjarlie on May 28, 2019, and was originally published as a four-part series in the January through April 2020 issues of the *Unlimited NewsJournal*. The entire interview is offered for you again in this special publication as a remembrance of Billy Schumacher's enormous impact on the sport of boat racing.

UNJ: What was your first involvement with boats?

Schumacher: I got started at a pretty young age, 1948, when I started running around in water-ski boats. It all started from puttzin' around with my father and his group's water-ski boats and canoes and anything else they had that would float. I was interested in it. When he asked me if I wanted a race boat I agreed, naturally, and he bought one that could be converted to a larger class also. He bought me that boat. It was on top of a car—it was yellow and red—from Al Benson, Don Benson's and Jim Benson's dad.

OK, yeah.

Then he bought a five-horsepower Mercury from Al Molson, and I was so happy with all of that. It was Christmas. He said, "You have to walk down the street and look on top of Benson's car." So, I walked down and there that yellow

boat was. I was pretty excited about that. Then, when I got back to the house, he had a five-horse Mercury sitting there. He said, "This is also yours. It goes on that boat." I was so happy with that motor that I slept with it for about a week. It was in my bed with me. I never did race the boat for...it was probably at least six months, I think, before the season really started. And during that time, they had a Slough race up the Sammamish Slough.

Yeah.

We lived right on Lake Washington, down on Riviera Place. My father and two of his other water-ski buddies bought what they call a B Runabout. It was a 10-horsepower Mercury that would go on the same boat I was going to run the JU with, a five Mercury. He ran it up the Slough in the race and didn't make a corner, went up on the bank, and hit a tree. He didn't get hurt, but the boat did. He was not only embarrassed, but he

said, "You know what? I'm gonna leave the boat racing up to you. I'm going to stay with the water skiing."

I was actually really happy with that. Well, the boat wasn't the same after it was rebuilt. It was and it wasn't. I mean, it was really a big enough boat for that 10-horsepower motor, a little too big for the five, really. It wasn't that fast. So, Benson had another boat being built, that he was having built for his son Don. My father walked in and saw it. Ed Karelsen was building it. This was at Benson's shop on Lake City Way. He sold outboards and boats there. Anyway, dad bought that boat. It kind of upset Don because it was being built for him, but he got another one shortly afterwards. It just turned out that, unfortunately for Don, this happened to be a really good boat.

OK.

I didn't think it was gonna be as good as it was. It had a warp in the bot-

tom, which wasn't normal. I think it taught Ed a few lessons on building runabouts. What it turned out to be was concave in the bottom. When it got up to a higher speed it rode on, I would call it a "U" shape on the bottom. So, it was very little drag, and the boat was fast. I'm not sure that Jim and Don even know that. We did. My father and I did, but nobody else did. Anyway, I won so many races with it in JU and then we bought a seven-horsepower—dad did—and I ran AU with it, A Utility. I won everything with that. Same boat. We ran the two classes and I'd win almost every time.

Do you know when your first season was, what year you started?

I was eight years old when I first raced. I raced the yellow boat in that race and that was my first race on Green Lake. Very first race and I won it. You're supposed to be nine, but we didn't tell the truth on that one. I was big for my age.

You're not the only one who has done that.

Yeah, I'm sure. Anyway, there was myself and my father and at that age, you



Bob Carver Photos

Billy Schumacher driving his Christmas present, his first outboard runabout.

know, they told me how to start the race and do all this kind of stuff and I wasn't really sure if I knew how to do what they were talking about. But I did it and I soon learned that the inside lane was the best because a lot of the other kids, even at eight years old, or nine years old, that's

what they were, they didn't know how to corner their boats very well, so if you started outside of them you got pushed way out. So, I decided the inside lane was where I was going from now on, 'cause my intention was to win the race.

It all worked out well for me. Then one of my father's friends, Lin Ivey, who raced bigger outboards back then, he used to tow my father up the Slough in water-ski races. They'd win quite often; whenever that 460 he had started, they would win. Often times they started behind everybody but passed 'em before they got up to Sammamish. On the way back they usually led from the beginning to the end.

So, Lin told me, when I talked to him about racing, he said, "Start on the inside if you can, because it's not only the shortest way around but you can kind of leave the rest of the field behind you, what you want them to do." I always remembered that. And he said, "When you start your race, once you're committed to that start line, stay on it. Don't change your mind half-way there." You know, a lot of guys did that. They thought, "Oh, I'm early," and they'd back off. Well, as soon as they did that, you had 'em.

Yeah.



Billy Schumacher's personal collection

Schumacher competing in the 1955 Sammamish Slough race.



Bob Carver Photos

Schumacher at the controls of a B Stock Hydro.

Between him and Al Benson, I got pretty good at making the starting line on time.

Yeah.

We raced that particular boat for, I don't know, must've been at least five years. Won a lot. And then I did the hydros. My father bought an A Hydro and I raced that. It was a Karelsen boat also. It was copied after a Swift. Swift made hydros back then and they were pretty fast. The one I had wasn't quite as fast. The motor I had was good so we were able to keep up with most of 'em and with my starting on the inside and on the line all the time, I was able to win a lot of races with that, even though it wasn't that good of a boat itself.

Chuck Lyford back then raced A Hydro. His dad had a Jacobsen built for him. Jacobsen had a marina in Ballard [a district in Seattle]. They built that hydro and Chuck would win a lot of races 'cause that boat was really fast. He and I would battle constantly.

Some records in *Propeller* magazine show you and Chuck were back and forth, either you or he were first or second in a lot of races.

I tried to find some of the photographs for you. One of 'em was Lyford flipping' me off. [Laughter] I was ahead of

him and he couldn't catch me. One of the reasons, in that photograph, my throttle was completely shut and I'm looking back at him kinda laughing. You can see him flipping me off and I noticed his throttle was only half open. He must've hit a wave or something and it scared him somewhat. We were still pretty young, I think, 10 or 11 back then.

One boat we wanted to ask about, you had an AU called *Lil' Bill*. That's the one you were talking about, the Karelsen?

That was the Karelsen boat.

You were first in the Slough in '55.

Yeah. I was winning the year before that. That boat was so fast that they tried to disqualify it because it was two inches too short per the rules. So Karelsen opened the bow up on it and extended it two inches. Actually, I think he put four inches on it and brought it back together. So, if you know what the bow of a Fountain offshore boat looks like, the very front of it bows out a little bit and extrudes forward. I don't know if he got that idea from this boat or not. It was a weird shape.

We painted the front white because my father wanted to see that white nose come out of the turn first all the time. And it did, normally. But that year you were talking about in the Slough, that was with the boat with the white nose. Before that they wouldn't let me run it for a while because it was too short. So, we made it long enough and everything was fine.

Wouldn't let you run it in the Slough?

I had run a year before, or two years before, I don't remember, with the shorter version and I was leading. Screaming seven-horsepower motor. It had a very small non-trip on that boat, and in the



Bob Carver Photos

A young Billy Schumacher poses with his boat racing trophies in his family's backyard.



Bob Carver Photos

Slough you have to turn left and right...

Yeah.

...and I made a corner and the non-trip caught and it rolled upside down. I was inside the boat because my leg got stuck underneath the deck. Being young, you know, you get scared and with that situation I just ripped my leg out. It tore part of the boat out. But I got out that way and I was, you know, like everybody else, you're afraid of drowning.

Sure.

When I got out people were coming after me and they helped pull the boat up on the beach. But that year I would have won the race easily, but the problem I had with that whole thing was that the motor was full throttle when it went upside down and it got a gulp of water and it split the crankcase in half. So that was the end of that engine, and that was such a fast engine. I mean, it was better than anybody's.

Who was doing your engine work?

It was a stock motor. It just happened to be one the factory-made that was better than the rest. It still had the seal on the side. Mercury did that back then, so you knew no one had gotten into it, and it was stock. We got another one and it wasn't as good, and we kept changing cylinders and reeds and every other thing in it, carburetors, you name it. We got it up to within three or four miles an

hour of what the other one would do, but that was as good as we could get. But my A Runabout was so good that the engine on that would still win all the races. Unless I personally screwed up, I would win. Then I just graduated from that to bigger boats and faster boats and bigger motors.

There were a couple things we wanted to ask you about. Nationals were at Devil's Lake, Oregon, in '55.

Yeah.

You won the AU class.

JU and AU. And that was with the Karelsen boat.

You set a one-mile record in AU.

Yeah, it was 46, I think. It was 46 point something. I almost blew it over backwards, believe it or not, on the straightaway on that run. Had that not happened, it would have been probably 50 miles an hour instead of 46. We didn't try again. I think I ran another straightaway run a year or two later, but I was heavier, the boat was heavier, and we didn't up our mark any. But that stood for a while. I had the competition record in JU and AU as well.

In '56 in the Slough, you ran AU and Chuck Lyford was first and you were second.

In the Slough?

Yeah.

Lyford was probably right in there, yeah. Don

Driving Lil' Bill in the Sammamish Slough event.

"We painted the front white because my father wanted to see that white nose come out of the turn first all the time. And it did, normally."

Benson was probably right in there, too.

One of the more interesting things is you went to Cambridge, Maryland, in '56 for the Stock Outboard Nationals.

I don't remember who won AU, I thought I did.

It was Dean Chenoweth.

Dean Chenoweth did?

There was a photo in *Propeller* magazine of all the winners. You and Dean were standing next to each other.

Yeah, I remember that picture. I only had one trophy, that's right.

Did Chenoweth's driving impress you? Could you tell he was going to be a champion driver, too?

Oh, yeah. On the East Coast, Dean was the top-notch guy back then. At Devil's Lake he actually got a better start than I did and when I won the race, I had to go around him. It was the last turn before the finish line and I got up along side of him around the corner and just stayed within three or four inches of his boat. If he moved out, I moved with him. I just stayed right there. When we got out of the corner, I straightened up immediately and he didn't. So, mine took off when his was a little delayed taking off. I beat him across the line by maybe a boat length.

So, that was at Devil's Lake.

Yeah, that was Devil's Lake. It was the year after where he beat me. He had a very fast boat and, uh, I forget the name who built it. I think it was a Champion boat, but it was fast. I knew he'd be my competition.

At Cambridge you got a one-mile record in AU and a five-mile record in JU.

Yeah, that five-mile would be the competition record.

You and Dean maybe traded heat wins and he won on time, or something.

Could be. I know it was close. I know that same year Chuck Lyford and my family went up to Canada with our boats after Cambridge. I think Chuck won the A Hydro and I won the A Runabout. So, we won Canadian Nationals as well that year. I don't remember, quite



Billy Schumacher's personal collection

The champions at the 1956 National Stock Outboard Nationals in Cambridge, Maryland. The 13-year-old Schumacher is third from the left and on his left is a young Dean Chenoweth.

frankly, whether we raced the JU there or not. I do remember the AU win. I came in and my face and helmet were completely covered with bugs. There were these little gnat-like bugs out there and we just got covered with them.

Oh!

Those were fun times back then, in outboard racing. I went through nearly every class of outboard racing in my boat racing career.

Some people have noticed that drivers who ran both hydros and runabouts tended to be some of the best drivers. It wasn't because they liked to do more racing, but because they had to do a different style to handle a runabout compared to a hydro. Did you notice something like that?

Oh, yeah. I definitely think so. The runabout was my favorite boat. I really didn't like the hydros. They just laid on the water, in my opinion. The runabout was trickier to drive. It bounced around a lot more and it moved to your body weight.

You paid attention to what you're doing.

Exactly. They were more fun for me, and it was a bigger challenge, and I found the competition was a bit easier. You know, I would start occasionally in the B Runabout that I had later, back in the pack at one time or another, either a bad start, I was sleepin', or whatever. It became a real challenge for me to beat everyone from behind a little bit. I had more fun doing that.

We started getting into the C Hydro and D Hydro and all that kind of stuff. I wasn't as thrilled with that. I wanted a runabout. That was just more fun for me. But I knew that if I ever wanted to race limited inboards or even the Unlimiteds—and I thought about it back even at those young years—I knew I had to learn how to drive a hydroplane better than anything.

Yeah.

But I think the runabout taught me more about water and wind and all that kind of stuff and I had won so much back

then in those days that people would ask me to drive their boats.

This was still in outboards?

Yeah. We only had a couple of different boats, but I ran a lot of different classes, because of other people asking me to drive their boat. One race in Oregon I ran 11 different classes. They had a trophy for the driver that had the most points at the end of the race, regardless of how many classes you ran. So, between all the other classes and everything, I won hands down, needless to say. They had elimination heats, too, so it was like 22 heats or more of racing that I did that day.

Were you too tired to walk?

I wasn't tired at all. I'd bring it in to the inspection area and run back to the next boat. My father would pick me up and carry me to the boat so I wouldn't get my feet wet, because that was an extra few pounds of water.

In the smaller classes especially that really matters.

It made a difference. And so, that was quite an afternoon.

Yeah.

You know, we ran C Hydro and I got flipped out of several boats back in those days. Like the Karelsen AU boat that I had. We tried a B on it. That was a Champion Hot Rod back then. They were light weight and really fast. It was too much power for the boat. I barrel rolled it in Oregon and we decided it wasn't made for that much horsepower. I had a C Hydro that I ran, won a few races with it. It wasn't a great boat, but it was a real pretty boat. I loved the way it looked with a mahogany deck and everything. We tried it with a D on it and it wasn't built for a D. That was too much power for it, too.

Yeah.

I didn't flip that one, but I brought it in, told my father there's no way this boat will handle that motor. But it was fun making all those experiments, seein' what it would do. When I started racing B Runabout, this was a mahogany boat, too, we absolutely loved. They had

a Champion Hot Rod on it. You can see it's 1-R because we won more races than anybody with that.

High point.

When I first got that boat, I couldn't drive it. It was different than the Karelsen boat. In the Karelsen boat you leaned to the inside. With this boat you had to lean a very little bit to the right side because it had non-trips that would go up from both sides. If you leaned on the inside it just slid around the corner. If you leaned slightly to the outside it would bank around the corner.

Catch the non-trip.

I had the worst time learning how to do that. In fact, at one of the races I told my father, "I can't drive this damn thing." [Laughter.] And he said, "Would you be OK if I put one of the other drivers in?" This was built by a guy I think in Oregon that copied the Calkinscraft. I don't know if it was John Sanders or who it was, it might have been Sanders that did it, but he got in it and drove it perfectly. So, my father said, "OK, nothing wrong with the boat." He always said, "It's not the engine, it's the en-gineer." So, if it was Sanders, I talked with him at length about it and he told me how to drive it. I went out and practiced at the race until I could finally get it.

Once I got it, I got it really good. We won a lot of races with that boat. I loved it. The Champion Hot Rod was one of my favorites. It then became my favorite boat because it was even trickier to drive, but once you learned how to do it, you could do all kinds of things. I used to tell my father, "I can make this thing dance." It was really fun for me. And then when I'd get into the hydros, they were boring. [Laughter.]

In '58 you were first in the Slough in BU.

Yeah, I don't remember all the years. I knew I had won the Slough a few times.

And then in '59 you were first in the Slough again in BU, and you set course records in A Racing Runabout and B Racing Runabout.

Right. The Champion, we didn't modify it. The carburetor was modified and so we put alcohol through it rather than gasoline. It worked really well with the Champion. We didn't do anything else to it. A lot of the other guys did and what it did was made them unreliable, where mine was pretty reliable. It was a lot faster, and it would run really well. The A Hydro that I had that was modified by Al Benson, once it started, if it started, it was fast, too, but I had a heck of a time getting that engine started. It



Bob Carver Photos

Schumacher driving an A Stock Hydro.



Bob Carver Photos

Schumacher in the cockpit of *Dough Baby*, a boat that was previously owned by racing legend Bill Muncey and once named *Thrifty Chevalier*.

"It would run 105. We'd change propellers, we'd change motors, we'd do all kinds of different things. 105. ... We changed the sponsons, we changed everything we could think of changing and it was still 105."

would flood itself out. You couldn't get it going. But once it did, if it ever did, it was fast.

Well, in '59, you had a 280-class inboard, *Dough Baby*. Was that your first year in inboards?

Yeah, it was. It was Bill Muncey's boat. It was called *Thrifty Chevalier*.

Yeah.

He won a lot of races with a 266 in it. When we bought it, my father decided I should run a 280, 'cause I was new in the limited inboard class.

Not as fast as a 266.

Right. So Muncey put a stock motor in it and it went fast enough to where I was able to win races with it, on the West Coast, anyway. We had built a scoop over the carburetor so that I could run through roostertails if I needed to without slowin' it way down. People copied that after we did it because it worked really well.

Yeah.

It would run 105. We'd change propellers, we'd change motors, we'd do all kinds of different things. 105. You know, I had an A Hydro that was about the same way. It would run a certain speed and that was it. This 280 seemed to be that same way. We changed the sponsons, we changed everything we could think of changing and it was still 105. Sometimes 104. And, uh, you know, it came natural to me. Well, not bragging or being cocky or anything, it just did.

Well, it was something you wanted to do besides...

Yes. I had run thousands of races in out-

boards, going across starting lines. I had the starting line pretty much figured out. Even though this boat was faster, and I wasn't accustomed to it, I mean, the other boats seemed just huge to me, because I wasn't accustomed to seeing a boat that big next to me. I was a little bit afraid of it, quite frankly, but after I had driven it for a few races and won a few races it was, you know, if you start out front, beat 'em at the starting line, get to that first turn on the inside first, you're gonna win some races.

Oh, yeah.

And the other guys were a little faster, but not fast enough to catch me, so I would win quite a few times. We raced against Lyford again, and Chuck was pretty fast in his boat. Donnie Benson had another boat he was racing called the *Calypso* and that was a really fast boat. And then Mira Slovak had the *Wee Wahoo*. I had a photograph of Slovak, Lyford, and me at the starting line. We were maybe six inches difference in the starting line position.

It was really fun racing back then with those guys. We didn't win, dad and I didn't win all the races, but we won quite a few. We were national high-point, regional high-point with it a few years. Other people, because I did well with that, they'd ask me to drive their boats and so, that's how I wound up winning in the 136-class and also in the 225-class.

The 136 was a boat called *JJ and MM*.

Yes, it was a local boat.

And the 225 was *Miss Goodwin*.

Yes, Doug Whitley owned that.

You got helped a little bit in the 136 when Shorty Haggard, driving a boat called *Falcon*, was disqualified in the In-board Nationals on Green Lake.

We won a race on Green Lake, I think a couple times with that. It was a fast boat. It suited me just fine; it was light in the nose. It was almost like driving an outboard hydro only the engine was in front of you. The *JJ* and *MM* was a fast boat, and we would win a lot of races with it.

Do you remember who built the boat?

I don't know who built it, I really don't. But it was a fast boat. It was light on its feet, and you had to really watch it so you didn't blow it over. But it was good. I enjoyed driving that boat. *Miss Goodwin* was really fast also. It had a Studebaker.

225s were pretty fast boats.

Yeah, you know, it was faster than I drove it because it had a vibration somewhere in the steering wheel. If you drove it too fast the steering wheel would get about four inches thick, the vibration. That scared me. I didn't like that. Something was about to break, and I didn't want to be in it when it did. When I won the Nationals, I pushed it harder than I normally did. I had to, to get around a

guy that was in front of me. The boat was fast enough to do it. He got a better start than I did. I followed him around for a few laps and then when it came close to the end of the race I decided to go ahead and let it go. I only had one straightaway to worry about that way. I just put my foot down and let it happen. The steering wheel got real fat, but we just blew by him. It was that fast.

Wow.

There was a race also in San Diego with that boat and I like to tell this story because I was out testing it and Ron Jones was watching from the shoreline with my father. Ron Jones, Sr.

Yeah.

There was another guy that crossed over the course going slow and left a big wake. The *Miss Goodwin* would, every once in a while, cut out because it was starving for fuel or something. I was screaming down the straightaway and didn't see that wake. It cut out and slowed down because it ran short on fuel, right before that wake. So, I bounced over it OK. My father told me that Ron Jones said, "Did you see that? He saw that wake and slowed down and made it over that thing." They didn't know that I didn't do that. [Laughter.] I don't know, it could have been a disaster if it didn't cut out on

its own.

Yeah.

But that was also a fun boat to drive, because once again it was really light on its feet. My 280 was kinda glued to the water all the time, it just wouldn't get up there and do it. So, those boats were fun for me to drive. Soon, Chuck Lyford asked me to drive his 7-litre. I'm not sure why he did because he was such a good driver with it. He won the Nationals in 1960 also with the 7-litre, beating everyone that had these big, blown Chryslers.

Buddy Byers and several others were out there in their big, blown Chryslers and Chuck had a little drilled-out 405 Chevrolet with carburetors on it and just blew 'em off. And he did it because it was fast, light, and fast around the corners, where theirs would, what you call, hobbyhorse around. They'd go like stink down the straightaway and catch up to him but then they'd get to the turn, he'd blow 'em away again. After a while they just gave up. They couldn't catch him. It was a really good boat. I drove it for him in a few races and did well, because the boat was that good.

Before we get any more into the in-boards and the Unlimiteds, there were some outboard drivers who were prominent in those years that we'd like to ask you about. One was Chuck Hickling. He was racing a lot of outboards and inboard classes, too. Did he talk to you much, or did you get to know him?

No.

No?

I don't have a lot to say about that because I think for the most part Hickling drove boats that were in different classes than I was racing. So, we never really got together. We did a few times, and I didn't, quite frankly, find him that much of a challenge.

A guy who was real good was Hugh Entrop. Did you get to know him?

Hugh Entrop was excellent, and he was a brilliant guy that could make a boat go faster than almost anybody. And he did it, that's documented, just to watch



Bob Carver Photos

From the left, Mira Slovak in *Wee Wahoo*, Schumacher in *Dough Baby*, and Chuck Lyford.



Bob Carver Photos

Billy Schumacher receives a trophy from the Seafair Queen after an event at Green Lake.

him drive that D Hydro of his...I think it was an F Hydro, it was modified. It was a cabover boat and he sat up in the front of it and he was one of the first guys that tilted his outboard motor in, and we were always tilting them out to get the nose up and get it flying. He tilted it in, and I couldn't figure out why he was doing that. When he would get it up to a certain speed it would lift the back of the boat by being tilted like that, and so the boat was basically just flying in the air. I don't know the speeds they got back then with those F Hydros, but you could see when his boat got airborne in the back that he had about 10 to 15 miles an hour on everybody. He would just blow by 'em.

Wow.

And it was fun to watch. Every time he got in that boat I'd go to the shore and watch. I wanted to see that happen and it was really entertaining back then, and interesting to me how he could do that with an outboard. Most of 'em dragged the back end of the boat and, uh, not that one. It was fun to watch.

I raced against a lot of big names on the East Coast. One of 'em was a guy

named Bill Tenney, who had set a lot of records in his boats. He asked me to run his D Runabout at Devil's Lake in the straightaway to set a record. I did set it with his. I don't remember, it was '69 or something like that. It was in the '60s. That was a really quick boat, too, and once again I almost blew it over in the straightaway.

I was proud to drive his boat and to set a record was good, too, but once again it could have been a lot faster if I hadn't screwed up. I had a really great outboard career. In fact, I drove around the country for years with all the boxes of trophies after I moved away from home. My father wanted me to take those with me. I must've had four or five hundred trophies.

When we had the house on the lake, my father would put 'em on shelves. The top shelf would be first place, and then second place, third place, and so on. He had a lot of 'em at the bakery as well, and people would come in just to see the trophies and then, of course, buy some goodies while they were there. It was a lot of fun for me in the outboard days.

It definitely taught me how to drive the bigger boats, the inboards as well, especially at the starting line.

When you got into the inboards, did you drive much of the outboards still, or did you pretty much make a clean break of it?

I would call it a clean break. We had sold most all of our outboard stuff, because in the summer we would go to the inboard races, not the outboard races. We didn't use them, so we sold them, put all of our efforts into the 280s we had.

Talking about outboards again, I had a rather illustrious career also with tunnel boats. It was later. Everybody always said, "You're an Unlimited driver, how can you drive a tunnel boat like that?" They didn't know I spent 10, 12 years racing more outboards than anybody else ever did and had been across the starting line, you know, thousands of times.

In tunnel boats you didn't have a starting line like that, but I would call 'em a cross between an outboard runabout and an inboard hydro. It was kind of a cross, 'cause you sat up in the front like a cabover so it was fun for me and also a challenge at the same time. That part of my outboard career was a lot of fun.

In 1961, you had your first opportunity to drive an Unlimited hydroplane. You drove *Cutie Radio* at Coeur d'Alene. You were still involved with inboards at that time, is that right?

I still had a 280. In fact, I made the statement to my father, and one of the press guys overheard me, that my 280 was faster than that *Cutie Radio*. And that wasn't accurate. It might've been able to beat it all the way around the course. The *Cutie Radio* would go about, I think I finally got it up to about 135. The 280 went 104. So, it was faster, but it didn't corner well, and it didn't have any horsepower to speak of for an Unlimited.

Yeah.

So, it was a pretty big dog in the turns. I have photographs of that race

over there...

That was at Coeur d'Alene.

At Coeur d'Alene that show me in front in the first turn. And in the back you could see Muncey catching me, but I was ahead at the time. How I would up beating him to the first turn in that boat I have no idea, but I did. That was the end of it.

What was it like? You had to get qualified as an Unlimited driver.

Yeah, that meant a physical and meant also, I think, a few laps around the course where they decided whether you could or couldn't do it. You know, I had a lot of experience not only in outboards. How old would I be? In 1961, I was 19.

One of the youngest drivers ever.

Yeah, I think I was the youngest. And also the youngest guy to ever win a Gold Cup. That record still stands. But at 19, nobody really had a lot of confidence in me. Bob Miller did because he knew of my—owned *Cutie Radio*—he knew of my outboard and limited experience and my accumulation of victories. And so, he wanted to give me a try.

I remember running a lot of laps over there in that boat, in Coeur d'Alene, just learning how to qualify. Bill Muncey, because he sold us our 280, he was right there to help me with anything I needed, and also give me advice on what to do and what not to do. One of his advice things was to stay out of the way [laughter], which I didn't listen to because no one competitive wants to

stay out of the way.

Right.

I knew the boat wasn't fast enough to win, but I thought they could safely go around me, which they did. In that particular race all the other boats either crashed or conked out and we wound up with a third place out of it.

Coeur d'Alene tended to be kind of rough water.

It was. And it was Slovak and the *Exide* that crashed there.

Yeah, a couple years later.

Was it a couple years later?

Yeah. He took a pretty good hit.

Yeah.

You drove *Cutie Radio* in qualifying at Seattle and then resigned.

I think I resigned before then because I knew I wasn't gonna win any races. I didn't see it as being beneficial in helping my career, getting into Unlimiteds, and Dave Johnson asked me to drive his *Tool Crib* boat at Seattle. And so, I believe that's when I resigned from the *Cutie Radio*.

Yeah.

It was a faster boat and a little bit more fun to drive. It wasn't fast enough to win much of anything either, but it was faster than the *Cutie Radio*.

In 1961 they had the three races in one at Seafair. You were in the Queen's Trophy race, or whatever they called it. Bob Gilliam was in it in one of his *Fascination* boats. You finished second,

"Bill Muncey ... was right there to help me with anything I needed, and also give me advice on what to do and what not to do. One of his advice things was to stay out of the way, which I didn't listen to because no one competitive wants to stay out of the way."

Billy Schumacher during his first ride in an unlimited, the *Cutie Radio*, which he drove at the 1961 Diamond Cup in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.



if I remember right.

Yeah, I think I got second out of it. I might've won a heat in that, I don't remember exactly. I know that the gearbox kept coming loose. That was a concern of mine because it was sitting right in front of me. They'd have to tighten it up after every heat I ran it.

Watch your feet, or something.

There was some vibration going on in there and, you know, when you have a gearbox that comes loose every time you get in the boat, you worry about something happening.

Yeah.

I probably didn't drive it as hard as I could have, either, because of that. But I think between the *Cutie Radio* and the *Tool Crib* and my previous experience racing in outboards and inboards, between all of it, it contributed to [Bill] Schuyler asking me to drive the *\$ Bill*, which was a step up.

Did you have a long-range goal when you started getting to drive an Unlimited, at some point?

Yeah. At that point I wanted to do it. I wasn't sure. When I started winning a lot in limited inboards then I started thinking I want to do the Unlimited

class. I thought my real shot at it came with the *\$ Bill* because that was a fast boat when it ran.

Before we talk more about the Unlimiteds, in the 1962 Slough race you drove an unlimited-class outboard.

Yeah, that was a celebrity race, I believe. It was a runabout that a guy named Jack Leek put together.

OK.

He was in charge of OMC's racing division [Outboard Marine Corporation] and he heard that I was gonna go up the Slough with a disc jockey in a runabout that Jacobsen built. He was good friends with Jacobsen so the two of them got together and Jack brought out, I think it was a V-4 from the factory for that race. He had a lower unit on it that was really good.

He actually came down to the lake house that my father had, with a bunch of lower units and asked if I would put them on a boat to see if they were better than what they had been racing with. So, I spent a full day with Jack and my father at the lake down there exchanging lower units. He found out what he needed to find out and that was really fun 'cause I was testing parts for OMC

with Jack Leek, who was one of the fastest outboard guys you ever saw.

Yeah.

I think he ran an A Racing Hydro and whenever he got going, he would beat everybody hands down. That's how he wound up, with his engineering background and everything, being the head guy for OMC. Anyway, he came out with that engine for that Slough race. We didn't get it started as quick as some of the other guys, so I had to pass them in the Slough.

That's not easy to do.

No. We passed most of 'em before we even got up to the first turn, but there were a couple that were ahead of us by the time we got to Bothell, and I just blew by 'em. I turned around to look at the disc jockey 'cause he was sitting in the back and I was up in the front of that boat. His eyes looked like tennis balls. He was frightened to death. But we didn't hit anything, and I had to go close to shore a few times to get around people.

You know, back in the day in the early '50s Don Benson and I used to go up the Slough all the time in outboards. So, I knew where the shallow parts were and where they weren't. I knew where the sharp corners were and where they weren't. I knew that Slough really well. So, I would cut corners people normally wouldn't, because I knew it was safe to do it. But we won that race, too. I had an advantage with Jack Leek's motor. It wasn't fair, but it was an unlimited class, so there you have it.

Before we talk about *\$ Bill*, in '63 at Seafair you drove a 266 and 7-litre called *Challenger*. It was owned by Jack Colcock and Al Lyford.

Yeah, that was a boat Chuck Lyford won the Nationals with.

Yeah, and you won both classes that day, at Seattle.

I had some really good boats. Really good boats, and I would be ashamed of myself if I didn't win with those boats.

Well, Norm Evans was driving *\$ Bill*



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Billy Schumacher drove the *Miss Tool Crib* in the 1961 Seafair Queen's Trophy race in Seattle.



In 1963, Schumacher was hired to take the controls of the U-21 \$ Bill.

and after Seafair he was out and you drove it at Tahoe, '63.

Yeah.

The race was stopped because of weather. You didn't get much time in it.

No, the water was really rough. I remember the race really well, even though I was young. I have photographs of that. Bill Harrah had given the owners and drivers cards so you could drink and eat whatever you wanted. Of course, Schuyler put me up in a hotel room there at Tahoe, and it was a pretty big deal for me to be able to enjoy all of

that at a young age. I was only 22. The race, I don't know if you have ever experienced Lake Tahoe, but back in the '60s the water was crystal clear. It was beautiful. You could see the bottom 100 feet out.

I remember hearing about that.

But it would get rough. It was such a big lake that you'd get swells that you couldn't see. I got the best start with the \$ Bill and came down toward the first turn; hit one of those swells. The boat flew out of the water. I don't know how far I was in the air, but it felt like a long time. I was probably going 160 or better because Schuyler had a two-stage Allison in it.

OK.

It was fast enough when it stayed together to beat everybody, all the hotshots, Muncey and the *Bardahl* with Musson and all of 'em. It was fast enough to beat all of them, but it wouldn't stay together. It would blow up within a lap, and that's what happened as soon as I hit that wake. I would've been first to the first turn by probably six boat lengths, but it flew out of the water and the engine ... I had to duck, parts flyin' through the air. But it was fast.

When it over-wound while the propeller was in the air, it just blew that thing sky high. That happened to me

a couple of times with the \$ Bill, when it just blew up, because it had so much blower, manifold pressure, that it would just break it. So, Schuyler wound up going back to the single-stage that was more reliable. But it wasn't nearly as fast. Rolls Merlins would drive around me.

Yeah.

I was in Detroit and I beat Ronnie Musson to the first turn with the *Bardahl*, and he went around me in the turn. He waved at me, bye-bye. I looked at him and waved bye-bye back. And then he blew by me down the straight-away and I think one or two other guys did. I just couldn't keep up with it, and Schuyler had thought that I wasn't driving the boat well enough, so '64 was the last year I drove it. But it wasn't, in my opinion, wasn't driving it well enough, it wasn't fast enough. Then he had a fuel problem with it as well where it would cut out occasionally and then people'd go around me. But, nothin' I could do about it. I still got out in front and couldn't stay there.

Do you know why Norm Evans was out after Seafair in '63? Did he have a disagreement?

I don't know. Schuyler was the kind of guy where if you didn't win with his boat, he wanted somebody else to drive



"It [the \$ Bill] was fast enough when it stayed together to beat everybody, all the hot-shots, Muncey and the Bardahl with Musson and all of 'em. It was fast enough to beat all of them, but it wouldn't stay together."

it. It wasn't so much the driver, I don't think, as it was the boat.

Yeah.

So, I can't really say what happened with Norm, because I don't know. But I know that's what happened to me.

So, at the end of '64 did he tell you he didn't need you anymore, or...?

Basically, yeah. And, uh, I went back to limited racing.

You still had some of your limited boats?

Yeah, I had the 280 and I think I was still driving the 136, the *JJ & MM*. And I drove the *Challenger*, Lyford's boat, the *Challenger* in a few races. And I'd listen to the Unlimited races on the radio. And that's how we did it. Then, one glorious day, Jerry Zuvich, with the *Bardahl*, came to find me because Ron Musson wanted me to test drive the *Bardahl*. Musson was intrigued with me because I beat him to the first turn quite often, with boats that weren't fast enough to stay in front of him. So, he wanted me to drive that boat.

Now, which *Bardahl*, the cabover or...?

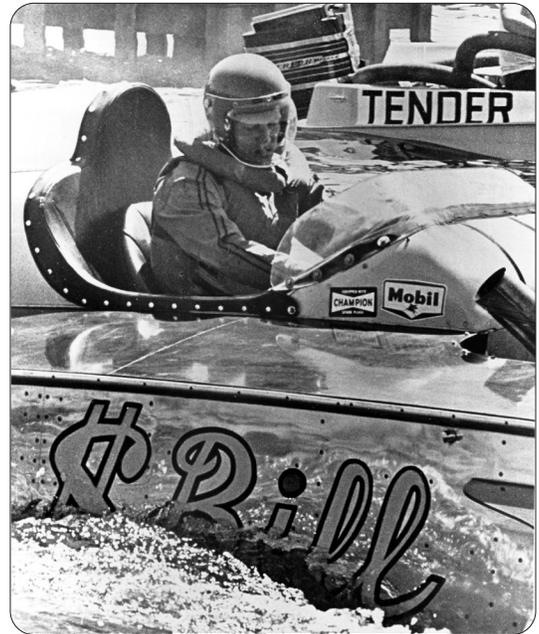
This was the cabover *Bardahl*.

Yeah, I understand you tested it.

Yes. And it did have a problem. I later found out what that problem was when I was driving the *Pay 'n Pak*.

Oh.

But we didn't know what the problem was and what he told the crew what was happening. It would get up to 155 to 160 and it would all of a sudden turn left. The boat would cock left. It wouldn't necessarily turn left, it would cock left.



Seattle Times/Josef Scaylea

It would start going that way, but it was kind of a scary experience. But it would drive wonderfully well before that happened.

Mmm.

It would take the speed of 155 to 160 before it would do it.

OK.

But the experience I had with the *\$ Bill* beating Musson to the first turn quite often is what got me the driving job with the *Bardahl* as it turned out.

So, after Musson's accident at the President's Cup, did you know that Ole might be talking to you for the next season, or...?

Well, I had a good indication, because Musson wanted me to test drive the boat that he was eventually killed in. He made it quite clear that he was planning to retire that year and have me drive the boat.

Oh, wow.

And he didn't like it. He simply didn't like that boat. And I did. I knew it had a problem but...

Was that problem fixed?

No.

No?

I don't think it had been, but that isn't what caused the accident.

But could it have been fixed if the boat had stayed together longer?

Don't know. The same thing happened to me. I'll jump from a little bit to the *Pay 'n Pak*. The

RIGHT: Billy Schumacher brings the *\$ Bill* back to the pits during the 1964 Seafair Trophy Race in Seattle.
BELOW: Schumacher takes the U-21 *\$ Bill* onto the Lake Washington racecourse.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

same thing was happening to me with that boat. It was about 160, about the same thing. When I got thrown out of the boat in Miami, we discovered what the problem was. I got thrown out because the keyway in the rudder system broke.

Oh.

And it would turn left. We put wings on the boat and did all this other stuff and some of the crew thought I was just afraid of the boat and all that, but it would turn left at that 155, 160 speed without turning the wheel.

What was happening was that the rudder would move when it got up to that speed, even though they would tighten the bolts on the top of the rudder as tight as they could get it and put the wing nuts and all that so it wouldn't come loose. There was a little slot in the keyway. So, when you got up to that speed the rudder would move that little bit. That's what made the *Bardahl* and that's what made the *Pay 'N Pak* turn.

Mmm.

They told me in Miami, with the *Pay 'N Pak*, just drive through it. Well, sure, from the beach it's easy to say that.

Yeah.

But in the heat of the day, I wound



Bob Carver Photos

Schumacher tested the new cabover *Miss Bardahl* before the 1966 season. Ron Musson was killed driving the boat in the season's second event.

up doing it because Chenoweth was challenging me in the *Budweiser*, or whatever boat he was driving. I think it was the *Budweiser*, I don't know for sure. But I didn't want him to do that, so I put my foot all the way into it, even past the point where it turned left, and it started to, it went through it OK until I got to the turn, or close to the turn when you decelerate.

As soon as I decelerated it took the pressure off the rudder and it started to vibrate violently, and I experienced what the 225 did. The steering wheel got

really fat. The next thing I know I was in the air. I saw the stadium in Miami in my eyes and I thought, "Oh, it's been a short life." That's what I remember thinking. That's the last thing I remember until I woke up in the water, face down. But what happened was that I drove through that point and then it vibrated enough on deceleration to shear the keyway.

And so, when you decelerate and the keyway is no longer holding the rudder, it moves and the boat stuck on its side, threw me out, and did a complete loop in the air. Tore a big notch in the back of my helmet, which basically knocked me out. My gloves, or at least one glove, was still in the boat. That's how quick I left.

Wow.

When it stuck sideways like that at that speed and spit me out. Steve Montgomery, I believe, still has that helmet. I gave it to him way back when. I think he still has that helmet with the notch in the back of it. But, anyway, the *Pay 'N Pak* taught me what was wrong with the *Bardahl*. Of course, you can't prove that at this point but the same, the exact same thing happened so I'm sure that's what the problem was.

Yeah.

It's not what caused the accident with Ron Musson. No one is really sure



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Schumacher in the cockpit of the new *Miss Bardahl* in 1967.



Eileen Crimmin



Sandy Ross Collection



Byron Lang

TOP: Schumacher fires up the engine on the brand-new *Miss Bardahl* to start a test run.
MIDDLE: From the left, Schumacher, race promoter Phil Cole, and team owner Ole Bardahl.
ABOVE: The *Miss Bardahl* was given a black and yellow checkerboard paint job in 1968.

if he hit a piece of wood in the water or what, but one of the blades came off the propeller and that's what caused what happened to him. It ripped the strut out of the bottom of the boat. The shaft turned into, it looked like a pretzel. When the strut came out of the boat it went upside down and the water hit that and blew the back of the boat up, which made it nosedive. They don't know if it happened from the blade coming off or whether he hit something. They don't know, never will.

Well, in '67 you got the offer to drive *Bardahl*.

Your initial question was whether my driving the *Bardahl* is what led Ole Bardahl to ask me. I believe it did. I believe Ron Musson telling him he wanted me to be his replacement is why he picked me. We went over to watch the race in Tri-Cities. He asked me what kind of boat he should buy.

Oh.

I told him that I didn't think he should buy one, I thought he should build one. The question was, who should build it? I suggested Ed Karelsen because what I wanted him to build, and he agreed to, was a copy of the *Bardahl* that Ron Musson won everything with. That was such a fast boat that I thought we should build something like that. But the *Challenger*, the 7-litre that I drove for Lyford, had a full non-trip on the side. The Unlimiteds back in those days had a flat side with the non-trip in the back.

That's where they painted the name, on the flat side.

I think there were a couple of boats built like that before the *Bardahl*, I don't recall, but I think I've seen photographs of them. We did it like the *Challenger* was, the 7-litre, because I liked the way that boat cornered, and you had zero chance of the side of the boat catching a wave and flipping you over.

So that's what we did. Ole had Ed Karelsen build it 'cause I had a lot of confidence in Karelsen. And Karelsen was, among his other talents of being

a great boat designer and builder, he also was a great copycat. He could copy about any boat out there. And I knew that, and I wanted him to copy the *Challenger* side and put it on the *Miss Bardahl* exactly with the lift that it had, the sponson depth that it had, the sponsons themselves, all of it.

And he did it successfully with Ole Bardahl watching every move that he made. And Ole did do that, 'cause Karelsen would use screws and staples and all that kind of stuff, and nails. Ole Bardahl wanted screws almost every time.

Ahh, OK.

So Karelsen would be putting a nail or a staple into something and Ole'd say, "No, no, no, no. I want a screw." So that's the way it was built. It was built well. And it worked out right from the get-go.

It did rock over on its nose right at the beginning and I wasn't sure what was causing that, but I could tell it was doin' it. Jerry Zuvich and Ed Karelsen figured out what it was. Then, you know, I always kinda wondered if it was built exactly like the *Bardahl*, why it did that. What they did to fix it was lengthen the flat area of the sponson runner. It was only four or five feet long and they made it longer. Jerry could tell you, but I think it was over six inches longer being flat. That cured the problem. It didn't go over on its nose anymore.

We knew the boat was gonna be good when we went to Florida for the first race. I was pretty nervous, and I can tell you all about that race, but the water was so rough that I didn't really push the boat as hard. I wasn't going to kill myself in the first race in the *Miss Bardahl*.

That was in Tampa.

It was in Tampa, yeah. But as the season went along the boat turned out to be the boat that we expected it to be.

So, they made those little changes during the season to get the handling...?

No, that sponson change was...we tested the boat when it was brand new

off of Sand Point.

OK.

We christened the boat in Seattle. Then we didn't run it very much there. When we ran it at Sand Point, we pushed it to see what it would really do. That's when we found that it rocked over on its nose. So, after that was fixed, we didn't do anything else to the boat.

OK.

We made a lot of engine modifications and changes because that's the way they did it with the *Bardahl* back then. They had high-dome pistons, and they had several. You could pick from two different-sized, high-dome pistons. Depending on the racecourse and competition and a few other things we would decide which engine we would use.

So, they built engines specifically for a certain racecourse, then.

Yeah, because the high-dome would give you more acceleration. It also gave you more manifold pressure, which, you know, was a danger point for blowin' rods out of the side of a Rolls Merlin.

Yeah.

So, you had to be careful what you did then. At small racecourses I'd pick the high domes. The medium-sized course, or a long-straightaway course, I'd pick the middle of the road high-dome. And then for the racecourses like Seattle where you ran a big ol' course, we ran the stock pistons, 'cause you didn't need that acceleration.

You needed the higher speed.

Yeah. So, we had tricks up our sleeve that we used, as well as different propellers, but the boat stayed the same. We didn't change it at all.

Everyone was starting to use nitrous oxide by that point, too.

Yeah. They had used that.

Three or four years before.

Yeah, and we were fortunate to have Dixon Smith who came up with that whole trick. Brilliant man. To have him on our crew; if anything went wrong with the nitrous system, you know, we

got it fixed immediately. And I think we probably had the best system of anybody as well. We enjoyed a lot of that. You know, later in my career I wished I had three or four bottles of nitrous rather than just two, because I'd use it all up.

At first, they were saying just coming out of the turns you use it for a quick blast, but later they were on it almost through the whole race.

Well, they'd use it a lot down the straightaway and stuff, too. But I was the one that really learned how to use it in the turns.

Mmm.

Kinda by accident. I got on the button in the corner. It really made the boat react. And I thought, wow, that's good. You know, if you drive it right, that could be a good thing.

That was in the *Bardahl*?

No, that was in the *Weisfield's*.

Oh, OK.

No, I only used it coming out of the turns in the *Bardahl*. And sometimes down the straightaway if I needed to. But I never thought of using it in the turns. I mean, people would think that you'd spin the boat out or flip the boat or something. Then when we found out that it worked really well in the corners, I was blowin' everybody away until they figured out what I was doing.

Well, you won the Gold Cup both years, '67 and '68, and you were national champion both years.

Yeah, you know, in '67 the boat cornered so well with that full non-trip that I could beat most of 'em because of that.

Yeah.

I just knew I didn't have to go as fast as the rest of 'em down the straightaway. I wasn't a guy that was totally thrilled with going fast. I wanted to go fast enough to win the race, that's all.

Right, yeah.

In fact, that full-length non-trip saved me in Madison, Indiana, in '67, 'cause I got a terrible start in one of the heats and went across the starting line probably in last place. But I had the in-



Schumacher drove the *Miss Bardahl* to a second-straight national title in 1968.

side. I was close enough to where they couldn't really legally cut me off. So, I went into the turn in last place and came out in first place. The reason that happened was in the middle of the turn I hit a swell, which was what you normally hit in Madison, Indiana.

Yeah.

And the boat, instead of makin' the normal arc around the corner, hit that swell and dug in and went immediately to the left. Well, those turns are sharp in Madison.

Oh, yeah.

So, it didn't flip over, but it went immediately to the left and I'm looking at the exit buoy where normally I'd be way out of line with it because of the tight turns. I'm looking right at the exit buoy and had to actually turn to the right a little bit to get around it. I just hit the nitrous and blew out of that corner. So, I went in in last and came out in first. I think it was Evelyn [Bardahl] was telling my father once again, "Look at how he made that corner." What they didn't know was it was a total accident and I almost killed myself in that corner.

But it worked out really well in my favor and needless to say we won that

heat and won the race, too. The boat cornered really well. In fact, I had a lot of confidence in that ability in the corners after that. And that was, I think, only the second race of the year. It could have been the third 'cause Detroit might've been in between, I'm not sure, but we burned up the wiring in Detroit, so we didn't get to race.

That was one of the races we lost that year. The only other one was in Kelowna, B.C., where I wasn't tough enough on my competitors. I was ahead and the *Budweiser* with Mike Thomas driving it, was a friend and I could've cut him off and I didn't because of it. I figured I'd win the race anyway 'cause I was in front, but in the last lap the engine broke.

I wound up finishing second to him, because the engine still ran. Ole would tell you it's because of the Bardahl oil. It still finished. I was able to finish that half-a-lap with rods stickin' through the side of the motor, but I wasn't able to beat the *Budweiser*. He did get around me. He might not have been able to if I had the inside and cut him off like the crew wanted me to.

Yeah.

Those were the only races that year we lost, and in 1968 I was pretty confident in the boat winning again like it did in '67, but I didn't expect the competition that I had, and they caught me with my pants down, so to speak. They were beating me at the starting line. In order to get the inside lane, they had it figured out. I had to get there early. They're taking a second or third lane at a faster speed, would beat me.

They weren't as critical on cutting people off back then. I got cut off a lot in the first turn. So, it was really a tough year for me that year and it was one of those years, too, where I wasn't as sharp on the starting line as I normally was.

And, you know, that happens to drivers. You go through times when, I don't know if it's cockiness or laziness or what it is, but you're just not as good as you normally were. And that, '68, they caught me when I wasn't prepared for them, and I didn't do as well as I did in '67. We still won enough races to win everything. And Colonel Gardner getting killed in Detroit wasn't good.

Yeah.

I was figuring I could beat him and *Budweiser* even if I didn't start bet-

ter than they did and that was kinda the wrong mindset to go in. They were fast enough to where I needed to get a better start than I was getting. It turned out that I was able to beat *Budweiser* even though he had a better start than I did in the final heat, but it was a tough year. We still had enough points to get the national title that year.

The paint on the boat was changed from yellow to checkerboard in '68.

Yeah. There was a fellow named Dan Bolls that worked with John von Neumann in California, and von Neumann owned Volkswagen in Southern California. Well, Dan Bolls talked him into using *Bardahl* in his program with Volkswagen and that was worth a lot to Ole *Bardahl*.

So, Ole paid him a handsome commission and also hired him because of his sales ability. Dan was a pretty bright fellow and one of his things to Ole was to bring the airplane racing and Indy car racing and the boat racing together. His way of doing that was to paint all three vehicles in the same way, with checkerboard.

OK.

I personally didn't like it, because the *Bardahl* in '67 was so successful with yellow. There's a little superstition that goes along with driving boats and I think it does with cars, too. And I wasn't totally free from that. I had some things that I did on a regular basis and I felt it wasn't good luck if I didn't do that.

There were a few things that I did do. And the one thing that I also liked was the yellow boat that *Bardahl* had in '67. So, when that was changed, the yellow and black checkerboard, it was a change I didn't particularly like. As it turns out, it was a really popular color scheme with everyone. It did show up on the water extremely well.

Yeah.

It probably was the most popular *Bardahl* boat ever. And that was a pleasure for me to be able to drive it. In my racing career from beginning to end the

most success I ever had racing, I think, was with the *Bardahl*. This *Bardahl*. It was a fun boat for me to drive. I had a lot of fun boats to drive but that was one of the most fun because I felt like I could drive it better than anybody else could drive their boat. I had a hand in designing it and I had a hand in winning the first race with it, and it just grew from there.

Well, after '68 Ole pretty much got out of it. He came back for two races at the end of '69. You didn't drive that time.

No, I was a little bit insulted because after winning that for him with *Bardahl* when I drove it, Musson won a lot of races with him as well, but in the short two years that I drove the *Bardahl* I think I won more than anyone else ever did for Ole *Bardahl*. To ask me to drive it for free the following year was an insult to me. I just wouldn't do it. Refused to do it. I stayed out of racing in '69 and then I talked to Laird Pierce about *PARCO*. That's what got me into the *PARCO* racing. But that's why I didn't drive the *Bardahl* in 1969.

Fred Alter drove *Bardahl* in '69.

Yeah, they selected Fred Alter for one reason or another.

Did you go back to inboards at all, or did you stay on the beach?

I didn't race. I was living in Los An-

geles. That was close to Laird Pierce and the *PARCO*. So, I had many conversations with him. But I didn't race. It was tough for me. I listened to all the races on the radio. I went to the race in San Diego because I was there, in Los Angeles. I think I even came to the race in Seattle. I didn't see the *Bardahl* do very much that I'd be proud of. And I knew that Ole was planning to retire anyway. So that had an influence on my decision as well.

Yeah.

I didn't want to just race two races, especially not for free.

***Bardahl* didn't have any intention of going east with the boat in '69?**

No, I don't think so. He had sold the sales rights to a fellow named Jules Berman who at that time had *Kahlua*, had brought *Kahlua* to the United States. So, he made a lot of money in his own field, and he made a deal with Ole *Bardahl* to buy the sales rights for the United States. He didn't have any interest in racing, not boats, not cars, not airplanes.

And Ole was the kind of person that said, "Well, the heck with you, then," to put it kindly. "And I'm not gonna pay for the racing if you're not going to participate in it." So, he didn't. He got talked into it by family, I think,



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

After taking the 1969 season off, Schumacher drove the brand-new *PARCO O-Ring Miss* in 1970.

and crew, and others, to race the boat in those two races.

That's when I was asked to drive it, but no. Had I driven it for nothing it wouldn't have helped my career later, and I wasn't gonna do it. So that's what happened there. It was hard for me to stay out of it, but even more difficult than that was what happened to me in the *PARCO*.

Yeah, Karelson boat, you would have thought it was going to be a real good boat.

Right.

Like Bardahl, but it wasn't there.

No, and I can tell you why.

OK.

We had Jack Cochran building the engines, who built the one for Dave Heerensperger when he raced with Colonel Gardner.

Yeah.

Having been beat by Colonel Gardner a couple of times when I was driving the boat of my dreams, um, I thought he had some really good engines then. So, I was really happy to be racing with Jack Cochran. And Laird probably had a dozen Rolls Merlins sitting on the floor, as many I think as anybody had at that time. Jack had rebuilt most of them.



Randolff Rout

Schumacher and *PARCO O-Ring Miss* in action during the 1970 season.

Those that weren't rebuilt were fresh.

Wow.

So, I had a stable that I thought was really prepared, and real proud of the crew. We had Gary Crawford who was on the *Bardahl* crew. I was pretty confident. Then Laird said, "What boat do you want?" just like Ole Bardahl did. And I said, "I want a copy of the *Bardahl*. If we get a copy of the *Bardahl* we're gonna win some races." So, we ordered a copy of the *Miss Bardahl* from

Ed Karelson. And unbeknownst to both Laird and myself, Ed had a new shop that wasn't wide enough...

That's the one on Roosevelt Way?

...on Roosevelt Way...

Yeah.

...to build a copy of the *Miss Bardahl*. So, we didn't know, but he built it narrower. I think it was as much as 12 inches narrower.

That's a lot.

You know, where that was cut back was in the center section. In other words, it wouldn't get enough air under the boat. He made other changes, too, that I wasn't really happy with. It was a Karelson boat, it was built like the *Bardahl*, except it was narrower and it wasn't built out of wood like we asked. A lot of it was aluminum. He convinced us later that that was the way to go. It still had some wood in it, but he bought aluminum. That wasn't the real problem, the real problem was it wouldn't get enough air in it. There was nothing, absolutely nothing you could do to that boat to make it go fast.

Yeah.

I nearly got killed in it in Washington, D.C., because I was pushing the boat as hard as it would possibly go. Down the straightaway it would just



Rich Ombrek

With Schumacher in the cockpit, *PARCO* crew members are perched on the deck of their boat as several spectators watch.

jump up and down. It wouldn't hold the air. I got to the first turn first with Muncey on the right side, as they used to say on my hip. Fortunately, it was him there, because when I got to the turn it went up on its side. The water came off the deck and slapped me in the face and I don't remember much of anything until it came back down. I didn't do it. It came down on its own.

I'm sure it was that full non-trip that did it again. But the boat made a right-hand turn when it did that in the corner because the rudder was out of the water. And Muncey had to turn immediately to the right in order to avoid hitting me. It would have been an accident like happened in Washington, D.C. between *Notre Dame* and *Budweiser*. He'd have run right over me. Fortunately, it was Muncey there that made that turn.

We wound up in second place behind Muncey. I think we got another second in Detroit with the boat. But it was a handful to drive. It wouldn't go down the straightaway. It hopped. It did

all kinds of weird things. And I didn't know what to do. We brought Jerry Zuvich in to help 'cause he basically was the one that fixed the problem with the *Bardahl*. I thought maybe he can fix this until we discovered that it was the narrow tunnel. And you can't fix a narrow tunnel.

No, it is what it is.

And other people bought that boat afterwards, they couldn't do anything with it. Nothing could be done with that boat.

Yeah.

It was a shame, because we had a really good opportunity. We had a lot of boat races that year and had that boat run like the *Bardahl* boat did, we would have done it. The craftsmanship and everything was wonderful in it, like Ed's boats, but there was a mistake in that boat. Unfortunately, it didn't work out for Laird or myself.

Yeah.

It took me a while to get another driving job. I was trying while I was

driving that boat. I didn't like it, didn't want anything to do with it after a while.

Yeah.

Dave Heerensperger and I finally got together with the *Pay 'N Pak*.

After the 1970 season, did you know you were going to have the *Pay 'N Pak* ride the following year?

I have a shortness of memory when it comes to 1971. I don't know if I raced.

Yes, you won the last few races.

Oh, that was with *Pay 'N Pak*.

Yeah.

That's right, that was *Pay 'N Pak* year.

And in '72 you raced until Madison and quit because of the debris in the water.

Right.

But in '71, Jim Lucero was crew chief. How was he for you to work with?

Fabulous.

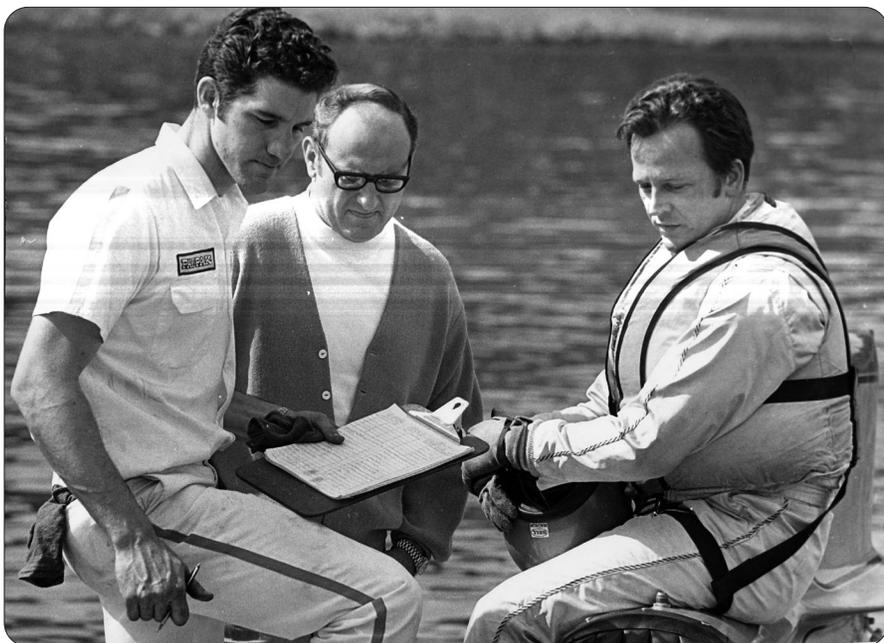
Yeah?

With the *Bardahl* I had to watch the manifold pressure constantly. Of course, a lot of that was our high-dome pistons. We built quite a few engines in 1968 and



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Billy Schumacher joined Dave Heerensperger's race team in 1971 as the pilot of *Pride of Pay 'N Pak*.



Greg Gilbert

The *Pride of Pay 'N Pak* team in 1971, from the left, crew chief Jim Lucero, team owner Dave Heerensperger, and Billy Schumacher

that accounted for a couple of races that I lost, too. Once again, that year my starts weren't the best and I'll admit it, but I felt I had a good enough boat to pass anybody anyway. And I did. But we broke engines because of my pushing the boat harder than I should have, but I felt they were gonna live like they did in '67, and then unfortunately, they didn't.

We blew up a few. Mostly manifold pressure, I think, that caused a lot of that. When I got to the *Pay 'N Pak* with Jim Lucero, I said, "How much manifold pressure should I look for, and where should I stop?" He said, "Manifold pressure? I don't want you to even look at the gauge. Just stare at where you're going and win the race."

Mmm.

"I don't want you to even look at the gauges." He said, "You can do that during testing and let me know what's going on but forget it in the race." And you know what? In my whole career with *Pay 'N Pak* and Jim Lucero, I don't remember breaking an engine. I don't think we broke one single engine.

I don't think you did.

I was able to put my foot on the

floorboard I don't know how many times and leave it there and use the nitrous before two laps were over. And never break an engine. Totally amazing to me, even to this day. I'm amazed at that. And you know, my accident with that boat set us back a few paces. It was turning left at 155 miles an hour, and that's what caused that, because of the keyway in the rudder.

It took me a while to build confidence in it again. One of the races that year that I did win, in Dallas, I was going to the first turn testing and there's a rockery. It was at the first turn, so if you didn't make the turn you were gonna be in the rocks.

Oh, yeah.

I got down to that turn and turned for the corner and the steering wheel wouldn't turn. It locked up. What happened was a bolt came out, vibrated out of the steering system, and when I went to turn it hit the frame in the boat. It wouldn't do anything. It turned to the right but not to the left. So, I'm going pretty fast into that first turn and when that happened, I just turned off all the switches I could see and held on to the steering wheel and got up onto the

deck, ready to jump off if I had to. But it stopped before the rocks. After my experience in Miami where I almost got killed, to have another steering problem happen in the same year, that was a big concern to me.

Sure.

I lost confidence. I really did. I lost confidence in the boat and some of the people working on it. Not mentioning any names, but it should have been corrected. Those things should not have been happening. So, all of that led to kind of an ill feeling between crew and driver.

And, you know, when the water was horrible in Madison [in 1972], I mean to the point of seeing tires and cows, stuff floating down the river—the river was dark brown, the buoys were laying on their sides from the current and you could see logs coming down. To race on that, I just said no. The rest of the drivers in the evening said no along with me. So, when race day came, they all said, "OK, I'll do it." Except me, I said no.

Yeah.

After the race when Sterett didn't get killed, or nobody else got killed from hitting anything, there was some boat damage and stuff but nothing serious happened, then the crew started thinking that I was just afraid of the boat. After the race, that upset me to the point that I just got in my motor home and drove away.

Mmm, yeah.

I wasn't very nice about it, but I figured the next race was a week or two away and they could find somebody else. I should have gone to Heerensperger or Lucero and said, "Look, I've had enough of this and I'm not gonna do it anymore," but I didn't. I just drove away. So, they hired Bill Sterett, Jr., to drive the next...

He finished off the season.

You know, they won that race, I heard. I wasn't there, but I heard the boat was completely out of shape many

times, but he drove it hard enough to win. They were pretty proud of that fact that they won it. I wasn't drivin' it. So, there were some pretty bad feelings between Heerensperger and me.

Yeah.

Actually, and Lucero, for a while.

To back up just a little bit to 1971, that was the year *Madison*—you were still coming off your accident in Miami—won the Gold Cup on their home water and then they won at Tri-Cities, the next race.

Yeah.

In Seattle you won, and you won a race in Eugene, and then Dallas. You finished off the season winning three races. Except for that incident in Dallas, things seemed to be better in '71, the end of the year.

Yeah, the boat was faster. We had tried different skid fins and made it corner better. It was a goal of mine to set the course record in Seattle in qualifying, which we accomplished. Just barely, but we did it. I started liking driving it again. It was a fast boat that I could use the engines as hard as I wanted to use 'em and I didn't have to worry about breaking 'em. That helped a lot, too.

I felt like we had something really going there. But, I don't know, things happen in racing

that you don't expect. That thing in Miami really was an experience, you know. Going back to your thing about the *Madison* race and Tri-Cities, I think Jim McCormick got on a roll. They had, with that *Madison* boat, they had put nitrous in it. I think I could have actually won that Gold Cup, but he was faster than I expected him to be, and, uh, legitimately won the race.

Yeah.

I couldn't really go much faster. I think I could've made a better start or something where he didn't get the jump that he got and, uh, done better. It could've been driver error as much as anything but, my hat's off to the way Jim McCormick drove the boat, and they had nitrous in it. He drove the pants off that boat, and it showed. Once you're on a roll like he was in winning the Gold Cup in *Madison*, he showed everybody it wasn't an accident and he did a really good job.

During those years—this is kind of an overview question—a lot of fatal accidents were happening. Were you worried about that being a possibility for yourself in racing as well? This is a dangerous game...

Constantly.

...can I survive this and still have fun?

That was mostly on my mind in the *Bardahl*

"I had a bucket of Bardahl that I would sit on in the truck, away from everybody, and I would just think about what I was gonna do and how I was gonna do it. How I was going to be concentrating on what I needed to do to win. Period."

The *Pride of Pay 'n Pak* heads out onto the Columbia River at the Tri-Cities, Wash., in 1971.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

days, because of what happened to Ron Musson and others in those years. I had a bucket of Bardahl that I would sit on in the truck, away from everybody, and I would just think about what I was gonna do and how I was gonna do it. How I was going to be concentrating on what I needed to do to win. Period. That was my goal. And I wasn't the most friendly guy in the world on my way to the boat when it came time to race. In other words, people needed to just get out of my way. I didn't want a slap on the back, a slap on the hand. I didn't want anybody saying anything to me. I was just tunnel-vision down to the boat and got in it.

Yeah.

I didn't even want crew guys sayin' anything to me. I'd been on my bucket and I knew what I was gonna do, and I was thinking about it the entire time. I was very thankful to come back in one piece after every race.

A couple of times you were pretty lucky.

Yeah, that went through my, uh, I was lucky, probably, in my career, talking about Unlimiteds only, probably four or five times. And that's what really led me to quit when I quit, at 36 years old. You know, that's pretty young today, but my thought was one of these times my luck's gonna run out.

Yeah.

There were several times when it was out of my control, and I was just flat lucky. And so, there was a lot more I wanted to do in life other than race boats. That's when I decided to quit. Those people who got killed were on my mind a lot.

Like every driver you think, well, if I'm watching my p's and q's, I'm gonna get through it OK where they don't. We just think that. I still concentrated on every effort that I did to be safe about it, about the dangerous sport I was in. As safe as I could be and still do well. So, yeah, it was on my mind a lot. And you know, it's tough when you see people, I mean, there were a couple of times when people got killed where I actually knew something was gonna happen. You just know.

Yeah.

In a couple instances I could tell that the driver's not thinking clear. Just wasn't thinking clear. The only thing on their mind was to win at any expense. That was never a problem with me. I did not have that attitude. I just knew that was not a healthy attitude, something could possibly happen. And it did. So, yes, it was on my mind constantly.

Well, after you resigned from Pay 'n Pak in '72, you got into the tunnel boats.

Yes.

That was a different type of racing.

When I left [Madison], I drove directly to California 'cause I enjoyed living there. I convinced my wife at the time, Cyndee, to live there with me. She thought that would be great. Sunny California and all that. So that's what we did. Ron Jones found out I was there—Ron Jones, Sr.—and he had built a tunnel boat



that people didn't like driving, and called one day and asked if I'd test it. He said a fellow named Rick Keller owned the boat. He was from Yorba Linda, California, which wasn't far from where I was living. I lived in Marina del Rey at that time.

A friend of mine built Scarab offshore boats. So, he and I were playin' around with that. I almost became a partner with him, and I wish I had, but I didn't. I was messing around with offshore boats and then when Jones asked me to drive that tunnel boat, I did, at Lake Elsinore. I came back and reported to him that it was an extremely tricky boat to drive and that it wasn't one of my favorites to drive.

Keller told me, "Well, we can get another boat 'cause I'd like you to drive for me." He was going to get another boat after we raced this one, the Jones boat. So that concerned me a little bit because when you get in the heat of a race you drive with more, harder than you should in most cases in order to win. I knew that was a possibility.

The first race we were in was in Arizona with that boat. I got to drive it second. We had two drivers. It was a long race. He'd drive for an hour or two and then I would and then he would, and so on. So, he got the first time. In his first run at it he crashed the boat and broke it. So that was the end of that

boat. I never did race it, didn't have to race it. Rick Keller bought another tunnel boat. It was a Scottie, which was one of the popular boats back then.

Yeah.

We were not a factory team, but Jack Leek who ran the factory was a friend of mine. I had done work for him on his lower units, as I mentioned earlier. He was watching me quite carefully, and I beat the factory team several times with the Keller boat that was not factory-supported. Jack noticed all of that. I think I won five or six races that first year with Keller.

My first race was at Lake Havasu. I don't know how many boats there were, but close to a hundred boats and we wound up third. At the end of the race I had learned how to drive it well enough where I was gaining on everybody about 15 seconds a lap. Had the race gone on another 10 laps I'd have won the race. We wound up third and I was real close to getting second. Just one more lap and I'd have been in second. So, you know, Jack Leek noticed that right away, too. So, I wound up driving for him in Paris. And we wound up winning that race in Paris.

That was a big race in those days.

Biggest, yeah. A 105 boats started the race. I drove with John Sanders. We shared. He drove an hour-and-a-half, I drove an hour-and-a-half. I mentioned this when the museum had the trophy presentation. I had to give a speech for their Hall of Fame thing, and I mentioned in that speech that we won the race in Paris. Well, I didn't mention that I'm still the only guy to ever win it his first year there. And I didn't mention the fact that we won by six laps, which was really quite an accomplishment.

I only got the chance to drive with John Sanders there because I had beaten the factory so many times with a non-factory boat, and Jack Leek knew me and knew that I had the potential of doing really well with a factory boat. So, after that everything changed at OMC and with that circuit, and I wanted to go

back to Unlimited racing.

OK.

I had a really successful career driving tunnel boats. People wondered how I was able to do it, but it came from my outboard experience.

All those years.

It was a challenge to me, which made it even more interesting, because they were tricky to drive. I did blow one over. I blew Rick's boat over in Elsinore. I don't think it was the first race with his boat, I think I had won a race or two before then. I raced at Elsinore. My father was there and there were several other people that I raced outboards with. In outboard racing we learned a few tricks on how to get an engine started. Instead of tryin' to start it in the water, you lifted it out of the water.

Yeah...

Once it was running, they'd drop it in and off you go. Well, those tunnel boats were heavier because they had a lot of fuel and the engine was bigger and all in the back, so it took about four guys to lift it out of the water. We weren't doing that at first, but I was getting beat with my inexperience and all that. I was getting beat off the line quite often, until we started lifting it up. That's another story, but we got beat off the line in Elsinore and I was back in seventh, eighth place, maybe even a little farther back.

In tunnel boats you run so long anyway it doesn't matter. If you're good, if that boat's fast and you're good, eventually, you can win. We were catching everybody, and I remember Rick [Keller] telling me on the radio that I was gaining 30 seconds a lap at the end. And he said, "You need to come in for fuel on this lap," and that was after I passed the pits. It was about a six-mile course. So, I went down the river and there was a big ol' boat in front of me. Inboard, I think, or maybe a twin-outboard or something, but it was throwing a pretty good wake.

I was light on fuel and pretty cocky in this thing 'cause I was screaming with it. I danced over the top of his wake and

it came down after his wake, hit the water, and that bounced it back up again. I wasn't quick enough on the down-tilt from the motor to catch it and it went over backwards. I was going over 105 miles an hour. It flipped over backwards and came down. The nose of the boat hit the water and spit me out. I got out of the accident in just, I mean, I hit that water at that speed, which knocked the wind out of me and did some facial damage, but nothing serious.

The boat really didn't get hurt that badly. It was all repairable. I wound up in the hospital for a day with a really bad chest from hitting the water. It didn't break anything but I'm sure it bruised some lungs and things. So, I was taught a lesson on that, which is not to get cocky with a tunnel boat. It'll only go so far before you string it out. I had it really up dancing. You don't want to get to that critical edge, you just don't.

Yeah.

I learned that. We won several more races after that and we won in Paris and I won the Muncey Invitational in Miami with tunnel boats. So, I had learned pretty much how to drive 'em and felt good about my chances in the future there, but my goal was to get back to Unlimiteds. So, I went to watch the race in Seattle when Les Rosenberg owned a brand-new boat. I think it was *Valu-Mart* at that time, and he wasn't really happy with his driver.

Before we go into that, in '73 were you under consideration for the U-95. Did Chuck Lyford talk to you about that at all?

Oh, it's interesting that you asked that question, because after my tunnel boat experiences and all, during that time I met one of Rick's good buddies named Jerry Barker.

This is Rick Keller?

Rick Keller, owned the tunnel boat that I drove out of Yorba Linda...

OK, yeah.

...and Jerry Barker and I became good friends because he had a tun-

nel boat that he wanted to build into a pleasure boat, and have Ron Jones, Sr., build it. I think he built the one that I test drove for him. We became very good friends and I wasn't really interested in doing that. There were some changes that needed to be made in the pleasure boat/tunnel boat to make it as they are today.

I wanted to race Unlimiteds. I didn't want to get down full time in that kind of stuff right then. I was still pretty young and had some piss and vinegar left in me and I wanted to go racing. So, I didn't do that with Jerry Barker. But we became good friends and he asked me right after that if I was interested in looking at turbine power in Unlimited racing. I said, "Sure, I'll look at that. They're running out of Rolls Merlins. They need to do something."

Yeah.

He said, "Well, I have a good friend in Seattle that's interested in maybe doing a turbine Unlimited hydroplane."

Hmmm.

So, I went to work immediately and did a lot of research on turbines and came up with the turbine that we're running today, the Lycoming that we're running today. I found a guy in California that did gearboxes. I came up with the

gearbox they use, basically, some of them are using today. I came up with all of that and then went to APBA, or what did they call it back then?

The URC, the Unlimited Racing Commission.

Yeah, URC. I spoke with Bernie Little, Lee Schoenith, Buddy Byers. Heerensperger had a hand in it. I got them to agree to let me run a turbine for two years, as an experimental, trial deal. I got two years out of it. So, Jerry Barker invited me up to Seattle to meet with a guy named Jim Clapp, who was involved with the Space Needle and properties all over Seattle. He had the money to do it. He had a cabin cruiser with twin turbines in it, a smaller turbine.

We sat down at the Seattle Yacht Club and discussed it. He decided to go forward with me on the turbine. I showed him my plan, told him about the engine that I wanted to use, the gearbox I wanted to use. I wanted to use Ron Jones to build the boat. He had a shop in California, Costa Mesa. Jim wound up writing me a check for \$30,000 to order the boat from Ron Jones. I took that \$30,000 check down to Ron Jones, gave it to him, got him to give me a deal, contract with Jim Clapp to build the boat.

I was living in Marina del Rey and my friend had a restaurant there in Marina del Rey with the offshore boats. He was the national champion in offshore racing. He got me a job down there because I needed to work—not racing anymore—selling boats in the marina. So, I started selling boats in the marina and working with Ron Jones on the hydro, the U-95. It wasn't the U-95 then, it was just a turbine boat...

Yeah.

...and Jim Clapp in Seattle. So, you know, I had a lot of experience racing with Chuck Lyford in outboards and in limiteds. I drove the 7-litre. Clapp called me one day when I was at work in Marina Del Rey selling boats, asked if it would be OK if he brought Chuck Lyford on board to help with the project. And I said absolutely. Chuck and I are good buddies, it'll be a big asset, he's a real smart man.

It went along where Chuck more and more started taking over the project because he was in Seattle with Jim Clapp and he was communicating with Ron Jones more than I was, which I didn't know about. He had come up with a different turbine program for Jim Clapp, with twin engines rather than mine. He came up with his own gearbox program because he had to connect two turbines into it. He used different gearbox people and he had his own turbine people in Seattle he was talking with.

So, my program had pretty much been changed entirely. I wasn't real happy about that. The next thing I know he calls and told me that I was asking too much to drive the boat. And I said, "Well, Chuck, did you forget this was my project?" And he said, "Well, it was, but it isn't anymore. It's mine. It's my project and you're asking too much to drive the boat, and I have a young man up here that has offered to drive it for free."

OK...

And I said, "For free. And who might that be?" And he said, "Leif Borgersen." And I said, "Oh, my God, I don't believe it." And I said, "Well, you know,



Bob Carver Photos

Billy Schumacher was involved in the early stages of the U-95 project, which resulted in the first successful use of a turbine engine in an Unlimited.



take Leif Borgersen and your project and stick it where the sun doesn't shine." And I hung up. Never talked to him again for at least a couple years. So that's the way the *U-95* got started.

Wow.

Very few people know that story, but that's how it started. And those that really can verify it are all dead. Ron Jones, Jr., might know about it but he and I aren't friends anymore and, uh, there's a reason for that. So, you know, it's documented in several places. The gearbox people know about it and other people know about it. Jerry Barker's not alive anymore. Rick Keller's not alive anymore. Jones is not alive anymore. You know, it just goes on and on.

The turbine people Lyford used, they probably know about it. But anyway, they did it differently than I would have. Chuck put a stick in the boat initially, rather than a steering wheel. There were a lot of things that were done differently than I would have. I think I would have had a successful boat right off the start, because we had the turbine that is used today. It has the horsepower and the dependability and all that. The gearbox was proven later, because that's who they went to later.

Yeah.

So that's my experience with a turbine boat. When Leslie [Rosenberg] asked me to drive his boat in Seattle, as a test drive. He had a guy named Ron Armstrong driving it and Ron wasn't doing too well. He qualified for Seattle at 111, I think it was. That was at Sand Point.

Yeah.

The boat was set up all wrong. I didn't like

it. It was totally wrong. I don't know how he even went as fast as he did. Well, I went faster, anyway, but it was capable of much better speed than what I went. He went 111, qualified the boat. I went 116 or -17, testing the boat. I got back—and he had driven it all year—that was my first time in it. We got back to Leslie in the pits, and I said, "Les, you know, the boat has a lot more potential, but the seat is wrong, the foot pedals are wrong, the steering wheel is wrong. Other than that, it's a good boat."

He said, "Well, what is it gonna take to get you to race it?" And so, I told him the number and a couple other people that knew me from racing vouched for me that I was a really good driver and all that. Les knew about me and stuff so it wasn't that he questioned that, but when he announced that he wanted me to drive the boat from then on, Dave Heerensperger was really against it. Tried to get me outlawed from it because I left his team, the *Pay 'N Pak*, and didn't even tell him I was leaving. So, he was saying the rule book says if you don't have a race under your belt within so much time, you have to re-qualify as a driver. And this was at the race.

Well, he was wrong. I had driven within two years and so I was qualified to race, so his argument didn't stand up. I wound up driving for Leslie, and as the *Valu-Mart*, we finally got it running really well at the end of the year at San Diego. I beat Chenoweth in one heat, and it had even more in it than I showed there. But it started to get nose light and I was not about to flip an Unlimited over backwards.

Schumacher joined a team headed by Leslie Rosenberg in 1974 and drove the *U-74 Valu-Mart*.

"So, I went to work immediately and did a lot of research on turbines and came up with the turbine that we're running today, the Lycoming that we're running today. I found a guy in California that did gear boxes. I came up with the gear box they use, basically, some of them are using today."



John Crouse



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

TOP: In 1975, the boat was renamed the U-74 *Weisfield's*. **MIDDLE:** Billy Schumacher and team owner Leslie Rosenberg. **ABOVE:** Schumacher, on the left, drove *Weisfield's* to victory at the 1975 Champion Spark Plug Regatta in Miami. On his inside in this photo is the U-71 *Atlas Van Lines* driven by Bill Muncey.

Yeah.

We put a fence on it to calm it down and it did calm it down. It also slowed it down, but it was still fast enough to win some races for us.

In '75 it won Miami. First race of the year.

Yeah, we did. I think I won another race that year, too. I think I won two races that year with it. It started to really, really go. I got to where I could really drive it well. Then we, Les and I—Weisfield's wasn't going to sponsor it anymore—so Les and I went to Olympia and talked them into sponsoring us.

Olympia Beer.

Yeah. Les and I drove down in the car and spent the whole afternoon with Mike Schmidt and came back with a sponsorship. It was fast that year [1976], too, with *Olympia*, but when I crashed it in Detroit. You know, it was built out of honeycomb. It was filled with water, so it was really heavy.

Yeah.

The sponson got rebuilt, made it heavier, too. So, it wasn't the same boat at all. But we did win the race in San Diego. That's a long story about how that happened because Bill Muncey had about 10 miles an hour on me, or more.

If there's anything that you think really stands out about that race...

Well, he wasn't the nice guy and I wasn't the nice guy. He knew he was way faster than me. I would've won the race in Detroit that year, I'm convinced. In fact, I was leading when it crashed. I was blowing by Tommy D'Eath in the *U.S.* like he was goin' the other way, who actually won the Gold Cup that year. It was gonna be a cake walk 'cause the boat was really fast. It went up in the air and came down on that side and blew that sponson off. That's when it sank. I was lucky to live through that.

Yeah.

I have a big photograph that shows me leaning over from the debris from the sponson, and the sponson literally gone. If the runner hadn't bent up like a water



ski it would've crashed in more, at faster speed and disintegrated the boat. I probably wouldn't be talking to you today. I was lucky, that was one of the times I was really lucky and not by my doing.

But, being as slow as it was after that accident, Muncey came up to me in San Diego, 1976, and said, "Look, we know, you know, I know you can't beat me with the boat that you're driving." I said, "All right, I know." He said, "Let's put on a race for the public, 'cause you and I are faster than everybody. Let's just put on a good race."

I said, "Great!" So, I did my flying start on the inside. He did his flying start on the outside. We got to the turn where he was a boat length ahead of me, not even a boat length, half-a-boat length ahead of me, and my lane disappeared.

Ah!

It knocked the wind out of me, broke the cowling, broke the windshield, the upholstery went over the side of that boat. It ripped that off. It was floppin' at me before it stopped. I got it started and was able to finish that heat.

There weren't very many boats in

it, I think. I probably wound up fourth place, but it was enough points to get me into the final. I was so mad, but it was on *Wide World of Sports* and I didn't dare act up. So, I just found a bucket to sit on. [Laughter.] Tried to think of what I could do without being nasty in front of the television.

So, when the final heat came, I made my decision. When the final heat came, the five-minute gun went off, we're out on the racecourse. I used up all my nitrous before the race started, cutting in front of Muncey before the race started, throwing as much water on him as I could. And there's nothing in the rule book that says I couldn't do that. And I just drowned him. I probably put 200 gallons of water in his boat. It freaked him out so bad he jumped the gun by at least five seconds, which was a long ways.

That's not something Muncey usually did.

No. And needless to say, I won the race. Nobody else could catch me. He was a half-lap ahead, but it didn't matter. So, after I came in, he sat in his boat in the water with his head down like he does sometimes. Never got out of the boat for probably five minutes. Just sat

there, probably disgusted with me and disgusted with himself.

He and I didn't talk for a couple years. I had retired from racing. In Seattle we were invited to the Seahawks game as guest hosts at half time. So, they announced us. And Muncey, you either loved him or you didn't. And a lot of people didn't because they called him a cry-baby in Seattle. I loved him, personally. I mean, he was one of the most talented boat racers I ever knew.

Oh, yeah.

In fact, the best I've ever known, uh, including myself. And he was one of the most talented musicians that I'd ever heard, and I thought he was extremely talented in everything he did. A lot of people didn't know he could play a piano extremely well. He played a trumpet, the saxophone, and I think it was the flute. Extremely well, all of 'em. He played with Guy Lombardo a few times in the band. He and I used to play tennis together. He was extremely good at tennis.

Yeah, he was.

We water skied together. He wasn't so good at that. I was. I had him there, too. I had him at water skiing and I shouldn't say, too. I only beat him a few



The 1975 Weisfield's team. Front row, from the left, Dave Culley and Mike Hanlon. Back row, from left, Billy Schumacher, Jerry Zuvich, Gary Crawford, and Leslie Rosenberg.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Rosenberg's boat as it appeared in 1976 while carrying the colors of the U-74 Olympia Beer.

times at boat racing, but for him not to talk to me for a couple of years was hard on both of us, I think. And then at Seattle [in 1977], his boat came apart. I was working with Wayne Cody at the time, broadcasting the race for KIRO. And his boat came apart and they weren't gonna run it in the final heat. The bottom was falling off of it. And he asked me if I'd race it for him in the final heat. I knew what was going on with his boat. I said, "Well, Bill, thank you very much but I think not."

This was with the Blue Blaster?

Yeah. Anyway, I believe that was the same year we were invited to the Seahawks game.

OK.

We saw each other. We didn't talk much after that, after the invitation to drive his boat, the bottom falling off of it. I just said no thank you. Anyway, when we got to the football game—back in that year Western wear was really popular—my wife at the time dressed me in Western wear for this event. My belt buckle—and I still have it—it's round, about four

inches one way and three the other and it had a donkey's ass on it. It was silver with a gold donkey's ass. I don't know why I thought that was funny, but I did. So, I wore that belt.

I'm standing there with him and we're not talking and he's just looking at my belt buckle. He looked back up at me and said, "Very appropriate." [Laughter.] In other words, I'm a donkey's ass. Anyway, then they announce us and believe it or not there were more boos than cheers when he was announced. There were hardly any boos when I was announced. That kind of rubbed him the wrong way, too. But we started talking again and became buddies again after that. It really shook me up when he was killed in Mexico.

Oh, I'm sure, yeah.

We were good friends for a lot of years. And, you know, in the heat of competition things changed from time to time.

Yeah. Well, you retired after the 1976 season.

Yeah.

You may have tested Pete LaRock's boat the next year, in 1977.

He might've asked me to take a ride in it.

It was the former U-95. He had it.

As I recall it's an OK boat. I didn't see any immediate danger in driving it. I had no interest in racing it. I had retired and I was gonna stay that way. I asked him if he would give my co-driver for the Paris Grand Prix race, John Sanders, a chance to drive it. I told him how good Sanders was. I mean, Sanders was a factory driver for a reason. He agreed to that. I wanted to see Johnny get into Unlimited racing 'cause that's something he wanted to do. That was my chance at doing it.

But, you know, he didn't show himself as being great there. It was his first chance at an Unlimited and all that, and his career in racing didn't go much further, in Unlimited racing. I'm not sure that it wasn't that he decided he didn't want to do it any more after driving that boat. I don't know, 'cause John lived in Denver at the time, and I wasn't near there. We saw each other skiing a couple

of times, but that was the extent of it. I can't tell you what his interest was at the time in racing an Unlimited again. I don't know.

OK.

But that's, I think, probably other than the vintage boats, the only other one I drove, I believe.

Perhaps we can talk with you about the boats you owned and raced?

OK.

From the time you stopped driving in 1976, until you got into it as an owner in 2006, you didn't really have that much to do with boat racing in terms of sitting in a cockpit or anything.

No, I didn't. You know, the sport's always been this way and it is today as well. Once you've done it, been there, they don't want to talk to you anymore. It's hard to even get a pit pass. I went to a few races to say hi to friends and it was difficult for me to get in and all that. I finally decided the heck with it. I'm not gonna go anymore. And I know several others, including some *Bardahl* people that felt the same way. We just didn't go. I didn't want a whole lot to do with it.

Yeah.

But the bug kinda bit me later, and when Bernie died, I started thinking about it a little bit. I had remarried to Jane. I

made the mistake of taking Jane to Detroit. It was her first race to see in person. I mean, when I won the Seafair race with *Miss Bardahl* and it was the Gold Cup that year, Jane's mother was watching the race. Jane was out at the swimming pool with her sisters and friends.

The final heat, when I was in second place, they were announcing that I would win the race if I stayed there. [The winner was determined by total points at the time – Ed.] So, Jane's mother ran out to her. Jane's 11 years younger than me, so I was 24 at the time. That made me the youngest Gold Cup winner ever. I beat Lee Schoenith by a few months. Jane's mother went running outside to her saying, "Jane, Jane and girls come in and watch. Billy Schumacher's about to win the Gold Cup." So that's all that Jane remembers about boat racing before I took her. Well, she'd watched a couple other races, but that really stuck in her mind that I, being as young as I was, was gonna win the race in Seattle.

Then I took her to the race in Detroit. We're walking down the dock. One of the heats was already on. We're walking down the dock at the Detroit Yacht Club. We're about half-way down and there's this yellow boat flying through the air upside down, and I said, "There's one of the wrecks right there." She saw that and said, "Oh, my God!"

We got out to the end of the dock and he had landed about, I'd say 20 feet, but it might have been closer, it might have been farther away, but it looked like 20 feet away from a cabin cruiser that had about 10 people on the top deck. Had it landed on that it would have been a terrible disaster for everybody. And, you know, we weren't sure what kind of shape Evans was in. I think it was Evans that was driving the boat. I believe he broke his leg or something. I hadn't been around the sport in a long time either and I didn't know who was driving what. But that yellow boat turned out to be the boat that we bought.

And that had been the *Bud T-4*.

Yeah. Before that boat, my interest was back into it. That's why I went to the race in Detroit and asked Jane if she wanted to go. We weren't even married at the time.

Oh.

And she fell in love with the sport, needless to say. But before that I'd talked to Les Rosenberg, who owned the *Weisfield's* and the *Olympia Beer* boat, and *Valu-Mart*, about buying one of Bernie Little's boats, because he'd passed away and they were for sale.

He had the money. So, we went down there and talked to the guy running the shop. He showed us around a little bit. Les sat in the boat. He didn't like it because you sat different than we did in our boat. And, uh, it was hard for me to talk him into it. Les is one of those guys who says, "OK, sure," until it's time to dig out the wallet. Then he says, "Aw, I don't know, I gotta think about this some more."

But, anyway, he thought about it, thought about it, never



Chris Denslow



Larry Dong

ABOVE: Jean Theoret and the U-37 *Miss Beacon Plumbing* on their way to victory in Seattle during Schumacher's first season as an owner. **BELOW:** Theoret and Schumacher celebrate at the 2006 Gold Cup awards banquet.

"But I saw that he was pretty fast, and I thought, you know, if Theoret can get a good start we can win this race. And that's what he did. So, Cahill's sitting there watching Beacon Plumbing win the race in Detroit, the Gold Cup."

did make a move. I was telling Jane about that. We kind of dusted it off because it was a little too much money. Then we were over at Sun Valley. She had a house over there. We were married now, and we were there in the summer because we were driving around and there was no snow. Scott Raney called me and asked if we would be interested in buying Bill Wurster's boat.

Mmm.

I said, "Well, what's the number on that?" It was considerably less than the *Budweiser*. I said, "Does that include everything?" He said, "Yes." He said, "Why don't you come down and take a look." I said, "Well, we're in Sun Valley. I'll talk to Jane about it and if we think we want to look at it we'll do it."

So, to make the story shorter, I talked to Jane. She said she'd go take a look at it and we did look at it. Talked to Scott some more and talked to Bill. He was willing to take payments on it and take a big, healthy sum down. Which it was. The rest was on contract to pay over time for, I think it was for a year. So, Jane and I thought about that. She told me, "If you can get a sponsor for Seattle, we'll go ahead and do it."

So, I wound up getting a sponsor through some friends, and it was Bill Cahill's Beacon Plumbing. He agreed to Seattle. At that meeting Jane and I talked him into Tri-Cities as well. I said, "C'mon, it's gonna do you some good in Seattle. We need to race the boat before Seattle just to get it ready." And so, he said OK. Then he gave us the money for both races, and we decided all right, let's do the whole circuit. We'll just run it as *Miss Seattle* in Madison and Detroit, then when we get

to Tri-Cities we'll have Beacon Plumbing.

Mm hmm.

So, we went to Madison. Jane couldn't go because she had a wedding to go to in Sun Valley. So, she wished me luck and off I went with the boat to Madison. Jean Theoret was driving, and the boat was fast, and I thought, well, won the race the year before, I think it was in Seattle, so I liked the boat, and I liked Scott. I liked John Walters who was doing the engines and so I thought, well, we have a good shot at this.

We got there in Madison and it caught on fire on the trailer. I have a photograph of that. Huge flames comin' out the back of it. They hooked up a line wrong, so it was spitting fuel into the exhaust



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

pipe. It was late at night, so it was really pretty, but I was afraid the boat was gonna burn down.

They fixed that problem, and the boat didn't get burned too badly. Some of the paint got blistered, but in the race Theoret proceeded to blow the motor. So, it comes into the pits broken up a little bit and under water. People were saying, "Welcome to Unlimited racing." [Laughter.] I thought, oh, jeez, this is the way it's gonna go? [Laughter.] So, we went to Detroit and fixed it in Detroit. Scott was amazing, his ability to fix things quickly. They stayed up all night a couple nights in a row. Got it done. We had a shop there to work in, so they were able to work late at night, too.

We weren't doing too well at the race there, but I called Bill Cahill and said, "You know, we don't have a sponsor for Detroit. What do you think I just put Beacon Plumbing on it in Detroit? You against that?" And he said, "Heck no. As a matter of fact, I'll come back and watch the race if you do that." And I said OK. We didn't charge him for it, we just put his name on it, *Beacon Plumbing*.

And, uh, Theoret had enough points to get into the final heat just barely. But I saw that he was pretty fast, and I thought, you know, if Theoret can get a good start

we can win this race. And that's what he did. So, Cahill's sitting there watching *Beacon Plumbing* win the race in Detroit, the Gold Cup. So, his name is going on the Gold Cup and all he spends is the money to get there to watch it. So, he was really happy with us.

We went over to Sindbad's the next day. It's a restaurant as you know, next to the pits, and he was congratulating us and all that stuff and just happy as he could be. And to go into Tri-Cities and Seattle as the Gold Cup winner was really good for him. He had sponsored boats before in Seattle and never won anything.

So here he is as the Gold Cup winner. And he said, "Well, who you gonna have run the boat, sponsor the boat in San Diego?" And Jane said, "You are." And he chuckles and started laughing and looked down at the table for a while—this is at Sindbad's—and he said, "OK." So, he gave us money for that, too. Well, we didn't win Tri-Cities but we did wind up winning Seattle.

Won Seafair, yeah.

And I don't know what happened to us in Tri-Cities. I don't remember. And then we won the World Championship in San Diego.

Yeah.

So, he got the trifecta that year. A

lot of people thought it was because of our skid fin, which was curved. It slowed the boat down in the straightaway, but it made it go around the corners a lot faster. And it was easy to drive. I mean, you could steer it in the turns. Very little effort. It would do it. Not a problem. It was a big safety factor issue.

It wasn't faster in the straightaway, it was slower. But they still outlawed it. We even told 'em who'd build skid fins for you guys. They still outlawed it 'cause they were afraid they couldn't get what we had. It's still outlawed today and it's stupid. It should not be outlawed. It's a safety feature and it's, uh, elapsed time it is faster.

Mm hmm.

Anyway, that year was really good to us. Part of it was the skid fin. The other part was we had a really good engine that was built by John Walters. It was way better than any of the other engines we had. It just happened to be. We would use it in the final heat and that won us some of the races it won. And then I think the next year we won in Evansville or Madison. I think it was Madison.

My notes, in 2007 you didn't win anything, your best finish was third at San Diego.

No, we won.



Schumacher's *Miss Beacon Plumbing* during a test run on Lake Washington in Seattle.



The Miss Bello's Pizza at Madison, Indiana, in 2009.

You won Evansville in 2008. First race of the year.

So, 2007, I don't know. I'd have to look it up. Seems like we won one race that year. It was Evansville that I remember.

You won Evansville the next year, 2008. That was the year the Gold Cup in Detroit was declared no contest because of weather.

We did win the Seattle race and they took it away from us...

Yeah.

...because they said Theoret was going too slow before the start of the race. We proved to them that we were going faster than anyone else out there and [Mike] Noonan said, "That doesn't matter, I've already made my decision." So, they took the race away from us. I remember winning that one hands down. That was with that good engine. And then Theoret broke it in one of his flips. We tried to fix it.

It was Miss Bello's Pizza at Madison in 2009. He flipped it there.

He flipped it in Evansville, too.

Yeah. He got hurt.

I don't know where it was that the engine got hurt but it did, and one main wheel in the hot section we had to replace. And it was never the same engine. So, we didn't have our super good engine

after that.

In 2009 in Detroit it was Miss DYC and J.W. Myers, rookie driver, took over while Theoret was healing.

He almost died in that accident in Madison. He drowned. He was dead when they brought him back in the patrol boat. He was out of commission pretty bad for a while.

Yeah.

We had to get somebody else to drive. I always liked J-Dub and Scott was real close with J-Dub. So, he drove for us until Theoret got better.

Yeah, uh...

The boat wasn't the same. We didn't have the engine, they took away our skid fin, and we were having trouble making it compete well. Some of the other boats were really fast. You know, later on when we got our new boat running really fast, it took a year to get it there, but we weren't being treated fairly, and I don't mind saying that. The commission treated us really poorly. And we got slowed down regularly by saying we had too much fuel...

Oh.

...which was absolutely not the case. You can put that on the record.

Theoret was out in 2010. The boat was Peters and May, and J.W. Myers drove it again at Madison and Detroit. That's where he hit the wall. The skid fin

came off?

Yeah.

Lucky he didn't hit it head-on, but the boat was pretty-much totaled after that.

Yeah, it was. I mean, Scott could've fixed it, but we already had a new boat started and the decision was made to use the old boat for parts and build a new boat, finish building the new boat.

You got the former Xnetix hull for the remainder of the 2010 season. They had to work all night to get that one ready just to finish out the year.

Yeah. That was our introduction to Degree Men.

Jane was quoted somewhere saying Scott Raney really did a great job to get that boat ready.

Well, he did. We did a lot of work to the boat. I mean, we improved that boat tremendously. Scott did.

Yeah.

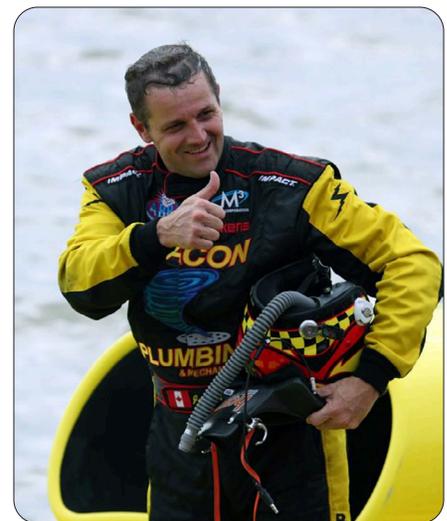
And it looked good in...

Which it never did before.

You know, it ran like its normal self. Couldn't get out of its own way, but it showed well enough to influence the Degree Men people to move forward for the next year.

Jon Zimmerman did some driving. Jamie Nilsen tested a couple times.

Yeah, Zimmerman drove it and



Theoret celebrates his 2008 victory in Evansville, Indiana.

Chris Denslow

Chris Denslow

I think he did a decent job. And they wanted us to help get Nilsen qualified, so I agreed to do that. That's normally not something I would do, but because it wasn't a winning boat, anyway I thought, "Why not?" Give him a chance.

Sure.

Anyway, he went, as I recall, he went faster than Zimmerman did. I was pretty impressed with him. Then he had some bad luck later with...

Blew a boat over backwards.

...Greg O'Farrell's boat.

He blew a boat over backwards at Seafair just a buoy length from the finish line, or something.

Yeah.

I've known Jamie from outboards, from the time he was driving J, so I saw him coming up. His dad's still involved with Seattle Outboard Association, too.

I think he's a tremendous driver. I tried to talk him into—the year that Villwock was involved with us—but Dave didn't think he had enough experience. I had to agree with Dave. He didn't have a lot of experience. He's driving for Scott Pierce now, I understand...

Yeah, in the Grand Prix.

...getting that experience he needs. You know, he made a couple bad errors in the boat that he flipped over. That flipping it over was a second bad error, and the first one was not being at the starting line at all. He was on the wrong side of the turn, and even as an outboard racer you should know better than that.

That's right.

So, I don't know what was going on there and I never did talk to him about it, but I agreed with Dave that he needed more experience, and I think he's getting it now. I think someday he's going to be a terrific driver. And who knows who he'll end up with. [The interview was conducted before Nilsen was chosen to drive Raney's U-11.]

In 2011 you had the new boat and J. Michael Kelly driving it...

Right.

...with Degree Men, and that's the boat you finished out your ownership with.

Yeah, and it...

You had a good driver with J. Michael.

Oh, the best there is. I can't speak highly enough of J. Michael as a driver. He is, you know, he makes fewer mistakes than anybody I've ever seen. He's an attentive driver that wants to win extremely bad. You know, I think he's a very talented race boat driver. The problem we had with *Degree Men* is that there wasn't enough sponsorship to complete making that boat run as fast as it has the potential to run. *Degree Men* went a different direction. Some of our competitors decided that they would race that boat for half of what we were racing it for.



Photos by Karl Pearson

The U-37 *Miss Peters & May* hits the wall at Detroit in 2010. **TOP:** The boat's skid fin has broken off. **MIDDLE:** A fraction of a second before hitting the wall. **ABOVE:** The damage. The left sponson and part of the cockpit were demolished. Driver J.W. Myers suffered a broken foot.

Mmm.

We got a decent amount of money from them to not only go racing that first year but do improvements to the boat that we couldn't finish. There were other things I wanted to do, which we eventually did do. J. Michael did as good as he could do with that boat. It was really too bow light initially. We needed to make weight changes and other changes, which we did. Being a new boat, that happens occasionally.

Oh, yeah.

There have been boats, brand new, that can go on the water and be good right from the beginning. That wasn't one of 'em. There were changes made to that boat while it was being built that I didn't know were taking place, which upsets me to this day, that I think held it back. And it now, because of its



Karl Pearson

ABOVE: With J. Michael Kelly in the cockpit, the brand-new *Degree Men* wins the first heat it ever entered, edging out *Valken.com* in Heat 1A of the 2011 Gold Cup in Detroit. **RIGHT:** In the 2012 Detroit Gold Cup, the boat finished third as the *Miss Beacon Plumbing*.



H1 Unlimited/Lisa Courmeya

"I can't speak highly enough of J. Michael as a driver. He is, you know, he makes fewer mistakes than anybody I've ever seen. He's an attentive driver that wants to win extremely bad."

low profile, I do believe, and that was something I wanted. Because of its low profile I believe it has the ability to be one of the best boats still today on the circuit. I'd like to see somebody prove that.

And if they don't get penalized with fuel violations all the time, it will prove that. I'm convinced of it. When we had the right amount of fuel in Coeur d'Alene when it was *Beacon Plumbing*, orange boat as *Beacon Plumbing*, we could have blown everybody away. And we were told that we jumped the gun in the final heat, so Villwock told J. Michael to slow down, you've already been disqualified. He said, "Well, I can take him. In the next half-lap. I'll get him." And he said, "Don't bother. Don't risk the boat for that."

And we were extremely fast, the boat was riding on the water the way it was supposed to ride

on the water. He slowed down and took a second place in the final heat, I believe. We saw the film the next day, of the start. He was not at the starting line when the gun went off. He had about a foot. [Laughter.] He was about a foot and that was on film so that was probably three feet before the gun went off. He did not jump the gun.

Yeah.

That was one of their ways of telling us we weren't gonna win the race again. Anyway, after that, when Villwock was involved, we got penalized I can't tell you how many times for being over on fuel. Every time we'd make the boat go fast, they'd come back to us saying you're over on fuel. No. And I can tell you how they did it, but no sense going into it. It's water under the bridge. I hope that the next time that boat races it gets the

same amount of fuel as everybody else, and everybody's going to see what potential that boat has.

Just one last thing from 2013, they had a race, one time, in Sacramento, in June. Do you remember anything about that course? You had Performance Chevrolet on the boat. J. Michael was still driving it.

Yeah, that had to have been.

Villwock was a paid consultant.

That had to be J. Michael. At that point I don't think we had the weight distribution right. We had come up with some other things after that race. It was fast there, but it wasn't as fast as those two boats that beat us. Later we got it going as fast as they were going. And then we got slowed down.

At Madison that year, it was canceled again because of conditions.

Yeah.

Madison had a little problem with that at times.

Yeah, it was pretty bad, but at least the people there seemed to really enjoy looking at the boats up close. You know, it appears like we didn't lose a lot of fans on account of that, that year. They understood why the race was canceled. If they hadn't have canceled it, I wouldn't have run our boat anyway. It would have been



Chris Denslow

the second time I said no.

Well, in 2014, you had Dave Villwock drive it. You just ran Tri-Cities and Seattle. And that was the last time you had a boat in a race.

Dave got blamed for stuff that he didn't do. I don't think we were quite as fast as *Oberto* was there, yet. That could be because we were slowed down on fuel, too. I don't remember. It might've been because we were constantly, constant-

ly gone after for that. And it wasn't, we didn't change anything with the motor. Nothin'. We changed the boat. As soon as the boat went faster, they came back, said we were over on fuel. So then, you know that little device they put in there that measures fuel supply supposedly?

OK.

There's something with that they call the K factor. The regulator they put in the boat to measure the amount of fuel shows up on their computer, whether you're over or not. They can come back and say you were over on fuel. We have to give you a new regulator. Well, that happened to us a couple of times. The first time they said we have to change your regulator 'cause the K factor is wrong. Well, the referee can change the K factor on that, on that device. So, before we went fast, we weren't over on fuel. But Dave changed the gear ratio and the propeller...

Mmm.

...and all of a sudden we were fast. We found a combination that made us fast. They came down and said we were over on fuel. We didn't change the motor. We didn't do anything to that. So, we said, "Well, OK." And they gave us



Chris Denslow

The U-37 Miss Beacon Plumbing on the Detroit River in 2013.

another regulator. We put it in the boat, we were way over on fuel. So, they said, “You gotta turn your fuel down.” So, we turned our fuel down. Dave made some more changes. Guess what? We went faster again. We went as fast as the top boat. They came back down, said, “We got a new regulator for you, something’s wrong with that one.”

Oh!

I said, “We didn’t change anything when we were legal again.” And, uh, gave us a new one. Guess what? We were over on fuel again. They slowed us down one more time. This happened, I don’t know how many times, but the K factor was wrong several times. The other times they just said we were over on fuel. I had gotten to the point where I just gave up. I didn’t even want to race with them anymore.

Yeah.

And Villwock got disgusted as well, but he laughs things off. You can do that when you don’t have all the money in the boat and stuff. When you have all the money in the boat and you’re risking your driver’s life and you and your sponsor have big hopes and all that and they get you like that, and you can’t win a race because of it, it’s disgusting. And I totally

got disgusted with the sport, people in it, and that’s when the boat went up for sale. Jane felt the same way.

I’m encouraged right now, quite frankly, with the new changes that have been made recently...uh, I heard about the possibility of some new money coming into the sport with national sponsorship.

Yeah.

If that happens that’ll change the sport. If they have the right leadership that doesn’t play games with owners and drivers. I think it’d be, once it’s a fair sport again so that everybody’s running equally on fuel, and in disqualifications like going too slow and you weren’t, or like jumping the gun when you didn’t. I think when it becomes more of a fair sport, I think people will start racing their boats again.

So, the sport has potential and in particular if they get money into it. I don’t know who this sponsor is that supposedly is coming in with some money, don’t know who that is, but I’ve heard it. And if that does happen, that’d be great. Our boat is still for sale.

Would you race it yourself or are you trying to sell it?

Still trying to sell it. That’s all I can

say at this point. I’m trying to sell it.

Well, we’ve talked a long time. We’re pretty much out of questions unless there’s something we haven’t covered.

No, there’s a lot of stuff in what we talked about, including the U-95 that some people might find hard to believe, but it’s the truth.

Mm hmm.

I got off my chest what happened to us in the last few years of our racing. I mentioned the fact that the boat that is still for sale right now is probably the best boat on the circuit. There’s no doubt in my mind. There’s actually no doubt in Dave Villwock’s mind and he’s driven a lot of boats.

Oh, yes.

And I think deep down J. Michael knows the potential that boat has. And I’ve always wanted to tell people that I thought Jamie Nilsen needs another shot at it.

If he wants to do it.

If he wants to, yeah. Who knows? Uh, the Grand Prix guys think they’re gonna take over boat racing and it just ain’t gonna happen.

No, it’s not the same.

You can’t beat the weight, the speed,



The U-37 Miss Beacon Plumbing at the dock in Seattle in 2014.

Chris Denslow



Schumacher's boat made its final appearance named *Miss Seattle* at the 2014 race in Doha, Qatar, and with Dave Villwock in the cockpit.

and all that. And I hope, for the sake of the sport that they allow piston engines. There was a time when I had the opportunity with sponsorship and all to get a big piston motor out of Detroit that's been tried and proven quite well. And according to Villwock, it is built properly also. And the spare parts are available also.

That's important.

I heard, second or third hand, that somebody in the sport said, "That motor will never be allowed." But that's a shame.

Why do they call it Unlimited?

Yes. Well, you can say that, too, in their fuel regulation, but it's a shame that those people that say things like that can control the sport enough to get away

with it. First of all, there's already a piston engine running.

Yeah.

And secondly, why not let something new in, even if it's on a one- or two-year trial period. I'm sure that engine manufacturer would go along with it. The sport needs that. If anybody ever asks me, I'm gonna say absolutely, the sport needs piston engines, even if they compete with the turbines. Beat the turbines. Who cares? But get some noise back in the sport. Let the progression begin on piston motors that can compete. I think that's vital, not only to the sport but to those people building those engines.

Yeah.

There are uses for them. And that

would be one of my big hopes that the sport does bring...let that happen. I might even be interested in helping build a new boat with piston engines.

Now, the boats that you owned, you never took a ride in them, did you? Never drove them?

Never did. I'm a little bit like Les Rosenberg. I don't feel comfortable in it. I've been in a cockpit. I've never even started a turbine. I don't want to let myself get, well, I'm too old now anyway...

Yeah.

...but I don't want to get interested in it. And, you know, even driving it. I always want to go as fast as I think I can safely, and the boat, if it's capable of doing it. Next year I'll be 77 and I'm not gonna go do it...because I'm afraid I might like it.

Yeah. [Laughter.]

As a driver you always think you can do it better than the next guy.

That's right.

If you don't think that, you shouldn't be doing it.

That's true. All right, well, thank you very much.

My pleasure. ❖

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