



# Indiana Governor's Cup Weather Wins in Madison

by Craig Fjarlie

**Cancelled**



The Ohio River can be a fickle friend. Over the years it has served as a boundary line, a source of transportation, irrigation and power, and a place for work and play. It also has been a source of misery through flooding, danger, destruction, even death. The river's down side was on display when it was time for the 2013 Madison Regatta.

On Wednesday before the race, officials met and cancelled all activity on Friday. It was still hoped the events scheduled for Saturday and Sunday could go on as planned. Yes, the water level would have to drop, and adjustments would need to be made to the layout of the pit area, but it was premature to announce cancellation of the entire event.

On Friday, hope began to dim. Activity on Saturday was cancelled, but there was still a possibility that conditions would improve enough for an abbreviated program to take place on Sunday.

Friday evening, all the boats went through the Regatta parade. On Saturday, the boats were lined up on Vaughn Drive above the pit area. The public was allowed in to get an up-close look. Drivers held an autograph session. Vendors made some sales, enough to avoid a complete bust. A replica of the first *Gale V* was on display.

Saturday evening the sky was clear and the fireworks show went on without a hitch. Sunday, the boats were again lined up on Vaughn Drive. There was another autograph session, and the public again could get close to the boats. The restored *Miss U.S. IV* was on site, and its Allison engine was started twice so fans could hear the roar.

Just after noon it was announced that the regatta was cancelled and would *not* be rescheduled. The river was within four feet of the judges' stand, which has been renamed in honor of the late Wib Heitz.

A few of the boats had name changes since Sacramento. The Jones 9 was still *Red Dot* but had the words Presented by Bello's Pizza on the engine hood. Webster's 22 was *Miss Broadway Tavern*, The Schumacher's 37 was *Beacon Plumbing*. Muscatel's leased 14 had no name on the hull.

Late Sunday afternoon, fans began drifting away and boats were moved elsewhere in town. It was a disappointment, of course, but people who live near the Ohio River understand its nature. The regatta will be held next year, and with a little luck the river will be on better behavior.

Below left is the U-6 Miss Madison display at the Broadway Tavern on display with the 5 *Graham Trucking*, 22 *Miss Broadway Tavern*, and 57 *FEDCO*. Below right is another reason to cancel the Madison race, debris, and lots of it. ~ Chris Denslow photos



# MEET DOUG FORD

## H1 UNLIMITED'S NEW CHIEF ENGINEER

### Interviewed by Clint Newman at the Madison Regatta

**UNJ:** I know you have been around the boats for many, many years. What was your first involvement with the unlimiteds?

**Ford:** I grew up in Seattle, if I ever grew up at all, that is. My first involvement was with the Slo-mo-shun crew. I lived in the Bellevue area, and I used to ride my bicycle down to San Sayres house on Hunt's Point. He kind of adopted me, and I became the first little kid on the Slo-mo-shun crew.

**UNJ:** As far as your professional background, you are an engineer.

**Ford:** Yes, it is because of these boats that I began studying aerodynamics and hydrodynamics as a kid. I wound up in an honors program at the University of Washington. I'm an aeronautical engineer by trade.

**UNJ:** Is there a conflict between aerodynamics and hydrodynamics in these unlimiteds?

**Ford:** Not a conflict, exactly. But, they are a lot different! These boats have a combination of both, of course. That makes them rather complicated. They are more aerodynamic than hydrodynamic except for what's in the water, like the rudder, skid fin, and the propeller. They are a special breed of cat, too! They are what we call "super-cavitating hydrofoils." Things don't work like an underwater airplane wing at all. It's quite different.

**UNJ:** I know this is your passion, but what is your "day job?"

**Ford:** I finally let go of my job at Lockheed. I was a Vice President with the Lockheed Corporation. I did a lot of my work in the "Skunk Works", which some people



Doug Ford



Clint Newman



U-2



F117



SR71

haven't heard of. That is a classified area where the U2 (the "Dragon Lady" high altitude spy plane), the SR 71 (the "Blackbird", Mach 3+ reconnaissance aircraft), and the F117 (the "Nighthawk", stealth ground attack aircraft) came from. Now I am just doing consulting. That means I can spend a little more time on the boats without worrying about vacation time and scheduling. I can enjoy my passion, but still do work on my schedule.

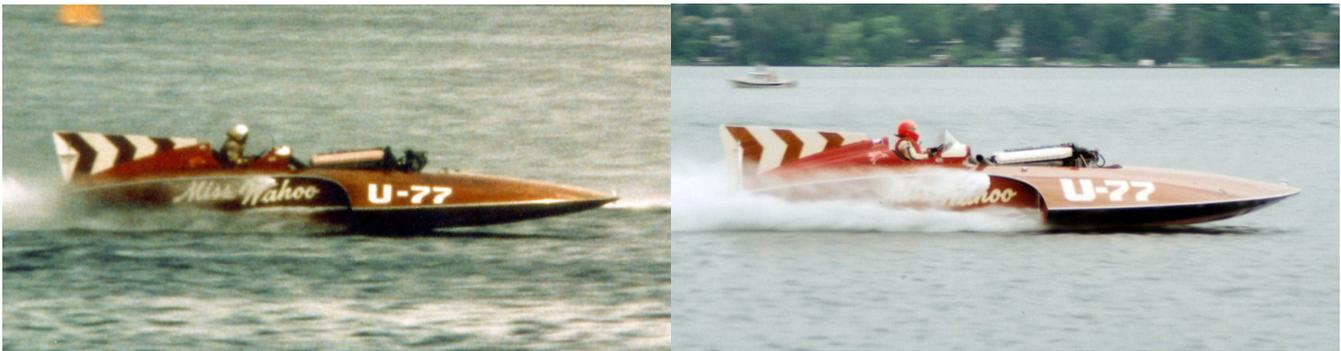
**UNJ:** You have consulted with a number of teams over the years.

**Ford:** Even when I was a kid, I did a lot before I had a degree in anything. After I earned my advanced degrees, I have done even more work on a lot of boats. The most prominent was the Miss Budweiser team. I did all of their wind tunnel testing, and did aerodynamic designs for them.

**UNJ:** Are the teams today doing much wind tunnel testing?

**Ford:** I haven't done any for quite a while. The teams are interested in doing it. You have to test in the right kind of wind tunnel. If the wind tunnel isn't configured right so it will simulate the water going under the boat, you don't get the right answers. The tunnel I use is in Marietta, Georgia. It still costs money to run there. Unless someone is going to step up with a checkbook, you can't wind tunnel test!

**UNJ:** If you had to pick a favorite boat over the years, who would it be?



Above left the 1957 U-77 Miss Wahoo. ~ HARM photo. At right the replica U-77 Miss Wahoo in 2009 ~ Michael Prophet photo

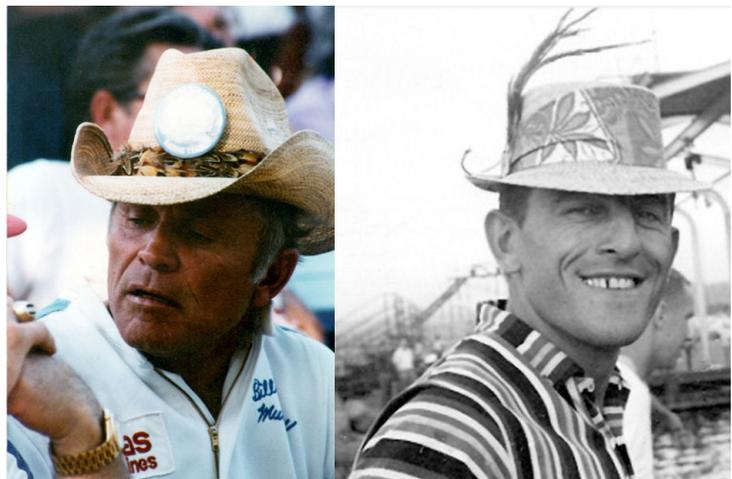
**Ford:** Miss Wahoo. After the Slo-mo-shun IV crashed, I was without a favorite boat as a kid. I grew up then with Mira Slovak and the Miss Wahoo. I loved that boat to death! Looking back on my history, that's the boat I really longed for, and now they have the new replica at the Hydroplane Museum in Kent. The boat is really pretty, better looking than the original one.

**UNJ:** What about a favorite driver or two?

**Ford:** It's hard to beat Bill Muncey and Mira Slovak. Both were friends of mine, Mira still is. He lives in Southern California, and I talk to him occasionally. Muncey was hard to beat. You loved him or hated him back then. He drove without a stopwatch; he drove by the seat of his pants. I don't think there will ever be a driver better than Bill Muncey.

**UNJ:** You are the new H1 Chief Engineer. What are your duties?

**Ford:** They are somewhat varied and they are evolving. Primarily, we are trying to bring somebody into the sport with a technical engineering background. You can referee the rules, but it is very hard to make technical rules or technical changes in the rules. So, they brought me on to do that. We



Above left is Bill Muncey, on the right is Mira Slovak ~ HARM photos

will take a look at rules involving engine fuel flow, all that kind of stuff. We are taking a look at the safety aspect of things like skidfin rods, rudders, and that type of things, certain aerodynamic things that we may or may not put on the boats. Back in the days of the Unlimited Racing Commission, I was the Director of Safety, Technology, and Competition. I did that for 12 years, helping write the rules back then, including cockpit standards and everything else. So I'm doing this type of thing again for H1.

**UNJ:** Mike Noonan (Chief Referee) has mentioned experimenting with GPS systems. I'm sure you will also be looking at that.

**Ford:** Yes, Mike and I are both looking at that. The idea is that nobody likes these 5 liter type starts, dragging the boats around. Those of us who have been around for a long time remember fighting for lanes and doing everything you could do. We want to bring that back to the sport. It's very hard with these new configuration boats. They can start from a standing start . . . they accelerate pretty rapidly. To fix that, we are trying to find a way to not only make sure they don't drop below a certain speed (which the GPS can do if we track them) but also, if there is an infraction because the boat is turned the wrong way, out of view of the helicopter referee, we can track that.

**UNJ:** I guess that part of the problem is instituting new technology on a budget.

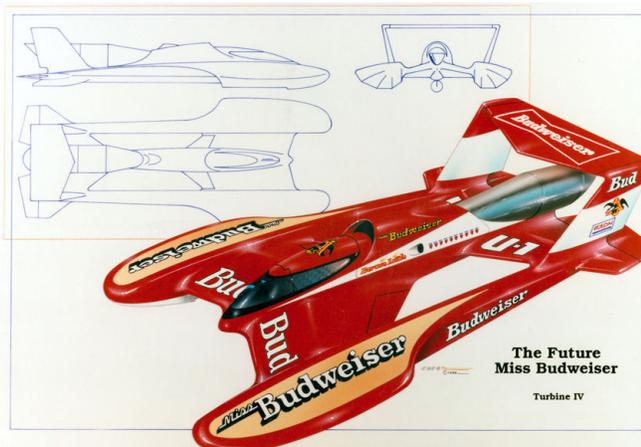
**Ford:** You are exactly right! We used to say, "Speed costs money. How fast do you want to go?" Safety and competition is the same way.

**UNJ:** I have been meaning to order a copy of your new book, "What Were They Thinking!" I remember when you consulted with former unlimited driver Todd Yarling of Madison, Indiana, on a new, very innovative two-wing boat. What happened to the two-wing boats?

**Ford:** The one that was the *Miss Budweiser* (the T-4), that was the one I originally designed. Unfortunately, there were a couple of people on the crew that weren't too happy to have to work on it, because they had a winning boat sitting along beside it. We never got a chance to test it much. In fact, what they wound up doing was building the rear wing lower than it should have been, and a few other things which got beat up in the rough water. The first time it ran where somebody really tried to run it was when Mark Evans drove it here in Madison. It was top qualifier; it went around everybody, including *Smokin' Joe's* on the outside. It was the fastest boat in the field and it fell apart. Rough water started beating up those parts that were not quite as originally designed, so it spun out in the final heat with a broken wing and everything else. But, it was fast.

Today, if we had to do it again, we could do it. It would take a little money to develop, because we are down on horsepower from what we were back then. That boat was designed for maximum speed without blowing over. We would need to do a few things differently with a little less horsepower. But, it would work. And, the one Todd Yarling was working on would be multiple piston engine driven, which would have been interesting and exciting to watch, because it would have been LOUD.

**UNJ:** Anything else about your plans for the future as Chief Engineer?



**Ford:** We will evolve it, like I say. I enjoy being back in the saddle again. Now, I hope I can really help the sport. That's what I want to do. I think the sport needs some improvement; competition and safety need some improvement. We will try to provide all of that.

**UNJ:** What do you see as the next possible innovation in unlimited hydroplane racing?

**FORD:** That's a tough one to answer. The rules are far more restrictive than they were 20 years ago. They can be changed. If we can change them, I would like to open them up a little more with the idea that we want competition and safety, but we want to promote innovation as well. Those two things don't always go well together. Right now, you will always see a three-point hydroplane. Maybe we would like to open that up for someone else to be a little more inventive. Right now, the boats have to be between 30 and 32 feet long and less than 15 feet wide. There are lots of other dimensions that are critical on the boat. If people can build it without the risk of sinking a bunch of money into something that won't work... I would like to open that up a bit.

**UNJ:** Thanks, Doug! It has been fun talking with you!



Miss Budweiser T4 in the wind tunnel at GTRI, Aviation Technology Branch

Doug Ford photo

## VINTAGE BOATS AT MADISON



The U-36 *Miss U.S. IV* attended two races in 1957. Above photo on left was taken at Seattle where Frank Saile failed to qualify the boat. ~ H&RM photo The photo at right is from Madison ~ Chris Denslow photo  
 The U-55 *Gale V* (3) last raced in 1964 at San Diego before being retired. It was the only *Gale* boat that wasn't burnt up at the shop. Below photo below left was taken at Lake Tahoe. ~ H&RM photo The photo below right is from Madison. ~ Chris Denslow photo



# Mira Slovak

## A Daring Pilot

## In the Right Place

## At the Right Time - Part 3

by Steve Nelson

This is the final installment in the three part series about unlimited Hall of Fame driver Mira Slovak. In this issue, Slovak talks about the difficult racing season in 1966, his horrific airplane crash in 1968, and yet another personal goal he may still pursue in the future.

### A Tough Summer . . . even for a Champion

Before the start of the 1966 season, Slovak again pondered his future as a hydroplane driver. This time he was coaxed out of 'retirement' by gaming giant Bill Harrah, who offered Slovak a ride in his gray and orange *Tahoe Miss*. It was a good fit for Slovak, who went on to dominate the competition. But even for the champion, it was a rough season. Tragic accidents in two different races that year cast a long shadow. And Slovak was an eyewitness from his seat in *Tahoe Miss*.

The President's Cup in Washington, D.C. on June 19<sup>th</sup> became known as 'Black Sunday' after three popular drivers were killed in two separate accidents. The first accident claimed *Bardahl's* Ron Musson, as he battled for the lead in heat 2B. Then came disaster in the final heat, when Don Wilson's *Miss Budweiser* collided with Rex Manchester's *Notre Dame*. Slovak was in that heat, trailing the leaders going into the turn. As he had done to help Bill Muncy in 1957, Slovak cut his boat's engine, and without hesitation dove into the water to help fellow driver Don Wilson. But it was already too late. Wilson was dead, and Manchester died minutes later.

It was a horrific day. But Slovak softly reminds us that every driver takes a chance when they get behind the wheel. The longer you keep driving, the more risk you see.

"You play with fire, you get burned. Some people said it's time to quit and stop racing unlimiteds. Well, that isn't going to bring the guys back. They know what they were getting into. It happened to me, how many times? I was close to it . . . but life has to go on."

In July of 1966, during Gold Cup competition in Detroit, the racing fraternity was hit by another shock wave. Preliminary competition was good. Mira Slovak's *Tahoe Miss* and Chuck Thompson's *Miss Smirnoff* had each won preliminary heats, and heat 3A shaped up to be a good one. But as Thompson and Slovak battled for the lead,



The U-3 *Tahoe Miss* (3) is being launched for a test run on Mission Bay for the San Diego Cup.

Sandy Ross Collection

*Miss Smirnoff* broke up in a geyser of flying plywood and spray about half a mile after the start. The 54 year old Thompson died from his injuries an hour later.

Despite the losses, the sport lurched forward, and completed the season. Slovak won four races that summer, including the Gold Cup, the Diamond Cup, the Governor's Cup, and the first ever British Columbia Cup. By October he was crowned the 1966 National High Point Champion. But 1966 would be remembered more for the darkness than the light. Hydroplane racing had lost four well-known drivers in three short weeks. It was the most dangerous summer ever for open cockpit boat racers.

### In Pursuit of the Triple Crown

In the fall of 1966, with the racing season over, Slovak and the Tahoe Miss team converged at Lake Tahoe to attempt a new speed record on water. Slovak was nervous, but eager to try. With a Gold Cup under his belt and a national high point championship in the bag, setting a new world speed record would complete what Slovak called the 'triple crown' of boat racing.

To prepare for the attempt, *Tahoe Miss* had been fitted with a towering turbocharger, developed by the former crew chief Everett Adams. The team made several attempts that week but had no success. Some days the weather acted up. Other days, it was the boat. Then on Wednesday, October 26<sup>th</sup>, after nearly ten days of trying, Slovak strapped on his helmet and fired up the engine for one last try.

The start of the run looked good. But as Slovak approached record setting speed with a full roostertail behind him, the engine in *Tahoe Miss* exploded, blasting Slovak with a flash fire that cooked his leather flying jacket. Slovak instinctively shut off the fuel, and seconds later leaped overboard to escape the searing heat. By then he was still traveling 125 mph, and Slovak skimmed across the lake surface like a skipping rock. After the crash, the boat was a mess. The crankcase and engine were blown asunder, leaving a jagged hole and blistered tail. Slovak was banged up as well.

"At 195 miles per hour, the second stage blower exploded. Caught on fire. I had an oxygen mask. But the fire burned my skin all over, and I had dislocated hips.

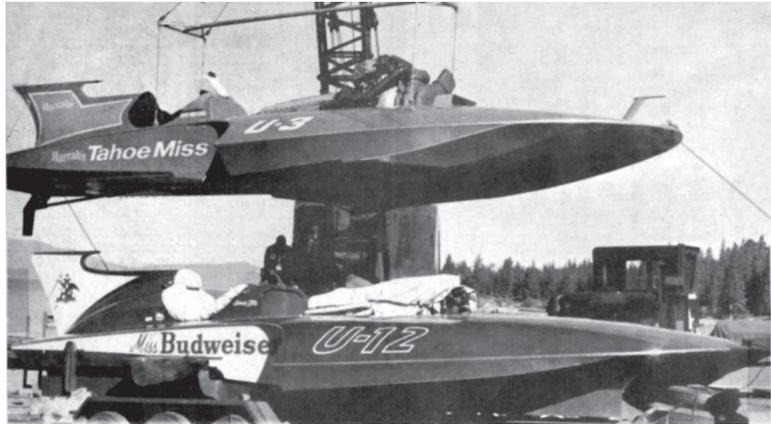
When Slovak had healed enough to return to his day job, he ran into Continental President Robert Six.

"He looked at me and swore like a Marine. He said "What in the hell happened to you now?" I said, 'Mr. Six, I got sunburned!' 'You lying, SOB' he said, and walked away. He was a great man."

### The Last Hurrah

After 1966, Slovak pretty much left hydroplane racing, except for a brief appearance in *Miss Chrysler Crew*, in 1967, as a fill-in driver. Slovak won't say that he finally hung-up his hydroplane helmet because of the danger. Instead, he talks about changes in the Tahoe Miss racing program, and about personal goals he had as a pilot. But it is also clear that the rising level of danger in the sport had made an impression.

"To be honest with you, [at some point] when I was sitting there in the driver's seat, I had a feeling that I didn't belong there. I didn't



The U-3 *Tahoe Miss* (3) on the hook after a mile run attempt. Bernie Little's U-12 *Miss Budweiser* (4) on trailer in the pits at Lake Tahoe.

File 10 photo



The U-77 *Miss Chrysler Crew* that Mira Slovak spent a very short time driving in 1967.

H&RM Collection photo

have the guts anymore, and I didn't have the drive anymore, and I didn't have the 'go and get them' anymore. I opened the throttle, and I was uncomfortable.

"For me, I eventually lost interest. I liked to do things and switch and change. To stick with one thing all the time until you kill yourself . . . I don't believe in that."

### **Other Horizons**

In 1967, Slovak was promoted to Captain for Continental. But in his spare time, after a final retirement from hydroplanes, Slovak did a complete 180. Instead of setting speed records on water, Slovak would attempt a slow endurance record in the air. In the spring of 1968 he flew to West Germany, purchased a Fournier RF-4 glider from the factory. Even after loading up with state-of-the-art radio gear, the plane still weighed only 860 pounds.

"I was flying a wooden, single seat, glider. They put a Volkswagen engine in it. An old Beetle. At 12cc, it produced 36 total horsepower. A little less than a hydroplane! When I looked at it, I said 'That would be lots of fun to fly.' There were aerobatics, with loops and slow rolls. I said . . . 'cheap transportation.' So I bought it, and decided to fly it home [to California]. They looked at me and said, 'Are you crazy'? When I was there, they called me the crazy American. When I crossed the Atlantic, they called me the crazy European."

Slovak guided his single seater over North Atlantic seas and ice-covered landscapes, crisscrossing 8,500 miles through inhospitable weather. He had several close calls along the way, landing for fuel in Scotland, Iceland, Greenland, Canada, and finally the USA. With flight time of just over 175 hours, Slovak's modified glider became the smallest aircraft ever to cross the Atlantic.

Slovak had faced many risks with the tiny beetle engine and its 31 gallon fuel tank, and he managed to dodge them all, until his final approach before a cheering hometown crowd in Santa Paula, California. As he flew in formation alongside a slow flying vintage 'welcome plane', Slovak's little glider stalled, and spun.

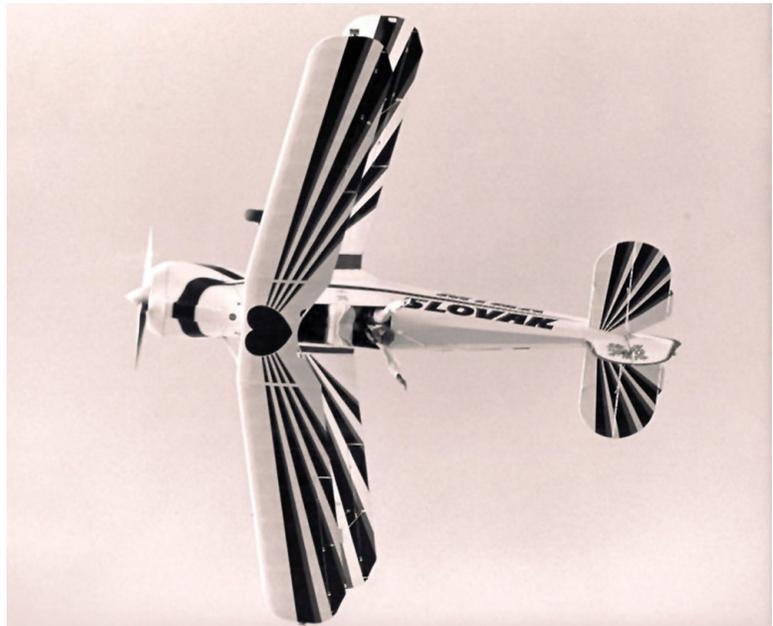
"I recovered from the spin, and made it for the runway. I was going to make it! So I put the gear down, which was even worse. I was in that position, with the engine, and I hit a ten foot ditch. Head on! And it exploded. Twenty one feet from the runway!"

### **Emergency Surgery**

"They said it looked like I was dead, so, the [first] people [who arrived] walked away. But a woman came by. All of this happened in a few minutes. She told me later on that she used to be a nurse, and was married to one of the pilots there. She said, when I hit, the dirt got into my eyes and I was choking. She said 'No, he is alive!' She cleaned my nose and throat, and right away the aid car came by and took me to the hospital.

"In the hospital, on a Sunday afternoon, there isn't too much activity. But a big surgery for a very important person was going on Monday. So the key doctors had a meeting, and they said 'Hey you guys, we have an emergency. Some idiot in the glider, crashed.' So they started working on me. They open me up, and took a spleen, and found a deflated left lung. Broken arm, nerve damage, I had only one eye. And I had four vertebra squashed. The vertebra, that was a big problem. The expert doctor told me later that when he saw me on the table all banged up he said 'Oh God, please let him at least be alive'."

Slovak was unconscious for a week, but eventually recovered. [As a note: Slovak had signed to drive for Bill Harrah again in '68, but the crash was just before the season was due to start.] The accident grounded him for a



Mira Slovak photo

Mira Slovak in his Volkswagen powered glider going into a rollover.

year before he could slip back into his captain's uniform with Continental Airlines. But he did fly again and eventually retired from the airlines in 1986, after 27 years with the company. By then his resume as a pilot included DC-10s, B-707s, B-727s, and B-747s, as well as a fleet of smaller jets and planes.

### Looking Back at Boat Racing

Today, Slovak enjoys a simpler life, living at home in southern California with a couple of dogs. His status says 'retired', but Slovak has been rebuilding his famous glider, and preparing his second Bucker Jungmann for day trips.

He has returned to the northwest several times in recent years to attend 'racing events'.

In 2009 he helped christen the new *Miss Wahoo* in Seattle, and in 2010 he helped fans remember the old Diamond Cup races in Coeur d'Alene. Both times, Slovak's friendly style made him an instant magnet for fans of all ages, who were eager to shake his hand and tell stories. Slovak has met many people because of boat racing, including a lot of nurses and doctors.

"I tried to make friends any place I went. In the days of hydroplane racing, everybody is friendly. Somehow they forget about life and enjoy the excitement of the boats. Everyone was always lots of fun."

Slovak gives credit to all the teams he drove for. But if you listen carefully, one name stands out from the rest.

"Bill Boeing was a great man, and I was very thankful to him. I have great memories. What is success? You have to pick the right place, know the right people, do the right things, and you are successful. And take a chance! With hydroplanes, you are taking a chance. No question about it. But the success depends on the boat, and the owner, and the mechanics who fix it for you.

"I was very fortunate that I had owners who never pushed me. I never had a bad word with one of them. I destroyed a couple of boats. Expensive ones. To me, I was a showman, to please the customers. Of course, I was performing for my owner, Mr. Boeing. But Mr. Boeing said to go out there, have a good time, and put a good show on. That's what I have done."

Not coincidentally, Mr. Boeing's boat was also Slovak's favorite ride.

"The *Bardahl* was rough; it wasn't perfectly balanced. The *Exide* was a disaster. Driving it was like playing with fire. The *Tahoe Miss* was a good driving boat, but just too heavy. The *Miss Wahoo* was the greatest of the great."

Today, Boeing has many fond memories of his boat racing days with Mira Slovak. "I've always gotten a kick out of Mira. He was a very good pilot. He was a gentleman; he did a good job, and was an enjoyable person."

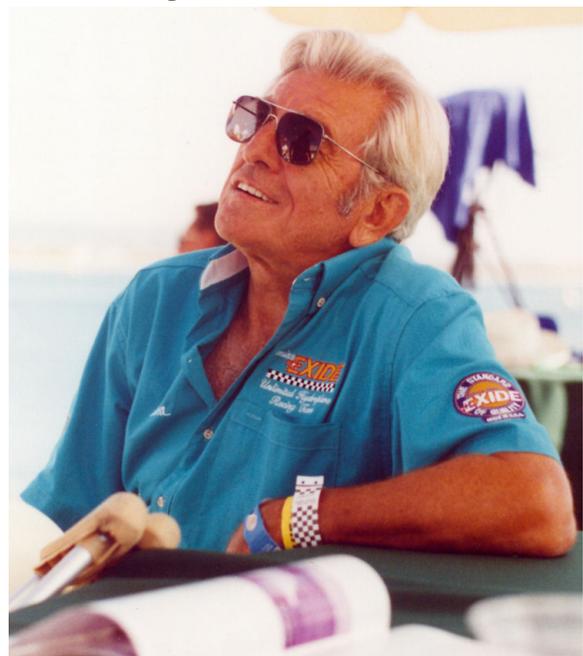
### A Grateful American

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Slovak's bulging resume is how many times he changed course and how strong his desire was to try something new.



Jim Dunn photo

The boat Slovak was supposed to drive in 1968, the U-3 *Harrah's Club*. Bartley Burnett and Jim McCormick shared the seat that year.



Steven Lane photo

Mira Slovak, former *Miss Exide* driver, was in Seattle in 1994 wearing an Exide shirt supporting the Exide team.

“I had an exciting time. I liked unlimited racing. It was great. But I think it was a good way to go to other fields. I liked to diversify.”

One thing has not changed over time. Slovak has the same views he had when he fled Czechoslovakia. His original motive in 1953 was to fight communism, and he feels the same today.

“Listen. Number one, I am not a politically oriented person. But communism is a disaster for everyone. You like it, or not. Communism is a beautiful thing, on paper. But in reality, it is impossible to follow up. The way I felt about communism 60 years ago . . . I still feel the same way today. No question about it. I love America.

America gave me a chance to live. America gave me a chance to do something in my life, and I tried to fulfill that.

“I’m 83 years old now, and time is running out. I’m very thankful that I had a chance to do what I have done. Nothing much. Not a big deal. But enough for me to be satisfied that I have paid back my way to the people of America.”

### **Any Fuel Left in that Tank?**

It should surprise no one that this colorful character has at least one more crazy idea percolating in the back of his mind; an ambitious goal for a man his age. Just last summer Slovak began final preparations for another trip from California to Europe. This time he would fly solo aboard his 1934 Bücker Jungmann open cockpit biplane. He planned to fly the vintage aircraft across the U.S. to Bangor, Maine, and then make 500 mile ‘hops’ to the far Northwest Territories, Greenland, Iceland, Scotland, England, Germany, Austria, and Slovakia. It would be a home going trip; flying his beloved Czech airplane to his Slovakian homeland.

But a few days before take-off, the 83 year old was jumping over a three foot fence near his home (don’t ask why) and fell, injuring his shoulder. The trip was cancelled.

Will he attempt it again this summer? Slovak isn’t ready to let the cat out of the flight bag yet, fearing if he says too much he will raise expectations. But don’t be surprised if you look up someday, and see the friendly and charismatic Mira Slovak fly by, tackling yet another challenge that some people say cannot be done.

Author Steve Nelson wishes to thank Mira Slovak for the ongoing conversation that led to this article. Special thanks also to Bill Boeing Jr., and to former Exide crew member Bob Woolms. Research assistance was provided by Michael Groves.



Michael Prophet photo

The Hydroplane & Raceboat Museum replica U-77 *Miss Wahoo* on tilt at Lake Washington before a test run in 2009. ~ Michael Prophet photo



Michael Prophet photo

Mira Slovak and Bill Boeings at the 2009 christening of the replica U-77 *Miss Wahoo* at Seattle’s Lake Washington..

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## Next Meeting of Unlimiteds Unanimous

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