



2011 Madison Regatta

Near Tragedy mars Season Opener

by Kirk Duncan

The season opener for the H1 Unlimited Air National Guard hydroplane series in Madison, Indiana did not disappoint.

Many story lines in the sport were in play during the winter months, and many more developed after the race ended. And, boy did it end with a bang!

Defending National Champion Steve David in the U-1 *Oh Boy! Oberto* was declared the winner of the 61st annual Indiana Governor's Cup after a violent collision with Dave Villwock in the U-96 *Spirit of Qatar* on lap 4 of the final heat.

Villwock was looking for his 63rd career victory as an unlimited driver. He was temporarily denied and stayed tied with the legendary Bill Muncey with 62 wins.

This season there is one new team, one new boat, and four "refreshed" boats. The U-11, U-22, U-25 and U-100 all fall into these categories. Scott and Shannon Raney, along with driver J.W. Myers, broke away from Schumacher Racing to form the Unlimited Racing Group using Ken Muscatel's refurbished U-25 (#0925). The team hopes to bring their program along slowly, and failed to make final heat. It's a learning process for this rookie team.

The highly anticipated debut of Billy Schumacher's brand new "88" *Degree Men*, with J. Michael Kelly behind the wheel, had a slow beginning. The hull arrived in Madison unfinished, but by Sunday morning the team had christened the gold and black hull, and



Ron Harsin photo



Ron Harsin photo

JMK finally took her out. The first time around was slow, but the second attempt produced a 128 mph lap. The lid on the cockpit would not stay locked in heat 2B, and Kelly brought the boat to the pits. The team was encouraged with the initial shake down of the new hull and look forward to the rest of the season.

The Websters's purchased the old 1988 *Oh Boy! Oberto* (#8806) hull during the offseason, replacing the former "Tubby," and hoping to upgrade their program and become more competitive this year. Mike Webster struggled all weekend long with throttle problems and also failed to reach the finals.

Fred Leland has a stable full of hydros (down to only four now). He pulled another "new" one out for the 2011 season (#9701). It last ran in 2000 and has few laps on it (only 6 races in total). Quickly dubbed "Casper" for the all-white painted hull, Greg Hopp took nicely to the high sitting cockpit. Team Leland narrowly missed making the final heat as this boat showed it will be in the mix this season.

Dr. Ken Muscatel leased the former U-48 (#9610) a few weeks prior to Madison, and the team worked all weekend long on getting it race ready. The "new" U-25 Superior Racing never left the trailer all weekend (lack of equipment).

Two new rookie drivers were looking for success on the Ohio River in their first race as unlimited drivers. One would have it, while the other will have to wait a bit longer.

Scott Liddycoat took over the driver's seat in Ted Porter's U-7 *Valken.com* and came away with a podium finish of 3rd place. Two 2nd place finishes in heat races, and the newest young gun showed he belongs in the H1 show. Bianca Bononcini was also hoping to get her racing feet wet as the developmental driver for Ted Porter. It didn't work out for her to get behind the wheel in the U-57 *Formula* entry this particular weekend, but her time will come. The team is looking to bring her along slowly under the tutelage of veteran driver Mark Evans. She hopes to be only the 3rd female driver ever in the unlimited class.



Ron Harsin photo



Karl Pearson photo



Karl Pearson photo



Chris Denslow photo



Chris Denslow photo

Ron Harsin photo



Ron Harsin photo



The U-5 *Graham Trucking* and U-7 *Valken.com*, both with new paint schemes and sponsors made the final. A first for rookie Scott Liddycoat. The boats have also switched U-numbers, the U-7 is now the former T6.

Rule changes in the off season now allowed drivers to fight for lanes in the five minute period prior to the start of a race. Fans, teams and most drivers were excited for the return of this new race strategy. Couple this with a much shorter race course, from 2.5 miles in length to 1.67 (because of work on the Madison-Milton Bridge), and the first race of the season was the most anticipated in years.

Kip Brown in the U-17 *Red Dot* joined series favorites David and Villwock as the top three qualifiers. Brown continued his success with two heat wins and made the front row for the final heat. With good heat draws and the wins, Brown said he “was going to Las Vegas after this” to continue his streak of good luck. These were Brown’s first ever heat wins as an unlimited driver. *Oh Boy! Oberto* and *Spirit of Qatar*, who didn’t draw each other in the first two heat sections, also each had two wins.

Since the top three teams didn’t draw each other until the final, heat racing had minimal deck-to-deck action. There was a serious accident in 3A. Driver Brian Perkins in the U-21 *Lakeridge Paving* hooked in the first turn

and missed a buoy. He circled back to pick it up and the 6,000 pound hydro rolled over the aluminum safety and rescue boat parked in the turn. Water rolling over the cockpit window prevented Perkins from seeing the small john boat. Perkins was unhurt, but three people in the boat sustained injuries. Michael Brand, Chris Cutshall, and Angela Greenwell were all injured and transported to hospitals in Madison and Louisville.

The U-21 had damage to the right sponson and right non-trip and was done for the day.

Unfortunately this was a prelude to what was to come in the final. The rerun and the rest of the third section were cancelled after time became a factor because of the accident and a three-hour delay in starting the event. The final heat was set.

Besides Brown, David, and Villwock, rookie Scott Liddycoat joined the front row. Jeff Bernard in the U-5 *Graham Trucking* was the trailer. After the five minute period of dicing and maneuvering for lanes, and creeping to the commit buoy in the exit of turn one, David in the U-1 captured lane 1. Villwock slid into lane 2, Brown 3, and Liddycoat 4. Bernard trailed. A good start and the anticipated battle between Villwock and David was on. The U-96 had boat speed on the U-1, and took a slight lead after one lap. But, David had the inside



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lane and wouldn’t let Villwock escape. A roostertail lead was all Villwock could get on David. By lap 3 of the five-lap final, the course was increasingly getting rougher.

On lap 4, Villwock exited the first turn, notorious for producing deep holes, and started down the back stretch.

One of those big holes was there, Villwock's left sponson fell into it, and the U-96 hooked hard left and spun out, right in front of the hard charging David in second place. A split second later the U-1 crashed into the left side of the U-96. David barrel-rolled over Villwock and landed right side up. After the spray of water and boat parts settled, both drivers exited their severely battered crafts by themselves and amazingly were unhurt.



Ron Harsin photo

After being checked out by the medical team, both drivers explained what happened. Steve David said, "It was real rough and Dave was bent out of shape in the turns and inevitably that was going to happen. This boat is phenomenal through the turns and Dave's was really out of shape. Not his fault. It just happened. A tenth of a second and I would have been ahead of the spinout. Now we have a heck of a damaged boat." Villwock confirmed, "The water got a little too rough and that far turn is down river and the current. Just fell into a hole and came around. Had one of them racing deals, that's all."

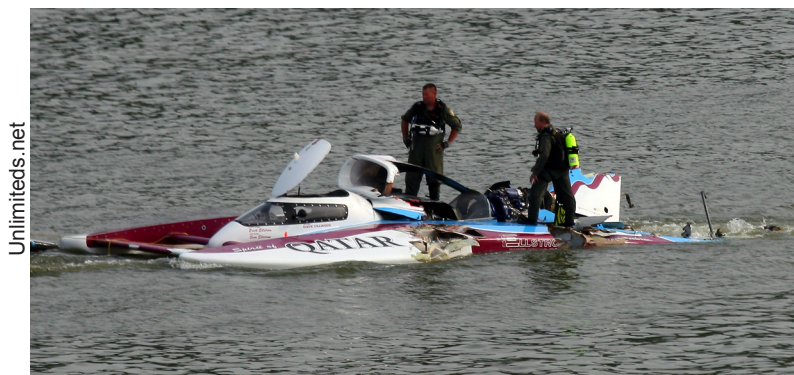
After a meeting of H1 Unlimited officials, and a check of the rulebook, it was determined *Oh Boy! Oberto* was the race winner. *Spirit of Qatar* was disqualified as a result of the spinout and lane infraction. The U-1 was determined to be "an innocent victim" in the crash. The red flag stopped the race, and the order of finish was determined as a result. [See the Madison Damage Report for more information and photos of both accidents ~ Ed.]

Oh Boy! Oberto was first, *Red Dot* and Brown was 2nd, Liddycoat in the *Valken.com* 3rd, Bernard in *Graham Trucking* 4th and Villwock moved down to a 5th place finish.

Not since the infamous "Black Sunday" at the President's Cup in Washington, D.C. in 1966, has a race winner been declared where the boat was involved in a final heat accident. H1 Unlimited historian Fred Farley says Rex Manchester was killed in his *Notre Dame*, but won the race on points accumulated from previous heats.

The first weekend of the H1 Unlimited season began with the Miss Madison team celebrating 50 years as a race team. It ended with a victory at their hometown race, but a high price was paid with a battered race boat.

It indeed was an exciting weekend of unlimited hydroplaneracing.



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Above, the wrecked *Spirit of Qatar* is towed in with two drivers on board. At right, crew chief Mike Hanson rides the wrecked *Oh Boy! Oberto* back to shore.



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STAT BOX

INDIANA GOVERNOR'S CUP

Madison, Indiana, July 2-3, 2011

1.66-mile course on the Ohio River

QUALIFICATION U-96 *Spirit of Qatar*, Dave Villwock, 142.710, 100 points; U-1 *Oh Boy! Oberto*, Steve David, 141.813, 80; U-17 *Red Dot*, Kip Brown, 138.224, 70; U-7 *Valken.com*, Scott Liddycoat, 134.292, 60; U-5 *Graham Trucking*, Jeff Bernard, 133.823, 50; U-11 *Peters & May*, J.W. Myers, 132.617, 40; U-57 *Formula*, N. Mark Evans, 126.433, 30; U-21 *Lakeridge Paving Co.*, Brian Perkins, 125.709, 30; U-100 *Leland Unlimited*, Greg Hopp, 131.251, 0; U-22 *Matrix System*, Mike Webster, 128.818, 0; 88 *Degree Men*, J. Michael Kelly, 127.148, 0; U-25 *Albert Lee*, Ken Muscatel, DNQ (Chairman option) — did not run, preparing boat.

HEAT 1A 1) *Oh Boy! Oberto* 126.601, 400 points, 480 cumulative points; 2) *Graham Trucking* 120.332, 300, 350; 3) *Peters & May* 95.649, 225, 265. Fast lap (3) *Oh Boy! Oberto* 131.023. **HEAT 1B** 1) *Spirit of Qatar* 129.144, 400, 500; 2) *Lakeridge Paving* 119.797, 300, 330; 3) *Formula* 112.921, 225, 255; 4) *Leland Unlimited* 102.990 (penalized one lap for encroaching on U-21, fined \$150, loss of 150 points, 19, 19. Fast lap (1) *Spirit of Qatar* 136.351. **HEAT 1C** 1) *Red Dot* 130.667, 400, 470; 2) *Valken.com* 122.978, 300, 360; 3) *Matrix System* 116.697, 225, 225. Fast lap (2) *Red Dot* 132.159.

HEAT 2A 1) *Red Dot* 125.678, 400, 870; 2) *Leland Unlimited* 118.322, 300, 319; 3) *Formula* 105.252, 225, 480; 4) *Matrix System* 86.569, 169, 394. Fast Lap (1) *Red Dot* 129.429. **HEAT 2B** 1) *Oh Boy! Oberto* 121.448, 400, 880; 2) *Valken.com* 119.438, 300, 660; 3) *Peters & May* 109.007, 225, 490; *Degree Men* DNS —, 0, 0. Fast Lap (1) *Oh Boy! Oberto* 126.142. **HEAT 2C** 1) *Spirit of Qatar* 125.414, 400, 900; 2) *Graham Trucking* 121.102, 300, 650; 3) *Lakeridge Paving* 116.349, 225, 555. Fast lap (1) *Spirit of Qatar* 133.169.

HEAT 3A *Lakeside Paving Co.* hooked and missed the apex buoy in turn 1 on lap 2. Circling to pick up the buoy crashed into a patrol boat stopping the race. The third heat sections were cancelled due to lack

FINAL (two laps) 1) *Oh Boy! Oberto* 130.067, 400, 1280; 2) *Red Dot* 122.938, 300, 1170; 3) *Valken.com* 114.286, 225, 885; 4) *Graham Trucking* 108.576, 169, 819; *Spirit of Qatar* DSQ — in turn 1 on lap 3 hooked in front of *Oh Boy! Oberto* causing a collision and stopping the heat, \$150 fine, loss of 150 points, -150, 750. Fast lap (1) *Oh Boy! Oberto* 130.488.

COMPILED BY ALLEN STILES



Ron Harsin photo



Karl Pearson photo



Ron Harsin photo

The new owners of the URG Peter's & May Team. From top to bottom: J.W. Myers, Scott and Shannon Raney.

U-1. After the final heat accident in Madison, the U-1 crew did a thorough assessment of the damage and began work on repairing hull even before leaving for Detroit. It was determined the damage was too severe to fix before Detroit. The Miss Madison board of directors called an emergency meeting and decided they would lease Mike and Lori Jones' U-9 for the Detroit Gold Cup. After Detroit it was back to work on the primary hull. The front

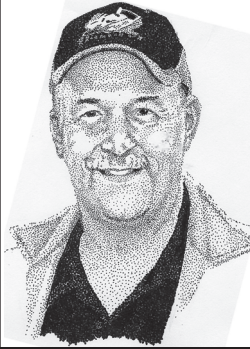
spar was twisted where the left sponson had struck the U-96, bending it upward. The skid fin area was damaged and running surfaces needed rebuilding, along with other components such as uprights, wings, cowling, and front canard. **Mike Hanson** and the crew completed repairs in 21 days and are expected to be in Tri-Cities for testing and ready to race the primary hull. With the current sponsorship money already budgeted for this season, there is a major fundraising effort underway in the Madison community to raise money for the repairs needed. Several different events have been organized, such as an on-line fundraiser, annual golf tournament, auction, and selling more advertising space on the race team equipment.

U-3. While the U-3 hull isn't expected to see the water in 2011, **Ed Cooper** is still involved. After the two incidents at the Madison Governor's Cup, he stepped up to help the U-96 and U-21 teams repair their boats by offering the use of the Go3 Racing shop in Posey County, Ind. The U-96 and U-21 crews, along with help from Cooper and several of the Go3 team members, spent the week between Madison and Detroit doing major repair work on *Spirit of Qatar* and *Lakeridge Paving*. The U-96 team's cowling was so badly damaged, they retrofitted a seldom used U-3 cowling to fit the U-96 for the Gold Cup, along with other significant work on the left side non-trip of the boat.

U-5. After pre-season speculation, it was confirmed that **Jeff Bernard** did switch hulls for the 2011 season. **Ted Porter's** U-5 is the former Bud T-5 hull campaigned in previous years as the U-7 (driven by **J. Michael Kelly**). This is the hull that had extensive off-season work done in the spring of 2010 at Hydros Inc.

U-7. **Scott Liddycoat** is the driver of the U-7 *Valken.com* (last year's U-5, former Bud T-6). He successfully completed his unlimited driver

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Lon Erickson

qualification requirements during testing and qualifying in Madison. He was allowed to start his first heat as a trailer boat and finished 2nd. From that point on, he was given clearance to compete on the front line and fight for lanes as a qualified driver.

U-9. Mike Jones said 7/19 that it looked like the U-1 *Oberto* hull will be repaired in time for Tri-Cities. Jones had talked to **Mike Hanson** and he told him the bottom was done and was waiting for

people at the shop to arrive so they could turn the boat over and start working on the deck. It is now ready, but Jones said if the boat doesn't run well testing at Tri-Cities his boat will be available. **Mike & Lori Jones** have announced that **Jon Zimmerman** will be driving the U-9 in Tri-Cities Columbia Cup as *Miss VisitTri-Cities.com*. That is the website for the Tri-Cities Visitor and Convention Bureau.

U-11. The new URG Peters & May team stuck to their plan and went into Madison to get a feel for their newly updated hull and let the driver get comfortable with the boat ride. **J.W. Meyers** qualified 6th for the race and finished every heat they started. In Detroit they had some handling issues the first day. They discovered a bent rudder and had to rework the strut area and rudder. Their consistency continued at Detroit after resolving the rudder issues.

Heading into Tri-Cities the U-11 will be known as Stevenson Roofing presents *Peters & May*.

U-17. The Our Gang Racing team showed up in Madison and showed they came to race. **Kip Brown** put the U-17 3rd on the qualifying ladder, won all of their heat races, and was in a 3rd position in the final until the heat was called due to the accident. **Cal Phipps** took over driving in his hometown Detroit for the Gold Cup (Kip had driving obligations for his 5 liter in Wash.). Phipps stepped in where Brown left off and put the U-17 in with the top qualifying group and showed all weekend they were going to compete this year. They left Detroit at the top of the National High Point ladder.

U-21. The Lakeridge Paving team was busy at Ed Cooper's shop between the Madison and Detroit race repairing damage to the sponson, recovery area, and running surfaces. Racing on the Detroit River caused some delamination of the temporary repairs.

U-22. Webster Racing's *Matrix Systems* experienced the usual dial-in issues with making the

transformation from last year's hull to their newly acquired race boat. They dealt with throttle issues in their first several times on the water in Madison. The boats performance improved as the weekend went along. At Detroit, the gremlins continued as they experienced turbine problems and ended up withdrawing after 3A. **Mike Webster** has plans to get some dyno-time in with their engines before the west coast races.

U-25. The former U-48 **Greg O'Farrell** leased to Superior Racing made it to Madison but never saw the water. From sources on-site and with the team, the hull was not in race-ready condition and needed lots of work. Only one motor and gearbox setup was available for use. In Detroit, the U-25 did see some time on the water during qualifying, posting one official lap time before going dead in the water with engine problems. Ken Muscatel ended up withdrawing without competing in heat action.

In Tri-cities they will be sponsored by 97 ROCK, a local radio station in the Columbia Basin.

U-57. The U-57 *Formula* hull got some attention during the off-season but experienced some fuel control issues in Madison and wasn't able to fully test the new modifications. **Mark Evans** drove the boat in Madison as they tried to work out the bugs. As they went to Detroit, the changes made started to show some improvement in qualifying speeds and **Bianca Bononcini** got her first opportunity in an unlimited testing session, turning several laps in the 125 mph range. In racing action, though, troubles arose again. Evans' ride suffered from a broken propeller and later was forced to withdraw with mechanical and structural issues. The U-57 hull was hauled to Mark and **Mitch Evans** shop in Chelan, Wash. for repairs from structural damage suffered on the Detroit River before heading to the Tri-Cities.

The repairs to *Formula* were more involved than anticipated, it involved repairing a major hole and crack to the right sponson and removing some decking to access the repair area. In addition to crew chief **John Walcker**, Mark & Mitch Evans, **Ted Porter** also brought in boat builder **Rick Bowles** to help with the repairs.

88. The Schumacher Racing team was still working on completing the new hull the week before Madison. They left Seattle late Wednesday and drove straight through to Madison, arriving late Friday night. They went directly to the U-1 boat shop to finish installing systems, hardware, and fitting the cockpit for **J. Michael Kelly**. *UNJ* sources say there was

realistically about a week's more work needed to be done on the boat. After working all night and morning, they brought the boat into the Madison pits but didn't make it on the water Saturday. On Sunday they got the 88 on the water after delays prevented the day's schedule from starting on time. The boat turned its first laps at 127 mph but problems with the canopy lid prevented further testing. Other issues prevented the 88 from competing the rest of the weekend. On to Detroit and a whole different story for the 88 team there. After qualifying at 148 mph, JMK showed that *Degree Men* was ready to run. It showed some amazing handling ability, competed all day long, and made the final heat for the Gold Cup.

U-96. After significant repairs from damage suffered at Madison, the Ellstrom team rebounded at Detroit but not before having some gearbox trouble in the first heat. After switching gearboxes out, borrowing a wing from the U-17 team and running with their last good engine, they showed why have dominated at the Detroit Gold Cup in recent history.

U-100. The hull, now known as "Casper" (#9701), did make the trip east for Leland Racing, and showed glimpses of being competitive after having updates done over the winter. There is some discussion of the high profile of the air intake and overall balance of the boat needing some work to be more competitive. "Casper" was sent back to **Fred Leland's** race shop and is undergoing some modifications to the running surfaces in hopes of improving the handling before the Tri-Cities race.

Fred Leland will have a familiar name sponsoring the U-100 in Tri-Cities. Beacon Plumbing will be the title sponsor on his boat for the Columbia Cup. The Beacon Plumbing sponsorship has not been seen in unlimited racing since the 2008 season. **Bill Cahill** and Beacon Plumbing's first sponsorship involvement was with Fred Leland back in 2004 & 2005.

~UNJ

Houston News: According to a Tri-Cities KNDU reporter, Clear Lake may be too shallow for unlimited racing. It is 6' deep in places and the bottom is layered with debris. The H1 rulebook calls for a 10' minimum depth racecourse for unlimited racing.

Madison Damage Report

by Michael Prophet

There were two separate accidents on Sunday. Four people were injured, three race boats were damaged, and one rescue boat wrecked.

#1. The Accident and Injuries: In 3A Brian Perkins, driving the U-21 *Lakeridge Paving* and in



Karl Pearson photo

third place at the time, missed a buoy in turn 2 on the south end of the short 1 2/3 mile course. He slowed and swung through the infield to pick it up. Spray over the sponsons blinded him and he failed to see a 16' aluminum "john boat" being used as a safety and rescue boat in front of him and ran over it. This happened about 4:30 pm.

The three workers on the safety and rescue boat were thrown into the water and quickly rescued by other rescue boats. All were injured, one critically.

Steve Miller, Indiana Conservation Officer, said the rescue boat's driver, 46-year-old Michael Brand of Middletown, Ohio, suffered head lacerations, cuts, and abrasions. Brand was treated in King's Daughters' emergency room. Nadja Boone, a spokeswoman at the hospital, reported he was in stable condition.

The second passenger on the rescue craft was 34-year-old Angela Greenwell of Louisville. She suffered a broken femur and was listed in fair condition Sunday night at the University Hospital in Louisville.

The most seriously injured was 31-year-old Chris Cutshall. He was also flown to University Hospital in Louisville

and treated for life-threatening injuries to his head and body. Reports said that he was not breathing on his own when rescuers reached him. He was listed in critical condition Sunday night then lowered to serious condition later in the week. His long-term prognosis was not known at press time.

Brian Perkins was not injured in the incident, but was taken to King's Daughters' Hospital for a check-up.

#2. The Accident: The second accident happened in the final between the U-96 *Spirit of Qatar* and the U-1 *Oh Boy! Oberto*.

Dave Villwock, in lane 2, was leading Steve David in lane 1 by about three boat-lengths on lap 4 when he hit a hole and hooked sharply inside, right in front of *Oh Boy! Oberto*. David didn't have time to do anything but hold on as he slammed into Villwock at 120 mph. Everything happened within seconds. Fortunately, he missed the canopy, hitting *Spirit of Qatar* about three feet back and then went airborne doing a vicious 360 rollover before coming to a stop right-side up. Boats parts flew everywhere. After everything settled, both drivers climbed out of their cockpits without help.



Karl Pearson photo

Chris Denslow photo



The Madison team reported that Tuesday they were leasing Mike and Lori Jones' U-9 (#9210) until theirs could be repaired.

Doctors recommended that Steve David not drive in Detroit, so Jon Zimmerman was drafted to drive the replacement for the APBA Gold Cup.

U-21. *Lakeridge Paving* suffered damage to the right side and sponson. A

hole was punched in the non-trip near the stern and the nose of right sponson was holed. Greg O'Farrell's boat was hauled to Ed Cooper's Evansville shop to be repaired by the U-21 crew and from the Go Racing team.

U-96. *Spirit of Qatar* had a large hole in the left side near the cockpit from where *Oberto* slammed into them. There was another hole caused from the U-1 skid fin, a broken cowling, crushed exhaust pipe, and rear wing assembly damage. This boat was also hauled to Cooper's

Ron Harsin photo



Steve David was taken to King's Daughters' Hospital. After being released he said, "I'm well, just some non-displaced radial fractures of the left lower ribs." About the accident David said, "There was nothing I could do and nothing he could do. It was just racing."

Dave Villwock was not injured in the incident. He did say he scrunched down in the cockpit anticipating a possible hit.

Damaged Boats Damage

U-1. *Oh Boy! Oberto* was hauled to the team's shop in Madison for repairs. Both sponsons were damaged, the left sponson was bent upwards and pieces of the U-96 were embedded in it, tail feathers were gone, exhaust pipe and cowling crushed, stern and skid fin area damaged, and a spar was twisted out of whack. Needless to say, the boat would not be able to race at Detroit the following week. Major work will be involved; a new canoe, the hull straightened, hardware, and painting among other things. They needed a replacement hull to fill in so they would be eligible to go to Qatar.



Karl Pearson photo



Ron Harsin photo

Posey County shop for repair work by the Qatar crew and some of the U-3 crew in shop. It was sitting next to the U-21 *Lakeridge Paving* hull. They replaced the rear wing assembly, added a cowling off the U-3, and replaced the damaged turbine and gearbox, and a large section of the deck. They also repainted the red engine cowl and damaged area. (As a note; a small U-3 Go Racing emblem was put on the cowling and Villwock had a small U-3 on his helmet.) Both boats would be ready to race at Detroit.



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~UNJ



Denny Jackson photo

Fletcher or Duncan photo



Cover-it-Live photo

Five former *Miss Madison* drivers show up at Madison



Left to Right: E. Milner Irvin, Andy Coker, Jerry Hopp, Tom Sheehy, Ron Snyder, and Tony Steinhardt; Miss Madison Board of Directors ~Ron Harsin photo

THE OAKLAND BOYS, Part Two

by Andy Muntz

The second-place finish by Dan Arena and Danny Foster in the 1938 Gold Cup not only awakened many Detroit and New York fans to the fact that serious boat racing was taking place on the other side of the continent, it gave the two young competitors valuable bragging rights back home in Oakland, California. Among the group of five friends who had grown up together near Lake Merritt, a group that included Stanley Dollar, Edgar Kaiser, and Lou Fageol, Arena and Foster had become the first to make a mark on big-time boat racing's most prestigious race.

Arena had been so impressive, in fact, that he quickly became a full-fledged member of the Gold Cup racing establishment. Not long after getting back home, intent to return to his duties in the family vineyard, he received an invitation from owner Herb Mendelson to become the driver of *Notre Dame*, perhaps the most powerful boat in the sport. The opportunity meant that he would be back on the Detroit River for the 1939 race.



H&RM Collection

Joining Arena that year was another of the Oakland clan, Lou Fageol. The son of Frank Fageol, cofounder of the Fageol Motor Company, Lou was a pint-sized man who had little quirks—he always complained about being cold and expressed an unnatural aversion to bacteria—but he was a fearless competitor both on the water and on the racetrack. For example, perhaps inspired by his family's development of the Twin Coach, a 40-passenger bus with two engines, Fageol had once fashioned a Porsche racing car with two engines—one in front and one in back. Going through a turn one time at Pebble Beach, California, the two engines fell into different gears, which caused the back of the vehicle to quickly pass the front and

send Fageol careening off into the woods. When rescuers arrived, they found him hanging upside down in his car, surrounded by spilling gasoline and smoking a cigarette.

As for boat racing, Fageol had won 74 first-place trophies while driving outboards throughout California, moved into the limited inboard ranks then purchased a three-point Gold Cup hull from Ventnor Boat Works that he named *So Long*, which he then hauled to Detroit to enter the big race. There, he found himself in the pit area with the likes



H&RM Collection

of Zalmon Simmons and his *My Sin*, Horace Dodge and his *Delphine IX* and, of course, his buddy Dan Arena aboard the impressive *Notre Dame*. Unfortunately for Fageol, *So Long* ran into some driftwood almost immediately after the start of the first heat, which bent the prop and caused the boat to limp along in last place. Meanwhile, Arena cruised to a second place finish and, three weeks later, took runner-up honors again at the President's Cup.

Despite the disappointment of his first Gold Cup effort, Fageol continued to dominate back home. He eventually would drive *So Long* to victory in three straight Pacific Motor Boat Trophy races and, in March 1940, drove it through a mile course at over 97 mph, which was good enough to set a world speed record

for supercharged Gold Cup hydroplanes. When he returned to the Gold Cup a few months later, however, this time held in North Point, Long Island, he was again beset by mechanical issues. The ignition system was damaged at some point during the long journey across the country and there was no time to get it fixed before the race would start.

Arena's fortunes were better. Though he didn't win any races in 1939, Arena apparently impressed Mendelson enough to earn the responsibility of building a new *Notre Dame*

boat for the 1940 season, a beautiful step-hydro powered by the same 24-cylinder Deisenberg engine that had powered an earlier *Notre Dame* to victory in the 1937 Gold Cup. As Fageol watched from the shore, Arena drove the new boat to a third place finish at the Gold Cup. Later, he set new lap and heat records at the National Sweepstakes in Red Bank, New Jersey, and at the President's Cup, he took first place in all three heats and won his first Gold Cup Class race. Finally, he took *Notre Dame* through a mile course a few weeks after the President's Cup and broke Fageol's speed record, averaging 100.987 mph—the first Gold Cup boat to break the 100-mile-per-hour barrier.

World War II caused a five-year break in Gold Cup racing. When the boats returned in 1946, the rules had been changed to allow any size or kind of engine (other than a jet or rocket engine), and any kind of hull, as long as it was no longer than 40 feet in length. Consequently, the field for the 1946 Gold Cup was immense. While only seven boats appeared for the 1940 race and only four bothered to show up for the 1941 event, a total of 22 boats were parked along the banks of the Detroit River when the Gold Cup made its first post-war appearance. Included were a number of 225-class and 135-cubic-inch-class inboards, Lou Fageol's 7-litre-class hydro *So Long Jr.*, boats that raced in the Mississippi Valley Power Boat Association's 725-class, old Gold Cuppers from the late 1930s, and one entry that was designed with the new unlimited-class rules in mind—a craft that was built, owned, and driven by Dan Arena.

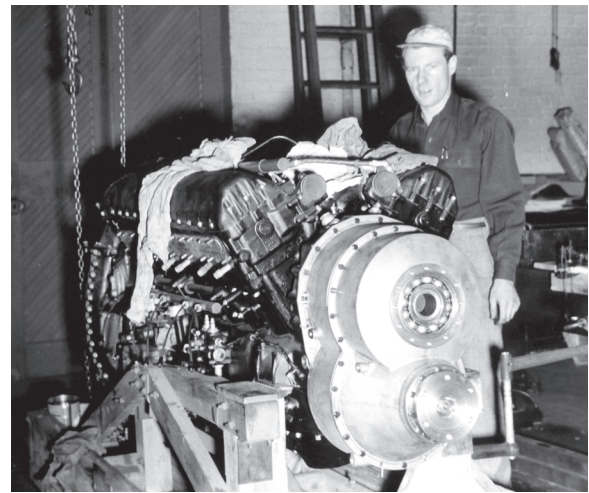
During the war, while working as a naval architect for the Department of the Navy and as a commissioned officer in the marine design section of the U.S. Army Transportation Corps, Arena's thoughts never strayed far from his favorite sport. He knew that the big Allison engines used in many fighter planes would be perfect for boat racing,

so almost as soon as the war ended and the rules were changed to allow the bigger engines, he bought a surplus P-38 from Lockheed, flew it to Monument Field in Concord, California, pushed it across the road to his shop, removed the engines and started building a hydroplane. The result was a giant yellow boat with an arrowhead-shaped bow and a stubby tailfin that he named *Miss Golden Gate III*.

On Labor Day weekend of 1946, an estimated quarter million people grabbed every



Frank Gudatis photo



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vantage point along the Detroit River to see Gold Cup racing finally return after the long hiatus. And, as a bonus, they saw a couple of firsts. Because of the huge field for the event, the competitors were divided into two groups that would race separately, the first time in Gold Cup history that this had been necessary. Then, shortly after the five-minute gun fired, they became the first to hear the distinctive deep thunder of an Allison-powered hydroplane rumbling onto a racecourse. It was *Miss Golden Gate III*, awkwardly wallowing around the buoys as its massive engine warmed up with Arena at the steering wheel and his brother, Gene, going along for the ride.

Arena didn't get the best start, but soon passed the flock of smaller limited-class boats that made up the majority of the field and fought *Miss Canada III* for five laps until it finally fell by the wayside with supercharger problems. All the while, as the other boats skipped across the water and threw splashes of spray into the air, *Golden Gate* showed the fans that it was a different breed of race boat. Not only did it create that unique, warbling roar; it threw a great plume of water into the air behind it that one observer estimated to be 60 feet high and 100 yards in length—a roostertail. It also had a ride like a bucking bronco. “The boat seemed to be quite unmanageable on the turns and not too stable in the straight-aways,” wrote Lou Eppel of *The Rudder*. Mel Crook of *Yachting* said Arena's madly careening boat “sauced around the turn in terrifying fashion.”

The famous bandleader Guy Lombardo, driving in his first Gold Cup, won the second section of the first heat in his *Tempo VI* then met Arena in the second heat. Arena took *Miss Golden Gate* into the lead at the start, but Lombardo soon caught up to the gyrating hydroplane, moved ahead at the end of the first lap and was never seriously challenged, eventually lapping *Golden Gate* during the ninth time around the course. The first-place finish gave Lombardo a decided advantage going into the final heat. Considering the points Lombardo had already earned and the bonus points that would be awarded to the boat with the fastest heat and fastest total elapsed time, the *Golden Gate* would not only have to win the final heat to claim the trophy, it would also have to do it at a record pace and would have to lap *Tempo VI* twice to make up the difference in total elapsed time.

Although the Gold Cup trophy didn't appear to be within reach, Arena still gave it everything he could. “*Golden Gate* was acting like a berserk lion, her open exhausts roaring defiance and a great rooster tail pouring angrily aloft as she tore over the water with a jerky snaking motion,” Mel Crook wrote for *Yachting*. “Her thundering roar and tremendous spurning wake brought the crowd to its feet and it never occurred to anyone to sit down.” Arena finished the first lap at an average speed of 73.740 mph, a new Gold Cup record, and then was around the second time at over 76 mph. Some of the officials and the press estimated *Golden Gate* was going down the straight-aways at an amazing 120 mph.



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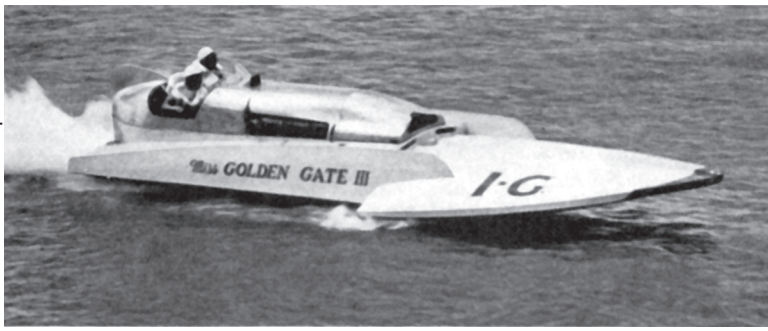


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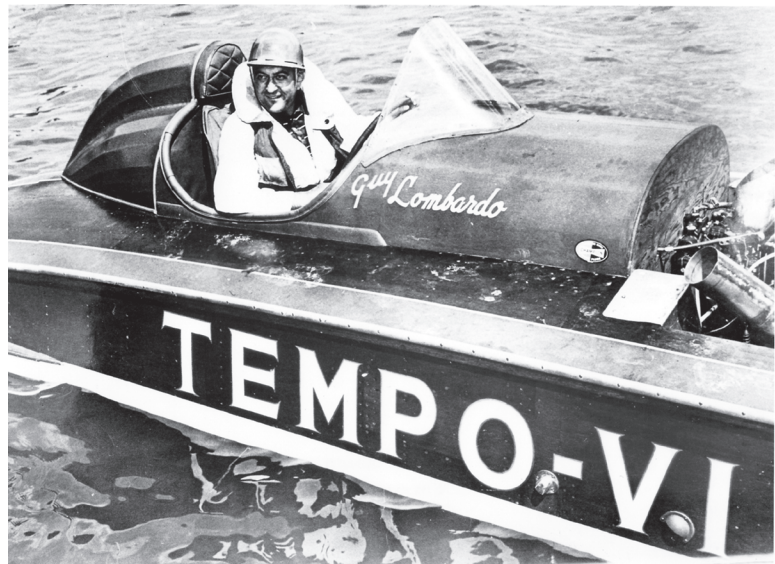
But, in the cockpit, Arena could see calamity was in the making. As he completed the second lap, he looked at his oil pressure gauge and cursed to himself as he watched the needle suddenly drop to almost nothing. An oil leak had drained all the lubricant from the engine and into the bilge. But, he pressed on. He averaged almost 76 mph in the third lap; the fourth was about 77, the fifth 75, the next

almost 78, and then another at almost 77.

“The crowd knew that it was seeing a speed display of a lifetime,” wrote Crook. “If anyone knew that Arena had virtually no chance of winning the race because of his time disadvantage, the secret was well kept from the spectators and press alike . . . You could feel in the crowd a silent wish that Dan would make it without accident to his careening craft and that his kid brother Gene, riding as mechanic, would not be injured from the frightful flinging about he was taking.”

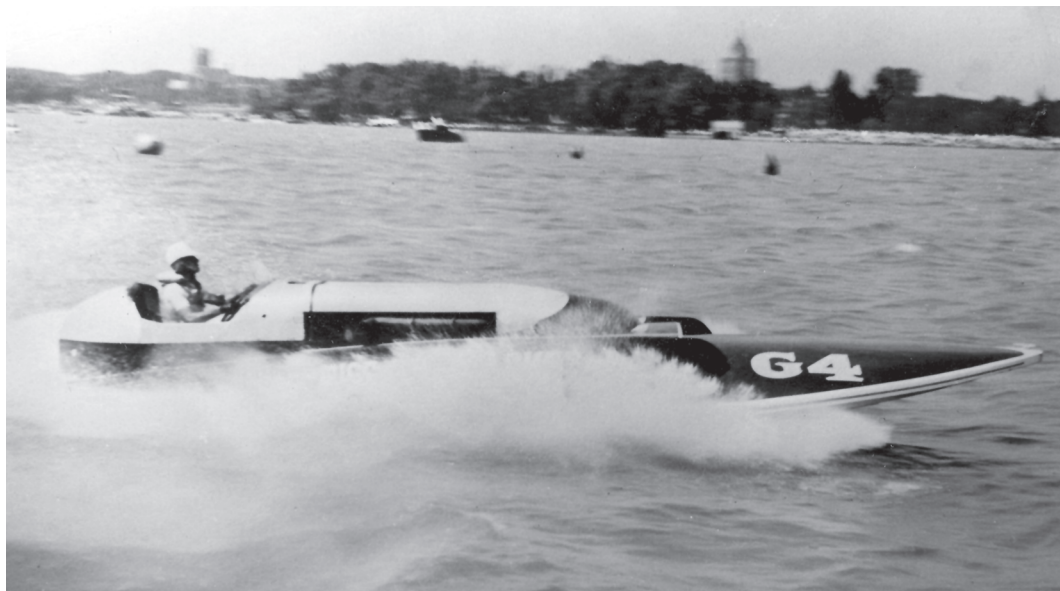
There’s a limit to how long an engine can run at top speed without lubrication. Arena’s Allison reached its limit as it started the last lap. Coming out of the turn into the backstretch, the engine’s roar suddenly quit and *Golden Gate* drifted to a stop, a connecting rod thrown with so much force that it virtually demolished the engine. From his cockpit, Arena could do nothing but watch as *Tempo VI* roared past him, cruised around the course one last time, and took the checkered flag.

Arena’s *Golden Gate* would face Lombardo again three weeks later on the Potomac River, but by then Dan Arena would no longer be in the picture. He had to go back to California to help harvest grapes for the family wine business. So, he sold his boat to a Detroit industrialist named Albin Fallon, who had asked only one contingency in the deal. He wanted Arena’s friend Danny Foster to stay behind and drive it in the President’s Cup.



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Dany Foster in Albin Fallons’ G4 *Miss Great Lakes*. Fallon and Guy Lombardo drove in 1947 and Foster returned to drive the ’48 Gold Cup. The former *Miss Golden Gate III* became *Miss Birmingham* in 1953, but it never raced.



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Editor, *Unlimited NewsJournal*, 16418 192nd Ave. S.E. Renton, Washington 98058
or E-mail to: USA1st@msn.com
Letters may be edited for clarity and space.



Silver Lake Dental Arts
Michael C. Johnson, DDS, PS
Brent N. Kellogg, DDS, PS
1809 100th PL SE
Everett, WA 98208
425-337-3922
sldarts@verizon.net
www.sldarts.com

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