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# UNLIMITED NEWSJOURNAL

A Chronicle of Speed

## Jimmy Shane and HomeStreet reclaim the national title.



HT Unlimited

**W**ith his victory in the first preliminary heat at the San Diego HomeStreet Bank Bayfair Cup, Jimmy Shane clinched his sixth national championship in the past seven seasons.

Shane also won another national title for the *Miss HomeStreet*, the third in the past four years, and gave the Miss Madison Racing Team its ninth championship.

Although he won only the first two events in the schedule, Shane finished the 2019 season with a comfortable 1,658-point lead over J. Michael Kelly and the U-12 *Graham Trucking*, the winner of the other three races.

Shane built his lead in the standings with his dominating performance in all but the winner-take-all final heats. He was the fastest qualifier at all five races, had

a perfect weekend at the Gold Cup in Madison, and until the final heats were held, also had perfect weekends underway at the Tri-Cities, Seattle, and San Diego.

(A perfect weekend occurs when a boat is the fastest qualifier and wins each heat that it enters.)

In all, Shane and the *Miss HomeStreet* won 19 of the 23 heats entered during the course of the 2019 campaign.

### IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE:

**3** My \$0.02 Worth by Andy Muntz

**5** Ask the Expert

**6** Detroit Hydrofest

**8** Pete LaRock: "Hydro Dreamer"

**13** HydroFile by Lon Erickson



J. Michael Kelly piloted the U-12 *Graham Trucking* to victory in San Diego.

## 2019 National Point Standings

(Final Standings)

U-6 <i>Miss HomeStreet</i> .....	8,977
U-12 <i>Graham Trucking</i> .....	7,319
U-7 <i>Spirit of Detroit/Boitano Homes</i> .....	5,124
U-1 <i>Delta Realtrac</i> .....	4,357
U-11 <i>J&amp;D's presented by Reliable Diamond Tool</i> .....	4,220
U-98 <i>Graham Trucking American Dream</i> .....	3,628
U-1918 <i>Oberto</i> .....	3,212
U-440 <i>Bucket List Racing</i> .....	2,189
U-99.9 <i>PayneWest/Miss Rock</i> .....	1,894
U-3 <i>Griggs Ace Hardware</i> .....	630

Jimmy Shane .....	8,977
J. Michael Kelly .....	7,319
Bert Henderson .....	4,955
Andrew Tate .....	4,357
Corey Peabody .....	3,628
Jeff Bernard .....	3,212
Jamie Nilsen .....	2,386
Dustin Echols .....	2,189
Brian Perkins .....	1,894
Tom Thompson .....	1,834
Jimmy King .....	630
Patrick Haworth .....	169

At the Bayfair Cup in San Diego, Shane won all three of his preliminary heats, but finished second behind Kelly and the *Graham Trucking* in the final. Kelly had grabbed the inside lane during the milling period before the start, taking advantage of a rule change implemented at the race that suspended the 80 mph minimum speed before the start, and used that advantage to claim the victory.

Jeff Bernard took third place in the race driving the U-1918 *Oberto Super Salami*, Bet Henderson was fourth in the U-7 *Spirit of Detroit*, and Corey Peabody finished fifth in the U-98 *Graham Trucking American Dream*. Jamie Nilsen in the U-11 *J&D's presented by Reliable Diamond Tool* was apparently washed down by another boat's roostertail as the final heat was getting underway and did not finish.

The defending national champion Andrew Tate and the U-1 *Delta Realtrac* did not compete in the San Diego event.

A full report about the 2019 San Diego HomeStreet Bank Bayfair Cup will be published in next month's issue of the *Unlimited News-Journal*. ❖



Jimmy Shane

# My \$0.02 Worth

## Editorial Comment



Andy  
Muntz

## How to start a hydro race.

In the typical edition of the *Unlimited NewsJournal*, I take a few column-inches of space on the last page to offer a little insight from a fans perspective about what's going on in the world of unlimited hydroplane racing. I call it offering my two cents worth.

This month, if you don't mind, I'd like to offer a nickel's worth instead because the sport is facing an issue that demands every fan's attention.

During the past 20 years, hydroplane racing has certainly seen more than its fair share of challenges. Major sponsors have come and, sadly, gone. Race sites, too. Attendance at the races has suffered, perhaps as part of a declining interest in motorsports in general, but also for other reasons we've discussed at other times.

Through it all, a general mistrust of the sport's governing body has also grown among hydroplane fans. Much of the criticism of H1 Unlimited has been unfair, but some of it has been earned. In large margin, it's been earned because those who run the sport seem to have limited understanding of where their focus ought to be.

The people who run most sports organizations understand that they are in the entertainment business. They know that nothing happens, team owners don't make money and athletes don't get paid, unless there are butts in the grandstand seats and fans listening or watching at home.

Big-time boat racing is no different. Yet, too often, this sport operates through a decision-making process that focuses on the needs and wants of the boat owners and little else. The attitude says to the hydro fans, "Sure, come on down and watch us race our boats, but don't expect us to cater to your interests, especially if it might inconvenience us."

It was this attitude that manifested itself in the fiasco that occurred at the end of this year's Seattle race, when a victor was crowned before the winner was determined. And, in a public relations disaster to rank among the worst, it turned out that the guy who was presented with the trophy would in less than an hour be relegated to fifth place.

The culprit in that affair, in addition to the poor judgment of allowing the ceremony to proceed (and embarrassing the sport's top sponsor in the process), was hydro racing's dumbfounding process for starting a race. So, that's where I'll spend the remaining three cents of my nickel.

During the past 20 years of challenge in this sport, one aspect of racing has continually befuddled race officials: the process for starting a race. Try as they might, no matter the solutions put in place, the problem has never been resolved.

Back in the old days, during the period before the starting gun fired and while the drivers were jockeying for position and trying

to grab the inside lane, the boats had to remain "on a plane" once the one-minute gun had fired. It seemed to work for many years until at some point the "on a plane" part of the rule was dropped. That led to what we'll call the Trolling Era.

As the clock counted down to the start, the drivers would claim a lane and then literally park their boats in it, creeping along at speeds so slow that a guy in a rowboat could overtake them. Then, as the last few seconds wound down, the drivers would hit the throttles and away they would go across the starting line.

I remember watching a boat race from the shore with my two young sons during this time and one of them asking me why one of the boats had slowed to a near stop. When I explained that the driver was trying to claim the inside lane, he innocently asked, "Why doesn't some other driver just cut in front of him and take the lane away?" I tried to counter with an explanation of the overlap rule, but I could tell that my efforts were fruitless. Even to a grade-school-aged child, what was happening on the racecourse simply didn't make logical sense.

There is a phenomenon in sports that I call Rule Creep. It's a parallel to what the building industry calls Scope Creep, which is what happens when the customer decides to replace the ceramic tile with granite and wants to add oak flooring, a fireplace, top-end appliances, and other things to the project that weren't in the original estimate. Pretty soon the whole

thing costs more and takes longer to build.

In Rule Creep, every time a problem comes up, those running the sport change the rules to make the problem go away. The result is rule, on top of rule, on top of rule, and a rule book that grows to mammoth size. NFL football is known for this, implementing a new rule to answer every problem that pops up. To understand the pass interference rule, for example, now requires a doctorate degree in quantum physics.

It's the same path that the hydroplane rule makers took.

Before long the complaining about the trolling became so overwhelming that race officials decided to change the starting procedure. They added a new rule. To prevent the boats from trolling to the start, they designated the exit pin out of the first turn as the score-up buoy and said the boats couldn't pass that buoy until one minute remained to the start.

The change meant that in order to cover the distance from the score-up buoy to the starting line on only one minute the boats had to go relatively fast. Trolling problem solved! The unintended consequence was, however, that the creeping along simply moved to the other end of the racecourse as the boats approached the score-up buoy.

I was once describing the sport to some tourists from New Jersey who were seeing unlimited hydroplanes for the first time. A race was starting and the couple watched in wonder as the boats slowly crept around the turn. One finally asked what in the heck was going on, but not five minutes into my dissertation about the starting procedure and the score-up buoy, I could see that their eyes were already glazed over. So much for attracting new fans.

The race officials eventually decided that the score-up buoy wasn't working, either, so another new rule was conceived. This time they decreed that there should be a minimum speed—80 mph—during the starting period. And, to enforce the new rule, somebody devised a strobe light that was connected to a gizmo that sensed the speed that it was traveling. One of these lights would be attached to each boat and, if the boat fell below 80 mph, the strobe light would start flashing.

The first time the officials saw the flashing light, they would give the driver a warning that he needed to go faster. If the light tattled on the driver a second time, the boat was assessed a one-minute penalty.

The rule has always been controversial. There have been times when a boat was clearly going faster than 80 mph, yet the light was flashing. There have also been times when a boat was obviously going slower than it should, yet no light flashed. In addition, there were only five of these lights available to the officials, which meant if there were more than five boats in a race, they couldn't be held to the same standard.

The whole business of the strobe lights came to a head this year at the previously mentioned Seattle race. The *Miss HomeStreet* literally came to a stop while in the backstretch during the starting period, but no warning was given. Driver Jimmy Shane went on to cross the finish line first and was the apparent winner, but race officials reviewed the film and decided after the awards ceremony was over that Shane should be assessed a one-minute penalty, thus giving the win to J. Michael Kelly and the *Graham Trucking*.

The resulting cry was deafening enough that when the boats met again in San Diego a couple of

weeks ago, the rule about maintaining an 80-mph speed was eliminated. That brought the whole matter full circle and gave us a flashback to the Trolling Era. In setting up for the final heat, Kelly camped himself in the inside lane while going down the backstretch at a pace barely faster than he could swim, hit the throttle and was across the starting line, then went on to a convincing victory.

So, now we find ourselves at a point where the starting procedure is yet again up in the air. Fans are complaining that they hate the trolling start, some are calling for the score-up buoy again, while others are suggesting to just leave it alone and learn to love the creeping along.

At the risk of adding to the confusion, let me suggest another solution, one that is simple and that would do away with much of the trolling at the same time. I'd like to know what you think.

My idea involves two easy steps:

**1) Shorten the starting period**—The boats can't leave the pits until two minutes before the start on a two-mile course or two and a half minutes before the start on a 2.5-mile course.

**2) Force the boats to go around the racecourse**—Each boat must cross the startline at least once during the starting period.

That's it. No flashing lights, no score-up buoy, and no rules leaving room for interpretation and the analysis of film by race officials. Most importantly, it would be easy for race fans to understand and would set up a great deal of strategy for the drivers.

Why two minutes on a two-mile course, or two and a half minutes on a 2.5-mile course? That's how long it takes to circle the course twice while averaging 120 mph, which I'm thinking is an adequate speed to

accommodate the speeding up and slowing down of the maneuvering that takes place during the starting period, but doesn't leave enough time to just camp on the backstretch, especially if each boat must cross the starting line at least once during

that short time.

I'm open to your comments and concerns about this suggestion. I'd especially like to hear from drivers. And, if you have ideas of your own, we'd love to hear them, too. We'll plan on a feature in an upcoming

issue of the *Unlimited NewsJournal* to continue the discussion about this important issue.

Who knows? It might make a difference. Maybe H1 will listen to its fans this time? ❖

## ASK THE EXPERT

*Do you have a question about hydroplane racing? Here's your chance to get an answer. If you have a question about the sport, we'll find the expert to answer it. This month's question is about turbine engines, and nobody is better qualified to give the answer than John Walters, the first driver to win a race with a turbine-powered boat and an experienced crew chief and boatbuilder.*

**QUESTION:** I am a big fan of NHRA drag racing and unlimited hydroplane racing. I am trying to understand what goes on during a weekend of hydroplane racing. For Top Fuel and Funny Cars the engines are adjusted for each run based on weather and corrected altitude. They may adjust the blower overdrive, cylinder pressure, advance spark and Nitro content. They will adjust the wing, air pressure in tires and primary and secondary clutch depending on track conditions.

What if anything can you adjust on the gas turbine based on weather and humidity? What happens from the first test section until the final heat as far as adjustments throughout the day? Wing, gear box and props? How many gear boxes, props do you bring to the race? What changes between qualifying and race set up? It seems as if HomeStreet has the field covered. What do they have that you need to be just as fast? As it is a brand-new boat, is it weight or something else?

Thanks for the information and I do enjoy the racing on the water. You put on a great show.

Patrick Heberlein

**ANSWER:** Hey there, well as far as engine adjustments, we really only have a few because we have limits on fuel flow and rpm, per our rules. The fuel flow will change slightly due to ambient air temp.

There are governors on the rpm, one for N1, which is the compressor speed and no rules concerning that. The N2 is the power turbine speed and has a governing adjustment and is monitored by H1 via onboard computer.

These are pretty major adjustments and most teams make them on a Dynamometer, not in the boat at the race site. The fuel flow is adjusted on site, at times. To get it as close to the maximum allowable by rules is critical for best engine performance and horsepower.

Because these are engines designed for aircraft, the fuel control adjusts and compensates for altitude/air density, temperature changes, etc.

As for hull changes, there are many. The easiest and most common are aerodynamic, front wings and rear wing. Props make a huge difference, too. Diameter changes the ride angle and height at the strut. This changes the angle of attack of the main wing section, affecting lift. Pitch and rake change the ride and the acceleration along with gear ratios.

The teams with the bigger budget can afford more options as far as gears, gearboxes, props, skid fins, etc. This day and age, a lot depends on the driver's skills and abilities to fly the boat. I hope this helps.

John Walters

# Detroit Hydrofest offers non-stop action.

Although no unlimiteds this year, the HRL Grand Prix boats, Hydro 350s, and Jersey Speed Skiffs did not disappoint. Detroit fans get noise and close racing.

by Roger Schaaf  
Photos by Robert F. Peters

**T**he 2019 Detroit Hydrofest was a huge success. Congratulations to Mark Weber and the awesome volunteers for a great race weekend. Thank you to all of the teams who raced and provided a great show. Last but not least, thank you to the Dynamic Duo, Ayler and Luce. You guys Rochon...or was that Rock On!

The weather was nearly perfect, upper 70s, and winds off of Lake St. Clair kept the Detroit River relatively flat. The wind at times was a bit strong, but not enough to keep the boats on the trailers.

The crowd was fantastic. Personally, I didn't think that many people would attend. Thankful that I was wrong. Great job Detroit for showing your support.

The H1 Unlimiteds were absent this year so it was up to the HRL Grand Prix, Hydro 350s, and Jersey Speed Skiffs to showcase their stuff. They did not disappoint. Noise, close racing, and non-stop action filled both days of racing.

Familiar H1 names were on hand to help put on the show. Names such as Bert Henderson, Andrew Tate, Jimmy King, Scott Liddycoat, Jeff Bernard, and Tom



[Top] Grand Prix action with the Detroit skyline in the background.  
[Above] Andrew Tate (left) driving the Pennzoil H-300 to victory in Hydro 350 competition. On the inside of him is Donny Allen.



[Top] The U-36 *Miss U.S. IV*, a boat that saw unlimited action in 1957 and '58, made an exhibition run on the Detroit River. [Middle] Tom Pakradooni takes his Jersey Speed Skiff around the turn on his way to victory. [Above] Scott Liddycoat has the inside lane during a Grand Prix race. Behind him is Mike Monahan and nearest to us in the outside lane is Jimmy King. [Right] Henderson is interviewed by public address announcer Brad Luce.

Thompson raced in the Grand Prix class. I sure hope that I didn't miss anyone.

The Grand Prix final was full of action and excitement. Great racing and a variety of penalties allowed Bert Henderson to take the win. A couple of names to watch are Mike Monahan and New Zealand's Ken Lupton.

The Hydro 350s showcased Tate and Bernard. If you have never seen the H350 class, you should really make it a point to see a race. You won't be disappointed. Excellent racing! A couple of drivers to watch in the 350 class are Dylan Runne, Donny Allen, and Bobby King. Great racers and, from what I've been told, great "kids."

The Jersey Speed Skiffs also put on a good show for the crowd. Always fun to watch.

Congratulations to the winners: Bert Henderson in the Grand Prix, Andrew Tate in Hydro 350, and Tom Pakadrooni in Jersey Speed Skiffs.

Here's to whatever 2020 brings to the Detroit River. ❖



# FROM THE UNJ VAULT:

## Pete LaRock:

### "Hydro Dreamer"

*Many colorful characters have been involved with unlimited hydroplane racing during the past 115 years, and among them was Peter Alan LaRock. Billed as the youngest owner in unlimited racing when he bought his first boat at the age of 26 in the early 1970s, LaRock may have been best described by a Seattle newspaper reporter who wrote an article about him titled "Hydro Dreamer."*

*He developed his passion for boat racing while growing up in South Seattle not far from a marina where many of the unlimited teams tested. While scraping by, making a living as a carpenter and even living for a time in a dog kennel, he nevertheless managed to buy an old hydroplane from Bob Gilliam and went racing in 1973. Two years later, with the death of Jim Clapp who had developed the first turbine-powered hydroplane, the U-95, LaRock convinced Clapp's widow, Pamela, that he was worthy of becoming the boat's new owner.*

*He removed the turbine engine and replaced it with an Allison, later re-powered it with a Rolls Merlin, and would drive it himself in 1977 as it carried the name U-96 KYYX. When Jerry Bangs was killed during the Seattle race that season, LaRock decided he had enough of racing and sold the boat, but while visiting with friends in the pits the following year, he was asked to take the wheel of the U-65 Miss Squire Shop II. That would be LaRock's last involvement in unlimited racing.*

*He went into business as a home builder and land developer for the next 25 years, tried retirement for a while, went into a partnership on a small-batch concrete business that sadly ended in litigation, then became a real estate investor near his home in Bothell, Washington. He passed away on June 30, 2016, at the age of 69.*

*The following interview was conducted by David Speer in December 1974, at a time when rumors were rife about the fate of the U-95 turbine boat and its future and shortly after Pamela Clapp gave 28-year old LaRock the nod as the new owner and urged him "to put a little love into it." The interview first appeared in the July 1975 issue of the Unlimited NewsJournal.*



KYYX Publicity Photo

**UNJ: Take us back. How'd you get started in unlimited racing? It is commonly thought you were on Bob Gilliam's crew.**

LaRock: Well, that's a misnomer, so I'll clear that up. I was born and raised in an apartment complex across the street from Jett's Marina in south-end Seattle where all the boats came to test every year. I watched the *Hawaii Ka'i* and the *Thriftyway* all winter long because my best friend's father owned the place. So, I lived at the boatyard and was thoroughly indoctrinated from the first grade on. My father wanted me to be a musician, and I always wanted to race boats. After college, the Army, and ski bumming for a couple of years, I returned to Seattle

and was a pretty good carpenter, had a Jaguar, a truck. Three pieces of property. But I wasn't too happy. I ran into Bob Gilliam testing the *Atlas* for Bob Fendler one day and asked him how to get to drive a hydro. He said you had to start on a crew. So, I asked if I could do that. He said, "OK." I started going out to his place weekends working on the U-21, which was under construction. When he decided to race the boat, his crew took it over. They were a tightly knit group, so I was never involved. I just worked on his boat.

**Did this thing ever take a dream form? Was there ever a specific point where you recognized you definitely**

**wanted an unlimited hydroplane?**

I felt a kinship with hydroplanes and a likeness with hydroplane racing from a very early age. I've been totally comfortable with it ever since I was a youngster. When I bought my first boat, everybody thought I was just crazy. They said, "You're getting into a millionaire's game." But, for some reason, it didn't come across to me like that because I'm a fairly strong-willed person, because—the money, the expertise, the emotional strain—none of that mattered. I wanted to do it. It didn't scare me in the least. It was raw desire that made me do it. I didn't have any other reasoning beyond that.



Pete LaRock's first unlimited was a boat that was built in 1957 and would race during its first four seasons as the *Breathless II* (Hull #5722). During its first year under LaRock's ownership in 1973, it was the U-11 *Shakey's Special* and Tom Martin was its driver. The hull has been rebuilt and currently appears at unlimited events as the U-80 *Blue Chip*, a name that it carried in 1963 and '64.

**Your first boat was the ex-Breathless II, ultimately called Miss Wickman.**

Yes, he [Gilliam] had it sitting in his yard and I asked to buy it. I sold my Jaguar and my real estate and bought the boat. I lived in a dog kennel outbuilding for eight months in the middle of winter with it, with only a couch to my name. I worked construction trying to save money to buy an engine with. All I had was the boat and it was all corroded, not even raceable. So, I went about a year and then met Tom Martin. I persuaded him to sponsor a boat. And with that money I was able to buy a couple of engines, that old truck, and went racing the first year.

**So, you spent less than a year actually near a boat crew?**

Yes. I had absolutely no experience with engines or running a boat at a race at all. I had put the plumbing in one boat, the decking, and for my efforts I was allowed to race an outboard. The first race I ever entered, I won. It was a D-Alky race. I won both heats. I'd never learned anything about mechanics, building up an Allison, lining up a shaft, or anything. When I got a sponsor, I just started out cold

turkey. Dan Emery, who had been on the crew of *Burien* and *Tempest*, came out to show me how to put an Allison together, but basically, I learned from an instruction manual. In fact, the first engine we ever built had the crankshaft in backwards and wouldn't even run. For three days it backfired and did everything but run.

**That was in 1973, How'd your first season of competition go? Your side of things?**



LaRock's boat was renamed the U-22 Sunny Jim in 1974 and saw action in several races that year with Tom Martin behind the wheel. LaRock took a turn in the cockpit and drove the boat at the Hydroglobe event in Dayton, Ohio.

It was a disappointment. We didn't qualify in Detroit. We went to Madison, Indiana, and ran at least 20 laps in qualifying, all between 85 and 94 miles per hour, and weren't allowed to race. A 95-mile-an-hour minimum. And we both know that a lot of boats have been let in races for going below the minimum speed! So, then we finished two heats at Pasco, qualified at 107 in Seattle, then broke the engine in the five-minute period. So, my first year was a dismal failure.

**How did you feed yourself?**

I've tried to make a living boat racing the past two years and I've barely done it. I haven't made any profit. In fact, over \$100,000 has come and gone through my hands.

**The most interesting part is, how'd you get the U-95? You started out with a boat that was 17 years old, scrounging, and now you have a piece of hardware that's pretty exciting.**

I guess it's a matter of being in the right place at the right time. Pam [Clapp] was anxious to get out of boat racing and was able to sell most of her equipment, except the hydroplane. There didn't seem to

be any real interest. She knew that I was interested and we had some lengthy talks about hydroplanes. After we got to know each other, she realized that I had high aptitude in construction, and of course all that carpenter experiences, and she desired some work done at her residence that at least equaled what the boat was worth in potential costs. And I'm talking the \$20,000 to \$30,000 price range. It was me persuading her to sell the boat versus a museum because she wanted to put it on display as a memorial to what her husband had started to do—pioneer the first turbine hydroplane. I told her that even though successful, the turbine-powered hull never reached its pinnacle. As Heerensperger says, "Second place sucks." Second place no more honorable than 15th place. The only way to make a real monument of it was to go ahead and make a winner of it. I thought I was the person who could do it. I offered her the general contracting job on her home, which would easily pay for the boat. It's a straight business deal as far as I'm concerned. A lot of people think I was given the boat for free, but that's not true.

**Have a couple of years taught you? What are you applying to this boat now that was learned along the way? What have you learned not to do?**

I think the most important thing is to realize what is best for you. What is the best you can do with what you have. A lot of camps are so obsessed with winning to a point where they go beyond their resources. A lot of camps have the money, but they don't have the expertise. Crews try to do things beyond their means and fail a lot. Basically, so far, I try to apply what I've already learned that I know works. And hopefully make enough small changes in a logical sequence



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Jim Clapp thrilled the boat racing world in 1973 when he introduced turbine power to the sport with a boat named the U-95. Sadly, Clapp would die before the boat saw its first action in 1974 while under the ownership of his widow, Pamela Clapp. That following winter, she sold the boat to Pete LaRock, who replaced its turbine engines with an Allison and renamed it the U-95 *Shakey's Special*. With Tom Martin driving, the boat failed to qualify for both the Tri-Cities and Seattle races in 1975.

that will lead to a winner. I'm hoping to take maybe 10 small steps on the new boat and make sure they're correct before I add the 11th and 12th.

**Talking about expertise, that's something you people don't have a lot of. Mostly a volunteer operation biting off knowledge piece by piece.**

That's true. I can't think of hardly anyone in the sport that hasn't helped me. I've asked everyone whose opinion I've respected. I've asked them questions, and I've always gotten a straight-forward answer. And I've applied what I've been told to my intuition.

**While you've asked technical questions and have gotten answers, did that cooperation extend top to bottom? Were you easily accepted as an owner? For example, you traveled back east and weren't allowed to compete. Did you feel out of shape over that?**

Well, I was much more readily accepted as a mechanic than as an owner. But it would seem that within the two years I've been in the sport, I've been accepted as an

owner. I occupy a somewhat unique position in that I work on my boat. And I make it known that I'm responsible for how it runs. I owe it all to my crew. I could've never done it without them. I'm the only one who works full-time around here and then apply what I learn to make the boat go faster. My only reservation about some of the calls against me is that if they do it unilaterally across the board, it would be better. If I have to do 95, so should you. Coming from the bottom end, I know the frustration of investing \$39,000 and traveling 3,000 miles to race, and because I was a mile an hour slow, wasn't allowed to race. I can't think anybody I would wish that on. That cost me a lot more than just money. It cost me a lot of anxiety and a lot of hardship with my sponsor and a lot of personal problems that lasted for a long time. A lot of bad vibes I got out of boat racing that I don't think are necessary because we need more boats. If you could get an unlimited to a race and it's respectable, I think you ought to be able to race. There's a lot of work involved and I don't think some people should have to go faster than others.

**If you had your way in changing rules or the way the sport operates, what would you change? Where would you look for improvements?**

There is a basic attitude, a posture problem in that the sport is too selfish. A few people think only of their own well-being, in getting ahead, and don't take the good of the sport or fellow competitors into account when making decisions that could greatly change the sport. And that is limiting the sport. When I came in, I felt very much an outsider. There were friendly exceptions, but overall it had to be a typical All-American success story. If you can take all the hard knocks and make it, you're a good guy. And that irritates me. I defy you to name any other owner that works all day long on this sport. I work, it's my life now, to make this sport work better by aiming high with this boat. But, don't expect a whole lot of help from the establishment because, "we like the thing the way we've got it and don't like the apple cart upset." I'd like to see some changes come about, but I'm not in a position to make any of them. Let's face it, my vote doesn't mean a tinker's damn! And that's just a cold, hard fact.

**Are there any specific suggestions?**

Well, that's a tough one for me. There's got to be a way to break the Executive Committee down so that some of the poorer guys are represented. And I don't know any other way to put it. Unfortunately, most of the decisions are split-second, last-minute decisions, which tend to favor some boats over others. That basic inequality is really the only complaint I've got. I don't have any big bitches about racing. I think it's set up fine. The rules are fine. We can spend a little more money on hospitality and the race sites and maybe less on purses.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

In 1976, LaRock's boat was again re-powered, this time with a Rolls Merlin, and saw action as the *Sunny Jim*. For a period of three races it even spent time with the name *Miss Budweiser* on its deck. The following season, LaRock did the driving himself and entered his U-96 KYYX in only two events, placing fifth in the Tri-Cities and third in Seattle.

It would be nice to be bigger, but we have to spend some money to get those purses bigger. I'd like to see the Unlimited Commission have two or three people full-time to promote new sites.

**In closing, when you got the boat, what were the processes, the changes, you had to go through to get you to today?**

The basic problem was the engine stringers were about four and a half feet apart. And for a reciprocating powerplant, it takes a 30-inch bed. So, we had to take the deck off, remove the existing engine stringers, fabricate wood frames from the outside of the boat all the way across, fabricate new engine stringers, re-deck it, and completely re-plumb it like a new boat. When we took it apart, it was about one-half a new boat. It had the stringers there and the strut, but no plumbing. We rebuilt with our prime considerations being balance, center of gravity, and the shape of the sponsons. We'll find out when we run it.

**Were there any problems with the boat?**

It was coming apart. It was obviously not held together because

the turbines did not constitute part of the frame of the boat, per se. With an aircraft, the boat is tied to both sides of the engine, so it's a part of the structure. The turbines were mounted on Hines joints and the ends of tubular rods and were only hung in the boat. The boat was warped. It had worked itself loose in the time that it ran.

**Ron Jones has consulted with you on the conversion?**

Yes, he's added insight in areas I didn't know much about. He's pointed out a few places where I could make changes. Ron has been extremely helpful. The conversion hasn't been easy, but no one said it would be. To my understanding, the hull was originally designed for an Allison, thinking ahead if the turbines didn't work. And, in installing the gearbox, engine, and lining up the parts, that's proven itself. Everything fell together very well. The only thing I'm worried about is the center of gravity being too high because the engine sits high. If it's high, we may have to go to a conventional rear-cockpit configuration. We're optimistic. We'll know very soon. ❖

# HydroFile

## Race Team News



Lon Erickson

### Jones Racing Team

No official word on the team's plans for the U-9 *Delta Realtrac* next year, but driver Andrew Tate has provided a hint. He recently signed on to be the full-time driver of the GP-777 *Steeler* as it competes in next season's Hydroplane Racing League (HRL) Series. In a story announcing his signing, Tate says, "I will drive wherever HRL goes, it will be my priority. I spoke with Mike Jones, it is possible that the U-9 team take a break from the circuit Unlimited in 2020." Below is Andrew Tate (left) with the owner of *Steeler*, Huey Newport. Tate will replace another unlimited driver, Jimmy King, in the *Steeler* cockpit.



Jack Lowe

### Unlimited Racing Group

After a successful 2019 season, the team hauled their boat north from San Diego and parked it into their shop in Edmonds, Washington (below). "Nice trip home from San Diego," owner Scott Raney posted on Twitter, "boat inside the shop now time to sharpen up the sawzall blades! Here comes 2020."



Scott Raney

### Guntersville HydroFest

Mark your calendars. The organizers of the Guntersville Lake HydroFest have announced that they plan to be back for a third straight year of racing next summer on Guntersville Lake, Alabama. The race has been scheduled for June 27 and 28, 2020. They promise that more details will be coming soon.

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Letters may be edited for clarity and space.

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

2 p.m. on Sunday, October 13, 2019

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