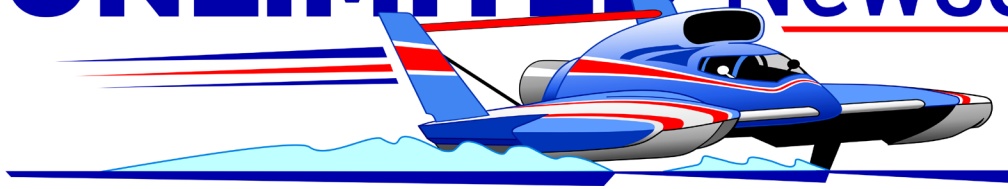


UNLIMITED NewsJournal

A CHRONICLE OF SPEED



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THE 2024 SEASON REVIEW:

Tate's path to the national title.



Chris Denslow

Andrew Tate put the hydro world on notice that his team was ready for a big season when he drove *Miss Goodman Real Estate* to nearly 166 mph during the pre-season test session on the Columbia River at the end of May.

As the 2024 H1 Unlimited Racing Series got underway, the word “uncertainty” would best describe the expectations of race fans. The previous winter, Unlimited hydroplane racing experienced a fundamental change of direction when the men running the sport’s top two teams orchestrated a hostile take-over of the sport’s governance

A special double issue

Due to unforeseen circumstances related to the sudden and unexpected death of Lon Erickson (See story on page 24) our website went dark for most of the month of December. As a result, we had no place to post our December issue and make it available to our readers. After a great deal of effort by our club president Chris Tracy, the situation with the website has finally been resolved. So that you will not miss a thing, we have combined our December issue with the content we had planned for the January issue. That means, as a holiday treat, you are now looking at a special jumbo issue of the *Unlimited NewsJournal*.

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hoping they might turn a profit from the organization's media efforts.

At the same time, the boat teams continued to struggle with ways to survive while the cost of running an Unlimited hydro was skyrocketing. Two competitors of the previous season had been placed for sale, with apparent little interest by prospective buyers, and rumors circulated about the possibility of again seeing boats that had remained untouched in shops around the country.

For a sport that featured thirteen different contestants just eight seasons ago, and ten entrants during the previous racing campaign, the crystal balls of the most optimistic soothsayers showed only eight boats likely to see action in 2024. But they would be a quality bunch, the fans were promised.

Leading the contenders as spring turned toward summer were the boats operated by the two previously mentioned people who now governed the sport. Darrell Strong, who with his wife, Vanessa, runs the Strong Racing Team, entered 2024 with the sport's defending national champion: the bright red U-1 *Beacon Electric* with J. Michael Kelly at the helm and the glittering white U-9 *Beacon Plumbing* driven by Corey Peabody and the second-place finisher in last year's final standings and, remarkably, the oldest boat still racing.

Charlie Grooms, team manager for



Tate signs autographs for the fans at Guntersville, Alabama.

the community-owned Miss Madison Racing Team, oversaw the other boat expected to dominate. The team ran two hydroplanes in 2023 but had placed a for-sale sign on the former champion they raced as U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate* in 2023. Instead, they would focus their efforts on the hydroplane that carried the name *Miss HomeStreet*, a craft that had won 95 percent of the heats it had entered since it was built in 2018. With HomeStreet Bank deciding to discontinue its sponsorship of the race team, 2018 national champion driver Andrew Tate moved over to the team's newer entry—a move that many expected would form an overpowering combination.

The first hints of how the season might play out came at the annual spring testing event on the Columbia River at the end of May. Tate put the others on notice with a run around the racecourse at nearly 166 mph, although it should be noted that nobody was checking for such things as N2 or fuel-flow violations. Kelly, on the other hand, turned in a top speed of 162.6 mph while Peabody's best lap exceeded 160 mph.

GUNTERSVILLE

Then, off to Alabama the fleet went, where six entries gathered on the banks of Lake Guntersville in late June for the Southern Cup. Included in that group was the U-27 *Miss Apollo*, a boat from nearby Gadsden, Alabama, that had been sidelined since it flipped over another boat's skid-fin spray while at Seattle in 2018. The boat was so heavily damaged that its rebuilding by owner Charley Wiggins was extensive enough that the boat is now considered a new hull. The sport's all-time champion driver, Dave Villwock, would handle the steering wheel. At 70 years of age, he's now officially the oldest person to ever drive an Unlimited hydroplane in competition.

The organizers in Guntersville like to call their race site the fastest water in the South, and in 2023 they helped assure



Miss Goodman Real Estate speeds across Lake Guntersville during Hydrofest.

Chris Denslow

Chris Denslow

that would be a reality by laying a race-course with huge sweeping turns. Dustin Echols had taken advantage and drove the *U-40 Bucket List Racing* around the buoys at an average qualifying speed of 171.2 mph, the fifth fastest in the sport's history, and Corey Peabody set an all-time heat record of 162.9 mph.

This year, under hot and humid weather conditions, Tate drove the gold and white *Miss Goodman Real Estate* around the course at better than 170 mph, but after he returned to the pits, the officials found that nothing had been recorded by the data-recording box, so the effort didn't count. A lap of 168.789 mph on Saturday morning did count, however, and became the fastest for the race.

Among the changes introduced to the sport this year was a new starting procedure that did away with the requirement that the boats maintain a minimum speed of at least 80 mph before crossing the starting line. Instead, as the drivers competed for lanes before the start, they could not cross the start-finish line before 45 seconds remained until the heat would start. The new procedure forced the drivers to practice their timing strategies as they also tested propellers and gearbox combinations before the race.

It all came together when the first heat of the 2024 season took place on a cloudy Saturday, June 29. The six-boat field was divided into a round-robin format so that four would race together at a time and the two sitting out would rotate so that each boat would see action in four of the six heats scheduled. The first group included both Andrew Tate and the defending champion J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric*. But Tate's boat stalled and went dead in the water before the race got underway. He restarted the boat but trailed the field across the starting line. Kelly eventually won after a close battle with Dustin Echols in the orange *Bucket List Racing*.

By the time Heat 2 arrived, the engine problem that had hampered Tate

The route to the national title



and his *Goodman Real Estate* had apparently been solved. This time, his start was flawless. The same could not be said for Corey Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing* or for Dustin Echols in *Bucket List*, who both crossed the starting line too early and had a one-minute penalty added to their overall time (this was also a rule change; a boat jumping the gun was previously penalized an extra lap). With those two out of contention for the victory, Tate cruised to an easy victory—with a four-lap average speed of 162.787 mph, the fastest heat speed that would happen during the entire event

The troubles of Heat 1 returned in Tate's next outing when he faced Kelly again during Heat 4 on Sunday. *Miss Goodman Real Estate* again went dead as the boats were preparing for the start. By the time he got the engine started again, Tate was nearly a lap behind the others as they were crossing the starting line—a disadvantage that caused him to finish in fourth place.

The heat luckily didn't count, though. As the boats returned to the pits, weather forecasters saw a severe thunderstorm approaching. Hoping to avoid what happened the year before, when a



Chris Denslow

Members of the *Miss Goodman Real Estate* race team celebrate their victory in the Southern Cup



Chris Denslow

The view from the Milton-Madison Bridge as *Miss Goodman Real Estate* circles the racecourse on the Ohio River.

The town of Madison has hosted races for the big boats since 1954, and members of its community have managed a series of Miss Madison hydroplanes since Samuel DuPont donated his Nitrogen to the people of Madison before the 1961 season.

thunderstorm forced the final heat to be canceled, officials decided to postpone the preliminary-heat action in favor of holding the final heat after the bad weather had passed.

But some boats had already seen action in three preliminary heats and others had raced only twice. To make things even, those who had been in three could discard the points they had earned in the worst of their finishes. Tate's team discarded that fourth-place finish.

Once the heavy rain and high winds had ended, the boats were called back into action. And, this time, Tate and his *Miss Goodman Real Estate* started perfectly from lane two, grabbed the lead heading out of the first turn, and was not challenged again—crossing the finish line the length of a roostertail ahead of Jamie Nilsen in the U-11 *Miss Mercurys Coffee*.

"It was a great ending to a weekend that had some ups and downs," Tate said when it was over. "It definitely ended on an up. I'm looking forward to heading to Madison next weekend and racing in front of the hometown crowd."

MADISON

It takes a good six hours to drive north from Guntersville to Madison, Indiana. Set on the banks of the Ohio River, Madison has a strong tie to Unlimited hydroplane racing. The town has hosted races for the big boats since 1954, and members of its community have managed a series of *Miss Madison* hydroplanes since Samuel DuPont donated his *Nitrogen* to the people of Madison before the 1961 season.

The Miss Madison Racing Team has since become one of the most successful in the sport's history, by this point having tallied a total of 41 race victories and 11 of the past 15 national championships.

Five boats made the trek to Madison for the Indiana Governor's Cup; Charley Wiggins decided to keep his *Miss Apollo* at home. Friday's action started with a drenching thunderstorm that sent crews scrambling to cover their equipment with tarps, and the occupants of the course patrol boats to dash for shore seeking shelter, and once the dark clouds had passed another storm of controversy erupted.

During the qualifying period, Andrew Tate drove *Miss Goodman Real Estate* around the course at an impressive speed of over 157 mph, but once they returned to the dock and the boat's data box was reviewed, it showed that Tate had pushed his boat past the rpm limit and the run was invalidated for an N2 violation.

Tate later made a run that those in the tech truck approved at 156.644 mph and that seemed to be the fastest in the field, but then came the squabble. Somebody discovered a clause in the rule book that requires that all boats attempting a qualifying run must run at least three laps—the fastest of which is counted as that boat's qualifying speed.

Tate had completed only two laps in his successful attempt. Two other qualifiers also fell short of the three-lap standard, leaving only the two boats from the Strong Racing Team eligible to earn points that are awarded for qualifying.

2024 SEASON SUMMARY

Num	Boat	ID#	Driver	Guntersville Southern Cup 6/26-27	Madison Ind. Gov. Ciup	Tri-Cities Columbia Cup 7/4	Seattle Apollo Cup 7/24-25	San Diego Gold Cup 9/18-19	Total Pts.
1.	U-91 Miss Goodman Real Estate	1801	Andrew Tate	1st 1125	1st 1725	2nd 1600	4th 1369	1600	7,419
2.	U-9 Beacon Plumbing	92102	Corey Peabody	6th 489	3rd 1525	1st 1505	7th 1351	1st 1180	6,050
3.	U-40 Bucket List Racing	0721	Dustin Echols	5th 732	844				5,151
	Flav-R-Pac	0721	Dustin Echols			3rd 1195	5th 1066	4th 1314	
4.	U-1 Beacon Electric	1496	J. Michael Kelly	3rd 1095	2nd 1280	60	1st 1360	2nd 1285	5,080
5.	U-11 Miss Mercurys Coffee	0925	Jamie Nilsen	2nd 1060	4th 1032	630	2nd 1090	3rd 565	4,377
6.	U-27 Miss Apollo	2427	Dave Villwock	4th 744		450	3rd 894	1044	3,132
7.	U-35 Gutters by Keith presents Boitano Homes	1999	Gunnar O'Farrell			4th 949	6th 744		1,693
8.	U-12 Graham Trucking	0001	Bobby King			209	537		746

PERFORMANCE DATA

DRIVER	BOAT	HULL#	RACE RESULTS					HEAT RESULTS						
			RACES	1st	2nd	3rd	DNQ	START	DNS	FINISH	1st	Pct.	Top 3	Pct.
U-91 Miss Goodman Real Estate	Andrew Tate	1801	5	2	1	0	0	21	0	20	13	0.650	18	0.900
U-9 Beacon Plumbing	Corey Peabody	92102	5	2	0	1	0	20	0	17	10	0.588	14	0.824
U-40 Bucket List Racing	Dustin Echols	0721	2	0	0	0	0	8	0	6	0	0.000	4	0.667
U-40 Flav-R-Pac		0721	3	0	0	1	0	13	0	13	2	0.154	10	0.769
U-1 Beacon Electric	J. Michael Kelly	1496	5	1	2	1	0	18	0	15	4	0.267	15	1.000
U-11 Miss Mercurys Coffee	Jamie Nilsen	0925	5	0	2	1	0	19	2	16	1	0.063	12	0.750
U-27 Miss Apollo	Dave Villwock	2427	4	0	0	1	0	14	0	12	1	0.083	9	0.750
U-35 Gutters/Boitano Homes	Gunnar O'Farrell	1999	2	0	0	0	0	8	0	8	0	0.000	5	0.625
U-12 Graham Trucking	Bobby King	0001	2	0	0	0	0	5	0	4	0	0.000	0	0.000
TOTALS:				5	5	5	0	126	2	111	31	0.279	87	0.784

Once that was sorted out and the racing started, a round-robin format was used again, but this time with five boats in the pits, just one at a time would take turns sitting out the heats. Tate faced both Strong boats in the first grouping. In preparing for the start, Kelly quickly grabbed lane one in *Beacon Electric*, while his teammate Corey Peabody settled into lane two with *Beacon Plumbing*. That left Tate in lane three. Kelly and Peabody successfully used the advantage of having a shorter distance around the buoys and maintained first and second place throughout the heat. Tate followed in third place and then took his turn out of the action during Heat 2, the last scheduled for Saturday.

Under clear skies on Sunday morning, racing in the third preliminary, Kelly again grabbed the inside lane as the boats prepared for the start. Tate settled for

lane two and used that to his advantage. The Madison racecourse is the opposite of Guntersville, with long straightaways and tight turns at either end. A driver on the inside faces the speed-robbing

challenge of maintaining a tight radius around the turns, while a driver to his outside is not pinched in and can maintain greater speed through the turns.

Kelly started the heat ahead, but



On the right, *Beacon Electric* (red) and *Beacon Plumbing* have taken the two inside lanes while Andrew Tate is starting from lane three.

Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow

Tate motors onto the Ohio River with Jamie Nilsen in Miss Mercurys Coffee to his right.

Tate soon caught him in the second turn of lap one and began to pull away. During his second time around, Tate turned the event's fastest lap of about 149.9 mph then went on to win easily with a three-lap heat average of 146.886 mph, also the event's fastest.

Peabody won a tight battle with Tate in Heat 4, then Tate faced both Strong boats again in Heat 5. Like clockwork, Peabody and Kelly grabbed the inside two lanes and led the field into the first turn, but Tate had now become adept at dominating from lane three. Tate pulled even with the two heading down the

backstretch of the first lap, then pulled ahead in the second turn and won comfortably.

The strategies that the drivers would employ with the new starting procedure became obvious with the final heat at Madison. To claim their preferred lanes, the two Strong drivers cruised at a snail's pace around the racecourse as soon as they motored away from the dock. Tate, meanwhile, was happy to be left with lane three.

As the boats gained speed headed toward the starting line, Tate had his gold and white hydroplane in perfect

position. He crossed the starting line at the precise moment the clock reached zero and was leading the others as they emerged from the first turn. By the time the boats passed under the Milton-Madison Bridge headed into the second turn, Tate had already taken command. Kelly eventually finished second and Peabody third.

"I'm pretty pumped right now," Tate said after reaching the shore. "Thank you to the town of Madison and everyone on the team. This is a super-fast boat and I'm having a great time trying to put it out front."

With the first two races in the books and the race series moving to the west, Andrew Tate and the *Miss Goodman Real Estate* were off to an excellent start. With just three events remaining, he enjoyed a 475-point advantage over Kelly in *Beacon Electric*, his closest challenger in the national standings.

But, as the race teams understood full well, with a short season of only five events, there isn't a large margin for error. Any misstep can knock a team out of contention for the national title—a lesson one of the two would soon experience firsthand.



Chris Denslow

Andrew Tate drives *Miss Goodman Real Estate* across the finish line to win the Indiana Governor's Cup race in Madison.

Chris Denslow



J. Michael Kelly's chance to successfully defend his national title came to an abrupt end when his *Beacon Electric* caught the spray from another boat, went flying, and crashed into the Columbia River during the Apollo Columbia Cup in the Tri-Cities.

TRI-CITIES

Although most of the sport's race teams (even the one from Madison, Indiana) are based in the Seattle area, the race fans who live in Richland, Kennewick, and Pasco like to call their home "Hydrotown." In the desert climate of southeast Washington where the Snake River meets the Columbia, the area is the home of Darrell Strong and for most of those on H1 Unlimited's governing board.

The Tri-Cities racecourse is set on the Columbia River, the largest and likely the most economically complicated river in the Pacific Northwest. Built across its width are numerous federal and local-government dams that generate a large share of the region's electricity, provide irrigation for Eastern Washington farms, allow for navigation by the ships and barges that move those crops to market, and regulate the river's flow for passing salmon. The result of those competing interests became apparent to those attending the annual hydro race in "Hydrotown" this year.

As the Unlimited fleet arrived, race officials discovered that the river at one end of the racecourse was not deep enough to safely accommodate Unlim-

ited-class hydroplanes, which require at least eight feet of water. At the last minute, a new course had to be surveyed, and the buoys repositioned so they avoided that shallow area, thus reducing the size of the course to two miles rather than the usual two and a half.

Eight boats were in the pits. The fleet was rejoined by *Miss Apollo*, which was sponsored by Apollo Mechanical Contractors, a company based in Kennewick that stepped forward to also provide title sponsorship dollars for both the Tri-Cities and Seattle races. Also competing for the first time were the U-12 *Graham Trucking*, and U-35 *Gutters by Keith pres-*

ents Boitano Homes, which raced a year ago as *The Beast Unleashed presents Miss Thriftway*.

The fastest qualifier, as was becoming routine, was Tate and *Miss Goodman Real Estate* with a run of 156.185 mph—this time, having also completed the required three laps. Corey Peabody and *Beacon Plumbing* were second and qualifying the third-fastest was Dustin Echols in the U-40 entry from Bucket List Racing, now renamed with the sponsor it had late in 2023: *Flav-R-Pac*.

Because eight boats were entered in the Apollo Columbia Cup, the race format could provide two sections of four boats in each heat. Kelly and Peabody were drawn into the first section of Heat 1, while Tate was in the other section. As the boats crossed the starting line to begin Heat 1A, Kelly had the inside lane, and his teammate was beside him in lane two. Peabody gained a little advantage over Kelly as they rounded the first turn, then nudged ahead, leading by about half a roostertail length by the time they completed the first lap.

On they went, Kelly in the red *Beacon Electric*, maintaining his position slightly behind and to the inside of the *Beacon Plumbing* going down the backstretch of the second lap and into the second turn. Suddenly, the right sponson of *Beacon Electric* caught the spray blasting from the side of the white boat and up it



Andrew Tate exits a turn on the Columbia River with Gunnar O'Farrell in the U-35 *Gutters by Keith presents Boitano Homes* right behind him.

Chris Denslow

Seattle is the race that most participants most want to win. For most, it's their home. It's the place where they spend each winter, where the volunteer crew members gather for work-party weekends, and where their boat sponsor likely does business.

Tate drove *Miss Goodman Real Estate* to a second-place finish in the Tri-Cities. Below he is side by side with Bobby King in the U-12 *Graham Trucking*

went like a fighter jet launched from the deck of an aircraft carrier. Kelly's boat stood on its tail briefly as it flew through *Beacon Plumbing's* roostertail, then crashed into the Columbia River, landing upside down within a cloud of spray.

Rescuers arrived within seconds and pulled Kelly from the cockpit. A check by the medical staff determined that he had suffered no major injuries. The same could not be said for his boat, however. *Beacon Electric* was damaged enough it would no longer see action the rest of the weekend. In a flash, Kelly's chance to catch Tate in the national points race and defend his national title was gone.

For his part, Tate made sure of that by winning each of the three preliminary heats he entered through the rest of the contest. His closest battle came in Heat 2B against Jamie Nilsen in *Miss Mercurys Coffee*, a boat operated by Scott and Shannon Raney of Cle Elem, Washington. Over the years, the team has gained a reputation for always being in the thick of things but has never claimed the race trophy—a bride's maid but never a bride. The 2024 season seemed more promising for the team because they had secured an enthusiastic sponsor in *Mercurys Coffee*, which runs a chain of coffee shops in the suburbs east of caffeine-impassioned Seattle.

Nilsen has a knack for grabbing the inside lane at the start and did so again in Heat 2B. He used that position to lead the field out of the first turn and down the backstretch, while Tate kept pace to his outside. By the end of the second lap, Nilsen was leading Tate by about three boat lengths. But Tate pressed his throttle harder, turned a final lap of 146.8 mph to Nilsen's 142.5 mph and nosed

ahead at the finish line.

That provided the set-up for the winner-take-all final heat. With *Miss Apollo* and *Graham Trucking* also taken out of the running because of incidents that occurred earlier in the event, five boats were left to answer the starter's flag. Nilsen seized lane one, while Peabody settled for lane two, and Tate was in three a second or two behind the others, and Echols was in lane four aboard *Flav-R-Pac*.

Peabody and Echols were the first to reach the turn, while Nilsen held his position on the inside, and fell in close behind *Beacon Plumbing* down the backstretch and across the line to complete the first lap. By the end of the second lap, Peabody's advantage over *Miss Mercurys Coffee* had grown to the length of a roostertail, and at that point the matter was essentially settled. Starting behind the others, Tate eventually caught Echols to move into third place and finally nudged ahead of Nilsen at the finish line to take second-place honors.

With his victory, Peabody earned enough points to move into second place in the run for the national title—931 points behind Tate. With only his qualifying points earned for the weekend, Kelly fell to fifth place and out of the running.

SEATTLE

In the eyes of most participants in H1 Unlimited racing, Seattle is the race they most want to win. For most, it's their home. It's the place where they spend each winter, where the volunteer crew members gather for work-party weekends in March and April, and where their boat sponsor likely does business.

Bill Cahill, for example, the founder of *Beacon*



Chris Denslow

Chris Denslow



The *Miss Goodman Real Estate* rests in the Stan Sayres Memorial Pits on the shore of Lake Washington.

Plumbing and sponsor of both Strong Racing Team hydros, runs his business in Seattle, so it was important that both boats would be there operating in top condition. After the accident in the Tri-Cities, the Strong Racing crew worked long hours in their Auburn shop south of Seattle to repair the damaged *Beacon Electric* and get it ready for the Seattle race and the live television audience that would watch it throughout the Puget Sound area. Their effort was rewarded when Kelly qualified the boat on Lake Washington at over 150 mph only seven days after the Tri-Cities accident.

Goodman Real Estate is also based in Seattle, and so it was important to John Goodman and the Miss Madison team that they also did well at the race. Working in their Tukwila shop south of Seattle, the Madison crew adjusted their boat to help make it even faster. The proof of their effort was a qualifying run of nearly 157 mph on Friday; it would be the fastest in the field.

With eight boats entered in the contest, the format for the Apollo Mechanical Cup would be the same as that used in the Tri-Cities: the preliminary heats were divided into two sections of four boats each. A blind draw

placed Peabody and Kelly together in the first section while Tate would be in the second.

The contest between the two teammates turned out to be one of the best of the weekend. Peabody got the inside lane while Echols in *Flav-R-Pac* crossed the starting line first. Peabody pulled even with *Flav-R-Pac* while rounding the first turn and used his inside position to pull ahead of the others, with *Beacon Electric* lurking behind them less than a roostertail-length away. It stayed that way to the finish line, though Echols was penalized one minute for starting too early.

In the second section, Nilsen started from the inside lane in *Miss Mercurys Coffee* but could not match the speed of *Miss Goodman Real Estate*. Tate

sped past going down the backstretch of the first lap and was never challenged. Later that afternoon, Dustin Echols finished ahead of Kelly in Heat 2A, and Tate finished behind Peabody in Heat 2B.

Sunday's preliminary heats saw Tate easily outpace *Flav-R-Pac* in Heat 3A while the two Strong Racing teammates battled in Heat 3B, with Peabody coming out on top. As the field maneuvered for the start of the final heat, Kelly and Nilsen slowed their boats to a crawl while rounding the north turn headed toward the set-up buoy, which under the new starting procedure couldn't be passed until 45 seconds remained before the starting clock reached zero. Tate and Peabody soon joined the slow-moving bunch, then all four drivers punched their throttles simultaneously to make their high-speed runs toward the timing mark.

Headed around the first turn during their run to the starting line, Tate suddenly saw a wall of roostertail water in front of him, thrown there by the two *Beacon* entries. He slowed and tried to dodge the blockade, but his boat caught a large dousing from *Beacon Plumbing's* roostertail, which snapped off his boat's canard wing.

Miss Goodman Real Estate's engine coughed and sputtered, the boat settled to a momentary halt. By the time Tate got it restarted, the others were at the opposite end of the racecourse dashing toward the starting line. Left without the canard and with no way to control the attitude of his boat's bow, Tate eventually started into sixth place, while Kelly and Peabody battled side by side for the lead. Tate eventually pushed his way past *Flav-R-Pac* to finish fifth, while Kelly, enjoying the inside position on his teammate, got across the finish line in first and won his second-straight Seattle race in a boat that a week before was too badly damaged to compete.

Yet, with two victories in the preliminary heats, Tate left Seattle with a larger lead in the national standings than the one he had before he arrived. With only the



Chris Denslow

While in the background thousands of fans watch the action from yachts tied to Seattle's famous logboom, Tate drives *Miss Goodman Real Estate* to the event's fastest qualifying speed.

Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow



TOP: Tate races side by side with Dave Villwock in the cockpit of *Miss Apollo*. **MIDDLE:** Andrew Tate pilots *Miss Goodman Real Estate* during a qualifying run of over 165 mph for the San Diego Gold Cup. **ABOVE:** Teammates J. Michael Kelly (left) in *Beacon Electric* and Corey Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing* once again find themselves racing in the inside two lanes.

San Diego event remaining, he had a 949-point advantage over Peabody and *Beacon Plumbing*.

SAN DIEGO

From Seattle, the road to the H1 Unlimited national championship turned south down the Pacific Coast to Southern California. With its warm weather, palm trees, and white-sand beaches, San Diego is always a popular stop on the Unlimited circuit. The racecourse is ideal. Mission Bay has salt water, which gives the propellers something more to grab onto, and is sheltered from ocean breezes. What's more, the racecourse is surrounded by gently sloping beaches that absorb the wake from the boats rather than causing it to bounce back into the path of the speeding hydroplanes. With all of these advantages, it's a place where some of the sport's fastest speeds have been recorded.

The hydros first competed on Mission Bay in 1964, but in recent years the organizing group has seen more than its share of economic challenges and have often let the sport's governing board know that they could not afford to pay the tow money for more than a few entrants. As a result, they often saw fields of just six boats.

Last year, faced with the loss of their prime sponsor, the race organizers canceled their race three months before it was scheduled to happen, cited small fields of entrants as one of their issues with the sport, and vowed to reorganize for a better show in 2024. Helping them reach that end, H1 Unlimited awarded San Diego this season's running of the sport's most prestigious event: the APBA Gold Cup. Mercurys Coffee Company stepped forward to be the event's title sponsor.

Although most observers recognized that he was out of the running to win the national title, J. Michael Kelly arrived in San Diego as the defending Gold Cup champion. He qualified *Beacon Electric* with a two-lap qualifying run that av-

eraged 156.7 mph, but Andrew Tate was again the fastest. He took *Miss Goodman Real Estate* around Mission Bay at an average of 165.116 mph. Corey Peabody was second fastest with a 158.559 mph run aboard *Beacon Plumbing*, a boat that won its first race in San Diego when it competed as *Coor's Dry* in 1992.

Like before, with six boats in the pits, the preliminary-heat action would involve six round-robin contests, with each boat racing in four four-lap heats. The first of those featured a race between Tate and Kelly. Tate got the inside lane on Kelly at the start, but Kelly beat him to the first turn. They battled side by side down the backstretch, until Tate slowly took the lead. With *Beacon Electric* to his outside, Tate extended his lead to the length of a roostertail by the end of the second lap and continued to increase that advantage to the end.

In the second preliminary, Tate faced the other *Beacon* boat. He again grabbed the inside lane at the start with Corey Peabody beside him in *Beacon Plumbing*. Tate was the length of a roostertail ahead of Peabody by the end of the first lap and continued to extend that lead to the finish line. "The boat ran well," Tate said when he returned to the pits. With the points earned by his two victories, Tate's



Tate leads Dustin Echols in the U-40 *Flav-R-Pac* during the final heat of the Gold Cup on Mission Bay in San Diego. Tate's lead didn't last, however, as he was later disqualified for having entered the Safety Zone before the start.

Chris Denslow

lead in the national points race was now beyond reach for all except Peabody. "We did what we wanted to do today. Lane one is the place to be here."

Peabody did his best to keep pace in the national title chase by winning Heat 3, but time was working against him. With the points from only two preliminary heats and the final left to be collected, it would require a miracle for him to catch *Miss Goodman Real Estate*. Tate needed only to finish fourth or better in his next heat to make the outcome official.

That formality was accomplished on Sunday morning when Tate drove his gold and white hydro to a victory over *Miss Apollo* and *Miss Mercurys Coffee* in Heat 4. The only question at that point was: Who would win the Gold Cup?

Kelly supported his defense of America's oldest motor-sport trophy by winning Heat 5 over Jamie Nilsen in *Miss Mercurys Coffee*. Dustin Echols won his second heat of the season when the other three boats in Heat 6 were penalized for starting too early. That left only the final—the last heat of the 2024 campaign.

Tate inexplicably took himself out of the running almost as soon as he left the dock and skittered onto the race-course. Instead of going right around the outside of the buoys in the nearest turn, he turned left and found himself inside the buoys and in the Safety Zone, which

earned him a disqualification.

Meanwhile, as was his custom, Nilsen grabbed the inside lane at the start while Tate took a position far to the outside. He led the field across the starting line and into the first turn but was too far outside to be a contender. Meanwhile, from lanes two and three, the two *Beacon* boats took command emerging from the first turn with Peabody slightly ahead going down the backstretch. By the time they reached the end of the first lap, *Beacon Plumbing* was ahead by the length of a roostertail. The result was settled. Peabody won easily; Kelly finished second.

At the awards ceremony after the event, Tate was not willing to celebrate the national championship he had won earlier that day. "It is an honor and a privilege to drive for the *Goodman* team," he told the audience from the awards stage. Obviously still embarrassed by what he had done at the start of the final, he added, "I am sorry. I hope there are brighter days ahead."

Some questions about Unlimited hydroplane racing may have been answered during the 2024 season, but that word "uncertainty" still hangs over the sport as the 2025 campaign looms ahead just six months away. ❖



Chris Denslow

With team manager Charlie Grooms looking on, Andrew Tate addresses the crowd during the awards ceremony after the Gold Cup race.

UNJ INTERVIEW:

A conversation with Mark (and Sandi) Tate

In 1959, Mark Tate was born in Wayne, Michigan, into a boat-racing family—his father and grandfather both raced hydroplanes. Mark began racing when he was a young teenager. His career eventually took him to the Unlimiteds where he won a total of 12 races, including two Gold Cups, and four national titles. His wife, the former Sandi Wray, did her own racing in California where she was a regular winner in the 145 in-board class. Today, they are the proud parents of Andrew Tate, who was the driver of Miss Goodman Real Estate this past season and won his second national championship. The following

interview of Mark Tate and Sandi Tate was conducted by Craig Fjarlie at the Tri-Cities on July 26, 2024. Answers to the questions are from Mark, except where otherwise noted.

UNJ: You came from a racing family, was it assumed that you were going to race, too?

Tate: No, it never really was, and never talked about. You know, my grandfather raced 266 and 2.5-liters; built his own boats and his own motors. I had an

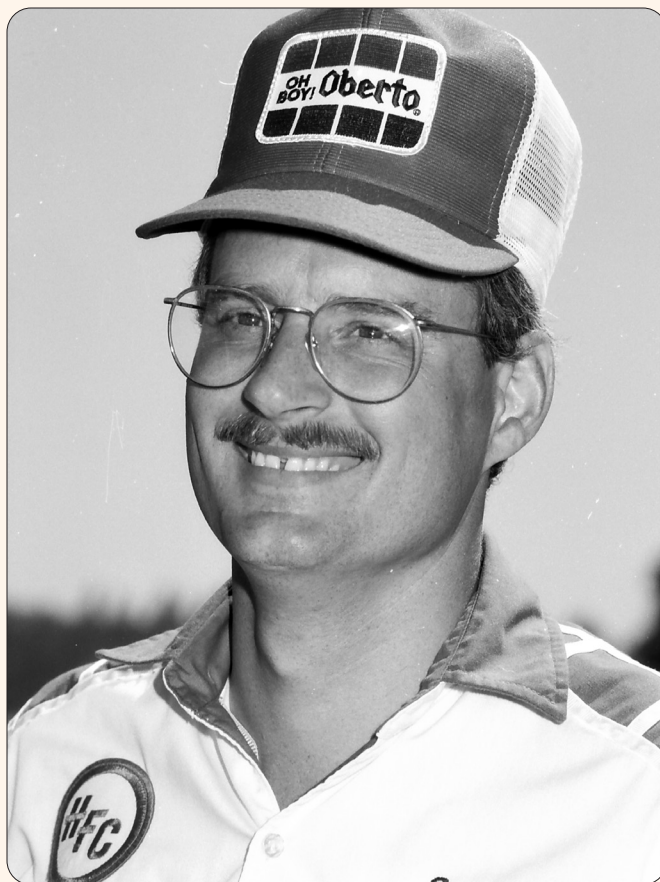
uncle, Casey, my dad's stepbrother, who raced. My dad raced, mostly 48s back in the day and drove a little bit for other people. My first opportunity of seeing outboard racing—my dad and mom and sister, we said we're going to a boat race. Okay, we didn't take our boat. We went there and there are these little outboards and these kids were racing. My dad asked me if that would be something I'd like to do. That was '71, I think, and we bought a boat. My first year of racing was 1972, in J Stock Hydro.

And that was with a Mercury engine?

Yup, that was the Merc 60, they called it.

Do you know who built the boat?

My boat was a J Hedlund. It was built by the Hedlund family. Back then, Hedlunds were a very, very good boat. That was the only J boat they ever built. We bought it from the Hertz, Lee Hertz and Steve Hertz owned it. They had it built, we bought it from them.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

So, you were a little older for the J class. You didn't start when you were nine?

No, I was a little older when I started. I think it was, you know, more of a family decision of when you could afford it and dedicate time to it. My dad was willing to give up his racing, so I think there were a lot of factors that went into it with my family, to give me the opportunity.

How did you do in J?

Good. My first year I was more of a third and fourth finisher. My last two years I was a region champ, divisional champ. It was pretty much myself and the Marcells of New York that were kind of controlling the Js at the time.

Do you remember the number on your boat?

Yup, 116-M. I'm not sure if there's a picture of me in *Speed and Spray* or not, when Rusty Rae was there and wrote the book *Speed and Spray*, in Dayton, Ohio.

Okay, you stayed in J until...

You know, I don't remember when I moved to A. My sister got involved and ran A Hydro. Then I moved up and ran A Hydro, 15 Hydro. My dad got a 25 Hydro, but I don't remember the years of the elevation in Stock racing. I ran Stocks up until 1978 and I got qualified as an in-board racer. And then, I was pretty much off running inboards.

Was your sister older than you?

A year older.

When you ran A, did you use the same boat?

No, my first boat was a Corl fiber-



That's Mark Tate on the left, in a 1-litre boat named *Anti Stick* chasing Steve David aboard his *Miss Century 21 Special* during a 1982 race in St. Petersburg, Florida.

glass boat. Corl Glass. They copied the Hedlund, made molds off of them. Then I had a Craig Craft. My last A Stock Hydro was a Craig Craft.

Did you ever run a runabout?

Now and then. Fred Miller put me in my first runabout. It was a marathon in the Trenton Channel. I think I only ran it, maybe, I only ran marathons, no short courses and I think it was maybe two marathons. I wasn't much into the runabouts.

Well, you went on to inboards. What class did you...

My dad owned, at that time, an 850, a Lauterbach that we bought from Mike Lipschutz. He had a driver, Steve Hertz. Then I got qualified at the last race in, I think it was '77 or '78, and started driving for my dad the following year. Then we bought a Kelson and we ran a Kelson and a Lauterbach for, like, three years. Over that period of those three, four years I was driving for my dad, you know, we won the Nationals and high-point championship three or four years in a row, and we campaigned pretty hard.

You ran a number of different in-board classes.

Yup. After getting kinda established in the Y class back then, other drivers were starting to give me opportunities. I drove for Jim Deal with the *Deal Me In* in 7-litre. We set all the records. I drove for Jerry Cook in 280 and we were very competitive on a national level.

Then when Jerry got out of racing,

I drove for Tom Funka with a Ron Jones boat, and we set all the records, mile, mile and-a-quarter, mile and-two-thirds. Mile and-two-thirds record stood for almost 20 years before Zimmerman broke it. Then I drove Grand Prix, *Rich Plan Food Service*, *Long Gone*, and *GP Valleyfield*. I think 1988 we actually set a world record with that at the Valleyfield Regatta, won the championship with it.

Did you have a favorite class in the inboards, or did you like all of them?

You know, all throughout my racing career I never really had a favorite class. I enjoyed each individual boat in class, and each one brought its own uniqueness of how you had to drive that boat in that class.

Boats from different builders handled differently?

Yeah, I drove Lauterbachs, Kelsons, Staudachers, I drove one Karelsen boat for Eddie Karelsen, but over the years, back then, Staudacher and Jones were the two really big guys.

Who was doing your engine work?

In the 48s, my dad used to build his own motors. When we went 850 racing, my grandfather built 'em for the first two years, and then when we bought our first Kelson, Jack Sellers of Florida took over building those motors for us. Then, when I started driving for other people, they had people like Bubba Wilton building 'em. Grand Prix motors were Robert Theoret. The Kenetics, of Michigan, used to build the 7-litre stuff. Tom D'Eath



Another photo of Tate's 1-litre Y-1 *Anti Stick*, this one taken in Maysville, Kentucky, in 1981.

Phil Kunz Photography

Phil Kunz Photography



Mark Tate driving ATA-1 *Double Trouble* at a race in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1987.

built the 5-litre motors for Funka.

What was the name of that boat?

Mark: Back then it was called *Miss Zeroll*, the 5-litre.

Sandi: That was their business.

Mark: They made ice cream scoops and it was called Zeroll Ice Cream Scoops. They were based in Toledo, Ohio.

That's not real far from where you lived.

No, about 45 minutes from where we lived back then.

You did some of your own props at that same time?

Started doing props with Vic Brinkman, who kinda took me under his wing when I was younger, to help me with set-ups and kinda taught me about motors and propellers and stuff. Vic and I started making propellers. He was making the outboard props when I was racing outboards, but then when we got into inboards, he made 145 wheels, 280 wheels, 7-litre wheels, and he made three Unlimited wheels when I drove for Jim Harvey the first year. We made the molds, cast 'em. He machined 'em, everything.

Did he do some of the fine-tuning?

All of it, yeah.

On a different topic, there's a story about your dad riding a motorcycle from Detroit to Mike Jones' house near Seattle.

My dad did a tour on his motorcycle. He left Michigan, went across the lower area of Canada, all the way across to Vancouver, dropped down, visited the Joneses, went all the way down into Mexico

and visited Art Oberto and his wife there at their little home where they had no electricity or nothin' in Mexico. When he left there, he went all the way, ended up in Brownsville, Texas. He got there late at night and getting into the hotel parking lot, it was on a brick road and it was oil slicked. He went down and broke his pelvis. He was there for a little over a month in traction. When he got well enough to get going, the bike was still runnable but he gave it to some Mexicans that helped him. He bought another bike and he finished up the trip, he ended up in Florida. He never made it up the East Coast. He wanted to write a book about his adventures, but he never got to do that.

Getting back to boat racing, did your dad ever take you to Unlimited races?

No, not at all. He basically...

Too busy with your own racing?

Yeah, I was racing, and the funny thing was, when the Unlimiteds were in Detroit, we were always at a race somewhere else. Came to the point where I

kinda thought that, you know, maybe I'd like to try that. I went to John Love, sat down and talked to John and he brought me out to San Diego. I don't remember the year, would've been 1989 maybe, 'cause 1990 was my first year and it was the year before that. Yes, 1990 was my first year running Unlimiteds for Jim Harvey. I drove '90 for him, '91 was my first year with Woomer and I won the Gold Cup. So, it was 1989 that we came to San Diego. I think that's when the double flip happened, right?

Believe so.

And that's when I was there. John introduced me to Harvey and took me around and introduced me to all the owners. He put a resume together and a video of me running smaller boats, and every time we got introduced, he passed one out to the owners. Jim Harvey called me, and we talked. Back then, the Unlimiteds used to go to the APBA National Meeting. We talked at the national meeting, and he hired me after that to drive in 1990. 1990 I drove for Harvey, '91 I won the Gold Cup with Woomer.

If we can back up just a bit, did you have any major accidents when you were driving inboards?

I blew over trying to set a kilo record in the Lake Okeechobee area. I blew over a 1-litre there. That was the first time I ever really blew over. At St. Pete, I blew over Tom Funka's 5-litre testing on Friday. Got really beat up, really bad. Drove the boat, first heat Saturday set the world record. Second heat Saturday,



Tate driving *GP Valleyfield* in the 1988 Valleyfield Regatta.

set the world record. The next heat, the first heat on Sunday, I broke the record again. I didn't drive the final heat, they put Tom D'Eath in it, and Tom went out and I think he ran, like, third [Laughs]. But those are my two blow-overs.

Well, on a slightly different subject, you and Sandi met through inboard racing?

Sandi: Yes

Mark: Yeah, Sandi was coming back east racing for a couple of years, and I wanted to get introduced to her, so a mutual friend, Jerry Hale, introduced the two of us at Decatur, Illinois. And I don't remember the year.

Sandi: I was still in high school. I want to say probably 1982...

Mark: Somewhere back in the '80s.

Sandi: ...or '83. It was a very short introduction. I'd have to look back in the books to see when that race was.

Mark: And I don't remember the year. So, after the introduction she would come back every year. I think it was the next year, a race back east, she and her dad came and stayed at my mom and dad's house for a while. We got to know each other better. Then when they went back west that year, I flew out there to two races, I think. Went out for two races.

Sandi: That was '85.

Mark: '85, and then that's when I decided to ask her to marry me, when I was out there.

Sandi: In '86 we got married.

[To Sandi] You had a successful career in 145. You got a national championship, high-point title?

Sandi: I did. I ran for high points and that was probably...I don't remember. I can't recollect like he does. I want to say, probably '83 I did high points. And I might have gotten, I think I got two years...

Mark: Two years in a row.

Sandi: '83 and '84. I did set a record, one-mile world record at Oroville one year, but that has since been broken. But, yeah, my career is not quite as exciting as



Phil Kunz Photography

Sandi Wray at the controls of her 145-class inboard S-511 *Country Girl*

Mark's. It's a little shorter. So, once we got married, I didn't race too much. Maybe 1988 would have been my last race, and that was with a friend from Michigan.

Mark: '88? No, it was before that. Maybe '86 or '87.

[To Sandi] What was the name of your boat?

Sandi: When I raced, it was *Country Girl*.

Country Girl.

Sandi: Yeah, S-511.

S-511.

Sandi: And that was a Belleville, a French-Canadian guy we met in California.

Marcel Belleville.

Sandi: Marcel Belleville, yup. I still chat with him on Facebook. He's still around but he's working on planes these days, having fun with that.

[To Sandi] Did anybody in your family ever race boats?

Sandi: No, so what happened, I was brought into it just merely out of curiosity. My mom worked with somebody who was involved with boat racing, so we started to go to a few of the local races and watched him. My mom did have a competitive background. She grew up with horses. She showed horses and then she also drag raced in California. When we were little kids, we used to go to the drag strip and watch her race. Then, for whatever reason, she kinda got out of that. The gentleman that she worked with, when we went to the few races, that's where we met Marcel, and he offered a boat. He just said, "Hey, I got some old boat." I want to say probably an

old Jones. It was pretty beat up, sitting in the back of his garage, doing nothing. So, he threw this boat together and made it raceable. We went and got our physicals at that time and my mom told me that she was going to drive it, and I was going to drive it and take turns. If I didn't like it, she was gonna drive it. So, obviously I liked it, and my mom and dad supported my racing for a few years, for whatever direction. [Belleville built a new boat for her the following year – Ed.]

[To Sandi] You were living in California?

Sandi: I was in California. I moved out in 1985, October of '85 is when I moved to Michigan. So, mine wasn't as long or exciting as Mark's, and then I knew I was pretty much done once I knew Andrew was coming along.

[To Sandi] You were pretty well known even in Seattle in that era.

Sandi: I was known in Seattle, yeah, 'cause we would travel up there, you know. Dave Villwock, George Woods, we were just talking about that the other day, all these flat-bottom guys, they kinda took me under...

Mark: She was just friends with Mickey Remund. She was good friends with Mickey.

Well, Mark, if we can continue with your career, when you drove for Jim Harvey the first year, that was a piston engine, right?

Started out as a Merlin. Miami, Detroit, and I think Madison, and then when we came back west, Tri-Cities would have been the first race back west, we became a turbine. So, that year we ran



F. Pierce Williams

Mark Tate's first Unlimited ride came aboard *Oh Boy! Oberto* in 1990, shown here during its last appearance with piston power.

Merlin on the East Coast, turbine on the West Coast.

Did they go through the starting process for the Merlin with you...

Yup.

...and how to drive it?

It was a big learning curve. The starting wasn't bad, I got that down pretty good, but when you were racing, anything I ever drove, you can put your foot in it and go. With those [Merlin engines] you can put your foot in it, but if the boost pressure got so high, you'd have to back off. You'd have to use the nitrous to get the rpms up, and then it was a dance in the cockpit and I was like, man, I had a lot of respect for Bill and Dean and Kropfeld and how hard they could drive those piston boats. You know, I got better at it. I know that my very first race, I had to start on the outside, the only restriction I had. I got a really good start and was going into the first turn with *Bud* and *Chip* in the *Circus* and they got to the apex. I was just coming into the corner, and I saw their wakes come together like this [gestures] and I backed right out of it. I didn't think any boat could go through water that rough. I ended up third, came back to the dock and Harvey goes, "What happened in that first turn?"

I said, "Oh, my God, Jim, I got down there and when their wakes came together, the water was this deep." I said, "I

backed off, I didn't think the boat would go through that stuff?"

And he goes, "Really?"

I said, "Yeah," and he turned around and walked off the dock. I thought I was gonna get fired [Laughs]. Anyhow, we got to Detroit and we broke one of the lines—like the prime lines or something, the real small lines—broke and nobody knew it. So, I was having a hard time starting it before the heat. I got it lit and got it going. When I came in, Jim asked me what was going on starting and I said, "Man, it just didn't want to start, it was just zsss, zsss, zsss."

He went up and looked at it and he goes, "I can't believe you got it started with that prime line being cracked and broken." So, I think that kind of re-deemed his confidence in me.

You were in an enclosed cockpit.

Yup, that was my first time ever in an enclosed cockpit and racing a boat that had radios.

How was it to drive in an enclosed cockpit?

You know, I didn't have any apprehensions about it. I felt pretty comfortable in it. I really liked the radio aspect, you know, having a spotter and somebody talking to you.

In the enclosed cockpit, did you feel like you were hemmed in?

No, I felt very comfortable in it,

when I got into it.

You had a spotter helping you.

Yeah, each time I drove it we usually had two spotters back then, talking, different areas of the racecourse and stuff. One was Harvey and the other one, I think it was Tom Anderson at the time.

Yeah, he was the crew chief.

Yup, back then, and I think he was on the radio, too, which was good. I mean, I think you need that when you're in an enclosed cockpit to really understand where everybody is.

When the boat was converted to turbine, how was that for the starting procedure, the torque curve, the...

It was back to old school for me. It was so easy to drive the turbine it was just like driving an inboard deal. You could smash the throttle and run it as hard as you could run it back then. I didn't even have front wings in the limited inboard boats. So, that was a new experience in how you could really control the boat with a wing. I felt a lot more comfortable in a turbine boat than I ever did a piston-powered boat.

That one half-year with Harvey was the only time you drove a piston Unlimited.

Only time. I never even tested the boat. We went right to Miami to the race. So, I got thrown right in for my first heat. Got a: "This is how you start it, this

is how you do that, this is what's gonna happen." So, all good.

You didn't win anything for Harvey that season.

No first-place winnings or nothing. We were mostly a third-, fourth-place boat, you know, fifth-place boat at times.

He didn't have a real big budget to work with, did he?

No, he didn't. I'm not sure what Oh Boy! Oberto gave him at the time, and that kind of stuff, but, you know, it was a great experience. I liked working with Jim and Tom and it was a good position to start in, because there wasn't any real pressure of any kind, and you could really get acquainted with the whole program.

How did you happen to get hired by Steve Woomer the next year?

Well, Kropfeld was driving for him and he only had the old boat when Jim drove for him. Then they bought all the Circus equipment and I got a call out of the blue from Lucero. He asked if I had an interest, and he lined up a meeting with Harvey and him over the phone.

They flew me out there and we put a deal together.

You were sent to Bob Bondurant's driving school, is that correct?



Karl Pearson

Tate joined Steve Woomer's race team in 1991 and drove *Winston Eagle* to a national title.

Yup. I had raced cars early on, but I went to, I can't remember, it's in West Virginia, I can't remember the name of the track, when I was running 48s. I wanted to learn about car racing, what technology could be learned there to what boat racing was, and I kinda told Woomer about that and he just said, "It's like everything, everything revolves." And he goes, "We're gonna send you to Bondurant." And I went to Bondurant and I was there a week and went through different sections of their course over the week, a little over a week, I guess, and you start with the Mustangs, and then we went from Mustangs, learning how

to do donuts and spins and you lift the car and do different things to 'em so you can learn how to control it if something happens. Then we went to the track and when I came back for the next course it was a step up to the open-wheel cars with the Formula Fords.

When I got there, I absolutely stunk. I couldn't drive a Mustang or a thing because of the weight transfer in 'em and everything was so much different than a boat. I had no feel for it, I mean, I was absolutely horrible. When I went back the next week, you know, obviously the same instructors and stuff. Got in the Formula Fords, it was like night and day. I could

Mark Tate's Driver Statistics

YEAR	BOAT	HULL#	RACES	1st	2nd	3rd	DNQ	START	DNS	FINISH	1st	Pct.	Top 3	Pct.
1990	Oh Boy! Oberto	8200	12	0	1	0	0	39	2	32	3	0.094	32	1.000
1991	Winston Eagle	8700	7	3	3	0	0	27	0	26	15	0.577	26	1.000
1992	Winston Eagle	8700	9	0	3	1	0	36	0	30	11	0.367	30	1.000
1993	Winston Eagle	8700	10	0	2	0	0	42	0	35	16	0.457	35	1.000
1994	Smokin' Joe's	8700	8	2	4	1	0	33	0	31	18	0.581	31	1.000
1995	Smokin' Joe's	8700	10	4	4	0	0	40	0	39	20	0.513	39	1.000
1996	Smokin' Joe's	8700	10	2	4	1	0	33	4	32	19	0.594	32	1.000
1997	Close Call	8700	10	1	6	1	0	38	2	37	15	0.405	37	1.000
1998	PICO American Dream II	98100	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	3	1	0.333	3	1.000
1999	Freddie's Club	9302	4	0	0	1	0	16	0	14	3	0.214	14	1.000
2000	Freddie's Club	9302	6	0	2	0	0	17	1	13	2	0.154	13	1.000
	Miss Chrysler-Jeep	9302	1	0	0	0	0	5	0	4	0	0.000	4	1.000
2002	Miss Trendwest	9302	6	0	1	1	0	26	0	25	5	0.200	25	1.000
2004	Miss Chrysler-Jeep	0302	1	0	0	0	0	4	0	4	0	0.000	4	1.000
TOTALS:			95	12	30	6	0	359	10	325	128	0.394	325	1.000

Paul Kemeiel



Paul Kemeiel



Tate won national driver's titles in 1994 and '95 driving Woomer's *Smokin' Joe's*

drive the livin' shit out of 'em. I went from one of the worst drivers to, I was better than anybody there in the class. A lot of these guys had raced carts and stuff, trying to get their license to move up to the next thing. I was so quick that, the instructors would run in front of you at times, they couldn't shake me. They were amazed at how good I was in a Formula Ford car compared to a Mustang. I know Jim did that, Jim and Steve did that, so I could learn how to anticipate apexes better, and in car racing we go up hills and down and you lose the track. So, it's like, how do you pick up these references of where you're at, outside, inside. There were a lot of beneficial things that you could transfer to boat racing if you got stuck to an outside lane or you're in a tunnel, you know, and what you're looking for, for references to pick up. So, it did help me a lot in those sorts of areas.

The boat was Winston Eagle at that time?

1991 when I joined the team we were the *Winston Eagle*, and, uh, the first

year I think we won a couple races. I won the Gold Cup in Detroit and not sure if we won here [Tri-Cities] or maybe Hawaii. I think we won two races that first year but, you know, it was a lot of fun. We had a really good piece of equipment. I really enjoyed Jim Lucero, the knowledge that he had and the things that he could talk to me about, helping me as a driver. Learned a lot about boat set-ups and propellers and trying different rudders and what they were doing and why they were

doing it. I think he was a great mentor.

They weren't still running the L-11, were they? That had been banned before that.

Right. We ran the T-55 Lycoming turbines, same thing got there [gestures toward boats in pits].

What do you remember about the Gold Cup win that first year with Woomer?

You know, I don't really remember much about the whole race itself. I just remember being on the stand and how emotional that moment was. Right then and there, you know? It's something that I'll never forget but it was, probably to date my biggest achievement ever in boat racing.

You won a driver's championship one year.

The same year, because Hawaii was the beginning of that year and I drove for Harvey, so whatever points I achieved for Harvey carried over to '91, and so, the first year we won the Gold Cup I won the driver's championship. That's why I say it was a really kind of exciting year for me.

Then you continued with Woomer for a few years.

Nine years from that until he passed away in '98, I think. But we went from *Winston* to *Smokin' Joe's* and our last year was *Close Call*.

He wasn't that old when he died, was he?

55. Very young man.

He smoked, that probably didn't



Tate's fourth national driver's title came when he drove *Close Call* in 1997.

Michael Prophet

help.

He used to smoke a lot, but he quit drinking real heavily and smoking about, not in the same year, the last two years I drove for him. He lived by fate. Enjoyed life and, uh, Steve was an owner. Not only was he the owner of the boat that I drove for him, but I owned a small business at the time I was driving for him, too, so we talked business a lot and, you know, the market, investments, and he always called me when he heard a new joke, 'cause he thought a good salesman always needed a new joke every time. So, our relationship over the years really got very personal and very tight.

As you drove for him over the years, did they make changes to the boat?

Slight changes, you know, and I think that was one of the advantages that *Budweiser* had over us is that, they were always, every other year, building a new boat. I think that they had four new boats built in the nine years I was there, and we never built a new boat. They did take the lobster boat and convert it to a conventional boat, but it still was never as fast as the *Circus* boat that we had purchased. We changed the balance of it a little bit, you know, we changed the sponsions.

The first year that I raced for him I was telling Jim about the big skid fins and what we did in inboards and how efficient they were. Jim built three of 'em. Got rid of the big, straight dagger and he built three of these fins, all different sizes. We came over here to Pasco before Detroit in '91. That was the first race of the year in 1991, the Detroit Gold Cup, and we tested all these new fins and a couple rudders, and that was huge. I think we went through the corners and through that pit turn so much faster than anybody else because of the fin design that we came up with and we implemented right away. Now they're even bigger! I mean, I can't believe how big they got.

They have to lift them with a crane. Well, when Steve died...

When Steve died the team disbanded. His son, Kenny, I could understand,



Mark Tate driving *Freddie's Club* at the Tri-Cities in 2000.

Chris Denslow

you know, he had a business there to run and he had to keep his focus and direction there and not be distracted by the racing. But the racing was really his dad's passion and not so much his. So, I took a year off. I didn't race the year he died and then, Harvey called me and wanted to retain the sponsor, Freddie's Club, that he had. So, I came back here in Tri-Cities and drove Tri-Cities, Seattle, and San Diego for him. We retained Freddie's. I drove the next year under Freddie's, the whole year, and then we went from *Freddie's* to *Trend West*. I drove one year, I think, for him, for *Trend West*.

In the Gold Cup that last year, you drove the preliminary heats, and Greg Hopp took over for the final.

Basically, I haven't told a lot of people this, but when I was back in the boat, when I came back to drive that year for Harvey, you had to wear a Hans device. I never wore one, I just wore tethers, and I was a little unparallel, my shoulders. The Hans devices then were bigger than what they are today, but they didn't have side straps on 'em to keep the strap from falling off. No matter how tight we would make the belts come down over the Hans device, the belt kept slipping off. I went into the corners, three and four, in the last heat before the final and the boat really unloaded hard. When it unloaded, the belt came off and I went up and hit my helmet on the canopy of the boat, and I fought for a lap to finish, because I had to finish the heat and I had to finish, I believe, third, for Harvey to make the final. And I struggled. I was seeing stars and everything and when I came in, I told my

wife I had pain and this and that and I said I'm done. Brought Jim in and told him I can't run the final, I'm all done. So that was it.

But you haven't completely left racing.

No, my boys were racing outboards, and we got more involved in that, and watched them progress through outboard racing. Our youngest boy quit racing for about three years, maybe four years. He...

And what is his name?

Brent. He was pursuing hockey. He had left from high school, moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, and played three years in the USHL. He went to Bowling Green, got a full ride in college. Then he went to the East Coast League and he decided to quit and came back to boat racing. Andrew was out of racing longer than that, you know, he was maybe nine-and-a-half years and when he entered at that point, he started to run more inboard stuff with the Englishes. But still, today, I'm really active in the outboard racing. I build a lot of racing engines, I try and mentor younger drivers and stuff.

Getting young people involved.

Yup, yup. Hey, I enjoy it, you know. I guess it's been such a part of my life, it's something that if I didn't have it, I might not know what to do.

Is Andrew going to run Top O' this year? [Top O' is an outboard marathon event in upper Michigan.]

Yup, we built a brand-new boat, built by Bobby Austin. We've been testing it, developing it. We feel pretty confident that we should be very, very competitive

with it, a good chance to win.

And what class is he going to run in?

C Runabout.

C Runabout, with a Yamato?

Yamato, yup. I got some pictures of it here. [Shows the photos.] That's it, that's Bobby Austin. You can't see him real well in the picture, the way it is, but there he is. Bobby Austin building runabouts was, on the East Coast, they were one of the well-known runabouts, like the Craig-Craft of the East Coast. But we'll be leaving Seattle and going back and running Top O'.

You must be real proud of how Andrew is doing in the Unlimiteds

Sandi: Not just the racing part of it, but watching him grow as a young man.

Mark: We get a lot of compliments about his demeanor, who he is, and how he is and how he presents himself and how genuine of a person he is.

Sandi: Very happy that he's had good paths with racing. I think that makes us more proud to see the person that he is.

Mark: When Andrew was younger, I think it was here, we were always here on Thursday. We had a big luncheon for the press and stuff and I'm pretty sure it was here where Andrew left our table and went over and sat in Chip's lap. He admired Chip. He would have walked down and touched every boat when he was younger. You know, it's so cool to kind of remember him from riding his Big Wheel to becoming a driver of one of 'em, you know?

Yeah, yeah.

Sandi: [Looking at photos] His very first win was his first year as a rookie, he won Seattle. This was Chip calling Mark, to tell Mark, with Andrew, that he won. It was 2016.

Well, one of the last things, you folks are big Red Wings fans, right?

Andrew more-so than us. As the boys quit playing hockey, you know, our nights, kinda been late...We come into being empty nesters, we're not sitting around watching hockey games with two boys who played. Andrew follows 'em

real tightly, still, to date. We watch 'em now and then, but not to the level of what we were back then when the kids were younger and playing.

Maybe as a final subject, one thing that seems to be an issue for boat racing is trying to get more people involved and getting them aware of it. Tell people you like hydroplanes and you get blank stares, they don't know what you're talking about.

Same with us, you know. Tell people that we boat race, we do this, we do that, and they look at you, "Well, what's boat racing?" You try to explain it to them, show 'em pictures, "Oh, yeah, I've seen that." The way I look at boat racing—and boat racing at the smaller levels—has always been generation-driven. At this level [Unlimiteds] you've got to carry those generations to get to this opportunity. Unfortunately, you also have the same owner base, you don't have many boats, so it's shrinking at this level, but even at the smaller generational type of areas. APBA has done a good job with the local racing outboard groups, just like Seattle, you do the J program. We have racer schools back there where we'll bring in different age groups of people and put 'em through racer school. Our club used to do it twice a year, they're only doing it once a year now.

But I got a guy in Florida who bought a boat from me. I helped him with his motor and he's in his 40s, probably. He and his dad got involved. His dad actually went to the racer school again this year in Michigan, for the second year in a row, just to run a boat. So, there are new people getting in.

The point is, we gotta get 'em in and keep 'em interested. We got to help them become competitive. In fact, when I was younger, if I didn't have Vic Brinkman mentoring me in outboards, it would've been hard for me to be competitive. And that's where I like it.

Janicki, the last name, they started racing just at Top O' four years ago, the one boy. Now they got their two boys

racing and I started building their motors for them and trying to educate them. "You gotta do this, you gotta do that. This is racing, this is not weekend have fun, put it in the closet, then go race again." So, they went from racing one event a year to where they have a hydro now. They run the 300 class, their dad does, the two boys run the marathons, and they run all four or five marathons that we have in Michigan now.

They actually went to Alabama and raced there this year. So, we are starting to see it, newer people come into the sport, but if they didn't have people like myself and other people mentoring them and helping them along, they would come in a year or two and be gone, because they couldn't be competitive with it.

It's not a self-taught type of thing, you have to have somebody bring you through.

You do. And I don't care what form of racing that is, outboard, PRO racing, to inboard, Unlimited, offshore, you gotta have somebody there with some knowledge to make sure that you're doing it right.

You know, Andrew with his Formula One boat that he runs with Dylan Runne, it's a bunch of kids that grew up together racing stock outboards that went inboard racing, some went Unlimited racing, and they put this team together and they've gone to five races now, but each race they go to they're getting better and better. They've got people like Tim Seebold and a little bit of Billy, giving 'em guidance, giving Andrew help on driving, introducing them to the right motor builders, how to get the boat balanced, and in five races they've gone from really not knowing much to being very competitive.

I went to a Missouri race this year. They were number two on the pole in qualifying. I think they ran fourth or fifth in the race so, I mean, they've been around racing, so they know what questions to ask, and the people are willing to help. That's what it takes.

Okay, great. Thanks very much. ❖

AROUND THE CIRCUIT

Race Team and Race Site News by Chris Tracy



The 2024 season H1 Awards Banquet was held at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum on November 2.

It was billed as the H1 Banquet presented by Strong Racing. The museum was a convenient venue, as it is close to SeaTac airport for those flying in, plus it gave those attending the chance to visit the exhibits at the museum.

About 130 people attended, and to make room for tables, chairs and catering, the museum staff towed a few boats out of the building. They were on display in the museum parking lot.



Chris Tracy

Representatives of four boat teams from the 2024 season attended the banquet: *Beacon Plumbing*, *Beacon Electric*, *Goodman Real Estate* and *Go Fast Turn Left/Boitano Homes*. The newly organized, Legacy Racing team, also had a table at the banquet that included owner Jane Schumacher, driver Brent Hall, plus their marketing and public relations representatives, and more.

The Madison and San Diego race sites sent representatives to the banquet. I noticed a couple of key Seafair and Tri-City race volunteers at the banquet, but I'm not sure if they were there as fans or race-site representatives. This year there were no H1 meetings associated with the banquet date.

Brad Luce was the master of ceremonies. In his opening remarks, he summarized the season. He mentioned that H1 had brought in some new officials and had a new start procedure. He noted that the season had substantially fewer penalties and disqualifications vs the previous season.

He noted that winners were announced within 10 minutes. Luce said that the live-stream viewership was up 32% this past season. He welcomed Apollo Mechanical and Mercurys Coffee as sponsors. And he noted that Legacy Racing was present and returning in 2025, and he vowed that H1 was absolutely committed to supporting them.

The season review video was shown. It was produced by Jim Simpson.

The program moved to the awards portion. Jeff Bernard's

daughters, Blakely and Rilynn, assisted Luce with the trophy presentations. The winners were:

Crew Chief of the Year—Scott Raney (U-11, *Mercurys Coffee*). Raney was not present.

Race Site of the Year—Madison, Indiana. Kyle Bips accepted the award. Bips will head the 2025 Madison Regatta. Bips noted that the Madison budget is \$1 million.

Sponsor of the Year—Mercurys Coffee. The award was accepted by H1 Chair Mike Denslow.

Outstanding Contribution—Bruce Ratchford of Apollo Mechanical. Ratchford was not present and the award was accepted by Mike Denslow.

Chairman's Award, Volunteer of the Year—Brad Luce. A surprised Luce accepted the award.

Steve Montgomery Excellence in Media Award—This award has not been presented since 2016. It was awarded to two people: Brian Montgomery, for his work with drone footage, and to Nick Kish, for his work with the streaming camera work. Both were there to accept the awards. Montgomery noted he was thankful for all that help him. Kish thanked Tait and Jared Meyer in his remarks

2024 Gold Cup Champion—*Beacon Plumbing* driver Corey Peabody accepted the award. "It's never not a big deal to win the Gold Cup," said Peabody. The Gold Cup was on display at the banquet. Peabody noted that, "Mike and Jeff Campbell do unbelievable work"

NATIONAL HIGH-POINT CHAMPIONS

Third Place—U-40 *Bucket List/Flav-R-Pac*. No one from the team was present and the award was accepted on their behalf by Steve Compton. Compton said he had talked with owner, Kelly Stocklin, who appreciates the trophy and is looking forward to 2025.

Second Place—U-9 *Beacon Plumbing*. Driver, Corey Peabody, accepted the award. He was disappointed to be second, but remarked, "it's tough to beat the Madison (*Goodman Real Estate*) team."

First Place, Bill Muncey High Points Driver—U-91 *Goodman Real Estate* winning driver, Andrew Tate, accepted the award. Tate thanked sponsor Goodman Real Estate, and remarked that "John Goodman does this because he is a fan of the sport." Tate humbly remarked that the sport is "more fun when surrounded by family, when they believe in you. They pull me out of the dumps." The Muncey trophy was not on display as it is being restored and repaired.

The final award of the night was the Martini and Rossi National Championship Team Award. It was earned by the

U-91, *Goodman Real Estate* team. Crew Chief Mike Hanson, accepted the award for the team. Team manager Charlie Grooms, was not present. Hanson thanked John Goodman. He noted that “consistency gets you national championships.” He also thanked his brother saying, “Larry is a fantastic mechanic.”

Observations: The food was good, the banquet atmosphere was great, but I left the banquet somewhat unsettled. Some things were overlooked. The banquet could have acknowledged Eric Corning, who recently left Seafair after more than a two-decade career that included staging Unlimited races in Seattle. We were all sitting in the wonderful Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. The museum, under David Williams’s leadership, has fielded vintage boats for years to support Unlimited venues and this would have been a great time to acknowledge those efforts with an award. The San Diego race site sent a representative to the banquet; they should have been given some sort of achievement award for their successful efforts that brought racing back to San Diego.

I did not see any team member from the Miss Apollo, Bucket List/Flav-R-Pac, Graham Trucking and Mercurys Coffee teams. Years ago, almost every team attended and each presented with an award for their unique contribution during the previous season. This year, half the teams did not attend—disinterest, dissatisfaction, bad timing? I didn’t notice any key boat sponsor representative at the banquet, even sponsors that were honored with an award were not present.

The banquet used to be an upscale affair. Sometimes even a printed program. Sometimes black-tie with live music during the cocktail hour. It kind of made the evening special, and possibly gave the awards that were presented more credibility. And while all awards this year were given to those directly involved with the sport, in the past there were awards for outsiders—radio, TV, print journalism, social media, and even photography. Many attendees this year dressed smart-casual, but others were dressed more like they were going to work on a boat, instead of attending a banquet.

It’s probably time to reinvent the annual banquet.

IN OTHER NEWS: Schumacher’s U-37 will return to the sport

Legacy Racing has recently been formed to campaign the U-37 during the 2025 season. Rookie Brent Hall will drive. The owners are listed as Jane (Schumacher) Suzick and Crystal Weiding. The former *Miss Beacon Plumbing* hull was stored in New York and then in Washington state for many years after Schumacher Racing stopped racing. The hull last raced in 2014 in Doha, Qatar.

There have been questions about the boat since it was put in storage. One rumor was that it was never properly flushed out after the 2014 saltwater race. Brent Hall says that was not



A UNJ Secret Agent

the case and that a crew chief from another team recently surveyed the boat and, while it is in need of general maintenance, the boat’s in pretty good shape overall.

Hall reports that the goal is to enter all races in 2025. Another rumor was that the engines were sold after Schumacher Racing stopped racing. Hall reported that they have two engines and speculated that they might be able to put together a third. Jeff Weiding is charged with putting a crew together.

Legacy Racing had a table at the H1 Awards Banquet. Included at their table were staff from an experienced Seattle-area marketing and advertising agency. Legacy Racing will be looking soon for sponsors.

Is the Madison team being sold?

As anybody who has been around this sport knows very well, rumors are a constant feature, but rarely have any validity. A month ago, it appeared there was some substance around chatter that the Miss Madison, Inc. racing team, last season’s national champion, was on the verge of being sold. We had heard a couple of versions of the story that involved different buyers.

The saga of the Madison team sale continued through December. It’s confusing, but this is the best we can do to try to connect the dots at this time. The story might not be completely accurate, but likely is fairly close. It appears that the entire Madison team, including both boats, is in the process of or has already been sold, as documented by the *Madison Courier*. Madison team financial issues likely played a role in the decision to sell.

While not completely confirmed, it appears that Bruce Ratchford, the founder and CEO of Apollo Mechanical, will finalize his purchase with the start of the new year. The Madison team and Apollo have not commented, but the sale was reported by Charley Wiggins, the owner of the U-27 that was sponsored by Apollo last season. Wiggins noted that his Apollo sponsorship is not returning to his boat, and that his U-27

is for sale. Also, Goodman Real Estate issued a press release that confirms the sale, but leaves other questions unanswered.

According to the press release: “Goodman Real Estate has not been contacted by the new ownership of the Madison team to discuss how this may impact the two remaining years on their sponsorship contract.” John Goodman, founder and chairman of Goodman Real Estate, expressed his enthusiasm for this partnership, stating, “We support the town of Madison and the sport of hydroplane racing, and we look forward to being part of the races at the 75th anniversary of the Madison Regatta.” We understand that an official announcement of the sale will likely be made by the time you read this issue of the *NewsJournal* at the beginning of 2025.

More muddy waters: The Strong team made comments on their Facebook page that deny rumors that the Strong Racing team had been for sale. The word “racing” or “team” may have resulted in confusing comments on Facebook. Dylan Runne noted that he was in earlier negotiations to purchase one of the Strong boats, the U-8. Charlie Wiggins claims that Strong Racing offered to sell Apollo their team, but I understand Wiggins meant that the Strong team offered to sell the “red” Strong-owned boat. Apparently, the Strong team confirms that they offered the red boat to Apollo, but then added that they quickly rescinded the proposal. The Strong team’s Facebook page outlined their commitment to race two boats in 2025.

A new date for Guntersville.

There was concerning news late in the season about the financial health of the group that puts on the Guntersville race. It seems that stormy weather the past two years has caused attendance to be less than anticipated. According to one media report, the race site came about \$80,000 short of breaking even on its budget. The City of Guntersville reportedly kicked in \$40,000 to help the situation. Now comes word that the Guntersville organizers are planning to hold their Hydrofest event during the weekend of June 6 to 8 in order to see if that helps the situation.

With the earlier date for the Guntersville race, the date for spring testing on the Columbia River at the Tri-Cities has been scheduled for Saturday, May 17.

H1 has announced a tentative 2025 schedule that reflects these changes. The Madison Regatta will follow four weeks after the Guntersville race on July 4 to 6, the Gold Cup will be held in the Tri-Cities on July 25 to 27, the Seattle race will be August 1 to 3, and the 2025 season will wrap up in San Diego on September 12 to 14. Gossip says that a race in Detroit is still a possibility, but Detroit was not on the tentative schedule.



Chris Tracy

The crowd at the hydro museum’s holiday gathering

The Hydro museum celebrates the holidays

The 2024 Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum (HARM) annual meeting and holiday party was held on December 7 at the museum. Dinner, awards, and a special show were featured, along with the election of HARM board members.

Although 2024-Gold-Cup-winning driver, Corey Peabody, was scheduled to speak to the hundred people attending, he was unable to attend.

Some of the awards given included the museum’s perpetual awards. **Gary Hansen** was awarded the Gold Cup, the museum’s highest award that recognizes long-term service to the museum in both grass roots and leadership roles. Nominations for this award are made by past recipients. **Bob Steil** was the recipient of the President’s Cup, awarded to a member whose museum support includes significant financial contributions. **Jim Hall** was named as the Wahoo Cup winner, presented to the “unsung enthusiast” who has contributed to the success of the museum over an extended period of time through efforts in the trenches. Members of the HARM Board of Directors were also elected.

A special program was a comedy hypnosis show presented by Seafair volunteer Mariana Matthews. It was a fun show that included a small group of folks who were hypnotized... and sang, danced, and did other humorous things. The crowd enjoyed it.

Mercurys Coffee promotes its involvement in the sport.

Mercurys Coffee continues to showcase hydroplane racing, even during the off-season. The company has featured hydroplane swag for sale on its Facebook page and at its flagship store in Bellevue, Wash. The Mercurys Coffee display boat continues to do display duty at the company’s Kirkland/Rose Hill shop, and photos of the boat are featured on the menu board at its Kirkland/Totem Lake location. Mercurys Coffee is hydro brand! ❖

Remembering Lon Erickson

As the production of the December *Unlimited NewsJournal* (UNJ) was wrapping up, we learned that Lon Erickson had passed away in mid-November after a short illness. He was 68 years old.

Lon wore many hats at the *NewsJournal* for many years. He wrote our Hydro-File column, he was our webmaster, he provided photos, and was a proofreader and fact checker. The *UNJ* is published by the club, Unlimiteds Unanimous, and Lon was vice president and co-treasurer of that group. He even booked the locations of our monthly meetings.

And maybe most of all, Lon was a passionate hydroplane fan. Ever since he was a child, he loved to talk hydros. He had a leadership role in the Royal Order of the Turbine (ROTT) and helped plan and execute the ROTT banquet in Tri-Cities each July that helped raise money for the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum (HARM). Lon was a frequent HARM visitor, as well. He was also one of the leaders that produced Hydro News on social media, and was proud that H1 had acknowledged their efforts with an award at an H1 awards banquet.

Lon lived much of his life in Bellevue, a suburb of Seattle. He was a graduate of Interlake High School in Bellevue and helped plan his class's 50th year reunion



that was recently held; unfortunately, his health did not permit him to attend. For many years, he worked in management at Lamonts Apparel stores in Western Washington, in Eastern Washington, and even in Alaska. After Lamonts closed, he managed conference services for a Microsoft subcontractor and finished his working career as a sales representative/operations manager. Lon was divorced many years ago.

Lon was a friend to all of us associated with the *UNJ*. He was part of our group that would go to dinner after our monthly meetings, where we continued our hydro talk, sometimes mixed with football and baseball, too. And while Lon loved to talk and was quick to give his opinion, two topics were generally off-limits: politics and religion. But Lon did talk about his family, and he was close to them. He cherished times with his father who is now in his late 90s, frequently taking day trips with him. And he enjoyed dinners out with his sister, brother, and dad.

And Lon was my friend. I enjoyed talking hydros with him and he enjoyed knowing and sharing all details about boats, racing, race sites, sponsors, drivers, owners, and more. I'll miss those late-night calls where we talked hydros.

Seven years ago, I was critically sick.

After I had completed some particularly difficult treatments and was feeling a little better, Lon called me and said, "Are you well enough to go out to lunch? Pick the place and I'll meet you there." We met in Kirkland, Wash., and had lunch. When the bill arrived, Lon picked up that tab, saying, "It's only right I pay as I invited you out." Going out with a friend for lunch lifted me up during the difficult time I was going through. Lon was private about his short bout with cancer. Only those who needed to know were told. I remembered how thoughtful he had been when I had cancer. And I talked to him three times after his diagnosis. I tried to be upbeat and told him I was praying for him and emphasized that I was still alive seven years after being pretty sick. And I told him that his friends were rooting for him. I followed up with texts, just letting him know I and his *UNJ* friends were thinking about him and sending positive thoughts.

Hydroplane racing lost one of its biggest fans and those of us at the *UNJ* lost one of our best friends. Happy trails, Lon...until we meet again.

Christopher Tracy, President
Unlimiteds Unanimous, publishers of the
Unlimited NewsJournal

MY \$0.02 WORTH

Editorial Comment by Andy Muntz



In the military they call it an After-Action Review (or AAR). After a mission has ended, the leadership involved in that action will sit down together and evaluate what happened. They review what the original plan had been and then discuss how that compared with what actually took place. They talk about what went wrong, what went right, and what lessons were learned.

The point of the AAR is to apply the lessons from the mission so that future missions will have better results. The focus of the AAR is to determine what needs to be applied to future planning efforts, how their preparation can be improved, and whether there are aspects of the mission that should be executed differently in the future.

I assume that the current leadership of H1 Unlimited has a written strategic plan for the organization. Any organization that hopes to be successful should have a plan that identifies what they want to accomplish. After all, if you don't know where you are going, how can you

honestly expect to get there?

An important component of any planning effort is to periodically take an account of where you are and in what direction you're heading, in order to know whether you're getting closer to your goal. An organization with a public relations plan, for instance, must gather feedback from key audiences to find out whether the effort is meeting the PR objectives, and if they're not, how to revise the plan to get your desired result.

I was disheartened to hear that the recent H1 awards banquet did not include any meetings. The annual gathering of the sport's participants is a golden opportunity to hold meetings to review issues, to see where things stand, and to plan for a better future.

The awards banquets in past years were held in conjunction with a day full of planning meetings. I first got involved in this when I was asked to give a presentation about the history of starting procedures at the meetings in 2019.

Among the best of these annual

meetings came

during the gathering in 2022 when race officials, drivers, and boat-team members got together to review many of the penalty calls that were made during the previous season. Together, they watched video of those incidents from several different angles and discussed in great detail what happened. The group reviewed what the rules say about the situation. Each driver explained what was going through their mind in that circumstance. The officials explained why a penalty was called, or not called, or whether a different call should have been made.

I think both sides came away from the meeting with a clearer understanding of the challenges that are involved during an Unlimited hydroplane race.

The opportunity for this kind of planning was apparently missed with this year's H1 Unlimited awards banquet. And, that's a shame, because those planning meetings have always been the most consequential part of past annual awards banquets. ❖

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Send comments to: ajmuntz@icloud.com

PLEASE JOIN US AT THE NEXT MEETING OF UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS

2 p.m. on Sunday, January 12, 2025

Bellevue Public Library, Room 3, 1111 - 110th Ave. NE, Bellevue, WA 98004