

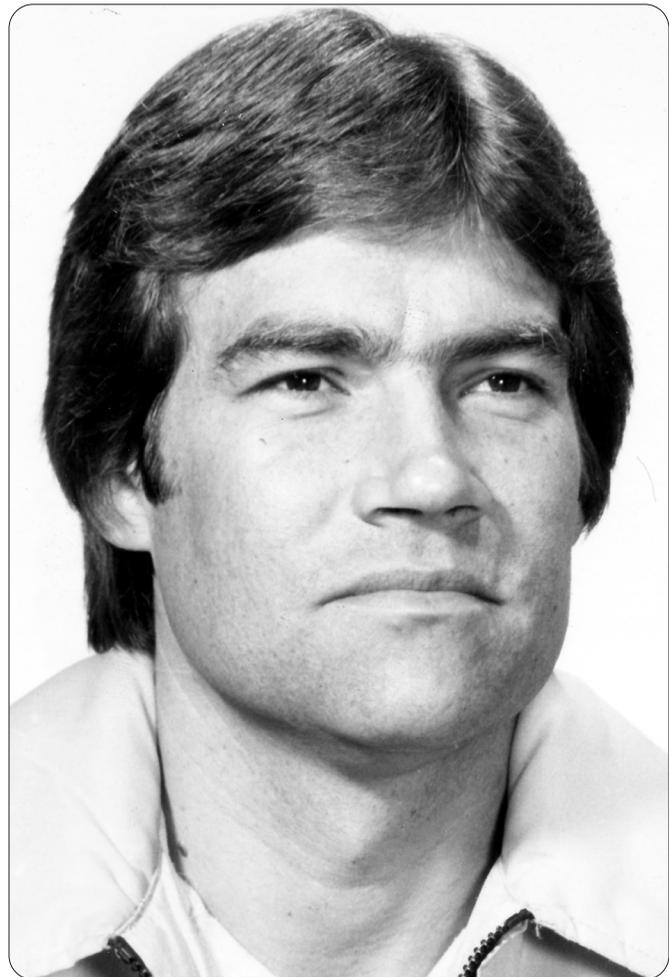
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FROM THE UNJ VAULT:

A conversation with Steve Reynolds

One could safely say that Steve Reynolds was one of the most popular hydroplane drivers in the late 1970's and early '80s. Handsome, thoughtful, outgoing, and a smooth-talking and polished public speaker, Reynolds was always an excellent interview for reporters and had the charisma to be an ideal representative for his sponsor and for the sport. Born in Oakland, California, he moved to Mercer Island with his family when he was four years old. There, like many kids of his age at that time, he developed an instant interest in the hydroplanes that churned the waters of nearby Lake Washington.

Reynolds participated in school



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sports, and was good enough in baseball that at the age of 17 he received an offer to play for the New York Mets. But, knowing he was about to be drafted into the Army, he instead volunteered for the Marine Corps and served in Vietnam, where he was decorated for his service as a helicopter crewman. Following his discharge in California, he went to work in an auto painting business and attended Long Beach State, where he majored in business.

At the age of 26, with the auto painting business closed, Reynolds moved back to Seattle. One day he attended a limited race on Green Lake and talked to a racer whose 225-class boat was for sale. He then went to another race on Lake Sammamish the following weekend and bought the boat—a conventional hull that was designed and built by Dave Knowlen.

Reynolds sold everything he had, moved home with his parents, and worked two jobs to support himself and the boat. Following a frustrating rookie season, he sat out a year and came back with a new 225-class Norm Berg hull named White Lightning. Later, the craft became known as Pay 'N Pak. Jim Harvey eventually became his crew chief, and Steve's father, "Tige," was the other crew member.

The Pay 'N Pak was extremely fast and highly successful, until disaster struck during a race at Green Lake in 1978. Competing against Jim Kropfeld, the boat flew into the air and crashed. Reynolds received a broken right hip, leg, and ankle. While he was recovering from the spill, he was awarded the job of driving a boat in San Diego that had previously seen action as *Valu-Mart*, *Weisfield's*, and *Olympia Beer*. The boat had recently been purchased by Bill Bennett and Bill Pennington, and would carry the banner of their company, the Circus Circus Hotel and Casino in Reno and Las Vegas.

Our story begins with Reynolds's move into the Unlimited ranks aboard Miss Circus Circus in 1978. What follows is the first of four segments of an interview that was conducted by Craig Fjarlie in 1992 and originally published in the September, October, and December 1982 issues of the Unlimited NewsJournal.

UNJ: You were laid up for quite a while after the accident, weren't you?

Reynolds: I was in traction for about a month.

And then [in 1979] the opportunity with Circus Circus came along.

It was shortly after that, that Dave Knowlen was contacted by the Circus Circus people, to build an Unlimited hydroplane. Since I knew I had a better working relationship with Dave and Norm Berg than anybody else, Dave suggested I drive the boat. So, I met with the Circus people. The chemistry was right, we got along well. That's how I started racing Unlimited hydroplanes.

You were basically fresh out of your cast?

When I got into the accident I weighed about 190 pounds. When I went down to San Diego to race about two and a half months later, I was walking with considerable pain in my hip. I wasn't supposed to be off crutches yet. I was walking. I didn't want to lose this chance to drive the boat, so I would practice walking around the house here without showing any visible signs of pain. I was about 25 pounds underweight. Very, very weak. When I drove the boat, I'd never driven a conventional boat before in my life, nor an Unlimited, so after the first couple of heats, I would come back and say everything was fine. We'd walk to the back of the motor home and nobody could see us. Linda would massage my forearms because my hands were cramped from hanging onto the wheel so hard. Atrophy had set in, because for two and a half months I hadn't done anything at all. She would massage my forearms so I could open my hands again. We were fortunate enough—we bought an old *Budweiser* display boat, same boat that's the *Gilmore* now, and beat the *Budweiser* two out of three heats that day. That was how the whole thing got started. Of course, we built the new boat the next year.

What was it like to sit behind the engine?

Well, to me, it was exciting, because



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The first hydro to carry the *Miss Circus Circus* name.

that's the way I'd grown up. Understand, that when I drove my first limited boat, I probably "won" 1,000 races and "drove" 5,000 heat races with that boat before I ever sat in it—mentally, up in my head. So, everything that I experienced wasn't necessarily new to me, I was such a student. I watched, and I tried to make mental notes, and I would make actual written notes about other drivers that I would drive against, how their boats handled in certain water conditions, characteristics that the driver had. So, when I got in there, I knew the rest of the drivers as well as any catcher in professional baseball knows every hitter that comes up, how to pitch them. So, I was fairly confident. I was confident of my own ability. To drive a conventional hydroplane, to me, was a tremendous thrill. I remember when I first took it out here in Seattle, one time, I made one lap before we broke a rod. I didn't know it. I'd never started a Merlin engine before. When I got it going, all this junk is flying out the exhaust stacks. I would smell the fumes. The thing vibrated terribly. I didn't know I had broken a rod. I thought the thing was running fine. All the gauges looked good. I thought to myself, "Boy, the guys that drive these things must be real animals." I mean it was shaking and bucking and bouncing and spitting garbage back in my face and I couldn't see and I thought, "Wow, boy, I don't know if I can do this!" It was pretty thrilling. To

do as well as we did down in San Diego at that first race, I really felt that the chemistry surrounded that team. I don't know that there's been a more potent team put together, that original *Circus* team—the one that ran in '79.

It was a pretty impressive line-up.

There was Jim Harvey, who was the crew chief. We had Dan Heye, who's now the crew chief of the *Executone*, Tracey Bratvold, who built the *Atlas Van Lines* and is now crew chief for *Gilmore*, Mike Campbell, and Dixon Smith was helping out.

Most of the guys have done very well.

Tremendous. Three out of four are crew chiefs, and I think if Mike Campbell wanted to be, he could be an excellent crew chief. He's good at building boats. He's excellent at building engines. All of them don't know anything but work, work, work, work. They're all great guys. A tremendous friendship and kinship was spawned among all of us, which still remains today. I work comfortably with any one of 'em.

The thing that has pleased me more this year than anything else that I've watched during the 1982 season has been the recognition of Jim Harvey as the exceptional crew chief that he is. I know of nobody—absolutely no one in the sport—who works any better under a tremendous amount of pressure, than Jim Harvey. Given the time and the space



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Steve Reynolds at the wheel of the first *Miss Circus Circus* hydroplane at San Diego in 1978.

and the room to be himself, I think he's one of the finest crew chiefs the sport has ever seen. And it's very obvious. The rapport that he works with Chip ... Jim had, he had an ability to psyche me up and really get me pumped.

You went into the 1979 season expressing a great deal of confidence.

That was a good year, that first year with *Circus*. We were all so filled with rookie enthusiasm, every one of us. Here we were with the biggest-dollar operation anybody had seen in the sport to date. We had all the money behind us, all the support. We were just a bunch of guys from the Northwest. We weren't really used to the flamboyant style of living that Bill Bennett, Bill Pennington, Mel Larson, and the rest of the people from *Circus Circus* were used to. And it was—I'm trying to find the words to say—it was an incredible feeling knowing that you had the best equipment money could buy. We wanted for absolutely nothing. If we wanted three gearboxes, Bennett bought us four or five. We probably bought 25 or 30 never-before-raced Merlin engines.

So, we were deep in equipment, deep in talent.

Do you remember when it was planned that *Circus Circus* would build that boat for '79?

Well, that was planned immediately. Before the team was even purchased. From a marketing standpoint, the *Circus* people wanted to get involved in one race before the 1979 season. So, Bennett had contacted Dave Knowlen and said, "Find me the very best used hull you can find. I want to participate in one event, the last event of the year. That gives us the remainder of the winter and the beginning of next year to go ahead and

hype the fact that *Circus Circus* is now in hydroplane racing." When we bought that old boat from Bernie Little, they had already signed a contract with Norm Berg to build the new three-point cabover. So, I have no idea how much money they spent in buying the original *Circus Circus*, the *Gilmore* now.

It's kind of interesting that you're driving that boat again.

I was just making that comment to somebody the other day. I've been in the sport for four years, and I'm back on the same racecourse with the same boat I started with. I don't know how much progress that is!

When they christened the boat, there was a lot of fanfare.

Oh, it was tremendous. Actually, the first time we drove it was over in Pasco. We took it over to Pasco for a private showing. The boat was, to me, it felt like a blown up version of my limited. I felt extremely comfortable in it. I had such confidence in the crew.

When we took it back and set it in the water, the only modification we did to the boat—after we ran it with all the fanfare that they had in Seattle with the Governor of Nevada, all of the media, they had a tent and the whole thing was catered—is we cut the air traps off. That's the only change to the boat from the first time we put it in the water until the last time I drove it in '79.

But that was quite a deal. The pressure that was on me, and Muncey had talked to me about it several times, the pressure was absolutely tremendous. The only times I really felt good and comfortable was when I was in the boat out on

We took it over to Pasco for a private showing. The boat was, to me, it felt like a blown up version of my limited. I felt extremely comfortable in it. I had such confidence in the crew.

the race course by myself. Then I knew I had enough confidence in my ability and in the equipment that we would make a respectable showing.

You drove it hard.

That first year I don't know if I drove hard because I wanted to win so badly or I was afraid of losing. I had never faced losing at anything I had done. I didn't know whether I could handle losing.

Of course, losing to someone like Muncey, there was absolutely no disgrace in that and we did beat him in several preliminary heats. I think that we were easily the class of the field here in Seattle when I jumped the gun by about six feet.

The season started in Miami.

We went to the first race, and I think we set two qualifying records. We qualified on the mile and two-thirds course at 110 or 112. We beat Muncey's time by a couple miles an hour. I think he recognized us as a threat immediately. We had all the potential, we were all just extremely green.

I find it was fortunate for me, we had so few boats that year, in '79, that I ran against Muncey in every single, solitary heat until we came west. That year, the *Budweiser* didn't start to become competitive until the end of the season. And *Squire Shop* never did develop that year like the *Circus* did. I remember coming back and telling Harvey after the very first heat with Muncey, I was a little shaken, and I was kind of excited, and I said, "You know, these guys play for keeps." And they really do.

In Evansville, you and Bill touched boats.

Well, actually, I went right over the top of the *Atlas Van Lines*. I don't know what it was. It was something that, actually, the press built up into. I was a little excited about it. But, to set it up for you, the day before, all day long we went back and forth, back and forth. It was a qualifying duel against the *Atlas Van Lines* and the *Circus Circus*.

We just played the game all day long, and stretched it right up to the end. We



Randy Hall



Sandy Ross Collection



Sandy Ross Collection

ABOVE: The Circus Circus team at the launching of the new *Miss Circus Circus* in 1979. **MIDDLE:** The *Circus Circus* crew works on the boat in Seattle. **ABOVE:** Jim Harvey, crew chief for *Miss Circus Circus*, meets with Steve Reynolds at the boat's cockpit.

knew what they were doing—Muncey and Lucero. Harvey and I decided we would play the game right along with them. So, they'd go out and qualify at 117. We'd go out and qualify at 118. He'd go out and qualify at 119. I'd go out and do 120.

It came down to about 15 minutes before the course was to close. He took the course and went 121. We took the course, and he stayed in the water. He was gonna go out again. But we waited and made excuses. We dropped in the water about three minutes before the course closed, and I went out and ran 122. Then, they shut the course down.

We'd come out of the first turn in the first heat. Muncey on the outside and the *Circus* on the inside. Well, coming up the back chute, I had either taken him by surprise or he wasn't sure where I was, because I came up the inside of him, and I noticed I was gaining on him.

I noticed, going up the back chute, I had my eyes riveted on the back of his helmet. I kept saying to myself, "J hope he knows I'm here." I could see that by the time we got to the corner, we would be virtually dead even, if he kept on and I kept on. He was taking an angle to the pin from about lane three, and I was going right down the buoy line. I pulled up so that my sponsons were even with his engine, and then I saw him turn his



Circus Circus Media

Steve Reynolds drives *Miss Circus Circus* in 1979.

hands and set up for the corner. He put the boat right in lane one.

There was nothin' for me to do. The last thing that I saw, as we hit the entrance pin, was his helmet directly in between the pickle forks of the *Circus Circus*. Now, he had turned and I was still going straight trying to turn the boat. The boat rode up his skid fin water. Now, that gold trim that goes around the outside of the *Circus* broke his vertical stabilizer, and the mark that was left on the stabilizer was about three inches from the top of the wing.

So, the *Circus*—it had picked the right sponson up, and the guys from the pits saw both sides, both sponsons, both numbers, *Circus Circus*. It was right on its side. It went over the top of the *Atlas*, then they saw the entire bottom as

it came down on the other side. That's as close as I've come to hitting anybody. Damage was sustained to his boat where my sponson broke his wing, way up high. There was nothing wrong with the *Circus*.

But, there was quite a ruckus in the pits. As I got back, Cantrell told me—he took me aside and he said, "You a little shaken up, kid?"

And I said, "You bet."

He said, "I've been driving against that guy for years and years." He said, "He's a different man when he's on the race course. Regardless of what he talks to you on the beach, when he gets out there, he's all business. If you don't want him to own you, you go back out and beat him the next heat."

I said, "Okay."

So, I did. That was the first time I'd beaten Muncey. I went out the next heat and I beat him. I came back and he [Cantrell] said, "You feel better?"

And I said, "Yeah."

He said, "Well, it's not over yet." He said, "At the end of the day, you gotta grab him by the arm and tell him just exactly how it is."

So, I did. At the end of the day I waited, and Muncey was walking down the road and I said, "Bill, could I talk to you for a minute?"

He said, "Sure."

So, he turned around and I said, "You know, I haven't been in this sport as long as you have, but the first thing they



Race fans cheer the passing Steve Reynolds in *Miss Circus Circus*.

taught me was look to the inside before you turn. I looked at your helmet all the way down the back chute, Bill. Either you didn't know I was there, which I hope, or if you did it on purpose, one of us could have gotten seriously hurt or killed."

He looked at me and he smiled and he said, "Well, I'll tell you what. You learn something every day, kid. If you're tellin' me that, if I made a mistake, that's fine." He said, "I make no apologies, no excuses for what I do on the race-course." Then turned around and walked away.

That night, he came over to my table after the banquet, and all he did, is he asked me, "Are you all right?"

I said, "I'm fine."

He said, "Good," smiled, turned around, and walked away.

You had another incident in Detroit.

When he took me to the wall in Detroit, was probably—that's where I think I really grew up. I mean, I thought that it was quite a gentleman's sport, that we had rules to live by and that we all did that. We extended certain courtesies from one driver to the other. Muncey knew exactly where I was and he knew exactly what he was doing.

If you read his book, which I have several times, he is quoted in his book as saying that when you come up to play in this league, whether you're a rookie or you've been doing it for 20 years, you deserve no better treatment than the next guy. Muncey, the way he measured you was to take you to the wall. Well, he took me to the wall.

Yeah, they still have a U-31 on it.

Oh, yes, they've still got my name written on the wall. They rewrite it every year. When I came back after that Muncey came into the motor home, and just walked up to me and grabbed me by the hair and shook my head and said, "How do you feel?"

I said, "Like I came this close" (gestures with thumb and forefinger). He smiled, turned around, and walked out of the motor home. I remember saying to myself, "You son of a bitch," and in the same breath I probably said how much I really admired him.

That was the last time that he ever took me to the wall. But, I guess that I had established myself at that point in his eyes to where now I could take everything that he was going to throw out and didn't complain and came right back at him. That he admired, and told me that a few years later.

But he had really strung me out, and did it for a reason. He measured all of his drivers that way. He thought what I did to him in Seattle, the bit with the propeller and qualifying at 111, and letting the Budweiser beat us in the second heat, really setting everybody up, he thought that was magnificent. He said, "You really play the game well." He said, "When you become a student of the sport, like you are, you'll do just fine."

You had a close call in the final heat of the Gold Cup at Madison.

Falling in that hole. That was an experience. I had talked to Bill after that. Cantrell had told me, back there in Madison he and I got to have a real good relationship. I really love that old man. He told me exactly where the spots in the river were to watch out for, and the one hole that was always there.

He said, "If the river drops, get out of the first two lanes. Get to the outside." I remembered that, but I didn't pay any attention to the fact that the water was dropping. They had opened up the dam. Muncey did. So, he chose to go to the outside, I stayed on the inside and found that great, big, nasty hole there. It bounced me off both sides of the deck.

A lot of people thought you were going to go over.

So did I, so did I. Then, I felt with Hanauer being right to the inside of me, I felt he was about ready to run right over the top of me, so I threw both hands in the air. Then the engine lit off again and away we went. But you give Muncey that kind of a head start and there's no way that you're going to catch him.

You lost a skid fin while testing in El Dorado, Kansas.

We had attached a special kind of leading-edge spoiler that Knowlen had designed, and slanted forward. It worked very well. Dave had asked me, when I went out, he said, "See how fast you can take it into the corner." Now, I like to drive the corners hard. I like to enter into the corner with probably more boat speed than anybody today.



Reynolds and Miss Circus Circus at Miami in 1979



Steve Reynolds was also popular among the race fans. Here, he and crew chief Jim Harvey chat with fans in the pit area at Seattle.

But I like it that way. I think the boat handles better, it's just my style.

I probably took it into that first turn, which was fairly tight, at 160, maybe 165. Two buoys into the corner, the skid fin let go. The boat went sideways, then started to swap ends, stuffed in backwards. That's the first steering wheel I bent in half staying in it. I bowed the whole side of the cowling out.

The one thing that flashed through my mind was Skipp Walther going out of his boat in Miami [in 1974] and the boat going over the top of him. Had I allowed myself to be thrown over the side, there's no question in my mind the boat would have gone over the top of me. It's amazing what you can do when you have that much fear.

But Kansas was a difficult course to drive. The wind was tricky, the course was small, the water was a real brown, it was very difficult to read. That was one of my poorer races. We did not do well in the final heat. Had a nitrous problem—the system failed.

You had a propeller failure in Tri-Cities, and turned that into a psychological game in Seattle.

We had another propeller identical to the one we broke over in Pasco, but we didn't want anybody to know that. So, we went out and ran 111 in qualifying. The excuse I gave was we didn't have a prop. We played that game all day.

Then, in the first heat, our intention all day long, the plan Jim Harvey and I discussed, was that we were going to lose. Just get enough points to get in the final and then see if we could take them by surprise. But you lose sight of your planning. Just get into the competitive action of it.

I went head-to-head with *Budweiser* in the first heat and beat him rather easily. I got back to the pits and Harvey said, "What are you doing? I thought we were going to lose this thing?"

You know, the first lap was, like, 119 or 120. We'd only qualified at 111. So, the second heat we went out and intentionally lost to the *Budweiser*. I said, "How am I going to do this and not look obvious about it?" So, instead of taking the inside, we took the outside. Came off the first turn and squirted by Dean. Then I came off the nitrous and let him catch me. Went in the next turn together side-by-side, then I swung real wide and just tucked in his trough.

We saw the way the *Budweiser* was running. I did not want them to run any better. So, I wanted to try to convince them that they were running fast enough to win, with the combination they had. I don't think the crew believed that our performance was all that we had. They wanted to change the boat and Bernie was against it. He wanted to leave it just like it was because it wasn't getting too

loose. But there was probably another 15 miles an hour that they would have to run, top speed-wise, to stay with us in the final heat. Of course, you know how the final heat went.

Muncey had to work to get around him.

I think Dean made a few errors, when I watched the thing. The hardest part for me was to run in between the two of 'em. I wanted to keep one on the inside and one on the outside. So, I would open up the inside lane for Dean all the way down the back chute. He would go to the outside of me in the corner and then cut back across my wake, go to the inside down the straightaway. And I would give him lane one about two buoys into the turn. Then I would swing back tight on the inside and push Muncey out and cut Chenoweth off. And I did that for about three laps.

Finally, Bill was able to get around Dean. He did have to work for it, but he did get around him and won that race. The satisfaction came from me knowing, regardless of what Bill said in the paper or what anyone else did, that I jumped the gun by about six feet, and yet finished about ten or twelve seconds ahead of both of them. So, they knew the boat was one to be reckoned with. We established ourselves that day.

Then, Muncey's dynasty kind of came to an end in Utah.

It did, and you could see the stress. I could see it. Bill was changing his driving style. He was pushing harder. He was at his best when he was rather relaxed and drove at his own pace. But, he had been feeling the pressure of the *Circus* all year long.

He and I—we had several private moments. He was saying, "Did you ever stop to think what you and I would do if the *Budweiser* just came out and blew our doors off? How are we going to fight that Griffon engine?"

I said, "Well, I don't know. Right at the moment I think we're competitive with it."

He said, “Yeah, but you keep an eye on it, because it’s getting better and better all the time.”

Well, *The Squire Shop* was coming on. Espland had done a good job, so the *Squire* was getting faster. The *Circus* was already fast. *Budweiser* was getting faster. And Muncey felt the pressure coming. He’d had it so easy for so many years, that he finally had to work for it.

What I think that I recognized in Bill was that he was a man that was coming to the twilight of his career, and knew it. And yet, boat racing held such a tremendous part of him, and totally monopolized his life, except for the time he would share with his kids.

How do you, as a competitor, face retiring after 30 years of competing? What is going to fill that void? What is left in your life, after you’ve come to the point that physically, you can’t compete anymore?

I think Bill was feeling that. There were people that were finally doing it almost as well as he was. And equipment was coming up. The old Blue Blaster was three or four years old. So, he felt the pressure and he drove like it. I think he abandoned some of the things that he did so well, and I think he was almost forcing his game a little bit. You could see that it took a little bit away from his competitive edge.

A couple of things happened to your team there in Utah. You had another propeller failure, banged the boat up pretty bad. But something else happened in qualifying that we wanted to ask you about. That was the time Ron Armstrong took the boat out. Is that a tender subject with you?

Not really, I’ll speak very freely about it. We had had problems. Of course, everybody was having problems with the attitude. Nobody knew how to figure it out except Espland. Bob knew. For some reason, *Squire Shop* and the *Atlas Van Lines* were running very well. They were pitted right next to each other.

At the time, there was good commu-

nication between Lucero and Bob Steil, and he was attempting to help out the *Atlas* people. They were running well, and the rest of us weren’t running worth a damn. Couldn’t figure it out. Well, Espland finally told us, because it got to the point—we had taken five engines with us.

We were planning to go to Utah, then down to San Diego, the last two races. Five engines would more than cover what we needed to do. We had blown three engines already. We were down to two.

So, Bob came over and told us what was going on. We disconnected the fuel enrichment, so when you hit the nitrous, all you did was push in nitrous. What it was doing is it was compensating for the high altitude. It was just leaning the mixture out. The thing was a rocket ship after that.

But we had stayed in Salt Lake City, and had about a 25-mile drive out to the racecourse. Here we’d gone through three days of trying to qualify, breaking engines right and left, nothing we tried would get the boat up on a plane. It just wouldn’t run. We were doing something wrong, and Harvey did not know what it was. So, Jim was a little panicky about it.

Dave Knowlen and I were driving out to the racecourse that morning, and

we stopped to get a cup of coffee, and we had a flat tire. So, we stopped to fix the flat tire and then drive on out to the racecourse.

Well, when I got out there, I could hear a boat running. I noticed that the *Circus* was not on its trailer. So, I knew instantly what had happened. Harvey had sent it out. I thought that Jim had taken it out himself, but then I saw Jim on the dock. I went into the motor home and started to put on my driver’s suit, and then Jim came in. He had a very guilty look on his face.

Now, understand that this guy had been like my brother for the last four years. We were very close. He started to apologize, and I told him, “Get out of here before I kill you. Now, just get away from me. Of all the things that you’ve ever done to me, you could not have done anything that insulted me more or hurt my feelings more than to send somebody...”

He started to explain and I said, “I don’t want to hear it. We’ll talk about it later, just go away and leave me alone.” So, he went out, and Armstrong came back in. Now, Jim was mad at Armstrong.

He ran the boat very fast.

Jim told him to go out and if you can get it up on a plane, that’s all I want to find out. If the engine is responsive,



Steve Reynolds and Miss Circus Circus at San Diego

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

bring it back in. So, Ron went out and drove like five laps, very hard. We only had one other engine beside that. So, Jim was a little upset. I was upset with Ron, for taking it in the first place. That bothered me a great deal.

What bothered me more than that was, after he came back in, I asked him, "How'd the boat run?" And we talked about it. Everybody in the pits was talking about it and thought it was really a cheap shot for another driver to climb into somebody else's boat. Harvey had asked a number of drivers earlier that day if they would take the boat out, and they all said no, they wouldn't do it.

Finally, Armstrong said that he would do it. So, when it was all over, he had gone up to Bennett and said a few things about maybe driving the boat. Bennett and I had absolutely no secrets from each other, and Bennett told me about it. So, Ron and I had a few words after that, and our relationship has been strained since then, but I think we're both big enough to put it aside, and that's been a couple of years ago and I have no problem.

I like Ron very much. We get along well, now. But that was a very tense moment. We all forgot it after it was over, but I let Jim Harvey know, that it was several months before I forgave him for doing that.

You were out of the final heat with a broken prop.

Yeah, I was doing the radio with Jim Hendrick.

You got a win in San Diego.

Yes. That was a crew victory, far as I was concerned.

A lot of other guys broke.

Well, our plan, when we went out there—we knew we could run with most everybody else out there. We knew we were as fast. The *Budweiser* then was very awesome. Very, very awesome. She could corner, out-accelerate any of us.

But, I remember that our plan to go out there was to keep constant pressure on them, stay up even with them.

The one problem that we did not seem to have was engine troubles. Our engines seemed to run very well, and I had a lot of confidence in what the guys were doing in the engine department. We had run fairly well out there, and we qualified in the 130's. I knew the boat had a little more.

Coming down for the start, and going through the first turn and coming up the back chute had to be one of the most thrilling experiences, really, of my entire life. Because, I know that the *Atlas* and the *Budweiser* on the inside of me, me in lane three, and *The Squire Shop* in lane four, as we were all going down the back chute. I have no idea how fast we were going.

But about 200 yards out of the first corner, the *Circus* picked the right sponson up, and I went the entire straightaway with the right sponson maybe a foot off the water. And I remember that they were starting to pull away from me, all of 'em, and I hit the nitrous button and stayed on it. I hit the nitrous button three quarters of the way down the chute and stayed on it all the way into the corner.

Took *The Squire Shop* out wide, and that eliminated Chip. Chip was no threat after that. Then I think the *Budweiser* broke, and then we stayed close to the *Atlas*, and finally the *Atlas* broke. We were able to go ahead and won the race.

But to me, that was a crew victory. I didn't do anything other than what I was told to do. I didn't win the race, the crew won the race. They prepared that boat. They made it finish all the way, so when the rest of the big powers were broken, we outlasted all of 'em.

I did ask Dean later that day, nobody knew how fast we were going down the back chute. But, I asked him, "Did you see how fast we were going? Anybody know?"

Dean said, "I saw 185 and we were still moving, I wasn't shaking anybody." So four of us—I'm telling you, at 185 miles an hour with your right sponson a foot off the water, and still a half straight-

away yet to go, and accelerating, and looking over and having a boat no more than three or four feet on either side of you, is an extremely exciting and frightening experience all at the same time. And watching all the rest of these boats.

I couldn't see the *Atlas* because she was on the inside—it's hard for me to remember now. But I know that the *Squire* was getting very loose, and the *Budweiser* was getting loose. I was hung up in the air. Having not sense enough to back out of it and bring the boat back down, I felt as long as I maintain power and it didn't get any more than an inch higher than it already was, that I could keep it at an attitude down the chute. I really questioned it when I hit the nitrous oxide button three quarters of the way down, whether it would blow over backward or stay with it.

Now, why would you hit the nitrous?

Because they were pulling away from me. At that time, I was even with the transom of the *Budweiser*, and the sponsons were about even with the engine of the *Squire*. And going into that corner, I wanted to at least be even with all of 'em.

They were inching away from me. I was holding back on the throttle because I did not want the bow to come up any higher. So, I—if I wasn't even with them going into the corner I would have taken a tremendous bath. I figured the boat would probably disintegrate or flip or something, hitting somebody's roostertail at that speed. So, I hit the nitrous button and it pushed me up even.

But it did give me a blast and I pulled up, actually, ahead of the *Squire* and even with the *Budweiser*. Great heat of racing. Those first two laps were very exciting. And I was afraid for Bill that day. ❖

Part two of our interview with Steve Reynolds will be in next month's issue of the NewsJournal. In that segment, he'll talk about ... Be sure to watch for it.

The Best and Worst of the 1980s

Looking back, the 1980s may have been the most pivotal decade in the history of Unlimited hydroplane racing. It started with the deaths of two of the sport's greatest legends: Bill Muncey and Dean Chenoweth. In response to those losses, the decade also included the introduction of the enclosed cockpit, which became mandatory in 1989 and is now such an integral part of racing, we have a hard time today conceiving what it must have been like when drivers sat in open cockpits without so much as a seat belt holding them in. Finally, the 1980s also brought turbines engines. Turbines were a novelty when the decade started, race teams were still trying to figure out which engines worked best and how they should best be set-up for boat racing. By the time the decade closed, turbines had become standard equipment—and the old 12-cylinder fighter-plane engines from World War II had become the novelty. What follows is a story that appeared in the January 1990 issue of the *NewsJournal* that revisits some of the best (and worst) of what had happened during the decade that had just ended. It was written by Tony Sepanski, who served as this publication's managing editor at the time.

We are publishing the story now to provide our readers with some insight about where the sport stood 36 years ago. The opinions expressed in the article are strictly the author's own and in no way reflect the opinions of the *Unlimited NewsJournal* or its current staff.

BY TONY SEPANSKI

TOP 10 BOATS OF THE 1980s

With the 1980s now behind us, it seems every publication is running a Top 10, Top 100, or Top 1,000 “something or other” of the ‘80s. The *NewsJournal* is not going to buck the trend. The following lists are my own top 10s. No input has been used other than statistical evaluations and personal preferences. I did try to keep my biases out of the lists. For example, I am not a great *Miss Budweiser* fan, but two *Budweiser* hulls appear on the 10-best list.

This article contains two lists. The first shows the 10 most significant boats of the 1980s (in my opinion). The second is a lighter look at the decade titled “Dogs of the Eighties.”

1. 1984 Atlas Van Lines

If you discuss racing in the 1980s, no other boat should be considered before the 1984 *Atlas Van Lines*. Chauffeured throughout its career (except for one race) by Chip Hanauer, he and the boat terrorized the circuit for the better part of five years. The records this boat set are tremendous:

- ◆ Four consecutive Gold Cups (1984–1987)
- ◆ Won at least one race in each of the six years it competed. (1984–1989)
- ◆ World's fastest boat three times: Tri-Cities in 1984, 145 mph Tri-Cities in 1985, 153 mph San Diego in 1987, 156 mph... And countless other speed records.

Quite a few boats have had their heyday, then faded away. This hull has remained, tenaciously competitive. Generally, a boat's lifecycle runs about two years in top competitiveness before newer hulls with more current technology relegate it to second- and third-place running. This hydro has remained competitive, even against third-generation turbine boats.

Take the Seattle race in 1989. The hull, then named *Miss Circus Circus*, was acting as backup for the team's number one-hull. When that boat was damaged in Syracuse, NY, the team readied the backup for the wars once again. With Hanauer driving, *Circus* convincingly defeated competition four to five years newer and faster.



The *Atlas Van Lines* in 1984 was viewed by the author as the best hydro of the 1980s.

One of the more amazing qualities this boat possesses is its stability. With one exception, the 1988 San Diego flip. The hydro never was out of attitude, never unbalanced. It would ride across bad water and hop over waves and rollers with virtual immunity to the conditions.

The boat raced as *Atlas Van Lines* in '84, *Miller American* in '85–87, *Miller High Life* in '88, and *Miss Circus Circus* in '88–89. The boat raced with both the Lycoming T55-L-11 and L-7, a smaller engine.).

No other boats have displayed the staying power of this boat. That is why I have chosen it as the number-one hull of the 1980s.

CAREER VICTORIES: 16

DRIVERS: Chip Hanauer, John Prevost

2. 1980 Miss Budweiser

This hull was the second Griffon-powered *Miss Budweiser*, built to replace the '79 hull destroyed in the mile straight-away record run. Designed by Ron Jones, *Bud* was a rocket the first time it hit the water. The design incorporated new ideas gained from the '79 hull and produced a near-perfect boat.

From the first heat of the 1980 season, Dean Chenoweth and *Bud* raced to 20 consecutive heat victories, a string that may never be broken. The boat and

Chenoweth continued to dominate the circuit for two years, winning the Gold Cup twice, the national championship twice, and the World Championship race once. This was along with a truckload of course and world records.

In 1982, the boat was leading in national high points when it flipped in Tri-Cities, killing Chenoweth. As a tribute to Chenoweth, owner Bernie Little had the boat repaired and named a new driver: Jim Kropfeld.

Kropfeld helped *Bud* once again become a dominant force on the circuit in 1983, but they missed the national championship by just a few points in the last race of the season. In 1984, they made up for the loss by cruising to six race wins and the national championship against teams with much newer (and in *Atlas's* case) faster equipment.

For 1985, the boat was made a back-up to the new *Griffon Budweiser*, and when the new boat didn't pan out, the '80 hull was run at the Midwestern races, with less than spectacular results. After that, the hull never again ran under *Budweiser* colors.

This hull is second only to the '84 *Atlas* in dominance during the 1980s. It is the second-winningest hull in history with 22 victories (tied with the '73 *Pay 'N Pak*) and at one point or another held speed records at every race on the circuit. The horsepower advantage of the Griffon engine and the advanced design of the hull in its day gave this boat the ability to destroy the competition and out-accelerate all others in the field. It was an awesome boat to hear as well as feel. This one belongs in the Unlimited Hall of Fame collection.

CAREER VICTORIES: 22

DRIVERS: Dean Chenoweth, Ron Armstrong, Jim Kropfeld

3. 1982 Atlas Van Lines

This boat has a storybook tale behind it. It was designed by Jim Lucero, built for owner Fran Muncey, and driven by Chip Hanauer. The boat was announced as a continued commitment to the sport by *Atlas Van Lines* and Fran Muncey, whose husband, Bill, was killed in the flip of the boat's predecessor a few months earlier.

This boat was the *Atlas* team's



The second Griffon-powered *Miss Budweiser* at its launching in 1980.



Chip Hanauer driving the U-00 *Atlas Van Lines* in 1982

Rolls-Merlin-powered answer to the *Budweiser* team's Griffon hull. Put together with as much heart as talent, the *Atlas* team debuted the boat at the 1982 season-opener in Miami and proceeded to fine-tune the hull until it consistently ran with *Budweiser*.

Using the Merlin engine rather than the Griffon, the team set out with a 1,000-horsepower disadvantage. They were able to prove quite convincingly the Merlin still could run with the Griffon. The boat fought *Budweiser* tenaciously in 1982 and 1983, both times coming away with the national championship and Gold Cup.

In the process, *Atlas* also set multiple speed and course records, the most notable being the 2½-mile course world record for piston boats of 140.818 mph, set at Seattle in 1982. That record stood for seven years.

The boat was sold after the '83 season and raced as *The Squire Shop*, winning a race in 1984. In 1987, it was sold to Jim Harvey, who was its only crew chief through the years. Since that time, it has raced as *Oh Boy! Oberto*, winning two races in 1988.

I chose this boat third for a number of reasons. It provided the fans with some spectacular races, the most notable being the 1982 Gold Cup in Detroit, where it became the first boat to beat the seemingly invincible *Miss Budweiser*. Second is how it was able to defeat the

competition. Instead of just increasing the horsepower, hull design was emphasized. Third, it was a trendsetter in many ways. It was the first boat to compete with the deep-cut pickle fork. In 1983, it became the first boat to sport the re-enforced cockpit, the forerunner of today's enclosed cockpits.

Perhaps the most significant thing about this boat was the magic feeling that surrounded it in 1982, when the entire season and national championship was dedicated to the late Bill Muncey.

CAREER VICTORIES: 11

DRIVERS: Chip Hanauer, Mickey Re-mund, Tom D'Eath, George Woods

4. 1987 Miss Budweiser

This boat was the second turbine-powered *Miss Budweiser* and, unlike the first, was designed and built by the *Budweiser* team. This hull is significant in a number of ways. It changed the style of hull design for the rest of the decade. All turbine boats built after it incorporated its design innovations to where they looked somewhat like *Budweiser* "copy cats."

The boat also was fast. Jim Kropfeld drove the boat to course and heat records all over the country. He made a mockery of the competition. The race I remember as the most vivid was the 1987 Seattle race. Kropfeld hit the line on the money at full power. This is the way all races are supposed to start.

However, this boat was so fast the race literally was over by the first turn—not the exit of the turn, the start of it.

The boat not only was fast, it looked fast. This could very well be one of the sleekest, meanest-looking Unlimiteds ever to come along. The low-profile cockpit and cowling, along with the gracefully curved deck, made it an aerodynamic dream to gaze upon. The deep blood red and sophisticated gold made the boat look stately, yet racy.



Jim Kropfeld drives the second turbine-powered *Miss Budweiser* (T-2) in 1987.

This hull is significant for another reason. It possibly is the apex of that particular design. The boat flipped three times over two seasons, for reasons that confounded the experts. At one minute it would be streaking across the water; the next it was hurtling through the air and smashing back into the water. As time went on, some experts came to the conclusion that perhaps this particular three-point design had reached its speed limit.

The boat won two consecutive national championships in 1987 and '88. It became the "world's fastest boat" in 1988 with a run on San Diego's Mission Bay at a speed of 156.169 mph on a 2½-mile course. This record lasted one year. In 1989, the boat was relegated to backup status as a new *Budweiser*, sporting significant design changes learned from this hull, took over.

CAREER VICTORIES: 9

DRIVERS: Jim Kropfeld, Tom D'Eath

5. 1982 Pay 'n Pak

With this hull, some explanation needs to be done. This boat never raced as *Pay 'n Pak*. It was the second hull commissioned by *Pak* owner Dave Heerenesperger to eventually replace the 1980 *Pak* hull. When Heerenesperger abruptly left the sport in 1982, the boat was completed and painted, but it had not been tested.

The boat was purchased in 1983 by Steve Woome's Competition Specialties team and raced in 1984 as *Miss To-*

sti Asti. In 1985 and '86 it was known as *Miss 7-Eleven*. In 1987 it became *Cellular One*, and in 1988 it raced as the unnamed U-10 for part of the season and as *The Vantage Ultra* for the second half. In 1989 it raced as *Winston Eagle*.

This boat is significant in the number of changes it has withstood, making it the most-modified and oldest turbine boat on the circuit in 1989. Its first modification came before it even hit the water. A new reinforced cockpit was installed, and the intake system, a common turbine gremlin at that time, was redesigned.

For 1985, *7-Eleven* had more design changes, making it look like a new boat. In 1986, an enclosed cockpit was added. In this area, the boat was most significant. After the 1986 season, at Tri-Cities, it became the first boat to test the enclosed cockpit in an accident. With Steve Reynolds driving, the boat lost its skid fin and barrel-rolled across the water, landing upright. In an open cockpit, the driver probably would have been seriously injured or killed. Reynolds escaped with a strained neck.

In 1987 the boat was completely rebuilt for the *Cellular One* sponsorship and was referred to as a new boat. The "improved" boat was fast. Too fast. In Madison, Ind., while leading the new *Miss Budweiser*, the boat flipped violently, critically injuring Reynolds. The hull was shattered.

By the end of the season, Reynolds was slowly recovering, and the boat was

rebuilt yet again. In 1988 and '89 it stayed in basically the same design, although major changes to the cockpit safety systems were incorporated.

What was stunning was the 1989 *Winston Eagle* paint job. The primary color was an incredibly fluorescent neon red-orange. The paint job seemed impossible to capture accurately on film. It quickly became a fan favorite. The best description I have read regarding the paint was from *Seattle Times* reporter John Peoples who said, "You don't wax this paint job, you feed it."

This boat never won many races, but because it changed shape so many times, and with favorable results, I consider it a noteworthy boat of the '80s. While other teams would build a new boat to improve speed and stability, this hull was just torn down and rebuilt with the new ideas.

CAREER VICTORIES: 3

DRIVERS: Steve Reynolds, Larry

Lauterbach

6. Fred Leland's Merlin hull

Fred Leland's journeyman hull might surprise a few people by its appearance on this list. The point of this list is to note significant boats of the 1980s.

Since 1982, Leland's Merlin hull has campaigned diligently under a plethora of names: *Oh Boy!*, *Oberto*, *Executone*, *American Speedy Printing*, *Miss Rock*, *Miss Houston*, *Team Velocity*, *Risley's Express*, *Coors Light*, *Boat*, *Miss KAMT/AA Auto Parts*, *PocketSavers Plus*, *Heartbreakers*, *Doll Houses*, *Easter Seals*, *ARC Construction*, *Pietro's Pizza*, and *Miss Marina*.

Aside from probably having the most coats of paint of any boat in the '80s, the boat also was the start (or near-start) for many of today's fine Unlimited pilots. Scott Pierce, Mitch Evans, Mike Hanson, Steve David, Jack Barrie, John Prevost, and, of course, Fred Leland drove it from time to time.

The boat also is unique in its design and material makeup. It was drawn by Ed Karelsen and sported some innovations



In 1984, the boat built to be *Pay 'n Pak* appeared as *Miss Tosti Asti*.



The boat built by Fred Leland in 1982 appeared two years later as *Oh Boy! Oberto*.

that never quite caught on. The boat is constructed entirely out of aluminum, to help facilitate lower cost. A side benefit to this was the boat is built like a Sherman tank.

A second feature, highly touted (when it was introduced), was the hull's depressed deck. The idea behind this was to compress the air as it flowed across the deck, thus stabilizing the boat at speed. The process is called "Venturi effect." Although the idea was never duplicated, *Budweiser* and other race teams reversed the idea and raised the decking on their boats, resulting in the same concept with better results.

The U-40, et al, is one of the few piston boats to make the transition from an open to a canopy cockpit. This boat has many colorful stories behind it and always could be counted on to show up at a race and qualify.

CAREER VICTORIES: 0

DRIVERS: Scott Pierce, George Johnson, Fred Leland, John Prevost, Mike Hanson, Steve David, Mitch Evans, Jack Barrie

7. 1973 Pay 'N Pak (Miss Madison)

There are two reason why this boat is on the list. First, after 14 years of devoted service, this was the second-winningest hull of all time when it retired in 1988. Second, its last race victory came in 1983,

when it defeated the likes of *Atlas Van Lines*, *Miss Budweiser*, and *The Squire Shop*. The boat, which campaigned under the *Miss Madison* banner from 1978 to 1988, was driven in the '80s by E. Milner Irvin, Andy Coker, Tom Sheehy, and Ron Snyder.

The boat's story has been well-documented. The craft very well could have been the "Boat of the 1970s." It soldiered on in the 1980s, providing the community of Madison, Ind., with a reliable, well-running, sometimes fast boat.

At its retirement, it was the last conventional (driver behind the engine) in boat racing. With the advent of the enclosed cockpit, it probably will remain that way. The City of Madison has put the boat up for sale, but there have been no takers.

It is hoped this fine example of '70s

invincibility will be housed in a museum sometime in the future.

CAREER VICTORIES: 22

DRIVERS: Mickey Remund, George Henley, Jim McCormick, Bill Muncey, Ron Armstrong, Jon Peddie, E. Milner Irvin, Tom Sheehy, Ron Snyder, Andy Coker, Jerry Hopp

8. 1984 Executone

With perhaps the '82 *Pay 'N Pak/7-Eleven/Cellular One*, et al, as an exception, no boat has undergone more significant changes in the 1980s. What makes this boat so unique is it is the only one to win races with both piston and turbine power. Built by Jim Lucero as a follow-up to the '82 *Atlas*, it originally housed a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine. In 1985, Scott Pierce drove the boat to victory in Miami, his and the boat's first career win.

Before the 1987 season, owner Bill Wurster converted the hull to turbine power—a Lycoming TF-25 marine turbine. This is a heavier, slightly less-powerful engine than the T55, used by most other turbine teams. The reconfigured boat, named *Mr. Pringle's*, won the '87 Detroit race. Wurster built a new boat in '88 and "sold" this one to his son. It once again was rebuilt, encapsulized, and sent off racing as *US West Cellular*.

This boat never has been extraordinarily speedy, nor was it ever a consistent front-runner. However, it won a couple



The famous "Winged Wonder" *Pay 'N Pak* finished its career in 1988 after being campaigned by the Madison Racing Team through most of the 1980s.

Ken Nugent



The boat that raced as *Executone* in 1984 is the only hydroplane to win races during the 1980s with both piston and turbine power.

of races and allowed itself to be converted to turbine power successfully. Changing from piston to turbine is not an easy task. It had not been done before (with *Miss LaPeer* as an exception) and has not been undertaken since.

What made this transition even more complex was the decision to use TF-25 power. The TF-25 did not fare as well as had been hoped, but it did provide the power to put the '87 *Pringle's* near the top, ready to grab whatever fell its way.

CAREER VICTORIES: 2

DRIVERS: George Johnson, Scott Pierce, Todd Yarling

9. Bob Patterson's U-80

As we reach the bottom of the list, my reasons for having boats included become more outlandish. Because U-80 was so unique, it must be here. Retired after the '87 season, Patterson's brilliantly painted round bow had created a small legacy in the years it competed.

The heaviest boat around (more than 10,000 pounds), it was for many years the fastest turbo-Allison craft campaigning, despite its weight. The exotic turbo system Patterson and team designed and perfected over the almost 20 years the boat raced was a wonder to witness.

The Patterson and Ron Armstrong (driver) combination proved to be quite a bank of engine knowledge, but running

with an outdated hull, they never reached the winner's circle throughout the '70s. The boat raced less and less throughout the '80s, with Patterson complaining bitterly about the turbines and their dominance over piston engines.

Enter San Diego, 1986. As the turbines fell one by one, Ron Armstrong and U-80 *Miss Bahia* ended up victorious—the boat's first and last race win. It was the oldest boat to win a race in the history of Unlimiteds. Bob Patterson won a small battle in his losing war with the turbines.

Conventional configuration boats were a rarity in the 1980s. But a round bow? (A hull with no pickle fork.) You probably never will have a chance to see that in competition again.

Between the paint job, engines, and owner, this boat always was a treat. It has been missed.

CAREER VICTORIES: 1

DRIVERS: Fred Alter, Norm Evans, Mickey Remund, Jack Schafer, Ron Armstrong



Jon Osterberg



Sandy Ross Collection

TOP: Bob Patterson's U-80 was the last round-bow hull to win an Unlimited race. **ABOVE:** The turbine-powered *Pay 'N Pak* has the 10th spot on the best of the 1980s list.

10. 1980 Pay 'N Pak

The first turbine-powered hull to win a race. For this boat, that is all the reason needed to be on the list. Most people consider U-95 (from '74) to be the first truly successful turbine Unlimited, but *Pak* did more than U-95 as far as laying the groundwork for today's turbine dominance. For example, *Pak* was the first boat to utilize the Lycoming T55 turbine, whereas U-95 was equipped with twin Lycoming T53s, a much-smaller turbine.

This boat probably was the most star-crossed boat of the 1980s. It was fast, had strong talent and financial backing, but it also had some of the worst luck ever experienced by an Unlimited. Regardless, Seneca Lake at Romulus, N.Y. in 1982 always will be known as the birthplace of turbine-powered victories. For this, *Pak* is the last boat on the list.

CAREER VICTORIES: 1

DRIVERS: John Walters, Steve Reynolds, Mike Hanson

DOGS OF THE EIGHTIES

If you have a ten-best list, you also must have a ten-worst list. This is a tongue-in-cheek list based strictly on this author's opinion of which were the ten least-successful, least-attractive, and least-redeeming boats (and other things) from the 1980s.

1. 1981 Miss Circus Circus (four-point hull)

Without a doubt, the number-one dog. What else would you call a hull all the experts said never would work, then had the owners dump \$1 million into it anyway? The four-point was a disaster from start to finish. Its design was based on a model, the power-to-weight ratio was completely out of scale. And, from there, everything went downhill.

The boat campaigned the entire circuit in 1981 (except Acapulco) and qualified for two races at the absolute minimum speed. *Circus* left the sport after



Number 1 on the list of the decade's worst was the four-point *Miss Circus Circus*, a experiment that failed.

that with much egg on its face. *Circus's* return in 1988 brought rumors the four-point would be back. The news reaching us now says this is true. It is hoped the *Circus* organization won't put so much emphasis on this hull.

2. 1985 Miss Budweiser ("Bubble Bud")

Another expensive failure. It is not really fair of me to put this on the dog list because it was the breakthrough boat that introduced enclosed cockpits to Unlimitees.

Apologies aside, competitively, the boat still was a dog. It was built as the third Griffon-powered *Miss Budweiser*, a kind of interim boat, and was supposed to compete in 1984. One year later, a fourth Griffon boat was to have been introduced, and it was to be built with the enclosed cockpit. But in response to driver Dean Chenoweth's death in 1982, the team installed the capsule on the "Interim" boat instead—the boat that didn't debut until 1985.

The result was a badly balanced hull that just didn't perform, despite the power of the Griffon engine and the talent of its crew. The boat campaigned for about half of the 1985 and 1986 seasons before Bernie Little gave up on it.

3. 1984 National School of Travel

Wil Muncey's "Blue Blister" was an insult to Unlimited hydroplane racing.

4. Arcadian

What could owner/driver Jim Hauenstein have been thinking of? Trying a radical new motor system—eight Mercury V-6 power heads—was one thing, but to combine it with a radical new hull design was another. The boat was built with one tunnel sponson running the entire length of the hull and one regular sponson on the inside of the boat. The hull also had a deep pickle fork with a canard wing.

All eight engines were buried below deck, with a separate exhaust stack for each. The boat was painted bright orange with "ARCADIAN" in bold white letters. The sound created when it ran (a rare occurrence), was quite unique.

The engine-hull combination proved too technically overwhelming, and Hauenstein abandoned the project after two years of work.

5. 1984 Lite All Star

6. 1986 Miss Budweiser

These two are the same boat, but because it ran for two teams with two completely different configurations, it has been given two slots.

1984 Lite All Star. This possibly could have been one of the dominant teams of the '80s if personality and ego problems had not torn it apart. Texas money man R. B. "Bob" Taylor wanted to

be the next Bernie Little. He bankrolled a new Jim Lucero bull, then hired some well-known names to run the team: Tom D'Eath, driver; Jerry Zuvich, crew chief; Sam Cole, team manager. The team then opted for the General Electric T-64 turbine, rated at 4,000 horsepower.

The team encountered problems from the start. The boat was based in Texas, far away from any "knowledge base" (e.g., Seattle, Detroit) of hydroplane racing. The boat barely was completed in time to make the Miami race, then didn't qualify until about halfway through the season. People were fired, new faces were hired. It was discovered the engines were installed backwards. Materials chosen for the hull were inadequate.

At the end of the season, after being constantly beaten by piston teams, Miller Brewing Co. dumped R.B. "Bob" and went looking for a better team. R.B. "Bob" sold the hull to Bernie Little and never was heard from in Unlimited circles again.

The 1986 *Miss Budweiser* (turbine): When Bernie Little purchased the boat, he also got turbine-whiz Ron Brown in the deal. Brown and the *Bud* crew completely rebuilt the old *Lite* and tested it extensively in the summer of 1985. The boat was campaigned in 1986 as the first turbine-powered *Miss Budweiser* (U-11). The boat then edged out the *Miller American* to win the national championship. So why is this on the dog list? It probably was the worst-riding boat ever to win a national title.

How this boat never flipped is a testimony to driver Jim Kropfeld's skill and sheer luck. In a late-1988 interview, Tom D'Eath, who drove the boat as *Lite All Star* and *Miss Budweiser*, said it actually rode worse as the *Bud* than the *Lite*.

The boat just didn't look right aesthetically. For a turbine boat, it was the ugliest, with the 1988 U-66 *Sutphen* as the only exception. The hull was short and stubby with a high profile when, for aerodynamic reasons, most teams were working to lower the profile to reduce

drag. At the end of the season, the boat was relegated to backup status, where it has remained ever since.

7. 1987-88 Eliminator

This dog was LOUD! For a single-automotive-powered boat, it could crank out the decibels. That's probably where all the power went because the boat qualified for only one race in its two-year career.

Eliminator was a small, yellow and black hull with Staudacher-style tear-drop sponsors. Since it was a new boat, it had to be equipped with a canopy. It probably was one of the most dangerous "safety" cockpits ever built, with no head room and a simple overhead hinge/latch for access. Upon impact with the water, I would bet even money this cockpit would have shattered.

After qualifying for the first time, the boat twisted a shaft and withdrew at the conclusion of the first heat. The team packed up and never was seen on the circuit again.

8. 1980 Pay 'N Pak

This boat is on the top 10 list also, for the same reason as the '86 *Bud Pak* never ran consistently stable. From its first race, when it flipped at Tri-Cities with 1¾ revolutions, to its last in Seattle two years later when it was slammed into by *Executone*, it always was on the edge.

There were many other hair-raising situations over the 2½-year career of *Pak* that won it attention for being unstable: a test session on Lake Washington in May 1981, Acapulco in 1981... The list goes on. In later interviews, driver John Walters said the team did what it thought was right, but because of the lack of knowledge about the turbine engine at that time, it was hit or miss. Basically, Walters recalled, the boat simply was a bad design.

9. Any boat driven by George Johnson

This is not personal. Mr. Johnson is one of the friendliest drivers I ever have talk-

ed to, always taking the time to sign an autograph or talk about boats. However, he's proven over and over again he can take a consistent boat and make it an also-ran.

10. Any race announced by Jim Hendrick

Unlimited fans had to suffer through Hendrick's bungled broadcasts for 10 more years in the '80s. His problems have been well-documented in the *NewsJournal*, so there is no need to be repetitive. We all can hope that in the year 2000, his name won't be on this list again.

Runners up:

The 1984 *Texmo*, 1981 *Miss Rent-It-Shops*, 1982 *Captran Resorts*, U-21 *Island Security Systems*.

OK, race fans, that's my list. I'm sure quite a few people out there are thinking, "Hey, what about such-and-such a boat?" or, "This guy is out of his mind!" or something worse. That is why I wrote these lists. ❖

Talking old engines with Peter Orton

Peter Orton has spent many years working on vintage hydroplanes. He has driven them, repaired their engines, provided general maintenance, and given rides to fans. Orton was at Mahogany and Merlot in October, specifically to watch the 1967 *Miss Budweiser*. He shared some memories in a conversation with Craig Fjarlie.

UNJ: You were involved with the 1967 *Miss Budweiser*.

Orton: I started working on the *Budweiser* for John Goodman, I think, around 2009. He just bought the boat. I overhauled the engine, did some work on it, and buffed up the interior. We ran it for nine years, all over the place. Had it in Idaho. He was good about letting us run it. So, then I retired, had to stop. It's fun until it isn't. The owner is great to work for. He was the best there is, John

Goodman. It was a fun boat to drive. If you wanted to lean on it, it would go.

You drove it?

Yeah, I drove. I started driving in 2000, right after we filmed the *Madison* movie. I started driving the *Miss Burien*. That thing's hard to handle. (He points to *Miss Budweiser*) It's nothing like the *Burien*. But I thought it was normal. So, then I got in what is now the *Notre Dame*. That's a point and shoot boat. You just turn it on and it goes. It is the most fun

boat to drive there is, because you just turn the wheel.

That's the former *Savair's Mist*.

Yeah, and it was the *Miss Lumberville* before that. The *Savair's Mist* and *Miss Burien* were sister boats forever. So, it's kind of interesting to see 'em both back at the museum.

Yeah.

So, I enjoyed my time at it and I enjoy not having to worry about it. I was in charge of taking care of the boat (the



Craig Fjarlie

The beautifully restored 1967 *Miss Budweiser* at Chelan

1967 *Miss Budweiser*) and driving it and rides.

It hasn't run for several years, where was it?

Well, John wanted the engine overhauled while it was down and I didn't want to do it, so we sent it down to Mike Barrow (in California). He's a Mustang builder, engine builder, and so they overhauled the engine. That took about three years to gather up enough parts to get it to work, which is why I didn't want to do it.

It has a Dash-7 Merlin?

It has a Dash-9 bank on it, other than that it's a Dash-7. It has Dash-7 gears in the blower. Dash-3 and Dash-7, the only difference in those, they had different connecting rods and different blower gears. And then the Dash-9 used the same blower gears but they had more advanced machine work and casting.

They were good for about 300 hours in an airplane, and about 20 minutes in a boat. They get about 12 minutes in an air race. The racing Mustangs, they were good for one heat at full power. They were 1,800-horsepower, originally, around 1,800, and in the race configurations, in the boats—'cause they would run 'em at a real high rpm—they were pulling 3,500



Craig Fjarlie

The restored 1967 *Miss Budweiser* during its appearance at Mahogany and Merlot in Chelan.

or better. And they didn't hold up.

They blew a lot of 'em.

But they still saved most of the engines, because if the hydroplane people hadn't got on to them and bought them up at \$50 a piece, they'd be Toyotas today. Jim Harvey went down to San Diego one time, and there was a whole baseball field piled with Merlins.

They went up and got a hook and just drug 'em out on the ground and put 'em in his truck, 'cause they wouldn't fit any more. They were sending them to

Tokyo for scrap. So, if it hadn't been for the hydroplane guys, these things, there'd be a whole lot less of 'em than there are.

And then the Hunt brothers, in that silver fiasco in the '90s, cornered the market on silver, busting up Allisons just to get the silver out of the engine. Sledge hammers, it's sickening. But there's still a number of 'em around. They built 74,000 units. They had 300 of 'em done in the beginning. Pearl Harbor, they had fewer than 900 complete engines and it was a very early mark of an Allison.

So, between then and the summer of '44, they built 74,000 engines. You figure that they put out an engine every 20 minutes. It took 120 hours of machine work to get a crankshaft complete. How many of those things are you machining at one time, to put one out every 20 minutes? The record was August '43. I think they built 2,500 engines in one month (laughs). American ingenuity.

Yeah, yeah.

It's wonderful machinery. 10,000 pieces in a Merlin, only 4,000 pieces in an Allison, 2,200 pieces moving parts. And they work.

All right, well, thank you. ❖



Craig Fjarlie

The 1967 *Miss Budweiser* roars onto Lake Chelan.

AROUND THE CIRCUIT

Race Team and Race Site News by Chris Tracy



Santa brings news to the hydro museum

The annual holiday dinner, meeting and party at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum (HARM) on December 6, 2025, brought many surprises. It was not the typical celebration, awards ceremony, and Board of Director elections. There was interesting news and stories from two featured speakers and plenty of surprises timed around the retirement of the museum's executive director David Williams.

It has been a tradition at HARM to have the season's Gold Cup-winning driver speak at the holiday celebration. The 2025 Gold Cup was won by Dave Villwock, driving *Miss Apollo*. Villwock has relocated to Indiana, so not easily available to speak. Representing the Bruce Ratchford-owned team was *Goodman Real Estate* crew chief Mike Hanson, and *Miss Apollo* crew chief Taylor Evans. Both Hanson and Evans spoke to the crowd of about 100 people.

Mike Hanson was candid and forth-



Members of the museum Board visit the new facility in Arlington.

coming in his remarks. Hanson said he was fortunate to have made hydroplane racing his career and "loved almost every moment." He continued, "The sport

has been the love of my life." Then he recalled the morning of the 2024 H1 banquet, when he learned from Charlie Grooms that the *Miss Madison* team would be sold. The news left him with many unanswered questions. The sale information was especially difficult, as Hanson had a long association with the Madison organization.

Later, Hanson met with new owner Bruce Ratchford. He told Ratchford that he really didn't want to run two boats and he also explained that his past relationship with Dave Villwock had been difficult. But Ratchford reassured Hanson enough for him to stay on. And Hanson said that Ratchford gave him the resources to run the team.

Hanson credited Villwock for working hard to make their relationship work well this past season. He also thanked the Goodman Real Estate leaders, especially John Goodman and Goodman president



The museum is already moving some of the collection into the new facility.

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Kelli Jo Norris, for their strong support.

Hanson said even more about the state of the H1 series and its future. He said that Bruce Ratchford will “grab the bull by the horns” when talking about the business role he now has with H1. Only three races are certain for 2026, as Hanson called the fourth race at San Diego, “iffy.” Hanson explained that Ratchford understands that the current H1 business model is not working and “things will change” and Bruce Ratchford will work to fix things.

As for Taylor Evans, Hanson described Evans as “the future of the sport.” He’s young and, Hanson said, we need more young talent in the sport. Taylor Evans talked about his career in the sport, starting with working with the Stocklin’s small Unlimited boat in 2012, working with Billy Schumacher and back with the Stocklin’s bigger boat. He also related a story about this year’s Gold Cup win in Tri-Cities.

The 2025 Gold Cup for *Miss Apollo* was Evan’s first win as a crew chief. He said Dan Walters encouraged him to step up and get in the Gold Cup pictures and remarked this was his “biggest moment.” Walters told Evans, “Make it a successful moment for yourself. Get in there.” And

Evans now especially cherishes one photo, the photo of Dave Villwock, Taylor Evans and the Gold Cup.

The program moved to talking about David Williams, who retires as the executive director of HARM on December 31. Mike Hanson said it all when he remarked, “David Williams has done a hell of a job.” This was the last Board of Directors meeting he presided over.

David Williams started as a volunteer at HARM in September 1992. He described the work for him, “It was first about the boats, but then it became more about the people.” This past year HARM ran nine boats and more than 400 laps. Proudly he noted, “No tow ins.”

To honor the work Williams has done to build the museum, the Board of Directors presented retiring Williams with a \$10,000 check that will help fund a retirement trip to Italy that Williams and his wife have planned. In addition, the main museum gallery of hydroplanes, will now be known at the David Williams Gallery. The Board also named David Williams as Executive Director Emeritus for the museum.

But other big news was dropped during the annual award’s portion of the program. Ike Kielgass and Joe Fraunheim

were awarded the President’s Award, given to those that have made substantial financial contributions to the museum. In a project that took three years to come together, Kielgass and Fraunheim donated to the museum 8.8 acres of land in Arlington, which is about an hour north of Seattle. The property includes a new 7,500-square-foot shop and 2,200-square-foot barn. Three vintage boats are already being stored there. David Williams said that if anything happened with the current building that they rent, HARM now has a place of their own.

Among awards presented by HARM, Linda Williams—spouse to David—was also honored with the Gold Cup Award, which recognized her volunteer work with HARM over the past decades.

Longtime Seafair leader, Kathy McLemore, will be stepping off the HARM Board. Bob Senior has retired from the Board, as well. APBA Vice President Kip Brown, will be joining the HARM Board as a new member. ❖

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PLEASE JOIN US AT THE NEXT MEETING OF UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS

2 p.m. on Sunday, January 11, 2026
Town Center at Lake Forest Park,
17171 Bothell Way NE, Lake Forest Park, WA 98155