

FROM THE UNJ VAULT

Joe Taggart: The jovial ice-cream man from Canton.

The success of the *Slo-mo-shuns* became a legend of men as well as machine. Joe Taggart, a jovial ice cream man from Canton, Ohio, was certainly a big part of that legend. He began boat racing in 1928 while still a high school student and in 1938 got his first three-point hydroplane, one of the first Ventnor 225s on the market. That's when he first got wind about the racing that was going on in far-away Seattle.

He raced often against Jack "Pops" Cooper from Kansas City, who also had Ventnor boats and told Taggart one day about a sale he had made. "I'll never forget when he said to me, 'You want to know where I sold my



last boat?' I said, 'Where?' He said, 'To somebody way up in Seattle, Washington.' I said, 'Where!?' Little did he

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know that the buyer, that “somebody,” would turn out to be Stanley Sayres, who many years later would make Taggart well known in the sport.

In 1946, 1948, and 1951 Taggart entered his 7-litre *Tomyann* in events that included Gold Cup– and Unlimited-class competitors and in 1952 he got his first ride in the big boats when he drove *Miss Great Lakes II*. He then joined Sayres and the *Slo-mo-shun* team in 1953 and remained there for four years, winning the 1953 Gold Cup in the process.

Why, some students of the sport ask, has Taggart earned such a lofty place in the *Slo-mo* story and in Gold Cup annals? After all, he won only one race and was overshadowed by the hard-driving Lou Fageol. But others remember him for his “heart,” and certainly for his final ride. He was the last to drive a *Slo-mo-shun* boat.

The following interview first appeared in the *Unlimited NewsJournal* in January and February 1976 and was conducted by Craig Fjarlie amid the helter-skelter of race day morning at the 1975 Seafair race. As Joe Taggart shared his story with a Coast Guard chopper thwomping at the ear, former *Slo-mo-shun* crew chief Mike Welsch happened by and hollered: “Don’t tell him any lies, Joe.” Taggart chuckled and replied, “I don’t think I can tell you anything that hasn’t been told before.”

UNJ: How did you meet Stan Sayres? Was it through Lou Fageol, running the Midwest circuit, in Detroit?

Taggart: Well, I met Stan when he came east in ‘50. But it was Lou Fageol that got me the ride in the *Slo-mo-shun IV* in ‘53. It was through Lou’s instigation that Stan invited me to drive the boat.

I suppose that was something you looked forward to? Obviously, the *Slo-mo* was the cream of the crop at that time.

Oh, yes, there was no question about that. There was no question that in those days the *Slo-mos* were the envy of everybody.

When did you hop in the *Four* for the first time?

Here in Seattle. I got here on Wednesday and took a ride Thursday morning, off Stan’s home at Hunt’s Point. Then we qualified Thursday afternoon.

Did Stan, or maybe Lou, go out with

you, to kind of give you an orientation?

No, Mike Welsch went out with me. At the time they had just changed the water injection—an Allison—and he went along as much to see how that was working as anything else. Then, Martin Headman came with me and I went down to qualify.

You’d been in a prop-riding Unlimited by that time, in *Miss Great Lakes II*, but what was your immediate feeling about the *Four*? Was it different? Did it feel special? Did it do things that you didn’t expect it would?

Actually, there was no great difference in that respect. The thing that, well, it’s kind of comical, but I knew how fast the boat would go when she set the record [178.497 mph]. I kept watching the speedometer, which started at 80. I kept going faster, faster, a little faster and the speedometer never moved. I thought, “Boy, this really must be fast. I’m not even

running 80 miles an hour.” I glanced at the tachometer and it read 3,500, which I knew was over 150 miles an hour. Other than that, I liked the boat very much. It handled not too much different than the *Great Lakes*. I just felt real at home in it. That afternoon we set the new qualifying record.

You hadn’t spent too much time to get used to the boat, so it must have been a testament to the quality and performance of the boat?

Well, I don’t know. I think that all you need to do is drive from here to the log boom and if you’re not acquainted with that boat by that length of time, you’re never going to be acquainted with it.

How about cornering? Were you getting into negative steering as time went on?

Well, of course the *Four* had a reputation of being a very poor cornering

boat. With just one look at it, why you knew it was going to be a little difficult to turn—with the small non-trip on the afterplane. I found that by “dirt-tracking” it, you could turn it fairly well.

So, what actual technique would you use?

Well, it was like you would turn a dirt track car. When you set yourself into the turn, you give your rudder a little left rudder to get the attitude of the boat started into the turn. And then you turn a hard right—the opposite way—as you apply the power. That lifted the stern of the boat so that it would ride on the sponson non-trip and hold

the side of the boat out of the water. That kept it from catching on you. But, you couldn’t carry it all the way through. Although you don’t really use a whole lot of power, you simply had to feather your power because you control, actually steer the boat with the power.

And it was a little bit different than any boat I’d driven before in that respect. The *Great Lakes* had a beautiful non-trip on the afterplane like these modern boats, but they lacked the horsepower of the *Four*, though they had the same Allison. They weren’t pulling the power. I kind of fell

“I kept watching the speedometer, which started at 80. I kept going faster, faster, a little faster and the speedometer never moved. I thought, ‘Boy, this really must be fast.’”

LEFT: Joe Taggart had a long history of driving limited-class hydros and got his first taste of competition with the big boats when he entered his 7-litre *Tomyann* in races that also featured Gold Cup- and Unlimited-class boats. **BELOW:** His first ride in an Unlimited came in 1952 aboard *Miss Great Lakes II*.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Bob Carver

Joe Taggart in the cockpit of *Miss Great Lakes II*.

into that technique; you try this and try that, try to get a little more all the time.

I've always thought that was a Joe Taggart "trick." Am I right?

Yes, I never knew anybody else that did it!

In 1953, then, you won the Gold Cup on Lake Washington. That had to be an interesting experience.

It certainly was. It was the peak of my life's ambition. You know, when you get started in an outboard you always want one bigger. You always want more power. And when I got into the Unlimiteds, we had power we couldn't even use. We were very excited about it, enthused about it. You always are when you win, of course. This was the epitome, to win the Gold Cup. I can't exactly tell you what was different about it, but it was the high point of my life.

Two seasons later, in 1955, you set a qualification record of 117.391. That was smokin'.

Well, in that boat I could've gone much faster if I'd wished, but all I was interested in was just running a little bit faster than Danny Foster. On the second lap I knew I'd hit a smooth spot coming off a turn and that slowed me down a bit, so I just ran a little faster on the straightaways. At 150 to 155 miles an hour, that produced about 116 a lap. And the boat would always run any speed you would

want. I don't know how fast it would go. You couldn't hold it open—it would always go faster.

When you ran the 117, was that a situation where Stan said, "Hey, go out and take the record"? Was that up to you?

Much to everybody's reverse thinking on it, I'm sure, Stan Sayres never told you how to run the boat, what to do. I asked him many times and Stan always said, "Well, you're driving. We've done what we can now it's your boat. You race it, do it the way you want to."

While Stan didn't necessarily give you specific instructions, I'm sure you had to work with the crew because they knew the designed limits of the equip-

ment.

Well, they did everything in their power to make it comfortable to race. They never told me how to drive. They always had the boat beautifully prepared, but there were little things in comfort, little items, that the crew didn't realize since they hadn't competed. Though they ran it faster than I ever drove it. I mean you had to fit in the seat right; if you weren't comfortable, you couldn't drive well.

I know that one year in a turn I noticed the oil pressure would stop, and I'd come back in and tell them that the oil pressure had all of a sudden gone to zero. They'd take the boat out, come back in, and say, "You're crazy, it's perfect." They thought I was a little bit off in the head. Then, they got to investigating. They had one oil tank with a device in it that, when the boat planed, it turned upside down and shut one particular oil outlet. Well, I was turning a little bit different than they were turning and that would flip up and shut the oil off. As they operated it, it never functioned the way it did when I drove.

1955 was a black year for the Slo-mos because Lou Fageol looped the Five down the Lake Washington backstretch. Were you on the water when that happened?

Yes, I was with the crew and we were pretty close. I saw Lou come out of the boat. And I was the first one on the boat after we got to it. My concern was that I wanted to check the cockpit. If you're going to get hurt, it's when you go out

JOE TAGGART'S DRIVING STATS

YEAR	BOAT	RACE RESULTS					HEAT RESULTS						
		RACES	1st	2nd	3rd	DNQ	START	DNS	FINISH	1st	Pct.	Top 3	Pct.
1946	Tomyann (7-litre)	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0.000	0	0.000
1948	Tomyann (7-litre)	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0.000	0	0.000
1951	Tomyann (7-litre)	1	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0.000	0	0.000
1952	Miss Great Lakes II	5	0	3	0	0	11	4	8	0	0.000	8	1.000
1953	Slo-mo-shun IV	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	2	2	1.000	2	1.000
	Slo-mo-shun V	2	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0.000	1	1.000
1954	Slo-mo-shun IV	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	0.000	2	1.000
1955	Slo-mo-shun IV	1	0	0	1	0	3	1	2	1	0.500	2	1.000
1956	Miss U.S. II	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0.000	0	0.000
	Slo-mo-shun IV	2	0	1	0	1	3	0	3	2	0.667	3	1.000
1965	Tomyann	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0	0.000
TOTALS		17	1	4	1	2	29	12	20	5	0.250	18	0.900

of the thing. I could see where he'd been snapped out and hadn't touched a thing. No broken bones. Of course, he was black and blue from head to foot.

There has been talk of how Lou had been instructed to not go out and break the record, just qualify. He obviously was running the hell out of it. Danny Foster had set a record, you had run a record, and I guess Lou thought it was his turn. Do you recall any discussions about that?

There was a good bit of discussion. I don't think it would've been a good thing to strike a match around Hunt's Point that weekend.

How do you remember Lou? Do you think of Lou as being eccentric?

I would say he was. He had his little quirks. Like he was always cold and was afraid of bacteria. I know I had a cold one time and I went over to get a shot. So, Lou had to have one, too. He was rather a colorful fellow. But he was a competitor. He liked any kind of racing. And I always liked Lou.

I recall one particular duel between you and Fageol in 1954, at Seattle. You were side by side an awful lot.

I had a sick engine that year and 125 to 130 was absolutely the fastest the boat would run. There was something about



Forde Photography

The Slo-mo-shun team when Taggart won the Gold Cup in 1953. From the left, Joe Taggart, Lou Fageol, and team owner Stanley Sayres.

the engine and all I could do was go the shortest distance inside. And, of course, we were concerned about George Simon. He really put up a terrific scrap. He never let up. I know that! I know one time I went into a turn, I looked over Lou and under Simon.

You and Lou ever get into any team racing? Perhaps when necessary?

Oh, we talked of it. Never tried anything in the *Slo-mo-shuns*. Any prearranged situation never seems to gel. You just have to play it by ear.

So, when you and Lou were going at it, you were going at it? Two guys driving and both wanted to win. And one of you would.

Yes



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

The "Grand Old Lady" *Slo-mo-shun IV* on Lake Washington in Seattle



Bob Carver

ABOVE: Joe Taggart drives *Slo-mo-shun IV* in the 1954 Gold Cup in Seattle. Here he has the inside lane against Bud Saile in *Miss Cadillac*. **BELOW:** Taggart drove *Miss U.S. II* at the 1956 International Boundary in St. Clair, Michigan.

What was it like at the Sayres home at Hunt's Point during the week prior to the races?

Well, that was an interesting place in those days. The tension was terrific. Really was. The whole week. Of course, I think the interest in racing on the part of the whole city was a bit greater then. Those were their only boats, representatives of Seattle. It was their boat against the world. You can't keep up interest like that forever, you know. I often thought it was harder to get to see Stan, if you weren't involved in the boat race, than it was to see the President of the United States.

How do you remember Stan?

He was a terrific individual. And I think the credit for the boat should go to Stan. He was the man that organized everything. If it wasn't for

Stan, there never would've been the boat in the first place, of course. But I mean people never seem to give him credit.

You were getting other offers to drive from time to time. What kept you with the *Slo-mo-shuns*?

Well, that was the boat. As long as she was running, and I had the opportunity to drive it, I wanted to drive. That's all. I had driven George Simon's boat in one race up in St. Clair, Michigan, but, as long as the *Slo-mo* was running, and Stan invited me to drive, I was going to stay with him. Because, although I never saw Stan in the boat when I was here in Seattle, I knew he had his finger on everything.

In 1956, *Slo-mo-shun IV* rolled in Detroit,

"The boat had turned sideways, and I was looking right into the entrance of the yacht club and I could see these two men looking back at me. And then, the boat came down."



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

which ended your active racing career. I've read all the newspaper clippings and I've got to say that none of them were very concise. Apparently, there weren't any reporters watching it. They were getting second-hand information. They couldn't tell what was going on. What really happened, in your mind?

Well, in the first place, I shouldn't have got up so early in the morning.

That was the first bad step?

Yeah, it was. I called the referee, Gib Bradfield, and had clearance. I told him I was going to make one lap to get the oil hot and, if everything was right, I'd continue on and qualify. And, then as I came up past the Detroit Yacht Club—the front of the docks is out of your vision, you can't see them—the first thing I was aware of was that I was on my side.

All of a sudden, the boat went up sideways and then came down. The next time it came down, the rounded nose turned it sideways at a 45-degree angle. And, I was in the air long enough to be aware of what was going on. The boat had turned sideways, and I was looking right into the entrance of the yacht club and I could see these two men looking back at me. And then, the boat came down.

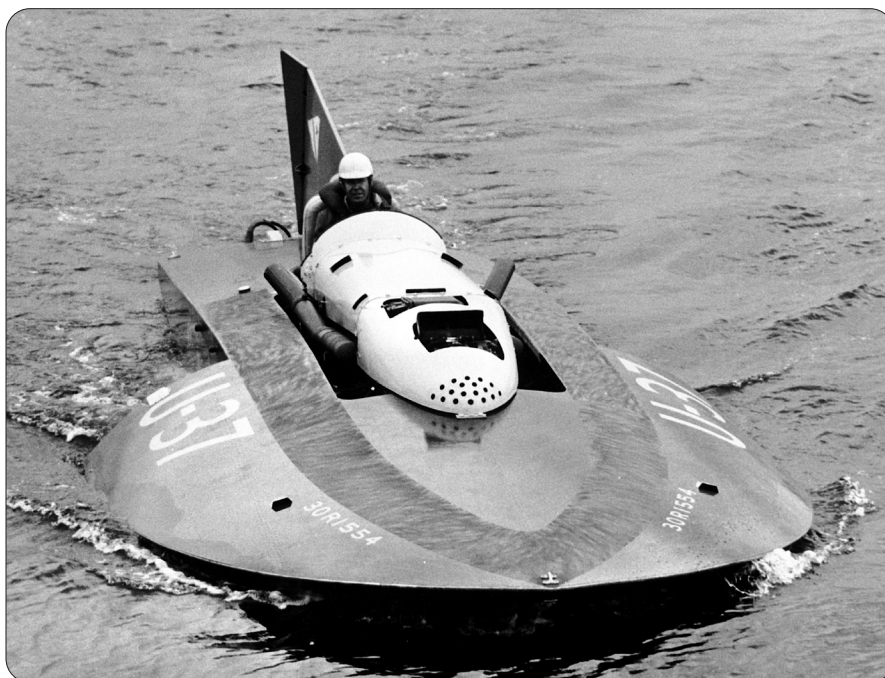
That was that—everything went black. I came to under water and knew I needed a breath of air awfully bad. I could see the surface. I got to the surface and somebody grabbed me.

OK. So, you hit a roller coming under your right sponson, went up on the left side, came back down, went up once more, came back down and the boat went sideways.

They had come down along the dock and put a wake out that I hit with the sponson. Just like you'd run a car up a fairground ramp to turn it up on its side. I didn't go out clean. I went through the dashboard. Took the wheel, and the dash, and the side of the deck with me. That's where I got hurt.

I've written that you left your shoes and socks behind.

I not only left my shoes and socks behind. I was as naked as the day I was born! I didn't have a stitch of clothes on. It just shredded everything. I don't know what did that. I'd never seen that happen



Bob Carver

When Stan Sayres decided to send the *Slo-mo-shun V* to the East Coast in 1953, Joe Taggart did the driving.

before. I had a life jacket on with four leather harness straps around me, each an inch and a quarter. And everything was gone. Tore the English climber's helmet into shreds. Oh, I think I had the hem of my undershirt hanging on one arm.

There were suggestions that the boat was undergoing some modifications at that time.

Well, we put some little shims under the sponsons because when you came out of the turn, the boat always had the habit of rocking forward and sticking a bit. And, we put a shingle on the bottom of the sponsons. Made kind of an air bubble. Had nothing to do with the accident.

Oh, they had all kinds of stories. They claimed a freighter going by on the other side of the island made the wave. Of course, I didn't see the wake, but I saw the boat that created the wake when I was in the air. You couldn't go back and rehearse it a thousand times and synchronize it any better.

When you look at these boats today [1975], what do you see as a real difference between the *Slo-mos* and now?

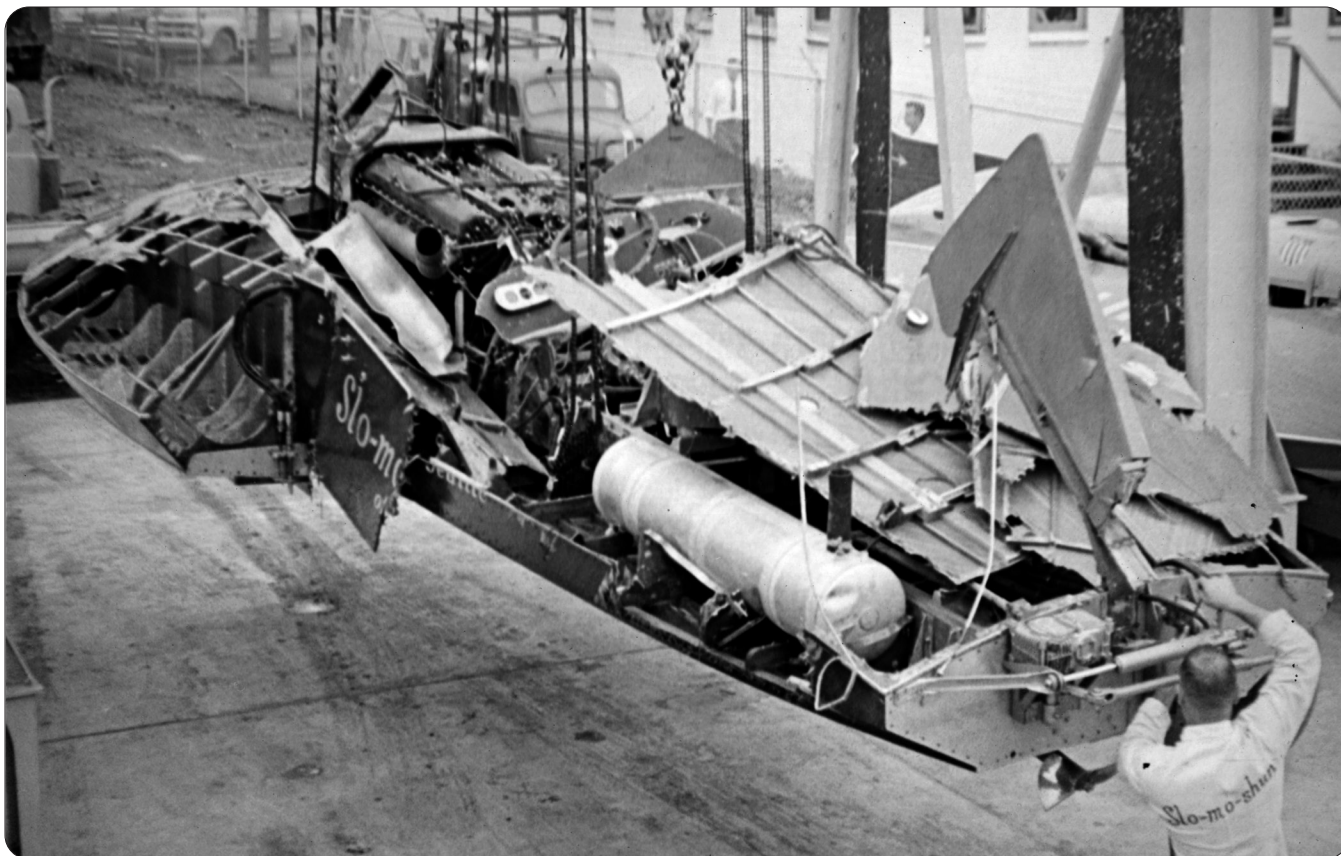
They have some features which are a tremendous improvement, like the

non-trip and wide stern. It must improve them in turning ability. I've never driven a pickle-fork boat, but it looks to me like they may have lost some of their stability from the pressure the deck of the boat had. That was a big factor with the *Four*. It was shaped such that it gave it more stability, whereas the *Five* was a detriment. That's what made the *Five* kite so. Other than that, I don't believe there's so much difference. I wonder about all these fancy things on the engines, whether or not they're getting any more power. They must, or they wouldn't be going to all the trouble.

Well, you've driven both an Allison and a Rolls.

Yes, but of course I'd never driven the Allison with the turbos. But, the Allison they had in the *Mo* in '53 was not just an ordinary Allison. It would pull 90 inches of manifold pressure. Even today, that's good. But the Rolls had quite an edge. When they put the Rolls in the boat, there was no difference in the top end because we could never run it as fast as it would go. It has a lot more acceleration.

You're interested in aerodynamics and have been for a long time. One of your *Tomyanns* had an airfoil on the



The *Slo-mo-shun IV* after the boat was pulled from the Detroit River after its accident before the 1956 Gold Cup.

deck and a large vertical stabilizer. Do you feel these devices work?

I've been convinced for years. The water is never the same, so air is actually

the most stable thing you've got to deal with. I think the shape of the deck was the real secret to the *Slo-mo-shun IV*. It gave it stability. The faster you went, the tighter it clung to the water. And the *Four* and *Five* were two different, two entirely different operating machines. Like here, you'll never find two boats alike.

You always felt confident in the *Four*? It never scared you, felt like it was going to bite you?

That's right. Now, where the *Five*, well, everybody's aware that when you climbed over 120, it started to get real light. It was actually flying. In '55 we put spoiler strips across the deck. That actually would help a bit, and let you get faster. But, then, it let you get into situations you couldn't get back out of. It let you go beyond where you should have gone.

Lou was obviously aware of the *Five's* tendency to kite. Did he express concern about that? Did he feel he could handle it?

He was very much concerned about it. Plus, the fact that it has thrown him

out on the deck earlier. He wanted me to take it out so he could watch it. I took it out behind Mercer Island and ran up to about 165. That was as fast as I wanted to go in it. So, yes, he was very much concerned about it.

Yet, he did his thing. Right?

Right.

After the flip in '55, and Lou had recovered, did he ever look back with any regrets?

Well, no, I never heard him say anything about it. He never mentioned it.

Were there any regrets for Joe Taggart?

I certainly regretted the accident. It changed things in my life, but I was very fortunate to have survived. I guess that's the way it goes. You can't do anything about it after it's happened. ❖



Joe Taggart was presented the Historical Award by the Unlimited Racing Commission in 1984.

What's going on at H1 Unlimited?

THE OFFSEASON HAS NOW GONE ON FOR 18 MONTHS, BUT DESPITE THE LACK OF ACTION ON THE WATER, THERE ARE STILL THINGS HAPPENING BEHIND THE SCENES.

BY ANDY MUNTZ

Looking at the outside, it would appear that little has happened in the world of unlimited hydroplane racing for well over a year. Thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2020 season was a total washout. Not since World War II, when all racing was canceled in 1945 because of the war effort, had an entire year gone by with no action.

But pull away the curtain and peek inside, and one will find that there continues to be activity within the sport. A new race team has been formed, other teams have moved to new homes, and crews have been working quietly to make sure their hulls and engines are better than they were when the hydros last saw action late in September 2019.

There also has been action on the administrative side of things.

H1 Unlimited rarely comes to mind when one thinks about the sport, and that's the way it ought to be. The attention deserves to be on the race teams and drivers

who are out there creating the action that hydroplane fans love to watch. But what transpires at H1 also plays a role in what happens on the race-course and is also important to the future of hydroplane racing.

So, let's take a brief look at what's going on behind the scenes at H1 Unlimited. What's being done to prepare for the 2021 season and for racing in years beyond that?

But, before we do that, it would be helpful to understand what H1 Unlimited really is, and what it's not.

What is H1 Unlimited?

In the world of professional football, the fans pay most of their attention to their favorite teams and to their favorite players. The National Football League doesn't come to mind until Roger Goodell appears on draft day or when there is a debate about the rules.

The same dynamic is true in the world of hydroplane racing. Race fans typically don't think of H1 Unlimited until something controversial happens, because it's usually H1 that gets the blame, sometimes even when the organization actually has nothing to do with the issue.

Perhaps the easiest way to describe the function of H1 Unlimited is to make it clear what it isn't.

- ◆ H1 Unlimited does not own any race boats.
- ◆ H1 Unlimited does not organize any races.

If you owned a race boat, one of the main things you would want is a place to race your boat. Otherwise, why have the boat?

If you organized a boat race in your community, one of the main things you would want is boats to race at your event. Otherwise, there wouldn't be any boats for your ticket-buyers to watch.

So, that's where H1 Unlimited comes in. It doesn't operate boats or run races, but it provides the bridge between those two interests. It fulfills both of their needs by organizing the race boat owners and by negotiating agreements with the race sites so that unlimited hydroplane races will happen.

In short, H1 Unlimited develops the rules and standards to assure that the competitions are held equitably and safely, it markets the sport so that people are aware of what an unlimited hydroplane is, and it arranges for the places where those boats compete.

H1 doesn't decide where spectators will park their cars or how much tickets will cost; that's done by the race site. And, it doesn't decide which boats will race where; the individual boat owners do that. But, H1 Unlimited officials will run the race itself and make sure the race facilities meet certain standards. It also arranges for the boat owners to receive a certain amount of money for attending.

As for the organization itself, H1 Unlimited is a nonprofit corporation that is registered with the State of Washington under its official name: the American Boat Racing Association. It is governed by a board of directors with five to seven members who are responsible for establishing the organization's budget, adopting the rules, approving contracts, and other similar obligations.

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REST ASSURED THAT EVERYBODY WANTS TO GO RACING THIS SUMMER IF IT'S AT ALL POSSIBLE. NOBODY WANTS TO STAY ON THE BEACH ANOTHER YEAR.

The day-to-day operation of H1 Unlimited is done by one paid staff person. That's right—one! The rest of what H1 Unlimited does—the board members, referees and officials, marketing, maintaining the website, driving the H1 technical truck, flying drones, public relations, and so on—is accomplished by volunteers who take time away from their regular lives to make sure hydro fans will have races to enjoy.

The 2021 season.

Nobody wants a repeat of what happened in 2020, but the fact is, the matter is entirely beyond everyone's control. And, looking toward 2021, there still remains a great deal that is unknown, thanks to the continuing Covid pandemic.

We've all been encouraged by good news. Vaccines against Covid-19 are now widely available and, as of this writing anyway, the rate of infection has dropped sharply from where it was two months ago. But, experts also warn us that the pandemic is far from over and if people stop wearing masks and taking other precautions to slow the spread, there's a real chance the numbers could once again soar.

Where does this leave the 2021 season? H1 Unlimited and all of the race sites are hopeful there will be racing this year. Uncertain, however, is probably the best way to describe the situation for now.

The organizers in Guntersville, Alabama, are ready to go for a race June 26 and 27. Tickets are set to go on sale about the time that you read this. But, the other race sites are still facing a great many unknowns. Will the spread of Covid-19 decrease by the time their races are scheduled, or will it increase as many experts predict? And, if

things improve, what kind of regulations will be in place for outdoor events? Will they be so restrictive that the events just aren't feasible?

At this point, there is still no way to know what the situation will look like this summer, which means that it's very difficult for the people who run the race sites to make any plans or to even solicit the sponsors they will need to make their events viable.

All that can be done for now, unfortunately, is to be patient. Rest assured that everybody wants to go racing this summer if it's at all possible. Nobody wants to stay on the beach another year.

Some news about rules.

One of the main things that H1 Unlimited does is establish the rules for running a hydroplane race. The sport's Rules and Competition Committee has been reviewing the Unlimited Race Rules and Regulations, as well as the Technical Manual, and has been asked to submit changes for board consideration by June 1.

The H1 board has directed the committee to include some changes in the way penalties are assessed. A review of the current rule book revealed there are more than 50 different kinds of penalties. To make things easier for everybody to understand, the penalties will be simplified so that there will instead be only three possible outcomes in the event of any rule infraction.

- ◆ A one-lap penalty will be assessed for all racing violations.

- ◆ A \$500 fine for all technical violations, along with a requirement that the issue be resolved before the boat can go back on the water.

- ◆ Disqualification for all performance and severe safety violations.

More details about these changes will be

YOU CAN'T GET THERE UNLESS YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING.

coming after the Rules and Competition Committee has completed its work and the 2021 rules have been adopted by the H1 board.

What about the future?

During the past several months, the H1 board has gone through a process of looking into the crystal ball, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the sport, and imagining what they hope the future will bring. From that exercise came a vision of where they would like the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing to be like five years from now and a planning strategy to make that happen.

With the idea that you can't get there unless you know where you are going, the H1 board has agreed to a vision that says, by the 2026 season, the sport will:

- ◆ Feature at least eight events.
- ◆ Provide race organizers with a variety of race-format options. Some will be major events, such as the APBA Gold Cup, and some races may have fewer heats and fewer entrants, which would be less expensive for race organizers.
- ◆ Feature more race teams and improved parity among contestants than was the case in 2019, a season that had a total of 10 boats entered and two different race winners.
- ◆ Have one or more national sponsors involved with the sport.
- ◆ Be perceived by the public as entertaining and professional. Fans will walk away from races feeling they have seen an event that was fast, exciting, and fun.
- ◆ Be in a place that puts H1 in a position for continued growth in the future.

How do we get there?

Any journey requires planning. Once you've decided where you want to go, you need to figure out how you're going to get there. Are you going to travel by plane or car? Will you stay in a hotel? What will you do when you get there?

The same goes here. Now that H1 Unlimited has a vision of where it would like to be in five years, next comes the plan for getting there. What things are in the sport's favor as it embarks on this journey? What opportunities will it likely find along the way? What problems lie ahead? Are there weaknesses that need to be addressed?

Assessing those things, the board identified five challenges that must be faced and overcome by H1 Unlimited in order to achieve its desired future.

- ◆ Gain the support of owners, drivers, and others involved in unlimited racing to be ambassadors for the sport and to speak on behalf of the sport with one voice.
- ◆ Improve the public's perception of the sport.
- ◆ Enhance the fan experience.
- ◆ Rework the financial structure of the sport.
- ◆ Keep an eye on the sport's future. Work to solve conditions that inhibit the sport's growth, such as an aging fan base and a dependence on volunteers.

From there, the plan goes into greater detail on various strategies and tactics that can be implemented to meet those challenges—too much detail to go into here. A few examples include meeting regularly with race team owners and race site representatives, developing a public relations plan, organizing a membership program for hydro fans, finding ways for race fans to get closer to the boats, and promoting the E-League as a way to capture the interest of young people.

Strategic planning is always an evolving process, which means these plans will often be assessed, modified, and enhanced as the years go on, conditions change, and H1 Unlimited draws closer to its destination. ❖

Three vintage hydro restoration projects

BY JOHN WOODWARD

As the current 1979 U-2 *Squire Shop* restoration project is nearing its completion and the 1971 U-6 *Miss Madison* (2), the former 1960 U-79 *Nitrogen Too*, is starting to ramp up, several other hulls are not far behind. Three of these restoration projects have caught my eye, and all three played a role in creating my passion and addiction for the hydroplanes.

They are the Gary Hansen's 1962 *Notre Dame*, Steve Hayden's 1964 *Tahoe Miss* (3) and the 1970 *Pay 'n Pak 'Lil Buzzard*, which is in the hands of the "5 to the 5" group in Madison, Indiana.

The original 1962 *Notre Dame* (4) is currently running on the vintage circuit as the 1967 U-12 *Miss Budweiser*. The hull being restored as the 1962 *Notre Dame* is the original 1961 U-33 *Miss Lumberville*, which later became the U-10 *Savair's Mist*. All three hulls were designed and built by the great Les Staudacher and, being very similar in design, were easily interchangeable.

I remember the *Savair's Mist* with Walter Kade behind the wheel making the final heat of the 1968 UIM World Championship in Seattle, finishing in fourth place and collecting fifth place overall points and again at the 1969 Seafair Trophy race, this time finishing in eighth place.

After the '69 season, the hull was stored away for nearly a quarter century before she was rediscovered to eventually



Sandy Ross Collection



John Woodward Collection

TOP: The *Savair's Mist* leaves the pits at Seattle in 1964. This is the boat getting restored.
ABOVE: It will look like *Notre Dame*, shown here during preseason tests in 1962.

become a big-screen superstar as the U-6 *Miss Madison* in the 1999 motion picture *Madison*. She carried many coats of paint from that point on, with her last being the 1975 U-8 *Oh Boy! Oberto*.

What makes this particular restoration so special is that she will eventually represent one of the oldest names in modern-day hydroplaning, the famous

Notre Dame. Very few original *Notre Dame* hulls remain as most were destroyed during competition, so this will be an extra special day when she reclaims her spot in the vintage unlimited fleet.

The 1964 *Tahoe Miss* (3) is most commonly known as the Gray Ghost because of her ghostly two-toned gray paint scheme from 1964–65. She became a na-

tional champion in 1966 mainly due to the legendary driving skills of the great Mira Slovak.

I remember this as the *Harrah's Club* in 1967 when Chuck Hickling ran over the top of Jack Regas's crippled *Notre Dame* and flipped right before my 8-year-old eyes. It was a pivotal moment in my young life as I exclaimed to my mother shortly after the accident that I wanted to one day be a hydroplane driver, which she quickly came back with, "Over my dead body!" Just for the record, I won that battle.

After a one-time appearance at the last race of the 1971 season as the U-3 *Budweiser Malt Liquor*, this classic hull returned in 1973-75 sporting the super cool black and gold colors of the U-3 *Mr. Fabricator*. The only time I saw this hull run as *Mr. Fabricator* was in 1973 on a misty rainy summer's day in Seattle. Tom Kauffman piloted the sporadic-running hull to a seventh-place finish, collecting a total of 338 points and missing out on a final-heat appearance to the U-8 *Red Man's* 450 points.

After her racing days were over, she eventually found her way to the Dave Bartush museum in Detroit, where she would quietly lie in waiting for the day of her glorious return to the water. In 2018, she was purchased by Steve Hayden and brought back to the Pacific Northwest for a full restoration by Larry and Mike Hansen as the famous *Gray Ghost U-3 Tahoe Miss*.

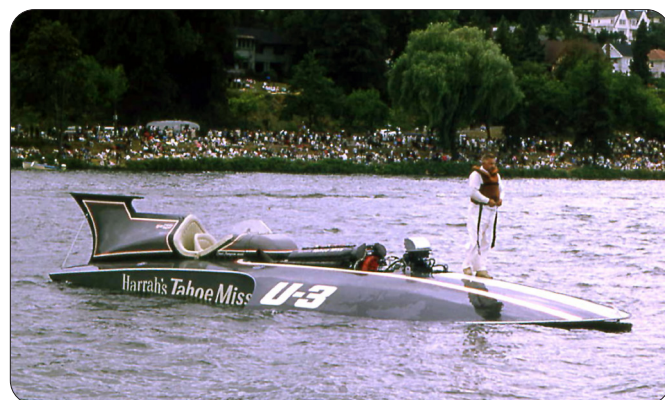


Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



John Woodward Collection

TOP: Pay 'n Pak 'Lil Buzzard at Madison in 1970. **ABOVE:** The boat as it appeared in the movie *Madison*. It's now being restored in Madison.



Sandy Ross Collection



John Woodward Collection

TOP: The "Gray Ghost" *Tahoe Miss* in 1964. **ABOVE:** The same hull fell into disrepair before its current restoration project.

Our final hull also played a big role in my hydroplane maturation. She began life as the 1969 *Pride of Pay 'n Pak* (2) where she made her maiden voyage at the 1969 Gold Cup in San Diego with the young rookie driver Tommy Tucker Fults in her cockpit. Fults drove the hull to two heat victories along with two DNF's to finish fourth overall.

The stellar performance earned him Rookie of the Year honors. Fults returned in 1970 as the driver of the U-25 *Pay 'n Pak 'Lil Buzzard*. The *Buzzard* made an instant impression on my soul after a convincing Heat 1B victory with her flashy famous metallic orange paint scheme.

Sadly, less than two months later, Tommy Fults was lost to a freak accident when the hull spun out, pitching Fults to his death. After the accident, the hull was retired from racing.

This hull would follow a similar path as *Savair's Mist* by becoming another film star in the 1999 movie *Madison*, playing the role as the *Atlas Van Lines*, where veterans Ernie King and the Fearless Fred Alter saw action behind the wheel. The hull was eventually purchased by John Freeman and safely stored away until her recent move to the great city of Madison for a full restoration by the "5 to the 5" group.

What a great day it will be when these three hulls return to the water for the final time as members of the Vintage and Historic Unlimited fleet. ❖

UNJ BOOK REVIEW:

Roostertail: The Miss Supertest Story

BY CRAIG FJARLIE

The Supertest team was one of Unlimited racing's most successful, yet also one of its most mysterious. John Joseph Kelly has written a book that thoroughly documents the *Supertest* boats that represented Canada four times in Harmsworth races.

In 1951, J. Gordon Thompson and his son Jim Thompson, bought *Miss Canada III* and *Miss Canada IV* from Harold and Ernest Wilson. Both boats were step hydroplanes. The Thompsons had watched the 1950 Gold Cup in Detroit and felt *Miss Canada III* was too small to compete safely, so focused their initial effort on *Miss Canada IV*.

Gearbox problems prevented the boat from running in 1951, but it was entered in two races the following year with Bill Braden as the driver. Again, gearbox trouble haunted the boat. It was entered in a single race in 1953 and managed to finish one heat in sixth place.

The Thompsons realized that three-point hulls were the way to go and had a new boat, *Miss Supertest II*, designed and built by Les Staudacher. At this point in the book, it becomes obvious that the Thompsons were most interested in winning the Harmsworth. The team worked to learn about the Rolls-Royce Griffon engine and early efforts included frustration. In 1954 the boat was entered in one race, the Silver Cup, but was unable to qualify because of piston problems.

Things began to jell in 1955. *Miss Supertest II* finished second in the Maple Leaf Regatta at Windsor, Ontario, and after the season Danny Foster drove it to a Canadian straightaway record of 154.845 mph.

The Thompsons entered their first Harmsworth race in 1956. *Miss Supertest II*, with Bill Braden driving, faced *Shanty I*, but Russ Schleeh drove the latter to victory. After the season, Danny Foster attempted to break the straightaway speed record, but a wake from a cabin cruiser thwarted his effort. The boat's left sponson was damaged; fortunately, Foster emerged from the incident unhurt.

Art Asbury was the driver of *Miss Supertest II* in 1957. He drove the boat to victory in the Buffalo Launch Club Regatta and set a straightaway kilo record following the last race of the season. At the Silver Cup in Detroit, crewmember Bob Hayward took a turn in the cockpit and became a qualified Unlimited driver.

The only time the Thompsons sent their boat to the West Coast was in 1958 for the Gold Cup in Seattle. Hayward had driven *Miss Supertest II* to victory in the St. Clair Invitational Trophy race and hopes were high for a good showing at Seattle, but mechanical problems struck in the first heat and the day

ended early. Gremlins continued to plague the boat and the season ended on a note of disappointment.

The Harmsworth was the trophy the Thompsons really wanted to win when *Miss Supertest III* made its debut in 1959. Hayward drove it to a decisive win in the Detroit Memorial, then won the Harmsworth six weeks later. The Thompsons had garnered the prize they had been seeking.

Miss Supertest II stayed on the beach in 1959, but returned to action in 1960, picking up second place in the Detroit Memorial. *Miss Supertest III* won the Harmsworth for the second time.

Hayward drove *Miss Supertest II* to second in the 1961 Detroit Memorial, then was back in *Supertest III* for the Harmsworth, where he took an easy win. The elation of the Harmsworth victory was shattered a few weeks later at the Silver Cup, when *Supertest II* crashed and Hayward was killed. That ended the Thompsons' involvement in Unlimited racing.

Kelly's book provides a detailed account of the Supertest racing team and clearly shows that the Harmsworth was



Roostertail: The Miss Supertest Story

The story of the Supertest Petroleum Company's unlimited hydroplane boat racing team that came to dominate world speedboat racing fifty years ago.



the award J. Gordon and Jim Thompson wanted to win. They won the trophy three times with a boat that never lost a race. *Miss Supertest III* is now in the care of the Canadian Motorsport Hall of Fame. It's unfortunate that the Harmsworth Trophy has been relegated to history, as

it produced intense international competition during the first six decades of the 20th century.

The book is thoroughly documented and includes biographies of both Thompsons, drivers Braden, Foster, and Hayward, crew members George Wells

and Gil Zamprogna, and has a foreword written by Jim Thompson.

Roostertail: The Miss Supertest Story was published in 2008 by iUniverse (www.iuniverse.com). Copies may be ordered through Amazon. ❖

AROUND THE CIRCUIT

Race Site News by Chris Tracy



Throngs of hydro fans head to the Tri-Cities (Richland, Kennewick, Pasco) for the race the last weekend of July each year. And many stay at the same hotel year after year. So, this is a heads-up, as there has been musical-chairs name changes with several large, old-time hotels that have been popular with both fans and race teams.

In Richland on the river, the former Shilo Inn (traditionally home to the Buffalo Brothers blocked rooms) has sold, has received a much-needed face lift, and is now called the Riverfront Hotel. Its a SureStay Hotel, by Best Western. (www.richlandriverfronthotel.com)



Previously called the Richland Shilo Inn, is now the Riverfront Hotel.

A few blocks down George Washington Way from the Riverfront Hotel is the former Richland Red Lion Inn. It also has been sold and remodeled and has been rebranded as the Holiday Inn on the River. (www.ihg.com/holidayinn/hotels/us/en/richland/rldgw/hoteldetail)

Please note that the large Red Lion

Inns in both Kennewick and Pasco are still operating as Red Lion properties.



The former Richland Red Lion is now a Holiday Inn.

Farther down George Washington Way is an older property that was originally a Holiday Inn and has been re-branded over the years, most recently called the Richland Tower or "M" Hotel. Always popular with families, many rooms are right off the indoor pool.

The hotel was closed and has been totally refurbished/rebuilt inside and out and has been re-branded as the Best Western Plus Columbia River



Previously called the M Hotel, it is now the Best Western Plus Columbia River Hotel.

Hotel. (www.bestwestern.com/en_US/book/hotels-in-richland/best-western-plus-columbia-river-hotel-conference-center/propertyCode.48183.html)

If you are not yet totally confused, there is one more change. The Guesthouse Inn & Suites on Clearwater Avenue in Kennewick has been rebranded to the Red Lion Inn Kennewick. (www.redlion.com/red-lion-inn-suites/wa/kennewick/red-lion-inn-suites-kennewick-tri-cities)

Don't get this name change confused with the larger Red Lion Hotel in Kennewick by the Columbia Mall, officially called the Red Lion Inn Columbia Center, which is still operating. (www.redlion.com/red-lion-hotels/wa/kennewick/red-lion-hotel-kennewick-columbia-center)

The NewsJournal hopes to include more information about hotels and restaurants near race sites as we get closer to race season. The Tri-Cities are growing rapidly and there are many new hotel and restaurant choices, too. More information will be upcoming. ❖

HYDROFILE

Race Team News by Lon Erickson



Miss Madison Racing:

U-1 Miss HomeStreet, U-91 Miss Goodman Real Estate

Crew members recently spent time at the HomeStreet shop in Tukwila, Washington, working on the primary hull and prepping new parts for the upcoming 2021 season. Media presentations are being done by 24 Productions and FASTR social media. The second hull in the Miss Madison Racing fleet is prepped and ready for Goodman Real Estate graphics.



Miss Madison Racing Team

U-3 Go3 Racing

Winter prep work continues in the engine room at Go3 Racing. Next up is hull maintenance.



Go3 Racing



Go3 Racing

The engine assembly housing for the U-3's Allison

Strong Racing: U-8 & U-9

Strong Racing has moved into its new race shop in Auburn, Washington. The facility is being setup with equipment, parts, and accommodations for the new team. The newly acquired former Ellstrom hull is getting prepped at the new shop, while the former Jones hull is getting some final paint touchups before it will be moved to the new shop (below).



Strong Racing



Bucket List Racing: U-99.9 & U-440

A variety of projects continue at the Bucket List Racing shop. New props are being made (below) and in the works are upgrades, servicing, and paint for the new trailer and hauler. Some changes are being done from what they learned at last fall's U-99.9 testing session.



J. Michael Kelly and the former Ellstrom boat in their new home at the Strong Racing shop..



U-11 Unlimited Racing Group

The U-11 J&D's team has completed their new shop facility near Cle Elum, Washington, and has begun moving in.



MY \$0.02 WORTH

Editorial Comment by Andy Muntz



In last month's issue of the *Unlimited NewsJournal*, I explored the process of compiling sports records and how achievements can be seen differently as rules and other factors change over time. More specifically, I identified the issue of determining which boat has finished the greatest number of consecutive heats.

In particular was the case of *Miss Bardahl*, which finished 57 consecutive heats from 1963 to 1965. The seventh of those, however, was a heat where the boat was disqualified because driver Don Wilson cut inside a buoy before the start. So the question was: Should that interrupt the string of consecutive heat finishes? In other words, is following the rules also a component of successfully finishing a heat?

I asked what you think and received two responses. Here they are:

Thanks for your article, "Which hydroplane finished the most consecutive heats?" At the end you asked readers, "What do you think?"

I'm a huge Bardahl fan and acknowledge my bias. I see Bardahl's 57-heat record as legitimate. Here's the simplest reason why.

To be objective, I had to switch the scenario: What if it were a Bardahl nemesis that achieved what the Green Dragon did? Substitute "Musson in Bardahl" with "Muncey in Thriftway," or "Brow in Exide," or "Thompson in Tahoe." Would I recognize the record as 57 straight heats, not 51?

Yes. I would not cheer, but I'd acknowledge and recognize it. The same rationale applies. Motorsports differs from team sports. You can't discount a hydro running a full heat—hard—and returning to the dock under its own power, rule infraction or not. Which is what happened when Don Wilson drove Bardahl to a close second behind Exide in Heat 1B at D.C. in 1963.

My rationale (and the URC's in 1965) applies to all boats, regardless of the team in question.

*Thanks,
Jon Osterberg*

Regarding the question about consecutive-heat finishes, on which you solicited reader opinion, Bardahl physically finished that heat. If it was disqualified, that means it didn't get points—maybe it's as if it wasn't acknowledged as competing. In the latter case, Bardahl loses one finish. In the former, it counts as a finish. The question was not how many legal finishes, but how many finishes.

More generally, I don't think piston and turbine finishes should be compared in this analysis. The engines are so different that they should be in different categories. My argument: Count the number of moving parts.

Roger Lippman

Thanks for your comments, Jon and Roger.

We love to hear from our readers! ❖

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Letters are welcome, but may be edited for clarity and space.

PLEASE JOIN US AT THE NEXT MEETING OF UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS

The April meeting has been canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Check our website for more information.