

Dave Villwock returns.

The most successful Unlimited hydroplane driver in the history of the sport will return to the cockpit this summer. Dave Villwock will handle the controls of a yet-to-be-named boat that was purchased by Sharon and Kelly Stocklin's Bucket List Racing Team last year. The boat previously raced for Go Fast, Turn Left Racing.

Villwock, who has 67 career race victories, including 10 APBA Gold Cups, and 10 national championship titles, tested the new Bucket List boat on the Columbia River at Pateros, Washington, last October.

The Stocklins said they are thrilled with the prospect of Villwock driving their boat. "We have worked with Dave for many years and had great success in the flatbottom classes and could not be more excited to have him drive our new boat in the upcoming season," they said.

"I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to drive for Kelly and Sharon this season," Villwock said. "We have made a lot of improvements to the boat and program as a whole. Our team looks forward to energizing the sport by announcing a new sponsorship for our new hull in the coming weeks."

Villwock returns to driving after five seasons away from the cockpit. His first Unlimited ride came in 1990 when he drove William Bennett's *Miss Circus Circus*. In 1992, he drove the new *Coor's Dry* for Ron Jones, Jr., and at San Diego that year won his first race.

He joined Fred Leland's race team in 1994 and won two races that season driving *PICO American Dream*. Two seasons later he won six races for the team, including his first Gold Cup, and won the 1996 national championship.

Bernie Little hired Villwock to drive his *Miss Budweiser* in 1997 and he would remain with the *Budweiser* team for the next eight seasons. During those years, Villwock won a total of 37 races, including four Gold Cups, and seven national titles.



Bucket List Racing

When Budweiser ended its association with the sport after the 2004 campaign, Villwock joined Erick Ellstrom's team and stayed there another eight seasons and again dominated the sport driving boats with names such as *Ellstrom* and *Spirit*

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of Qatar. During those years, he added another 21 race victories to his total, including five Gold Cups, and two national titles.

His most recent stint at the wheel of an Unlimited hydroplane came in 2014 when he drove the U-37 *Miss Beacon Plumbing* for Billy Schumacher.

Villwock stands at or near the top in just about every driving category. His accomplishments include:

- ◆ Most race victories of any driver in history: 67.
- ◆ More national championship titles than any driver in history: 10.
- ◆ The second-most Gold Cup victories in history: 10
- ◆ More perfect weekends than any driver in history: 28.
- ◆ The best percentage of races won vs. races entered: 47.9%
- ◆ More heat victories than any other driver in history: 340.
- ◆ Second in most consecutive heat victories: 19 in 1997.
- ◆ Best percentage of heat wins vs. heats finished: 67.2%

Having turned 67 years old in February, Villwock also will be one of the oldest drivers in the sport's history, but not the oldest—yet. Walter Kade was 68 years old when he drove U-51 *Sweet Thing* during the 1972 Gold Cup in Detroit.

The boat that Villwock will drive was built in 2007 as *Meyer's Auto Tech*. It also saw action that year as *The Plumbing Joint* and *All Access Rentals*. In the years since it has raced with numerous

names, including *Albert Lee Appliance*, *Snoqualmie Casino*, and *Al Deeby Dodge*. It last saw action in 2018 as *PayneWest Insurance*. The boat has yet to win its first race. ❖

Madison and San Diego selling tickets, Seattle race is canceled.

The Covid-19 pandemic that canceled all racing a year ago is still having an impact on the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing. While race organizers in Guntersville, Alabama, are proceeding with their plans to hold a race June 26 and 27, the organizers in Seattle decided health restrictions there would not allow live Seafair activities to take place this summer, which not only includes the hydro race but also the annual Torchlight Parade, Milk Carton Derby, and the Boeing Air Show.

The other race sites are somewhere between those two. Race organizers in Madison, Indiana, received needed funding from local government and have started to sell tickets for an event on July 2 through 4. Organizers in San Diego have done the same for their event scheduled for September 17 to 19.

As for the event in the Tri-Cities, Washington, race officials there say they

are continuing to plan for a testing session in June and a race on July 23 to 25, as long as allowed to do so by local health restrictions.

In announcing the cancellation of live Seafair activities in Seattle, officials said some of the events will be held virtually. A virtual hydroplane race, for instance, will feature the actual drivers competing from their homes and racing on the Lake Washington course. The event will also include a look back at 70 years of racing in Seattle and other race-related activities.

H1 Unlimited issued a statement shortly after Seafair's announcement was made to indicate its disappointment with the decision. "We recognize that this was a difficult decision," the statement says.

"This year's Seattle race would have been the 70th anniversary of the first unlimited hydroplane race on Lake Washington. We're looking forward to a race in Seattle in August 2022 and will begin immediately to work with Seafair, the Seafair Boat Club, and their tremendous network of volunteers to get unlimiteds back on the lake."

In announcing the availability of tickets for the Madison event, race organizers expressed their appreciation to the City of Madison and the Jefferson County Board of Tourism for their financial support. "The board and I are excited to be able to bring the Madison Regatta event to our beautiful riverfront this year considering the hard year we all had," said Greg Thorpe, president of the Madison Regatta. "This will be great for our community." ❖



Chris Denslow

In the sport's only on-the-water action last year, Dave Villwock took the Bucket List Team's new boat for some test runs on the Columbia River at Pateros, Washington, last October. Villwock has now been hired to drive the boat during the 2021 campaign.

TIME CAPSULE: A look back at hydro history.

The American Power Boat Association was created in 1903, making powerboat racing one of the oldest forms of motorsports in America. With our focus on the largest and fastest boats in the world, and with that long history, we have an excuse once a year to take a look back at some of the events that happened 25, 50, 75, and 100 years ago.

BY ANDY MUNTZ

25 YEARS AGO: The 1996 Season

As the unlimited hydroplanes gathered near Phoenix for the first race of the 1996 campaign, there was little doubt among the experts how things would turn out in the end. A glance at the immediate past was enough to see that the winner was likely to be Chip Hanauer and the *Miss Budweiser*. Bernie Little's Beer Boat had won each of the last five national championships, after all, and he added a new boat to his fleet in 1996—the *Miss Budweiser* that would be known as T-5.

There would be other boats in the field, of course. Another quick look at the history would tell you that Mark Tate and *Smokin' Joe's* was likely to be the strongest challenger. The team had been the runner-up the past two years and, thanks to Hanauer missing races because of an opened hatch in 1994 and a torn muscle in 1995, Tate was able to win the national driver title the previous two years.



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The PICO American Dream at the 1996 Bayfair Bill Muncey Cup in San Diego.

The preseason prognosticators considered other boats as among those to potentially make the final heat, but likely little more. Those possibilities included the Miss Madison Racing Team, which had a serious sponsor in DeWalt Tools, Mike Jones's *Miss Exide*, or perhaps a boat from Fred Leland's low-budget outfit. He had two: a new boat named *PICO Ameri-*

can Dream and a craft they called "Lucky," which was built in 1993, won two races the following year, and finished third in the national standings in 1995. Driving for Leland was Dave Villwock, a wizard at setting up a boat and so far, the winner of three races.

The season opener was on Firebird Lake, a 1.5-mile course that was so tight



F. Pierce Williams

ABOVE: *Miss Budweiser* had won the national championship for the previous five seasons and was the overwhelming favorite to win the title again in 1996.

RIGHT: *Smokin' Joe's* was seen as the biggest threat to the dominance of *Budweiser*. Driver Mark Tate had won the last two driver national titles.



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only two boats could race at a time. The event, therefore, became a series of two-boat shootouts. It also provided an indication that there might be some surprises in store. Driving “Lucky,” Villwock turned in the fastest lap during qualifying at over 149 mph, then earned the choice of lanes for the final heat, selected the inside, and beat Hanauer and the older *Miss Budweiser*—the boat known as T-3, which was rebuilt the year before—to the finish line.

Next came the Gold Cup in Detroit, an event Hanauer had won 10 times in the past 14 years. Hanauer got the better of Villwock in the first

preliminary heat, but then collided with *Smokin' Joe's* in his second heat, knocking Mark Tate out of the contest and giving himself a concussion. Mark Evans was pressed into duty to complete the race for *Budweiser*, but couldn't overcome *PICO American Dream* in the final, giving Villwock a second-straight victory.

By the time the fleet reached Kansas City, Hanauer decided to step aside as the driver of *Miss Budweiser*. Though Bernie Little chose to describe his departure as a sabbatical, Hanauer would never return to the *Budweiser* cockpit. Mark Evans took his place for the rest of the campaign.



F. Pierce Williams

Mike Hanson takes out a buoy driving *DeWalt Tools*, which was campaigned by the Miss Madison Racing Team in 1996. The team finished fourth in the final standings.

Another change came to Leland's *PICO* team—the arrival of his new boat. This gave Leland the ability to employ a strategy that was mastered by Bernie Little and a couple of other big-money teams—bring more than one boat to the race and, after qualifying and testing, select one of them to do the racing. For the Kansas City event, the new *PICO* did the honors and finished second behind Mark Tate and *Smokin' Joe's*. Mark Evans and *Budweiser* finished third.

The newest *Budweiser* finally got a chance to race at Evansville, but Villwock was again the winner, this time aboard Leland's newest boat. The Eastern circuit then wrapped up with another victory by Tate and *Smokin' Joe's* at Madison, where Villwock took second in the older *PICO* and Evans was third in *Budweiser*.

Heading west and with five races to go, the defending champion and overwhelming preseason favorite had yet to score a race victory and had just two second-place finishes. Meanwhile, Leland's underdog *PICO* had a comfortable lead in the national points chase.

The hard luck for the *Budweiser* team then continued. While Villwock won the final heat and another race victory in the Tri-Cities using his newer boat, *Smokin' Joe's* was hampered by stability issues and *Budweiser* went dead in the water. A week later in Seattle, Villwock won again, this time with the older *PICO*. (The new boat was withdrawn after blowing over during a test run.) *Smokin' Joe's* was again second and *Budweiser* third.

Weather played a role when the Unlimiteds then returned to Kelowna, British Columbia, for the first time since 1967. High winds caused the final heat to be canceled and the race to be decided by the three sets of preliminary heats. Both

the older *PICO* and U-6 *DeWalt Tools* had two victories and a second-place finish in those heats, but Villwock had circled the buoys 11 seconds faster, which gave him a third-straight victory. *Budweiser* was third.

The *Budweiser* team finally scored its first race victory of the season in San Diego, largely because of issues involving *PICO American Dream*. Driving the older boat, Villwock was assessed a one-lap penalty because of a lane infraction in the event's first heat and his boat suffered sponson damage in the third preliminary that was severe enough to force its withdrawal from the final. Yet it still won its two other preliminary heats and scored enough points to clinch the 1996 national title.

The season then wrapped up in Honolulu, where *Miss Budweiser* finally looked like it had in years past. With rumors running strong that he had been hired to drive *Budweiser* the next season, Villwock drove *PICO* to second place behind Bernie Little's boat, which won all four heats. Mike Hanson was third in *DeWalt Tools*.

So ended one of the most unexpected seasons in history.

It was Fred Leland's first and only national championship, with a margin of 1,610 points over *Miss Budweiser*. It was also the first national title for Dave Villwock, but he would later earn many more. *Smokin' Joe's* ended the 1996 campaign third in the national standings and *DeWalt Tools* took fourth-place honors.

50 YEARS AGO: The 1971 Season

The sport saw a controversial new race format in 1971 and a race result so surprising that it was made into a movie. As for the boats, the *Miss Budweiser* team stayed with the same boat and driver that won them the national title the year before.

Other top teams saw changes. Atlas Van Lines moved its sponsorship to Lee



Bill Taylor

Dave Villwock in 1996



Randy Hall

ABOVE: Billy Schumacher takes the rebuilt *Pride of Pay 'N Pak* out for a test drive on Lake Washington before the 1971 season. The boat was reconfigured during the offseason so that the cockpit was moved from the bow to behind the engine. The twin Chrysler Hemis used in 1970 were also replaced with a Rolls-Royce Merlin. **RIGHT:** The two-time defending champion *Miss Budweiser* with Dean Chenoweth in the cockpit.

Schoenith's organization, for instance, which then built a new boat for Bill Muncey—a craft that was similar in appearance to the radical *Smirnoff* of 1968 but 800 pounds lighter. Dave Heerensperger also made a change, converting his auto-powered, cabover *Pride of Pay 'N Pak* to a hydro that had the cockpit behind a Rolls-Royce Merlin.

The season started at Miami's Marine Stadium, where the *Miss Budweiser* team continued their winning ways from the year before. Chenoweth won all three heats while Jim McCormick and *Miss Madison* finished second.

Then Bill Muncey enjoyed a quick win streak with his new *Atlas Van Lines*, winning both the President's Cup in Washington, D.C., and the Kentucky Governor's Cup in Owensboro. In both cases he won the races with second-place finishes in the final heat.

Outcomes like that are what led to the controversial race format, which saw its debut at the next outing in Detroit. Called the Fan Plan, it called for a winner-take-all final heat rather than the winner determined by the total number of points earned during the entire event.

The format also pitted the fastest, and the slowest, qualifiers against each other in the preliminary heats. To prevent the driver of a fast boat from purposely qualifying his boat slow so he would be matched with slower entries, the boats



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placing in the slower heat sections were awarded fewer points than those in the faster heats.

The old guard hated the change, but fans had grown tired of watching what Muncey had just done—build a big lead in points during preliminary heats then coast to a race victory without winning the final. The new format also meant that

since the same boats would be racing against each other in the preliminaries, the dead time between heats could be reduced—solving another thing that fans hated.

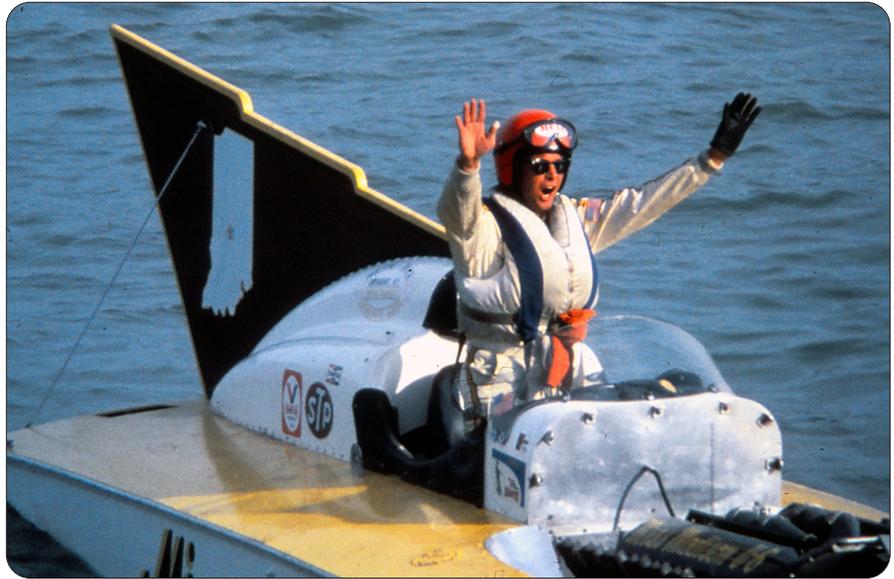
All of the races on the 1971 schedule were given the option to adopt the Fan Plan, but only two signed up: Detroit and Seattle.

Both *Miss Budweiser* and *Atlas Van Lines* won the preliminary heats among the fastest boats, then Chenoweth won the race with a victory in the final. Leif Borgersen, driving *Hallmark Homes* (the boat that won the 1967 and '68 national titles as *Miss Bardahl*), finished second ahead of Muncey.

The old tradition of allowing the winner of the Gold Cup to choose the location of the next year's event was brought to an end in 1963 in favor of a process that awarded the race to the highest bidder. It was a way to increase prize money for the boat teams. The plan seemed to work fine for several years, one Gold Cup offered \$75,000 in prizes, but the novelty had apparently worn off by 1971. Only one city submitted a bid—Madison, Indiana—and that was for only \$30,000. It was the first time the little city on the banks of the Ohio River had hosted the sport's most prestigious event.

The usual entries were there along with the hometown *Miss Madison*, a craft that was acquired from Samuel DuPont in 1963. Owned by the citizens of Madison, it didn't operate with nearly the budget that many of the others had, but the boat was always there and its fans always enthusiastic. Thus were the ingredients for one of the greatest Cinderella stories in the sport's history.

Hallmark Homes was eliminated in the first heat when the boat pitched onto its right side, nosed in, and was demolished. Borgersen was thrown into the water but not seriously injured. In the third heat, the *Atlas Van Lines* hit a swell that punched a hole in the boat's right sponson, forcing Muncey to pull off the course into shallower water, where the



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Randy Hall

TOP: Jim McCormick celebrates as he brings *Miss Madison* to the dock after winning the 1971 Gold Cup before the hometown crowd. **MIDDLE:** Bill Muncey was driving a brand-new *Atlas Van Lines* during the 1971 season. **ABOVE:** Leif Borgersen in the cockpit of *Hallmark Homes*.

boat sank. Driving *Miss Madison*, meanwhile, Jim McCormick went into the final with one heat victory and two second-place finishes.

McCormick then pulled off a miracle. His boat roared first across the starting line and stayed there to the finish, sending the hometown crowd of about 110,000 into delirium. The improbable result would later inspire the 2004 movie *Madison*.

The surprise continued when the fleet went west for the Atomic Cup in the Tri-Cities. Billy Schumacher and *Pride of Pay 'N Pak* appeared to be the clear favorite when the final heat started, and that seemed even more certain when *Notre Dame* sputtered to a stop during the second lap, but then the engine woes hit *Pay 'N Pak* and it also went dead. That left McCormick with a 15-second lead over Bill Muncey, and he stayed there to the end.

Two victories in a row for the old, low-budget hydro.

Schumacher finally got his victory in Seattle, where the Fan Plan was again employed. He finished second behind *Budweiser* in the first heat of the fast boats, but won the second preliminary and ran away with the final—twice. In the final heat's first running, he was 15 seconds from the finish line when *Notre Dame* nosed in and came apart—tossing Billy Sterett, Jr., into Lake Washington. Schumacher then pulled ahead of *Budweiser* coming out of the first turn of the re-run and won comfortably.

He did it again in Eugene, Oregon, for the first and only running of the Oregon Emerald Cup. *Pride of Pay 'N Pak* swept the event with a perfect weekend—fastest qualifier, victories in both preliminary heats and the final.

With eight events done and one race left, the Atlas Van Lines Trophy in Dallas, four boats had two victories each. Dean Chenoweth and *Budweiser* held a slim 681-point lead over McCormick and *Miss Madison*, and Schumacher and *Pride of Pay 'N Pak* were only 196 points behind them. Bill Muncey and *Atlas Van*

Lines were further behind in fourth place.

All four of them finished either first or second in the two preliminary heats at Dallas, which meant nobody really gained anything on the others. As a result, going into the final, the *Budweiser's* third-straight title was already clinched.

Muncey won the final heat, Schumacher won the race, and Chenoweth won the national title. The surprising *Miss Madison* ended up second in the final standings and *Pride of Pay 'N Pak* was third.

75 YEARS AGO: The 1946 Season

The war was over! After most of five years sitting on the beach while battles raged in Europe and the Far East, the hydroplanes could finally once again hit the water. What's more, surplus engines were available—12-cylinder monsters that would breathe new life into the sport, which had struggled in the late 1930s.

The P-40 Warhawks flown in Northern Africa and the P-38 Lightnings that shot down Admiral Yamamoto's plane in the South Pacific had used the Amer-

ican-designed Allison V-1710 engine. The later-model P-51 Mustangs that escorted bombers into Germany, as well as the Spitfires and Mosquitoes flown by the Royal Air Force, used the British-designed Rolls-Royce Merlin—many of which were built in America by Packard. Now that the war was over, thousands of the engines were available at rock-bottom prices—and, they were perfect for boat racing.

To make them legal for use in a Gold Cup race required a change of rules, however. The size limit at the feeble Gold Cup races in 1940 and 1941 had been 625 cubic inches, about a third the size of an Allison or Merlin. So APBA officials, knowing that it had become nearly impossible to find the old engines used before the war, decided to allow engines of any size into the Gold Cup.

Among the first to put one of the fighter-plane engines in a race boat was Dan Arena, who earned headlines in 1938 when he and his buddy Danny Foster hauled the homebuilt *Miss Golden Gate* from Oakland to Detroit and finished second in the Gold Cup. He later designed a *Notre Dame* boat for Herb Mendelson and served as a naval archi-



The crew, and perhaps some interested onlookers, check out the Allison engine installed in Dan Arena's *Miss Golden Gate III* at the 1946 Gold Cup.

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tect for the Department of Navy during the war. While doing that, he dreamed how those V-12 engines might fare in his favorite sport, so as soon as the war ended, he bought a surplus P-38, removed its engines, and built another hydroplane. It would become *Miss Golden Gate III*.

Another competitor anxious to get back on the water was Guy Lombardo, the famous bandleader who also loved driving fast boats. He got involved as a racer in 1939 when he purchased a 225-class boat from Ventnor Boat Works. When the war ended, he decided to make the jump to the big boats and contacted Zalmon Simmons, the mattress mogul and the winner of the 1939 and 1941 Gold Cups while driving a Ventnor hull named *My Sin*. Lombardo bought the boat, renamed it *Tempo VI*, and prepared the hull and its beautiful, custom-built, 16-cylinder engine for racing.

Thanks to the more liberal rules, an immense field of 17 boats showed up for the 1946 Gold Cup, but the clear favor-



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TOP: Three of the main characters in hydro racing in 1946. From the left, Albin Fallon, Guy Lombardo, and Danny Foster. **ABOVE:** Guy Lombardo's *Tempo VI* on the hook at the 1946 Gold Cup on the Detroit River.

ites were Arena's *Miss Golden Gate III* and Lombardo's *Tempo VI*.

The two raced in separate sections during the opening heat of competition. Both won easily. When they met in the second heat, it became apparent that Lombardo's entry was the better of the

two. While *Golden Gate* gyrated around the course, its engine producing more horsepower than its hull could handle, Lombardo calmly drove into the lead and stayed there.

When they met again in the final heat, however, it was Arena who took a



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ABOVE: Danny Foster drives the *Miss Great Lakes* to victory in the 1946 President's Cup Race. That's Guy Lombardo in *Tempo VI* following in second place.
RIGHT: Danny Foster accepts the President's Cup trophy from President Harry Truman.



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commanding lead—hitting speeds estimated to be 120 mph. Considering the points Lombardo had already earned, *Golden Gate* would have had to pass *Tempo VI* two times to make up the difference, and that just wasn't going to happen. Nevertheless, Arena pushed on until he discovered that his Allison was just like every other engine in one sense—it needed lubrication. A leak had drained so much oil from the engine that a connecting rod finally let go just as he was starting the last lap.

When the Gold Cup ended, Arena was compelled to go home to California to help in the family wine business, so he sold his boat to Albin Fallon of Detroit, the owner of the Great Lakes Broach & Gage Company. Fallon renamed the craft *Miss Great Lakes* and hired Danny Foster to drive it at the President's Cup. There, Foster erased all doubt that the Allison engine would be a commanding force.

In the first heat, Foster crossed the starting line in fourth place but passed the other three before they had reached the first turn. The second heat had a similar story. Lombardo jumped to an early lead in *Tempo VI* and managed to hold off *Miss Great Lakes* for two laps, but Foster eventually surged ahead and took the checkered flag and the race victory.

Fallon was so impressed with his new boat that he decided it should easily set a new world speed record. But later that fall, as Foster neared top speed on the Detroit River, the boat hit a series of swells, went soaring six feet into the air, then flipped end over end as it landed. Foster flew from the cockpit and suffered some broken ribs. The boat, however, was not as lucky. Although it would be rebuilt, it would never be the same.

The Gold Cup and the President's Cup were the only two events of any consequence in 1946. There were other contests, but the number of boats entered in them was quite small.

The season instead will always be remembered as the first to include the distinctive sound of an Allison engine.

100 YEARS AGO: The 1921 Season

Gar Wood was the undisputed king of boat racing throughout the world as the 1921 season got underway. He had won his fourth straight Gold Cup the year before and crossed the Atlantic to race on the English Solent, in Osborne Bay near Cowes on the Isle of Wight, where he captured the Harmsworth Trophy.

The 1921 season included events in Buffalo, New York; Peoria, Illinois; Chicago; Toronto; and Los Angeles that had just a few entries. The headlines, however, were all created by the races in Detroit, where the Gold Cup and Harmsworth were held a week apart in late August and early September.

The Gold Cup came first, but was not much. Perhaps because boat owners were intimidated by the success of Gar Wood, only two boats started the race on the first day. Gar Wood and his defending champion *Miss America* easily defeated Sheldon Clark aboard *Miss Chicago*. Another boat named *Orlo III* joined them for the second heat, but was no match for the others. Then the original two raced in the third heat—again won easily by Wood when the event was stopped after two laps because of heavy rain.

As for the Harmsworth the following weekend, a challenge was submitted by Sir Mackay Edgar, who lost to Wood the year before. He figured his new *Maple Leaf VII* would be fast enough to claim the Harmsworth for Great Britain. Meanwhile, Gar Wood was so determined to defend the race for America that he built another new boat for

the purpose—a massive craft named *Miss America II* that was powered by four Liberty engines.

The potential clash of the two titans attracted a huge crowd to the shores of the Detroit River, but the action fell far short of expectations. The challenger had run into trouble as soon as it arrived in North America. In hoisting *Maple Leaf VII* off the freight car in Walkerville, Ontario, the tongs slipped and the boat dropped with a crash about two feet into the deck.

The incident knocked the hull's alignment off just enough to severely influence the way it cut through the water. Then, three laps into the first scheduled race, the boat began to take on water and eventually sank, thus ending the challenge—assuring that the famous British International Trophy would remain in the trophy case at the Detroit Yacht Club.

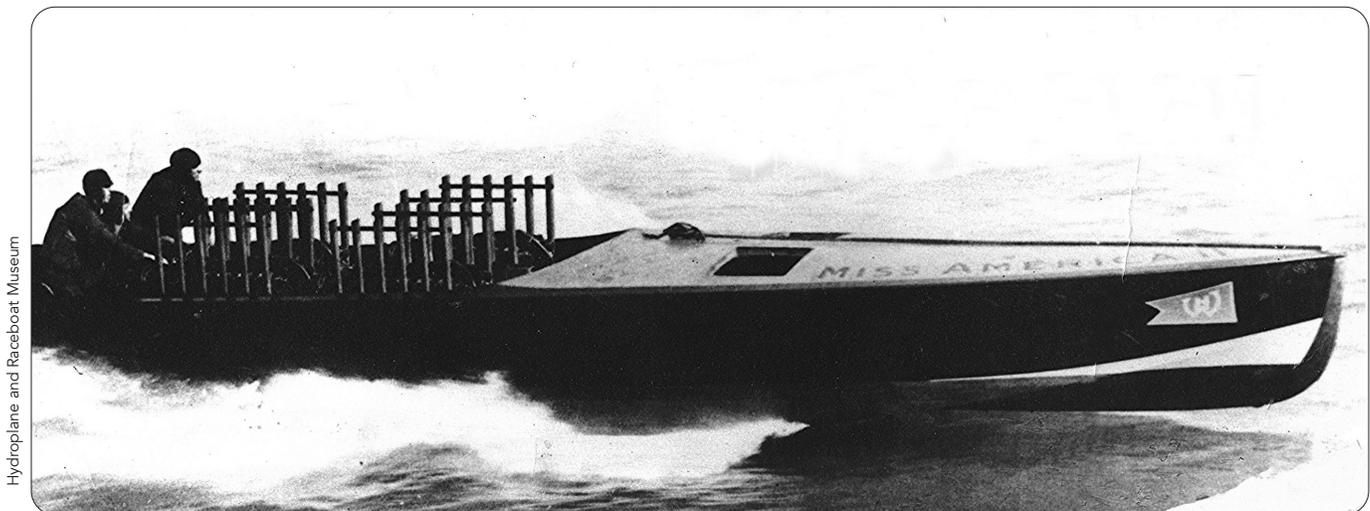
Watching from the committee boat were APBA officials, who couldn't help but grow increasingly concerned about their flagship event—the Gold Cup. Over the past several years, the field of competitors for the race had dwindled to almost nothing. The blame, they felt, rested with Gar Wood, who had set a standard so high that other racers were opting to stay away, not able to match his tenacity or his bankroll.

The final blow was the embarrassing 1921 race the week before. Not only did the Gold Cup have only three entries, it had been reduced to a mere sideshow to the Harmsworth.

Meeting in New York the following winter, the APBA would adopt new rules to fix the problem. The result would create the Gold Cup class and end Gar Wood's dominance over the event.

But, that will be a story for next year. ❖

CAPTION: Gar Wood's *Miss America II* was the winner of the 1921 Harmsworth Trophy.



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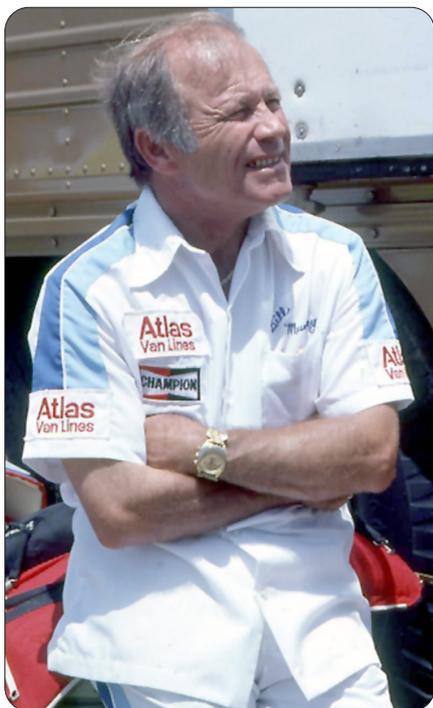
RECORDS OF A DIFFERENT SORT

BY CRAIG FJARLIE

Most ardent observers of hydroplane racing are familiar with annual awards for boat and driver championships. They are traditional honors given for the boat and driver who score the most points during the course of a season.

After reviewing a variety of other statistics, it becomes obvious that some drivers have earned a special place in the historical record. There are no awards for these achievements, but they are noteworthy just the same.

The following summary will look at drivers who competed in at least one race for the most consecutive seasons without a break, those who competed in the most consecutive Gold Cup races, the most consecutive races in Seattle, and the most consecutive seasons in Detroit.



Bill Muncey

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The latter requires a little clarification. Detroit usually held at least two regattas from the time racing resumed following World War II through 1961. Rather than separating participation in the Detroit Memorial from the Silver Cup, if a driver participated in one or the other that would be sufficient to constitute consecutive years of racing on the Detroit River.

Before we delve into the lists of competitive longevity, Jim Sharkey deserves thanks for assistance with research used in compiling the documentation.

Consecutive seasons:

The majority of Unlimited drivers compete for a half-dozen years. A few may stay on for 10 years or so, but hardly any continue for decades.

At the top of this category is Bill Cantrell, who drove an Unlimited every year from 1955 through 1981. His mark of 27 consecutive seasons places him above three drivers who are tied with 21 seasons: Bill Cantrell (1946–1968), Ken Muscatel (1991–2011), and Dave Villwock (1992–2012). Next in line is Jerry Hopp, who drove from 1983 through 2001 for a total of 19 seasons.

There's another tie with drivers who competed for 18 seasons: Chuck Thompson drove from 1949 through 1966, Mike Hanson was in an Unlimited cockpit from 1986 through 2003, and Mitch Evans was on the water from 1987 through 2004. Fred Alter drove for 17 seasons (1955–1971), and Greg Hopp drove for 16 seasons (1999–2014). He's tied with an active driver, J. Michael Kelly, who has raced from 2004 through 2019.

Because the entire 2020 season was canceled, Kelly could move up on the list provided he races in 2021. Again,



Bill Cantrell

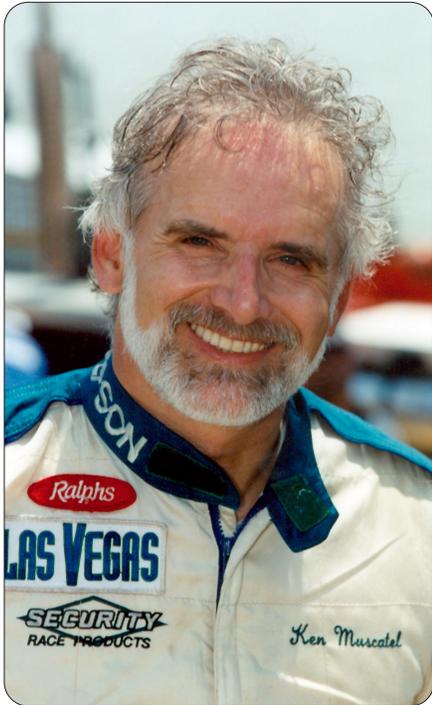
Sandy Ross Collection

there's a tie with drivers who competed for 15 consecutive seasons: Chip Hanauer raced from 1976 through 1990. Bob Gilliam, who rarely received recognition for all the racing he did, drove from 1959 through 1973.

Consecutive Gold Cup races

The driver with the most consecutive Gold Cup appearances is the wily veteran Bill Cantrell. He participated in the race for the Old Mug 18 times, from 1948 through 1965. Bill Muncey is next with 16 consecutive Gold Cups, from 1966 through 1981.

There's a tie for third. Mitch Evans raced in the Gold Cup 15 consecutive years, from 1989 through 2003. Ken Muscatel had 15 consecutive appearanc-



Bill Taylor

Ken Muscatel

es, from 1997 through 2011. Next is Chip Hanauer with 14 consecutive Gold Cups, 1977 through 1990. Right behind him is J. Michael Kelly, 13 consecutive Gold Cups from 2005 through 2017.

Unfortunately, *Graham Trucking* skipped the 2018 Gold Cup, so even if Kelly appears in the 2021 race, his streak has a break in it. Dave Villwock participated in 12 consecutive Gold Cups, from 1993 through 2004, and came back to add four more, from 2009 through 2012. Mike Hanson raced in 10 consecutive Gold Cups, from 1988 through 1997, missed 1998, then added five more from 1999 through 2003.

Consecutive Seattle races

The driver who has competed in the most consecutive Seattle races is Ken Muscatel. He made his first appearance in 1991 and drove through 2011, for a total of 21 years. He is followed by Chip Hanauer, who drove for 19 consecutive years, from 1976 through 1995.

A notch behind Hanauer is Mitch Evans, who competed from 1988 through 2003, for a total of 17 years. There is a tie in the next position. Bill Muncey was in 16 consecutive Seattle races, from 1966

through 1981. Remember, he qualified *Such Crust IV* in 1965, but helped with the television broadcast and stayed on the beach come race day. As he walked through the pits in '65 with his broadcasting gear, some fans pleaded with him to drive, but he politely shook his head and said no.

J. Michael Kelly also has 16 consecutive Seattle races to his credit, from 2004 through 2019. Next time there is a Seattle race and if Kelly participates in it, he will surge ahead of Muncey, tie Evans, and close the gap on Hanauer.

Some may argue that Kelly will have a gap in his effort because there were no races in 2020. The list is based on sanctioned races. Because there were no sanctioned races in 2020, there is no break in Kelly's string. Dave Villwock is the next driver on the list. He competed in 15 consecutive Seattle races, from 1998 through 2012.

Consecutive seasons on the Detroit River

Bill Muncey is number one on the list of consecutive seasons racing on the Detroit River. He participated in at least one race every year from 1955 through 1981, for a total of 27 years. Well behind him are Bill Cantrell and Ken Muscatel, both with 18 years.

Cantrell raced on the river from 1948 through 1965, while Muscatel raced from 1993 through 2011. Mitch Evans is next. He raced on the river from 1987 through 2003, for a total of 15 years.

Chuck Thompson participated in Detroit races for 13 consecutive years, from 1949 through 1961. Tied with him is J. Michael Kelly, who raced in Detroit from 2005 through 2017. Because *Graham Trucking* stayed home from the Gold Cup in 2018, Kelly will have a gap in his record if the Unlimiteds ever return to racing on the Detroit River.

No one else is even close to Muncey's mark, so it is unlikely anyone will break it.

Longevity is an impressive aspect of racing. Too many drivers had their careers cut short for various reasons. Others quit while they were ahead.

No matter how one looks at it, remaining involved carries its own reward. There have been good times and difficult times, but through it all, there will be friendships that last decades and plenty of stories to tell.

Congratulations to those who have stayed the course. You have helped make Unlimited hydroplane racing the unique and intriguing sport it is. ❖

Family Series Update

Readers brought to my attention that a few things were missed in the family series that appeared in three consecutive issues of the *NewsJournal* earlier this year.

In part three, where we focused on crewmembers, sponsors, and officials, former chief referee Mike Noonan and his brother Billy Noonan were inadvertently omitted. Mike was head referee for several years and Billy also served as a referee. Their father also worked as a referee and their mother was a scorer at regattas in the Ohio River Valley and other Midwest sites.

In a matter of foot-in-mouth disease, Rex Manchester's son Mark was a toddler when his father was killed. Contrary to what was written in the article, Mark was much too young to work on boats that Rex drove. However, Mark's older brother, Kurt, did work on boats, including Les Rosenberg's *Valu-Mart*.

My thanks to readers who pointed out the omission and the mistake. The series was a learning experience, and in that sense, I hope I'm never too old to continue learning.

Craig Fjarlie

AROUND THE CIRCUIT

Race Site News by Chris Tracy



One of the most iconic hydro brands is Oberto—beef and turkey jerky, pepperoni, sausage and more. As a kid growing up in the Rainier Valley of Seattle, even before Oberto sponsored unlimited hydroplanes, I knew the company. In 1953, Art Oberto and his mother bought the smallish triangular block of property on Rainier Avenue for their plant, and it was home to the company until 1978.



Art and his late wife, Dorothy, also bought the eight lots behind the plant, across the street and west of the property. I seem to recall that Art and Dorothy lived in a house on that property early in their marriage.

My parents bought a house in the northern Mt. Baker neighborhood in about 1961 and the Oberto store/plant was biking distance from our house. In 6th and 7th grades, I biked to the Oberto store to buy beef jerky. Times were different. The jerky was not packaged in commercial bags; it was more like an old-fashioned meat market. The salesperson scooped up the jerky and placed it in a small, white, waxed bag.

As the company grew—eventually to 900 employees—the new Oberto plant in Kent, Washington, opened in

1978. While the Rainier plant went idle, the Oberto Factory Store remained open and a fixture on Seattle's Rainier Avenue—kind of an anchor to the once-Italian neighborhood, sometimes referred to as Garlic Gulch.



Over time it became the place to get great deals on Oberto packaged products, such as overstocked items, discontinued items, items close to their pull dates, plus great prices on packaged “ends and pieces” of jerky, pepperoni, etc. One could always grab a warm sausage in a bun for a quick meal.

And the Oberto Factory Store kind of evolved into a Oberto kitsch museum, with photos, signs, plaques, and posters, all over the walls—about the family, company, customers and hydroplanes.



Part of the store was the hydro room, a small room with a couple of tables where customers could sit and eat sausages in buns. Hydro fans often stopped there, too, to buy products and take-in the hydro history. And since the Factory Store was close to Seattle's hydroplane racecourse, the store was always busy around Seafair.

Over the years the Obertos developed a relationship with the Hamlin Robinson School, often referred to as HRS. It's a unique private school that works with students with dyslexia and other language-based learning differences. It currently enrolls more than 300 students.

HRS had previously rented school facilities, but was looking to build its own facility. In 2013 the Obertos sold the eight-lot property across the street and



behind the plant/store property to the school for \$2.2 million. HRS built its new school on that site and the two became neighbors.

As HRS grew, it wanted to expand its middle school. About the same time, the Oberto family was thinking of selling their company. Separate from the sale of the Oberto Company, the Oberto family sold the 1953 plant and Factory Store property to HRS for \$4,110,000 in 2019.

The Factory Store remained open while the school planned for its middle

school. But in late March, it was time for the curtain call for the Oberto Factory Store, as the Hamlin Robinson School was ready to start building the new middle school.

Dressed in our Oberto racing clothing, my wife and I went to the Factory Store a couple of days before it closed in late March. While we don't eat beef any

longer, we picked up a few bags of turkey jerky and snapped a few photos. While there still is an Oberto Factory Store in Renton, about a half hour south of the former Rainier store, the closing of the Rainier store was the end of an era.

For more about Art and Dorothy Oberto and a tour of their former Lake Washington home, read the article, "An

Evening with Dorothy and Art Oberto" in the December 2011 issue of the *Unlimited NewsJournal*. You'll find it by clicking on the UNJ Archives link at www.unlimitednewsjournal.net. ❖

\$ENIOR \$AYS

Feeding Your Hydro Habit by Bob Senior



A Guide to help hydro fans spend their hobby money

Covid-19 restrictions permitting, some hydro fans may be planning to attend an out-of-town race for the first time. Here is the 2021 H1 Unlimited race schedule and some useful web addresses.

GUNTERSVILLE, ALABAMA, June

26-27:

<http://www.guntersvillelakehydrofest.com>

and

explorelakeguntersville.com/stay/hotels

MADISON, INDIANA, July 2-4:

www.madisonregatta.com

<https://visitmadison.org>

TRI-CITIES, WASHINGTON, July

23-25: www.waterfollies.com and

visittri-cities.com/hotels

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA, September

17-19: www.sandiegobayfair.org

CHELAN, WASHINGTON, MAHOGANY

AND MERLOT, October 1-3: Google

"Visitlakechelan" and

thunderboats.ning.com

HYDRO FEVER WEEK AT THE HYDROPLANE AND RACEBOAT MUSEUM: The

Museum will hold another virtual online fund-raiser auction from May 17 to 22. Preview should be up around May 1. You will need to register at thunderboats.ning.com.

NEW HYDROPLANE MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP PREMIUMS: Four hydro-shaped thumb drives, all loaded with an hour of appropriate video. 1955 *Gale V*, 1963 *Notre Dame*, 1976 *Atlas Van Lines*, and 1964 *Miss Exide*. Not for sale! Available only with your new or renewal membership. Details at thunderboats.ning.com.

"WINNINGEST," BY WIL MUNCEY: Bill Muncey's son's book tells the full story of Bill's life as a boat racer, musician, broadcaster, and family man. \$30 postage paid c/o Wil Muncey, P. O. Box 539, Keauau, HI 96739.

"BEST OF THUNDERBOAT RACING" BY STEVE GAREY: Here is a look at unlimited hydroplane racing through a kaleidoscope of great stories and rare photos. Special price: \$19.99 postage-paid c/o Stephen A. Garey, P.O. Box 989, Mt. Clemens, MI 48046.

MAJOR MEMORABILIA COLLECTION LIQUIDATION: Well-known collector Chris Ostrom is selling off his extensive collection of hydroplane items, some 100 years old! Email: ostrom808@yahoo.com.

That's all for this time. See you in October! ❖

Become a member of new H1 Unlimited Fan Club.

Hydroplane fans can help support the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing with an H1 Fan Club membership.

Members get two special gifts from H1, too. Plus you'll be added to the H1 volunteer list and will receive a regular newsletter from H1 that will give you the "insider" scoop about what's happening within the sport you love. Membership is only \$50. Go to the H1 website at www.h1unlimited.com today to get an application form and become a charter member.

MY \$0.02 WORTH

Editorial Comment by Andy Muntz



Many look back with great longing to hydro racing during what is often called the Golden Age, the 1950s and early '60s. They have an impression that the sport was then a thriving enterprise with no politics—especially, they say, compared with the way it is today.

From its very beginning, this sport has been dependent on races organized by non-profit civic organizations, be they local yacht clubs or community festivals. This is vastly different than car racing, for example, where the competition usually takes place within a facility that somebody owns and operates as a business.

This arrangement for boat races worked fine for half a century because the participants were not involved to make money. It was a hobby for wealthy people who wanted to race their expensive speedboats against each other.

Then, in the 1950s, a few boat owners got the idea that racing boats should be a business, so they tried to claim the cost of racing as a necessary business expense. Joe Schoenith, the owner of the

Gale boats, was one of them, but when he included that deduction in his tax return, the IRS cried foul.

It was a hobby, the tax collectors argued, and as evidence they pointed to the fact that there was little prize money to be earned. Most races paid nothing, offering instead a silver cup or platter to the winner.

Soon after losing the tax case, Lee Schoenith became the commissioner of the Unlimited Racing Commission (URC) and resolved to change things. At the top of his list was the desire to make the sport professional, so an edict was sent to all the race organizers before the 1962 season that required them to offer a purse of at least \$10,000.

When the organizers of the Apple Cup in Chelan, Washington, decided to no longer hold their race the year before, they cited as their primary reason the difficulty of raising the money needed to hold their event. One let it be known that their profit in 1960 had been just \$500. So, upon hearing the new requirement

from the URC, how do you suppose the race organizers responded?

If you guessed not well, you'd be correct. In 1961, there had been eight race sites on the calendar, but when July rolled around in 1962, there were only four races on the season's schedule.

Eventually Schoenith used his persuasive powers to convince two of the holdouts—his hometown Detroit and Washington, D.C.—to finally organize a race that summer, but for a long time the sport was in a quandary—certainly not thriving like some fans now seem to recall that it was.

I mention this because that aspect of hydroplane racing has not changed. Even still, 118 years after the sport's founding, boat races are usually organized by non-profit, civic groups that are made up of hard-working volunteers who earn their living doing something else.

It's one of any number of things that makes unlimited hydroplane racing so compelling—and complicated. ❖

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

Check our website for more information.