



The perilous racing career of driver Scott Pierce.

In 1984, Scott Pierce was driving Fred Leland's boat in Madison when it crashed in qualifying and started to sink. Pierce's parachute harness got caught in the boat and nearly pulled him under. Later, at Clifty Falls State Park, the NewsJournal's Clint Newman was hanging out with friends when a car drove up bringing Pierce back from the hospital. Though banged up and broken, Pierce saw the boat racing fans on the balcony and said, "I'd give my ass for a shot of Bourbon and some pizza!" Newman and his friends said, "Come on in!" The following interview was conducted by Newman 31 years later during the 2015 Madison Regatta.

Scott, I know your dad, Laird Pierce, was a boat racer. Tell me a little about your dad and his influence on your life.

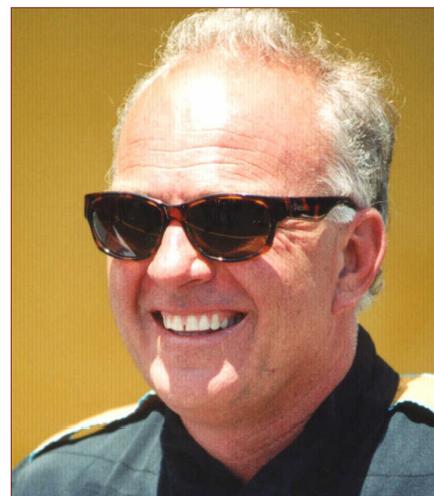
My dad raced sprint cars when he was a teenager. In 1960, I believe, he built what turned out to be a



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famous 266 called *Miss Parco*. They won two world championships with that boat (1964 in Morgan City and 1966 in Seattle). 1966 is also the year he first got involved in unlimiteds. They bought a boat from the Gordon brothers. Freddie Alter engineered the deal and they ran it as the *Miss Dixi Cola*. They did relatively well with it. The boat was never a world beater, but it got a couple of seconds. My dad decided to get a better boat, so he had Bob Patterson build the first *Parco's O-Ring Miss*. Chuck Hickling designed the little boat and the unlimited, so it was a blown up version of the 266. They tried a lot of different stuff and the boat never really worked out for him. He ended up taking it out and flooding the engine. It finally started, but my dad drove the thing to the bottom of Lake Elsinore. He came floating out of the top, walked up the boat ramp, jumped in his T Bird, hit the



Ron Harsin Collection

highway, and said, "I never want to see that damn boat again!"

That night he ordered a Karelsen hull that was supposed to be a replica of the *Bardahl*, the *Budweiser* and the *Notre Dame*, the top boats at that time. Unfortunately, his boat was built a little differently and, once again, he faced disappointment. He had bought all of Ole Bardahl's Rolls Royce Merlin

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My \$0.02 Worth

Editorial Comment



Andy
Muntz

Sven Ellstrom

Unlimited hydroplane racing lost a patriarch this past month. Sven Ellstrom, a self-made success story, passed away on May 18 at the age of 87.

His was a career much like another of unlimited racing's greatest participants: Ole Bardahl. While Bardahl immigrated from Norway, tinkered with oil additives and became a millionaire, Ellstrom did the same in the world of laminates. He was born in Sweden, was a flight engineer in the Royal Swedish Air Force, then, in 1956, he and his wife Kerstin decided to take the gigantic risk of leaving their native country to seek a better life in the United States.

They initially lived in California, but eventually devised a plan to move to Alaska. Problem was, the \$854 they had scraped together wasn't going to be enough to get them that far. So, they instead settled in Seattle. More specifically,

they lived in Ballard, an enclave for fellow Scandinavians where they could readily find the meat balls, lingonberry jam, and fruit soups that reminded them of home

Ellstrom was focused on using his engineering skills to make something of himself, so he crafted a press from scrap iron and modified a table saw to begin experimenting with laminates. From that, he built an enterprise that would become a worldwide supplier of panel components for the marine, aircraft, fixture, furniture, and specialty products industries.

For example, during a trip to Sweden to visit his sister in the early 1990s, Ellstrom noticed a new type of flooring made of laminates, so he took a sample home to Seattle and his STEL Flooring, Inc., a subsidiary of Ellstrom Manufacturing, became the first company to make laminate flooring in the United States.

It was about this same time that Ellstrom decided to get into unlim-

ited hydroplane racing, a move that seemed natural given his family's passion for the water and boating. In 1994 he agreed to sponsor an experimental four-point boat that is now best known for the spectacular backflip that it performed during a test run on Lake Washington on the morning of the Seattle race. The following year, Ellstrom's three children—Tom, Erick and Lisa—decided to build their own *Miss E-Lam Plus*, and from there came a career that has so far collected 28 race victories, including five Gold Cups, and three national championships.

Scott Carson, a friend, a fan of hydroplane racing, and a former CEO of Boeing Commercial Airplanes, described Ellstrom as a very kind man, but also a very shrewd businessman, "who came from a different place and time and built a very successful enterprise, an enterprise that was always able to change with the times."

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Letters may be edited for clarity and space.

Shane returns to the Madison race team.

Jimmy Shane has decided to return to the Miss Madison race team for the 2016 season and will be behind the controls of the *Miss HomeStreet Bank* in an effort to win his fourth straight title. The team also announced that crewmember Dan Hoover will take over duties as crew chief.

Just last month we reported in the *NewsJournal* that Shane and the team's crew chief, Larry Hanson, were leaving the team. In a statement made at the time, Shane said he needed to do what was best for himself and his family, but also left the door open for a return to unlimited racing. That return took less than a month.



Lon Erickson

Jimmy Shane

"The team has made great strides over the last few weeks in its racing plans for the 2016 season," Shane said. "The team is once again setting itself up to be a top contender and looking forward to defending both our H1 Unlimited high points championships and APBA Gold Cup victories."

Shane said he is also looking forward to the team's new partnership with HomeStreet Bank and working to promote their company. "The past month has raised some awareness in keeping the team

focused on continued success and I would like to extend a big thank you to the fans and supporters of the team who helped make my decision to return as the driver for such a great team an easy one."

Team Manager Charlie Grooms said Miss Madison, Inc., and HomeStreet Bank are extremely pleased to have Shane back. "Events of the last several weeks have reshaped our focus and, with the promotion of Dan Hoover as crew chief, we can't be more excited to start a campaign to repeat our national

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Lon Erickson

Dan Hoover

Remembering Peter Thomson.

By Craig Fjarlie

Unlimited inspector Peter Thomson passed away unexpectedly on May 13. He was 73. Thomson, nicknamed "The Sheriff," was a thorough inspector known for his quirky sense of humor. He operated a fiberglass and insulation business.

Thomson started racing with Seattle Inboard Racing Association in the 7-litre Division II class in the mid-70s. He drove boats built by Don Kelson. He was known to be a very competitive driver, but also a safe driver. He was the kind of racer that others could run next to without having to worry that he would do something dangerous. He set two records in 7-litre Division I in 1982, and another record in 1983.

Thomson learned about boat building from Kelson and used his knowledge to become an inspector. In the mid-90s, Ed Nelson recruited Thomson to help inspect the unlimiteds. At that time, inspecting turbine boats was becoming a more complex task and Nelson needed



Kirk Pagel

assistance. Thomson's knowledge of hull construction was important. He focused on items such as hull integrity and design of skid fin brackets. A few years later, after Nelson retired, Thomson took over as head inspector. He was willing to help teams if he detected problems that needed correcting.

The pit area will be quieter with Thomson's passing. His smile, funny hats, and unique humor will be missed, but his memory will live on with those who knew him. He was a friend who helped make racing fun. Thomson is survived by his wife, Sam.

The Scott Pierce story.

Continued from page 1

equipment, so he had the finest engines and a great crew. He had Billy Schumacher driving the thing. He had 15-year-old Scott working on the boat, getting in the way, and they tried and tried, but the best it ever did was a second in Washington, D.C. It never amounted to much. He was done. He died two years later at 41 years old.

The sad part for me, of course, was losing my dad when I was 16 years old. He only lived to age 41, him not being able to enjoy any of the success I was able to have in my career. It was his dream to win an unlimited race. He knew how difficult it is. Obviously, I wouldn't have been doing this for all these years if it wasn't for my dad. I retired from driving boats in 2013. At that point, I had 54 years of competition, starting at age 5 in go-carts, moving my way up to the small boats, then the big boats. It's been a long run, and he 'was responsible for it, good or bad.



Laird Pierce



Sandy Ross Collection



Ron Harsin Collection

[Top] Scott Pierce's unlimited driving debut came at the 1981 Champion Spark Plug Regatta in Miami while at the controls of a boat named *Michael's Pride*. He managed a fourth-place finish. [Above] That season ended in Acapulco with the boat renamed *Oh Boy! Oberto*.

What was your first ride in the unlimiteds?

It was in 1981 with Bill Wurster. He had bought the original *U-95* turbine from Chuck King. The boat had been given to Pete LaRock in exchange for some construction work. Pete originally put an Allison engine in it, but it wasn't all that fast. Somewhere along the line, Pete installed a Merlin in it. That helped, but it still didn't do all that well. Chuck King ran it for a couple of years. It wasn't very good. Bill Wurster bought it with a couple of other guys from Edmonds, Washington, and I was hired to drive

it. Danny Heye was hired as crew chief, his first crew chief job. We got that thing running good. In our second race, Detroit, we came in second. We were fourth in National High Points, I got the Rookie of the Year deal, and the boat made every final heat except one that year.

Who sponsored that boat?

We had Great Scott in Evansville and North Tool in Detroit. On the West Coast it was the *Oh Boy! Oberto*. At the end of 1981, they decided that they had a guy who wanted to buy in to the boat and he wanted to drive it. They were



Tony Bugeja

paying me, so they left the guy with the money in the boat, not a kid. So I went on and started driving for Leland and Chuck Hickling. In 1982, I drove the *Bud Light* for Bernie (Little). It was second in the world championship in Houston. I still say today that I won the race. Chip Hanauer and Jim Kropfeld were so far over the line at the start. I thought I had jumped the gun, and they were way ahead of me!

I started to make a name for myself. In 1984, Bill Wurster had Executone telephones as a sponsor, so they ordered a brand-new (Jim) Lucero boat. George Johnson drove it in 1984, but they weren't doing very good with it. The sponsor actually came to me and asked me to consider driving the boat. I thought the boat had a lot of potential. We agreed on a number and then the sponsor told Bill, "Meet your new driver, Scotty Pierce!" He said, "That's my old driver!"

We prepared 13 Rolls Royce Merlin engines that winter. The first race in 1985 was in Miami and I won the darn thing. I had tested

the boat, but that was my first race in the boat. In 1986, I drove the Budweiser Griffon boat on the East Coast, and then in July at Madison I was approached by Rich George, special events manager for Proctor and Gamble. I was standing in the back of the Budweiser truck and he walked up, introduced himself, and said he was going to get P&G involved in the sport. He had done his research and they wanted me to be their driver. They really needed someone who was savvy with the media, and could talk to customers, and also drive a race boat. They needed a full-package deal. So, they offered a number that I couldn't refuse. I went to Bernie and said, "I know I've got a contract, but I have a real opportunity here. You are running a two-boat deal." He gave me his blessings and said, "I wish

you the best." So, I left Budweiser.

We had the marine turbine in the old *Executone* boat for one year and won Detroit with it. That's probably the best drive I ever drove in my life. [Ed: *Mr. Pringles* in 1987]. In 1988, they built a new boat, a Jones design but the crew guys (Danny Heye and Tracy Bratvold) put the boat together. We went to the first race in 1988 in the new boat. That's where Jimmy Kropfeld and I got tangled up. Jimmy ended up breaking his neck. I drowned! I was a dead guy, but they got me back to life. We didn't start off too good. We went to Detroit and I was in really bad shape. I shouldn't have been in the boat. My lungs were just tortured. I climbed in and, luckily, it didn't start one heat. That kept us out of the final. I don't think I would have made five laps. Then we



Don Meck



[Top] Executone at San Diego in 1985. [Above] Mr. Pringles at the Tri-Cities in 1988.



Rick Sullivan

Scott Pierce (left) with Budweiser teammate Tom D'Eath.

came to Madison and they turned everything around. I won the race and went on from there.

In 1989, I had three blow-over accidents in that boat. It was just a weird thing. The crew thought it was me. I was convinced it was them. Bernie had come back to me and said, "Things aren't going real good for you over there." I said, "Yeah, I'm driving with a broken leg, I've got to be picked in and out of the boat, I feel like I'm going to get killed in this thing! He said, "You need to heal. Why don't you take a year off and I'll hire you at a full salary. Technically, you'll be Tommy D'Eath's back-up driver. Tommy's getting a little older and you are the next Budweiser driver."

That was a gift from heaven. I got a check and I had to take the boat out twice the whole year. Tommy got hurt, I think in early 1991. He got his neck broken in a stock car deal down in Charlotte. That put me in the boat and I won the world championship in it.

What was the last year you drove the Bud?

1992. I left the sport in 1991, I bought Seattle Boat Company, a large Cobalt dealership that was bankrupt. Being the genius I am, I bought a bankrupt company and thought I could turn it around. I did. It turned into a successful endeavor. I took the money because I knew what I had been through. At that point I had broken just about

everything in my body. I was 40 years old and still a young man. I took the money and built that business with it. They got Chip to drive the *Bud*, then he crashed at Seattle. I hadn't driven in over a year and a half. I jumped in it and was leading and should have won the race. The rear wing broke, and once that happened, I couldn't keep the boat on the water. George Woods came around and passed me. I was happy for George.

Then you tried car racing?

In 1997 I was driving an unlimited for Fred Leland and it was fast, way faster than his primary boat, the *Pico*. Fred didn't like that because Pico was paying the bills. I had a race-to-race sponsorship. In Detroit, I got the thing over at about 220 mph and really had a severe head injury that they didn't know about until two weeks later. My wife found me wandering around the neighborhood in my bathrobe and thought that something had to be wrong.

At the end of '97, I had always dreamed of racing sprint cars. I just think they are the baddest things to the bone. Eight hundred horsepower



Pierce in the rescue boat following an accident at Miami in 1988.



Pierce aboard the *Trendwest* in 2001.

er in a thousand-pound car sounded like a good deal to me. I bought a sprint car and we ran those for ten years, the last four or five, Oberto was our sponsor. We were very successful, won a bunch of races.

In 2001, Jim Harvey called and asked if I would be willing to drive his unlimited that year. I didn't really want to do it, but I told Sue that the last time I left the sport it was in the back of a meat wagon. We had a tough time. I'd like to go out walking out on my own terms. She agreed and we went out, exorcized all the demons, and did fairly well with the boat. It was a good boat. I was out of boat racing until I got roped into this Grand Prix deal.

I was in a wheelchair five years ago, I couldn't walk. From all the accidents, my back was just gone. One of the tour doctors, one of the best surgeons in the world, said, "I can fix that!" I was in the one percent pain category. That means that only one percent of the people in this world have ever been in that amount of pain. I was stuck in the chair. I couldn't lie down, I couldn't go horizontal, I would scream at the top of my lungs when the pain would hit. I was in bad, bad shape. He performed the operation on me

and said that he would get me back in a race boat. I told him that the last thing I was thinking about was a race boat. Let me just get up and walk without pain. He did the surgery pro bono. He was a big fan, a heck of a guy. He saved my life. The next year, I was driving a Grand Prix boat and loving it.

The first time I met you was here in Madison, the year that you had an accident in Fred Leland's boat while qualifying. You were wearing a parachute, the boat went down, your straps were hooked up in the boat and the boat about pulled you under. Some folks probably don't remember the parachute days. What was the theory back then on the parachute?

The boats had open cockpits and no seat belts. The theory was to get thrown away from the boat. The parachute would open on the back of the life jacket. The parachute would slow you down and put you into the water feet first rather than going in head first and breaking your neck. For the time, it was a good idea and it worked when I came out of the boat. The boat was upside down. It just happened to be

when I surfaced the river, the boat went right by me and the parachute got caught in the rear wing of the boat. I knew the boat would sink, so I told the diver that jumped in to cut the lanyard because the parachute's caught in the boat. He said, "I don't have a knife!" I said, "Get well away from me." He asked why. I told him that I had to swim out of the lifejacket or I would die. He stood by. There are 10 or 15 buckles, zippers... but I swam out of that thing, they stuck me in the litter, started over to the ramp. I looked down and there was a bone sticking through my right arm. It just goes to show you what a human can do with adrenaline. That arm shouldn't have worked at all, but I'm here today. It got me out.

Do you have a favorite boat of all that you drove?

I would have to say that it was the 1985 *Executone* boat, just because it was my first introduction into a good ride. It was a well-prepared boat, had a good crew, a supportive owner and sponsor, and the first race I ever sat in the boat I won. You couldn't write a movie to be any better than that. As far as the best driving boat I ever had, it was definitely the *Miss Budweiser*. It was so well prepared, had so many smart people working on it. It went really fast. I sat up at the Lake Stevens dyno, Budweiser's dyno, many days watching engines make an honest 4,000 horsepower. Today they make maybe 2,650 horsepower if they are lucky. We had some serious horsepower to run with. They have way better hulls today, which is why they go as fast as they go. Today, they are using hull and propeller technology to go fast.

Of all the drivers that you competed against, who, in your opinion, was the best driver?

By far and away, the greatest driver I ever dealt with was Jim Kropfeld. Jim was just an animal. Chip's no slouch and he's a close second, but Jim was tops. He was a tremendous human being. He raced you clean. We were all getting paid a lot of money in those days. There was a lot of stuff going on out there that you don't see so much anymore. There were big salaries at stake. There are only eight or nine of those jobs in the world. Everybody thinks they are a driver. Everyone wants to be a hero. I went deck-to-deck with Jim Kropfeld so many times. It was awesome. What I admired about him the most was he just never had a "quit" attitude in him. That's hard, because sometimes you are behind, you didn't get the lane you wanted, didn't get the turn you wanted. For me, I remember telling myself, Scotty, push the pedal all the way down. I did, and I drove a boat pretty hard. But I remember Kropfeld saying, "Put the throttle down. The thing ain't over. Don't give up!" Jimmy only had one position, and that was down!

Did you ever have just a bad feeling getting in a boat? Thinking, I don't know if I want to do this today, in this boat?

There should have been a lot of them that I had that feeling about. I was standing there with Dean Chenoweth's daughter, Kelly, watching Dean die in Tri-Cities. The year before, I had Bill Muncey in my arms at the beach when he crashed and died. In an article back



in Tri-Cities, they asked me how I could get back in a boat. I said that I never even thought another thing of it. It's what I do. I make a living doing this. This is my job. I don't have thoughts like that. I just got in and did the best I could do with what I had to work with.

When did you start with the Grand Prix boats?

We bought our team in 2010. It's been a long haul. The whole idea from the beginning was exactly what you will see this weekend (at Madison.) The unlimiteds get a lot of criticism because they are so quiet. The GPs are anything but quiet. The unlimiteds have a lot to sell with their technology and their speed, their size, and the competition. But, there is a hole there, and the hole is the noise. The GPs fill that hole very nicely.

When Steve David took over, we go way back, and it took us about 30 days to execute an agreement, Steve's vision for rebuilding the unlimiteds and my vision for building the GPs into a quality show. Touring the country, pulling in lots of fans, attracting sponsors. We are all about spent out. The cost

to run a GP boat today is basically what it cost us in the mid-'80s to run a competitive Merlin program. A couple of hundred thousand dollars a year. Sooner or later, everybody runs out of money. This is our year to prove our worth. Both series will benefit from this new TV package and the enthusiasm that everybody has to see the sport survive and grow. We are thrilled to be a part of it. I'm thrilled to do my part. I have a little more duty than I would like. I run my own marine business and my own race team. Me and one other guy, Larry Linn, the president of GPW, and Shawn Bridgeman, one of the team owner's wives, we basically do all the work. There's nothing left to do but put on a show that everybody enjoys.

Thanks Scott. Good luck with your GPW,

A couple of final notes: Since this interview was conducted last summer, there has been an organizational restructure of GPW and leadership going into the 2016 season. Also, Scott Pierce underwent quintuple bypass surgery in early May of this year. He is now at home in Seattle recovering. We wish him well on his road to a speedy and full recovery.

A visit with hydro broadcaster Steve Montgomery, Part 3.

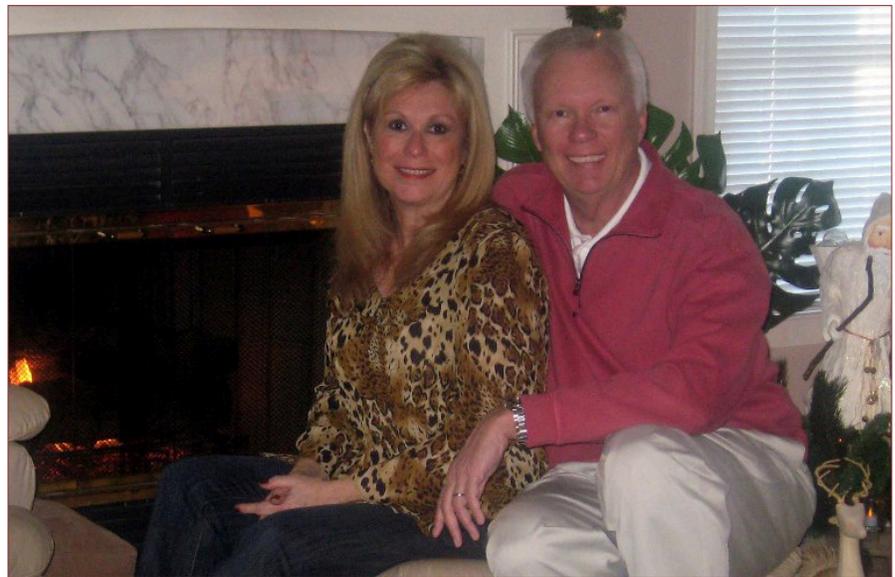
In parts one and two, Steve Montgomery told how he broke into the broadcasting business, his early involvement with unlimited hydroplane racing, various people with whom he worked, and sponsors that he helped bring into the sport. In the final installment of the interview, Montgomery discusses the change in H1 leadership from Sam Cole to Steve David, reviews the 2015 season in relation to his role with the Ellstrom team, and peers into his crystal ball for a look at the 2016 season. The interview was conducted by Craig Fjarlie.

What can you tell us about your current role with the sport?

Well, I had a day-to-day job with H1, which was media relations and running the website and keeping track of social media, which you have to keep track of because of the goof-balls that want to get on there and say things for various reasons, whether it's sponsors or whoever, you don't want on your Facebook page. The website job meant a lot of writing. Creating content is a big part of that job, besides keeping up the website. It was a time-consuming, low-paying job. Actually, two years ago I told Sam Cole I wanted to retire from that. He told me he was putting together a trip to China and some other stuff and would appreciate if I could stay a year and help with all that. So we did, thinking we were going to China. Besides that, in the job I was in, you're in the middle of all the politics.

Oh, yeah.

At my age I was able to deal with it pretty well, but it wasn't much fun a lot of the time. I'm a person who usually gets along with everybody, and there was just so much



Debbie and Steve Montgomery

Steve Montgomery Facebook Page

animosity back and forth between these people and those people. I finally went to Steve David. I told him what I wanted to do. He said, "Would you still be willing if we had streaming and needed an announcer or something?" I said, "We could talk about that as long as it didn't involve every day." I mean, I probably averaged over an hour a day, two, three, and then there were days I didn't do much. And there were days when I worked all day on that stuff. Things like my business suffered as a result. That business is fun and it makes some actual money when I put a little time into it.

You've been on TV doing ads and things.

Yes and I wanted to get back to doing more of that here in my golden years. I still don't know how I got to be 70 and 71. And, now 72. That's like the last decade or two slipped away. Still do some streaming and voice work for the sport. There is a fairly unique skill set involved for a lot of that stuff and it helps if you have your own studio. We don't have a lot of people with TV experience. I enjoy listening to Brad Luce and Jeff Ayler on PA systems, but TV is a different

animal, technically and style wise. Mark Allen is a real pro and I was glad to see him take over the KIRO-TV broadcast. I enjoyed working with Bill Weber and I thought he did a nice job for us. He got into some political problems. The sport had financial issues. We had a production company that had financial issues. Bill didn't get all the money he was supposed to so he was justifiably upset. But I enjoyed the work he did. I'm way past the point where my ego was involved. That's actually an important thing to say. I have a kind of a low profile as a personality in the sport. It wasn't like some of the guys who have been... I won't say any names, but there are certain names. "Oh, he was the greatest announcer ever." When I was announcing the sport, it was never about me. It was about the boats and the people.

Yeah.

So I didn't end up being a big personality in the sport. I was just the guy who announced the races. But for that reason it wasn't too long before I got over the whole ego part. At this point I had none of



Chris Denslow

that left the last decade or two. So, it was, "Weren't you disappointed when Bill Weber became the anchor?" And I said, "No, I'm happy to listen to somebody else if they do a good job." For me it's not about me wanting to do it. It's about wanting the sport to look and sound good, which was always my goal whether I was announcing a race or running the website, writing a story. Try to make the thing look and sound as good as it could with whatever ability I had.

You're doing some work now for Erick Ellstrom.

I am the webmaster and social media guy for Erick Ellstrom. Take

a look at ellstromracing.com and you can see the new website we have.

How did the arrangement with Ellstrom come about?

We were in Doha and there was political stuff going on. I just got kinda fed up. There was one night I didn't sleep much because you're on this time change. We woke up in the morning and I told Debbie, "I'm gonna quit or retire from the H1 job." And Debbie said, "Well, we like going to the races. We like the people." And I said, "Do you realize we could still do all that and not be busy all day? We'd have some time to talk to the people." With the H1 job, we had to be in the pits early in the morning, and we were the last people out of there at night when they were shutting down the media trailer. Debbie would have dinner reservations with friends at 7:30 and I'd be updating the website at 7:30. So, I just figured we needed to do one or the other.

I had developed a good relationship with Erick and liked his family and the team. He was looking for help with his Internet presence, so we agreed to work together. This little job gives me

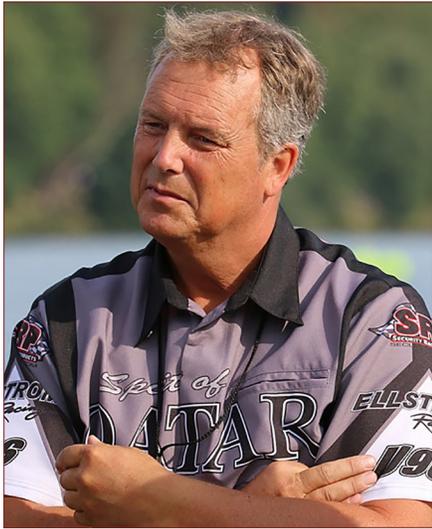


Steve Montgomery Facebook Page

Montgomery teaches a group of children about hydroplane racing.

contact with the sport and gets us to the races with about the right amount of work. Now Erick and his son have gone off-road racing in addition to the H1 team, so there is a whole new sport to follow. You can see how we set up ellstromracing.com to do that.

Let's talk about the 2015 season and your work for Erick Ellstrom. Madison had weather problems and the boat didn't run. The next race was the Gold Cup in Tri-Cities. Aside from the call in the final heat, how do you feel Jean Theoret did in his first race in the boat? Did it take a while for him



H1 Unlimiteds



Bill Osborne

Erick Ellstrom [top] and Jean Theoret [above].

to feel comfortable in it, or was he ready to go right away?

I really felt bad for Jean. He is such a good guy and he just couldn't catch a break. There's no debating that the boat was fast with him driving. And small mistakes led to big disappointment for him and his team. Change about three seconds of the season and he wins the Gold Cup and maybe the season championship.

For a moment the team thought they had won the Gold Cup, but it was taken away because Theoret went inside a buoy before the start. What was the reaction by Theoret and members of the team when the call was made?

Jean and his owner and crew are all veterans. They have won and lost a lot of races. I saw disappointment on a lot of faces, but no one was all that emotional. Just like after the accident in Detroit, everyone moved on and went back to work.

At Seattle, Theoret hit a buoy in the second heat. Was he under pressure and trying too hard, or just a victim of a wake that pushed the boat around and caused the buoy incident?

I didn't see what happened and never really asked about it. You could probably chalk it up to racing hard in rough water.

Then in Detroit, the boat went over. Theoret wasn't badly hurt. There was some damage to the boat. What happened, exactly?

I think it's the same thing we said about Steve David earlier. A more

conservative approach to that turn would have produced a better result. But that's not the way these guys are wired. You see the top drivers constantly pushing it. That's why they are the top drivers. If Jean gets through that turn okay he probably wins that heat and maybe the race. The boat was strong. Like I said, he couldn't catch a break and little mistakes bit him hard.

The boat didn't go to San Diego. Had the accident not happened in Detroit, do you think it would have gone to San Diego, or was there never a plan to go there? Was the fact that San Diego doesn't pay full prize money a factor in the decision to stay home?

I can't speak for Erick, but I don't think the prize money was a factor. There was a delay getting the hardware back from Detroit and there was also a little more damage than Mike Hanson thought originally. With all that in play, I think the boat still would have been in San Diego if they were in the hunt for the series championship.

How do you see the sport in its current situation? Can Steve David pull it together?

Steve is a really good guy to be trying to pull it together. All the positive energy has really been a good thing. You know, there are people who picture Steve as a smiling face front man and he's really a lot more than that.

If you know about his businesses in Florida, you can get past the smiling face and know that he does have the skill.

Sure, absolutely. The issues that have been problems over the years are still there and he's working through them. The first few weeks, he and I would be talking and he would be telling me about some struggle he was having with owners or whoever and I'd say, "Welcome to Sam Cole's life." And he'd say, "I'm beginning to understand." Sam kept it pretty tight-lipped, except he would share with some of us who were close, some of his frustration. He just dealt with a lot of that stuff without really burdening anybody else. It's tough. It's herding cats, you know?

Yeah.

Trying to get this group of guys all going the same direction, it's tough because of the financials. If there was money to throw around, everything would be a lot better. You gotta do it with smoke and mirrors. The sport's at a really critical time right now for a lot of reasons. The next year or two will tell a lot. I don't think there's anybody better to have in the chair than Steve David.

Yeah, yeah.

There are other people who were talked about who would've scared me. The problem with it, like almost anything else in life, is—since I first got involved in the sport—there has always been a group or some person running the thing and a bunch of people talking about how it should be run and how I would do it and we should do this, we should do that. There certainly was a lot of it through the decades. And those people, it's one of those things where a little



Bruce Madej (left) and Walt Ottenad.

bit of knowledge is dangerous. They look at the thing and they see what's going on and they go, "Well, I could do this better." Well, you have no idea what it takes to keep all the race sites afloat and all the race teams afloat and keep 'em all working together and agreeing on how things should be done, you know? Until you're in Sam's chair, or Steve's chair, you have absolutely no idea what the job is like. And it's thankless. There's nobody out there going, "Well, great job. You kept that race on the schedule." It's taken for granted. And then when you lose one, "Well, you should've been able to save that. You should've done this, you should've done that." But like I said, it's a critical time. You know, Sam used the term that he had race sites and teams on life support, which to a large degree is true. I don't like to think of it that negatively, but I would say that within two years from today we will know what the future is and if there is a future. It's gonna go through a really critical time here.

But now you're not working directly with Steve David.

I would've enjoyed working with Steve, the little bit I got to do it. It was pretty enjoyable. But I had decided by then, realistically, when you get into your 70s, you need to change your work a little bit, you know? Debbie and I have some other things we want to do. We have very seldom been on a trip in the last 13 years that didn't involve hydroplanes. And whenever we did we'd go, "Wow, this is pretty cool." We get up in the morning, we don't have to go to the pits. We can go have breakfast and play golf. We want to do more of that. We have 12 grandkids, four of 'em are in Wisconsin. The rest of them are here. Just getting around to all of them is time consuming.

Oh, yeah.

So that was basically the basis for the decision. You know, I've always done what I could for the sport and I will continue to do that, but not in any situation that requires a daily, time-consuming responsibility. It's a relief already because you'll hear of an issue, this is happening, or how do I make this sound good or

look good? I don't have to. Somebody else can do that. Bruce Madej is a very capable guy.

Yes, he is.

He's retired, so he has time now. And if Bruce has any issue, and I've talked to him about this, "You're not going to be running a department with eight people like you were at Michigan where you had a web writer and a Facebook girl, etc., etc., etc." The job grew up around me, so it was what I could do. But I was a one-man band. Bruce is not going to be as hands-on with a lot of stuff as I was. They have to figure out how to cover those bases and they're making progress. You know Lisa Courneya, Walt's Lisa, is going to help Bruce on the technical side. There should be three or four people in that department and all they can afford is part of one person. I'll tell you something, if it weren't for Walt and Lisa... People have no idea how valuable they are

to this sport. Walt is basically the I.T. guy. Everything Internet would collapse in a couple of weeks without Walt Ottenad.

The whole Go Pro camera program, that's a pretty big step. We had chased Go Pro around for years. Sam worked on 'em. I just happened to come across a contact. It was a name and I managed to track him down. This was early in '14, like in January. I ended up talking to the right guy. Got him some video, got him interested, and we ended up with \$50,000 worth of Go Pro cameras we didn't have to buy. They have used our stuff on their channels. They got excited about our sport. They went from not interested to very excited, which when you think about all the stuff they have going on is pretty amazing.

Yeah.

That's been a good deal, which will grow, I think. As long as Walt's

involved it'll grow and go on, anyway. So now I get to sit back and kinda watch what happens, along with you and everybody else.

There have been times when the boat count was a problem.

I was in Don Jones' office when he was on the phone, pleading. He had to get six boats to Miami and he only had four, you know? Ken Muscatel went through the same thing with Hawaii a couple of years.

Yeah, they had to bring a museum boat over to make eight. The Quasi Ka'i.

I rode in that boat. I have a picture in my office of me riding in that boat with Scott Pierce. We were pulling away from the dock and Debbie is standing there like this. She was brand new at the time. She's going, "What the hell is this thing all about?" It was neat, even though it was the Quasi Ka'i. One of the images in my mind was the time (the original) *Hawaii Ka'i* hadn't been racing, but the crew brought it out and Jack Regas drove it and won Seafair.

1958; won the Gold Cup.

I was not at that race. I was watching it on television. The boat was sitting at the dock. Regas was sitting in it and they had a microphone down by him. He goes, "Look at all these people. Man, if you won this thing you'd be famous." I had that image in my mind and then I rode in that boat, in my mind. And I thought, this is what it was like out there. Imagine going 30 miles an hour faster with



Lon Erickson

Montgomery interviews driver Brian Perkins.

boats all around you. But I'm really glad I had that experience. Bernie offered me once an opportunity to drive a Bud turbine boat and I wasn't interested. Now I kinda wish I had. I don't remember what year it was, but they were building T-6. He said to me, "You want to drive one of these?" I said, "I don't think so." He said, "When we get our new boat ready and we know it's OK, you can drive the old boat if you want to." And I said, "Mmm, I'll pass." And that's funny 'cause I was younger then than I am now, and now I think I'd want to do it. I saw August Busch IV get in one in San Diego and go around and around and around, 130 miles an hour. Piece of cake. Well, I could've done that, you know?

Looking ahead to the 2016 season, which is almost here, what do you see for the sport as a whole this year?

I think the sport you see on the water in 2016 will be just fine. As of today (March 7) seven or eight owners have committed to be in Madison and Detroit. Ten or 11 boats should show up for the western races. So boat count does not appear to be a big problem. Steve David is working on some creative ways to make traveling more attractive to owners on the bubble. He continues to work with potential race sites and time will tell whether or not the five-race season will expand. By the time you run this, a lot of the questions will be answered. Right now we are in a time of the year where things are always up in the air. This year is certainly no exception. Fans just need to be realistic. Motorsports are all having to try to do more

with less. The Indy 500 was huge when I was a kid. I sat glued to the radio all day with my dad. Look at that series now. Even NASCAR is down in sponsorship and attendance. People in online forums want the sport to get back to where it was in the 50's. You can't do that. All you can be is the best you can be in the next couple of decades ... working with what you have.

Do you expect the U-96 to run at most races? We're hearing the boat may not go to Madison...

Again—as of today—Erick is keeping his plans close to the vest. I would love to have some juicy content for the website and Facebook, so I bug him at least once a week. I am aware of some things he is working on, but I can't really answer that question with the knowledge I have right now. We'll have an answer before you print this. I will say this. He likes winning the high-point championship. To do that, you have to go to all five races.

That's about all the questions we have. This has been a fascinating and informative conversation. Thank you.

My pleasure. I appreciate your interest. When I look back on the last 40 years, I put a lot of time and energy into the sport and it has been a big part of my life. For that, I have been richly rewarded in terms of people I have met, things I have seen, trips I have taken, etc. Whenever I thought about stepping away and devoting my time to something else, I would be at a meeting or banquet the sport was having, and I would realize that many of my best friends in the world were right there. The sport gave me tremendous opportunities to experience people and places I would never have known otherwise and I'm grateful for that. In return, I just hope people know my part was always done to the best of my ability. We will see you at the races this summer.



Heritage

Historical Perspective



Craig Fjarlie

Collapses

At the Master's Golf Tournament earlier this year, Jordan Spieth seemed well on the way to victory. Going into the back nine holes in the final round, he was leading by five strokes. Then, everything went wrong. He ended up finishing second, losing by three strokes. Some sportswriters called his loss one of the biggest collapses in sports history. One writer compared Spieth's collapse to other stunning losses in professional sports. Of course, collapses in unlimited hydroplane racing weren't included. No one should collapse in surprise at that. All the same, there have been a number of collapses on the nation's race courses.

The one significant thing to keep in mind is that unlimited racing is a mechanical sport, so collapses can be caused by mechanical failure as often as by driving error. Following, then, are some – but certainly not all of unlimited racing's most stunning collapses.

At the 1952 Gold Cup on Lake Washington, Chuck Thompson had two preliminary heat victories with *Miss Pepsi*. He was unable to start the final and lost the race to Stan Dollar and *Slo-mo-shun IV*.

The final race of the 1962 season was at Lake Tahoe. Bill Muncey had driven *Miss Century 21* to victory in every race up to that point. Finally, a mechanical failure caught up with C-21 and *Miss*

Bardahl won the Tahoe race, spoiling Muncey's quest for a perfect season.

Miss Madison surprised the hydro world when it won the Gold Cup on home water in 1971. The team followed that with a victory in the Atomic Cup in Tri-Cities, which meant the boat was suddenly in contention for the national championship. But at Seafair, *Madison's* Allison engine was timed wrong and it finished only one heat in fourth. That was the collapse that

took it out of the running for the national championship.

In 1975, Billy Schumacher and *Weisfield's* won two races at the start of the season. It appeared the team was on its way to the national championship. At Dayton, *Weisfield's* won two preliminary heats before disaster struck in the final. The boat lost its prop shaft and failed to finish. It then completed only one heat at races in Detroit, Tri-Cities, and San Diego. That



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



The *Miss Century 21* [top] and the *Weisfield's*.

allowed George Henley to drive *Pay 'n Pak* past *Weisfield's* to earn the national championship, although Schumacher did hang on to claim the driving title.

Muncey was on another victory march in 1978 with *Atlas Van Lines*. He won all the early races and appeared to have Tri-Cities in the bag when mechanical failure struck. Coming out of turn one half-way through the final heat, Atlas slowed to a crawl and gave the victory to Ron Snyder in *Miss Budweiser*. Once again, Muncey's quest for a perfect season collapsed.

The Griffon-powered *Miss Budweiser* also was a victim of an unexpected collapse. In 1982 at Houston, Jim Kropfeld appeared well on the way to victory when the boat ran out of fuel on the last lap of the final heat. It was one of owner Bernie Little's most heartbreaking and frustrating losses.

Miller High Life had a similar collapse at Madison in 1988. Chip Hanauer was coming off the final turn of the final heat when the boat suddenly went dead in the water. Scott Pierce slipped by and won the race at the wheel of *Mr. Pringles*.

In 1999, Hanauer won three races, including the Gold Cup, with *Miss Pico*. The boat flipped at Tri-Cities, which started a collapse that took it out of contention for the national championship.

Jimmy King appeared to be on the way to his first unlimited victory aboard *Master Tire* at Evansville in 2009. He was leading the final when the propeller broke, ending his day.

Golfer Jordan Spieth has our sympathy. For competitive people, it's difficult to accept losing at any time. When victory is almost within grasp and the world collapses instead, it's frustrating, maddening, and heartbreaking. Chuck Thompson, Bill Muncey, Jim McCormick, Billy Schumacher, Jim Kropfeld, Chip Hanauer, and Jimmy King all experienced the same emotion. Their fans on the shore could sympathize. However, that's what makes the sporting world, and hydroplane racing in particular, interesting.

Nothing is absolutely certain. There's always the possibility of a surprise collapse waiting around the next turn.

Shane returns to Madison team.

Continued from page 3

champion efforts. Jimmy and Dan have worked together for many years, are close friends and have been a part of our team's success the last two years, which make's Dan's promotion to crew chief very seamless."

Hoover has worked on unlimited race crews for many years. He assisted with the turbines on the *Appian Jeronimo* in the late 1990s and joined Kim Gregory's U.S.A. Racing Partners team in 2001, eventually becoming crew chief three years later, then left unlimited racing to work on turbine-powered catamarans in Florida. He returned in 2013 to be on the crew of the U-5 *Graham Trucking*, which won the season championship with Shane at the wheel, then moved to the Miss Madison team the following year when Shane became that team's driver.

During the past two seasons he has had a number of different responsibilities on the team, including propellers, shore-to-cockpit radio communications, and engine/gearbox "on deck".



Dayton Holcomb

The *Miller High Life*.

THE 2016 SEASON

JULY 2-3: Indiana Governor's Cup; Madison, Indiana

JULY 23-25: Columbia Cup; Tri-Cities, Washington

AUGUST 5-7: Albert Lee Cup at Seafair; Seattle, Washington

AUGUST 26-28: APBA Gold Cup; Detroit, Michigan

SEPTEMBER 16-18: Bayfair Bill Muncey Cup; San Diego, California

HydroFile

Race Team News



Lon Erickson

U-1 MISS HOMESTREET BANK

With the Madison team getting things sorted out, it's full speed ahead getting the new HomeStreet Bank paint scheme finished, and hardware and systems re-installed. New crew chief Dan Hoover (right) leads the way, preparing the boat for the June testing session on the Columbia River in Tri-Cities.



Tyler Hanson



H1 Unlimiteds

U-5/U-7 PORTER RACING

Team Porter Racing has posted a "sneak peek" of one of their hulls being painted recently (below), though it is not clear which hull it is. Other sources have reported the U-5 will be participating in the June testing session in Tri-Cities.



Porter Racing

U-3 Go3 RACING

Cooper Racing continues work on the hull, repairing the typical racing wear and tear, and taking care of the usual off-season maintenance that should be done every winter. That's Ed Cooper and Rick Bowles in the photo below right, working on the carbon fiber near the cockpit. At this point, the search for sponsorship continues and no definitive word on racing in 2016 yet.



Kirk Duncan



Go3 Race Team

U-11 URG/MISS PETERS & MAY

Scott Raney and the crew have been busy getting brackets and hardware magnafluxed, per the H1 rulebook, and re-installing them. In addition, engine work is coming together for a third complete engine for the Peters & May team. The team has worked with two truly competitive motors since its inception in 2011. Now, they will have three complete engines in their racing program. Scott has also been working with a motor from the U-100 Leland camp, getting it back into running shape for their season. The photo at right shows what race teams face when they compete on salt water. Salt water and spray can get ingested into the motor and when the water is boiled off, salt residue is left on the turbine vanes. This salt buildup disrupts the airflow and balance and also makes the engine temperature go up. To correct the problem, the part will be lightly blasted and cleaned thoroughly so it can be used again. The other photo shows the Leland motor stripped down and ready to clean. It takes many hours of work, post race and all winter, to field an H1 unlimited race team.



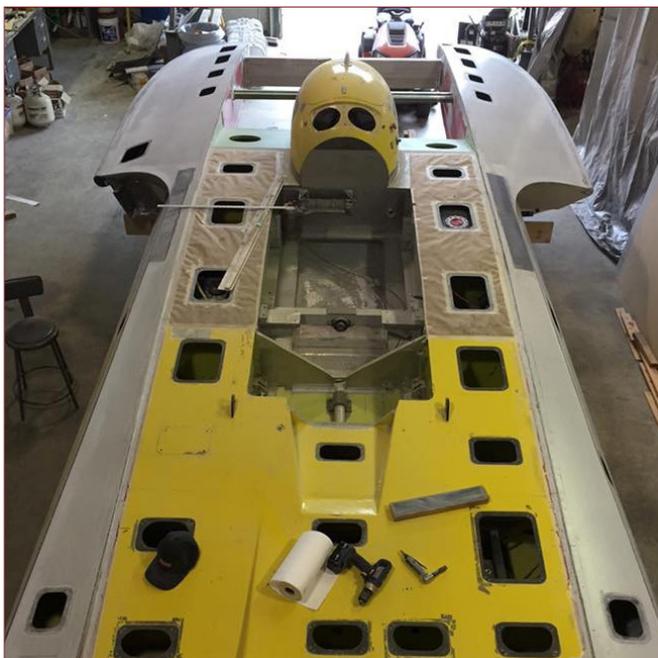
Scott Raney



Scott Raney

U-18 BUCKET LIST RACING

The rebuild of the U-18 continues in the Bucket List shop. New decks are on (below) and boat has been flipped over to work on the running surfaces. They are also aiming towards attending the June testing session in Tri-Cities.



Bucket List Racing

U-21 GO FAST TURN LEFT RACING

Owner Greg O'Farrell announced a partnership with Darrell Strong and Payne West Insurance as U-21 title sponsors for the 2016 MainSource Bank Indiana Governor's Cup and HAPO Columbia Cup. The U-21 team is in the final stages of preparation for the 2016 season, with many different systems and hardware installations. That's Brian Perkins testing the cockpit.



Go Fast Turn Left Race Team

U-27 WIGGINS RACING

The U-27 crew is working on installing hardware (top photo below) and replacing some critical pieces on the boat, such as the canopy (the other two photos below)



Wiggins Race Team



Wiggins Race Team



Wiggins Race Team

U-100 LELAND UNLIMITED

The Leland Unlimited team is finalizing sponsorship plans for 2016. CARSTAR returns with larger involvement and is bringing an iconic “to be announced” regional Northwest friend with them on the boat. Last season’s red, white, and blue color scheme is gone from the boat. Hardware and systems will start going back on soon, along with a new color scheme.



Lon Erickson



Lon Erickson



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**NEXT MEETING OF
UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS**

Sunday, June 12, 2016
Meeting starts at 2 p.m.

Kingsgate Public Library
12507 NE 144th Street
Kirkland, Washington 98034

YOU ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND!