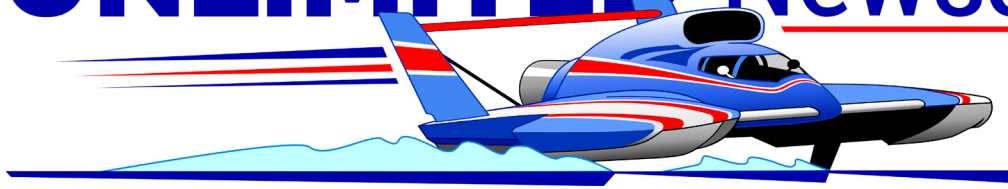


# UNLIMITED NewsJournal

A CHRONICLE OF SPEED



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## Fearless Freddie Alter passes away at age 94.



BY ANDY MUNTZ

**F**red Alter rarely earned a spot in the winner's circle, but he made a significant mark on the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing, nevertheless. Always living life to its fullest and known for his lead foot, which earned him the nickname "Fearless Fred-

die," he spent parts of 21 seasons driving the big boats, sat in the cockpit of more hulls than anyone else in the modern history of the sport, was an owner for two years, served as the commissioner of the sport for three, and was inducted into both the Unlimited Hall of Fame (1983) and the Michigan Motor Sports Hall of Fame (2013).

Alter passed away in Palm Beach, Florida, on January 9 at 94 years of age. Some believe he may have been the last surviving driver from the Golden Age of unlimited hydroplane racing.

Born in Detroit, Alter had a passion for boat racing that was stimulated by hanging around Kean's Harbor, where the race boats were. He raced sailboats

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**Alter's success in the 1955 Silver Cup was enough to catch the eye of two of the top team owners in Detroit. ... Driving for those two, Alter would stay busy for the next three seasons.**

on the Detroit River and then graduated to small limited-class hydros such as his 48-cubic-inch-class boat named *Fancy Pants*. He remained active in local limited races well into the 1950s.

He also got involved as a crew member on some Detroit Unlimited-class entries. He was on the team when Bob Harvey entered his *Fickle Eye IV* in the 1949 Gold Cup and Silver Cup contests. Though the boat failed to start the former and couldn't finish the latter, Alter was hooked and continued his involvement, eventually becoming a member of the *Miss Detroit* team at the 1955 Silver Cup.

Bill Stroh, the boat's owner, had hired Ray Crawford of El Monte, California, to drive in the race. A decorated pilot in World War II, Crawford was an experienced car racer. The year before he had won the five-day, 2,000-mile Carrera Panamericana open road race across Mexico and four months earlier had become the only person in history to drive the entire 12 Hours of Sebring event without relief. Crawford would later become a top Formula 1 competitor and would start three Indianapolis 500 races, finishing fourth in 1958.

But boat racing turned out to be another matter.

The other drivers had expressed their misgivings about Crawford's lack of experience in a race boat when the drivers' committee barred him from competing in the Gold Cup three weeks before the Silver Cup, but Stroh hired him anyway. Then, during the boat's first preliminary heat, Crawford committed what would become the event's only incident. He cut too sharply around the buoys in the first turn, nearly collided with the judge's stand, and was disqualified.

Accounts differ as to whether Crawford

voluntarily relinquished his seat after the near accident or whether it was Stroh who had seen enough, but Fred Alter was invited to take the controls the next time out. In his first heat of Unlimited competition, Alter finished a close second place behind Bill Muncey in *Miss Thriftway* and outpaced both Bill Braden in *Miss Supertest II* and that year's Gold Cup winner Lee Schoenith in *Gale V*. He couldn't get the boat to start for the final heat, however.

Alter's success in the 1955 Silver Cup was enough to catch the eye of two of the top team owners in Detroit: Jack Schafer, the owner of the *Such Crust* line of hydroplanes, and George Simon, the owner of the *Miss U.S.* boats. Driving for those two, Alter would stay busy for the next three seasons.

In 1956 and '57, he saw action in both *Such Crust III* and a pair of *Miss U.S. I* boats. His first podium finish was a third-place effort aboard *Such Crust III* at the 1956 International Boundary event in St. Clair, Michigan, and he placed second at the 1956 Rogers Memorial Trophy in Washington, D.C., with *Miss U.S. I*.

His first victory came in early October that year at the Indiana Governor's Cup in Madison, Indiana, an event that attracted six entries from Detroit. At the controls of *Miss U.S. I*, Alter finished just a whisker behind Bud Saile in *Miss Wayne* in the day's first heat but was a winner from that point on, taking both remaining heats with an average speed of just 89 mph.

Alter's second victory, and perhaps his most significant, came in his first outing for the 1957 season, a wind-swept Detroit Memorial that featured an extremely rough Detroit River. It was those conditions, in fact, that made the victory

Fred Alter was on the crew of the *Miss Detroit* in 1955 when he was asked to substitute for driver Ray Crawford for the second preliminary heat. That started a driving career that lasted 21 seasons and put him in the cockpit of a greater number of different hulls than anyone else in the modern history of Unlimited racing.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

possible, as Alter was at the controls of *Such Crust III*, a monstrous blue and white craft—35 feet long, weighing 10,000 pounds, and with twin Allison engines—that could cut through the ocean-like waves as though it was the *Queen Mary*.

Twelve boats attended, all from Detroit and other eastern locations, but only nine competed, and that number quickly dwindled as a result of the heavy seas and winds that gusted to 28 mph.

In Alter's first heat, he was leading the pack when *Miss Supertest II* collided with *Such Crust's* wake and the pounding waves and threw Art Asbury from the cockpit and into the water. The race was immediately stopped but *Supertest* continued on its way, cruising along at idle without a driver, until Jack Bartlow jumped aboard from a patrol boat and steered it back to the pits. The heat was declared complete and Alter was crowned its winner.

By the time the second heat rolled around, the field had been reduced to only five boats—*Gale V* had lost a sponsor in its first heat, *Gale VI* had lost its entire prop shaft, and both *Short Circuit* and *Miss Ricochet* were badly damaged. Alter was again victorious, holding off Bob Schroeder in *Wildroot Charlie* and averaging about 83 mph, but this time he paid a price. *Such Crust* returned to the pits with the running surface on its right sponson completely torn off and with layers of the plywood bottom between its sponsons peeling away.



Sandy Ross Collection



Tony Bugeja Collection

**TOP:** Fred Alter drove the giant twin-engined *Such Crust III* to victory in the 1957 Detroit Memorial. **MIDDLE:** Alter enjoys a laugh with Jack Schafer, the owner of the *Such Crust* boats. **ABOVE:** Alter alternated between the *Such Crust* and George Simon's *Miss U.S. I*. This is the boat he drove for Simon in 1956 and claimed his first race victory: the Indiana Governor's Cup

Tony Bugejia Collection



Byron Lang



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



**TOP:** Fred Alter drove a new *Miss U.S. I* in 1957, shown here at the Gold Cup in Seattle. He was driving it when he won the 1958 International Cup. **MIDDLE:** In 1959 and 1960 Alter drove Joe Schoenith's second *Gale VI*, another big twin-engined boat. **ABOVE:** Alter returned to Jack Schafer's team in 1961 as the pilot of *Such Crust IV*. The boat suddenly came apart as Alter was driving it at the 1961 President's Cup on the Potomac River in Washington. He suffered only minor injuries.

At first it looked as if the boat would join those no longer able to compete, but with the efforts of Walt Kade and the crew, the officials finally allowed it to start. So, when the starting gun fired, Alter was there with Asbury and Schroeder by his side.

The three boats plowed their way through the first turn together, then Alter nudged the *Such Crust* ahead. The *Miss Supertest*, using a brand-new Rolls Griffon engine that Asbury had been instructed not to push too heavily, stayed comfortably behind and never offered a challenge. In the end, Alter and the *Such Crust III* crossed the finish line four seconds ahead of the Canadian entry with an average speed of 85.7 mph.

Two months later, Alter was back on the Detroit River for the Silver Cup, but this time in much better weather, at the controls of a new *Miss U.S. I*, and facing some of the speedy boats from the West Coast. After failing to finish the first preliminary heat, Alter was drawn in Heat 2B where he would face Jack Regas in *Hawaii Ka'i III* and Bill Stead in *Maverick*, two of the fastest boats on the circuit.

With his heavy foot, Alter managed to gain a lead over both Regas and Stead through the first two laps, but as he headed wide around the tighter of the two turns during the third lap, the sponsorship on the *Miss U.S. I* grabbed a wave and pitched Alter 25 feet from the cockpit into the water.

Regas saw the incident from about 200 yards behind. "Fred shot out of the *Miss U.S.* like a rocket," he told a reporter afterward. "He hit the water and tumbled like a rag doll."

Regas immediately cranked his *Hawaii Ka'i* into a tight turn to avoid hitting Alter, cut the engine, and dived overboard to help his fellow driver as *Maverick*, *Gale VI*, and *Wildroot Charlie* came roaring toward them from behind. Disaster was averted when the other drivers miraculously avoided the two bobbing heads of Regas and Alter, who was paddling his way back to his boat. He

casually yelled to Regas, “Thanks, Jack,” climbed aboard, started the engine, and drove it back to the pits.

Alter won his third race the following year in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, where he was driving the *Miss U.S. I* in the 1958 International Cup, an event that included only three other Detroit-based entries. He finished second behind Lee Schoenith in *Gale VI* in the first two heats, but while leading in the final heat the *Gale* boat suddenly took a hop, rolled over, and sank. Fortunately, Schoenith was not injured and the boat was not seriously damaged, but the acci-

dent eliminated them from the race. The final heat was declared finished and Alter was awarded the trophy.

Alter drove Samuel DuPont’s *Nitrogen* at the 1958 Sahara Cup then joined the Gale team in 1959, where he drove a new *Gale VI*, another twin-engined monster that replaced the boat that had rolled over in Elizabeth City. His best showing was at the International Boundary event in St. Clair, where he placed second behind Chuck Thompson in *Miss Detroit*. He appeared only once in 1960, failing to qualify the boat for the Detroit Memorial, then returned to Jack Schafer’s team to

drive *Such Crust IV* in 1961.

Alter was awarded a second-place trophy in the Silver Cup, a race that was canceled after the first set of preliminary heats because of the death of Bob Hayward in *Miss Supertest II*, then suffered his own accident at the President’s Cup that would earn him the moniker of Fearless Freddie.

He had taken a third-place finish in the first preliminary heat and was cruising along at about 140 mph in the second when the right sponson suddenly broke away and the entire right side of his boat came apart. Alter later described to Joe Dowdell of the *Detroit Free Press* what came next:

“I don’t know what happened,” he said. “The boat was traveling along smoothly. I know it didn’t bounce, but suddenly it seemed to stop dead. I was slammed against the steering wheel and the dashboard. The water pressure shot me into the air. I guess my momentum kept me going forward with the wreckage, because I remember seeing the boat still moving under me. I came down in the cockpit with one leg up on the deck.”

This time, Alter wasn’t going to drive the boat back to the pits after the mishap. Instead, the *Such Crust* was beginning to

## FRED ALTER’S DRIVING STATS

YEAR	BOAT	RACE RESULTS				HEAT RESULTS					
		RACES	1st	2nd	3rd	START	FINISH	1st	Pct.	Top 3	Pct.
1955	Miss Detroit	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0.000	1	1.000
1956	Such Crust III	7	0	0	1	7	4	2	0.500	2	0.500
	Miss U.S. I	5	1	1	0	9	5	2	0.400	4	0.800
1957	Such Crust III	2	1	0	0	3	3	3	1.000	3	1.000
	Miss U.S. I	4	0	0	1	8	5	0	0.000	3	0.600
1958	Miss U.S. I	8	1	1	0	19	14	5	0.357	10	0.714
	Nitrogen	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0.000	1	1.000
1959	Gale VI	4	0	1	0	7	6	1	0.167	4	0.667
1960	Gale VI	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0	0.000
1961	Such Crust IV	4	0	1	1	9	8	1	0.125	6	0.750
1962	Such Crust IV	6	0	0	0	14	10	0	0.000	6	0.600
1963	Mariner Too	3	0	0	0	2	0	0	0.000	0	0.000
	Gale V	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0	0.000
1964	Blue Chip	4	0	0	0	5	4	0	0.000	2	0.500
1965	Blue Chip	4	0	0	0	7	5	1	0.200	2	0.400
	Such Crust IV	3	1	0	0	6	6	3	0.500	5	0.833
1966	Miss Dixi Cola	6	0	1	0	17	16	1	0.063	13	0.813
1967	Mariner Too	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0.000	0	0.000
	PARCO O-Ring Miss	3	0	1	0	6	5	2	0.400	5	1.000
1968	PARCO O-Ring Miss	8	0	0	0	13	7	0	0.000	7	1.000
1969	Miss Budweiser II	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0.000	0	0.000
	Miss Owensboro	1	0	0	0	3	3	0	0.000	2	0.667
	Miss Schweppes	1	0	0	1	3	3	2	0.667	2	0.667
	Miss Bardahl	2	0	0	1	6	5	2	0.400	3	0.600
1970	Miss Budweiser II	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0.000	0	0.000
1971	Towne Club	3	0	0	1	9	9	0	0.000	5	0.556
1972	Towne Club	5	0	0	0	13	10	1	0.100	9	0.900
1973	Gale's Roostertail	5	0	0	1	10	7	1	0.143	7	1.000
	Pizza Pete	2	0	0	1	7	7	1	0.143	6	0.857
	Miss Cauffiel	2	0	0	1	6	5	3	0.600	4	0.800
	Miss Lapeer	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0	0.000
1974	Atlas Van Lines II	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.000	0	0.000
	Pizza Pete	2	0	1	1	7	6	2	0.333	6	1.000
	Gale's Roostertail	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0.000	0	0.000
1975	Miss Vernors	3	0	0	0	7	4	1	0.250	4	1.000
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>108</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>0.214</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>0.767</b>



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



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**ABOVE:** In 1962 Alter was driving a new *Such Crust IV*, another boat powered by twin Allison engines. He returned to the boat in 1965 (when this photo was taken) and drove it to victory in the South Shore Trophy race.

**RIGHT:** Alter was hired to drive *Blue Chip* in 1964. The boat had previously raced as the *Breathless II* from 1957 to 1960.

sink with him stuck in the cockpit. But, like Regas four years before in Detroit, Bob Schroeder saw the accident ahead of him, immediately cut the engine on *Gale VII*, and swam to Alter's rescue. He was taken to the hospital, treated for a gash in his right arm and a wrenched shoulder, and was back in the pits in time to watch the day's final heat.

"I guess I'm about the luckiest guy in the world to be alive," Alter told friends the next day as the demolished *Such Crust IV* was raised from the bottom of the Potomac River. And, from that point on, Alter would become a crusader for driver safety, pushing for improved life jackets and a mandate that all helmets be painted bright orange so that a driver would be more visible to others while in the water.

Schafer had a new *Such Crust IV* built for the 1962 season and he asked Alter to once again be at the steering wheel, but the best the team could do that year was a fourth-place finish in the President's Cup. Then, he joined Jim Herrington's team in 1963 and drove the *Mariner Too*, but it became a year in which he failed to finish a single heat. During the first heat of the Seafair Trophy Race, the boat's engine threw a rod and sent a ball of flame into the cockpit that gave him second-degree burns on his legs and left wrist.

Dick and Paul Gordon, the proprietors of Fairlane Tool, a Detroit machine shop that was frequented by most of the Motor City race teams, decided they would like to get into racing and purchased a boat that first saw action as the *Breathless II* in 1957. They named it *Blue Chip* for the color of the shavings that are created when steel gets hot in the machining process. They asked Alter to be their driver.



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The best he could coax out of the boat was a second-place finish in a preliminary heat at the Dixie Cup in Guntersville, Alabama, and a third-place finish in the President's Cup, but the Gordons were apparently enthused enough that they asked Les Staudacher to build them a new boat. They requested that it be sturdy and safe, but they maybe got more than they expected. The craft was so heavy it had a hard time running correctly and, on top of that, had a nasty tendency to hook unexpectedly.

Although Alter won the first preliminary heat at the 1965 Spirit of Detroit Trophy, the new *Blue Chip* proved too great a handful and the Gordons decided to seek a buyer. Alter, who had been a sales representative for the Dearborn Interceptor marine engine, contacted one of his clients, a boat racing enthusiast in Los Angeles, and convinced him to purchase the boat. That's when Laird

**"I guess I'm about the luckiest guy in the world to be alive," Alter told friends the next day as the demolished *Such Crust IV* was raised from the bottom of the Potomac River.**

Pierce, the owner of Plastics and Rubber Company (PARCO), got involved.

Meanwhile, Alter returned to Jack Schafer's team and once again found himself at the controls of the same *Such Crust IV* that he had driven three years before. It was aboard that craft that Alter won his fourth and final race: the 1965 South Shore Trophy on Lake Tahoe.

The event used a new format that was intended to make the race day more exciting for the fans by eliminating the long dead time between heats. Instead of one race, there would be three separate races. The fastest qualifiers would compete for the World's Championship, the next fastest would compete for the Ponderosa Cup, and the slowest would be entered in the South Shore Trophy. The events would run concurrently so that a heat of racing action would start every 30 minutes. The boats also would be assigned lanes at the start, which they called an Indianapolis Start.

Alter and the *Such Crust* competed with the four slowest qualifiers, a group that included Warner Gardner in *Mariner Too*, Rex Bixby in *\$ Bill*, and Bob Fendler in *Miss San Diego*. In the first heat, Alter started in the third lane and finished behind Bixby, then he won the second heat with an average speed of 89.5 mph. There were only two starters for the final and Alter stayed ahead of *Miss San Diego* to win the trophy.

The 1966 season was the deadliest in the sport's history, with three drivers killed at the President's Cup and another killed two weeks later at the Gold Cup. Alter, who was again driving the troublesome former *Blue Chip* boat, but this time for Laird Pierce and with its name changed to *Miss Dixi Cola*, was among those who stood out as a pillar of strength during those terrible days, going from camp to camp after the President's Cup to help crews stow away their gear and comfort the bereaved.

As for *Miss Dixi Cola*, the handling issues were still there. Alter managed to claim second-place honors in the Gold



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**TOP:** Alter had arranged for Dixi Cola to sponsor Laird Pierce's newly purchased boat in 1966 and dispensed the soft drink to fans. **MIDDLE:** As it was the year before when it raced as the second *Blue Chip*, the *Miss Dixi Cola* proved difficult to drive, though it finished second in that year's Gold Cup. Late in the year, the team tried to tame its erratic handling by installing a wing. It didn't work. **ABOVE:** Pierce built a new boat in 1967 and Alter drove it that year and the next as *PARCO O-Ring Miss*.



Fred Alter is interviewed by Jim McKay, the host of ABC's "Wide World of Sports," as part of a national broadcast of the racing action.

Cup, his best-ever finish in the prestigious event, and a fourth-place finish in the Seafair Trophy, but otherwise, the season was a struggle, especially on smooth-water courses where the heavy boat just couldn't get up enough speed to be competitive. The team even tried to improve the ride by installing a wing on its tail, one of the first such attempts, but that didn't seem to help.

When the season was over, Pierce announced he was going to set fire to the boat and ordered a new one that was designed by Chuck Hickling and built by Bob Patterson. He named it *PARCO O-Ring Miss* after one of his company's products.

The new boat was late in getting completed so Alter drove the *Mariner Too* at the World's Championship race in Detroit, then drove the *PARCO O-Ring Miss* through the rest of the 1967 season. They worked through the typical new-boat

challenges and then, in the year's final race in San Diego, he beat Jim Ranger in the *My Gypsy* in a preliminary heat and won the final heat, though the finish was largely aided by the fact that *Bardahl*, *My Gypsy*, *Miss U.S.*, and *Budweiser* had all jumped the gun and had to run an extra lap. Nevertheless, the good

showing gave the team high expectations heading into the 1968 season.

Perhaps the expectations were too high because the season turned out to be a huge disappointment. *PARCO O-Ring Miss* was simply not competitive all year, never getting enough points in preliminary heats to qualify for the final, so the driving duties were turned over to Norm Evans.

Alter didn't have a steady ride in 1969. He drove the *Miss Budweiser II*, the 7-year-old former *Notre Dame* hull, at the Dixie Cup; drove Bill Sterett's *Miss Owensboro* at the Kentucky Governor's Cup in Owensboro; and returned to the Gale camp to drive their *Miss Schweppes* at the World's Championship in Detroit. Then, when Ole Bardahl decided he wanted to bring his famous *Miss Bardahl* back into action one last time at the end of that season, Alter got the nod.

According to Sandy Ross, a crew member on several Detroit-based boats and a long-time close friend of Alter's, the chance to drive the *Miss Bardahl* not only put him at the controls of a top-flight competitive boat for the first time, it gave him a chance to make good on a missed opportunity of three years before.

Before the boat was built, Ross says, Ole Bardahl approached Alter with the chance to drive it and Alter said he would as long as Bardahl paid him \$1,000 per race, paid his expenses, and paid for a life-insurance policy. Bardahl thought the price was too high and turned instead to Billy Schumacher.

So, in 1969, Alter finally got his chance to drive the boat. He won the first two preliminary heats at the Seafair Trophy with average speeds of 108.564 mph and 106.973 mph, the fastest two heats of the day, and also turned in a



Alter drove several different hydros in 1969, including the *Miss Schweppes* for the Schoenith family. He drove it to a third-place finish in the World's Championship race in Detroit.



competition lap of 113.924 mph, also the fastest of the event, but had to settle for a third-place trophy because the boat's engine threw a rod in the final. Finally, at the Gold Cup in San Diego, the boat could only manage a second-place finish in one preliminary heat and did not qualify for the final.

There were enough flashes of speed in Seattle, however, that crew chief Jerry Zuvich told the lead-footed Alter that he didn't realize how fast the boat could go. It was a comment that would fill Alter with pride for the rest of his life, Ross said.

He drove the boat again in 1970, this time as it carried the name *Miss Budweiser II*, but it couldn't finish a heat at the Suncoast Cup in Tampa. Next, he opted for a new adventure. He purchased a boat that was built by the Gale team in 1965, a craft that had raced as the *Gale's Roostertail* and *Smirnoff* and that was driven by Alter in one race in 1969 when it was named *Miss Schweppes*, and planned to enter it into the 1971 campaign.

Outside of racing, Alter earned his living in the bottling industry and had become an expert in setting up the machinery that is used in a bottling operation. He consulted all over the country and, in the process, had made good con-



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Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



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**TOP:** The fastest boat he ever drove was the *Miss Bardahl*, a craft he handled late in 1969 when owner Ole Bardahl entered it in races for the last time. **MIDDLE:** Alter became a boat owner in 1971 and 1972 when he purchased for former *Miss Schweppes* from Schoenith's Gale team and campaigned it as *Towne Club*. **ABOVE:** He rejoined the Gale team in 1973 and drove their second boat for two seasons. Here it appears as *Pizza Pete*.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Fred Alter became among the first drivers to handle the controls of a turbine-powered Unlimited when he tested Jim Herrington's U-99 *Miss Lapeer* at the 1973 National Champions Regatta in Detroit. The test was not successful.

**He was in charge when the total purse reached more than \$1 million for the first time, but also faced difficult challenges, such as the deaths of two of the top names in the sport.**

tacts with people in that industry. It's no surprise, therefore, that many of the boats that he drove over the years were sponsored by bottling companies such as Dixie Cola and Schweppes. And, that's where he turned when he had his own boat. His hydroplane was sponsored by Towne Club, a favorite beverage in the Detroit area that the company makes a point of calling pop, not soda.

He entered his *Towne Club* in only three races in 1971, his best showing being a third-place finish in the Horace Dodge Memorial, and five races in 1972, a fourth-place finish in Miami his best result. Then he had enough. He sold the boat to Bob Gilliam in Seattle where it would conclude its career as the *Valu-Mart* and *My Cupiee*.

That experience behind him, Alter returned to just being a driver and signed on with Joe Schoenith's *Gale* team once more. This time he would pilot *Gale's Roostertail*, a craft that debuted as *Smirnoff* in 1968—a spacey-looking hydro with a vee-shaped tail that was the first ride for a rookie named Dean Chenoweth. Now, in 1973, most of the spacey bits were gone and it had become second fiddle to the team's better-known entry, the 1972 national champion *Atlas Van Lines*, which was driven by Bill Muncey.

As the boat changed names over the next two years from *Pizza Pete*, to *Miss Cauffiel*, to *Atlas Van Lines II*, and back to *Gale's Roostertail*, Alter saw several moments of success and sometimes even outshined Muncey and the *Atlas*, which was starting to lose its edge against boats such as *Pay 'n Pak* and *Miss Budweiser*. In 1973, Alter had three third-place finishes, including one in the Gold Cup, and the following season took second-place honors

at the World's Championship in Detroit and was again third in the Gold Cup.

It was also during this time that Alter became one of the first to recognize the potential for turbine engines in an Unlimited hydroplane. When Jim Herrington, Charles Voelker, and Les Staudacher repowered an old *Mariner Too* hull (a boat Alter had driven in 1963) with turbines, Alter did the test drive on Lake Guntersville, Alabama. The lessons learned in that effort were then applied to a new boat that used a small General Electric J-25 turbine to produce gas pressure and a larger Westinghouse J-46 to provide the power to the propeller.

The experiment culminated in the arrival of the U-99 *Miss Lapeer* to the 1973 National Championship Regatta in Detroit, where Alter fired it up but managed to just putt-putt around the racecourse as it pushed water aside like a snowplow. Unfortunately for Harrington and the others, the project was by then overshadowed by another turbine effort called the *U-95*, which also made its debut that year and would prove to be much more successful.

Alter's driving career finally ended in 1975 as he handled the controls of yet another boat sponsored by a soft drink. This time it was the *Miss Vernors*, a boat that won three national titles as *Miss Budweiser* and was now owned by Jerry Kalen. Alter drove the craft in three races, won a preliminary heat at the Indiana Governor's Cup, and then called it career.

Though he wasn't going to strap on a driving helmet again, he wasn't about to leave the sport; his involvement just took on a new flavor.

After contemplating how to solve the issues that seemed to hamper the sport's growth, he decided that Unlimited racing needed a source for inexpensive hulls so that owners with a less-than-over-flowing bank account could also afford a competitive boat. It was an issue he no doubt saw first-hand during his own foray into hydroplane ownership.

He worked with Les Staudacher to develop a boat patterned after the 1976 *Miss Vernors* that could be purchased as a kit. An interested owner could purchase the precut pieces and either have the crew assemble them or hire a contractor to do the job. He presented his idea at the sport's annual meeting in late 1976, detailed ideas for promoting the project, and got a warm response. Dave Heeren-sperger, the owner of the *Pay 'N Pak* boats, was especially enthused by the idea and offered to provide funding.

But the kit boat project never quite got off the ground. One of the kits was partially assembled, but it sat behind the old Bardahl plant in Seattle for many years and was eventually sold to Bob Gilliam.

Alter also got involved in the administration of the Unlimited Racing Com-

mission (URC) and became the sport's commissioner late in 1980. He was in charge when the total purse reached more than \$1 million for the first time, but also faced difficult challenges, such as the deaths of two of the top names in the sport: Bill Muncey and Dean Chenoweth. After Chenoweth was killed in 1982, Alter appointed a blue-ribbon panel of experts to examine proposals on ways to prevent blow-overs. He also ordered a tank-immersion test for driver flotation devices.

But not everybody was happy. The commissioner position was typically filled without opposition, but at the URC's annual meeting late in 1982, Alter faced a challenge from Don Jones, the managing director of Seattle's Seafair Festival, who was being pushed by interests who didn't like the direction Alter had taken with regard to safety and who also wanted the sport's headquarters moved to the Pacific Northwest.

That effort failed, but Jones challenged Alter again during the 1983 meeting and this time won the election in a 15 to 13 vote. Jones immediately announced that the URC's headquarters would be moved from Detroit to Seattle.

Alter's final involvement with the sport came after Bob Gilliam passed away in 1998. His widow wanted to get rid of all the hydroplane junk he had collected, including that unassembled kit boat. So, Alter and his buddy Sandy Ross drove to Seattle to retrieve the thing. Their idea was to put it together and hang it from the ceiling of a combination museum, restaurant, and bar that Alter and Dave Bartush were planning to open in Detroit.

For three years, he and Ross labored in Bartush's garage building the boat, which they planned to paint as a replica of the *Miss Vernors*, and along the way cemented a close friendship. "He had a very pragmatic approach to things," Ross said. "He could be cantankerous and hard on others, as well as on himself, and his response to any idea was always 'no' until he thought about it some more."

Progress would stop in the winter when it got too cold and Ross would leave for the Florida Keys, and Alter would later join him down there. "We had all sorts of adventures," Ross said. Alter even sailed a boat all the way from Detroit to Ft. Lauderdale, an excursion that took parts of several years, and then he bought a place in Palm Beach.

The kit boat was finally assembled and driven by Alter in 2006, 2007, and 2008. They were the last times that he'd sit in the cockpit of a hydroplane because, not long thereafter, he suffered a debilitating stroke. He eventually was confined to a wheelchair and nursed day and night by his life partner, Peggy Kennard. "Peggy kept him alive for three years," Ross says.

A celebration of Fred Alter's life is being planned in Michigan sometime in late spring. Memorial donations can be made to the Great Lakes Maritime Institute/Pioneers of Power Boating, a charitable program that Alter organized in 1990 to be a shrine to honor the sport's heroes. The fund can be reached at P.O. Box 1990 in Dearborn, MI 48121. ❖



Ron Harsin

Fred Alter waves to the fans when making an appearance at the Detroit race in 2016.

# IT'S IN THE FAMILY

Last month, in part one of this series, we looked at individuals who entered unlimited hydroplane racing as owners and listed the involvement of family members who followed them into the sport. In part two, we will consider people who made their foray into the world of fast boats as a driver and then had family members who joined in the fun. Next month in part three, we will review people who became involved with the Unlimiteds in a variety of other ways—as boat builders, crew members, officials, or other roles.

## DRIVERS:

BY CRAIG FJARLIE

In the years before World War II, most boats were operated by people who were both owners and drivers. Few participants were exclusively drivers. For that reason, we will limit the focus of this part to the years following the war.

Bill Muncey, the most famous name in unlimited hydroplane racing, drove *Miss Great Lakes* in 1950 and went on to drive boats such as *Miss Thriftway*, *Miss U.S.*, and *Atlas Van Lines*. Following his death in Acapulco in 1981, his wife, Fran, picked up the reins as an owner and kept the Muncey name in the forefront of racing action. His oldest son, Wil Muncey, began driving in 1982 and participated for three years in second-rate equipment.

Norm Evans drove *Miss Seattle* in 1956 but, unfortunately, the former *Slo-mo-shun V* had seen better days. He drove a variety of boats in a lengthy career, won the 1958 Apple Cup in *Miss Bardahl*, and later drove *Miss Spokane*, *\$ Bill*, and *Totum Trailer Sales*.

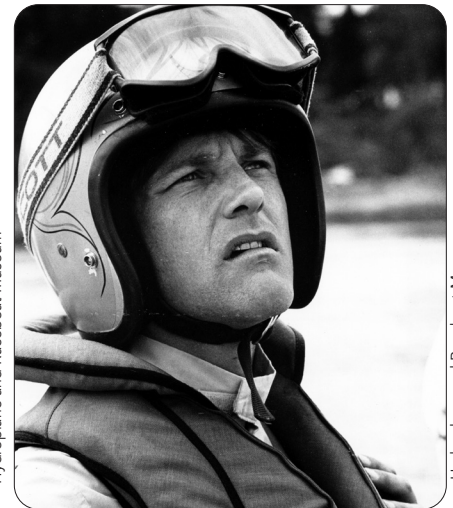
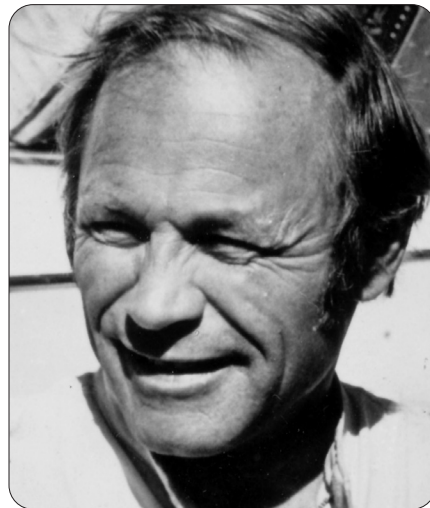
Evans had two sons who also drove Unlimiteds. Mark Evans made his entry in 1979 aboard *Evergreen Roofing* and

had a significantly better ride in 1991 in *American Spirit*. He later drove *Miss Wellness Plan*, then took over *Miss Budweiser* in 1996 after Chip Hanauer was injured. Evans won the San Diego race that year. In 1997, Mark Evans became the driver of *PICO American Dream*, won the Kelowna, B.C. race the following year, and was injured at Detroit in 2003 while driving *Llumar Window Film*.

Norm Evans' other son, Mitch, moved into the Unlimited ranks in 1985, driving *KISW/Miss Rock*. He drove Ed

Cooper's piston-powered U-3 under a variety of names, including *Cooper's Express* and *Miss DOC*. Cooper had a new boat built in 1997, again with Allison power. Mitch Evans moved to the *Appian Jeronimo* in 1998 but returned to Cooper's team in 2000. He won the Gold Cup in 2003 when the boat was named *Miss Fox Hills Chrysler Jeep*.

Bill Brow took the helm of *Miss Burien* in 1958. He became the driver of *Miss Exide* in 1964 and won the Diamond Cup that year and again in 1965. Brow took over the cockpit of *Miss Budweiser*, a new boat pressed into action after the tragic 1966 President's Cup. He was killed at Tampa, Florida, the first race of



Bill Muncey (left) was among the greatest competitors the sport has ever seen. His eldest son, Wil (right), saw action as an Unlimited driver from 1982 to 1987.

1967, when the boat flipped.

His son Doug started driving Unlimiteds in 1996 aboard *Computers and Applications*. He drove other boats including *Miss Exide* in 2001. Brow served H1 as chief referee in 2018.

Billy Schumacher moved up to the Unlimited class in 1961 driving *Cutie Radio* and *Miss Tool Crib*. He won the Gold Cup and two national championships in *Miss Bardahl*, and drove other boats including *Pride of Pay 'n Pak* and *Valu-Mart*. Following a lengthy absence from racing, he returned in 2006 with his wife, Jane, as co-owner of *Miss Beacon Plumbing*. They won the Gold Cup that year.

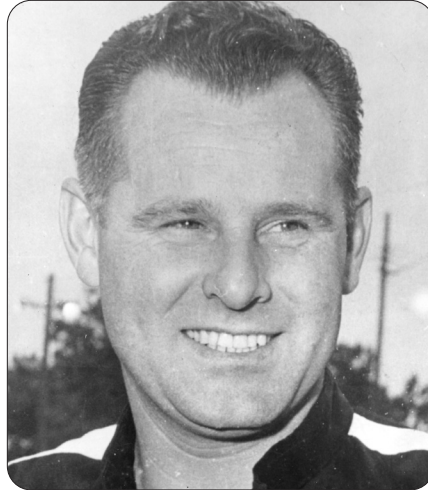
Warner Gardner made his debut in the Unlimited class in 1962 at the wheel of *Notre Dame*. He later drove *Mariner Too* and *Miss Lapeer* and in 1968 took over as driver of *Miss Eagle Electric*. He won three races but was killed at the Gold Cup in Detroit. His son, Warner Gardner, Jr., worked on the crew as an engine mechanic.

Jim McCormick was tabbed to drive *Miss Madison* in 1966. He remained with the team through 1971, when he won the Gold Cup in Madison and the Atomic Cup in Tri-Cities. He next drove *Miss Timex* then *Red Man*, which he owned. He had a brief stint in *Pay 'n Pak* in 1975. His brother, Roger, drove a few times in *Miss Timex* in 1971.

David "Salt" Walther, who had experience in Indy car racing, was named to fill the cockpit of *Miss U.S.* in 1970. The following year his father, George Walther, bought a new Ron Jones hull named *Country Boy*, which Salt drove.

Tragedy struck the family in 1974 when Salt's brother, George "Skip" Walther, Jr., was picked by Jim McCormick to drive *Red Man*. Skip qualified the boat at Miami, but during testing on race day morning he had a fatal accident.

Chip Hanauer was a successful racer in smaller boats when Tad Dean asked him to drive *Barney Armstrong's Machine* in 1976. Hanauer subsequently drove a number of boats including *The Squire*



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



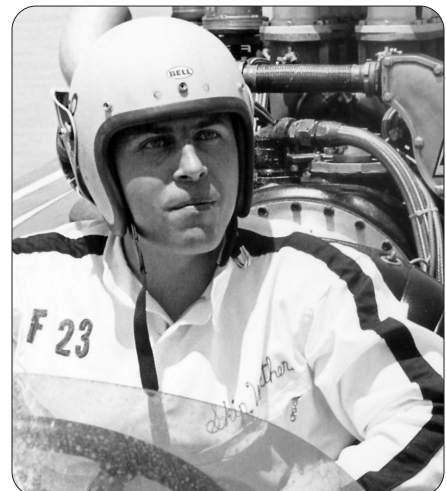
Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Sandy Ross Collection



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

**TOP:** Bill Brow (left) was the winner of six races in a career that began in 1958 and ended with his death in 1967. His son Doug (right) drove in 1997 and again in 2003 and 2004. **MIDDLE:** Gold Cup winner Jim McCormick. His brother Roger drove *Miss Timex* in 1971. **ABOVE:** Dave "Salt" Walther (left) drove both Unlimiteds and Indy cars. His career in hydros lasted from 1970 to 1976. His brother George "Skip" Walther (right) was killed when he drove an Unlimited for the first time in 1974.

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Chris Denslow



**TOP:** Jerry Hopp (right) drove Unlimiteds in 20 seasons from 1982 to 2004. His son Greg (right) also had a long career, driving in 18 seasons from 1998 to 2017. **MIDDLE:** Mike Hanson won four races in a driving career that lasted from 1986 to 2003, including a victory driving *Kellogg's Frosted Flakes* in 1993. **ABOVE:** The only father-son combination to both win the Gold Cup. Mark Tate (right) won four national titles and two Gold Cups during a career from 1990 to 2004. His son Andrew (left) won the national championship and the Gold Cup in 2018.

*Shop, Atlas Van Lines, Miller High Life, Miss Circus Circus, Miss Budweiser, and Miss PICO.* He won a total of 61 races, including 11 Gold Cups. His father, Stan, worked on crews when Chip was in the early years of his driving career.

In 1983, Todd Yarling was named to drive *Miss Tosti Asti* and drove other boats, including *Miss Cellular One* and *Miss Madison*. His sister, Yvonne, worked on the crews of boats that Todd drove.

Jerry Hopp moved into the Unlimited class in 1984 at the wheel of *Miss Machine Rock Band*. He later drove *Jackpot Food Mart*; the boat carried several other names. His son Greg began driving Unlimiteds in 1999 aboard *Miss R.S. Eastin*. Both Hopps are currently active in the Grand Prix class.

Mike Hanson, a champion inboard racer with extensive mechanical and boat set-up knowledge, received his first shot at the Unlimited class in 1986, with the generically named *Boat*. He took over the cockpit of *Sutphen Spirit* in 1988. The following year, he won at San Diego in *Kellogg's Frosted Flakes*. In 2001, Hanson drove *Tubby's Grilled Submarines* for Mike and Lori Jones and won the Gold Cup.

Hanson's brother, Larry, has worked tirelessly on the crews of boats that Mike drove, and both have given their time and talent to restoration projects at the Hydroplane and Race Boat Museum.

Mark Tate was born into a racing family. His father, Joe, was a successful driver in inboard classes. Mark took his first ride in an Unlimited in 1990 with *Oh Boy! Oberto*. In 1991 he drove *Winston Eagle*. Tate was the national champion driver four times: in 1991 in *Winston Eagle*, 1994 and '95 with *Smokin' Joe's*, and 1997 with *Close Call*. His son, Andrew, carried on the family tradition when Mike and Lori Jones named him the driver of their U-9. He won the Gold Cup and was national champion in 2018 when the boat was named *Delta Realtrac*.

In one case, three different boat racing families are intertwined with each other.

Mark Weber drove *Miss Exide II* in 1996 and drove *Miss Budweiser* in the last three races of 1997, winning at Lake Mead. He also won the Honolulu race in 1998 with *Wildfire* and last drove in 2003 aboard *Miss Chrysler-Jeep*. He served as president of the American Power Boat Association and currently is in charge of the Detroit regatta. His brother, Mike, occupied the cockpit of *Miss Exide* in 1997 and later drove boats such as *Graham Trucking*, *Miss Emcor*, and *Formula-boats.com*.

The Weber brothers have a sister named Sue, and she was married to Terry Troxell, who drove *Znetix II* in 2001. The boat also carried the name *Miss Fox Hills Chrysler Jeep* the following year and Troxell won the Gold Cup in 2005 driving *Miss Al Deeby Dodge*. Sue Troxell's son to a previous marriage is Jeff Bernard, who began driving Unlimitees in 2007 aboard *Formulaboats.com*. He won the Madison and San Diego races in 2008, and Evansville in 2009. Bernard was in the cockpit of *Oberto Super Salami* in 2019.

Bernard's half-sister, the daughter of Sue and Terry Troxell, is Tiffany, who is married to Kip Brown. He began driving Unlimitees in 2008 in the U-17 *Our Gang Racing*, was named Rookie of the Year, and won the Gold Cup in 2013 with *Spirit of Qatar*.

Kip Brown's uncle is Nate Brown, who moved up from inboard classes in 1992 when he accepted cockpit duties for *The Brake Shop*. He drove a number of boats, including *Tide* in 1994, *Pizza Time*, *Truck Gear*, *Llumar Window Film*, *Miss E-Lam Plus*, and *Miss DYC*. He won the Gold Cup in 2004.

Charley Wiggins drove *Miss Madison* in 2000. He and his father, Milt, bought the U-17 from Nate Brown in early 2015 and ran it as *Dalton Industries* with Cal Phipps as driver. The boat carried the name *Oberto* in 2018 but was badly damaged in an accident at Seattle.

J.W. Myers grew up racing outboards. His first opportunity in the Unlimited class came in 2003 at Tri-Cities



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Ron Harsin



H1 Unlimited



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

**TOP:** The Weber brothers, Mike (left) and Mark, have both seen action in Unlimited cockpits, Mark from 1996 to 2003 and Mike from 1998 to 2006. **MIDDLE:** Their sister Sue was married to Terry Troxell, who won three races during his career, including the 2005 Gold Cup while driving *Miss Al Deeby Dodge*. **ABOVE:** Sue Troxell's son is Jeff Bernard (left), who has won three races in a career that started in 2005. She also has a daughter who is married to Kip Brown, who has driven from 2008 to 2014 and who is the nephew of Nate Brown (right), who had a long career as a driver and owner.

with *Tony Roma's*, a boat that was named *Miss Nicole Marie Yacht Charters* the following weekend. At the Gold Cup in Detroit, it was called *Miss Epoch Events*. In 2005 he drove *Ellstrom E-Lam Plus* to victory at Madison and continued to drive boats such as *Al Deeby Dodge*, *Miss DYC*, and *Peters & May*. His sister, Kay Brewer, who also grew up racing outboards, currently does public address at a number of APBA events and worked the microphone at San Diego in 2019.

J. Michael Kelly was a champion in many classes when he was tabbed to drive *Miss APBA* in 2004. He has been a consistent winner in boats such as *Spirit of Detroit*, *Degree Men*, *Beacon Plumbing*, and *Graham Trucking*. His victories include the 2016 Gold Cup and the last three events of 2019. His father, Jeff, has worked on crews when J. Michael was the driver.

Mike Webster and his father, Steve, purchased Ed Cooper's piston-powered *Master Tire* in 2007, re-powered it with a turbine, and began racing it in 2009 with Mike in the cockpit. In 2011 they purchased a former *Madison* hull and raced it through 2015. Their boats were always well-prepared and performed consistently, but victory was elusive.

Families have always been an integral part of unlimited hydroplane racing. Some family members have worked in support roles for drivers, while others have decided that driving looks like fun and made their own way onto the nation's race courses.

There's another part to the story about families, and we will look into it next month. Some family members have devoted their effort to toiling on crews, others worked in various administrative positions. Some have served on regatta committees and others have been race officials. The list goes on, sometimes with surprising twists and turns. The story is far from over. ❖



Chris Denslow



H1 Unlimited



Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow

**TOP:** Charley Wiggins entered Unlimited competition as the driver of the *Miss Madison* in 2000. The Wiggins family now owns a boat that last raced in 2018 as the U-1918 *Oberto*. **MIDDLE:** J.W. Myers (left) has won one race during a career that dates to 2003. His sister Kay Brewer (right) handles the public address duties at many H1 Unlimited events. **ABOVE:** J. Michael Kelly has won 11 races in an Unlimited driving career that started in 2004. Here, he gives some pointers to his son Carson, who drives J-stock outboards and may one day continue his family's racing tradition.



# AROUND THE CIRCUIT

## Race Site News by Chris Tracy



## Putting UNJ together

Even though all races were canceled in 2020, readers have noticed that during the pandemic the *Unlimited NewsJournal* has published its issues on schedule, with new interviews, new stories and an occasional reprinting of stories or interviews that were first printed sometimes decades ago. It has been a little more stressful, but generally has gone smoothly. So, how do we put together an issue of the UNJ?

Before the monthly Unlimited Unanimous meeting begins on the second Sunday of each month, the UNJ has an editorial meeting. In previous times, the publication staff and UU members generally met all afternoon at a greater-Seattle-area library conference room, but that does not work during the pandemic.

Some of our key members don't have technology equipment that support Zoom or a camera, so we have had our meetings via a conference call. At the beginning of the meeting, we touch base with each member, kind of a social minute. Traditionally, most of the UU members would go out to dinner together after the meetings and, frankly, most of us are missing the fellowship.

First on the agenda, we review the current issue, talk about each story and the photos that accompanied each article, and get any feedback on each piece. It's kind of a reflection on our work—what went well and what can we improve on. If there were any letters or emails to the editor about any story, they are reviewed.

(Some readers may wonder, where do we get the historical photos. Former

UNJ editor Michael Prophet compiled an absolutely huge electronic database of photos and made it available to the UNJ before he passed away. We also reach out to UU members and hydro photographers for photos that are needed to illustrate stories.)

After reviewing the past issue we move to the UNJ status report, which is compiled by our editor. The status report contains a brief outline of what's planned for our next six issues. That's not saying that all of those articles have been completed or final decisions have been made, but it serves as a general outline for moving forward.

For example, in past years when there were races, we'd place race reports in certain monthly issues and articles or interviews that were planned to be published. Also, in the status report is a list of stories we have ready to go, called In the Can, and a list of stories in progress and a list of story ideas.

We immediately talk about the next UNJ issue, the discussion led by our editor, who selects the stories for each issue. We talk about those stories: whether they need photos, fact checking or editing; if a sidebar would be useful; should the story be divided and published in multiple issues; etc. The next issue's content is pretty much finalized during this part of the meeting.

Our editor moves the meeting to a brief discussion of the next couple of issues and their contents and, especially, if we need to search for photos or content. A general discussion of what to publish going forward usually takes place and sometimes UU members update their

progress on stories they are writing. Then the editorial meeting is finished.

In the days after the editorial meeting, our editor lays out and formats the next issue. HydroFile is usually the last piece added to the issue, hoping to include the latest news in the upcoming issue.

If the UNJ is publishing a story from our vault, maybe a story that was first printed on paper perhaps 40 years ago, how do we go from a print story with no electronic history to an online story? Well, thank goodness for technology. Our editor uses an app called Office Lens. He takes pictures of the old print story and then, through wizardry built into the app, the copy on those pages is converted into to a Word document. It's not perfect, but way faster than re-keying the entire article.

Our editor creates the publication using an application called InDesign then makes a PDF of that file and transfers it into a file hosting service called Dropbox so that it can be reviewed by multiple proofreaders. Currently, our vice president/webmaster and president proof the issue for typos and so forth, our editor makes revisions, then it's ready to go.

Our webmaster formats the issue for our website, posts it online, sends out an email to those on our email list and posts a notice on our UNJ Facebook page, and another month's issue is live.

We couldn't produce the UNJ month after month without the help of so many people. From coast to coast, UU members and hydro fans send us story ideas, freely share with us stories that they have written, and contribute photos. For example, when former hydroplane driver Brien Wygle passed away recently, we got an email from Steve Nelson telling us

that he had interviewed Wygle and could provide us with an article.

Craig Fjarlie likely should be considered our in-house interviewer. He has a passion for documenting the sport and has interviewed many people for the UNJ over the years.

Lon Erickson wears two hats, as he is our webmaster and also puts Hydro-File together each month.

Our race reporters all do a first-class job of providing the information our readers want and some of the quotes and details in their race reports. Mac Clouse and Kay-dub Myers Brewer have provid-

ed race details that can only be found in the UNJ.

Hydro photographers have been generous sharing their work with us. Our editor is a professional journalist, and our product is a reflection of his talents. Our webmaster publishes our issues timely and professionally.

To all who help us out—and there are a large number of folks I have not mentioned in this article—thank you! UNJ readers, if you are ready to research and tell a hydro story that you've been thinking about, feel free to reach out to us; we share your passion and we'd be

happy to help.

### Etcetera:

Congratulations to UNJ editor Andy Muntz, who has been elected to the H1 Board of Directors. The 2021 Unlimited Unanimous officers elected at the December 2020 meeting are as follows: Christopher Tracy, president; Lon Erickson, vice president; Dan Lopez, secretary; Bob Senior, treasurer; and Karen Senior, events chair. ❖

## \$ENIOR \$AYS Feeding Your Hydro Habit by Bob Senior



# A Guide to help hydro fans spend their hobby money

**T**he *Unlimited NewsJournal* is published monthly by Unlimiteds Unanimous, the longest-running Unlimited hydroplane racing fan club in America. Our main purpose is to document the colorful history of Unlimited hydroplane racing and further the interests of our members. For several years, our monthly meetings have been held in various Seattle-area public libraries. However, COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 led us to telephone-conference meetings.

During a recent meeting, I spoke up and said, "I have something on my mind. While we often offer book reviews of hydroplane-related subjects, we don't let the UNJ reader know where to order the book or the cost." Editor Andy Muntz responded, "We can do that."

Then I said, "Many of our readers may not have known about the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum's recent online memorabilia auction fundraiser.

Some of our UNJ readers might have enjoyed advance information about such an event." Again, the editor responded, "We can do that."

I continued, "Years ago, the *NewsJournal* offered information about convenient hotel and motel information for racing fans who would be visiting an out-of-town race site for the first time." The editor said, "We can do that, too."

I went on to say, "The *NewsJournal* does not need to 'tell' hydroplane racing fans how to spend their hobby money, but we certainly could help give them information and options." The editor again replied, "We can do that too, and we can give Bob his own column maybe three times a year." So, here we go with my first effort of *Senior Says*. A guide to help hydro fans spend their hobby money.

**DRAGON DAYS. JON OSTERBERG'S COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY OF MISS BARDAHL.** The hard-copy edition is sold

out, but the text has recently been upgraded and there are now 402 photos. The book is now available at Amazon or wherever e-books are sold. The price is \$19.99.

**ART ASBURY. SPEEDBOAT DRIVER AND WORLD RECORD HOLDER.** This new book by nephew Doug Cunnington tells the story of Asbury's limited hydroplane experiences and driving *Miss Supertest II* to a then world water speed record. The book has over 300 photos, two-thirds of them in color. The book sells for \$70 Canadian, which includes shipping. Order via email at [dchowie@hotmail.com](mailto:dchowie@hotmail.com).

**APBA: THE AMERICAN POWERBOAT ASSOCIATION.** Join the APBA. The world's most exciting motorsport wants YOU! When you join APBA you are welcomed into a vibrant community of boat racers and fans. You'll receive *Propeller* magazine, the APBA Yearbook, and the latest boat racing news from across the USA and beyond. Associate memberships are just \$35/year USA or \$55/year International. For more information, phone 586-773-9700 or go online at [www.apba.org](http://www.apba.org).

## HYDROPLANE AND RACEBOAT MUSEUM ONLINE MEMORABILIA AUCTION.

Last November the museum offered a very popular and successful virtual online fundraiser auction. Auction items included the likes of rides in *Pay 'n Pak* and *Miss Wahoo*, original vintage hydroplane clothing, original hydroplane-themed art, vintage race programs, an authentic propeller, a custom-made *Eagle Electric* guitar, a condo in Palm Springs, and a trip to Mexico. A similar auction is planned for Hydro Fever Week, May 17 through 22. Access, registration and preview ability will start around March 1. This column will keep you apprised of

how to access, register, and bid.

**SPEAKING OF THE HYDROPLANE AND RACEBOAT MUSEUM**, its gift shop offers a wide variety of collectibles. You will need to click on the “Shop” button. There is also a convenient “Join the Museum” membership button. You can visit their website at [www.thunderboats.org](http://www.thunderboats.org).

**FACEBOOK PAGE FOR HYDROPLANE MEMORABILIA COLLECTORS.** Administrator Steve Kristiansen has started an interesting Facebook page. It's a place to buy-sell-trade hydroplane racing collectibles, pin-back buttons, and tacks, photos, programs, patches, T-shirts and caps, clothing, and any other sort of related mem-

orabilia. There are already over 1,000 members signed up. Join the fun! Go to Facebook and search for hydroplane and racing boat pins and collectibles buy/sell/trade. Sign up and participate. You'll be glad you did!

## 2021 UNLIMITED HYDROPLANE RACE SITE HOTEL/MOTEL INFORMATION.

Depending on local COVID-19 restrictions regarding large social gatherings, some UNJ readers may plan to attend an out-of-town race. In a couple of months this column will publish a list of them.

There! Installment number one of *Senior \$ays* is in the books. Thanks for this opportunity! ❖

## BOOK REVIEW:

# Art Asbury: Speedboat driver, World Record Holder, Friend.

BY CRAIG FJARLIE

Canadian participants too often have been overlooked in unlimited hydroplane racing history. Ask the casual fan for information about Canadian racers and the result may be a blank stare. Some will remember Jean Theoret and possibly the *Supertest* boats, but that's about all.

Truth is, Canada has produced some great owners, drivers, and boats. Doug Cunningham, of Kimberley, British Columbia, has written a book about Art Asbury that helps give Canadian racers the recognition they deserve. Cunningham's uncle was Art Asbury, a top driver in a variety of classes from the late 1940s through the 1980s.

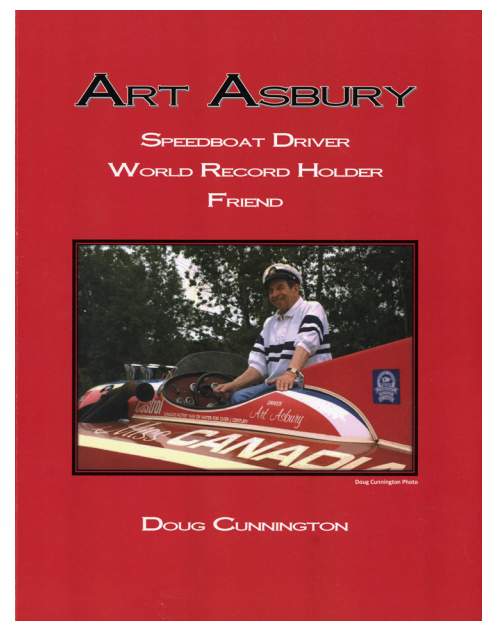
The title of the book is *Art Asbury, Speedboat Driver, World Record Holder, Friend*. Among Unlimited fans, Asbury is best remembered for driving *Miss Supertest II* in 1957. He won the Buffalo regatta and on November 1 of that year set the world mile straightaway record at Picton, Ontario, breaking the record that had been held by *Slo-mo-shun IV*. *Hawaii Ka'i III* raised the record a few weeks later, but Asbury's mark still stands in Canada. In fact, he remains the fastest Canadian on water.

Asbury won his first race in 1948 in a 225-class boat named *Kingcot*. He won the Prince Edward Gold Cup in 1953 driving a 266-class boat *My Betsy*. His most famous boat was *Miss Canadiana* in the 266-classes. He later drove the 7-litre boat

*Royal Canadiana*, winning the U.S. National Championship for the class in 1964 and setting a straightaway speed record in 1965.

Asbury was co-grand marshal, with George Simon, of the 1996 APBA Gold Cup race in Detroit. Asbury made contributions to life jacket safety and served as harbor master for Expo '67 in Montreal.

Cunningham's book, which is filled with photos—many in color—is a welcome volume that documents the life of an outstanding Canadian racer. To purchase a copy, contact the author at [dchowie@hotmail.com](mailto:dchowie@hotmail.com). ❖



# MY \$0.02 WORTH

## Editorial Comment by Andy Muntz



Earlier in this issue of the *Unlimited NewsJournal*, Chris Tracy mentioned some news that has happened to me. So, I figured this would be a good opportunity to expand on that a little bit and discuss what this might mean to this publication, this column, and to our readers.

If you didn't catch it, I was elected to serve on the Board of Directors for the American Boat Racing Association (ABRA), which runs the sport known as H1 Unlimited. I'm honored that the leaders of the organization felt that my skills would be useful and I'm humbled by this new responsibility. As a kid who was captivated by hydroplanes on TV back in the 1950s and who until quite recently could not be assured of even getting a pit pass, this new role still has my head spinning.

For those who may not know, the ABRA is a non-profit organization registered in the State of Washington to "create and operate an unlimited hydroplane racing series." The board has seven members who as a group are responsible for ratifying agreements with race sites,

adopting rules, establishing a budget, and other such matters. The board also hires staff people to perform key functions necessary to operate the racing series. For example, the board has hired Jan Shaw to serve as the director of operations, who handles the day-to-day duties of running the organization.

The board's mission, which is recited by everybody at the beginning of each meeting, is "To maintain, improve and expand the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing, while being ever mindful of enhancing the fan experience."

I come to the board following a 40-year career in public relations, and that's how I got involved. I was asked several months ago to help them develop a strategic plan that would set a direction for where the sport would like to be in the future. One thing led to another, and the next thing I knew I was asked to join the group.

A tool that I used in starting the strategic planning process is what's called a SWOT Analysis. It's a way to identify

strengths, weaknesses, and barriers that might stand in the way of an organization achieving its goals. As my strategic planning work continues, I've identified several challenges that must be faced and overcome in order to meet the sport's objectives.

Among the challenges is improving the public's perception of unlimited hydroplane racing, and an important step in meeting that challenge will be improved communication, especially to devoted fans like you. I'll identify strategies and tactics for doing that in a public relations plan that I'm also developing for the organization.

As you read this publication, you'll not see much change because of my new role on the ABRA board. We'll still run the same stories about the latest news and history of the sport. But, this column may change slightly. I'll now write it with a better understanding of how the sport actually works. I hope you'll find that useful. ❖

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

**PLEASE JOIN US AT THE NEXT MEETING OF UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS**

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

Check our website for more information.