

A look back 50 years to the 1970 Seafair Race.

When the fleet of Unlimited hydroplanes rolled into Seattle 50 years ago this past summer, the outlook for the national title chase seemed well in Bill Muncey's hands. Driving the *MYR Sheet Metal*, he had won three of the season's first four races. Yes, his team had a hard time two weeks earlier in the Tri-Cities; he finished only one heat. But his closest rival, the defending champion *Miss Budweiser* with Dean Chenoweth driving, had an even worse outcome. The boat had flipped and was fished from the depths of the Columbia River with serious damage.

BY DAN LOPEZ

A field of 14 Unlimited hydroplanes, the largest so far of the 1970 season, competed in the Seafair Trophy race held on August 2. Action started on Wednesday with testing only, then the time trials started on Thursday. Boats that had competed earlier in the season were not required to qualify, but prize money was awarded to the top three boats on each of the three days.

Notre Dame, with driver Leif Borgersen, scored the highest lap speed of the week on Thursday at 117.391 mph, fol-



The Stan Sayres Memorial Pits in Seattle during the 1970 Seafair Trophy

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Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Randy Hall



TOP: The national points leader, Bill Muncey and the MYR Sheet Metal.
MIDDLE: The owners' and drivers' meeting before the 1970 Seafair Race.
ABOVE: Bob Gilliam returns to the pits after a test run with the U-29 Atlas Van Lines.

lowed by Bill Muncey in *MYR Sheet Metal* at 116.129 mph and Tommy Fults and the *Pay 'N Pak 'Lil Buzzard* at 112.500 mph. *Notre Dame* again scored the top speed on Friday while Dean Chenoweth was second fastest on the newly repaired *Miss Budweiser*, which had arrived in the pits on Friday morning, only 12 days after its disastrous Tri-Cities accident. *Burien Lady*, driven by George Henley, clocked the third fastest time at 94.737 mph.

On Saturday, *Notre Dame* once again sat atop the leader board, but this time had to share the honors with *MYR Sheet Metal*, as each had lapped the course at 116.883 mph. While it was not necessary for most of the boats to qualify for the race, one entry was making its 1970 debut and was required to meet a minimum standard.

The U-80, a craft that raced the last three years as *Parco's O-Ring Miss*, attracted much attention when it appeared in the pits on Friday morning having been towed up from Southern California behind an antique Beverly Hills fire engine. It had the name *Super Cinders II* when it arrived, but by Saturday a sponsorship deal was reached with a Seattle catering firm and the boat was renamed *Miss Van's P-X*. Less than an hour after acquiring its sponsor, well-known California limited ace Mickey Remund qualified himself and the boat for Sunday's competition.

Optimism abounded on Sunday morning. Bill Muncey came into the day 720 points ahead of the *Miss Budweiser* and 780 points in front of *Notre Dame*. Muncey was confident he could lock up the national championship, perhaps even in Seattle.

Miss U.S. owner George Simon and driver Salt Walther also were optimistic, with Simon quoted as saying they had a 50/50 chance of winning. Laird Pierce felt that changes made to his new *Parco's O-Ring Miss* after Tri-Cities had improved the chances of competing with the top boats, while driver Billy Schum-



acher said the boat was “riding perfectly.”

And, *Bud* owner Bernie Little, remembering the previous year when they had come into the Seattle race trailing badly in the national standings only to win both Seafair and the San Diego Gold Cup to claim the national title, was looking forward to history repeating itself.

Things weren't so bright for everyone, however. *Pride of Pay 'N Pak* had started the season with six Chrysler engines and was now down to two, after blowing one during a Wednesday test session. Owner Dave Heerensperger was talking about installing a Merlin in the craft.

Racing begins

Parco and Schumacher had the inside lane at the start of Heat 1A. Jim McCormick and *Miss Madison* were in lane two, and Muncey and *MYR Sheet Metal* were in lane three. Entering the first turn, Muncey moved over in front of *Madison*, officials ruled an infraction, and Muncey was penalized a lap. McCormick went on to victory followed by Ron Larsen in the *Pride of Pay 'N Pak*, *Parco*, then Bob Gilliam and *Atlas Van Lines II*. With the penalty, Muncey finished fifth.

Muncey and *MYR Sheet Metal* team owner

ABOVE: George Henley fires up the engine on the *Burien Lady* and heads out onto Lake Washington.

BELOW LEFT: The *Miss Van's P-X* with Mickey Remund at the wheel.

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STATBOX

Seafair Trophy

Seattle, Washington; August 2, 1970

3-mile course on Lake Washington; 45-mile race

FINAL STANDINGS: (1) U-12 *Miss Budweiser*, Dean Chenoweth, 969 points; (2) U-4 *Burien Lady*, George Henley, 825; (3) U-7 *Notre Dame*, Leif Borgersen, 800; (4) U-6 *Miss Madison*, Jim McCormick, 794; (5) U-77 *Miss Owensboro*, Bill Sterett Jr., 700; (6) U-80 *Miss Van's P-X*, Mickey Remund, 596; (7) U-00 *Pay 'n Pak 'Lil Buzzard*, Tommy Fults, 400; (8) U-19 *Atlas Van Lines II*, Bob Gilliam, 394; (9) U-25 *Pride of Pay 'n Pak*, Ron Larsen, 300; (10) U-88 *Totum Trailer Sales*, Walt Kade, 300; (11) U-29 *Atlas Van Lines*, Bob Gilliam and Bob Miller, 300; (12) U-8 *Parco's O-Ring Miss*, Billy Schumacher, 225; (13) U-70 *MYR Sheet Metal*, Bill Muncey, 127; U-2 *Miss U.S.*, Dave Walther, 0.

Boats qualified at a previous race during the 1970 season were deemed qualified to race in this event. Only one boat had not qualified previously. **QUALIFYING:** U-80 *Miss Van's P-X*, Mickey Remund, 104.651. **TESTING:** Prizes were offered to the fastest boats during pre-race testing. The fastest recorded testing speeds were as follows: U-7 *Notre Dame*, Leif Borgersen, 117.391; U-70 *MYR Sheet Metal*, Bill Muncey, 116.883; U-00 *Pay 'n Pak 'Lil Buzzard*, Tommy Fults, 113.924; U-6 *Miss Madison*, Jim McCormick, 112.500; U-12 *Miss Budweiser*, Dean Chenoweth, 110.833; U-8 *Parco's O-Ring Miss*, Billy Schumacher, 110.204; and U-4 *Burien Lady*, George Henley, 108.871.

HEAT 1A: (1) *Miss Madison* 101.809, 400 points; (2) *Pride of Pay 'n Pak* 97.826, 300; (3) *Parco's O-Ring Miss* 93.328, 225; (4) *Atlas Van Lines II* 92.024, 169; (5) *MYR Sheet Metal* 88.379 (penalized one lap for encroaching on *Miss Madison* in turn), 127.

HEAT 1B: (1) *Pay 'n Pak 'Lil Buzzard* 105.386, 400; (2) *Miss Owensboro* 102.583, 300; (3) *Burien Lady* 100.334, 225; (4) *Miss Van's P-X* 94.405, 169; *Totum Trailer Sales* DNS – magneto failure, 0.

HEAT 1C: (1) *Miss Budweiser* 104.166, 400; (2) *Atlas Van Lines* 61.983, 300; *Notre Dame* DNF – threw rods on third lap, 0; *Miss U.S.* DNF – blew engine on first lap, 0.

HEAT 2A: (1) *Miss Budweiser* 97.719, 400, 800 cumulative points; (2) *Miss Van's P-X* 91.836, 300, 469; *Pride of Pay 'n Pak* DNF – fuel pump problem, 0, 300; *MYR Sheet Metal* DNF – blown supercharger, 0, 127; *Atlas Van Lines* DNS – burned boost coil, 0, 300.

HEAT 2B: (1) *Miss Owensboro* 104.529, 400, 700; (2) *Totum Trailer Sales* 101.351, 300, 300; *Parco's O-Ring Miss* DNF – lost propeller, 0, 225; *Pay 'n Pak 'Lil Buzzard* DNS – stuck valves, 0, 400; *Miss U.S.* W/D – , 0, 0.

HEAT 2C: (1) *Notre Dame* 107.270, 400, 400; (2) *Burien Lady* 101.809, 400, 625; (3) *Atlas Van Lines II* 97.367, 225, 394; (4) *Miss Madison* 85.039, 169, 569.

CONSOLATION: (1) *Pay 'n Pak 'Lil Buzzard* 108.433, 200, 600; (2) *MYR Sheet Metal* 106.635, 150, 277; (3) *Pride of Pay 'n Pak* 100.037, 113, 413; (4) *Totum Trailer Sales* 96.704, 85, 385; (5) *Atlas Van Lines II*, 94.306, 64, 458; (6) *Atlas Van Lines* (Bob Miller) 64.034, 48, 348. Fast lap: *Pay 'n Pak 'Lil Buzzard* 109.533.

FINAL: (1) *Notre Dame* 103.726, 400, 800; (2) *Burien Lady* 102.002, 300, 925; (3) *Miss Madison* 99.557, 225, 794; (4) *Miss Budweiser* 87.890, 169, 969; (5) *Miss Van's P-X* 86.844, 127, 596; *Miss Owensboro* DNF – lost steering, 0, 700.

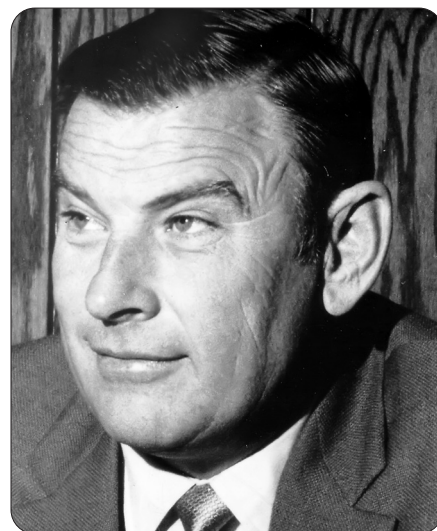
COMPILED BY ALLEN STILES

Lee Schoenith were livid over the official's call, with Schoenith even threatening to withdraw from the race. But with a national title on the line, he soon changed his mind. Both owner and driver were then fined for unsportsmanlike conduct, however.

In Heat 1B, *Pay 'n Pak 'Lil Buzzard* outran Billy Sterett in the *Miss Owensboro*. George Henley drove *Burien Lady* to a third-place finish, while Remund finished fourth in the *Miss Van's P-X*. Walt Kade was unable to start the *Totum Trailer Sales*, which hadn't been started since the Atomic Cup. The plan had originally been for crew chief Al Thoreson to qualify to drive the boat.

Miss Budweiser and *Notre Dame* dueled in Heat 1C until the third lap, when the latter blew a rod and coasted to a stop for a DNF. Gilliam, now driving *Atlas Van Lines*, finished second more than two laps behind the *Bud*. Magneto problems caused the *Miss U.S.* to die 300 yards past the start line.

The good finish for the *Atlas* came despite the fact that it was running with an engine that hadn't seen action in nine years. Its performance was further hampered with fuel-flow problems in the carburetor. The crew had worked late to get the engine to fit into the boat, which meant that Ray Fageol, who had planned to pilot the boat, didn't have the oppor-



Miss Budweiser owner Bernie Little

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Rich Ombrek



Rich Ombrek



Bob Greenhow



TOP: The *Notre Dame* and driver Leif Borgersen. **MIDDLE:** Crewmembers gather around the *Parco's O-Ring Miss* as Billy Schumacher sits in the cockpit. **ABOVE:** From the left, the *Pay 'n Pak 'Lil Buzzard*, the *Atlas Van Lines II*, and *MYR Sheet Metal*.

tunity to become qualified and had to be replaced by Gilliam.

In Heat 2A, *Miss Budweiser* outran *Miss Van's P-X* while *Pride of Pay 'n Pak* failed to finish due to a failed fuel pump. *MYR Sheet Metal* blew a supercharger and also scored a DNF. The *Atlas Van Lines* did not start due to a failed booster coil.

The 23-year-old Billy Sterett and Walt Kade, who was more than 40 years older than Sterett, battled it out in Heat 2B before Sterett was able to pull off the victory. *Parco's O-Ring Miss* lost a propeller and failed to finish. *Pay 'n Pak 'Lil Buzzard* couldn't start because a stuck valve caused the engine to flood.

Entering the first turn in Heat 2C, Borgersen on the outside in the *Notre Dame* cut inside the *Burien Lady* and caught the end of the *Burien's* roostertail, which knocked a fuel fitting loose. *Notre Dame* galloped on to victory, but upon crossing the finish line, the spilled fuel ignited. Luckily, Borgersen was able to get out of the cockpit and avoid injury. *Burien Lady* finished second, followed by *Atlas Van Lines II*, and *Madison* in fourth.

Half points were awarded toward the national standings in the consolation heat, and Muncey and the *MYR* team were counting on the much-needed 200 points they would earn for a victory, hop-



Notre Dame (left) and *Burien Lady* running side by side.

ing to help them stave off *Miss Budweiser* and *Notre Dame*. Tommy Fults had other ideas, of course.

The *Lil Buzzard* had been relegated to the consolation heat because, though it was tied with *Notre Dame* in event points, the *Shamrock Lady* had run faster in the preliminary heats that it won. Fults took the lead at the start and ran off to victory, followed by Muncey, then Larsen in third. Kade, whose engine exploded at the finish, took fourth; Gilliam in the *Atlas II* was fifth; followed by Bob Miller, who was subbing for Gilliam in the *Atlas Van Lines*.

The Final Heat

With a new engine installed in the *Notre Dame* before the final heat, Leif Borgersen drove the boat into the lead in the first turn and went on to win the heat, finishing with enough points for third overall in the race.

George Henley in the *Burien Lady* chased Jim McCormick and *Miss Madison* for much of the heat before passing *Madison* on the backstretch of the fourth lap. The result gave him second place in the heat and in the race, quite a comeback for a team that had scored a big goose egg in the Atomic Cup two weeks before. *Miss Madison's* third-place finish in the finale gave it fourth overall for the race.

The *Burien Lady's* performance also

was notable because its overall average speed for the event was 101.376 mph, making it only the second boat to exceed 100 mph all season. (Bill Muncey and the *MYR Sheet Metal* exceeded that race average mark at both Washington, D.C., and Detroit.)

Meanwhile, during the heat's first lap, Dean Chenoweth in the *Miss Budweiser* was trying to get by both *Madison* and *Burien Lady* when the boat died at the north turn, probably because of wa-

ter that remained in its fuel system from its sinking in the Columbia River. Chenoweth said he "could have died" at that moment, but was able to get the engine restarted and go on to finish fourth. That earned the team enough points to win the race.

Miss Van's P-X exceeded all of the team's expectations with a fifth in the final, and a sixth-place finish overall. For the second race in a row, *Miss Owensboro* entered the final with 700 points. While Terry Sterett couldn't get the boat to start at the Atomic Cup finale, his brother Billy Sterett at least got it started in Seattle, only to have his day end when a cotter pin broke in the steering wheel. The 700 points was enough for fifth overall.

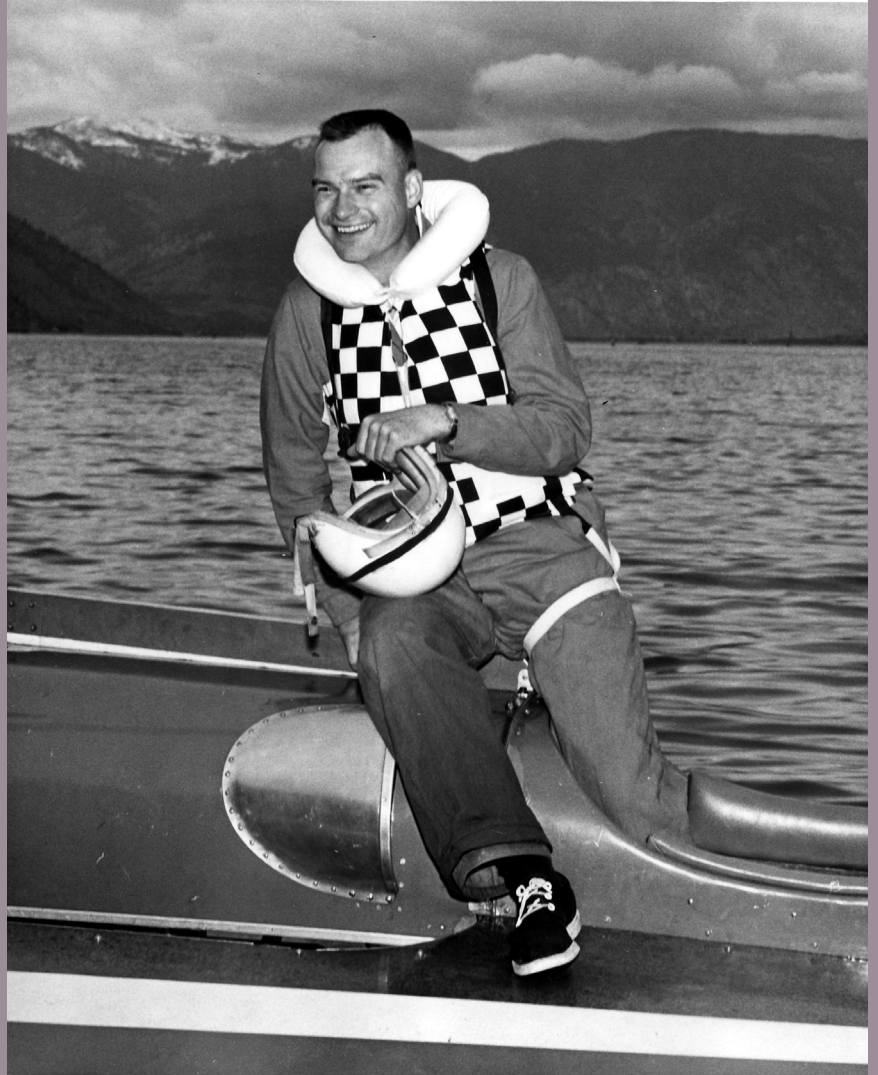
At the end of the day, going into the season's final race seven weeks later in San Diego, the huge national points lead once enjoyed by Muncey and the *MYR Sheet Metal* had been whittled down to less than 30 points over *Miss Budweiser*, and by a couple of hundred points ahead of the *Notre Dame*. ♦



Rick Ombrek

The *Miss Budweiser* team members celebrate their victory at the 1970 Seafair Trophy Race in Seattle.

A UNJ INTERVIEW: Remembering a famed pilot and a true gentleman who drove hydroplanes.



Associated Grocers

BY STEVE NELSON

Brien Wygle, who passed away on September 15 at the age of 96, was a true gentleman. The first time we met, he invited me to his beautiful lakefront home in Bellevue, Washington, where we talked for over an hour about what it was like to drive Unlimited hydroplanes in the late 1950s. Wygle is best known as an aircraft pilot. He was chief test pilot and director of flight testing for the Boeing Company, and retired in 1990 as Boeing's vice president of flight operations. He flew the 727 on its maiden flight and was co-pilot on the 747's first flight. But our

conversation that day in 1997 was primarily about driving hydroplanes, as he warmly welcomed my curiosity and my questions.

UNJ: As your career unfolded, you were best known as an aviator.

Wygle: I started as a test pilot for Boeing in 1951 and took experimental flight tests on the B-47 and B-52, early Boeing jet bombers, and the KC-135. Those were the military airplanes. Later,

I flew all the jet transports 707, 727, 737, and then the 747, 757, and 767. I was an experimental test pilot on all those airplanes, over a span of nearly 30 years.

So how did you get selected to drive the new Thriftway, Too in 1957?

By good fortune, I guess. I had no experience, but a good friend of mine, Colonel Russ Schlee, was an Air Force test pilot. Russ was invited by Ted Jones to try out for driving. Russ liked it and

Ted liked his driving. He went on to drive *Shanty* and did very well with it. Meanwhile, Ted Jones had designed, for Associated Grocers, the new *Thriftway, Too*. The boat was radically different because for the first time they were putting the driver in the front of the boat, ahead of the engine. Ted felt that a traditional driver would not do a good job of turning the boat. He said, "You know, they were so used to having that



Bob Carver

Brien Wygle at the controls of the *Thriftway, Too* in 1957.

“He liked the idea of putting the driver up front. Initially, he thought he would put two engines in it. But two engines were not very successful, he found...”

boat in front of them.” Whether that was true or not, I’m rather doubtful. But in any case, he said he wanted a driver who was not experienced. I approached him.

So, Russ Schlee put in a good word for you?

Russ Schlee introduced me to Ted, and Ted said he would give me a try. Actually, I competed against a couple of other potential drivers when we first put the *Too* in the water. But after some months of doubt and competition, Ted finally selected me, and I went on to drive it for the next couple of years.

To get qualified for Gold Cup I had to get in more heats. So, I managed to get in and drive a limited for one race that had been built in fact by Ron Jones, who was Ted Jones’s son. And Ron arranged for me to drive in a limited race. It was in what we called a 266-cubic-inch boat. Anyway, that qualified me for Gold Cup in 1957, and after that I was qualified for everything.

Was the *Thriftway, Too* meant to be a backup to the *Miss Thriftway*?

No, not really. I think Ted felt that there was room for improvement. Although he knew that he’d produced good boats in the *Thriftway* and *Wahoo* and *Miss Spokane*, he felt there was an opportunity to use a little bigger boat. He liked the idea of putting the driver up front. Initially, he thought he would put two engines in it. But

two engines were not very successful, he found, and midway through the development of the boat, he decided that we’d go with a single Rolls-Royce, which could produce more power than the Allisons he had planned. And it was a pretty good boat.

I was new at racing, and the boat was new. That is what he wanted. He was afraid that an experienced driver would get in and be very critical of it. I think he was concerned about that. That’s the course he chose to take.

As an aviator, was it difficult to adapt to driving a race boat?

Not really. No. I think I started up kind of slowly, but it seemed very natural to me in a short time. You do go fast! [laughs] And certainly that first concept of 160 miles an hour on the water is pretty fast. You have to do that a couple of times before you’re comfortable with it. But it came pretty quickly.

Who showed you the ropes?

Well, what ropes I was shown came from Ted Jones. Besides being a designer and a builder, he’d also been a driver. Muncey was my teammate, but Bill did not offer me any assistance. He wasn’t very happy about the whole affair. And I understand that a bit. Bill had started racing, I think, when he was 11 years old. He’d raced everything for years. When I came on the scene, I think he resented

that Ted would get a new driver in without any background. I think that is understandable.

In any case, we got going. Ted showed me what I think was almost the minimum. Fortunately, I had flown Mustangs in the Air Force and the engine was not a mystery to me. So, it was easy to handle the engine, which some other drivers found difficult.

While driving the *Too* you sat in the front.

That's right. I think a lot of drivers thought it was a disadvantage. But I didn't think it was. Over my flying career I had flown airplanes that you sat in the back with the nose in the front. But eventually I flew airplanes where I sat right in the front with the airplane all behind you, like the DC-3. I knew that you could fly an airplane very comfortably once you got used to it from any position. I thought the boat would be the same, and it was. In fact, you were away from the heat and the noise, and you had much better visibility. So, in my opinion, it was a good place to put the seat, and I liked it.

You were the first to do that in an Unlimited.

That is true. They had always been there, but we were the first in the large boats. Of course, if you look at



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

The new *Thriftway, Too* at the dock during qualifying for the 1957 Apple Cup.

outboards, you can say they are always in that position. The engine is behind them in the racing outboards. So, it's a matter of degree. But certainly, in Unlimiteds, it was the first one. Even back to Gar Wood and so on, they were always right in the rear of the boat.

How did the boat handle?

The *Thriftway, Too* was a peculiar boat, and we had a difficult time with it. Although it had some spectacular performance, it also had a very bad handicap; it was very difficult to get it through the turns. To be competitive, I

found I had to run much faster on the straightaways. Once the boat got in a planing position, it would accelerate very rapidly, and would go very fast.

I could go into the turns at a very high speed. But no matter how fast I went in or how I maneuvered it, I always came out at a low speed. It would lose its way in the turn. The boat would come off a plane in the last part of the turn, which meant it was difficult to accelerate coming out of the turn until you got it back on the plane. So, I often raced that boat by passing people on the



Forde Photography

Brien Wygle and the *Thriftway, Too* made their first appearance at the 1957 Apple Cup in Chelan, Washington.

straightaway, and then them passing me on the last half of the turn. It was discouraging.

But we did have some very good performances. I have a video of a race we ran where I ran against the best. It was in Chelan in '58. The boat came out first in the first turn and led through the first two laps. It led the whole field, and I'm talking about the very best boats. So, it could do it, but it was very critical as to its propeller. And that good propeller we found cracked one day and we never could get that kind of performance back.

What happened?

We were always changing things. We put a new propeller on in the last race of 1957 at Las Vegas. It was a new propeller and the boat ran the best it had ever run. I was pretty excited because it was the first time I had been able to stay up in the corners better. I took it out and the boat ran beautifully. I then went to lunch before the actual race, and when I came back, they were changing the propeller. I said, "Don't change that. That's the only one that will work." They told me that they checked it and found a crack. They showed me the crack and I realized we couldn't run that prop, and I was very disappointed. I was correct. [The *Thriftway, Too*] did not run well again. It never did.

The prop was one of a kind?

They had lots of propellers. But they didn't have this exact propeller. And that boat was very tricky on propellers. They were custom made.

Ted Jones envisioned two engines in the *Thriftway, Too*.

Did you ever test it with two engines?

No, they abandoned that long before. We never put two engines in it.

From the shore, the *Thriftway, Too* looked like the biggest boat out there.

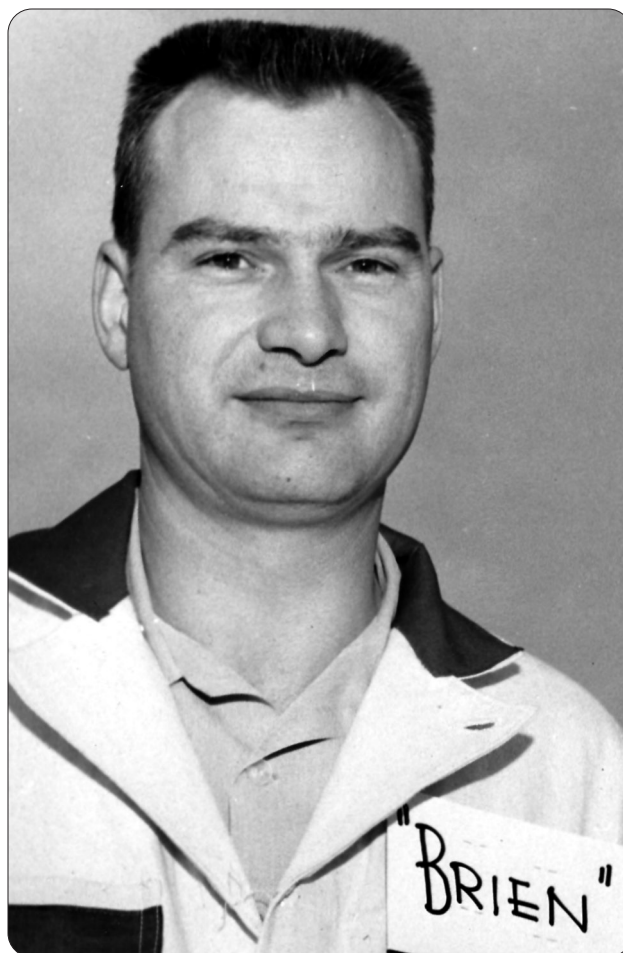
Well it wasn't. There were a couple of bigger boats. *Such Crust* was a twin-engine boat, and *Gale VI* was a twin-engine boat. They were actually bigger than mine. They were never successful at all. They always had difficulty with them. Part of it was trying to keep two engines running instead of one.

The *Too* wasn't entirely successful.

The boat never won a race although I took a couple of seconds and a couple of thirds. And there were times when I led the whole pack, like this time in Chelan, and I expected to win that race. I was outperforming everybody. But I hit something, and it punched a hole in the bottom of the hull, and bad luck seemed to follow us, and the boat filled with water and I had to pull it into the infield. So, it was an inglorious end to a wonderful start. But it really was not a top winning boat.

Did you always feel you had a chance to win?

Yes, I did. Although I knew it would take some luck. But nonetheless, I felt I always had a chance. I knew that if the other boats, say the three top boats—like *Hawaii Ka'i*, *Maverick*, and so on—if they were at their best, there was no way I could beat them. So, you counted on them having some sort of trouble and then beating all the other boats. As I say, I nearly won a couple of times, but not quite.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

What strategy did you use to start a race?

Well, various people started various ways. In those days we had a big clock we called it. On the barge, on the starting barge on the starting line, there was a big round circle, a big thing that would be at least six feet across, I think. And when the one-minute gun went off, that clock started to close. It turned from yellow, I think, to black, like a clock would. It would sweep around, and as it swept it left all the area behind it black. So, you could see it coming up.

And what I used to do is to pick a place from a buoy, but also I picked a place on shore. And maybe a couple of places, because sometimes somebody got between you and the buoy. And then I would practice starts on that course, using those points. Coming up to the point at say 100 miles per hour, when I got to that point, I knew I that could floor it and go full out and I would pass the line at the gun at top speed. That was our objective, and that's the way I did it.

Who did you learn that from?

Jack Regas was a good starter, although I think he started almost on instinct. We started in Las Vegas out at Lake Mead. We started about five starts together because they called some back, and somehow in that race one day we had about five start together. And we were starting so



“The boat never won a race although I took a couple of seconds and a couple of thirds. And there were times when I lead the whole pack...”

closely. We’d be coming across at top speed on the line as the gun went off.

And one time I was about 10 feet ahead of Jack’s boat, I think. And he said I jumped the gun. Now remember, we were doing about 150 mile an hour! So, we got the photo start, because when the gun went off, it took a picture. And I think the bow of my boat was like three feet from the line. That had to be very lucky, but it wasn’t a false start. But I was that close. And Jack was right beside me.

So, it’s incredible how good you could get at it. It was a very important part of racing in those days. It was very important not to jump the gun, but to hit the line at top speed as close to the gun

as you could. And of course, you had to err on the safe side. Jumping the gun almost invariably cost you the race.

Were you involved in any accidents?

I never had anything serious. On one occasion I lost my rudder at about 150 miles per hour, while I was on the backstretch right here in Seattle on Lake Washington. I went to qualify for the race, a couple days before the race. The rudder just failed. It failed exactly the same way that Bill Muncey’s rudder failed. It was the same design when he hit the famous Coast Guard cutter in Seattle’s 1958 Gold Cup race. Mine failed the same way. But whereas his boat kept going straight, my boat lost

ABOVE: The Thriftway, Too at the 1958 Apple Cup.

BELOW: A publicity shot for the Associated Grocers Thriftway team in 1957. Brien Wygle is driving the Thriftway, Too (bottom) and Bill Muncey is in the cockpit of the Miss Thriftway.





Associated Grocers

directional control. It spun out right on the spot. It headed right towards the log boom, which was there and full of boats, and spun out in a very, very short time. It very nearly threw me out of the boat. I don't know how I managed, but I hung on cuz we didn't have seat belts in those days. It was considered dangerous to wear seat belts because if the boat sank, you wanted to be free.

Anyway, I hung on and stayed in the cockpit, barely. It did daze me. I don't know what the g's were, but they were enormous because the boat just spun out like that. But I never got thrown from the boat, nor did I have the boat disintegrate.

But hanging on was a challenge, at times.

Well yes, it was. You would brace yourself. You had one foot, your left foot, braced against something. Your right foot was on a throttle that rotated under your instep so that you could push hard on it. With your instep, you could push hard on sort of the rotating arm of the throttle and still adjust your throttle as you felt. So, you'd jam your feet up against those two things, and then hang on to the wheel. It was a rough ride.

Both of the Thriftway boats suffered catastrophic cracked rudders.

That's right. I think it was a weakness in manufacturing. Both rudders came about the same time, or from the same batch. It may have been in the manufacturing. They may not have gotten the heat treat right or it was something wrong. They failed in the same manner, straight across the shaft. Usually that didn't occur. That wasn't common. It was unusual that in the same camp we had two rudders fail in exactly the same way, when a rudder failure was not a common occurrence at all.

Tell me about Bill Muncey. What was he like?

Bill was a very, very competent driver, as his record shows. He was a really skilled driver, and that's what he lived for. I mean, that is what he did till he died, was race. He was, however, a rather difficult person to deal with. He and I were never that friendly. I tried to be, but Bill resented me, I think, and with some reason. We were never friends, nor did he ever suggest any sort of cooperation, nor did he give me any assistance. He lived and went his own way.

Did you feel like you were driving in his shadow?

Yes. He had a better boat. When I left the camp, the Associated Grocers Thriftway camp, I went over and raced driving the *Hawaii Ka'i*. A number of people then raced in *Too*, including Bill Muncey. None of them got anywhere with it, and I'm not surprised. By the time I left it, the boat was operating very poorly. Bill raced it and a whole lot of people raced it. Russ Schlee raced it. Most of them never even finished a heat. But if they did, they did very poorly. So, the boat, unfortunately, ended up in a sad state and had a rather inglorious end to its career.

Next up, you drove the Hawaii Ka'i.

I went over to the *Ka'i*, and the *Ka'i* was a great boat. A man named Joe Mascari bought it from the Kaisers and put a whole new crew on it. Unfortunately, before I got aboard, they had made a lot of changes to the boat. I thought this was entirely the wrong thing to do, because in its last race it had won the '58 Gold Cup. So why they wanted to change things, I was pretty upset, but it was too late to do anything.

The boat still had good performance,

but the ride was very, very difficult. Very rough ride, which it never had before. In fact, Mike Welsch, who'd been the crew chief on the *Ka'i* for a long time, when I came in from a qualifying run here in Seattle at Gold Cup in '59, he got me aside and said, "What's wrong with our boat?" He said, "It's not running right at all!" And I said, "I know Mike, it's killing me!" [laughs] It would still go, but I could hardly stay in it, it was such a rough ride. They managed later to fix that.

Nonetheless, the Pink Lady still had speed.

Yes. I set a world's record in it in '59 at Coeur d'Alene [Idaho]. I set a competitive lap record. It was 115.632 miles an hour on the first lap. And I'll tell you a little bit about that because in that heat, I was going against Bill Muncey. Once I was in the other camp, Bill was very determined to beat me, and I was determined to beat him.

We hit that [starting] line just the way I described. Fast and together. He liked the inside. I was willing to take the next row. Anyway, we hit the start well together, as I knew he would. He always had a good start. But I came out of the turn first and I led wire to wire. We ran 10 laps in those day, and I think by two or three laps from the end, he just eased off. I think in the end I beat him by more than half a lap. That was because he knew he couldn't catch me.

I was very gratified by that. [laughs] And it was that first lap in that race, that I set a competitive record. It took the APBA two years to acknowledge it, but I have a thing downstairs

which the APBA sent me saying I set a world's record. I framed it and it is on the wall in my den.

Describe the rivalry between the Detroit camps and the Northwest teams.

There was rivalry everywhere. It depended on the personalities. The theory was it was the Seattle boats verses the Detroit boats, and that was true. But personalities were very much in play. The *Gale* boats with Lee and Joe Schoenith, for example. Lee Schoenith and his father were very feisty characters. They would argue about everything, loudly and frequently. They didn't do any harm, but they became the 'bad guys' out of Detroit, in the local press. But actually, they were not very competitive at times. Although, *Gale V* won the '55 Gold Cup.

On the other hand, George Simon who ran the U.S. boats, and his driver, Donny Wilson, were extremely quiet and

well-mannered folks, who never caused any trouble at all. [laughs] So, it really was a question of personalities.

Wild Bill Cantrell worked for the *Gale* camp and drove for them, and was a mechanic for them. He was kind of a feisty character, too. So, there was a certain amount there. But some people, like Bill Stead and Mira Slovak, for example, were amiable people. They were friends of mine and they were amiable, and we never had any razos with them.

Muncey was very touchy. Of course, he was from Detroit and that is where he'd done his racing. So, he, I suppose, had mixed loyalties.

Muncey's Thriftway was consistently fast.

Thriftway did very well. Very successful. Bill always had a very competitive boat. And he drove it well. But it was a good boat. In fact, after *Thriftway* stopped racing, he drove a couple of mediocre boats. These are boats that no driver can make good. [laughs] He didn't go anywhere in those boats until he finally got on to the *Atlas*, where he had a good boat again.

What about the owner Willard Rhodes?

Willard was a nice guy. All of those people at Associated Grocers and all the crew. I had good relations with them and they were good guys.

His was one of the first sponsored boats.

Yes, he put his first boat in, in '55. That's when Bill Muncey almost won the Gold Cup. So, he was pretty early. He stuck with Ted Jones throughout his whole career there. And, of course, Ted was controversial in his own way. But



Brien Wygle and the *Thriftway, Too* at the 1958 Mile High Gold Cup on Lake Tahoe.

Clyde Cassaday

he had a gift. His idea of the history is a little different than nearly everybody else's. He has a memory that is somewhat elastic. I think he believes it, but it was not always the way it was.

Why did you leave the *Thriftway, Too*?

I left the *Thriftway* camp because I sensed that they were beginning to blame me for the *Thriftway, Too*'s lack of success. In fact, years later, Ted Jones, not too many years ago, apologized later. He said, "You know, even I thought that you should be getting more out of the boat." But he said, "You know, I realized later, it wasn't you at all." Of course, that became obvious. Other people raced it and did much worse than I did.

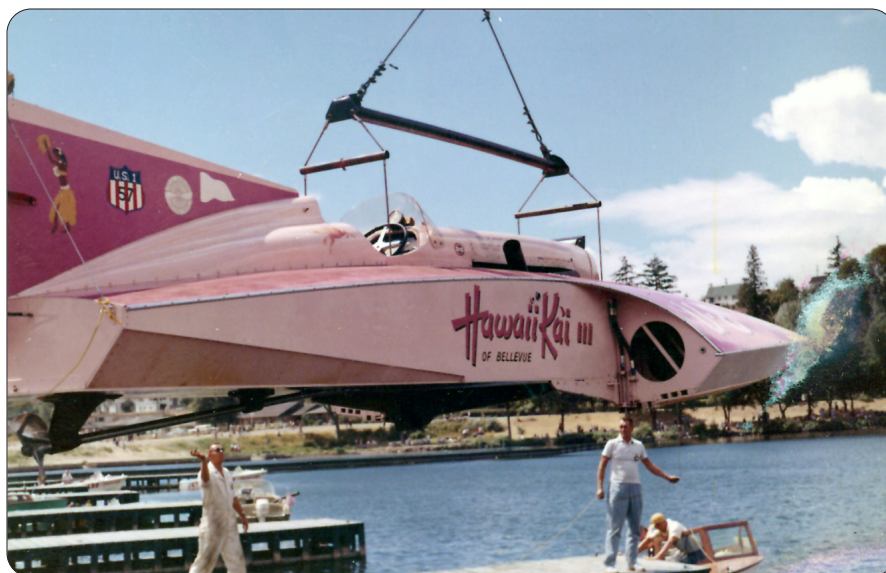
Secondly, I went on to drive the *Hawaii Ka'i*, although not very long. But still, I drove it at top performance on a number of occasions. But we had hard luck with it, too. Finally, Ron Musson took over when I quit completely.

But I sensed this. When they offered me the job in the *Ka'i*, I didn't want to leave the *Thriftway, Too* camp in the lurch, so I went to Willard Rhodes, who was the representative of Associated Grocers, the boat owner. I told him I had been offered this job and that I'd like to take it unless he thought it was unethical. But I noticed he didn't have any trouble saying it was OK. [laughs] So, that's what confirmed that they were not happy with me, or with the boat, or both in any case. But I know it didn't take them long to realize it, because it never performed again, anyway.

What about the danger? You never really had a bad accident.

Yes indeed, it was close. I don't think we lost any lives while I was actually racing, although there were some people hurt pretty bad. Mira Slovak turned turtle one time—Russ Schlee, Bill Muncey. There were quite a few people whose boats disintegrated when they hit the water, and they were bruised up pretty badly.

One of the reasons I left in '59, it



Jim McCormick

Brien Wygle drove the *Hawaii Ka'i III* in 1959, shown here being launched at Seattle.

was clear to me that the sport was getting very dangerous. The boats were going faster, the drivers were getting very competitive and capable. But the boats were not any more stable. I just decided it was too dangerous. I had a good job, and a wife, and children to take care of. My livelihood was being a test pilot and if I injured myself seriously, I might not be able to pursue that career. So, I left in '59.

One by one ... The first really shocking one was the one [in 1966] in Washington, D.C., and three of them—Ron Musson, Rex Manchester, and Donny Wilson—were all killed. It was a terrible day. They were all people I knew, and it was pretty shocking.

Despite the danger, hydroplane racing was wildly popular in the 1950s.

In 1950, when *Slo-mo IV* won the Gold Cup, it just changed things. And of course, Seattle picked up this enthusiasm for racing and the local population supported it enormously. The crowds here, you might get 300,000 people here. So, it was a unique era. And it was very much a kind of amateur sport still. Particularly here in Seattle.

You know, we didn't get paid. We were all volunteers, except for a few. There were full-paid professionals—Bill Muncey was paid. One of the crew chiefs

was paid. But on my boat [*Thriftway, Too*] we were all volunteers. We didn't get paid anything, other than our expenses. Yea, it was a unique time.

Did the drivers from aviation stick together?

Dallas Sartz, Russ Schlee, Mira Slovak, and after my time, Warner Gardner. We were all pilots with flying experience. Although, in retrospect, I'm not sure it made much difference. Maybe it did. It gave us some credibility or something. But it was an interesting time.

You drove for only three years, but you look back with fondness.

A lot of fond memories. We went to the Silver Cup in Detroit and Ted was a very good guy to me in those days. Well, he always was. Ted took me to visit Gar Wood, in Gar Wood's home, which was on the water where he had a huge dry dock right outside his house on the Detroit River. We spent two or three hours with Gar Wood, just the three of us. It was wonderful. I really enjoyed it.

When you did well, it was wonderful. My crew and I were all good friends and remained friends for years after.

I had a lot of good memories. It was good fun. ❖

A weekend of hydros, just what the doctor ordered.

BY KIRK DUNCAN

We're living in odd times due to the COVID-19 virus, but a September weekend in Madison, Indiana, was just what the doctor ordered. It brought back some sense of normalcy for boat racing fans with the running of Madison Vintage Thunder.

The event was run in memory of Jean Johnson, the wife of 5 to the 5 Vintage Hydros co-founder, Dave Johnson. Jean passed away earlier this summer. Dave, who also runs the F-128 *Miss Jean* vintage hydro, said, "I feel honored about that."

Owners came from all over the eastern half of the country to run their vintage hydros, most for the first and last time in 2020.

While the vast majority of hydro racing in all classes had to be canceled or postponed this summer, the 5 to the 5 Vintage Hydros club persevered and, with the blessing of the local health department and state officials, held its fifth annual event as scheduled. It was only



Kirk Duncan

Fans gathered on the shore of the Ohio River on a sunny day to watch vintage hydros.

one of a handful of race sites that held racing events this summer.

Twenty-eight vintage inboard and outboard hydros filled the pits along the Wild Bill Cantrell Memorial racecourse on the Ohio River in Madison.

The headliner was the 1957 Henry Lauterbach-built U-36 *Miss U.S. IV* Unlimited hydroplane. Rarely raced after it was built, and sitting dry docked for many years, the boat is now hitting the

vintage circuit anytime owner Jay Armstrong is able.

"Crank 'em up!" was heard often from PA announcer Jeff Ayler during the two days as the green flag was waved. The piston-powered vintage engines growled to life and piston sounds bounced off the Kentucky hillside on the backstretch as the old-time boats toured the Cantrell racecourse, much to the enjoyment of race fans who made their way to downtown Madison.

Two picture-perfect weather days with bright sunshine and blue skies greeted the owners, drivers, and crews. And, the water couldn't have been better for the exhibition racing of these classic vintage hydros.

"We had to get out of the house and missed our hydros this summer, so this was perfect, and the weather is great," one local Madison resident explained with a smile on their face. "I haven't sweated once," another fan was heard saying, noting the cool temperatures compared with those in early July when the hydros typically appear in Madison.

Fans also loved seeing the *Miss*



Kirk Duncan

Some of the vintage inboards that took part in Madison Vintage Thunder.



TOP and MIDDLE: The star of the show was the U-36 *Miss U.S. IV*, which took several runs around the course during the two-day event. **ABOVE:** PA announcer Jeff Ayler (right) interviews Mark and Lori Weber after their run on the Ohio River.

HomeStreet display hull and the Madison Regatta display hull, decked out in 1971 *Miss Madison* colors. Both were parked on Vaughn Drive as fans stopped to take pictures.

The ages of these vintage drivers varied from the 20s all the way to the 80s, as did the boat names and classes of hydros. At 83 years old, and the oldest driver in the pits, Bill Edwards brought his Chrysler-powered 1937 *Dennis Point Menace* outboard from Maryland.

Boats with descriptive names such as *Fool's Gold*, *Heavy Duty*, *Hire Voltage*, *Natural High*, *Tijuana Taxi*, and *Mom's Worry* were sitting in the pits and entertained the fans with their noisy piston engines. Folks loved seeing the Allison-powered *Miss U.S. IV* take the course often during the two-day event.

Driver Mark Weber had the U-36 humming, much to the joy of the crew that had been working to find speed. And, speed they found. Smiles all around for the red-clad U-36 team. "When they throw you the keys to a 12-cylinder Allison with 3,000 horsepower—not so bad," Weber said with a more than satisfied smile on his face.

The two-mile Unlimited course put the second turn under the Milton-Madison Bridge, which hasn't happened in several years when the modern-day Unlimiteds race. Fans watching were thrilled to see the U-36 power around the turn going under the bridge.

The highlight of the weekend came on Saturday when Mark Weber took his wife, Lori, on her first-ever ride in an Unlimited. Lori had spent the past year battling cancer and is now cancer free. The ride was one of celebration for the couple.

Mark did a couple of laps before Lori motioned that she had enough, but both arrived back to the pits with big smiles and hugs from the crew and friends. "It's a blast!" Mark said, in his third year as the driver for the vintage U-36.

The only mishap of the weekend happened in the first heat early on Sun-

day morning. Mike Fine, a 5 to the 5 club member, was driving the F-128 *Miss Jean* and, after receiving the checkered flag, hit a hole entering turn one. The boat was swallowed up and Fine was tossed out into the Ohio.

Wearing a borrowed green and blue *Miss DiJulio* driving suit, Fine was “fine” after being checked out by paramedics and was telling his story to anyone who asked. The *Miss Jean* suffered extensive damage to the underside of its hull and is now undergoing repairs.

This year is also a year of transition for the 5 to the 5 Vintage Hydros club.

With a desire to preserve the history of boat racing for all classes, from steamboats to modern-day hydros, the club is in the initial planning stages for a National Boat Racing Heritage Center to eventually be located in Madison.



Dave Johnson's *Miss Jean*. The boat and the event were named in the memory of Johnson's wife, Jean.

The idea was born seven years ago and is still a work in progress. Paul Nicholson, chairman of the Heritage Center Committee, says, “I think it’s going to be a high level of interest nationwide.” The goal is to be a place where somebody can

research race boats, learn how to build a race boat, restore a race boat, or even learn to drive a race boat.

Classrooms, tours, and rotating displays of boats are also in the plans for the proposed center. But the crowning jewel so far for the future Heritage Center is a gift from John Freeman.

Freeman gave the 5 to the 5 club, with no cost involved, the former U-00 *Pay ‘n Pak ‘Lil Buzzard*, a trailer, and an Allison V-12 engine, as well as a hauler to transport the hull. The boat raced in five races in 1969 and 1970, winning the 1970 Atomic Cup in the Tri-Cities with Tommy Fults driving.

Fults was killed while testing the boat before the San Diego Gold Cup in 1970 and it hasn’t entered a race since. Bill Muncey had used the boat as an *Atlas Van Lines* display hull and it even portrayed the *Atlas* in the movie *Madison* in 2004, when Freeman bought the hull.

The boat is currently in Florida, waiting for the group to make the trip to pick her up and relocate to Madison. Mike Fine tells us the plan is to restore it, run it, take care of it, and display it.

A second former Unlimited is also in the works for the club’s growing collection of vintage race boats.

The 5 to the 5 has huge plans for the future, and lots of work ahead of them. As club member and PA voice Jeff Ayler says, “Here they come!” ❖



Popular attractions for those who attended the event were the display boat for the *Miss HomeStreet* (top) and the *Madison Regatta* display hull.

HERITAGE

Historical Perspective by Craig Fjarlie



The long offseason.

For the first time since 1946, when racing resumed following World War II, no events were held in 2020. Cancellation of the entire season was the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the years, a number of individual races have been canceled, usually because of weather or water conditions, sometimes because of money woes, but never because of a health crisis.

It's interesting to browse through the historical record and review when regattas were called off.

One of the earliest races to fall victim to excessively rough water was the 1949 President's Cup. Following the first heat, the regatta was declared no contest. A similar situation occurred at the 1956 Maple Leaf race at Windsor, Ontario. The race was called after the first heat because of rain, although trophies were awarded based on first-heat positions.

One of the most frustrating bouts with weather took place at the 1960 Gold Cup on Lake Mead. The race was scheduled in November, and wind was the winner. Only Heat 1A was held before rough conditions forced officials to declare the event no contest.

Other races have suffered similar fates to the 1960 Gold Cup. The 1961 Silver Cup and the 1963 President's Cup were both canceled after only Heats 1A and 1B were conducted.

In 1964, the Unlimiteds ventured to New Town, North Dakota. The first race was a success, but in 1965 the course was clogged with logs. No boats were able to run and the fleet never went back to New Town.

The President's Cup also was

dropped from the schedule in 1965, although the race returned to the circuit the following year. The 1966 President's Cup was the most tragic event in the sport's history. That year the final heat was canceled when *Notre Dame* and *Miss Budweiser* collided in the original running.

San Diego held the Gold Cup in 1969 and 1970, but then the site ran low on money and was unable to afford the sanction fees. Finally, in 1974, Bill Muncy helped secure sponsorship so racing on Mission Bay could resume.

Weather was a problem in Philadelphia in 1986. Heat 3B and the final were canceled and the event was declared no contest. The following year, both Madison and Syracuse fell victim to un-raceable conditions. In Madison, the third preliminary heat and the final were canceled and the race was declared no contest. At Syracuse, only the first set of preliminary heats was held before the event was declared no contest.

Racing at Miami Marine Stadium concluded with the 1993 regatta because, later that year, Hurricane Andrew blew through south Florida. It would be all but impossible to have a race there now, as the area that once served as the pits is currently being used as a marina.

The Gold Cup had wind and water trouble at Detroit in 2008. *Formulaboats.com II* flipped in the first turn of Heat 3A. By the time the boat was towed back to the pits, wind was gusting and conditions were too rough for racing. Officials waited, hoping things would settle, but no luck. By early evening, officials declared the race no contest. It's interesting to note that points scored in earlier heats

were counted toward national standings.

San Diego had financial trouble and was off the schedule again in 2009. Backing was secured and the race returned to the calendar in 2010.

Madison had problems with high water in 2013 and the regatta was declared no contest. The edge of the Ohio River came within four feet of the judges' stand.

Over the years, several sites dropped off the circuit and attempted to return years later, usually with only temporary success. Most recently, Guntersville has made a comeback following a lengthy absence. Time will tell if the effort bears long-term fruit.

I have watched Unlimited hydroplanes run every year since 1956. Initially, I only saw testing and qualifying. From 1963 through 2019, I have attended at least one race every year. That personal legacy came to an unplanned halt in 2020 because of the pandemic. The only consolation I have is that no one else saw a race in 2020, either.

While this past summer had an empty feel, it works best for me to view the year as a long off-season; albeit a very long off-season. No one knows with certainty what 2021 will bring, but for now, I intend to hold on to the hope that we will have racing on the nation's waters once again. ❖

MY \$0.02 WORTH

Editorial Comment by Andy Muntz



It's been a tumultuous year, no question about that. There's no need to remind you what did not happen during the past eight months thanks to the efforts to control one of the greatest pandemic challenges that our nation has ever faced.

But, despite a year of very little activity and continued uncertainty about the future of this sport, I was reassured through a couple of personal experiences that hydroplanes still are important. Both experiences provided me with a booster shot of faith that, even outside our circle of passionate followers of this sport, there remains a wider interest in Unlimited hydroplane racing.

The first experience came in July at a time when Seattle's traditional Seafair Festival would have been building toward its climax, the arrival of the hydroplanes to Lake Washington. I had the honor of writing the cover story for *Pacific NW* magazine, which is a glossy-paged publication that's inserted into the Sunday edition of the *Seattle Times*.

In that article, I told the story of

what happened 70 years ago when three Seattle boat racers built an odd-looking craft that set a world straightaway speed record and then went to Detroit and won the Gold Cup. I'll not share any more of what I wrote because we're planning to run the story in next month's issue of the *Unlimited NewsJournal*.

I will tell you that I received many wonderful comments from readers as a result of the article. We'll share many of them with you next month, as well. I was heartened by their overwhelming theme, that hydroplanes have been an important part of what it means to live in the Puget Sound area. Writers told me many stories of watching the races with friends, racing little wooden hydroplanes in their neighborhoods, and remembering many other activities connected with the sport.

More recently, I had an opportunity to give a presentation about hydroplanes (via Zoom) to the members of a local Rotary Club. I played for them the excellent two-minute video about the sport that was created by Brian Montgomery,

talked about the sport's history, told them the story of the sport's coming to Seattle, reviewed some of the best-known boats over the years, and provided them with information about how a hydroplane works.

Again, the response was heartwarming. As they asked questions about the old *Hawaii Ka'i III* and other boats of the past and told me stories about towing little hydros behind their bicycles, it was clear to me that many people still have fond memories about Unlimited hydroplanes. They also had excellent questions about the current state of the sport and about its future.

In short, they cared.

And, that's the main thing—they cared. So, if you feel down about the future, especially after a year like 2020, please remember that this sport continues to be important in our communities. There are still many people out there who care about hydroplanes. ❖

EDITOR: Andy Muntz

ASSOCIATE EDITORS: Craig Fjarlie, Chris Tracy, Dick Sanders

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WEBSITE: unlimitednewsjournal.net

EDITOR: Unlimited NewsJournal, 14313 Beverly Park Road, Edmonds, WA 98026

Email: ajmuntz@icloud.com

Letters are welcome, but may be edited for clarity and space.

PLEASE JOIN US AT THE NEXT MEETING OF UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS

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

Check our website for more information.