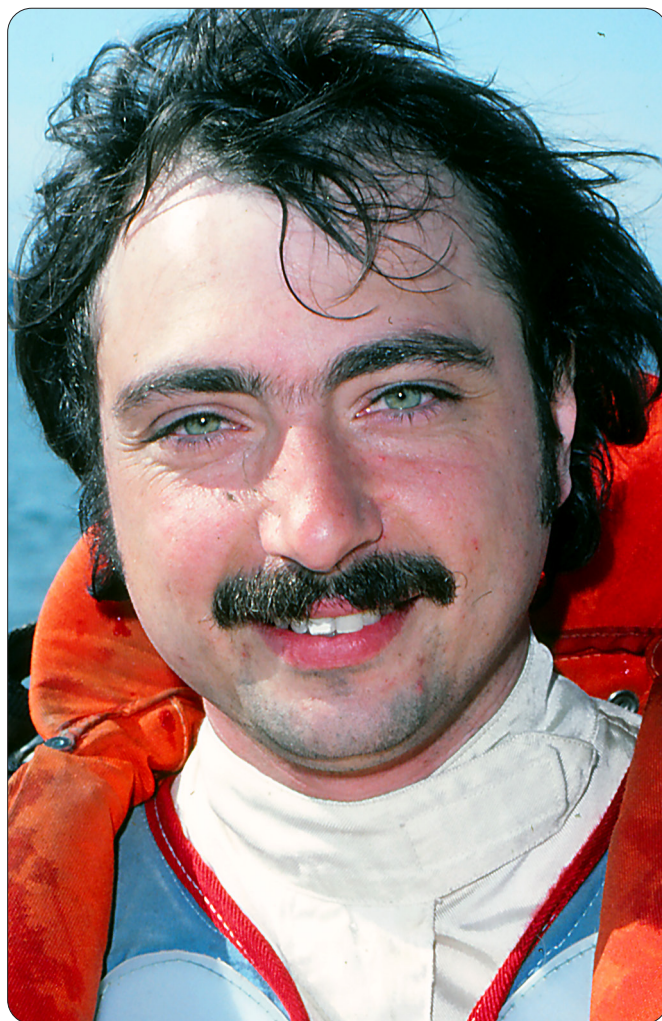


UNJ INTERVIEW: PART ONE

John Walters: Sport's first turbine-powered winner.

John Walters is perhaps best remembered as the driver of the turbine-powered *Pay 'n Pak* and as the first in history to win a race in the cockpit of a turbine-powered boat. But his career goes much deeper than his time in the driver's seat. Walters has spent most of his life around race boats. He started in outboards then moved on to limited inboards. During that time, he learned how to build hulls using a variety of materials and gained a reputation as someone who clearly possesses an ability to focus on details and has a skill for doing a job right the first time. Before and after his days as a driver, he worked on a variety of crews, sometimes in the role of crew chief and sometimes as a mechanical specialist. He currently works in the H1 tech truck, watching for rule violations after every heat. In this, the first of a three-part interview conducted by Craig Fjarlie, Walters discusses how he got involved in this sport.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

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UNJ: Would you tell us a little bit about when and where you were born and some of your early life experiences?

Walters: I was born January 22, 1953, at Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane. My dad was in the Air Force and he was based there, although he was from the central and eastern Ohio area. Most of my relatives on my dad's side are from back there. He met my mom—the relatives on that side of the family are from the Spokane area—while he was based at Fairchild. I was born on the Air Force base there.

I started seeing outboards race in different places when I was just 7, 8 years old and was kind of enthusiastic about that. My dad always had a boat. We water skied and were active in different water sports and all. I saw my first Unlimited race at Coeur d'Alene in 1963, the Diamond Cup. I was 10 years old. On my way home I told my parents, "When I grow up, that's what I want to do." And I'm sure most of the boys, the male kids

that were at the race that day, probably told their parents the same thing on the way home.

But, you know, from that point forward I started washing dogs and mowing lawns, and there were still deposits on pop bottles in those days that I'd take back to collect money. My dad made me a deal that however much money I came up with he would match it, you know, gettin' some equipment to go boat racing. It was not long after that, that I managed to come up with the finances to purchase a used J-Stock hydro. It was actually an A-Stock boat, but we ended up running a J engine on it.

You weren't old enough to run A-Stock.

No, not quite old enough for A yet. I think in the day there was a young boy and a young girl in the Seattle area that had all the records in J-Stock and in A-Stock. I think Mike Downing, and I don't remember the girl's name, she ran J-Stock. And so, we got the boat and got all the equipment. Got things to where it would run and do what it was supposed to do.

Dad was, you know, being in the Air Force, he had the opinion there's two kinds of pilots, those that have crashed and those that are gonna crash. So, it was very important to make sure we had all the safety equipment, had a good idea of what the boat was gonna do in all different conditions and how it was gonna work. I lived in the Lynnwood area [north of Seattle]. There's a little lake up there, it's called Lake Stickney. We would take the boat up there in the afternoons and evenings after dad would get home from work, and we'd run the thing until dark.

Was he still in the Air Force at that time?

No, at that point he was doing civilian work and was doing heating and air conditioning and electrical work. An

BREAKING NEWS

The last glimmer of hope for racing in 2020 is snuffed out with the cancellation of the Columbia Cup.

Now, it's official. In a move that surprised nobody, the Tri-City Water Follies Board of Directors decided on July 20 to cancel the annual Columbia Cup. Coupled with the earlier cancellation of races in Guntersville, Madison, Seattle, and San Diego, the decision means that there will be no Unlimited hydroplane racing in 2020 as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Water Follies board had decided in June to postpone the race, hoping that the spread of the coronavirus would slow down and that racing would be possible in September, but with the Tri-Cities area still being one of the hardest hit by the virus in the state and still in a modified Phase 1 of recovery, the board members realized there was no way that a race could be possible this year. "We are looking into a potential drive-in air show for 2020, and we are working with the Benton-Franklin Health Department on the requirements to make that happen," said Kathy Powell, event director.

Unlimited driver Scott Pierce passes away at age 64.

The sport of Unlimited hydroplane racing lost one of its most popular personalities with the death of Scott Pierce on July 19 in Kirkland, Washington. Pierce was introduced to the sport at an early age when his father, Laird Pierce, owned boats named *Miss Dixie Cola* and *Parco's O-Ring Miss* in the late 1960s.

Scott started his Unlimited driving career when he got a ride in a hydro named *Michael's Pride* in 1981. Until he retired from driving in 2001, he saw action in many different boats for owners such as Bill Wurster and Bernie Little and helped drive the *Miss Budweiser* to a national title in 1991. During his career, Pierce won a total of seven Unlimited races. He was more recently active as an owner in Grand Prix racing.

A more complete remembrance of Scott Pierce and his career can be found on page 16 of this issue.

electrician. So, when he'd get home from work we'd go run the boat just about every day, it seemed. The deal was that I had to run it one year before we raced it, or one season.

Learn how to drive it.

Learn how to drive it. Learn what it was gonna do. And so once that was accomplished then I started racing J-Stock Hydros. Ended up going through several different changes and things, tryin' to make the boat better and figure out how to drive it better. You know, you get beat pretty hard a couple of times and you figure out what they did to beat you and you try to do the same sort of thing and get better the next time around. So, like a lot of races around in those days it seemed like there was a race every weekend some place.

Yeah, there were a lot more then.

Yeah, and we could race everywhere and then do a lot of things without having to travel very far or go very much distance. Did that for a number of years. I experimented a little bit with A-Stock, but for some reason, I was kinda intrigued by B-Stock Hydro. The same boat was legal for all three classes and so we ended up investing in some B-Stock engines and parts and pieces, and ran that. Learned an awful lot about driving boats and winning and losing.

About that time my grandparents, who lived back in Ohio still, were getting older and kind of struggling with the business and different things and every year, it seemed, we would go back there, spend a little more time. We'd go back for a two-week vacation and then it was a month and before long it was a little longer and eventually we ended up moving back there. So, really a big transition from racing in Region 10 here to Region 6 back there.

Sure.

There were still a lot of races, a lot of competitive boats and people. Always people that were willing to help in any way they could. I think that's part of the fraternity of boat racing. Just everybody is willing to help everybody, whatever it takes, whether it's loaning them parts or pieces or showing you how to do things.

You know, we lived in the Newark, Ohio, area, which is about 30 miles east of Columbus. We might be racing in Pennsylvania one weekend and Kentucky the next weekend and central Ohio the next weekend and some place in Michigan the next weekend, so it was the travel arrangements

and things that made it a lot more expensive, a lot more difficult time-wise for dad to be able to get time to do the things that we needed to do.

You were still running outboards at this time?

Yeah, running a B-Stock outboard in those days.

This was a hydro, right?

B-Stock Hydro, yup.

Did you ever drive a runabout?

I did. You know, I went for rides in runabouts a couple of times. Later on as I got old enough and experienced enough to race in the inboard classes, I ran a few flatbottoms as well. It was fun; it was completely different.

Yeah.

I think it was a good learning experience to do both, and honestly, looking back on it now, I think the best boat drivers I've ever competed with and, you know, see these days, at some point in time they drove flatbottoms. Most of 'em were very good flatbottom drivers and then they got in the boat, the same rules, they were unstoppable.

Yeah.

So I think that, um, I don't know why, for some reason the hydroplanes just did it for me. You know, goin' fast on the water in a runabout was one thing but the feeling, the sensation, I guess, of flying in the hydroplanes and just something about the shape and the way the boats ran and handled and watching from the beach, the hydroplane just seemed like more of a race boat than the flatbottoms, for whatever reason. However, again, no disrespect for the flatbottom guys. I think probably they end up being better drivers because the boats are more difficult to drive.

Look at Dave Villwock.

Exactly. He's a perfect example. And George Stratton and guys like George Woods and a whole bunch of those guys that ran K-Boats. There's no doubt that's a race boat. Those things are difficult to drive and very fast and, I mean, a lot of things going on with running the cavitation plate with your foot and everything. Helped them, I think, to adapt to driving the new boats with the front wings a little better.

Yeah, yeah.

Certainly, a little faster than the other guys. A lot of credit to all those guys. I first slowed down a little bit when we got to Ohio, in Region 6, just because of the difficulty of getting to and from the

"Ended up going through several different changes and things, tryin' to make the boat better and figure out how to drive it better. You know, you get beat pretty hard a couple of times and you figure out what they did to beat you and you try to do the same sort of thing and get better the next time around."

races, the distances that were involved, the extra expenses and all the things, although we did still compete, we still did go to races and do a lot of things.

In those days one of my heroes was Dean Chenoweth who would continue to be one of my heroes later on in different classes. At the time I think Dean was the only driver in the outboard classes—even if he wasn't the only driver, he was one of a very few—that won three national championships in one weekend in a stock outboard event. And that was something. It had never been surpassed until recently when J. Michael Kelly won four. And so, in those days, you'd go to a stock outboard event and there'd be 450 boats show up.

Oh, yeah.

In the stock classes especially, just as the name implies, the boats are stock, the engines are stock, and it's really a driver's class to where you have to make excellent starts and you have to make good decisions and I think that it should almost be mandatory for boat drivers as they continue to progress through the ranks, especially if they have visions of being a Grand Prix driver or an Unlimited driver. At some point in time you ought to drive some stock outboards and you ought to drive some of the stock limited inboard classes as well. The equipment is the same as the next guy's. It's your driving ability that makes the decision whether you win or not.

Yeah. So, after the outboards, you moved into inboards.

Yeah, I ran some 145s, 145-cubic-inch inboard. They are again, in those days, were a strictly stock class. The boats were, uh, not too many regulations on the boats: overall length, the weight, that sort of thing. And most of the boats were built by either Lauterbach or Ron Jones. Two Karelsens here and there that later ran pretty well, and, uh, Staudacher, I guess, had some boats then, too.

Kelson?

Not in the early days, in the days that I first started racing. I think Don,

in fact, I ended up working with Don and I'd help him design and build some boats for Kelson Hydros in the middle '70s, middle and late '70s, and I actually worked with Ron Jones for a number of years down in Southern California.

Yeah.

In fact, it started with one of those 145s. It was a boat that had come up from Cincinnati that was a Ron Jones copy. It was built, copied after a Ron Jones boat that was, I think, called Little Joe. I'm not a 100 percent sure on this, but I think that, uh, gosh...

Well, maybe we can back up a little. How did it happen that you started working for Ron Jones? Were you still racing at the same time?

I was racing in Region 6 and this boat had come up out of the Cincinnati area that was a copy of a Ron Jones boat, and it had been crashed. I was in

the process of tryin' to put the thing back together. And I, over the years, went to work on a lot of crashed boats and a lot of the boats I bought were second-hand and were crashed for one reason, or were damaged, and so the prices were cheap. I learned how to fix 'em, how to work on 'em, uh, make improvements on 'em.

And one afternoon in 1974 I called Ron Jones Marine Engineering, who was in Costa Mesa, California, at the time, explained to Ron what I had and I was wondering if he had any frame drawings and if he was willing to sell me some frame drawings. He said yes, he did have frame drawings and yes, he was willing to sell 'em, however he wasn't a 100 percent in favor of it because it wasn't his boat. It was a copy of one of his boats.

Yes.

He, of course, was concerned that I was building boats for sale while using



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Newton Marine

Ron Jones built four Unlimited hydroplanes in preparation for the 1974 season. **TOP:** The U-77 *Country Boy* was built with automotive power for George Walther but didn't see action until it raced as *Miss Budweiser* in 1976. **ABOVE:** The U-55 *Lincoln Thrift* was driven by Mickey Remund and scored a third-place finish in San Diego during its debut season.

his design and then building them myself and doing an end-around on Ron Jones Marine, which was not at all the case.

Sure.

So after a bit of time and explaining to him what was going on and why I needed it and what I needed, he asked me where I was, address and all, that sort of thing, and he made the comment, "It's too bad you're so far away because we're just so busy I can't hardly see straight here. We need people to build boats." And I said, "Well, as it turns out, I'm in a position where I could move if the position was right and the things were right."

We skipped ahead a long ways from when I was 11 years old racing outboard stuff and now I'm 18 years old and married. And so, Ron said, "Well, if you were here, I've got a job for you the minute you get here." And I said, "Excellent, I'm on the way."

So Arlene and I packed up our belongings and, let's see, I would have been 19 or 20 years old then, because we had two children, Katrina and Maciva, and Maciva was very young, just months old. I had a 1962 Ford Econoline van that we had converted with a bed and sleeping quarters and things to go to the races, and, uh, had a 1967 Mustang GT that we were gonna tow behind the van, and off to Costa Mesa we went. We got there and the shop was crazy busy. There were 30 or 35 employees at the time.

Wow.

And there were four Unlimiteds. He had just finished the Winged Wonder *Pay 'N Pak* the year before and the *U-95* had just been delivered, so when I got there, there were orders for four Unlimiteds: a new boat for the Walthers in Dayton, Ohio, as the *Country Boy*, it was gonna be a twin-engine automotive cabover; there was a boat ordered by the *Miss U.S.* team for George Simon in Detroit; Bob Fendler's *Lincoln Thrift*; and *Valu-Mart*. So they had four Unlimiteds going. Ron's money man in those days was Paul Cook, who was Betty Cook's



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TOP: Also new in 1974 was the U-74 *Valu-Mart*, which Ron Armstrong drove to a third-place finish in the Tri-Cities. **ABOVE:** The *Miss U.S.* was piloted by Tom D'Eath during its debut campaign in 1974.

husband. Betty Cook was the offshore racer.

Yeah, sure.

And honeycomb was the latest, greatest thing in those days. The *Pay 'N Pak* was the first boat to be built out of honeycomb in 1973, and they had such an outstanding season in '73 that it started a whole new different...

Everybody went that way.

Everybody went that way. And so, the four boats that we were building now were all built out of honeycomb, and we were building a, I think it was 43-foot honeycomb catamaran that was an offshore boat for Paul and Betty Cook that was called *Kudu*. We had a Division II 7-litre that was being built out of honeycomb for John Leach, the *Buccaneer*.

Oh, yeah.

And Al Curtis in the Seattle area, the 280 guys in the Seattle area will recognize Al Curtis' name, the boat was called

Gladiator. It was a honeycomb boat and it also had what we were calling then a steerable strut. It was like a stern-drive on this boat, so it was steerable like an outboard. When the boat ran, and you could keep it together, it was unbeatable. The thing turned on a dime. It accelerated harder. Besides being a stern-drive, besides the ability to actually steer by moving the propeller, it also had power trim.

Oh.

And so, you could jack the thing up to get it off the turns faster. You could lay it down at the end of the straightaways, and it was a huge advantage. The problem was we couldn't find a manufacturer that could build the U-joints that would handle the torque, horsepower, rpm, in that angle of deflection and it kept kickin' the U-joints out of the thing. When it ran and finished, like I say, it was unbeatable. The problem was it was very unreliable

“On the way to Miami, Jim decided that he wanted to stop in Guntersville, Alabama, and set the world speed record. So the boat was set up with a very shallow, short skid fin; a very shallow, short rudder; didn’t carry much fuel; and was set up just to do this kilo run.”

Jim McCormick stands on the deck of the U-81 *Red Man* in 1974. McCormick was the boat’s owner and also drove it in an attempt to break the world’s straightaway speed record at Guntersville, Alabama. With engine issues, the boat managed a run of only 189 mph.

and so, eventually after a couple of years of struggling, Al converted it to a more conventional boat with a fixed propeller shaft and strut and all.

So, there were a lot of boats being built. There were a lot of boats that were back there being repaired and modified and different things. So, the place was just crazy busy. We ended up getting the boats done in time. The Walther’s boat, with the automotive engines in it, I think it only ran one time as the *Country Boy*. Maybe a time or two. And it ended up being sold to Bernie Little and it was converted to a conventional boat and ran as the *Miss Budweiser*.

Yeah.

The *Valu-Mart* was pretty fast and pretty competitive right out of the box. The cowlings shapes and things were a little different, but very similar to the ’73 *Pay ‘N Pak*.

Yeah.

Ron Armstrong was driving it originally. In Miami all the new boats were running pretty well.

One of the older boats, a wooden boat that had started out life as the *Country Boy*, uh, Jim McCormick had purchased it and converted it to turbocharged Allison, was sponsored by the Red Man chewing tobacco company, Liggett and Myers. On the way to Miami, Jim decided that he wanted to stop in Guntersville, Alabama, and set the world speed record. So the boat was set up with a very shallow, short skid fin; a very shallow, short rudder; didn’t carry much fuel; and was set up just to do this kilo run.

A lot of things on the boat were experimental at the time. Not so much on the boat, but on

the engine. Boots Mallory had designed a Mallo-ry ignition system for it. It was a good idea, you know, it was an electronic ignition now instead of a magneto. It had a lot more fire power and everything. The problem was that Boots was in the early design stages and there weren’t many parts available. A lot of the parts that were made were one-off. And even the things as basic as the distributor caps—the distributor, the stock Allison distributor caps—didn’t work any more so they were using a 12-cylinder Lincoln Continental distributor cap on it.

Huh...

They were having problems hangin’ on to ‘em and keeping the plug wires in and a lot of different things and made several passes over the weekend. It kept dropping a cylinder for one reason or another and usually it was ignition problems. Stu Hilborn was involved and he was building the Hilborn injection system for ‘em and, uh, Bob Fendler, I think, was actually the first one to do that. This was like the second generation, which was, you know, just a year later.

I think they made a couple back-to-back runs, as hard as it would run, like 189 miles an hour. They were almost identical both ways, and it was only on 11 cylinders, and just ran out of time. The weather was not conducive to going faster. There was a lot of fog over the couple of days, and so off to Miami.

Jim McCormick, the driver and the owner, decided that—of course, got there late—and decided that let’s just run the boat, get it in the show as is, which meant, you know, the straightaway record stuff, which was not at all a good set-up for the tight, little course in Miami.

No.

Jim had most of his successes in conventional boats where you sat behind the engine.

Yeah.

And this was kind of a pretty steep learning curve, being in front of the engine, driving a cabover and all the stuff. Anyway, to make a long story short, Jim was comin’ into the first turn there by Miami Marine Stadium and with the tiny, little fin on it, and the short, little rudder, it wasn’t very controllable. The thing tried to spin out on him and took a couple of pretty violent hops and pitched him out. He ended up getting hurt pretty seriously. Got tangled up in the dashboard and different things on the way out and ended



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up with—I'm gonna pull a number out of my hat here—but something like 300 stitches in his legs, you know, inside and outside.

I don't think many people realized it at the time but Jim was a hemophiliac, and once he got cut it was hard to stop the bleeding. So, he knew with no question he should not have been a race boat driver. He nearly bled to death on the way to the hospital. Of course, this happening on Friday, there was no way he was gonna be able to drive the boat over the weekend. So they put Skipp Walther in the boat...

Yeah.

...who was the younger brother of Dave "Salt" Walther, who had driven the boat originally. There was a lot of argument over that. A lot of people did not think that Skipp had the experience yet to be driving an Unlimited. He also had a hand that wasn't...

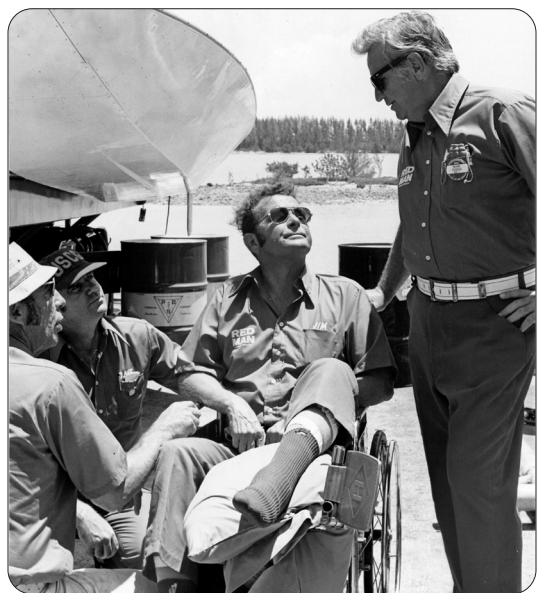
Deformed

...had been deformed a little, right. Fingers or something. And older brother Salt, who had driven the boat before, was completely against it. Didn't think that he was experienced enough. Didn't think he had any business doing it. And the next day, on Saturday, Skipp was qualifying the boat and the boat took a pretty violent hop and spun out, started doing a big left-hand spin-out. Skipp fell out of the boat, no seat belts or enclosed cockpits of course in those days.

I think it was Sunday.

It was Sunday.

I was there, it happened right in front of me. Sunday morning testing.



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Right. This was not in competition. And when Skipp fell out the boat continued to spin out and literally ran right over the top of him.

Cut off both of his arms and hit him in the head.

Yes.

A lot of people didn't know Muncey was on the course at the same time. He was a half-lap behind.

Right.

Muncey was back up in the upper turn.

Yeah. In testing you're allowed three boats on the course and let's say there were two at the time. And, of course, that started a lot of arguments and some of the Walther family told Jim he shouldn't have been in there, and that sort of thing. Kinda blaming Skipp for the accident. My humble opinion, for what it's worth, the accident was nothing that Skipp did wrong. You know, there had been sightings of manatees earlier in the weekend and, you know, they were around the Marine Stadium there, and one had been sighted in fact that morning, right there.

Yeah.

And I'm confident that he hit one of those.

Could be, I don't know.

Yeah.

As I remember—I was up in the stadium when it happened—the boat came up out of the water and went back down. He got up in the cockpit and looked over his left shoulder...

Yeah.

...and then he sat back down. That's when the boat went sideways.

Yeah. At that point in time the rudder had come off of it. And I think that, uh, I ended up being the one that was in charge of repairing the

ABOVE: Skipp Walther was chosen to substitute for Jim McCormick in the cockpit of the U-81 *Red Man* when the team was in Miami in 1974. It would be Walther's first ride in an Unlimited hydroplane.

BELOW LEFT: Jim McCormick was seriously injured when he was thrown from the cockpit of the *Red Man* during a test run. He is shown here after his return from the hospital.

"My humble opinion, for what it's worth, the accident was nothing that Skipp did wrong. You know, there had been sightings of manatees earlier in the weekend and, you know, they were around the Marine Stadium there, and one had been sighted in fact that morning, right there. And I'm confident that he hit one of those."



TOP: Skipp Walther settles into the cockpit of the U-81 *Red Man* before heading out onto Biscayne Bay at Miami in 1974. **MIDDLE:** The *Red Man* is hoisted from the water after the accident that killed Walther. The boat's right sponson was extensively damaged when the boat spun out. **ABOVE:** The rear of the *Red Man* after the accident in Miami. Note that the rudder is completely missing.

boat when we got it back to Costa Mesa, in California there, in Ron Jones' shop. If Ron was guilty of anything, he built the boat very conservatively and construction-wise way overbuilt. Certainly, by today's standards.

Yeah.

As a for instance, the rudder bracket in its entirety was completely removed from the transom. Now, when it was removed, the engine stringers were two three-quarter inch, nine-ply marine plywood. Plywood, laminated together, to make them an inch-and-a-half thick and then had eighth-inch aluminum skins for the first two frames from the transom up, back and forth, to sandwich that all together, and then in the corners where the transom was attached to the engine stringer there were two half-inch thick, six-inch by six-inch aluminum angles right there, bolted to them, and it tore those angles just like, you know, a strong guy in the circus goin' through a telephone book. It literally tore those things. And of course, the push-pull tube that was there on the piston arm and everything was completely gone. All that stuff was completely torn off the boat. A tremendous amount of energy was needed to do something like that. If you hit, at 150 or 155 miles per hour a 900-pound sea cow, it could do that kind of damage, I think.

Yeah.

And I'm confident that he hit something, and the rudder bracket didn't just fall off the boat, by no means.

Yeah.

And that's pretty typical in those boats. When the rudder bracket and the rudder completely leave, the boats go into a big left-hand turn. The propeller, being right-hand rotation wants to walk the back end around and the skid fin up there has enough drag that it makes the boat go into a big left-hand turn. On the other hand, when the steering fails and the rudder stays on the boat they always go the other way. They always turn to the right. And so, lookin' at the damage,

lookin' at all the things that were wrong there, I'm pretty confident that he hit something.

Could be, yeah.

The problem, one of the obvious problems besides the fatality was that for the sport, the new Ron Jones boats that had showed up, uh, the *Valu-Mart* had a handling problem and Ron Armstrong got pitched out and got hurt a little bit. And the other boats... Ron, in his effort to make improvements was trying to get the boats to turn easier and mechanically to work better. So all of the new boats, the rudder brackets and things were different.

The old boats had a bronze bushing, top and bottom that the rudder post ran in. The new Jones boats of '74 had ball bearings. Actually they were roller bearings top and bottom. Great idea, the problem was that we couldn't get 'em sealed up and the salt water would get in there and overnight they'd rust to the point that you could hardly turn the thing any more.

And so those problems, with the rudder problem that Skipp had, the handling problem that was later kinda pointed out as the handling problem or rudder issue with the *Valu-Mart*, the governing body of the Unlimiteds basically banned Ron Jones boats at the next event in Washington, D.C., until they could prove that there was no problem with the rudder.

Yeah.

Well, in the meantime, by now, a bunch of lawyers are involved and the word was getting back to Ron Jones Marine Engineering that there were lawsuits and there was gonna be

all kinds of stuff and if we can't race our boats, you know, and if Jones has the opportunity to make a living by racing our boats, because of a problem from your shop, of course, the lawyers are going to sue Ron.

The big problem there was, as I mentioned earlier, Paul Cook was the money behind Ron Jones Engineering, and Paul had a whole barrage of lawyers himself, all of which advised him if there are lawsuits here and wrongful death lawsuits and things, there's gonna be big-time lawsuits and there's gonna be big-time suits filed, and if they won, it's gonna be your money. And so, before this thing went to any kind of trial or there was any kind of legal processes gone forward, Paul was advised to completely separate himself from Ron Jones.

So he left and so did the money. By the time we got back there, we worked on getting all those boats repaired. The *Lincoln Thrift* came back, *U.S.* came back, the *Valu-Mart* came back. *Red Man* came back for repairs. So we worked on all those. The *Red Man* was my project and I worked on getting it all put back together. By the time...

Did he turn it into a rear cockpit at that point?

That happened later.

Later, yeah, OK.

At that point, Ron was trying to, you know, make things work on his own with his own ability to finance the company and everything. Within a matter of weeks we went from having 32 employees to three. Loren Sawyer was there. Loren had just left and gone to work with the *Lincoln Thrift* team. Craig Tavenner was there with the *Valu-Mart* team, which Dave Culley was crew chief running.

Most of the guys had left. All of the machinists had been laid off. The entire paint crew was gone. Not the entire paint crew, Jim Metzner was the painter and Jim was left. I saw him not too long ago. He was a pretty good painter. He didn't do much of the layout work. In fact, while Loren was there he did a lot of the layout work and the masking and things and basically Jim just did the actual painting.

Bob, gosh, I can't think of his last name, he was a good woodworker and built most of the wood boats. When I got hired by Ron, I got hired as a hardware guy. I would design and build most of the hardware, install all the systems, cooling systems, and get the rudder on the boat. And Bob, Jim Metzner, and myself were the only three employees that were left.

By the time we got things finished up, it was time for the race in Tri-Cities. All the other boats were ready to go. *Red Man* wasn't quite done yet. So everybody went to Tri-Cities to race. We got *Red Man* finished, completed for Seattle.

Larry Crisp was the crew chief on *Red Man*. He asked me, "Well, will you go the rest of the season with us, and

then will you be our boat guy?" And I said, "Well, you know, it's a good thought and I appreciate the confidence in my abilities and I appreciate the offer, but I work for Ron and let me go talk with him and see what he has to say." And Larry was fine with that.

I went and talked with Ron almost immediately. Ron kinda smiled and he said, "We've been talking for a week," and he said, "I don't think I have anything to offer you right now." He says, "When that boat leaves, I'm not sure that you're gonna have a job next week. So if they can use your help and they're willing to pay you and can utilize your talents, I think you ought to take it."

Yeah.

So I went home and talked with Arlene. We had paid first and last month's rent on the apartment and everything was good there so we had a little time to make a decision. So, we came to Seattle to kinda see if we wanted to do this. That was the year they raced at Sand Point, at the other end there.

That's right.

All of the boats that we'd worked on were there. ❖

Next month, John Walters talks about the rest of the 1974 season, his time away from racing while working at a marina on Lake Mead, a call from Bob Espland, and his involvement in inboard racing including driving a boat owned by Mike Jones. Be sure to read part two of our interview with John Walters next month in the Unlimited NewsJournal.



Steve Wilkie

“HONEY, I BOUGHT A HYDROPLANE!”

The rediscovery of the *Shanty II*

One of the star attractions at last fall’s Mahogany and Merlot classic boat show at Chelan, Washington, was the *Shanty II* hydroplane from California. The dramatic aluminum race boat quickly attracted a crowd because it is so unusual. But so is the story of how Steve Wilkie and his boss acquired it 23 years ago. At the time, they had never heard of the *Shanty II* and knew nothing about hydroplanes. So, when they made the impulsive decision to buy it, they didn’t tell their families. Not even their wives.

BY STEVE NELSON

The story began one warm afternoon in 1997. California businessman Mike Paveo and aircraft mechanic Steve Wilkie had set down their tools at Paveo’s Clarksburg Air Repair to go for a flight. It was not unusual for them to take a low-flying joyride over the sun-soaked Sacramento River to test an airplane. But on this day, they saw sunlight reflecting from a large shiny object resting beneath an old oak tree.

For the next few months, while conducting various test flights, they continued to study the object from the air. Finally, Paveo couldn’t stand it any longer. He and his daughter Anna took a bicycle trip to investigate. Spotting it along the quiet riverbank, they coasted to a stop and stood in front of it. What they discovered was more surprising than a Sacramento snowstorm.

A few days later, Paveo drove his pickup to the site with Wilkie. They were both dumbfounded. Tucked beneath

that large tree, smothered by many seasons of broken twigs and leaves, was an alien-looking rocket ship. The cockpit was empty, and there was no engine. It was little more than an elongated aluminum carcass, bound together by thousands of carefully pounded rivets. The beast looked otherworldly as it rested quietly on an old rusted trailer.

At first, Wilkie thought it must be an abandoned salt flats race car. “Quite frankly, we didn’t know what it was,” he says. “It was dirty and full of oak leaves

and lying underneath this tree. We looked it over and laughed. We know how to build stuff like that and we both realized there was no way you could build this thing in a garage.”

He would discover later that they were staring at an incredibly expensive hydroplane. But at that moment, neither of them knew what a hydroplane was. Puzzled and intrigued, they immediately set out in search of the owner.

Wilkie says they entered Jay’s Towing Company in nearby Cortland, California, and asked, “Do you know anything about this aluminum boat back here?”

Jay, the guy sitting behind the counter said, “Yea, it’s mine.”

“Well, what is it? What’s the history on this thing?”

“I have no idea,” he answered. “I bought it at a lien sale, but I’m going to cut it up for scrap aluminum. I’ve just been too lazy to go out there and do it.”

Scrap metal? Really?

To the man behind the counter, this odd-looking boat was nothing more than a giant beer can, so Paveo and Wilkie put their brains together and questions poured out. “What is it? What will we do with it if we buy it? And when our wives find out, aren’t they going to kill us?”

Wilkie spoke first. “Mike, if you don’t buy it, I’m going to buy it.”

“You don’t even know how much the guy wants,” Paveo responded.

“I don’t care. Either you buy it, or I will. I’m not going to let him cut it up.”



Steve Wilkie

Back at the Jays Towing, Jay named his price. “A guy came in and offered me \$1,000 for it. I should have taken it, but now I want \$1,200.”

“OK,” Paveo said. “We’ll take it for \$1,200.”

“He didn’t argue or anything,” Wilkie says. “We drove back to the hanger, got a company check, drove right back and paid for it.”

Proud new owners?

So, if you just plunked down \$1,200 on a futuristic looking boat, what is the first thing you would do?

“We sat in it!” says Wilkie. “We immediately went back out there, blew up the trailer tires (which, surprisingly, held air), pulled it out from underneath the oak tree, dug some leaves out of it, and just sat in it. We must have been pretty high... on adrenalin.” [laughs]

“So, we towed it back down to the airport, basically to hide it from our relatives, from our wives. We didn’t want to tell anyone that we

ABOVE: Mike Paveo in the cockpit of the strange aluminum craft that he and Steve Wilkie purchased from the owner of a towing company in 1997.

BELOW: The *Shanty II* sits beside another aluminum hydroplane, the *Skip-A-Long* that Stanley Dollar drove to victory in the 1949 Harmsworth Trophy Race. The boat sank in Lake Tahoe later that year and was recovered many years later.



Steve Wilkie

“We sat in it!” says Wilkie. “We immediately went back out there, blew up the trailer tires (which, surprisingly, held air), pulled it out from underneath the oak tree, dug some leaves out of it, and just sat in it. We must have been pretty high... on adrenalin.”

bought something nuts.”

The race boat immediately drew attention, Wilkie said.

“Oddly enough, driving it down the little two-lane river road, there were a lot of boat people who followed asking the same question: ‘What is it?’ We drove it in front of the hanger and they all thought we were crazy. The same day we laid eyes on it, we owned it. That’s how quick it happened. But at that moment, my wife—and Mike’s wife—knew nothing about it.”

So, Steve and Mike did what all good impulse buyers do. They hid it. “We stuck it back behind a hanger and waited until the next weekend.”

Breaking the news

In order to ‘fess up’ properly to their wives, they needed a strategy. But the first step was to clean the boat. Wilkie borrowed a pressure washer from his wife’s cleaning business, without explanation, and went to work. “I spent the whole weekend washing as much as I could and then stuck it in an empty hanger. Then we tried to figure out how to break the news.”

Paveo told his wife first, Wilkie says. “She didn’t take it well. She thought it was crazy that he would buy something

like this. But he was the owner.”

Clearly, Wilkie needed a better plan. So, before telling his wife, Kelly, Wilkie shared the news with his father-in-law, George McIntyre.

“He fell in love with it,” Wilkie says. “When he fell in love with it, I thought, ‘Cool. There was a chance that Kelly can’t kill us both and get away with it.’ It was dumb luck that I took him down there, but Kelly knew that her dad loved it, too.”

Wilkie’s father-in-law just had to have that boat. He would ask Paveo all the time to sell it to him. “Well, Mike just couldn’t make up his mind,” Wilkie said. “But his family thought it was just such a crazy thing for Mike to have. He ended up selling it to George and Kelly in 1999.”

Oddly enough, by then Wilkie had been staring at it for two years and still did not know its true identity.

“It sat there in that hanger with nothing more done to it. We’d go out and look at it and try to figure out what it was. Etched into the aluminum on the side was *SHANTY II* and *U-29*. I could see that. That gave us at least something to go on.”

Dead end

It’s no real surprise that Wilkie knew nothing about the *Shanty II*. But oddly

enough, he also knew nothing about hydroplanes.

“Neither of us had seen a hydroplane race,” he said. “We just weren’t in that culture. If you had dropped the name Ted Jones on me, I wouldn’t have known who he was. We never grew up around it, so we didn’t know anything.”

But the more he studied the boat, the more he knew there had to be a story there.

“Being airplane guys, we’ve pounded enough rivets to know that you just don’t take aluminum and make something like that,” he explained. “There was a ton of workmanship. But we couldn’t get anybody to respond. We showed a lot of people the boat, talked to a lot of people about it, and nobody really wanted to talk about it or get in touch with us. It was kind of mystifying at the time. To be honest with you, it wasn’t until we received a call from Doug Ford.”

Ford was doing research for his latest book, which had a title that was longer than the *Shanty II* itself. The book is titled *What Were They Thinking: Stories about Unique Unlimited Hydroplanes Designed by People That Thought Out of the Box; the Issues They Faced, What Went Wrong, and What Innovations They Brought to the Sport*.



The *Shanty II* poses next to another sleek creation, a Lockheed SR-71 Blackbird spy plane.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Right after Ford's book was published in 2012, Wilkie received a call from the California Speed Boat Association. "They called us up and said, "You're a member!"

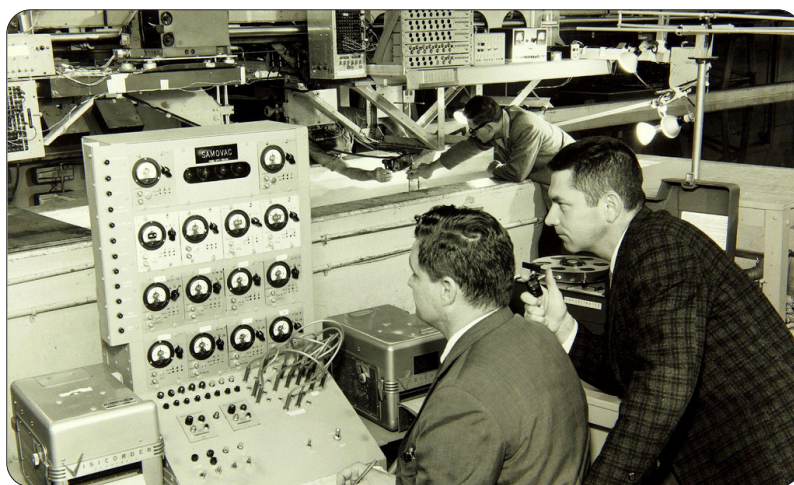
We said, "Of what?"
"Our boat club."

Mystery solved

After Wilkie read Ford's book, he called Dave Williams at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum and began his own research. Overnight, he caught the hydroplane bug and could not soak it up fast enough.

"I'm a history nut and I enjoy finding out about things," he said. "Both Mike and I are that way."

He soon began to realize that restoring the



boat would not be easy. In its present state it was only a shell. No engine, no prop shaft, no rudder. There was no seat or windshield. The tail was gone and the cowling had been cut in half. There were no instruments. Vintage parts from 1958 would be scarce and expensive. Even in 1958 they had been expensive!

1958

On paper, the *Shanty II* project team seemed perfect. The money man was William T. Waggoner, a wealthy Texan with millions of dollars from oil and ranching. Waggoner had already owned two other hydroplanes: the *Shanty I*, named after his wife, Mary Beth "Shanty" Waggoner; and the original *Maverick*.

Russ Schlee was the project manager. Schlee was the Air Force lieutenant colonel who had driven Waggoner's U-29 *Shanty I* to a national high-point championship in 1956. The design team was California's Hydrodynamic Research Lab, which developed a delta-wing jet powered fighter, the Navy's Convair XF2Y-1 Sea Dart. The

TOP: The *Shanty II* as it appeared when the boat was built in 1958.

ABOVE: Technicians at Hydrodynamic Research Lab in California study the results of experiments that were conducted in a tow basin to determine the optimum design of the *Shanty II*.

BELOW LEFT: The project was funded by Texas rancher and oil man William T. Waggoner, who owned the U-29 *Shanty I* hydroplane and two *Maverick* boats.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Kirk Pagel

The *Shanty II* sat for eight years in the potato cellar of Bill Stead's ranch near Reno, Nevada. Stead was the driver of Waggoner's *Maverick* hydroplanes from 1956 to '59.

boat was constructed in Los Angeles by skilled Allison engine man Howard Gidovlenko. On all fronts, the *Shanty II* team had the blue-ribbon credentials to "get it done."

Photographs from the Convair research lab show engineers hard at work, holding clipboards and studying instruments. They timed and tested working models in tow basins, using high-speed cameras to validate theories about water dynamics. From a design and build standpoint, it was a colossal effort.

By summer 1958, the boat was ready. The project team birthed a three-ton hydroplane that was skillfully constructed of aluminum and magnesium. Proportionally, it looked like a 32-foot rocket boat, unlike anything else on water. Instead of sponsons it had subtle wing-like stabilizers. Up front in the middle it had an unusual step feature, referred to as the ski.

When launched for testing in July, the craft was stunning, painted with the same color scheme as its sister ship *Shanty I*. The project team had high expectations. They visualized their revolutionary hydroplane rocketing to the front of the pack and staying there. But the engineers had never really watched a hydroplane

race and it appears the builders strayed from the blueprints.

Handling was a problem in early testing, especially when Schlee tried to turn it. *Shanty II* porpoised badly and rolled over completely during a run on Lake Mead with Gidovlenko driving. Expectations for the *Shanty II* sank almost as quickly as its broken aluminum tail. After that, the boat was quickly forgotten by most of the racing world until it reappeared as chapter 8 of Ford's book."

Sticker shock

The *Shanty II* is still among the most expensive projects in hydroplane racing history. Some estimate that the total price tag would have felt like \$2.5 million in today's economy. With that in mind, Wilkie is surprised at how quickly the team abandoned the boat. "Looking at Schlee's logbook, it only had about five hours and 20 minutes of actual run time on it."

Do the math. That's almost half-a-million dollars for every hour of run time.

If Waggoner felt buyer's remorse, it was short lived. He quickly hired Ted Jones to design and build a conventional three-point hydroplane, which he campaigned in 1959 as the new U-00 *Maverick*. He got a small return on his expensive experiment when the *Maverick* crew cannibalized some of *Shanty II*'s parts for the U-00. Waggoner struck gold this time, as Bill Stead drove the U-00 to win the Gold Cup in Seattle and was crowned the 1959 high-point champion.

After its vital organs were harvested for the new *Maverick*, the empty shell of the *Shanty II* was towed to the Bill Stead ranch in Nevada, where it gathered dust for eight years in a dark potato cellar.



Steve Wilkie

The *Shanty II* during a recent appearance at a classic boat show in Lake Tahoe.

In 1966, it was sold for \$1,000 to Ken Murphy, who envisioned an exciting future for the *Shanty II*. He concocted a plan to add more seats in the “Sliver Bullet” and offer rides at an amusement park in Los Angeles. He removed the ski, cut the cowling in half, and stripped off the majestic paint job in favor of engine-turning the aluminum hull. But his plan stalled out and Murphy lost the craft in a lien sale in Sacramento.

That’s when it began to sit quietly under the oak tree, waiting to be crushed at a recycling plant until Wilkie and Pa-veo rescued it in 1997 and offered *Shanty II* yet another chance on life.

Shanty II reborn

Once the real backstory behind the *Shanty II* became less obscure, Wilkie felt lucky to own it. He also felt an irresistible tug to restore it. He added a rudder, prop shaft and propeller, steering mechanism and steering wheel, a windshield, and an instrument panel. To restore the boat’s unique silhouette, he ordered a new tail and replaced the cowling.

The engine, however, was a problem. At first, Wilkie was tempted to go big. “I would love to put an Allison back into it, but it’s too expensive,” he says. “I’m sorry, I just don’t have that kind of money!”

How expensive? Even if he could find one, an Allison V-1710 engine in 2012 would have cost between \$50,000 to \$60,000 and would require \$7,000 a year to maintain. And don’t forget the gas. For every minute touring the lake he would burn eight gallons of expensive aviation fuel. At racing speed, a thirsty Allison can swallow 12 gallons a minute, which explains why *Shanty II* was built with two primary 80-gallon fuel tanks plus two 40-gallon tanks.

So, instead of an Allison, he and his father-in-law installed the next best thing: a trusty Oldsmobile 455 engine.

“Back in the day, with Russ Schlee at the wheel, it scared a professional test pilot,” Wilkie says. “I would never take it back to that. You’d have to be crazy. Even



Lew Dobbins

Three classic race boats going for a run on Lake Tahoe. From the top, the Hurricane IV, the My Sweetie John Francis, and Shanty II.

at 100 miles per hour, that thing was bouncing all over the place. The boat was unsafe with an Allison in it. To put an Allison back in it and try to make it the way it was would be scary. With the Olds engine, at least I can put it in the water and let people see it.”

Show and tell

Looking back 23 years ago, Wilkie knew nothing about hydroplanes. Much has changed.

“When Kelly and I had our 30th wedding anniversary, she says, ‘Where do you want to go?’ I said, I want to go to the hydroplane museum. So, we spent our 30th wedding anniversary, and that’s when the floodgate opened. Now I’ve become a hydroplane nut! Next thing I’m collecting buttons off the Internet, buying programs from Dave Williams, God knows: shirts and books and memorabilia. I’ve collected all this stuff about Waggoner and his team. That’s sort of how I became really addicted to hydroplanes.

Like many big projects, the *Shanty II*’s to-do list is never finished. Wilkie wants a more authentic dashboard designed after the instrument panel in the *Miss Thriftway*. He also wrestles with whether to restore the original paint job. But his main objective these days is sim-

ply to enjoy the *Shanty II*; to go out on the lake, and to share it with others.

“My intention is to float it around, tell its history, and hopefully let other people enjoy it,” he says. “I would like to keep it in the public’s eye and let people know about the museum through it.

“Right now, I am going to keep it the way it is. It runs fine, and I can tool around in it. It is usable. I take it to a lot of charities and some car shows and some things like that. It gets the word out and lets people know that there is a hydroplane world out there. So, my future plans are just to keep going and enjoy it!”

Wilkie has no regrets about pursuing the bright shiny object that he spotted from the air so many years ago.

“It has been such a wonderful whirlwind of my life from the time I found it. Growing up in southern Idaho, I knew nothing about hydroplane racing. It has just been one wild ride, and it still continues to be!” ♦

Remembering Scott Pierce.

BY CRAIG FJARLIE

Scott Pierce passed away in the early hours of July 19, 2020. He was 64. Boat racing was a major part of his life, from his earliest years until the very end. His father, Laird, owned and campaigned unlimiteds named *Parco's O-Ring Miss*. Scott followed his father's lead and started competing in various inboard classes as soon as he was old enough.

Laird Pierce died young and never saw his son achieve success in the Unlimited ranks. Scott made the career step to the top class in 1981. He drove a number of boats, most notably *Miss Budweiser* in 1991. That year he won three races, including Seattle's Seafair Regatta before a live TV audience, and captured the national high point championship.

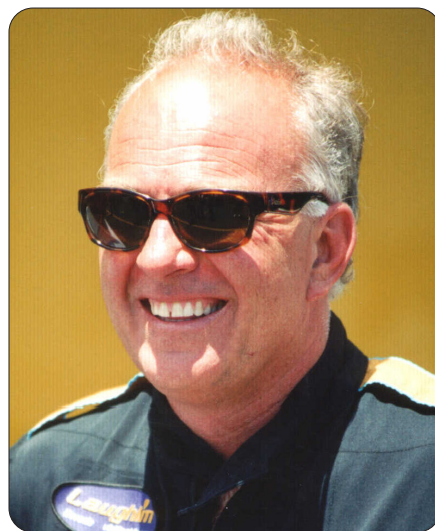
Those who knew Pierce remember his friendly, approachable manner. He made time to greet fans and talk with

them. Basically, if you loved boat racing with the same fervor he did, he would exchange stories and remember you. That said, Pierce approached racing with intensity. He wanted to win, there was never any question about that. While he pursued victory every time he climbed in the cockpit, he was a clean driver who avoided placing himself or his rivals in dangerous situations.

When Pierce retired from driving, he remained close to racing. He started a business and was capable of doing color commentary for race broadcasts. Later, he participated in the Grand Prix hydro ranks as an owner. His drivers included Kevin Eacret and Jamie Nilsen.

Pierce's experience as a driver helped him select the best talent for his GP boat. Nilsen won at San Diego in 2019, the final race of the season and by coincidence, the last race Pierce would attend.

Scott Pierce was a credit to the sport



Ron Harsin

he loved. He was a top ambassador for water racing's greatest show and earned a place in its historical record. His passing leaves an empty space in the hearts of those who knew him.

We will miss you, Scott. Thanks for being part of our lives. ❖

We love to hear from our readers

Kudos to you for creating an updated record book! I too enjoyed the annual media guides and have had to tap multiple sources to find current records. I'm eager to go to the UNJ website and start reading.

One record in particular interests me: Which hull owns the all-time record for consecutive heats of competition run without mechanical failure?

As you might guess, being a Miss Bardahl fan compels me to know. It would have been nice to know the answer and include it in my updated Dragon Days 2020 edition book, which should go on sale this month.

Fred Farley shared my interest in that particular record and he did preliminary research to find the answer. The last time we discussed it before Fred passed, he said it was difficult to determine with certainty because no one had tracked that statistic during the turbine era, when Budweiser in particular raced hulls that had been significantly rebuilt (e.g., T-3 '95). We both guessed either a Bud or Elam hull might own the record.

Bardahl retired with that record on October 3, 1965, with 57 consecutive heats completed (Thriftyway had completed 55). What's interesting, even though it's unrelated to actual racing, is that Bardahl's amazing streak has been extended during its post-restoration (2007)

years to include every single run. When added to its 57 heats of racing, it totals 209 runs as of today. Kind of cool. My book notes that, of course.

*Again, kudos on your project, Andy!
Jon Osterberg*

Another great Unlimited News Journal! One comment I have in regard to The Hydro Record Book and the category of which sponsors have won the most races. There is a misconception that Pepsi-Cola sponsored the four boats that were raced by Dossin's. In fact, Pepsi-Cola didn't have any interest in sponsoring any of the boats, even after the 1947 Gold Cup win in the corporate headquarters backyard of Freeport, Long Island. The 1946 Pepsi-Cola III was sponsored by Dossin's and the remaining three boats were all owned and sponsored by Dossin's. Dossin's owned the Pepsi-Cola bottling and distributorship rights for all of Michigan and northern Ohio. It may be that Pepsi may have sponsored a boat at some point, but not any of the boats raced by Dossin's.

*Thanks!
Douglas P. Dossin*

HYDROFILE

Race Team News by Lon Erickson



With the current state of the COVID pandemic and the subsequent effects, it goes without saying that, with the majority of race teams, there has not been much recent activity. The work has been more maintenance related, done by a minimum of crew members who are now looking ahead to 2021. Most teams were in the mindset of prepping their boats over the winter and getting them ready to hit the water, but like the old saying goes: “They are all dressed up with nowhere to go.” Some will be taking advantage of display opportunities and helping their sponsors in whatever way they can. There also has been some discussion of an upcoming testing session, but there are no definitive plans at this point.

We will continue to monitor and check in with teams, owners, drivers, sponsors, and other related personnel to bring you news as it becomes available.

HomeStreet Racing

U-1 driver Jimmy Shane has been out and about in the Seattle area with the HomeStreet Bank display hull, promoting his sponsor and the Seafair Festival.



Seafair, Inc.

Goodman Real Estate U-91

Another look of the U-91 *Goodman Real Estate* livery, a design concept from Montgomery Custom Boats. This hydro (Hull #0706) is the second boat in the Miss Madison racing team and will have Jeff Bernard in the driver's seat. Seattle-area real estate mogul John Goodman jumped into the sport this past winter with the sponsorship of the boat, which ran last year as the U-1918 *Oberto Super Salami*. Charlie Grooms, president of Miss Madison Racing, said Goodman is excited about his partnership with the team.



Miss Madison Regatta

Making its debut during the Fourth of July weekend in Madison, Indiana, was the Miss Madison Regatta display hull. The new color scheme is loosely based around the history of the Madison Racing Team boats, featuring some retro looks to past hulls. The hull is the former Leland boat known as “Casper” (Hull #9701) and was acquired last year to help promote the regatta.



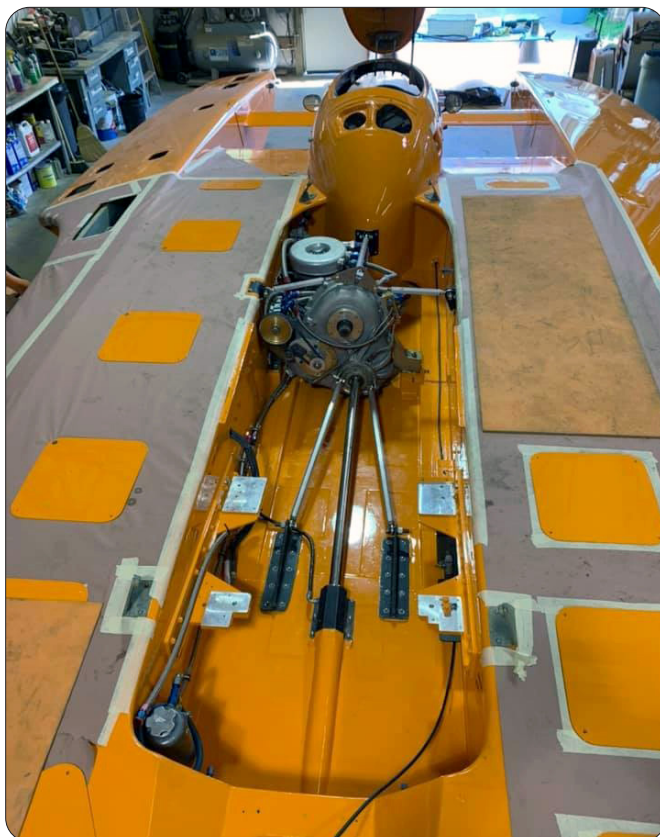
Trey Holt



Trey Holt

Bucket List Racing 99.9/440

The one team that has been very active throughout the spring and summer is “Team Orange,” aka BLR. While the 440 hull is ready to race, the newest member to the team, the 99.9 hull, has undergone some major updates in design, equipment, and colors. The new color scheme is based around the same Tennessee-orange theme as the 440. Hardware is going into the hull, strut and shaft alignment is done, the gearbox is in (right), as is most of the plumbing. Work continues on a new skid fin. Watch for more news coming from the Bucket List Racing team in the coming weeks.



TOP: Team co-owner Kelly Stocklin works on the skid fin for the 99.9 boat.
ABOVE: Dave Villwock (left) and crew chief Taylor Evans.



Photos from Bucket List Racing

MY \$0.02 WORTH

Editorial Comment by Andy Muntz



The Seattle sports world has been a wasteland for the past six months, thanks to the pandemic. That's why the local TV stations interrupted their regular morning programming recently when Seattle's new hockey team announced its name.

When the National Hockey League granted Seattle a new franchise, the first question in many minds was what the team would be called. I favored Totems, the name of the city's entry in the Pacific Coast Hockey League from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s. Others liked the Metropolitans, the Seattle team that beat the Montreal Canadians in the first Stanley Cup in 1917. Sockeyes, Steelheads, Emeralds, and Rainiers were also widely suggested.

Then came an idea that many of us thought was a joke: Kraken. "What's that?" we wondered. The city's more enlightened all seemed to know. It's a sea monster of Norse legend, they explained. It was the terrifying, giant octopus that swallowed the ship in the movie *Pirates*

of the Caribbean. Liam Neeson, playing Zeus in the movie *Clash of the Titans*, also made the monster famous when he ominously commanded, "Release the Kraken!"

Still, we imagined others scoffing at us, saying the arena that our team played in would be called the "Krak-house." But the objections were laughed off and the momentum for Kraken grew.

Finally, the time for the big announcement came, and with a flourish and crash of cymbals the name was revealed ... Kraken!

A great deal of effort was put into the decision, the team officials said, and with the help of designers at Adidas, a logo and team colors were also brought to light. Perhaps because one of the team owners, Jerry Bruckheimer, was the producer of *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the team also had T-shirts ready for sale that said: "Release the Kraken!"

I have to admit, the whole thing was done exceptionally well. The logo does

look very classy, the colors are great, and I'm sure the Kraken name will eventually grow on me.

So, what does this have to do with hydroplane racing?

When we talk about the need to market this sport, we hydro fans can't help but look at the issue through our own eyes and with our own experiences. Just as we tend to favor familiar team names like the Totems or Rainiers, we recall a sport that featured personalities such as Bill Muncey and Chip Hanauer, and we remember favorite boats such as *Budweiser*, *Bardahl*, or *Pay 'N Pak*.

We want the sport to be like that.

But, if hydroplane racing wants to survive, it needs to look toward the future, not backwards. It needs to attract a younger audience who might look at it differently than we do—the kind of people who thought from the beginning that Kraken was an excellent name for a hockey team. ♦

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

Check our website for more information.