



THE OAKLAND BOYS, Part One

by Andy Muntz

Oakland, California, has never hosted an unlimited hydroplane race. The Sacramento Cups of 1966 and '67 were the closest the sport has ever come to the city; the Gold Cup came closest in 1961 when it was held in Reno, almost 200 miles away. Yet, thanks to five friends who grew up there in the 1920s and early '30s, Oakland has had a greater impact on the sport than most of the cities that have actually seen the roar of thunderboats and the majesty of a roostertail.

Gold Cup boats had a way of capturing the fancy of young racing fans during the decades before World War



Danny Foster, at left, and Dan Arena get ready to fire up *Miss Golden Gate*. Sandy Ross Collection
 II. Especially in Detroit, upstate New York, along the Jersey Coast or in the many other places that regularly hosted the race boats, many boys developed a keen interest in the sport. And, that was only natural. They could attend the races, see the spray, feel the engine vibration in their gut, and appreciate the tremendous speed.

There also was an enclave of interest in faraway Oakland, half a continent away. Five young friends, living in a neighborhood of stately homes near Lake Merritt, a quiet body of water near the city's center, also shared a craving for speed, loved to tinker with powerful engines and each month devoured the latest issues of *Motorboat*, *The*

Rudder, or *Yachting* magazines to follow the exploits of Gar Wood, George Reis, Bill Horn, or Clell Perry; the people who were leading a racing life they could only imagine.

The oldest of the group, Lou Fageol, oozed self-confidence and had engine grease in the family gene pool. His father as cofounder of the Fageol Motor Company, maker of the “Safety Bus,” the first passenger bus built from the ground up. The wealthiest of the neighborhood chums were Stanley Dollar and Edgar Kaiser. Dollar was the grandson of the steamship magnate Captain Robert Dollar, the founder of the Dollar Steam Ship Line, and Kaiser was the son of Henry Kaiser, the famous industrialist who by this time had built Boulder and Bonneville dams and who would soon make a fortune in shipbuilding and aluminum.

The remaining two, Dan Arena and Danny Foster, were the youngest. They were not as rich as the other three, but they dreamed large and would become the first to make their mark on the sport, along the way being the main characters in one of the greatest underdog stories in the sport’s history.

Both Arena and Foster started by racing small outboards, but when the expense of trying to outdo the other became too high, they decided to consolidate their efforts. That joint project came in the form of faster and more challenging inboards, thanks to the encouragement of Fageol, who had ordered several hulls and wanted the others to race against him so he would have some competition. Of course, racing inboards was expensive, so Arena convinced his father to give them some sponsorship money, which meant the boat was named *Miss Golden Gate* in honor of the family business, the Golden Gate Winery in nearby Modesto. In exchange, the pair promised they would work in the vineyards when the grapes were ready for harvest.

In time, Arena’s father also became enamored with his son’s racing hobby. In fact, during a business trip to Philadelphia, he found an aging Hispano-Wright engine that he thought would be perfect for his son’s boat, had the thing shipped to Oakland and asked a mechanic named Lloyd Taylor to rebuild it. (Taylor would later gain fame as the developer of the Crosley engine.) With Taylor’s magic touch, the engine was one of the most powerful in Northern California and gave Arena and Foster the wherewithal to collect race victories at a rapid pace.

By the mid 1930s the pair felt like they had conquered the California racing scene, so they turned their sights to the big time: the Gold Cup. Arena volunteered to attend the 1937 race in Detroit, carefully noted the variety of entrants there and returned home believing that their engine probably would be adequate for the challenge. Their problem, he concluded, would be the boat; it wasn’t up to Gold Cup standards. So, Arena’s dad reached into his pocket again and agreed to fund the construction of a larger hull.

Being careful readers of the speedboat magazines, Arena and Foster knew all about a new three-point hull design developed by Ventnor Boat Works of New Jersey. Problem was they couldn’t afford the \$2,200 price tag for a bare hull from Ventnor, so they instead



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Above: The former Baxter Special *Miss Golden Gate*. Bottom: Danny Foster working on Hispano-Wright engine.

produced their own set of drawings based on photographs they had acquired of a smaller three-point boat. Once their new craft emerged from the shop, they painted it bright yellow and put the name *Miss Golden Gate* on its side.

Following a testrun of 75 miles per hour on the Oakland Estuary, the 21-year-old Arena and his 23-year-old friend borrowed a car from Arena's mother, loaded it with their provisions and set off on their adventure and headed east across Donner Pass with their big yellow hydroplane following behind, strapped to an old wooden trailer that was attached to the bumper. Along the way, they stopped at the Bonneville Salt Flats to watch John Cobb set a land speed record, and then pushed on across the Great Plains, over the Mississippi River and through the Midwest to Detroit.

When they arrived, their first order of business was a stop at the Detroit Yacht Club to get their registration materials. That's where they learned they had already become famous. The Detroit newspapers had been buzzing about a mysterious entry by what they described as two California millionaires, so race officials were shocked when the two bedraggled young men appeared and identified themselves as Arena and Foster. Danny Foster remembered the moment in an interview published in the *Unlimited Newsjournal* in December 1984:

"We drove in, and they said, 'Where's your boat? Are you shipping it by train?' We said, 'Why no, it's right out in front. You wanna see it?' They almost died. The next day: retractions. 'They weren't millionaires. They were just two kids with a boat!'"

Arena and Foster were directed to the pit area and parked their humble \$1,000 craft among race boats that cost at least forty times more. But, judging by the performance of those boats in testing, it was hard to tell much difference. While the *Golden Gate* cruised smooth and steady around the Detroit River course, the others became victims to a host of maladies.

One of the biggest knocks against the Gold Cuppers had been their poor reliability. It seemed the boats couldn't stay running for more than a few laps; and the 1938 Gold Cup was proving to be no exception. Herb Mendelson's new *Notre Dame* flipped during a run and sent driver Clell Perry to the hospital; Zalmon Simmons couldn't start the engine of his new Ventnor boat *My Sin* because water had gotten into the oil system; and two more boats dropped out on the morning of the race



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because of mechanical problems. That left only four to answer the starting gun for the first heat: the Italian Count Theo Rossi in his bright red *Alagi*, Harold Wilson in the *Miss Canada III*, Bill Horn in Horace Dodge's odd-looking *Excuse Me* and the low-budget boat from Oakland.

In the first heat, with Arena at the steering wheel and Foster in the riding mechanic's seat, the *Golden Gate* bounded across the starting line right behind the *Canada III*. Their hold on second place lasted only a few seconds, however, as Count Rossi soon roared



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past in the more powerful *Alagi*. Meanwhile, behind the Oakland pair, the *Excuse Me* chugged along for a few laps and then began to fall apart; the sponsons split, then pieces of decking flew off and finally the nose folded back and landed in the cockpit before it came to a stop and quietly sank. That left only three.

The second time out, the *Canada III* was hampered by an oil pump problem, which left the race to *Alagi* and the *Golden Gate*. Arena again got across the starting line before Count Rossi, but the *Alagi* was soon past the yellow boat and continued to pull further ahead clear to the end.

In the final, Arena again piloted the *Golden Gate* across the line first and turned a first lap at almost 66 miles-per-hour, but then the natural order of things took over and Rossi roared past once more. Arena was having a great ride, nevertheless. The *Golden Gate* was running smoothly and, though he had fallen about half a lap behind, he was keeping pace with the *Alagi* as they started their fourth time around the buoys. All considering, the second place trophy was looking pretty good, he thought to himself.

Suddenly, the *Golden Gate*'s engine coughed and fell silent. As the massive crowd groaned in despair and the boat slowed to a stop, Foster leapt from his seat and dived headfirst into the engine compartment. He immediately saw the culprit (the cable connecting the accelerator pedal to the throttle had broken), grabbed the throttle linkage and brought the engine back to life just as the sputtering *Miss Canada III* wallowed past. So, on they went for the remaining eight laps, bounding across the waves at about 50 miles-per-hour as Foster lay prone on the deck with his head nestled next to the engine and his hand manipulating the throttle, and as Arena drove the boat with one hand on the steering wheel and the other holding his friend's ankle so he wouldn't fall into the river. With one lap to go, the *Canada III* finally stopped running, which gave Arena and Foster the second place finish they hoped for.

"The roar of the crowd drowned out the roar of the mighty motors," gushed a reporter for *Pacific Motor Boat*. "The Oakland lads received a tribute few losers ever receive. They lost the race but they were the heroes of the Gold Cup." The writer for *Yachting Magazine*, meanwhile, referring to the sport's recent history of lackluster performances, pointed out that it was fortunate Arena and Foster brought their little yellow flyer across the country because they "provided most of the color that relieved the drabness of the match."

Back home in California, Arena's mother and father spent the day listening to the radio reports. They heard the excited announcer urge the pair to the finish line and, after the race, heard their son congratulate the winner and talk about how much fun it had been. His mother's only complaint was about the way some of the press had embellished the story by saying the young men had come to Detroit in a second-hand car.

"It wasn't a second-hand car," Mrs. Arena told a reporter, incredulously. "It was my 1935 Ford coupe—without a dent in it!"

After the race, the two Californians returned home to make good on their promise to tend the family vineyards. Arena was so sure that his future was in the winery, in fact, that he sold the *Miss Golden Gate* to his friend Stanley Dollar; his life's ambition having been met, or so he thought.



E Lon Erickson

U-1. The Oh Boy! Oberto/ Miss Madison team is working on routine maintenance on the primary hull. New props and gearbox work is also in order. With the starting rules changing, most teams are anticipating the need for additional spare parts such as uprights, wings, canards. The Oberto team is at work on

those components. As was mentioned last month, some serious discussion and options surround the back-up hull (#8806). Those discussions have now played out. The team has sold the Oberto/Madison back-up hull; see the report on the U-22 Webster Racing team.

U-5/U-7/U-57 Ted Porter's PPE, LLC race team continues to move forward with work on gearboxes, motors and plans to race all three hulls in 2011. Major sponsorship arrangements are in the works. The team has made some changes with crew assignments and brought on some new team members for 2011. There are plans for a spring testing session. Ted Porter is using many of his display hulls to promote his team, with one hull specifically supporting the Air National Guard on a multi-city tour.

U-9. Mike Jones Racing continues to move towards plans to run in Washington state, providing sponsorship arrangements come through. Several names are being discussed as driver possibilities.

U-11. The Peters & May/Unlimited Racing Group team continues work on evaluating and making changes to their "new" race boat. New electrical systems have been fabricated, portions of decking removed to survey structural integrity, new hardware fabricated, along with new canards, air intakes, bullnoses, uprights, and wings. The engine shop has been busy completely re-working the motors that were acquired with the initial purchase and gearboxes have been gone through as well. The hull has been flipped to inspect the running surfaces and access to other components. Design work has begun on a "new" paint scheme for the boat and should be finalized soon with painting to follow as hull work wraps up.

U-13. Spirit of Detroit Racing has been relatively quiet since last month when decks were removed and updates done to tighten up the boat.

U-17. Red Dot Corp. has signed on again as title sponsor for the U-17. Crew nights have kept the Our Gang Racing team busy building new parts, wings, bullnoses, cowling, and making changes to their front canard. Work continues on their third motor and some new gearbox packages. They also acquired a stronger trailer for the race boat that will allow more flexibility for storage, which they have been re-working and painting. Expect to see the U-17 testing at 'Tastin 'n Racin' on Lake Sammamish in June, as it will

provide some good opportunities for set-ups comparable to the revised 2011 Madison racecourse.

U-22. The Webster Racing team made a big step and purchased the Oberto back-up hull (#8806). This hull was the primary race boat for the team up through 2006, finishing 2nd in high points in 2005 & 2006. The sale includes additional wings, uprights, and other components built for that hull and will be the U-22 race team's primary boat. The work will now be configuring existing engines, gearboxes, and parts to work in the new hull. The former U-22 hull (#9703) aka "Tubby", has been sold to **Ted Porter** for use as a display hull.

88. The Schumacher Racing hydroplane will be referred to as No. 88 this season as they have chosen the option to drop the "U" from their number designation for marketing purposes. Work continues at **Ron Jones Jr.**'s shop in Pacific, Washington on the new hull, while the crew works on systems and building boat components at the Schumacher Racing shop in Seattle. They will have a new motor along with new props, and gears. Joining the crew will be **Adam Bratvold** from Whispering Turbines Inc. Adam (**Tracy Bratvold**'s son) has worked as turbine specialist for the Miss Geico Offshore team, along with Ellstrom Racing and Bill Wurster's teams. Word coming from the camp is still indicating the new boat will have a lower profile deck and driver safety capsule. Team Manager **Jim Harvey** has plans to test the new race boat in Tri-Cities before the season opener at Madison. **Billy** and **Jane Schumacher**, along with new driver **J. Michael Kelly**, attended a Gold Cup fundraising event in Detroit and formally announced their sponsorship with Degree Men. The hull leased from **Fred Leland** last season (#0010) is now heading out for display duty 'wrapped' in new Degree colors of black, gold, silver, and white.

U-96. The Ellstrom Racing crew has been working on building up a stock of spare parts for the 2011 season along with routine system upgrades. As with all the teams and the need to comply with some of the new rule changes made during the off-season, the crew has been checking and updating components to ensure all is current and up to spec. At this point, no significant changes heading into 2011 for the Spirit of Qatar race boat.

U-100. The Leland team has been putting in work on two of Fred's race boats this spring, one being the hull that raced in 2010 (#9899) and another from his race stable of boats (#9701). It has not been decided which one will be the primary hull in 2011. Sponsorships are also being pursued and there has been mention of a possible testing session, depending on hull choice and upgrades presently being worked on. Word on Fred's automotive power hydro (#9810) is that he is still working on the project but unlikely to see it finished in 2011 as other team priorities take precedent right now.

~~ UNJ

A Conversation with J. Michael Kelly

Interviewed by Craig Fjarlie

J. Michael Kelly started racing in the Junior Outboard category when he was nine years old. He is a third generation boat racer. He quickly established himself as a winning driver. As soon as he was old enough he moved into adult outboard classes driving both hydroplanes and runabouts. In 2004, Jim Harvey selected Kelly to drive his U-2 (through 2005). That same season, Kelly earned a place in the American Power Boat Association's Hall of Champions in the Stock Outboard category. He later drove the U-13 for Dave Bartush (2006 through 2008), and the U-7 for Ted Porter's Formula team (2009 and 2010). Kelly won the UIM World Championship at Doha, Qatar, in 2009. He continued to race outboards and won an unprecedented four championship titles at the 2010 Stock Outboard National Championships and was again inducted into the APBA Hall of Champions. Earlier this year, Schumacher Racing announced that Kelly would join their team as driver for 2011. In this interview, conducted by Craig Fjarlie, Kelly talks about his expectations for the coming season.



Owen Blauman photo

How did you and Schumacher get together? Did he call you, or how did that come about?

They called me, but I had talked to them years before. It had always been an interest driving for them and an interest from them wanting me to drive for them. So, with J.W. (Myers) and Scott (Raney) doing their own thing, that kind of opened up the door for me.

What can you tell us about the new boat? Do you see anything different in the design, the way it's going together?

It's starting to look more like a boat every time I go down there. I think it's going to come together quite well. Should be similar to the *Oberto* boat but with, hopefully, better changes.

Ron Jones, Jr., is building the boat.

JR's basically building this boat. So, a lot of the stuff that's going into it now, Ron Jones is pretty much doing it all. It's going to be a JR boat.



Lon Erickson photo

In general, what are you looking forward to in the 2011 season? What are you hoping for?

This is a new opportunity. It basically opens the door not only on the race course but outside of it. It's the opportunity to drive the newest boat on the water. A lot of new equipment, so that'll be an exciting part. The other part, doing some of the P.R. and stuff like that. Good opportunity for myself and my family.

Is Rob Graham, of Graham Trucking, coming with you to this team?

No, he's not. I did talk to him. He's going to, probably, be more of a fan this year, rooting me on. He'll probably help out Seattle a little bit more, just doing his own thing.



Lon Erickson photo

Billy Schumacher has a history in outboard racing. You're still involved in it. Have you found some common ground with him and talked about some of that?

Oh, yeah. You know, it's nice being a partner of somebody who came from the same roots as I have. We'll probably be a lot on the same page. He raced outboards, I've done outboards. He did OPC, now I'm racing OPC. He also went to unlimiteds and stuff like that.

Are you going to stay involved with the outboards, to some extent?

Oh, a little bit, you know. I could go race the kneelers if I wanted to (traditional outboards where drivers race in a kneeling position – Ed.). I chose not to this year. I'm going to run some 45 tunnel boat stuff (45 SS and SST 45 classes – Ed.) and then probably some inboards, just to keep crisp on the unlimited. Just kinda put the outboard stuff on hold, really.

OK, thank you.

UL and Upcoming Unlimited Driver has a Close Call at Spring Testing on Lake Washington

by Lon Erickson

Photos from Karl Pearson

After a testing session on Lake Washington, Kayleigh Perkins Mallory was returning to the pits in the UL-72 Foster Care-Change A Lifetime unlimited hydroplane, when an apparent fuel leak ignited in fire inside the engine compartment of her raceboat. As she shut down, her crew noticed the flames coming from the boat and radioed for her to get out.



Before she was able to exit the driver's compartment, accumulated fumes exploded, blowing the right side of the deck off along side the engine and right sponson. Kayleigh was able to free herself, attempted to activate the fire suppression system, and jumped into the water. The fire continued to grow with the fire suppression not working, as rescue craft rushed in to assist.



Kayleigh's brother Brian, her husband James, and fellow racer Shane Pratt jumped in to help Kayleigh to shore. The hydro's right side, engine compartment, and cockpit area continued to burn as it drifted to the shoreline. Crews contained the fire but not before the boat suffered extensive damage to the engine and compartment. Kayleigh was shaken but not hurt in the incident as her training and quick response paid off.



The exact cause of the fire has not been determined and the boat will require major work before competing again. The UL-72 team is working on repairing the boat but at this point don't have a date set yet when to expect them back on the water for the 2011 UL season.



Time Capsule 2011

1961; 50 years ago

By Kirk Pagel



Bob Carver photo

In 1961 the U-60 *Miss Thriftway*, carrying the name *Miss Century 21* to promote the 1962 Seattle World's Fair, won four races including the Gold Cup in Reno, Nevada. She accomplished that without winning a single heat, and bonus points were written out of the 1961 rulebook. *Miss Century 21* went on to win the National Championship. Her other three wins included the President's Cup, the Diamond Cup and the Indiana Governor's Cup. This third *Thriftway* hull became the model of consistency.

With only one race win, the Harmsworth Trophy, the CA-3 *Miss Supertest III* continued her undefeated record. 1961 would be her final year of competition.



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The only hull that experienced a name change during the race season, was the U-4 *Miss Burien*, which became *Tempest* when the fleet arrived in Seattle.

The U-40 *Miss Bardahl*, in its fourth and final year of competition with the 1958 hull, finished second in the National High Points. She had two race wins, one in the World Championship by ten points over *Miss Century 21*, in Seattle, and the other in the Silver Cup which was stopped following Bob Hayward's death aboard *Miss Supertest II*.

Debuting at the ill-fated Silver Cup was the only new hull for 1961. This was the U-33 *Miss Lumberville*, built by Roy Duby, Walt Kade (driver), and owner Joe Dewey. That same hull now resides in the Hydroplane & Raceboat Museum as *Oh Boy! Oberto*.

The U-55 *Gale V* won the 1961 Detroit Memorial and went on to one more podium finish at Madison, placing third overall in the 1961 high points.

Schoenith's behemoth *Gale VII* had been running as U-56 *Gale VI*, but re-appeared in 1961 as the V-16 Packard powered U-57.



Alan S. Pagel photo



File 10 photo



Gale V (3) photo, taken at Seattle by Kirk Pagel. *Gale VII* photo, taken at Detroit from H&RM Collection.

The former *Tempo VII* placed second in a two boat field at the Harmsworth, but struggled the rest of the season as the U-99 *Miss Detroit* (on next page).

With the longest “U” number in history, the *U-1230-910 CUTIE Radio* (was yet another paint job for the former *Gale IV* hull. Driver & future owner Billy Schumacher got his first ride in 1961, at the Diamond Cup. Later in the season, in Seattle, Billy took over the U-5 *Miss Tool Crib*.



Detroit Free Press photo

The U-25 *Miss Spokane* made her final appearance under that name at the Gold Cup. Bob Gilliam bought this hull at the end of the season, and in 1963 she would re-appear as U-25 *Miss Eagle Electric*, leased by Dave Heerensperger.



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The defending Gold Cup champion dated back to 1959 when, running as U-00 *Maverick*, she won in Seattle. In 1960 there was no contest, due to high winds, and by 1961, running as *Miss Reno* driven by Lt. Col. Russ Schlee, she was but a shadow of her former self. What a difference the crew makes!



Mel Hicking photo

There were seven other race sites in 1961, Detroit for the Detroit Memorial, and Coeur D’Alene for the Diamond Cup. Seattle hosted a trio of races on its Lake Washington racecourse. The World’s Championship, the Seattle Trophy, and Queens Trophy, were contested by the high, mid and low qualifiers. Picton, Ontario in Canada, held the Harmsworth, and rounding out the sites a



Eileen Crimmin photo

second visit to Detroit for the ill-fated Silver Cup, Washington D.C. for the Presidents Cup, and Madison for the Governor’s Cup.

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