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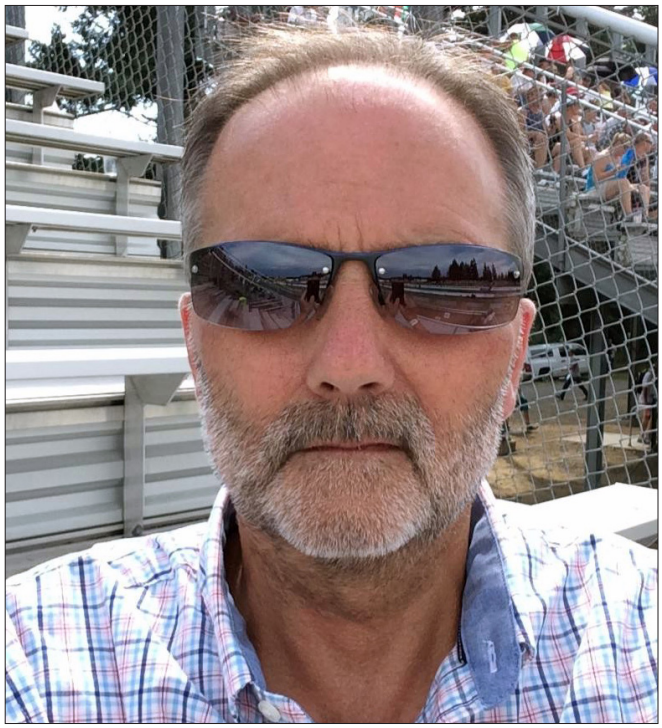
UNJ INTERVIEW:

Ron Jones, Jr: Designer, builder, and boat owner.

Ron Jones, Jr., was born into a famous boat racing family on April 4, 1957. The birth took place in Renton General Hospital, a building that is now a McLendon Hardware store. "I was the first grandson born into either side of the family tree, so it was pretty exciting," he says. "My mom had already had two girls and everybody was nervous, you know, could we get a girl or are we gonna get a grandson? So, I showed up. Of course, I could do no wrong. First son in the family. Grandfather was trying to move a refrigerator down a flight of stairs. He let go to celebrate, pinned two of my aunts against a wall until he collected his thoughts and asked for help. Still talk about that to this day." The following interview with JR was conducted by Craig Fjarlie and Bob Senior on January 17, 2019.



UNJ: What were some of your early experiences? Did you go on to college?

Jones: No. All of my education was private school, from fourth grade on. The school rented space at a church and we used their Sunday school rooms for our classrooms, and I remember all the way to my senior year being in that type format. We had block timing back then, so it's two hours math, two hours of history, two hours of whatever, and then the next day you throw a different topic in there. The nice thing being, when I was in high school, physical education was, you go to the beach. We'd all pile in the bus and

IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE:

Robert F. Peters

Ron Jones, Jr., leased this boat (Hull #8401) from Steve Woomer in 1991 and campaigned it as the U-50 *American Spirit*. The boat was built as the *Atlas Van Lines* in 1984, won the national championship the following year as the *Miller American*, won four straight Gold Cups from 1984 to 1987, and also saw action as the *Miss Circus Circus*.

go down to Huntington Pier. The P.E. teacher didn't care what you did as long as you didn't lay down and sunbathe. You had to participate in some sort of activity. Volleyball, surfing, football, catch, Frisbee, something. Didn't want to get in trouble, they'd let me keep doing something. So, I had no problem with that. That was perfect for us. Of course, Disneyland's right in your back pocket. So, when customers would come pick up their boat, sometimes they would bring their family. Well, it was me and my sisters' responsibility to keep 'em occupied while they hurried up and finished this guy's race boat. So we went to Disneyland more than our share.

What was your first exposure to boat racing? Probably your whole life, really.

Depending on where we lived and what span that occurred in, I guess, would depend on where we would go for summer boat racing. Everybody said, "Oh, what did you guys do for holiday, what did you do for your family vacation?" I said, "We went on a lot of vacations." Every summer we'd go on vacation as long as there was boat racing nearby. (Laughter.)

So, you learned boatbuilding and things through the family, then?

Yeah, my grandfather, Ted, he was the shop foreman when we had the shop in Costa Mesa. So that was, to me, the icing on the cake, you know, the best of both worlds. I got my dad and my grandfather right there.

How well did you know Ted? How long did he live after you were born?

(Pause.) Well, he was at my wedding, that was 1983.

You got to know him pretty well, in other words.

Yeah. In fact, I visited him the day before he passed away at Jensen Park. He was sleeping at the time, I'm sure he didn't remember anything. But I went there to check on him, see what was going on. I think that was 2000 or 2001. It was a month, maybe two months before his birthday. October 16, I think, is his birthday.

Did you learn a lot about boatbuilding from him, or from your dad more, or a combination that's hard to separate?

Well, my job at the shop, pre-high school and high school, was to…let's say we're gonna fix an unlimited.

OK.

At the time they were just getting into the aluminum honeycomb. But the sponsons and the decks were still wood. So, my responsibility after school was to go there and do all the wood prep. Take the raw lumber, and we'd buy giant loads of spruce and northern ash, and I would plane it, jointer it, table saw it, re-plane it to whatever size batten they needed for whatever particular part of the boat they were working on.

Yeah.

So, when the guys came in the next day, they didn't have to go through all that nonsense which, you know, takes a long time to cut all that stuff up and get it prepped. They have, you know, you run one batten through and you gotta run them all at that dimension. OK, then you move the table up or down and do it again. So, it's like, hmm, did I move the table? So, you always had a sacrificial piece of wood to double-check your dimensions. So that was the beginning, I guess, when I was learning about all the tools.

And then you learned design as well?

Being out in the shop, I mean, it's just right in front of you. It's technique. This is how we do it, this is why we do it. This is stronger than that. So, you know, that's the way we do it. And as far as the actual designing of the boat, my dad had built a custom, 40-foot long drafting table and actually hired a guy to do the lofting. He would draw it inch or in-and-a-half to the foot and then this guy would come in and loft the thing out full size.

Not that he didn't do that, but we built six unlimiteds, two 33-foot offshore tunnel boats, and 24 limited hydroplanes all in 18 months. So, everybody was kinda busy. And, uh, besides, he drew all the hardware so all the machine shops could feed us parts. And it's a lot.

Now, the unlimiteds that you built, which ones were they, do you remember?

Country Boy, *Valu Mart*, *Miss U.S.*, *Lincoln Thrift*, *U-95*, and *Pay 'n Pak*.

Way back all the boats were wood. Then they started getting into the honeycomb aluminum and then it went to various composite materials. What was the progression with construction materials? Honeycomb aluminum was kind of a unique substance the first time we heard about it.

That was 1972, '73, with the *Pay 'n Pak*, and then we also used it in the construction of the 33-foot offshore tunnel boats. And, you know, you grab a piece of three-quarter-inch or one-inch plywood, either fir or aucome, and man, that thing's heavy. Real heavy. And then you gotta put aluminum on the outside of that, that's against the water surface so the water doesn't delaminate the plywood. Pretty soon you got a battle ship on your hands. This thing got real heavy real quick. So, switching to aluminum honeycomb, I mean, you just shredded the weight out of the boats. And, uh, (pause) we learned a lot about the new way of construction, you know, basically overnight. Here's the material, here's what an insert does. I mean, now we pop-rivet 'em together.

Yeah.

And before we'd have to put these sleeve inserts in there, and special drill bits that spot-faced one skin, the core, but left the inner skin so it would stop the insert and fill the hole full of glue, smash the insert, it would expand and catch itself underneath the skin. The insert was glued in. Now you had a hard point to put a bolt…very time-consuming. So, started learning how to trust the glue and rivets and use less fasteners.

You drove various types of boats. You drove outboards first?

I drove a D Stock outboard for Skeet Phillips. I want to think [John] Rheinberger and Skeet built it. I don't know whose design it was. They were both from Oregon. I can't remember the guy's name that lives down there that builds a lot of outboards. Anyway, that was the first outboard, the only outboard I ever drove.

That was just one time, or…?

One. And then various customers, you know, live on the East Coast and they would send an engine ahead so we would install it and the boat would be complete when they came to pick it up. If the timing worked out right, we always had some local boat race on Mission Bay or Long Beach or Puddingstone, Southern California, Northern California, Bakersfield, raced all over down there and, uh, I didn't continue driving. Conflict of interest on my part, I guess. All classes, all sizes.

Is it possible to remember the first inboard you built?

(Pause.) Well, it would be 1976 and we were obligated to build a drag boat for Ed Wills.

OK.

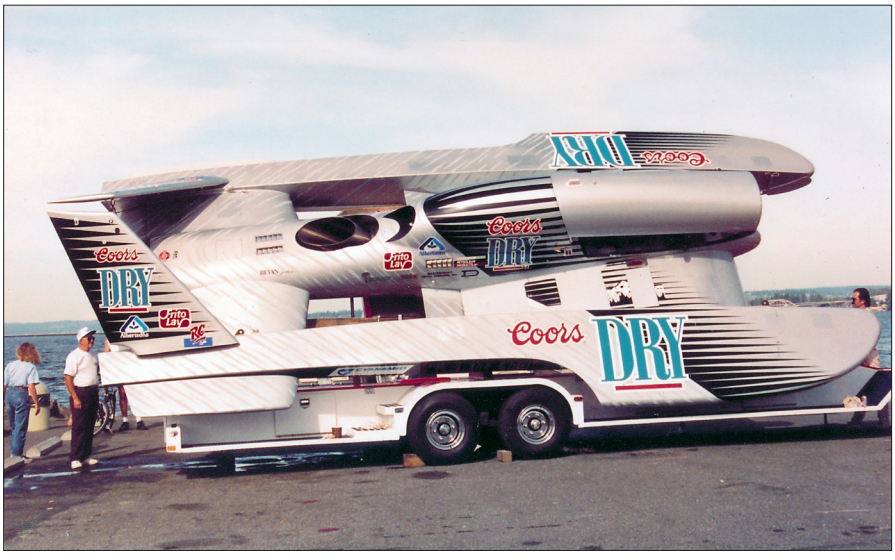
Mr. Ed was the name of his boats. In trade for moving all of our goods and machinery and everything that we managed to glom onto and get out of the United States government that had been locked up due to Fendler's escapades. It was all sitting in Phoenix. So, Ed Wills said, "We'll go get your stuff and deliver it in Seattle and in trade you build us a 20-whatever size drag boat and we'll see what happens." So, we did that. First time down the track the thing went 186 miles an hour. Everybody was, like, "Wow, where'd you get that?"

Well, you built flatbottoms with Dave Villwock.

Yeah, I bought a mold from Kim Gregory, which was the very first Beismeier mold, so it had some pedigree to go with it.

How did you get to know Dave Villwock?

Well, I knew of him from racing



Kirk Johnson

In 1992, Ron Jones, Jr., designed and built the U-102 *Coor's Dry* (Hull #9210). The boat is still racing and, in fact, won the 2018 national championship with Andrew Tate driving.

in the Northwest. He worked in a sheet metal shop, bending up, making stuff for restaurants and businesses and HVAC stuff and was very successful in a Cracker-box. Then he got in being buddies with Steve Jones. Steve Jones built Starfire runabouts, flatbottoms, and he holds, I think, every world record there is, or he held in that class: Superstock, Pro-Stock, and all those classes. Went to Florida and they brought two flatbottoms and a 6-litre. And they won every heat they entered in all classes. Somewhere I have a picture of the pile of trophies. I think we ended up having to ship 'em home because they wouldn't all fit in the car. Anyway, when we built the *Coors Dry*, he [Villwock] had already been the crew chief for *Circus Circus* when [Chip] Hanauer drove. So, we're out looking for sponsorships and he's tuggin' at my shirt saying, "I can help you with that but I gotta get qualified in your boat." I said, "Well, you have two races, Seattle and San Diego." Seattle, we struggled pretty hard. The boat was, aerodynamically it didn't have a break in the bottom. It was a true airfoil and the boat was confused, should I continue to fly off the water or do I seek an elevation and—which was a lot higher than any driver was used to flying—but he flew that flatbottom around, so that was a pretty good choice of what to do here, as far as driving. Seattle, we just couldn't keep the thing on the lake.

You had Mitch Evans driving…

Mitch Evans was also driving it. He came from [Ed] Cooper's piston-powered boat. I think that was his first. I don't remember if *Jeronimo* was around, if Mitch had driven that boat yet. Anyway, no fault of Mitch's, Dave just brought the *Circus Circus* sponsorship with him to the party. So, kinda hard not to do that. Of course, that bit us in the long run when he pulled the rug at him again.

When you were building flatbottoms for Villwock, did you ever drive any of those boats?

No, it wasn't for him.

Oh, OK.

He actually worked for Ron Jones Marine. Dad hired him as an employee. And that's when we were getting started putting cockpits in boats, early '90s.

Ah, yeah. You got involved with the unlimiteds as an owner…

Um hmm.

…or you leased the boat from [Steve] Woomer first, if we have the time line correct. That was the first…

American Spirit… The hull was either the *Miller American* or *Circus Circus* when Fran [Muncey] and [Jon] Prevost had it. It's the boat that blew over right next to *Madison* and broke in half at San Diego. That's the *American Spirit*. It was a lease-to-purchase.

Mmm, OK.

Everybody said why you doing the lease? Why doesn't he just sell the boat? We didn't have time. It was easier for me to acquire a hull and throw a set of our sponsons on it and do updated hardware and, you know, basically putting earrings on, whatever. And that's what we did. And half-way through the second year, the *Coors Dry*, that was, we were out shopping for sponsorships and the *Coors Dry* package showed up and said, "Can you build a boat in 60 days or less, for $35,000?" I said, "Well, that's about one-tenth of the amount of money it's gonna take, but if we get sponsorship and people volunteer their time, you know, all we can do is try."

So basically, that's what we did. And we had Pietro's Pizza as a primary sponsor for the American Spirit boat for Tri-Cities and Seattle. We made an agreement with the owner of Pietro's that we would leave it painted up his theme, and all the vinyls, for the whole year and give him more advertising. And he would provide us, whenever we called and ordered pizza to feed the crew. Well, I don't eat much pizza these days. (Laughter.) I've never eaten so much pizza in my whole life. So, we got non-alcohol beer from Coors, which is the Coors Dry brand, and all the pizza, bread sticks, and salads you'd ever want. And one Saturday I counted we had 24 people there workin' on the boat, tryin' to get the thing done. And, of

Paul Kemiel

The U-9 *Miss Exide* in 1994 (Hull #8401) with Mark Evans driving.

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

The former *Coor's Dry* (Hull #9210) raced in 1994 and 1996 as the U-11 *Miss Exide 2*. Here it is at the 1996 Columbia Cup with Mark Weber driving.

course, a lot of people were confused. They're in there trying but it takes an army just to steer the army.

Yeah.

And so, at the end of the year we had crew day and we gave 15 rides to various people who own machine shops, crew members, whatever, as payment for all their help.

That took place where?

Lake Chelan.

Oh, Lake Chelan, OK. And that was in the *Coors Dry*?

Both boats. Mark [Evans] drove the *American Spirit*. There was enough room with no seat in it, and he could have the person sitting in front of him, reach around, they would help steer and Mark ran the throttle and canards. Well, the crew chief of the boat, Jake Hodge, his wife is like 5 feet tall, or 4 foot 10. She ended up running the throttle and canards and Mark steered, because she was just a size in between. So, her legs sat flat in the cockpit. Mark thought, "What's the problem? This isn't gonna hurt, no big deal." Debbie only knew one thing, step on the gas. So, when they got the thing started, she just floored it and got Mark's attention! It scared him a couple times. And he's tryin' to, you know, tell her to slow down and she's laughing hysterically.

Having a grand time.

We could hear her as she's going by, we could hear her screaming at the top of her lungs. She's having a great time scaring Mark to death. Well, the boat's starting to get out of hand and we're like, "Oh, yikes, maybe this isn't a good idea." So, after that was over, we had a couple more ideas of how to control the crowd. But that's when I drove the boat by myself, the *Coors Dry*. And that was a big item bein' in there, for me.

Yeah. That was your first time in an unlimited?

Yeah.

Now, at the end of that season Mark went with Leland, and you had Scott Pierce drive for a couple seasons.

Yeah, well, I had sold all my equipment. Dave Villwock crashed basically both boats, one in Detroit and one in Tri-Cities. So, Exide shows up, buys everything I own, motors, trucks, trailers, boats, you name it. There was a tool box full of tools. Everything I had. Off to Detroit it goes. But they wanted the boat fixed before it left town. So, we put a new cockpit on the *American Spirit*. Rebuilt it basically from the ground up. Made it a new, fresh boat. And Mark drove for them out of Detroit. Lived here, but…

You had two *Exide* boats. Jimmy King…

Yeah, there were a couple years of *Exide* before he went to Leland.

But then you sold the *Coors Dry* boat to Mike Jones.

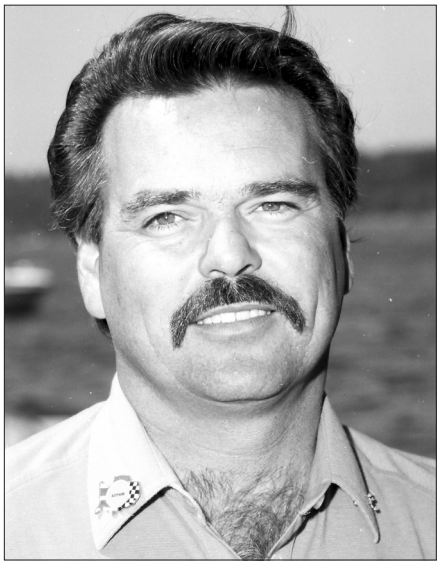
No.

No?

Sold it to Exide first.

Exide, OK.

That cost Brian Keogh his job, 'cause he lied to the owner of Exide. I told him I wanted $250,000. The trailer was brand new, the boat had been repaired and painted, motors, everything. It was $250,000. I don't remember how much they paid for the *American Spirit* as is, but then they paid us to fix it. So basically, they got everything. Well, somehow Keogh's agreement with his boss was, he could only write a check up to, but not to exceed $200 grand. So, he told me, "Here's what we're gonna do. I'm gonna write you a check for $200 and we're gonna do all the paperwork that says $200. But every week, for 10 weeks, I'm gonna send you a check for $5,000 'til we get to $50 grand." "So, what if you trip and fall? What if something happens? Who's gonna know to pay me." That's a lot of money, you know, $50 grand is $50 grand.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Ron Jones, Jr. in 1990.

I'm not gonna leave it on the table." So, corporate's wondering why the boat hasn't left Seattle, why I'm holding it up. So, next thing you know the phone rings and it's the president of Exide and he's asking me a lot of questions. Well, unbeknownst to me, Brian is on the phone and has been told not to say a word. So, the owner of Exide starts askin' me these questions. Well, I'm not gonna lie to the guy.

Yeah.

I didn't know that they're trying to trip me up by having somebody on the phone. And so I answered all the questions and told him what the suggested plan was and we ended up settling for $225,000, not $250. And some jigs and fixtures, you know, little nick-knack stuff that, I don't know how it got overlooked in the beginning anyway, but that they wouldn't own it anyway. So, they ended up getting what they wanted, I ended up getting paid, boat left town, you know. 'Course, right at the end of the conversation with me, the president of Exide says, "Is this what happened, Brian?" "Yes."

Mmmm.

"You know what to do, Brian. Somebody'll be there in 10 minutes to grab your keys." Cost him his job.

Wow. Oh, OK. Then [Jim] Harvey's two-step in 1993.

The full-body boat.

Yeah.

Which was the old *Atlas* boat that I put sponsons on.

In an email exchange, Mike Jones said in 1994 he bought the boat that had been the *Circus* that Villwock drove.

He ended up with both boats from Exide.

Yeah.

The deal with him and the Exide guy—the Exide guy's in prison to this day—I don't know if he's still alive, but both he and his wife went to prison. Federal prison for what they did to Sears on the batteries. It was one of the biggest scams in corporate America. And he went down hard. So, I have no feelings for that man. Anyway, Jones ended up getting both boats, trucks, trailers, everything that said Exide on it. You can have all this crap but you gotta leave the paint job and race it that way for five years, and then it's all yours. I don't think it cost Mike any money.

We've never asked about that.

Yeah, so of course, Mike helped Fendler, put Fendler's name on it, to do whatever. It's gotta stay that color. And he suffers and he pulled it off. Now he's national champ.

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

The U-4 *Truck Gear* at Seattle in 1997 when driven by Nate Brown. The boat (Hull #9031) was built as the *Miss Circus Circus* in 1990.

Yeah, yeah. Mike Hanson rebuilt it as a single wing, and the Campbells have done some further work on it. What was your thought when they converted it? Now, at that point they were starting to do the fuel restrictions. Did that play into it?

Oh, yeah. Two-wing boats love horsepower. There was nothing faster than that *Coors*. We went to Hawaii and San Diego, dad had requisitioned onboard Race-pac stuff.

Yeah.

We were seeing 218 miles an hour and we weren't turning the motors way up, 'cause we only had one. So, the thing was fast, I mean, blazingly fast. But we had to be careful. One propeller, one motor…

Yeah, one broken blade and it'd be big trouble.

Well, we kinda laid back all the ears on the propellers and I don't know that there's gonna fit any more cracks on 'em. But we didn't break it. Stopped crew day just in time. Now they're lamps. We made 'em into lamps.

Did you work with Mike Hanson when he changed the boat?

No.

That was strictly his project?

Between him and Mike Jones.

OK, so you weren't involved at all.

I did the same thing to the three-wing *Circus* boat that Woomer owned when we caught it on fire in Hawaii. We came back home and I filled it all in and Nate [Brown] ran it as the *Truck Gear*. His job was to crash into Mark Evans at any and all races to abort his chances of becoming national high point instead of Woomer's boat.

OK, well…Did you tow your own boats back east or have crew members…

I rented a van from Hertz, a

Ron Harsin

Ron Jones, Jr., became a partner with Ken Muscatel in operating the U-25 in 2007. Here, Muscatel drives the boat at Evansville, Indiana, in 2008. The boat (Hull #9302) was built in 1993 as the *Miss T-Plus*.

passenger van or whatever they are. Seats seven or nine people. The crew and I rode in that. Sometimes I flew in and out or from race-to-race, but, uh, for the most part I rode with the crew in the rental car.

You and Ken Muscatel were partners. How would you describe that partnership? How did that arrangement work?

Not very well for me. I got aced out of that deal. But I'm not gonna throw Ken under the bus, although I could, pretty hard.

So, the arrangement you had with Muscatel, when he ran U-25, you did a major rebuilt on the boat.

Brand new boat. That thing was a rocket ship. We tried a lot of stuff, running no wing, no inlet on the scoop, just a foil that was shaped, you know, like the inlet of an airplane. As soon as air came over the cowling, (makes a sucking noise), right in. I still say, if we would've known then what we now know, or after what happened ahead of time, we wouldn't have blown that motor up. Unbeknownst to us, that motor was run in that boat and they had a hot start in Madison. Got that P.T. really hot. Well, Jon [Zimmerman] gets in the thing, we put this new-fangled cowling on there, he makes two laps and blows the hot end out of it. Why? The warm-up lap was nothing, just idling around. Then he starts to get after it and he goes into the first turn and "poof!" Hmm, that shouldn't have done that, 'cause the temp gauge didn't show any excessive heat. It was just tired. Then we find out oh, that's the motor we got really hot in Madison. Oh, thanks for tellin' us. We wouldn't have run that one over there if we would've known that. That's the kind of crap that just drove me out of my mind. I just, I just couldn't stand that stuff.

Did you yourself learn A to Z all about turbine engines or did you have other people do...

I have full-time motor builders. Tom Anderson used to put motors together for us.

When you look back, what in your opinion makes a top driver? You worked with a number of people.

Tenacity. I think that encapsulates talent. It encapsulates drive, um, if you're just tenacious about all aspects of why am I sitting in this seat? What is my responsibility? It's no different than the guy wearin' the jersey that's facing the quarterback. You're the team captain. You gonna pull this team together? Are we gonna win this game or are we gonna be stupid? A good driver's got to be tenacious. A guy that'll never, ever give up, 'til the ball flight comes out. Don't stop trying. I mean, so many times I've seen (gestures down) driver just lives and settles into third place. Why? You weren't that far from takin' over second.

Of all the drivers you've worked with, in your own team, is there one who stands out as better than the rest?

(Long pause.) I only had Mark, Mitch—and Mitch was only for a

Lon Erickson

The U-25 was extensively rebuilt before the 2009 season, to the point that those who track such things considered it to be a new hull (designated Hull #0925). It's shown here at Stan Sayres Pits before a test run on Lake Washington.

Lon Erickson

Ron Jones, Jr. and Jon Zimmerman discuss the testing of the rebuilt U-25.

couple of heats in Seattle—Dave, and Pierce. That's all I had, right?

And Muscatel, too.

Well, that was his deal. I was involved in that, working. Well, we got that boat going. He'd never qualified that fast. He won a heat. And he led the final at Seafair. I was havin' a heart attack. Wow, yay, we did it. (Gestures, declining speed.) He lifts off. "Why'd you let off, Ken?" "I got confused, never been out front before." (Laughter.) Gee whiz. I don't know. Each guy, I mean, Pierce was good for qualifying. He didn't get lost in Hawaii on the race course. He was a good qualifier. Scared to death of competition. Dave does not like lane one. Give him a fast boat and put him in lane three, look out. Mark? All depends on how Mark feels that day on how you're gonna do. I didn't know enough about Mitch. He drives the socks off that "Turbinator." Or did.

Well, can we talk a little about your health? What happened to your lungs and…

I have a genetic disease.

Ah.

It's called Alpha-1 antitrypsin. Each of my grandparents, Grandpa Volgar and Grandpa Jones, had a form of emphysema, or an issue with their lungs. That got passed to my parents, that is, my mom and my dad. So, when I was born, dad, no signs of anything being wrong with them as far as their breathing or anything. So, I got the disease. I ended up getting Alpha-1 antitrypsin. Trypsin is an enzyme that your liver produces that protects your lungs from getting sick. Anyway, my body doesn't make trypsin.

OK.

So, I've had pneumonia eight times.

Oh, wow.

I spent a month in the hospital. The day I got out of the hospital was the day that George Henley died. So, I won't forget that day.

Yeah.

So, for the last three years I've been learning all about trypsin. In 2009, when I got out of the hospital, they handed me an inhaler and said, "You have COPD." And I said, "What's that?" The doctor explained to me what COPD was. "You're gonna need this inhaler." OK. Well, in 2011, when I'm building Billy [Schumacher] and Jane's boat, I'm finding it's getting really hard to breathe; harder and harder and harder to breathe. What's going on? So, I told myself we're gonna get to the bottom of this. I'm going to go see a real pulmonologist that's gonna tell me what's going on with my lungs. So, I did.

Come to find out it's gone from COPD to stage-one emphysema. One year later, three years ago, it went to stage-four emphysema. So, I've used up pretty much all my lung sacs in my lungs. Almost two years ago to the day, or within a month, Dick Lynch said, "I want to take you to see somebody that I go see, and he's helped me with my vertigo. He thinks he can keep you right where you're at, and maybe even improve you with your breathing, with acupuncture." I said, "C'mon." So, I've been going to Dr. Lin for almost two years. And out of the generosity of his heart Dick has been taking care of all this for me, to help me get better. And I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for Dr. Lin's acupuncture treatments.

Really.

Oh, it's made a night and day…I can tell the difference. Sure, I have my days…

Yeah.

…and it's pretty scary when you can't breathe.

Well, we'd been hearing that your problems were caused by some of the dust and things you were breathing in the shop, but that has nothin' to do with it, then?

Nope. All genetics. I don't recommend grinding without a mask. I mean, 'cause right now if I walked in to a boat shop and they were, I'd instantly feel it.

What do you think of the future of boat racing? Unlimited owners can't get on the same page year after year after year.

There's a word for that. I'll think of it. That organization doesn't mind eating its own young, for some reason. They're really good at it. And to me, we don't even have a limited field to draw from. You don't need to be eating your young, you need to be helping them.

Yup.

Making sure that they can get to the next race, where the motor starts. No owner understood that. There's a guy in the pits struggling to trailer-fire his engine. And this

guy over there is going, "Well, if they would just do this." Well, go tell them! Oh, that's not my position. OK, then go ask him if you can help. I never understood why people don't do that.

Do you think the future for unlimited racing is still viable? A lot of people are expressing concern these days.

Well, they should. Of course, now we're right on the cusp of trying something new that I think, you know, could perk up some ears.

Mmm, yeah?

Big aluminum shiny, pretty blowers. All kinds of noise and giant horsepower. Some people say, "Oh, that'll never work." How do you know? *Chrysler Crew* looked pretty good for a little tiny 427. I mean, it wasn't top qualifier, but it went around and around, did a pretty good job at it. Heerensperger's same thing. Full 427. That thing made 800 horsepower. Cut it up and eat it. I mean, Tim Gross's motors make 3,000 horsepower and you only need to have one of 'em, not two. And now, you get to have a little DC transmission. Wow, I mean, just think of the possibilities. Phenomenal. In my opinion the deal with this automotive is gonna be more of an issue with propellers than it is with the drive train, because of the torque.

Yeah?

These guys doing their little leap frog (makes engine noise) trying to stay at 85 of whatever, you know, on and off, on and off, can't do that with a blower. I mean, it's just gonna want to twist those ears right off those propellers. That to me is a bigger problem than anything else. If they do adopt the rules that we asked them to, there's no weight restriction, you can have a 10-speed transmission, who cares? It's up to you if you want to chase that dream or not. I think until somebody proves me wrong, I stand behind this. I think that if you only did one change to a current unlimited, you could add 10 miles an hour, possibly, to its average speed. Left-hand rotation propellers. Just like every outboard in the world.

Yeah.

Why did Carl Kiekhaefer, Mercury Marine, pick left-hand rotation to build all those outboards? Millions of 'em. Not because left is a smaller word than right. I mean, 'cause it works. And it still works to this day. They figured out that 5.5-degree shaft angle with 15 degrees of rake is absolute, optimum efficiency for a pair of racing propellers. And they're left-hand. Why do little outboards go around the corners with a skid fin this big (gestures)? Not because the skid fin's that big, let me tell ya. If you want to work on that little yellow boat to get it to go around the corner, it has nothin' to do with the skid fin. Shoosh, left-hand rotation.

How easy is it to change the rotation on it?

Change the gear box.

Change the gear box?

Take one gear out of the thing, it'd spin the other way. Now you have the opportunity to start with a blank sheet of paper with a gear box and have it come out going left, and have a shift. Wow! That's better than Christmas. These guys have no idea what opportunity they got in front of 'em. And the sport's in the toilet.

Yeah. The *Renault* came out of storage from 30 years, back to Sonny Young's kid in Michigan, hooked up with Jerry Schoenith. They're talking about five-blade propellers.

Um hmm, because the offshore guy, which he came from, Hering, makes five-blade propellers all day long. Four blades, six blades, why do we have to contain ourselves to three? Will your boat like a five-blade? I don't know. Probably less chance of throwin' a blade with five than there is with three, because the gap between the blades is less, so you're gonna have, you know, less of a chance of (claps his hands) the slapping instead of entering the water. You get rid of that and when you go into the corner, now you really made this mad, goin' the wrong way in my opinion. You know, instead of this wanting to go around the corner, this blade is going this way, you're doing this and it's picking up the right sponson. Outboard doesn't do that, it just drives around the corner. Just go around the corner. It doesn't know. It's not a brain. It's just a function. Carl figured something out. He built a lake to prove it. ❖

Lon Erickson

Ron Jones in the shop while he was building the U-88 *Degree Men* in 2011.

FROM THE UNJ VAULT:

PROPS 101

AN INTRODUCTORY COURSE ABOUT THOSE ROUND, SPINNING THINGS THAT MAKE A HYDROPLANE GO FAST.

by David D. Williams
illustrations by Tim Johnson

Race boat propellers are very simple looking pieces of equipment, which in fact are extremely complicated and not well understood, even by the people who work with them daily.

One of the reasons that they are so misunderstood is that they look so much like conventional, fully submerged propellers, which have been around almost 200 years. The latter have been at the heart of the multi-billion-dollar shipping and naval-defense industries and have been so thoroughly researched and tested that their performance can be accurately predicted from their design specifications.

The technical name for the type of propeller used in hydroplane racing is "surface piercing, super cavitating." They act much differently from conventional props. Surface-piercing propellers have only been used with any frequency since the late 1940s and have very few commercial or military applications. Little hard research is available on them and correlation between design and performance is anecdotal at best.

This article was originally published in the March 1997 issue of the Unlimited NewsJournal

Terms:

Several terms are used to describe propeller characteristics, whether conventional or surface-piercing. They are:

- Diameter
- Rake
- Pitch
- Cup

DIAMETER: Refers to the propeller's size and is expressed in inches. To find the diameter, draw a circle around a propeller, taking care to just touch the tip of each blade. Then draw a straight line from one side of the circle to the other, passing through the dead center. Measure this line and you will find the diameter [see Figure 1]. Most contemporary unlimiteds are running a diameter around 15 inches. Early prop-riders such as the *Slo-mo-shuns* ran about 12 inches.

RAKE: Expressed in degrees and refers to the angle of the blade relative to its hub. To understand rake, it's easiest to start by thinking

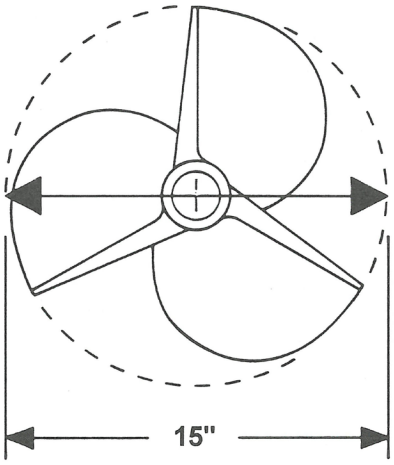


FIGURE 1

of the blade and hub as two separate pieces. Think of the hub as a perfect horizontal plane, then imagine that the blade is being glued onto it. If the center line of the blade is perpendicular to the hub, the propeller will have zero degrees of rake [see Figure 2].

In your mind, shave a small wedge off the bottom of the blade—let's say at a 7-degree angle [see Figure 3]. Now, when you glue the two together, the center line of the blade will be 7 degrees off perpendicular. This propeller would have 7 degrees of rake [see Figure 4]. Early prop-riding Unlimiteds used 7 to 10 degrees of rake. The turbine boats have rake in the high teens or low 20s.

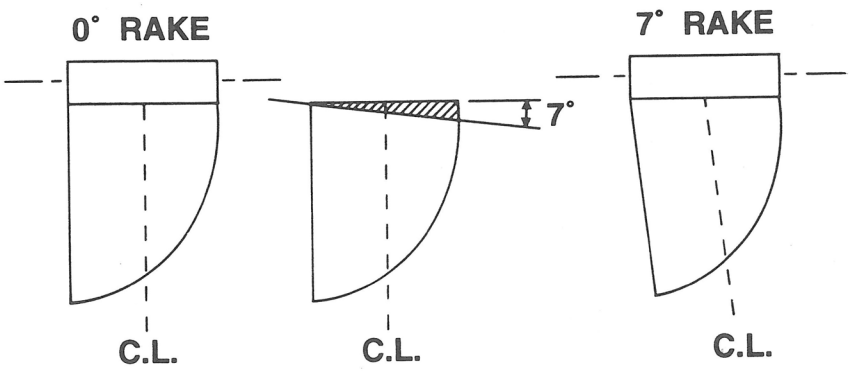


FIGURE 2

FIGURE 3

FIGURE 4

PITCH: Measured in inches and describes how far a propeller theoretically would travel in one revolution if there were no slippage. The easiest way to understand pitch is to imagine a large, glass aquarium filled with very thick Jell-O. Now put a propeller in it and watch as the prop turns one full revolution. The tip of the blade will cut a long spiral in the gelatin. Measure from the top of one coil to the top of the next. This dimension shows how far the blade traveled in one revolution. If the distance is 20 inches, then that propeller's pitch is 20 inches [see Figure 5].

Gelatin-filled vats are not very practical, so race teams have pitch gauges to measure pitch. But a propeller blade is a compound shape and pitch will change from one part of the blade to the next. To account for this change, most teams will take a number of measurements off a given blade and then average them to get a single number. The problem is that no two teams will measure the same blade at the same points. If you give four different people the same propeller to measure, they will most likely give you four different answers that may vary by over an inch! This problem is not as big as it first appears. If all of the propellers used by one team are measured in the same way, they can be compared accurately.

Boats in the 1950s and '60s ran pitches in the high teens and low 20s. Boats are now running in the high 20s.

CUP: One of the most elusive elements of design. It refers to the amount of concavity on the back side of the blade. There is no universal measuring standard for cup, but it can be estimated by laying a straight edge across two points on the blade and measuring the depth of the concavity [see Figure 6]. This depth is expressed in thousandths of an inch.

Basic Principles:

A boat propeller acts much like a large wood screw, pulling itself through the water with each revolution. The back of the blade is the working surface, and in a surface-piercing propeller, only one blade is in the water at a time—even then, only the bottom third [see Figure 7]. The roostertail is a by-product of the tremendous thrust that the propeller develops, but it offers no thrust of its own.

The effectiveness of a propeller can be dramatically influenced by diameter, pitch, rake, and cup. Diameter and pitch have a direct effect on boat speed. Rake primarily affects boat attitude. Cup influences both but has a greater effect on speed.

Every propeller has a theoretical top speed. It can be computed by multiplying the pitch by the shaft speed. For example, a 25-inch-pitch propeller spinning at 10,000 rpm with no slippage would travel 250,000 inches in a minute, or 236 mph.

We can convert theoretical top speed to actual top speed by subtracting for "slippage." Slippage is expressed as a percentage and accounts for the fact that in real-world conditions, a propeller will not have total adhesion to the water and will in fact "slip" somewhat. Even a good propeller will have slippage of at least 10 percent, which means that 10 percent of the propeller's theoretical potential is lost. Now, if you subtract 10 percent for slippage from the theoretical top end of 236 mph, you get 212 mph. Ask Ron Brown what *Miss Budweiser's* top speed is and I bet it's darn close to 212 mph.

Once a race team decides what their pitch and shaft rpm are going to be, they have to select the right propeller diameter. Finding the right diameter is like finding the right

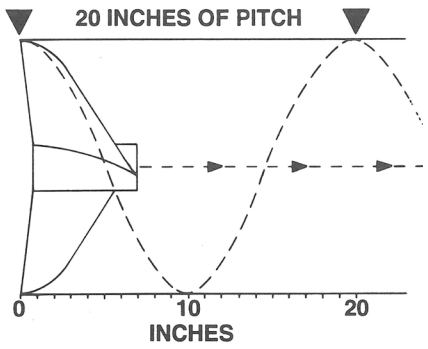


FIGURE 5

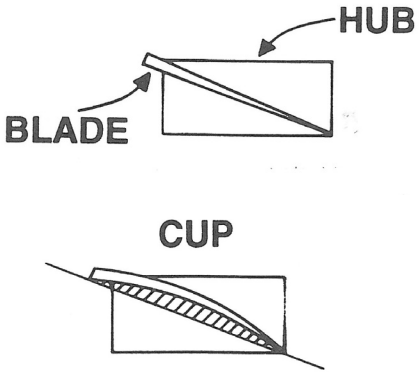


FIGURE 6

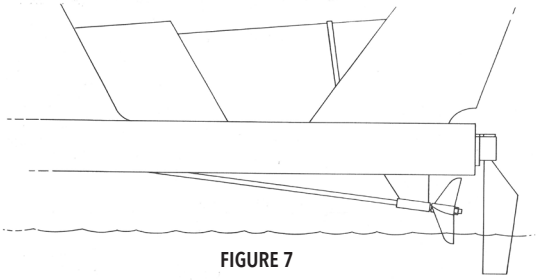


FIGURE 7

gear in your car. Too large a diameter and the engine will be overloaded and not produce enough power—much like trying to drive away from a stop sign while your car is in fourth gear. Too small a propeller will not get enough bite to transfer its power to the water. It will spin wildly but go nowhere, just like a tire on ice.

Most propeller design work is done on computers, but the final test comes when the boat hits the water. Most teams will start with a prop that is a little bigger than they think is necessary. (You can always shave some blade off, but you can't stick it back on.) A team will begin propeller testing with an optimum rpm and target speed in mind. If the new prop keeps the engine from reaching the optimum rpm, the diameter will be shaved a fraction of an inch at a time until the desired rpm is reached.

If the optimum rpm does not produce the targeted speed, then slippage is too great and changes must be made in the blade to reduce slippage, often by adding more cup. Cup is not fully understood yet, but one of its effects is to cause the propeller to act as if it has more pitch.

All surface-piercing propellers will provide some lift just from the action of the re-entering blade slapping against the water. Additional lift or down force is provided by blade rake.

With a conventional, fully submerged propeller, all the blades produce equal thrust and the thrust line is directly up the shaft. With a surface-piercing propeller, only one blade is in the water at a time and all of the thrust is produced by the single submerged blade. In this case, the thrust line is perpendicular to the line of the submerged blade. If the center line is raked back, then the thrust line is perpendicular to the rake.

To see how rake affects a boat, look first at a hypothetical, old-time prop-rider from the 1950s and '60s [see Figure 8]. Given that:

◆ The two-blade propeller provides enough lift (from slapping the water) to raise the transom, and

◆ The shaft angle is 7 degrees.

Three different rakes would have the following effects:

1. If the propeller has no rake, the line of thrust will be angled up, and the propeller will have a good deal of lift, raising the tail and forcing the nose down. It will slow the boat. It may cause the boat to hook or even to stuff its nose.

2. If the propeller has 7 degrees of rake, the line of thrust will be straight ahead. The boat (if all other factors are right) will be fast and stable.

3. If the propeller has 14 degrees of rake, the line of thrust will be angled down from the transom. It will suck the rear end down, raise the bow, and may cause the boat to be wild and flighty. It may even blow over.

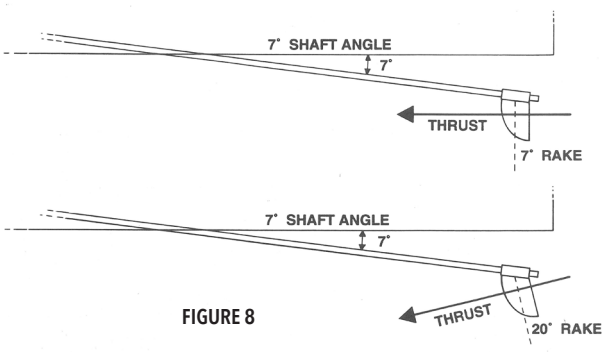


FIGURE 8

Obviously, these angles have been exaggerated to illustrate the point. In actual racing, a change of a degree or two will have dramatic effect.

The same principles apply to a modern boat, but there are a few additional considerations. First, a three-blade propeller provides more lift than a two-blade, so a three-blade propeller must have more rake to overcome this lift. Second, today's boats have wide transoms and they carry a lot more aerodynamic lift, which calls for extremely high-rake propellers with thrust angles that are sharply angled down.

Propeller performance is boat specific. What works on one boat may not work on another. Propeller theory is also a lot like politics: Two well-educated and intelligent people can look at the same problem and come up with very different explanations and solutions. They both will believe they are right and both can back up their positions with facts.

There are no textbooks or manuals that cover racing propellers and most racers are very secretive about their propellers. This article is based on information gathered during interviews with a variety of boat builders, owners, drivers, and crewmen. It is not intended to be the "gospel" on propellers, but only an overview of the currently accepted propeller theories. ❖

TIME CAPSULE:
Looking back at the sport's history

The sport of unlimited hydroplane racing has one of the longest histories in all of motorsports, dating back even beyond the first running of the Gold Cup in 1904. As the sport gets ready to hold another racing season, we take the time each spring to look at boat racing's legacy and to consider what has gone on before. With the 2019 campaign fast approaching, let's look at what happened 25, 50, 75, and 100 years ago.

25 YEARS AGO
The 1994 Season

When the 1994 campaign got underway in Detroit, every fan and participant in the sport was already sure who would eventually win the national championship. Bernie Little's *Miss Budweiser* team was the clear favorite. During the previous five years, they had won four national titles and 28 of the 40 races they had entered. What's more, they had one of the most successful drivers the sport had ever seen. When the season started, Chip Hanauer had already collected seven national titles and 50 race victories, including nine Gold Cups.

The *Budweiser* team also had the advantage of having multiple top-tier boats. During the season, they would use three different hydroplanes. They'd bring two of them to most of the events, would test and qualify both, and then would enter the boat that they felt was best suited to win the race. Everybody else was limited to just the one boat that they brought.

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Bernie Little

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Miss Budweiser in 1994.

Sometimes a huge advantage on paper doesn't come true on the racecourse, however. And, the 1994 season would offer just such a surprise for Bernie Little and his team.

Things got off track for *Miss Budweiser* right at the start. While preparing to start the first heat of the Gold Cup, the boat smashed into a wave that blew open the escape hatch on the bottom of the hull. The result sent a blast of Detroit River water and debris into the cockpit that injured Hanauer.

The team quickly enlisted the services of Mike Hanson to take the boat's controls, but he managed only a third-place finish. The winner was Mark Tate in the *Smokin' Joe's*, a craft owned by Steve Woomer and widely considered to be the best challenger to *Budweiser's* reign. Nate Brown drove the colorful *Tide* to second place.

Next the boats went to Lewisville, Texas, for the second running of the Sneaky Pete's Hydrofest, where Hanson won a victory for the *Miss Budweiser* as Hanauer still recovered. Then the fleet moved on to races in Evansville and Madison, Indiana, where Hanauer returned to his cockpit and added two more race wins for the *Budweiser* team. So, as the boats headed west for the second half of the season, things

Paul Kemiel

Rick Sullivan

[Top] The U-10 *Smokin' Joe's*. [Above[the U-100 *PICO American Dream*.

were starting to appear just as they had been predicted.

Expectations continued to be on track in the desert heat of the Tri-Cities, Washington, where Hanauer drove the *Budweiser* to a fourth straight victory. The team's domination seemed to continue in preparation for the race in Seattle. During a qualifying run on Friday morning, the older of the two *Budweiser* boats caught a gust of wind and landed upside down, badly damaging its hull. Less than three hours later, after he had been cleared by the doctors, Hanauer qualified the other *Budweiser* while his team, meanwhile, took the damaged *Budweiser* back to the shop, pulled a third *Budweiser* from display duty, and prepared it to go racing. As further testament to the team's incredible skill, Hanauer was able to qualify that boat at almost 158 mph before the course was closed that same afternoon.

But, that's where the success ended. On race day, the boat lost power during the first heat and finished fifth, Hanauer was penalized for a lane infraction in the second heat, and the *Budweiser* finished third in the third heat. Meanwhile, the day belonged to Dave Villwock and the *American Dream*, who won each of the three preliminary heats and the final. After years of entering unlimited hydroplane races, it was the first victory for team owner Fred Leland.

Villwock did it again six weeks later. He won the Bayfair event in San Diego while Tate finished second in the *Smokin' Joe's*. That had become typical for Tate, who had finished second in four of the six events held since he won the season-opener. That consistent

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Chip Hanauer

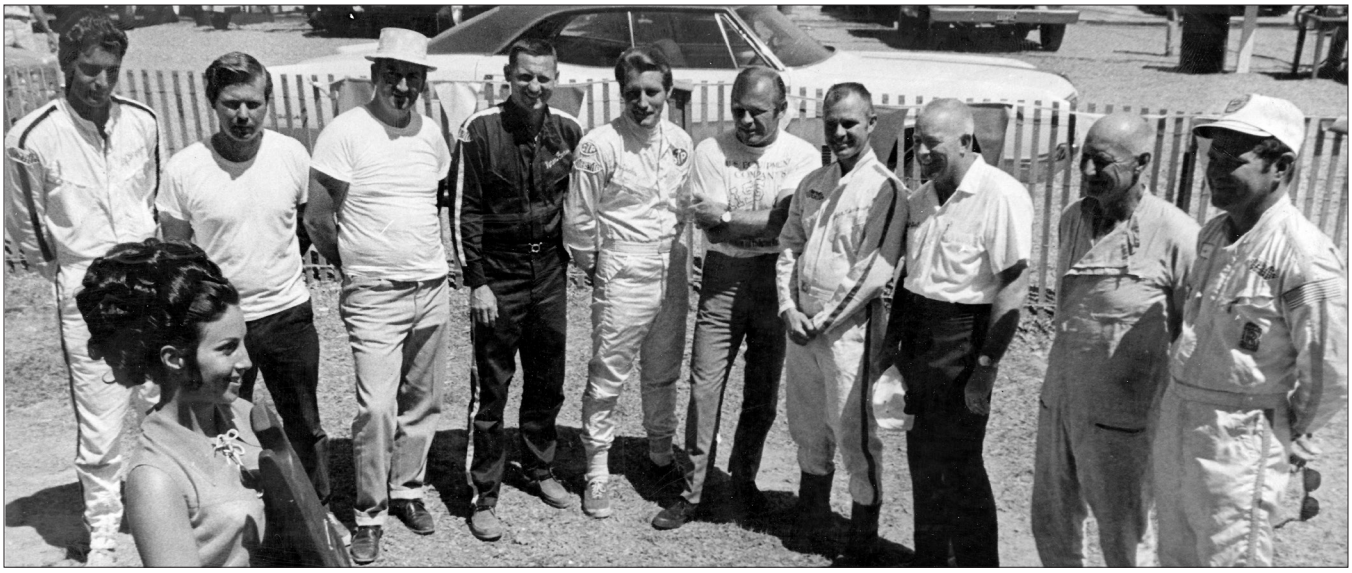
performance also meant Woomer's boat was only 404 points behind *Budweiser* in the national standings with just the Honolulu race remaining.

Racing on the waters of Pearl Harbor, Tate did everything in his power to close that gap and win the title. He drove his boat to victory in the first heat, beat Hanauer and *Budweiser* when they were paired in the second, won the third preliminary while *Budweiser* again placed second in its section, and won the final to put together a perfect weekend.

But, Hanauer managed just enough to stay ahead. His second-place finish in the final gave his team the national title by a mere 46 points. Tate did have one thing to celebrate, however. Because Hanauer missed the two races early in the season, he had earned enough points behind the wheel of *Smokin' Joe's* to take the national driver's championship.

50 YEARS AGO
The 1969 Season

One could say that the 1969 season marked a time of transition. It was a year when one of the most acclaimed teams of the 1960s saw



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

The 1969 drivers with the queen of the Tri-City Water Follies event in the Tr-Cities. From the left, Leif Borgersen, Ron Kasper, Bob Gilliam, Norm Evans, Tommy Fults, Bill Muncey, Dean Chenoweth, Bill Sterett, Walter Kade, and Jim McCormick.

its last action, when the Pay 'n Pak name first appeared on hydroplane, and when one of the most dominate teams for the next three decades would celebrate its first national championship.

When the season started at Guntersville, Alabama, one of the sport's most famous names was missing. Ole Bardahl, the founder of Bardahl Manufacturing and the owner of the *Miss Bardahl* boats that had won the national title in five of the past six years, had sold the company's marketing rights to a firm in Los Angeles and they, in turn, decided that sponsoring a race boat didn't fit into their strategy. As a result, among those gathered on the shore of Lake Guntersville, the *Miss Budweiser* was widely considered the class of the 1969 field.

Rich Ormbrek

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

[Top] The *Miss Budweiser*. [Above] The *Miss U.S.*

Bernie Little had first entered a boat in a hydroplane race when at Guntersville only six years earlier and during the years since had collected a total of four race victories. His most recent came in the final event of the previous season with Bill Sterett driving a new *Miss Budweiser*, a craft that Little had ordered from builder Ed Karelsen to be an exact duplicate of the *Miss Bardahl*. Also among those in the pits was a new *Notre Dame* that was also cut from that same Karelsen mold, and the bob-tailed *Miss U.S.* with veteran Bill Muncey driving.

Attracting the most attention, however, was an odd-shaped hydroplane named *Pride of Pay 'n Pak*. Entered by Dave Heerensperger, who had campaign boats named *Miss Eagle Electric* since 1963, the boat carried the new name of his chain of hardware stores and featured a radical design where the sponsons were separated from

the main hull by thin beams. One reporter would later describe it as looking like a South Seas war canoe.

Having seen six fatalities among unlimited drivers during the previous three seasons, including the death of his own driver Warner Gardner the previous year, Heerensperger decided the new *Pride of Pay 'n Pak* should be designed in a way that was more stable and safer on the water. The big question was, would it also be fast?

Rich Ormbrek

The U-7 *Notre Dame*.

When the racing got underway, Sterett drove the *Miss Budweiser* to first-place finishes in every heat and easily won the Dixie Cup trophy. He added another race victory the following week in Owensboro, Kentucky, before the fleet made its annual stop in Detroit, this time for the U.I.M. World Championship. There, Bill Muncey drove the *Miss U.S.* to victory in his first preliminary heat while Sterett took a swim in his section after the *Miss Budweiser* spun out and tossed him from the cockpit. In the final heat, Muncey took an early lead over the others and never looked back.

Another change for the 1969 season came in the name of a boat that was campaigned by the Schoenith family, which had been involved in the sport since the early 1950s. For the previous several years, the team's boat carried the names *Smirnoff* or *Gale's Roostertail*, but during the offseason the makers of Smirnoff vodka decided to no longer sponsor a hydroplane. So, the Schoeniths found another sponsor: Myr Sheet Metal Company.

The *Myr's Special*, which was driven by Dean Chenoweth, started the final heat at Madison, Indiana, tied in points with Bill Muncey and only 100 points behind the *Miss Budweiser*, which meant that all three had a chance to win the trophy. The *Budweiser* fell out of contention when it suffered mechanical woes and *Miss U.S.* trailed *Myr's Special* by eight seconds at the finish, giving Chenoweth his first unlimited victory.

His second trophy came just two weeks later in the Tri-Cities, on a day that is best remembered for Neil Armstrong's walk on the Moon. While the *Budweiser* struggled with two third-place finishes in the preliminary heats and *Miss U.S.* failed to finish its second heat, making both ineligible for the final, Chenoweth got into the final with two second-place finishes.

His main competition for the Atomic Cup title was Leif Borgersen in the new *Notre Dame*, who had a victory in one early heat and a second-place finish in the other. But, when the *Notre Dame* careened onto its side during the final, Chenoweth surged ahead and led to the finish. Although Borgersen finished second and ended up tied with Chenoweth in points, the tie was broken by a new rule that gave the tie-breaking advantage the winner of the final heat.


Rich Ormbrek

The flying start during the running of the 1969 Seafair Trophy Race on Lake Washington in Seattle

Next stop was Seattle and the Seafair Trophy, where a familiar competitor appeared. Ole Bardahl decided he wanted to enter his boat in one last race, so gathered his crew together and appointed Fred Alter to sit in the cockpit of the *Miss Bardahl*. The team's magic was still there, it turned out. Alter drove the boat to victory in both preliminary heats while Sterett did the same in the *Miss Budweiser*, setting up a showdown in the final.

The two crossed the starting line together, with Sterett on the inside and Alter on the outside, but the competition came to a sudden stop in the first turn when a thrown rod ended the *Bardahl's* day. Sterett went off to an easy victory, which gave his team a slim 225-point lead in total season points over the *Myr's Special* and a 450-point lead over the *Miss U.S.* with only one race to go. It would all be decided at the Gold Cup in San Diego.

Dave Heerensperger had finally given up on any thoughts that the catamaran *Pride of Pay 'n Pak* would ever be a contender, so he put it away and replaced it with a new, more conventionally designed boat driven by Tommy Fults. He immediately impressed the crowd by defeating both Sterett in the *Budweiser* and Muncey in the *Miss U.S.* during the day's first heat on a Mission Bay that was shrouded in a hazy fog. Meanwhile, Borgersen and the *Notre Dame* defeated Chenoweth in the other heat.

Myr's Special and *Budweiser* were both winners in the second set of preliminary heats and the *Budweiser* and the *Pride of Pay 'n Pak* were winners in the third set. When the *Miss U.S.* couldn't get started for Heat 3B because an oil-line coupling had come apart, and when the *Myr's Special* failed to finish when its engine blew apart in the same heat, that pretty much sealed the deal for the *Budweiser*.

Although Chenoweth crossed the finish line first in the final heat and Sterett started dead last, the *Budweiser* was able to gain ground, ran steadily, and eventually finished second with enough points to give Bernie Little his first Gold Cup victory and his first national championship. In both cases, they were only the first of many more to come.

75 YEARS AGO
The 1944 Season

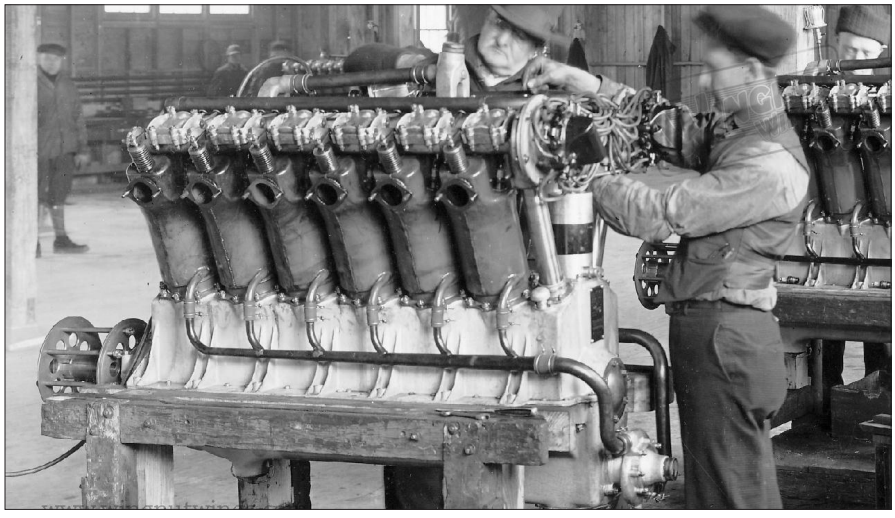
For the third year in a row, no boat racing activity occurred in 1944 so that resources could instead be focused on the effort to win World War II. There continued to be a connection to the future of racing, however, by virtue of the engines that powered many of the fighter planes that were used in the action.

In 1944, for instance, Rolls-Royce Merlin engines like those that would one day find themselves in unlimited hydroplanes were powering the P-51 Mustangs that strafed the beaches of Normandy on D-Day or that escorted the B-17 and B-24 bombers as they dropped 750,000 tons on bombs on Germany's industries. The same was true of the Allison engines that powered the P-38 Lightnings as they supported the invasions of the Marshall Islands and the Marianas in the South Pacific, as well as the islands of Saipan, Guam, and Tinian, from which the bombing of Japan's mainland would eventually be launched.

100 YEARS AGO
The 1919 Season

The legendary Gar Wood had won the Gold Cup two years in a row, the most recent in 1918 with a *Miss Detroit III* that had set the racing world on its ear. Despite the conventional wisdom that said an aircraft engine would be too fragile for the rough treatment it would get powering a speedboat, Wood nevertheless acquired a 12-cylinder aircraft engine called a Curtiss V-4 and installed it in his hydroplane. The advantage of its power-to-weight ratio just couldn't be overlooked, he reasoned.

The experiment proved to be a tremendous success. Wood won his second Gold Cup in convincing fashion, outpacing the *Whip-po'Will*, which was owned by Albert L. Judson, the president of the American Power Boat Association. His success set the stage for a future where the largest and fastest raceboats would depend almost exclusively on engines that had



Wingnut Wings

A Liberty 12-A aircraft engine being assembled in the factory.

Wayne State University

Gar Wood

come from aircraft.

In 1919, that technological course continued with the introduction to the sport of one of the most famous of all aircraft engines: the Liberty 12-A.

In early 1917, with the United States finally getting involved in the fighting of World War I, the Aircraft Production Board decided they needed an airplane engine that would rival those produced in Europe and convinced two of the nation's best engine designers, Jesse G. Vincent of Packard and Elbert L. Hall of the Hall-Scott Motor Company, to combine their skills on such a project. The Liberty was the result, a liquid-cooled, 12-cylinder machine that could produce more than 400 horsepower yet weighed about 845 pounds, greatly surpassing the efficiency of any other engine at the time.

By the time the hostilities in Europe had ended late in 1918, more than 20,000 Liberty engines had been built, but the U.S. government needed only half that number. So, thousands of inexpensive, surplus Liberty engines were suddenly made available.

Among the purchasers was Gar Wood, who bought an entire railroad car full of the engines and visited Jesse Vincent to learn how he could coax 500 horsepower from the machine. At the same time, judging what his competition might be like, Wood decided he could get by not building a new boat for 1919 and instead use the two that he already had. So, he installed a Liberty in both the 1917 Gold Cup winner *Miss Detroit II* and the defending Gold Cup champion *Miss Detroit III*.

As for the racing itself, Wood entered the *Miss Detroit III* in the Thousand Island Trophy Race that was held on the St. Lawrence River at Alexandria Bay, New York, and won all three heats easily, outpacing *P.D.Q. VI* with Graham Miles driving and the *Arab IV* with Ralph Sidway at the wheel.

Next came the big event, the Gold Cup in Detroit. Wood drove *Miss Detroit III* to victory in the first heat and Doc Sanborn in the *Miss Detroit II* was close behind, which appeared to be more of a show to give the fans the impression that there had been some competition. "Neither boat was doing its best," one reporter complained. Finishing a distant third was a John Hacker-designed boat named *Eleventh Hour*, which was driven by Paul Strassburg and also powered by a Liberty.

In the second race, Gar Wood again went on to an early lead while Sanborn and Strassburg followed behind. The *Eleventh Hour* managed to pass *Miss Detroit II* and was even beginning to challenge the *Miss Detroit III* when it was hit by rough seas and was swamped. Both Wood and Sanborn stopped to lend a hand to the crew and their capsized boat then continued the race, with Sanborn finishing only one second ahead of Wood.

The third race belonged entirely to Wood, who led from start to finish with an average speed of 55 mph and claimed his third straight Gold Cup. The *Eleventh Hour* lost a propeller and could not finish, and Sanborn again ended the race close behind Wood and in second place.

In other action that season, Fred Miller in the *Heldena II* won the Canadian International Gold Trophy in Toronto and, four days later on the same course, Dick Smith won the Great Lakes International Gold Cup driving the *Leopard III*.

Unsatisfied by the caliber of competition he had seen at the Gold Cup race, and feeling the challenge of winning the event was apparently gone, Gar Wood decided it was time to begin a new quest. But, that's a story for next year. ❖

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

The *Miss Detroit III* with Gar Wood driving in 1919.

HydroFile
Race Team News

Lon Erickson

U-1 Jones Racing
We are still awaiting word from the team on their plans for 2019. The hull has seen basic off-season maintenance in the shop.

U-6 HomeStreet Racing/Miss Madison
While routine off-season work is being completed at the HomeStreet shop in Tukwila, Washington, official word has come from the team that longtime crewmember and 2018 crew chief Cindy Shirley (left) is stepping away from the sport for 2019. (See our exclusive two-part interview with her in the March and April issues of the UNJ.) Shirley's expanding responsibilities with her full-time job as Director of the Office of Research for the University of Washington at Bothell, led in-part to her decision to step away for 2019. She tells the UNJ that, "you never know what the future holds," so she doesn't rule out future involvement in the sport again at some point. The team reports that the decision on the crew chief position will be made at a later date.

Miss Madison Race Team

Bartush Racing
U-7 *Spirit of Detroit*, Hull # 9601/T-5: Bert Henderson returns full-time to drive the U-7 *Spirit of Detroit*. Off-season work found some repairs were needed to a cracked right-side deck and along the air trap, damage that was suffered at last year's Gold Cup. Those repairs are now complete, hardware re-installed, and paint is next so that the boat will be ready for Guntersville.

U-10/T-3/former 88 *Degree*, Hull # 9501: Work continues on the former 88 *Degree* T-3 hull at the HomeStreet shop in Tukwila with Jim Harvey overseeing the project. The boat will be numbered U-10 and driven by HRL GP Champion Patrick Haworth (right above), who is stepping up to the Unlimited ranks. The hope is the boat will be ready for the entire H1 circuit, though that is not a certainty at this point. The Tri-Cities, Seattle, and San Diego races are likely in 2019. Along with Haworth, the U-10's former driver and fellow Canadian, Scott Liddycoat (right below), will be returning to the Unlimited ranks. Liddycoat will share seat time with both the U-7 and U-10. In addition to driver changes, former U-88 and U-7 crew member Bob Catipovic has agreed to join the Detroit team, which is returning all of last year's crew for 2019. In addition, a testing session for the team is scheduled for June 7 and 8 in Brockville, Ontario.

Chris Denslow

Lon Erickson

Former U-2, Hull #0302: Bert Henderson reports that the former *Trendwest* hull will not see competition in 2019. While a major hull rebuild was completed last year, the hull still needs to be "rigged," hardware, systems, and setup for racing. Look for this hull in 2020.

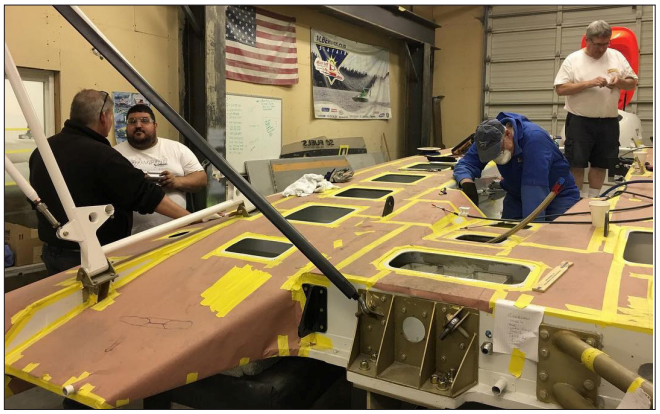
U-11 Unlimited Racing Group

Lots of progress at the team's Edmonds, Washington, shop Work preparing the U-11 *Reliable Diamond Tool presents J&D's* for the 2019 season. Three engines have been fit and aligned in the boat. The team has relaunched its website with a new design and content. Check it out at http://www.u11racing.com/

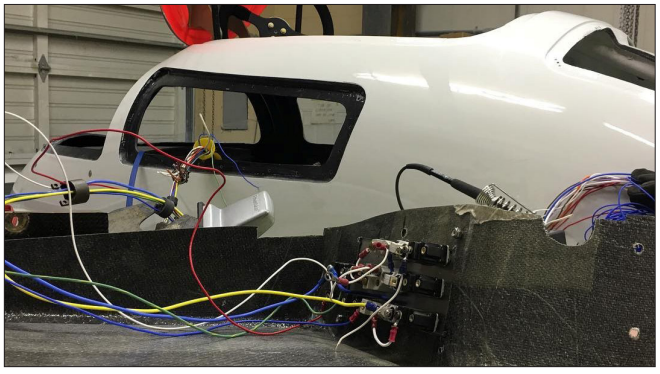
Unlimited Racing Group

U-21/48 Go Fast Turn Left Racing

The O'Farrell team recently held a long crew weekend where they worked on the new U-48 hull with help from Mike Hanson. Indications are that we will see the GFTL team at only two races in 2019, with the Darrell Strong/PayneWest sponsorship in the Tri-Cities and a yet-to-be-announced sponsor in Seattle.



Go Fast Turn Left Racing



Go Fast Turn Left Racing

U-98 American Dream

The former U-99 Leland boat (Hull #9899) and equipment are getting attention in the Graham Trucking shop in Milton, Washington. Current plans are for the boat to race in the Northwest with Corey Peabody driving (right).

Chris Denslow

440 Bucket List Racing

The BLR team continues with upgrades and prep work on the hull for 2019. The boat is now right side up, prepping for a fresh coat of paint and for systems going back in.

Bucket List Racing

Bucket List Racing

Bucket List Racing

My $0.02 Worth

Editorial Comment

Andy Muntz

In this month's issue of the *Unlimited NewsJournal*, we are privileged to offer an interview with Ron Jones, Jr., the grandson of one of the sport's greatest boat designers, the son of another history-making designer and builder, and in his own right a successful designer, builder, and boat owner.

Jones has many stories to tell about his own career, but I'd like to pass along one that he told about his grandfather, Ted Jones, a man who overflowed with confidence.

Ted Jones gained fame as the designer of the *Slo-mo-shun IV*, the first Unlimited-class hydroplane to successfully use a concept called prop-riding. As Jones was developing the design of the boat, he visited the 1948 Gold Cup race in Detroit and brashly told all of the sport's luminaries that he was going to build a boat and would come back and whip their butts with it.

So, he did, winning the 1950 Gold Cup in a runaway.

During his interview with Craig Fjarlie and Bob Senior, Ron Jones, Jr., told a story about his grandfather that we didn't include in the printed version, but that also speaks to the confidence of Ted Jones.

Jones, his son, and grandson were on a yacht owned by offshore competitor Paul Cook as the craft bobbed on the Pacific Ocean with a new 33-foot tunnel offshore boat tied alongside. Cook was telling the others that he was having a hard time steering his new raceboat and getting it to hook up and go around a corner. Ted Jones explained that he had to hook up the whole air trap, then decided he'd demonstrate what he meant.

"I'm going to aim this thing right at your yacht," he said as he climbed aboard the raceboat and got behind the steering wheel. "Two things are gonna happen, This boat's going to turn or we're all gonna die."

"So here we are all on the back deck of this boat and here comes this speck right headed for us," remembers Ron Jones, Jr. "He's probably doing 130, 140 miles an hour. Some pretty tall waves out there and he's flyin' this thing and I'm startin' to get a little nervous. I'm thinking. 'wow, grandpa, you kinda are aiming right for us.'

"Well, he got close and I could see him through the windshield. Both hands grab a handful of steering wheel, pull down as hard as he could, and that boat hooked up on the air trap and turned so hard we all got soaking wet. I mean, he just hosed us all."

As Jones turned the boat around and then shut down the engine, everybody on the yacht was clapping and cheering. Everybody except Paul Cook, that is. "Don't ever do that again," he yelled. ❖

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