



January 2018

UNLIMITED NEWSJOURNAL

A Chronicle of Speed

FROM THE UNJ VAULT:

Bill Muncey talks about driving the *Miss Thriftway*.

In 1955, Bill Muncey was a 26-year-old who had a successful career driving limited-class hydros in the Detroit area, but who had only a couple of appearances in the cockpits of an unlimited. Then he got a phone call from Ted Jones, the team manager for the brand-new Miss Thriftway. Before he was killed in a tragic accident in 1981, Muncey would go on to become one of the greatest drivers in the history of the sport. If he were still alive, he would celebrate his 90th birthday later this year. More than 40 years ago, Muncey agreed to be interviewed by

a young Craig Fjarlie at the Atlas Van Lines boat shop in Seattle and talked about his first few years behind the wheel of the Miss Thriftway, when he made his mark upon the sport. The interview was published in two parts. This portion originally appeared in the January 1978 issue of the Unlimited NewsJournal.

UNJ: Maybe you'll recap how you were selected as driver of Miss Thriftway? You had driven Miss Great Lakes, Dora My Sweetie ...

Muncey: Well I'd driven the Great Lakes in competition, but the critical part was in 1950 when Ted Jones came back to Detroit with the *Slo-mo*. I had attempted to qualify *Miss Great Lakes* for the

Harmsworth Trophy race. I ran very well with it. I wasn't selected to be one of the U.S. representatives on the Harmsworth team, but I did reasonably well.

Apparently, about 1955 when Jones made an arrangement with Willard Rhodes and the Thriftway organization to build a brand new boat. He remembered my driving in that qualifying effort. I don't think Ted had a chance to see me drive any other time that I recall.

I wanted to be in unlimited racing if I could. You have to earn a ride. You get started anywhere you can get your foot in the door. If you do enough, the chances seem to be that you can move on to something bigger and better.



Seattle Times

The young Bill Muncey

I worked for my father, and I was working nights. While I was at work, Jones called me. I about fell

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[Top] Willard Rhodes, left, the president of Associated Grocers and the owner of the *Miss Thriftway* hydroplane, with Ted Jones, the designer of the boat and the team manager. [Middle] Construction of the *Miss Thriftway* took place in the shops of Les Staudacher in Kawkawlin, Michigan. [Above] The finished *Miss Thriftway* on its trailer.

off the floor. I couldn't believe he wanted me to come out and drive a brand-new boat, which was the *Miss Thriftway*, which I knew was under construction up in Les Staudacher's shop. I had been up there once 'cause Les was building me a new 266 at the time. It was a Jones design. I had gone up there to look at my new limited boat and I had a chance to look at the new *Miss Thriftway*. So I did have a chance to see it while it was under construction.

So it was Jones who called you and not Rhodes?

Oh, yeah. Ted was responsible for me making my first truly "professional" step in unlimited racing. I say professional in quotes because I wasn't paid or anything. They didn't pay drivers in those days. However, when I did drive for Rhodes, I did get my expenses out here and that was about it.

Do you know if Jones had to "sell" you to Rhodes?

I don't know that he had to sell me so much. I think that Rhodes, like any good businessman, placed the responsibility for the acquisition of the boat, the crew, and the driver in the hands of Ted Jones, and Ted assumed the responsibility. Rhodes would never, ever question that. I think he probably had some second thoughts about it. He didn't know me, of course. He didn't know my background. He didn't know whether I shuffled on my feet and said four-letter words and all those kinds of things that wouldn't make a good representative for Thriftway stores. But, finally, when we got a chance to meet, he met my mom and dad, and we got to know each other a little bit, we had a beautiful working relationship. I admired Willard Rhodes very, very much from many points of view, not all associated with racing.

How long before the '55 Gold Cup did the call from Jones come?

Bob Carver



The new *Miss Thriftway* during a test run on Lake Washington.

It was about a month, I guess.
What were your thoughts when you first arrived in Seattle?

Oh, I was frightened! I wondered whether I had bitten off maybe a little more than I could chew and digest well. I hadn't driven an unlimited, really, since 1950. I was in the service for a little over two years and had done some traveling in Europe. I'd graduated from college, of course, and got my degree. I really hadn't been racing limiteds from 1951 to 1954 all that extensively. For three years there I was only racing now and then. So, when I arrived here in Seattle, it was with some skepticism on my own part. And I don't think the crew that Jones had selected really wanted me. I think, to be honest with you, he'd have been better off with a local boy. From a promotion point of view, from many points of view, he'd have been better off to hire a local guy. The cost of flying me out here and back was extensive, and I did come out and run a lot. I really do feel that as Willard Rhodes progressed in racing, he was glad that he hired me. But I know that there was some skepticism on his part as well when Jones selected me. But once again, he swung with Jones. Jones made the selection. Jones was qualified. I'm not here to explain why, out of

a clear blue sky, Ted invited me to drive the boat. You'd have to ask Ted about that.

When did you get your first ride in the boat? Was it during qualifying, or did you get some time in beforehand?

In those days, we used to put a lot of break-in time on a new engine. We were running Allison's. Of course, even in those days, there weren't any new engines around. They were all old and you scabbed parts from one engine to another. But they put an engine together for me and asked me to go out and test and just break it in. I would spend a lot of time on the north end of Lake

Washington around Sand Point Naval Air Station. It gave me a lot of cockpit time and, as it did, I had a chance to build a lot of confidence. I wasn't, to be honest, absolutely sure I'd get the job done. I really wasn't. When I first joined the *Thriftway* team, I did the best I could, and that's all you can expect, I guess. I'd never been in a real smokin' unlimited before, and this was a good one. It was runnin' strong.

Jones had tested the boat before you came to town. Was it trimmed pretty well? Did it handle well, or did you offer suggestions?

I think he'd driven it a couple times. I don't think I was qualified to offer that kind of input. I didn't have the background, and certainly didn't have the unlimited experience. I'd had a lot of success in limited racing, but once again, it was a situation where I had to lean on people who were a heckuva lot more qualified than me. I'm not a mechanically oriented guy. I'm a marketing man by education. My whole background was based on a marketing experience. So, in those days, I couldn't offer the input to try to get a boat to handle and perform better.



The *Miss Thriftway* crew pose with their new boat. Ted Jones is in the cockpit and Jones' wife is on the trailer.

Forde Photographers

What were your feelings when you went out and qualified for the Gold Cup?

Well, they sent me off all by myself to drive all the way from Sand Point down to the racecourse. We didn't take it down by trailer. We were keeping the boat at Sand Point. I guess it was a stall where they normally worked on aircraft, a little back from the lake. They put me in the boat and proceeded to go back and watch it on television. It was a long drive. It's about 10 or 12 miles down to the racecourse, and I'd never been there. It was a very lonely trip for me.

I did go down there. I stopped in front of the judges' stand and asked for permission to qualify. They granted me that. Well, there was no way I was able to tell that I qualified. It seems the qualifying speed minimum was about 85 miles per hour in those days. I ran my three laps and I wasn't sure I was running fast enough. There was no way I could know what my average had been.

I concluded and they gave me the checkered flag for the qualifying run. I began to make my way north again the 10 or 12 miles back to Sand Point. When I came around the peninsula and turned in to where the crane was supposed to pick me up, there wasn't a body around. I thought, "Oh, Geez, I've really blown it. They're really mad at me. I'll go tonight. I'll just leave because I'm not getting the job done." I didn't really feel that I'd run that hard, and I thought, "If I can just turn 85 or 6 or 7 ..." I felt the boat would do it. I pulled up to the moorage and no one was there. I got out of the boat and figured, "Well, they're just mad. They're just sitting back in the garage and they're really upset with me." Well, man, all of a sudden they came smokin' out of that garage and they



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

The *Miss Thriftway* with Bill Muncey at the wheel.

are so happy! I come to find out I'd averaged 103 miles an hour. They were pleased and elated and there was a great moment of celebration. I think after that particular run, Bill Muncey had been accepted as the driver of the *Miss Thriftway* for that race at least. I think there were later some questions whether I would continue as driver that year because of the race. I lost it by some squirrely things that happened to us.

Did you happen to see *Slo-mo-shun V* flip?

Yeah, I was there.

What effect did it have on you?

I've not been the kind of guy who responds emotionally to any kind of activity like that. I'm sort of a cold turkey kind of guy, may be an indication of a lack of sensitivity or a lack of soul or whatever you want to call it. So, I was able to observe the *Slo-mo-shun V* incident, and it was frightening and I was scared for Lou and concerned for him, but I didn't think of it in terms of anything relating to myself.

Do you think you had the fastest boat in the '55 Gold Cup?

No, I don't think I had the fastest boat there, by a long way. I think there were two or three boats

that were quite a bit faster. *Slo-mo-shun IV* was quite a bit faster. When it was running, *Slo-mo-shun V* was faster. The *Tempo VII* was faster, and *Gale V*, I felt, was faster. It was proven later in the race that our boat was quite a bit faster than the *Gale V*. Maybe even the *Rebel*, *Suh* was faster than ours. I felt our boat was competitive, but I didn't think it was as fast as some of the other boats. I think it was proven that way. We were able to win a lot, but I didn't think our boat was as fast as some other boats, particularly the *Tempo*. It was very, very fast.

In the last turn of the last lap of the final heat, did you slow down?

Oh, yeah. Quite a bit.

Do you think that's what cost you the race?

No, I don't believe it. I think I lost the race in the first heat. I was new on the team. Jones was the manager of the team. It was a brand new boat and it wasn't ready to be run in competition with those three or four other boats that were really fast. Ted's instructions to me at the start of the first heat—he explained the boats that he thought were quicker. He said, "Bill, if you can just go out in your first heat and get the experience and pull a fourth or

fifth and maintain your position, that would be excellent. Well, hey, Jones was the boss. He called the shots and you played the game the way he wants it played.

You've got to remember, we started 10 or 12 or 14 boats in those days, so a fifth on that field would be fairly strong. But I did get into a position where I was able to pull a third in the first heat. In those days we ran eight laps on a three-and-three-quarter-mile course, which is 30 miles. So, by the end of the sixth lap, I think I was in third. That was a slot or two better than Jones expected me to do. So, I just parked there. I wouldn't let anybody pass and I wouldn't go any faster. That was the way it was. I finished and I came in. Jones was very happy for me to pull a third. We were running very, very well. He asked me, "Did you have any left?" I said, "You bet. I got a bunch left." But he was still calling the shots.

Finally, it just coincidentally happened that I was sitting in the cockpit between heats talking to some of the crew about some things we had to do, and one of them said, "Well, gee. Won't it go any faster?" His implication being, we think it's faster, why don't you drive it quicker? Maybe he didn't know I was under orders, running the boat



Bill Muncey confers with Ted Jones

Bob Carver

under a rather strict format that Ted thought would put us up in the money.

I've always raced like that. For years and years and years, I've run races based on a three- or four-heat performance, not just a one-heat performance. Ted's strategy was a good one, and it worked in many, many races for me, and I've continued to use the idea. But, in that particular race, a couple of the guys on the crew were upset because I wasn't running faster. That kind

of bothered me because I'd already run two slots better than Ted wanted me to.

How did you approach the second heat?

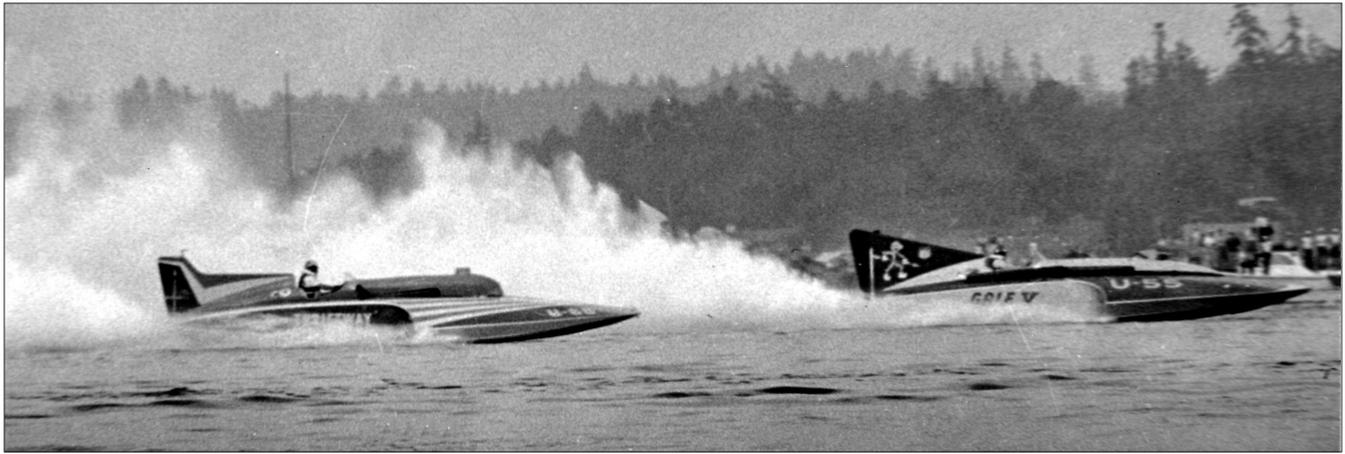
Ted said, "If you can pull a third again, we'll be in good shape with the kind of traffic we had." He didn't think I could beat the *Slo-mo-shun IV* or the *Tempo*, or even the *Gale V* for that matter. So, I went out for the second heat and it just so happened that all of the guys except Lee Schoenith in the *Gale V* and myself were all ahead of the gun. They came up to the line way too fast and they had to back off to keep from jumping. I could see quickly that everybody had goofed and I could take advantage of the situation. I was sure Ted would approve of that.

Well, Lee and I started from back in the pack and we weren't caught up in all of that garbage, and we just made one of the smokin'est starts you'd ever want to see. Both of us went across the line full bore. We nailed 'em to the wall. We were down in the first corner before those guys even got on a plane. So, I was up and gone like a shot. I was



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

The start of the second heat of the 1955 Gold Cup. From the inside lane: Such Crust III, Miss Thriftway, Gale IV, Miss Cadillac, Gale V, and Breathless.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Bill Muncey in *Miss Thriftway* follows Lee Schoenith in *Gale V* during the 1955 Gold Cup on Lake Washington in Seattle

on the inside of Lee. He was running really fast, but I had an advantage being on the inside. I ended up winning the heat, just going away without too much strain. Of course, when I came in, the crew was just overwhelmed, just delighted, and Ted was too. We felt we were maybe in a position to win the race.

And then in the final heat ...

I went out in the final heat and there was a great movement on the part of Detroit to take their boats as a team effort. The two guys who could win the race and beat Detroit were the *Slo-mo-shun* and myself. So, they had to do something for Detroit and try to get *Gale V* to win. It involved a couple of 'em trying to work the *Slo-mo-shun* over on the racecourse and trying to work me over, to try and slow us down.

So, we came up for the start, and I didn't have a great start, but I didn't have the worst start, certainly. I think I started maybe sixth or seventh on the line. I forget who broke on the inside. I think it was probably the *Slo-mo-shun*. I was able to work myself into third place. I was trying to get by the *Such Crust*. The *Such Crust*, being a Detroit boat, was doing a great job keeping me running a wider racecourse, wider in the corners and wider in the chutes. The end result was the *Slo-mo* had broken on top and he

was gone. Nobody could hinder his performance. It was just brilliant. He got out in front.

As I say, the *Such Crust* was running second and holding me back. I couldn't get by him. Walt Kade was driving at that time. I was new and he was giving me a helluva driving lesson and I was responding. I was doing everything he wanted me to, until about the sixth lap. Then we started lapping some boats. Just as we did that, the *Crust* came up behind a boat. I was in the lane next to him, just behind. Walt took a look at him, knew he couldn't come to starboard, and he couldn't go inside. He had to drive right up that roostertail or let me go by. And, so, he backed off. Of course, I went by him. At that time I was in second place. I went smoking into the north corner. At that time the *Slo-mo-shun* was coming off the exit pin and was beginning to have some kind of difficulty. I think his exhaust stacks were breaking, to a point there was a concern on his part about fire. When he came off the exit pin, he was slowing down already and I went right by him. From then on, I stayed out in front. He eventually had to stop.

I had about two laps to go. I was out in front and in my head I had the race won. I just didn't see how I could lose. The only guy who could beat me was Lee Schoenith, but Lee

had a third and two seconds and I had two firsts and a third. Pointwise, certainly, he couldn't beat me based on performance on the racecourse. Total elapsed time was critical, but Lee was so far behind me that I just didn't see how time could be a factor. I just thought I had won. I think everybody in Seattle at that time emotionally felt I had won. There were maybe a few who sat back and said, 'Hey, somebody else won this boat race.' But, in the mean time, we were celebrating it. I think a lot of people left the racecourse thinking the *Thriftway* team, in the very first race in its history, had won the Gold Cup.

Later that summer, in the President's Cup, you had the fastest race average. Do you remember anything about that race in particular? *Tempo VII* won.

All I remember about that event is, in the final heat, I had a great start. I was really gone like a shot. I was running well, but Danny Foster in the *Tempo* had a good start, too. He and I were running side by side. He had just a little more chute speed than I did. He seemed to have a better performance through the corners and accelerated better. He was doing some experimental work with pistons and was pulling a little more horsepower than a lot of us. But his boat was outstanding and Danny was an excellent chauffeur.

We were running about side by side and we got into the first corner. The balance of the field was behind us. We moved up the back chute good, came down the front chute again to complete the first lap. We started to go into the first turn of the second lap and Danny spun out. He spun into the infield. This put two or three of us, of course, ahead of him. He had to spin into the infield, keep it running, circle around the buoys, and come back on the racecourse. Of course, he was in last place. Well, he ended up passing the whole field to win the heat, which in my opinion was just an incredible performance. When he got ready to pass me, I was the last one he had to pass. I couldn't hold him off. He was just running too fast.

At the end of the '55 season, did you expect to be back with the Thriftway team the following season?

Well, at that point, to be honest with you, I felt I did well enough that, yeah, I expected to be back. I felt I had done what I wanted to do, and that is at least make the sport aware that I was interested in being wholly involved in it. And I maybe would be driving for someone else, but I liked Willard Rhodes and I liked his organization. They were my kind of people. I was particularly fond of one of the guys on the crew. His name was Jack Ramsey. So, I felt if I was invited back to drive the Rhodes boat, I would be happy to do it. On the other hand, if I wasn't invited back, I felt confident I'd be driving for someone else. I felt that really, from a marketing point of view, they should have had a local driver at that point.

Before the 1956 season, did the crew make any major changes that you know of?

Yeah, I think they made a few changes on the sponson runners. They said they were going to give me a little more horsepower. I

don't know that we had that much additional horsepower. A little bit, maybe. The boat was handling a little better, I felt, and I felt more secure at higher speeds. It wasn't a real barnburner off the corners, but it got through the corners well. And so, I felt, all things being equal, once again being dedicated to a consistent performance, and not necessarily a record-breaking performance, we could probably win a lot of races. I felt confident that we'd have a good year. And think that we did.

The first year, the team bought their Allison from Ray Bettmann in Detroit. Were they still doing that in the second year, or were they starting to build their own equipment?

I really don't know. We were starting to build some, but they were still using some Bettmann equipment. There's a fellow named Ray Morey who came in during '56 or '57 to help. I just don't remember exactly any longer.

In the '56 Seafair Race you had some carburetor troubles. It wasn't a very good day for you.

Yeah, they were experimenting with a new way to go with superchargers and carburetion. And compression, too, I think. It certainly wasn't all that successful. When it was running, it was strong, but it just wouldn't run with any consistency. As you mention, the end result was we had a lousy performance here in Seattle. I was really embarrassed over that.

You didn't race again until the Gold Cup in Detroit. Were they still playing with the supercharger, or had they gone back to an earlier setup?

I'm going to have to tell you, I don't remember exactly all the mechanical changes we made in that boat. I'm inclined to think that when I arrived here to run the Seafair race, they were experimenting with some changes in the Allison engine to get it to accelerate better and maybe pull a little more horsepower. I got a feeling, to run the Detroit race, we went back to the original concept, which is consistency, and went back to the kind and type of equipment we knew would run consistently. That's what



The pit area for the 1956 Seafair Trophy Race in Seattle.

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

The *Miss Thriftway* on the Detroit River during the 1956 Gold Cup.

they gave me, a very consistent machine.

There were a number of boats running a lot faster than I was in Detroit that year. They were running a lot faster in the chutes and they were accelerating faster. But no one on our team felt that they'd live. And, the truth was, many of them weren't able to live. It isn't like now. The sport's changed, you know. We just go with everything turned on all the time. We're in sprint racing now. We're not racing in a format where racing over an extended period of time is of any consequence. That's what counted then. I felt our conservative approach was the most rewarding one. I think we proved that without question.

I think that concept of the consistent performance was fairly prominent throughout the *Thriftway* years. True, we began to run a little faster, and then we went to Rolls-Royce power in '57, and that was a little more power for us maybe, but even with Rolls power, the consistent performance was the basis—the objective—in our team. Like I say, there were a lot of other boats around that were a lot quicker, but I don't think they did anywhere near the winning we did.

Going into the '56 Gold Cup, how did you feel about your chances? Probably a lot of people felt *Shanty I* had the best chance.

Yeah. And the *Hawaii Ka'i* had indicated moments of sporadic brilliance. You didn't know, maybe they'd really get turned on there. In '56, we thought sure the *Slo-mo IV* would be really quick and run strong. It was just hard to tell. The *Gale* boats were good. George Simon's *Miss U.S.* was always a

spectacular boat. It turned some fast lap times, but they couldn't complete races, and that's where the winning was. The objective was to finish the heat.

How about the buoy incident? We interviewed Bill Newton awhile back and he says he feels you did hit the buoy. He says there was orange paint on the *Thriftway*. What do you have to say about it? Can you defend yourself?

No, I can't defend myself, other than the evidence, which spoke pretty well for me. The films indicated my wash hit it, there's no question about it, and destroyed it. Frankly, we finally found out, and it was never mentioned, that the *Pepsi* ran over it. But that wasn't critical to the argument at the time. I didn't even care. I don't have feelings like that about racing. I was happy with my performance. That's what was important. I felt if I did well, we should win. If didn't, well, I'd win the next race. Things like that don't get me down. I've had a lot of "official" complications and incidents involving my career over a period of time, and I just don't



Forde Photographers

Bill Muncey, Willard Rhodes, Ted Jones, and the rest of the *Miss Thriftway* team celebrate the acceptance of the 1956 Gold Cup trophy after many weeks of delay.

let them get me down. I just don't respond to stuff like that.

Was the court battle a long, drawn-out thing for you?

Oh, that didn't involve me, really. Horace Dodge had put an injunction on the race because they wouldn't let his boat qualify. Unfortunately, I ended up getting tied up and having to go to court with it because we wanted to get the Gold Cup released. I'd won it and I wanted to take it to Seattle as fast as I could. They wouldn't let me have it because he had this injunction on the event.

Some time later, a writer for the *Seattle Times* said you had considered retiring from racing after the complications surrounding the '56 Gold Cup.

Well, some writers have a great capability for putting words in peoples' mouths, and I'm not really here to comment on that. But I have never, ever suggested that I was thinking about retiring. When I do think about it, I will. I did resent, at times, people who retire today and are back racing tomorrow. I think that's unfair and it's not good for the sport. I've never suggested that. There have been other people who have suggested that. Maybe there are people who would like to see me get the hell out of it. But, when I do say that I am going to quit, I will quit. I guarantee you.

The President's Cup was next. You ran some real hot races with the *Pepsi*. Had some boat damage, too.

Yeah, that was incredible. The battle itself was just an incredible thing on that racecourse. It was always one of the most difficult racecourses to negotiate at competitive speeds with any margin of safety. The *Pepsi* had already won that race three times. Chuck Thompson could run that racecourse with his eyes shut. I was, relatively speaking, new to it.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

[Top] The damaged *Miss Thriftway* is pulled from the Potomac River in Washington, D.C. before it could sink. [Above] Willard Rhodes looks on as crew members from other West Coast race teams lend a hand in getting the boat ready to compete in the 1956 President's Cup race.

I think it was the second heat; never forget it. He and I went side by side for the complete heat. I won by just a little bit. Couldn't have been more than a couple of lengths. The spectators were enjoying it so much that everybody stood up

to clap because they'd seen such a wild, side-by-side race. When they stood up, the grandstands all collapsed and they hauled half the population off to hospitals around Washington, D.C.

I had lost the right side out of

the boat in the second heat. I finished the race, but I really had lost the right side. Maybe if I had been older I'd have pulled in. So, we got it back to the pit area and it virtually sank right there. They got a line on it fast, picked it up, and took to the Naval Air Station, which is where the pits were located at that time.

We had to make some decision as to whether we could repair it and continue racing. It looked like it was beyond repair. We couldn't even launch the boat because it would sink. But, because we were the one boat from the West Coast that was in a really good position to win, a whole bunch of guys jumped in—the *Shanty* and *Maverick* teams, the *Hawaii Ka'i*—they all went to work to repair the *Thriftway* so it would at least float, so I could get it up on a plane. They felt if they could get it in the water and it floated long enough and I could start it quick enough and get it moving, then the water that was coming in the sponson would go overboard and I could keep going and limp around and finish the race.

Fortunately, there were some weather conditions that required a postponement. That helped us a lot. I don't know the time of the total postponement, it may have been an hour, but the guys did a tremendous job. Great esprit de corps being a part of that. It was fun to be associated with it and stand and observe it. It was frightening. I was hoping they wouldn't repair it because I was afraid of it. As I stood there, it was frightening for me because I could see they were going to get it done and that meant I had to then go do my thing, which I wasn't really that eager to do. But, we finally did get it in.

They decided to put me in the water late and make me run all the way from the Anacostia Naval Air Station, out around a peninsula



Bill Muncey and Willard Rhodes accept the 1956 President's Cup trophy from President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Associated Press

of land off Hanes Point, and then make a sharp right and go to the starting line. We had to time it perfectly, and this was assuming that I'd get the boat started. I wasn't the greatest guy in the world at starting Allison engines at that time. But, anyway, they did put me in late. I got it started and I went smoking down to the line. Of course, the balance of the field was coming around the racecourse going to the starting line. I had a beautiful start, just nailed it, going like a son of a gun. Really, I wasn't supposed to go that fast. Ted Jones and everybody had said, "Hey, Bill, don't run this boat hard. You don't have to. All you have to do is run fourth or fifth and you can win the race." Once again, youth shall be served. Something happened inside of me that said, "I want to prove to these clowns that even with a busted up boat, we can run faster than *Miss Pepsi* and some of the other Eastern boats." So, I was was able to break on top and I got out in front and I led the first lap or so. Then I backed off. I felt I'd proved our point. If we'd lost the boat at that

time because of my irrational performance, a lot of people would've been awful mad at me. I never really should have done it because it would have let down all the guys who had done so much work on the boat. But, on the other hand, we did prove our point and they were pleased with the performance. I did end up backing off. We won the race, and that's what counted. As a result, got to see President Eisenhower.

In the '56 Sahara Cup, you broke a prop blade and had damage to the bottom of the boat in the second heat. Do you recall that?

Yeah, it started to sink. It filled up with water and I stuffed my gloves and some rags into the hole. I kept it floating until we got a line on it. I can't even remember how I ran there. ❖

Next month, we'll publish part two of the interview, when Muncey talks about the 1957 season, the destruction of the Thriftway in Madison, and the unique accident he had while driving the new Miss Thriftway in 1958.

Heritage

Historical Perspective



Craig Fjarlie

What was covered.

A name from television's past was in the news in early December when Bruce King, a sportscaster with Seattle's KOMO, passed away. He routinely included hydroplane racing in his sports reports. At about the same time, Seattle's new mayor, Jenny Durkan, announced changes would be made to Key Arena that would allow Seattle to pursue an NHL hockey team and an NBA basketball team.

The sports scene in Seattle, as well as in other cities, has changed substantially since King and other reporters had news to pass along to their viewers and readers. Last summer I was in the parking lot of a motel in Tri-Cities, talking with a group of fans and participants. Someone mentioned the Seattle Seahawks and a former owner scowled. "I hate the Seahawks," he said. "They changed the city and I don't like what they've done."

It's not my intention to turn this column into a hand-wringing diatribe against other sports. There should be room for everyone. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, as other sports have moved in, hydroplane racing has been pushed aside in media coverage. Granted, new technology has changed the shape of media; the change has been greatest in newspaper and magazine coverage.

Before professional sports teams became big business, newspapers often had a writer who was

assigned to motorsports. The *Seattle Times* had Bud Livesley, who wrote a column called Make Mine Water, and Hy Zimmerman, who occasionally wrote about boat racing. Other Seattle writers included Emmett Watson, Bill Knight, and Craig Smith.

One of the great boat racing writers in Detroit was Harry LeDuc. Others included George Van, Joe Falls, and Jerry Green. More recently, Joe Dowdal covered hydroplanes. Hec Hancock routinely covered hydroplanes for the *Tri-City Herald*. In Madison, Phil Cole wrote a column called From the Cole Bin for the *Courier*. He was followed by Graham Taylor, whose column was called On Sports. Bill Center wrote about hydroplanes in San Diego.

Stephen Shepperd's book about the history of the Diamond Cup notes that the *Coeur d'Alene Press* treated the race as front-page news. He quotes Duane Hagadone, son of the publisher, who explains, "It was a great opportunity to really promote our area and tourism."

Decades ago the *New York Times* carried reports on the Gold Cup and occasionally other races. When the President's Cup was held on the Potomac River, the *Washington Post* covered the race.

Magazines carried coverage of motorsports, some were devoted exclusively to boat racing. Bob Nordskog was the publisher of *Powerboat*. Other periodicals that

included hydroplane coverage were *Hot Boat*, *Trailer Boats*, *Boat racing*, *Race Boat and Industry News*, and *Southern Boating*. In August 1957, driver Russ Schlee appeared on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. The magazine regularly reported on hydroplane racing in that era.

Sponsors also produced reading material. Budweiser had an annual publication and for several years the *Pay 'N Pak Racing News* appeared periodically throughout the season.

Early television coverage, usually in black and white on a set with an antenna, was something stations could do without generating the wrath of advertisers who were promoting their products on network programs. Seattle's KING-TV was a pioneer in coverage of local and some out-of-town races. Bill O'Mara clearly liked the races and his emotional attachment to the boats was readily apparent. He left the station around 1960 and his replacement, Rod Belcher, dutifully covered the hydros, but they were obviously not his favorite sport.

O'Mara, meanwhile, became a sports reporter for Bellevue radio station KFKF and continued to broadcast the Seafair races. Keith Jackson was on Seattle's KOMO in the 1950s, where he learned about hydroplanes. He left for the ABC network and called the races on *Wide World of Sports*. Bill Muncey often joined him behind the microphone between heats.

Jim Hendrick was on TV in Detroit before he and Phil Cole formed the Unlimited Hydroplane Radio Network. Another top

television broadcaster in Detroit was Van Patrick.

Until 2017, Seattle's CBS affiliate, KIRO, carried the Seafair race live, following in the tradition started by KING. As this is written, Seafair and H1 representatives are negotiating with KIRO about coverage in 2018 and beyond.

I'll admit that I lack the background in professional media to write a critique of the newspaper, magazine, or broadcast industry. The purpose of this column is to look at the heritage of unlimited hydroplane racing. The depth of coverage in previous decades is part of that heritage.

We owe a debt of gratitude to reporters and broadcasters, Bruce King among them, who gave us information about the hydros.

Their work encouraged new fans to follow the sport. Children would tow a wooden hydro on a string behind their bikes. Sometimes, stone "buoys" were set up in a vacant lot and races were held to see who could tow their boat the fastest around the course, without running over someone else's boat in the process.

Many of us who have been life-long fans sat glued to our TVs or radios when races were being covered. We anxiously awaited the daily newspaper to see photos and read reports about regattas in other parts of the country. Magazines often had color photos of boats and the drivers who were our heroes.

It frustrates me that professional sports teams now have every game covered live on TV, radio,

and the Internet. Newspapers, in spite of the fact many people are moving away from paper, still have the resources to print occasional special sections about a local sports franchise. The *Madison Courier* is the only paper that still prints a special regatta section; that's probably because there is no professional sports team in town. The *Tri-City Herald* still covers its hometown race thoroughly.

The sports world has changed, and it's necessary to come to terms with that reality. Still, I wish there was more space and time for sports that aren't played with a stick or ball. My thanks to reporters who embraced that bigger picture when I was growing up. ❖

UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS AWARDS: And, the winner is...

At the conclusion of each unlimited hydroplane racing season, the members of Seattle's Unlimiteds Unanimous, the publishers of this publication, decide which entrants from the past year are deserving of special recognition. The result of this year's votes were as follows:

CREW CHIEF OF THE YEAR: Jeff Campbell, the crew chief for Mike and Laurie Jones' U-9 team, got the nod for the innovative way that he was able to make the oldest boat in the field among the fastest. Campbell is always open to new ideas and is always trying some little trick to give his boat the most speed possible.



DRIVER OF THE YEAR: This one was easy. How could anyone not select Jimmy Shane, who has now won five national championships in a row. He was the steadiest performer on the circuit and made the fewest mistakes.



ROOKIE OF THE YEAR: Dustin Echols was the best choice for this honor. He did exactly what he needed to do in 2017. He kept his nose clean and got as much out of his boat that anyone could expect.



BOAT OF THE YEAR: The criterion for choosing this winner is who the members would expect to win a mythical race at the end of the season. That winner would probably be the U-9 *Les Schwab*, which seemed to have the best ride and the fastest speed. Perhaps the best indicator of that was the fact that the boat had enough speed to pass *Miss HomeStreet* to the right.



Photos: Campbell and Shane, H1 Unlimiteds; Echols and U-9, Chris Denlow.

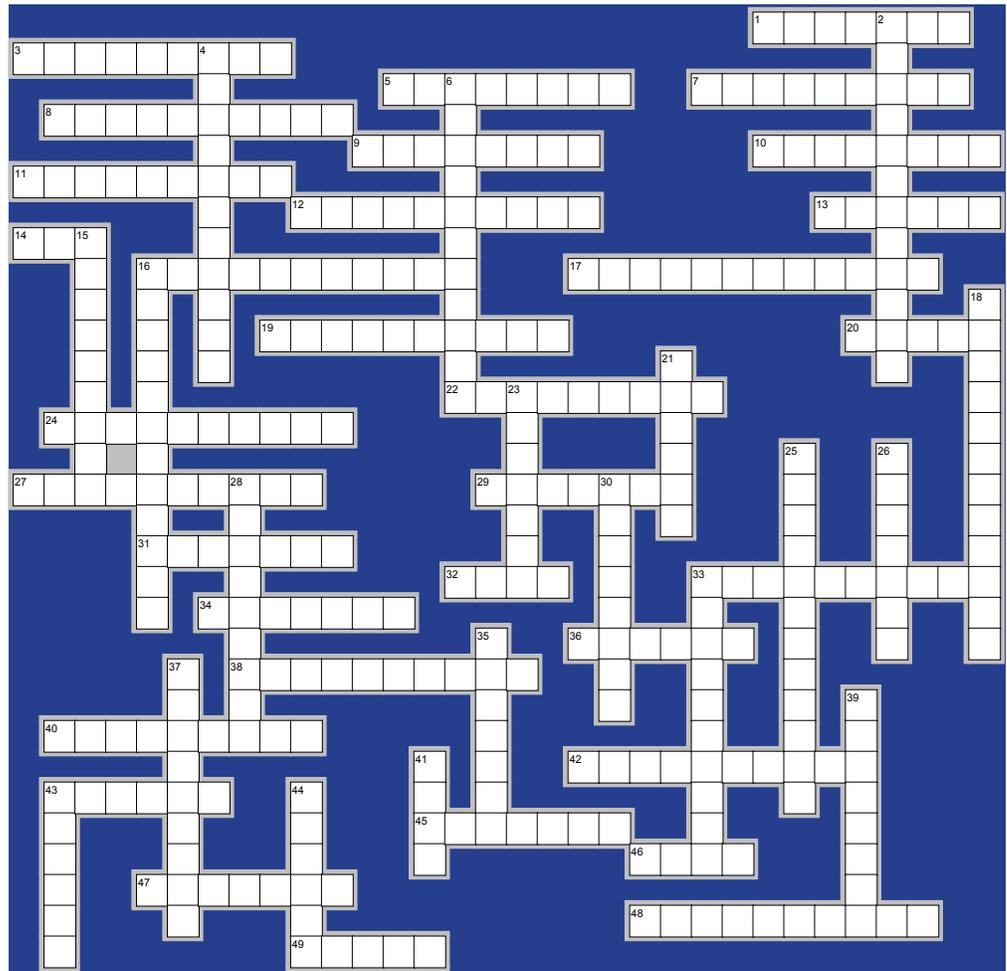
UNJ Hydroplane Conundrums

ACROSS

1. Ultimate hydro prize
3. Revolutionary Seattle hydro
5. Tail feathers
7. Former unlimited organization
8. Hydro legend
9. T-55 L-7
10. Two major running surfaces
11. "Wheel"
12. Blue and white champion
13. Art's company
14. Fuel flow measurement
16. Bill's protege
17. "Darth"
19. Nice guy with the smile
20. Isle Bridge
22. Gold Cup announcers
24. Neck safety equipment
27. Salty super speedway
29. Hang it on the "hook"
31. Engine cover
32. Turbine "food"
33. Type of hydro design
34. Hull classification
36. Moveable control surface
38. Billy "The Kid"
40. Famous hydro dynasty
42. Best air show
43. Section of a turbine
45. Oil additive sponsor
46. Hydro retirement home
47. "the Movie"
48. Unlimited historian
49. Minimum overlap length

DOWN

2. Twin hemi hydro
4. Worlds Fastest Race Boat Series
6. LOTS of water
15. Flip & Win guy
16. Pink boats
18. Red Pants
21. Whose Navy?
23. The drivers "office"
25. Pay n Pak
26. Home of the Roostertail Turn



28. Air ram portion of the hull
30. gearbox type
33. Go3 hydro nickname
35. Long running Seattle festival
37. Indicates start of a heat
39. The Good Doctor
41. Powerboat sanctioning body
43. Driver's bucket
44. Sides of the hull/sponsons

Look for the answers in next month's issue of the NewsJournal.

Can you name this boat?



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Can you guess the name of this former Gold Cup winner?
Need a hint? It also won the President's Cup.

HydroFile

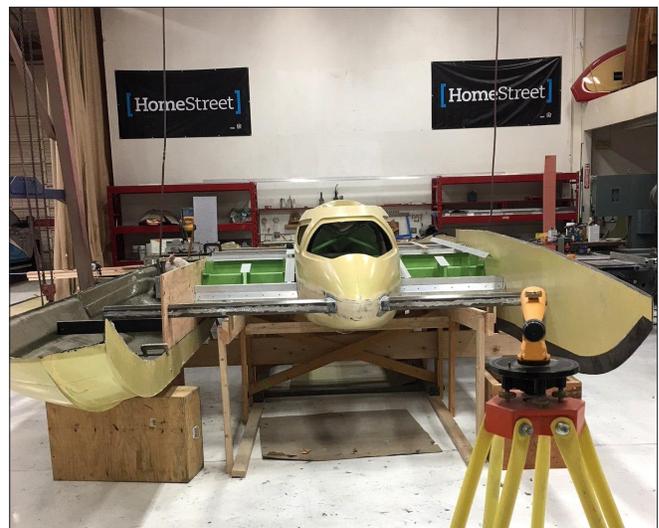
Race Team News



Lon Erickson

U-1 HomeStreet Racing

The 2017 national champion hull traveled back to Madison to participate in City of Madison's Christmas parade and to celebrate the 2017 championship with the citizens of Madison. In the meantime, the team's new hull is being constructed at the HomeStreet Racing shop in Tukwila, Washington. Here are the latest photos. Once the major hull build is complete, the boat will head to the shop in Madison to have all the running hardware installed. It's expected to be completed for the 2018 H1 Unlimited season.



Photos from the Miss Madison Race Team

U-2/U-7 Bartush Spirit of Detroit Racing

Update on the U-2, the former *Trendwest* hull (hull #0302), from Bert Henderson: "Things are coming along very nicely with the U-2 unlimited. Upside down now and ready for new inserts on the primaries. Look out for this boat in the 2018 H1 Unlimited racing series. She is on a serious diet and balances quite nicely right to left." Henderson notes their plan is to test both the U-2 and the U-7 (the former T-5) hulls in May. Then some decisions will be made for which boat will be the primary race boat in 2018.



Bert Henderson

U-11 Unlimited Racing Group

Phoenix-based Reliable Diamond Tool, Inc., has joined Unlimited Racing Group as the full 2018 season presenting sponsor of the U-11. The team also plans to participate in a June spring testing session before the first H1 race in Guntersville, Alabama.



Lon Erickson



Bert Henderson photos

U-21 Go Fast Turn Left Racing

Work continues on the new hull for the O'Farrell GFTL team. The bottom of the boat and belly pan installation is nearing completion.



Rick Stafford

440 Bucket List Racing

The 440 hull in the shop. The team has some new ideas for a more effective cowling design and work is underway fabricating the new engine cowling. They also rolled the boat over and began work on the hull's bottom. Areas getting attention will be the running surfaces, fixes on the shaft log and air traps, and then speed coating.



Photos from the Bucket List Race Team

My \$0.02 Worth

Editorial Comment



Andy
Muntz

A year ago, I wrote a wish list to Santa Claus asking for several things that I hoped would improve this sport. I asked Saint Nick for more boats in 2017, more races, and more media coverage.

Well, sorry to say, Santa didn't come through on any of my wishes. Only 11 boats appeared during the year, two fewer than in 2016, and like the year before, only five events gave boats a chance to earn points toward the national title. I suppose the past year gets a slight advantage on this account, however, because there was an exhibition in Madison and a test in Guntersville, Alabama, to add some excitement.

As for the desire for more media coverage? It appears that Santa didn't hear that plea, either. The biggest disappointment was the decision by KIRO TV in Seattle to not provide live coverage of the Seafair race, a tradition that has continued since 1951.

But, all is not lost. Perhaps my message to the North Pole was held up somehow. Maybe Santa didn't get my message in time to impact the 2017 season and will instead apply his magic to 2018?

Things are looking like that might be the case. Two brand-new hydroplanes are currently under construction and, fingers crossed, will make their debuts this year. The Miss Madison Racing Team is building a new *Miss HomeStreet* at its shop south of Seattle and the Go Fast, Turn Left team is building a new boat in their Maple Valley, Washington, boat shop.

It's also encouraging to see that Bert Henderson is working hard to prepare two boats for Dave Bartush, while Kelly Stocklin is incorporating some new ideas into his Bucket List Racing craft.

As for the number of races, things are looking up there, as well. Guntersville appears on the

schedule for what will be a real boat race in late June. The organizers in Madison are also hoping to once again hold a real race. That would give the teams six stops during the 2018 campaign, a promising sign.

As for the media coverage, there's word on the street that KIRO might be persuaded to provide live coverage again. That said, the sport really should look beyond television, though. The future audience can best be reached elsewhere, such as through live streaming on the Internet.

One final note, as we wrap up this issue, word arrives from H1 Unlimited about the sport's annual awards banquet. It will be held at the Red Lion Hotel in Kennewick, Washington, on Saturday evening, February 10. Go to the H1 website for more information and to purchase tickets.

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Letters may be edited for clarity and space.

PLEASE JOIN US AT THE NEXT MEETING OF UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS.

2 p.m. on Sunday, January 14, 2018

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