

Tate takes the first two.



H1 Unlimited

Andrew Tate started the 2024 H1 Unlimited Racing Series by driving the U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate* to victory in both Guntersville, Alabama, and Madison, Indiana.

The racecourses in Guntersville, Alabama, and in Madison, Indiana, couldn't be more different. The first is set on a large lake and has wide, sweeping turns that encourage the hydroplanes to go fast. Some say it has the fastest water in the South, which Dustin Echols proved to be the case a year ago when he made a qualifying run of over 170 mph. Madison, on the other hand, has a narrow racecourse with tight turns and long straightaways. Held on the Ohio River, the race also has a reputation for being rough on the boats.

Peabody wins in Tri-Cities.

Corey Peabody drove the U-9 *Beacon Plumbing* to victory in the Apollo Columbia Cup in the Tri-Cities. It was Peabody's second-straight victory on the Columbia River. Held on a shortened racecourse, the event included two accidents that caused severe damage to the U-1 *Beacon Electric*, U-12 *Graham Trucking*, and U-27 *Miss Apollo*. The drivers of those boats weren't seriously injured, however. A full report about the Tri-Cities race will be included in next month's issue of the *Unlimited NewsJournal*.

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As the flowing water moves past peaks and valleys on the river's bottom, the swirling surface near the first turn has gobbled up many speeding boats over the years. And, so, with those two very different tests, the 2024 H1 Unlimited season got underway, and our reporter Craig Fjarlie was there to witness both of them.

BY CRAIG FJARLIE

Guntersville and Madison both had hot, humid days complete with wind and rainstorms. The racecourse at each location complemented the weather with hot racing as the boats stormed past the buoys. When the first two regattas of the 2024 season were complete, *Miss Goodman Real Estate* and driver Andrew Tate had notched a pair of impressive victories.

GUNTERSVILLE Southern Cup

There were six Unlimiteds in the pits at Guntersville, in addition to eight Grand Prix boats and two vintage Unlimiteds. A two-hour testing session was scheduled to begin at 2 p.m.

on Friday. The first boat on the water would be the recently restored *Miss U.S. I* with Mark Weber in the cockpit. Also on hand was the vintage *Miss U.S. IV*. The Roman numeral had been added to the latter's name since its last appearance at a regatta.

Miss U.S. I, which set the mile straightaway record on Lake Guntersville in 1962, turned a couple of laps at modest speed. The vintage boat is powered by a dash-one Rolls-Merlin with an Allison carburetor. When its run was complete, the current Unlimiteds had an opportunity to test. *Goodman Real Estate* completed several laps with Andrew Tate in the cockpit, the fastest at 170.483 mph. However, there was no data on the data box, so the speed was unofficial. Next, Dave Villwock put the new *Miss Apollo*

on the course. His best lap was 150.358 mph.

Villwock was joined on the water by Dustin Echols in *Bucket List Racing*, who had a best lap of 146.462 mph. J. Michael Kelly turned several laps in *Beacon Electric*, his best speed was 164.272 mph, and Kelly's teammate, Corey Peabody, drove *Beacon Plumbing* to a best lap of 154.464 mph.

The crew of *Miss Mercurys Coffee* was changing an engine, so Jamie Nilsen's ride missed the first round of testing. When asked for his opinion of *Miss Apollo*, Villwock replied, "We just ran a small, driver-friendly prop our first time out. We'll change the prop for our next run." A drain plug fell out but aside from that, Villwock was pleased with the boat.

The Grand Prix boats had an opportunity to test, then it was round two for the Unlimiteds. *Goodman Real Estate* tried to run but Tate was unable to start the engine. An electrical issue caused the problem. *Beacon Electric* was next on the water. This time Kelly turned a quick lap of 167.613 mph. *Beacon Plumbing* ran five laps, with a best speed of 164.083 mph. The boat then went dead in the water with a gearbox oil problem.

Miss Apollo did four laps with a best speed of 163.898 mph. A Grand Prix boat took to the course but went dead in the water, with a long tow back to the pits. The vintage *Miss U.S. I* was going to run, but had to go back onto its trailer because it was almost time to close the course. When the Grand Prix boat was near the pits, *Mercurys Coffee* had a chance to run, but no speeds were



Dave Villwock makes some adjustments to the skid fin on the totally rebuilt U-27 *Miss Apollo*.

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reported. The course was closed at two minutes before four o'clock.

Saturday

Saturday dawned cloudy with a light breeze. Qualifying was scheduled to begin at 8 a.m. The first boat to run was *Miss Apollo*. Villwock's best lap was 162.834 mph, but an N2 violation was reported by the tech truck. *Goodman Real Estate* ran next and had a fast lap of 168.789 mph.

Mercurys Coffee followed and had a best lap of 159.633 mph. *Bucket List* turned a quick lap at 168.051 mph and *Beacon Plumbing* took to the course and had a best lap of 165.831 mph, but the tech truck reported a fuel violation. The last boat to run during the first qualifying round was *Beacon Electric*, which had a best lap of 165.261 mph.

Goodman Real Estate was the first boat to run during the second round of qualifying, and Tate turned a best lap of 168.249 mph. The effort fell just short of his best lap in the first round. *Bucket List* ran next, but Echols could only coax the boat to a best lap of 164.974 mph, well below his speed during the first round. *Beacon Plumbing* did a best lap of 162.557 mph, but again the tech truck reported a fuel violation. As a result, the team opted to take a commissioner's option and enter the race without qualifying points.

Miss Apollo ran next and had a best lap of 159.016 mph, then *Mercurys Coffee* did a lap of 157.414 mph, slightly below its best lap in the first round. *Beacon Electric* passed on a second run. With that, qualifying ended as a stiffer breeze came up.

Preliminary Heats

The two preliminary heats on Saturday would be four laps each. The round-robin format put *Beacon Electric*, *Mercurys Coffee*, *Bucket List*, and *Goodman Real Estate* in Heat One. Because the pits are a long way from the racecourse, boats could fire and go six minutes before the start of the heat.

STATBOX

Guntersville Hydrofest - Southern Cup

Guntersville, Alabama; June 29-30, 2024

2.5-mile course on Guntersville Lake; 30-mile race

QUALIFYING: (1) U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate* (#1801), Andrew Tate, 168.789, 100 points; (2) U-40 *Bucket List Racing* (#0721), Dustin Echols, 168.051, 80; (3) U-1 *Beacon Electric* (#1496), J. Michael Kelly, 165.261, 70; (4) U-11 *Miss Mercurys Coffee* (#0925), Jamie Nilsen, 159.633, 60; (5) U-27 *Miss Apollo* (#2427), Dave Villwock, 159.016, 50; U-9 *Beacon Plumbing* (#92102), Corey Peabody, DNQ - Fuel-flow violation, 0, (Commissioner's Option).

HEAT 1 (4 laps): (1) *Beacon Electric*, 161.539, 400 points, 470 cumulative points; (2) *Bucket List Racing*, 161.466, 300, 380; (3) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 158.501, 225, 325; (4) *Miss Mercurys Coffee*, 142.758, 0*, 60. Fast lap: (4) *Bucket List Racing*, 163.710.

HEAT 2 (4 laps): (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 162.787, 400, 725; (2) *Miss Apollo*, 151.382, 300, 350; (3) *Beacon Plumbing*, 123.101, 225, 225; *Bucket List Racing*, DNF, 0, 380. Fast lap: (2) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 164.928.

HEAT 3 (3 laps): (1) *Beacon Electric*, 158.539, 400, 870; (2) *Miss Mercurys Coffee*, 158.364, 300, 360; (3) *Miss Apollo*, 153.982, 225, 575; (4) *Beacon Plumbing*, 130.358, 169, 394. Fast lap: (3) *Beacon Electric*, 162.100.

HEAT 4 (3 laps): (1) *Miss Mercurys Coffee*, 157.213, 400, 760; (2) *Beacon Electric*, 152.839, 0*, 870; (3) *Bucket List Racing*, 146.550, 225, 605; (4) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 125.082, 0*, 725. Fast lap: (3) *Beacon Electric*, 159.591.

FINAL HEAT: (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 156.177, 400, 1125; (2) *Miss Mercurys Coffee*, 153.086, 300, 1060; (3) *Beacon Electric*, 152.439, 225, 1095; (4) *Miss Apollo*, 146.092, 169, 744; (5) *Bucket List Racing*, 144.042, 127, 732; (6) *Beacon Plumbing*, 135.790, 95, 489. Fast Lap: (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 161.873.

* Heats 5 and 6 were canceled because of an oncoming thunderstorm. Teams that had raced in three preliminary heats discarded the points they had earned from the one lowest finish among their three starts.

COMPILED BY ALLEN STILES

During the warm-up, *Goodman* stalled and went dead in the water near the second turn. Tate was able to restart, but trailed the field to the starting line. *Bucket List* had the inside with *Beacon Electric* in lane two and *Mercurys Coffee* in lane three.

The race for first was a side-by-side battle between the Tennessee-orange *Bucket* and *Beacon* with its new red paint scheme. It was one of the best heats in recent memory. Echols had a slight edge at the end of each lap, but Kelly refused to concede. Coming off the final turn, *Beacon Electric* pulled even as they charged down the front straightaway.

Officials waited to announce the winner until they had reviewed videos of the finish. People watching from the pits held their collective breath as they waited for the result. The video confirmed it: *Beacon Electric* won by about two feet and with an average speed of 161.539 mph. *Goodman Real Estate* passed *Mercurys Coffee* in the second lap and garnered third.

Following the heat, drivers were shuttled to the front side of the lake for an autograph session. Fortunately, they were under cover because rain began to fall.

Heat Two would consist of *Beacon*



Crig Fjarlie



Chris Denslow



Craig Fjarlie

Plumbing, Miss Apollo, Bucket List, and Goodman Real Estate. In the shape-up, Peabody cut the course in *Beacon*, which forced Tate and his *Goodman Real Estate* out to lane three. The boats were early for the start and both *Bucket List* and *Beacon Plumbing* jumped the start.

Bucket List physically led through the first lap, but went dead in the water in the first turn of lap two. The gold, black, and white *Goodman* and the shimmering-white *Beacon Plumbing* then had a battle for the lead, but in turn two of the second lap, *Beacon* hit a roller that caused its right sponson to lift. Peabody turned right and went through *Goodman's* skid-fin spray—a move that saved the boat from flipping.

Goodman won the heat with a four-lap average speed of 162.787 mph, which would turn out to be the fastest of the entire event and was just a tick slower than the all-time three-lap heat record set on the course by Corey Peabody a year ago. Tate's second lap of 164.928 mph was also the fastest that would be seen during the event and established a new course competition-lap record—breaking a mark also set by Peabody last year. *Apollo* finished second and *Beacon Plumbing* finished

TOP: The *Miss U.S. 1* made an exhibition appearance on Lake Guntersville, the body of water where the boat set the world's straightaway speed record in 1962. **MIDDLE:** Dustin Echols in *Bucket List Racing* (left) and J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric* battled each other throughout Heat One. **ABOVE:** Dave Villwock drives the U-27 *Miss Apollo* onto the Lake Guntersville racecourse.



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ished third because of its gun jump at the start and the resulting one-minute penalty.

“It was a close call for sure,” Peabody said of his near-accident when the heat was over. “Turn two has some parallel rollers happening. I noticed them the lap before and how it was making the boat pop when I was in lift mode on the canard. So, the next lap I left the canard in neutral hoping to keep the boat down, but when I hit the roller, it still popped the front end up and off it went. Luckily the rudder stayed in the water and helped keep it from going over.”

After the boats were back on their trailers there came word from the tech truck that *Apollo* had an N2 violation, a disqualification that would give *Beacon Plumbing* to second place. *Bucket List* had a mechanical problem so the crew changed engines in preparation for Sunday’s heats. Meanwhile, the crew of *Mercurys Coffee* changed the gears in its gearbox, and the crew of *Beacon Plumbing* changed the front canard wing.

Sunday

Sunday was another hot, humid day with dark clouds in the sky. The first news of the morning was the reversal of the N2 call against *Miss Apollo* from Heat Two on Saturday due to a correction during the technical inspection. The revised standings showed *Goodman Real Estate* first, *Miss Apollo* second, and *Beacon Plumbing* third. A brief test session was held, beginning at 8:15 a.m. *Bucket List* ran three laps, *Beacon Plumbing* ran five laps, and *Mercurys Coffee* did one fast lap. For the first time all weekend, Nilsen climbed out of the cockpit with a smile



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on his face. Sunday’s preliminary heats would be three laps.

Preliminary Heats

Heat Three would consist of *Beacon Electric*, *Beacon Plumbing*, *Mercurys Coffee*, and *Miss Apollo*. Nilsen and the beautiful red, black, and white *Mercurys Coffee* had lane one at the start, Peabody and *Beacon Plumbing* were in lane two, J. Michael Kelly and *Beacon Electric* took lane three, and Dave Villwock was on the outside aboard the blue *Miss Apollo*.

Mercurys led through the first turn and up the backstretch. In lap two, while exiting the first turn, *Beacon Plumbing* got wet by *Mercurys*, but there was no call. Peabody slowed his boat momentarily and was passed by Kelly in *Beacon Electric*. Kelly and Nilsen then battled for the rest of the heat, with *Beacon Electric* eventually taking the checkered flag with an average speed of 158.539 mph. *Miss Apollo* was third and *Beacon Plumbing* fourth.

TOP: From the left, Dave Villwock in *Miss Apollo*, J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric*, and Jamie Nilsen in *Miss Mercurys Coffee* round a corner side by side. **ABOVE:** Teammates: the U-9 *Beacon Plumbing* with Corey Peabody driving (left) and the defending national champion U-1 *Beacon Electric* with J. Michael Kelly in the cockpit

Sunday was another hot, humid day with dark clouds in the sky.

Then came word that *Mercurys Coffee* was disqualified for a safety-zone violation, so Nilsen immediately called for drivers' rep Jeff Bernard. The issue centered on a fireboat that was patrolling the course. The boat was out of position and sitting in the area where the boats are allowed to cross from the frontstretch to the backstretch, or visa versa, before the start. When Nilsen tried cut the course, he was therefore forced to cut through the safety zone to avoid a collision.

Following considerable discussion, the disqualification was reversed. The fireboat was indeed in the wrong place. The revised results for Heat Three put *Beacon Electric* first, *Mercurys Coffee*

second, *Miss Apollo* third, and *Beacon Plumbing* fourth.

Heat Four would include *Beacon Electric*, *Mercurys Coffee*, *Bucket List*, and *Goodman Real Estate*. The score-up period was messy. *Bucket List* was briefly dead in the water, which put it out of position. The situation was worse for Tate and *Goodman Real Estate*. The boat was dead in the water near the starting line, in lane three.

Tate tried to restart, and in the process *Goodman* belched smoke out of its exhaust pipe. The engine finally started, but Tate had to go around a full lap in order to make a legal start. *Mercurys Coffee* was first across the starting line, two

seconds after the starting gun. Dustin Echols and *Bucket List* were second, followed by J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric*. *Goodman* was a lap down. Kelly got around Echols in the second lap, but was unable to catch *Mercurys Coffee*, which took the victory with an average speed of 157.213 mph. There were no penalties in Heat Four.

As the boats were placed back on their trailers, weather problems hit. Wind began blowing, the pressure dropped, and rain fell. Crews quickly covered their engines and moved items into their haulers. A good portion of the spectator crowd packed up and left. Finally, at about three o'clock, the wind and rain eased and an announcement was made that the Grand Prix final would be held at 3:45 p.m., with the Unlimited final at 4:30. Buoys had to be reset quickly and equipment that had been packed away had to be brought back out.

Final Heat

The five-lap final heat would have five boats on the front line, and *Beacon Plumbing* would be the trailer. All six came out for the final and none of them had a problem during the five-minute gun period, so the lanes were established before the fleet passed the commitment buoy.

Jamie Nilsen and *Mercurys Coffee* had the inside with Andrew Tate and *Goodman Real Estate* in lane two. *Mercurys* led through the first turn but was overtaken by *Goodman* on the first backstretch. Meanwhile, J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric* and Dustin Echols in *Bucket List* duelled for a lap, then *Bucket List* faded. A lap later, Dave Villwock in *Miss Apollo* passed *Bucket List*. *Apollo* was flighty but stayed on the water.

Goodman Real Estate won going away and finished with an average speed of 156.177 mph. Kelly made an effort to catch *Mercurys Coffee*, but fell short by a roostertail. Echols held off a late charge by Corey Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing*.

All boats passed technical inspec-



Craig Fjarlie



Chris Denslow

TOP: *Miss Goodman Real Estate* stalled during the warm-up for Heat Four. A plume of smoke blew from the exhaust stack of the boat as Andrew Tate restarted the engine.
ABOVE: The autograph session is always a popular event for the fans and for the drivers.

tion. The final order of finish was *Goodman Real Estate*, *Miss Mercurys Coffee*, *Beacon Electric*, *Miss Apollo*, *Bucket List Racing*, and *Beacon Plumbing*.

“It was a great ending to a weekend that had some ups and downs here in Guntersville, Alabama,” said Tate. “It definitely ended on an up for the *Goodman Real Estate* team sponsored Miss Madison. I’m looking forward to heading to Madison next weekend and racing in front of the hometown crowd! It’s been several years since I won an Unlimited race, but with the *Goodman Real Estate* team, we had a great offseason, and we came here to Guntersville prepared. Hopefully, with this win we can keep the momentum running.”

There was joy in the *Goodman* pit, but absolute elation around *Mercurys Coffee*. It was the highest finish since Scott and Shannon Raney set up their own team. Dustin Echols had hoped for something better than fifth, but said the engine just didn’t have the power. “At least the boat is going to Madison in one piece,” he added.

One clarification concerning points is needed. Because the afternoon storm resulted in the cancelation of one preliminary heat, some boats participated in more preliminary heats than others. To make that discrepancy fair, those boats that had run an extra heat threw out the points from their lowest finish among the preliminary heats. The points were eliminated only from season point standings and did not change the heat results.

Clouds cleared and the threat of rain moved away from Guntersville as the Southern Cup trophy presentation was held. Crews packed their equipment and put the boats on tilt, ready to move to the next stop on the Ohio River. The only boat not going on to Madison was *Miss Apollo*, which was returning to its shop to prepare for Tri-Cities.

“After winning here in Guntersville, next week in Madison will be very special,” Andrew Tate told reporters. “To be able to race in Madison and know that



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The Miss Goodman Real Estate team celebrates their victory in the Southern Cup.

everyone there is pulling for you, I’m really looking forward to it. There’ll be a little more emphasis on our situation and where we’re at, but the team and I won’t have any additional pressure.”

MADISON Indiana Governor’s Cup

The racecourse in Madison was supposed to open for testing at 10 a.m. on Friday. The weather gods had other plans, however. Dark clouds were moving in from the west and everyone knew what to expect. Officials covered their equipment, the boat crews packed tools and mechanical parts, and the course patrols took shelter.

At 9:55 a.m., the anticipated thunderstorm hit with a drenching downpour. Water three inches deep gushed down gutters in city streets. Nature’s display of fury lasted an hour. Before the events could continue, everything had to be uncovered and unpacked, and the course had to be completely reset. Testing was rescheduled to start at 12:30 p.m., but it was almost 1:30 before things were ready and the first boat headed onto the course.

The first boat to test was *Goodman Real Estate* with Andrew Tate in the

cockpit, followed immediately by Dustin Echols and *Bucket List Racing*. *Goodman* slowed in the first turn while *Bucket List* ran some quick laps then returned to the pits as Corey Peabody and *Beacon Plumbing* entered the course. *Goodman* ran some fast laps as did *Beacon Plumbing*.

Jamie Nilsen in *Miss Mercurys Coffee* did one fast lap and several slower ones as Nilsen checked timing marks. J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric* ran fast on the front straightaway, but the boat was loose and Kelly went back to the pits. The Grand Prix boats then had an opportunity to test. The five Unlimiteds in the pits had a second brief test session at 2:30 p.m. *Beacon Plumbing* and *Goodman* were the only boats that ran. Qualifying was scheduled to start at 3:30 p.m.

The first boat to make a qualifying run was *Beacon Plumbing*, which turned in a fast lap of 152.542 mph. *Bucket List* ran next. Echols did a best lap of 154.671 mph and was followed by *Mercurys Coffee*, which did one quick lap at 144.736 mph. Nilsen said later that he was unhappy with the propeller.

Beacon Electric then went out and made three laps with a best speed of 150.045 mph. Tate and *Goodman Real*



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ABOVE: Corey Peabody drives the *Beacon Plumbing* under the Milton-Madison Bridge and gives photographers an interesting vantage point. **RIGHT:** Andrew Tate in *Miss Goodman Real Estate* (left) and J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric*.



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The skies were clear and the temperature was warm when the event resumed on Sunday. The Ohio River water was remarkably good, considering how rough it often is.

Estate turned an impressive lap of 157.370 mph, but the effort was tossed because of an N2 violation. During a second qualifying round, *Goodman* turned a lap of 156.644 mph, which did pass tech. *Beacon Electric* also ran again and did a fast lap of 151.065 mph. *Beacon Plumbing* did two more laps, its best speed being 146.129 mph, then the course was closed for the day.

Saturday

The course was scheduled to open for Grand Prix qualifying at 9 a.m., which would be followed by an open testing session for the Unlimiteds from 9:45 a.m. until 11:15 a.m. The big news of the morning, however, was a ruling from race officials about the qualifying.

The rule book states that a boat must run three consecutive laps when qualifying, and that one of those laps must meet the minimum standard of 130 mph. The best speed is the official qualifying speed. But, only the two *Beacon* boats

followed the letter of the rule with three continuous laps. Because of that, *Goodman*, *Bucket List*, and *Mercurys*—which had all run fewer than three consecutive high-speed laps—had to take a commissioner’s option to enter the race and would not receive points for qualifying.

Ed Cooper, who was attending the race, said that the rule has been on the books for years but was never enforced until now. The H1 board issued a statement that they would discuss the rule at their next meeting, but were unable to make any changes at the moment.

Preliminary Heats

The round-robin format would place four boats in each three-lap preliminary heat. The five-lap final heat on Sunday would have four boats on the front line and a trailer.

The first preliminary heat, scheduled to start at 12:30 p.m., included the two *Beacon* boats plus *Goodman* and *Bucket List*. During the score-up,

Kelly grabbed lane one in *Beacon Electric*, while *Beacon Plumbing* had lane two, *Goodman* had lane three, and *Bucket List* was on the outside. Peabody and *Beacon Plumbing* led as the field up the first backstretch, with teammate *Beacon Electric* on its hip and *Goodman* close behind in third. *Bucket List* trailed. Those positions held to the finish, with *Beacon Plumbing* taking the win with an average speed of 142.884 mph.

Next there was a drivers' autograph session, while the Grand Prix and Pro-Lite classes had time on the water.

Heat Two was the last event of the day. It featured both *Beacon* boats, *Mercurys Coffee*, and *Bucket List*. Both *Beacon* boats cut the course during the five-minute warm-up period, and Kelly slipped his *Beacon Electric* into lane one. Peabody and *Beacon Plumbing* had lane two, Echols in lane three with *Bucket List*, while Nilsen and *Mercurys* started on the outside.

Kelly took the lead in the first turn and held it to the checkered flag, while *Beacon Plumbing* was a solid second. *Mercurys* passed *Bucket List* in turn two of lap one then *Bucket List* faded throughout the heat.

Following the heat, it was found that the data box for *Beacon Electric* had not recorded any data, so the boat was disqualified. The revised standings gave first place to *Beacon Plumbing* with an average speed of 140.040 mph, *Mercurys Coffee* finished second, and *Bucket List* was third. With that, Saturday's program was complete and the course was closed.

Sunday

The skies were clear and the temperature was warm when the event resumed on Sunday. The Ohio River water was remarkably good, considering how rough it often is. Before activity began, 2024 Regatta Director Jak McCormick presented long-time regatta volunteer and *Miss Madison* crewmember Tony Steinhardt with a plaque in recognition of his years of service. A brief

STATBOX

Madison Regatta - Indiana Governor's Cup

Madison, Indiana; July 6-7, 2024

2.5-mile oval on the Ohio River; 42.5 miles

QUALIFYING: (1) U-9 *Beacon Plumbing* (#92102), Corey Peabody, 152.542, 100 points; (2) U-1 *Beacon Electric* (#1496), J. Michael Kelly, 151.065, 80; U-11 *Miss Mercurys Coffee* (#0925), Jamie Nilsen, TNR - did not complete laps, 0 (Commissioner's Option); U-40 *Bucket List Racing* (#0721), Dustin Echols, TNR - did not complete laps, 0 (Commissioner's Option); U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate* (#1801), Andrew Tate, TNR - did not complete laps, 0 (Commissioner's Option).

HEAT 1: (1) *Beacon Plumbing*, 142.884, 400 points, 500 cumulative points; (2) *Beacon Electric*, 141.959, 300, 380; (3) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 141.033, 225, 225; (4) *Bucket List Racing*, 129.996, 169, 169. Fast lap: (1) *Beacon Plumbing*, 144.267.

HEAT 2: (1) *Beacon Plumbing*, 140.040, 400, 900; (2) *Miss Mercurys Coffee*, 129.645, 300, 300; (3) *Bucket List Racing*, 123.909, 225, 394; *Beacon Electric*, DSQ - no technical data, 0, 380. Fast lap: (2) *Beacon Plumbing*, 141.436.

HEAT 3: (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 146.886, 400, 625; (2) *Beacon Electric*, 142.908, 300, 680; (3) *Bucket List Racing*, 141.263, 225, 619; (4) *Miss Mercurys Coffee*, 121.764, 169, 469. Fast lap: (2) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 149.887.

HEAT 4: (1) *Beacon Plumbing*, 146.749, 400, 1300; (2) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 143.978, 300, 925; (3) *Bucket List Racing*, 136.141, 225, 844; (4) *Miss Mercurys Coffee*, 126.610, 169, 638. Fast lap: (2) *Beacon Plumbing*, 147.362.

HEAT 5: (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 144.181, 400, 1325; (2) *Beacon Electric*, 137.810, 300, 980; (3) *Miss Mercurys Coffee*, 128.700, 225, 863; *Beacon Plumbing*, DSQ - Safety Zone violation, 0, 1300. Fast lap: (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 145.945.

FINAL HEAT: (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 145.049, 400, 1725; (2) *Beacon Electric*, 141.847, 300, 1280; (3) *Beacon Plumbing*, 135.205, 225, 1525; (4) *Miss Mercurys Coffee*, 133.912, 169, 1032; *Bucket List Racing*, DNF - Pulled off course to save equipment, 0, 844. Fast lap: (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 148.345.

COMPILED BY ALLEN STILES



Part of the crowd attending the Indiana Governor's Cup in Madison.

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testing period was scheduled at 10 a.m. and racing would continue with Heat Three at 11:30 a.m.

Preliminary Heats

The boats in Heat Three were *Beacon Electric*, *Mercurys Coffee*, *Bucket List*, and *Goodman Real Estate*. During the five-minute warm-up period, both Kelly and Tate cut the course. Kelly snagged lane one in *Beacon Electric* while Tate and *Goodman* settled into lane two. *Mercurys* had lane three and Echols was on the outside aboard *Bucket List*.

The start was close and all four were legal. Kelly and *Beacon Electric* were first out of turn one, but Tate pulled even in *Goodman* as they went under the Madison-Milton Bridge. The crowd cheered as *Goodman* took the lead in turn two and pulled away headed down the front straightway. Tate then slowly extended his lead, turning the event's fastest lap of 149.887 mph during his second time around, and continued leading to the finish. His three-lap heat average was 146.886 mph, which would be the fastest of the weekend.

Echols held third in *Bucket List* and tried to close the gap on *Beacon Electric*, but couldn't catch it. *Mercurys* was a half-lap back at the finish.

"Lane one is tough here and we knew that all along," Tate said when it was over. "We saw Mike [Kelly] in testing there hugging the buoys. So, I needed to figure it out and give myself some padding there. This boat goes through the turns awesome and comes off the turns awesome and that's where we won the race. Couldn't be happier with the Miss Madison/Goodman Real Estate team. Rough day yesterday with some ups and downs, but today we're starting out on the right track."

Heat Four would feature *Beacon Plumbing*, *Mercurys Coffee*, *Bucket List*, and *Goodman Real Estate*. During the five-minute warm-up period, *Goodman*, *Mercurys*, and *Bucket List* all cut the course. Peabody ran the full course at



Chris Denlow



Chris Denlow

TOP: The activity in the pits as the Unlimiteds are lifted to the water to prepare for the start of a heat.
ABOVE: The run for the starting line. Corey Peabody has the inside lane in *Beacon Plumbing* (right), teammate J. Michael Kelly is next to him aboard *Beacon Electric* in lane two, and Andrew Tate is on the outside in *Miss Goodman Real Estate*.

high speed in *Beacon Plumbing*. Nilsen drove *Mercurys* into lane one, and *Beacon Plumbing* slipped into lane two. Echols and *Bucket List* had lane three and Tate had to settle for lane four in *Goodman*.

Peabody took the lead in the first turn and Tate challenged as they raced up the backstretch, but to no avail. *Beacon Plumbing* held on to win the heat at an average speed of 145.749 mph, with *Goodman* second. Echols and Nilsen battled each other for a lap, but *Bucket List* pulled away to take third. *Mercurys* was well off the pace at the finish.

"It didn't work out in our favor coming off the dock," Peabody explained, "but that's okay, we were able to settle in

and settle down and figure out what we were going to do. We got good lane position and were able to squeeze our way in there and get our lane position and off we went into the first turn clean. Had some fast boats all around me, but just kept my foot in it and it worked out for the best."

Heat Five, the last preliminary heat, would include the two *Beacon* boats, *Mercurys Coffee*, and *Goodman Real Estate*. When the boats came down the front straightway for the start, Peabody had the inside with *Beacon Plumbing*, with teammate Kelly and *Beacon Electric* in lane two, Tate and *Goodman Real Estate* in lane three, and Nilsen outside in *Mercurys Coffee*.

Peabody led through the first turn,

but Tate pulled even as they went up the backstretch. Kelly in *Beacon Electric* was sandwiched between their roostertails. Tate then took the lead in the second turn, but Peabody was right behind as they went down the front straightaway.

In the first turn of lap two, *Beacon Plumbing* went inside a buoy and, as Peabody attempted to correct, the boat hooked and spun into the infield. While the boat came back on the course at low speed, it was passed by *Mercurys Coffee*. Meanwhile, Tate and *Goodman Real Estate* went on to win with an average speed of 144.181 mph, *Beacon Electric* finished a solid second, and *Mercurys Coffee* was third. All four boats cleared the tech truck, but then came word that *Beacon Plumbing* was disqualified for entering the safety zone just before it hooked and spun in turn one of lap two.

The incident involving *Beacon Plumbing*, which gave *Mercurys Coffee* third-place points, meant *Bucket List* would start in the trailer position in the final heat. The other four boats would all start on the front row. The primary question was: Who would be in which lane?

If Kelly could get the inside, would he be able to hold off *Goodman*? Did Andrew Tate learn in the preliminary heats that he could win from lane three, but not

from lane four? Corey Peabody's boat is fast; could he maintain control and win if he got a jump on the others at the start? Could Jamie Nilsen get a break in the final and have a strong finish like he had at Guntersville? The partisan crowd on the Ohio River shore was about to find out.

Final Heat

Shortly before the final heat was scheduled to begin, a breeze came up from the west. That meant that it was blowing against the current. The result was a definite chop on the water.

As the boats left the pits, the two *Beacon* boats moved slowly around the first turn, barely on plane. The others made a warm-up lap at a faster speed. As *Goodman*, *Mercurys*, and *Bucket List* came down the front straightaway, they cut the course just past the start/finish line. When they reached the backstretch, the two *Beacon* boats were already just far enough up the backstretch that the others had to fall in behind them.

Kelly secured lane one in *Beacon Electric*, Peabody and *Beacon Plumbing* had lane two, Tate and *Goodman Real Estate* took lane three, and Nilsen had lane four in *Mercurys Coffee*. *Bucket List*, the trailer, had to start 10 seconds back.

The four boats on the front line

slowly crept around the course until they passed the score-up buoy. The boats went faster halfway up the backstretch, the speeds increased more at the exit buoy from turn two, then they charged for the starting line. Tate timed the start perfectly and took *Goodman* into the lead at the first turn. *Beacon Electric*, with the advantage of the inside lane, led at the exit buoy while *Beacon Plumbing* got out of attitude and slid into *Electric's* roostertail. That gave Nilsen an opportunity to take third place with *Mercurys Coffee*.

As the leaders went under the bridge, *Goodman* surged ahead of *Beacon Electric* and the crowd cheered. The fight wasn't over, however. Kelly and his *Beacon Electric* pulled even in turn two, but Tate kept his speed up and took the lead for good as they raced down the front straightaway. Meanwhile, *Mercurys* held third over *Beacon Plumbing*.

Tate extended his lead in the second lap, although Kelly kept the pressure on. Dustin Echols, meanwhile, returned *Bucket List* to the pits at the end of its second lap. With nothing to gain by staying on the course, and considering the team's luck in Madison the previous two years—hitting a log that caused extensive damage in 2022 and then flipping over backwards last year—they decided it was best to call it a day and return home with their boat still in one piece.

In turn two of lap three, Nilsen swung wide in *Mercurys Coffee* and Peabody closed the gap in *Beacon Plumbing*. In the first turn of lap four, Peabody took over third place. *Mercurys* then slowed and settled into fourth place. *Goodman* went on to win by a roostertail and with an average speed of 145.049 mph. The boat was followed by *Beacon Electric*, *Beacon Plumbing*, and *Mercurys Coffee*.

There was more cheering when Tate brought the gold, black, and white *Goodman Real Estate* back to the dock. "They tricked us and did something completely different during the final," Tate said of the Strong boats, "but props to them, they were exactly where they wanted to



Jamie Nilsen gets into the cockpit of *Miss Mercurys Coffee* before a heat.



Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow

TOP: J. Michael Kelly has the inside lane in *Beacon Electric* (right) as the boats race to the starting line. In lane two next to him is Andrew Tate in *Miss Goodman Real Estate* and on the outside is Jamie Nilsen in *Miss Mercurys Coffee*. **MIDDLE:** *Goodman Real Estate* (left), *Beacon Electric*, and *Beacon Plumbing* after rounding the first turn heading down the backstretch. **ABOVE:** Andrew Tate meets with reporters after his victory.

be. J. Michael Kelly drove a heck of a heat in that Strong Racing boat.

“I’m pretty pumped right now. Thank you to the town of Madison and everyone on the team. The list is endless, and the equipment is awesome. This is a super-fast boat and I’m having a great time trying to put it out front.”

Tate reflected on what the victory meant to him personally. “I’ve been coming here since I was a little kid and the parade and the fireworks, a lot of core childhood memories from here,” he said. “The hometown people were just lining the beach and that was really, really cool. You don’t get to experience things like that anywhere else. I’m more happy for everyone here that hung out all day, listened to the bands and enjoyed the event. Thanks for everything.”

“I wouldn’t say that a win in Madison is ever easy, but it makes it easier when you have a great team, a great city and a great sponsor behind you. We started the final heat where we wanted to in lane three and got through the first turn clean. After that, it was get down the back straight and dictate the racecourse. I’d like to think that we saved the best race of the weekend for the final. We’re happy!”

A few minutes after the racing was over, the trophy presentation was held by the official stand. When asked about the course conditions, Kelly had only one word: “Rough.”

Tate gave special thanks to Charlie Grooms and Mike Hanson for providing him with a winning ride. He accepted the Indiana Governor’s Cup from Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb, but nobody mentioned politics—just the excitement and recognition the regatta brings to Madison.

So now, with two wins under his belt, one can only ask: Is Tate on a roll similar to the one he had in 2018? Will *Miss Goodman Real Estate* take the top prize at future races?

We’ll know before long. ❖

The world's fastest boat

The radically designed, prop-riding hydroplane named *Slo-mo-shun IV*, developed by a team from Seattle that included owner Stan Sayres, designer Ted Jones, and builder Anchor Jensen, was created during most of 1949, launched in October of that year, and immediately started test runs on Lake Washington. The world speed record for boats at the time stood at 141.74 mph, a mark set by Sir Malcolm Campbell as he drove *Blue Bird K4* on a glass-smooth Lake Coniston in northern England on August 14, 1939. Many experts thought it was an achievement that could never be broken. But, the three Seattleites thought otherwise. As testing of their boat continued during the spring of 1950—the team operating from a boathouse built on the shore of Cozy Cove next to Sayres’s new home on the tip of Hunts Point on Lake Washington—they felt *Slo-mo IV* had become ready to claim a dream that they all shared: to have the fastest boat in the world. The following account of what happened next is an excerpt from Chapter 7 of the book *Slo-mo-shun* by Andrew Muntz.

The trial runs of *Slo-mo-shun IV* had progressed well by the time dawn arrived on the morning of June 26, 1950.

About a month earlier, Stan Sayres decided that the boat was ready for the record attempt. He contacted the APBA to get a sanction and arranged for the race officials to oversee the effort.

The officials surveyed a mile course not far from Sayres’s former home in Laurelhurst and off the Sand Point Naval Station, which occupied a wide piece of land that jutted into the west side of Lake Washington toward the north end of the lake. They installed and tested the timing equipment and secured people to run patrol boats and help keep the waters clear of spectators.

Then there were several days of frus-



The team that created *Slo-mo-shun IV*. From the left, designer Ted Jones, builder Anchor Jensen, and owner Stan Sayres (behind the steering wheel)

tration. Issues with the rudder caused the first delay. One rudder was bent when Jones turned a corner at 110 mph and another created a dangerous flutter at high speed. It was eventually removed and reworked.

“I’ve been saying for the last few months that we can make a new record only if everything goes right,” Sayres told one magazine writer as he paced the dock outside his boathouse while the repairs were underway. “I still have my fingers crossed.”

The crew fixed the rudder, and a test run proved that it worked great, but then they discovered another issue. “We also learned that we have engine trouble,” Jones announced to the crew. “Low rpm.” After another several hours of work, they solved the problem by resetting the timing of the magneto and using lower octane gasoline, but by then a south wind had kicked up—making a high-speed run of the flying boat too dangerous.

Weather forecasters finally predicted that the wind would subside on Friday, June 23, so the timing officials were summoned. A news flash was issued that *Slo-mo IV* would attempt a record run shortly after noon that day. But the wind and swells continued—the forecasters were wrong.

Finally, by late afternoon, Sayres and the others agreed that they’d take *Slo-mo IV* out for a run through the mile course to evaluate the timing equipment, but at a reduced speed of only 120 mph. So, at about six o’clock, Sayres and Jones climbed aboard, fired up the engine, and drove the boat from Cozy Cove across the choppy lake to Sand Point.

Sayres hit the throttle. Suddenly, no more than a hundred yards into the course, *Slo-mo-shun IV* leaped from the water, yawed wildly, rocked on its sponsons, then settled to a stop. It lost its propeller and the prop shaft had broken. “I am certainly enthusiastic about the stability of the hull after that experience,” Sayres said later. “In a lot of boats, a mishap like that would be very serious.”



Mary Randlett/Jensen Motor Boat Collection



Mary Randlett/Jensen Motor Boat Collection



Jensen Motor Boat Collection

TOP: The brand-new *Slo-mo-shun IV* during its first test run on Lake Washington. **MIDDLE:** Ted Jones (perched on the edge of the cockpit) and other *Slo-mo* crew members prepare the boat for a test run as it sits at Anchor Jensen’s boathouse. **ABOVE:** The hydroplane during early test runs. Note that the boat’s tail fin has yet to be installed and that it was using two rudders during this test.

The south wind was again blowing on Saturday as the crew replaced the propeller and shaft. Then, while everyone took Sunday off, Sayres and the officials announced they'd make another try the next morning. "The Sand Point station told me the weather reports for Sunday were extremely bad," Sayres told the *Seattle Daily Times*. "So, since all of my crew as well as the timing crew and the others are pretty tired, we decided to put things off until Monday, at least."

But there was troubling news from across the Pacific Ocean. Roughly 100,000 troops from the North Korean People's Army had poured across the border into South Korea during the weekend. It set off what would soon become the Korean War.

By the time the sun climbed above the Cascade Mountains on Monday, June 26, articles about the conflict filled the front page of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*—General Douglas MacArthur was speeding arms and ammunition from his headquarters in Tokyo to South Korean forces; the United Nations Security Council was holding an emergency session; President Harry Truman had cut short a weekend visit to his home in Missouri and hurried back to Washington, D.C., to meet with top aids.

Meanwhile, back on page 20 of the



Kent Hitchcock

Stan Sayres and Ted Jones getting *Slo-mo-shun IV* ready for its world-record attempt.

newspaper, surrounded by other news in the sports section, there was a small article with the headline: "SAYRES TRIES AGAIN TODAY."

Stanley Sayres is ready to try again for the speedboat record in the Slo-mo-shun IV.

Postponed because of rough water and other difficulties, Sayres is expected to make another attempt on the world mark on Lake Washington Monday afternoon.

A new shaft has been flown from the East.

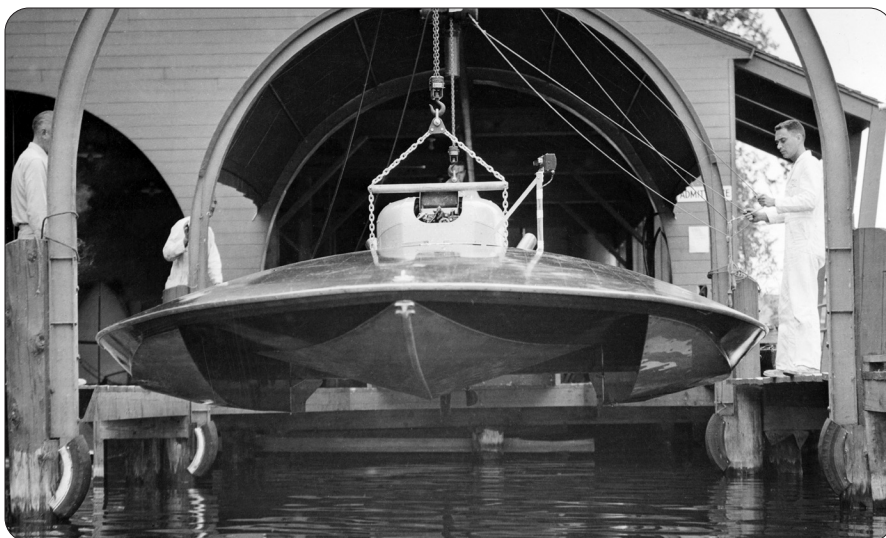
The Slo-mo-shun IV's first try at the measured mile ended Friday when the boat lost its propeller when it hit rough water.

Everything was perfect at Sayres's boathouse on the shore of Cozy Cove that morning. A faint, cool breeze kicked up only a slight chop on the lake—ideal for allowing just enough air under the hull to give *Slo-mo IV* the most effective run possible.

Jones was there early enough to greet the others as they arrived: crew members Joe Schobert, Elmer Linenschmidt, Doug Minor, Mike Welsch, and the rest. The designer of the gearbox, Don Spencer of Western Gear Works, soon joined them; as did Hi Johnson, the propeller expert; and Anchor Jensen.

Soon, reporters from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and the *Seattle Daily Times* arrived. Yacht club members and other interested onlookers joined the growing crowd. Then, using a mono-rail hoist, crew members lifted *Slo-mo IV* off its cradle inside the boathouse. The chains of the hoist clattered as they moved the boat over the water then lowered it next to the dock.

Although Sayres had driven the boat in the aborted run through the mile course on Friday and although all the newspaper reports said that Sayres would drive his boat again on Monday, Jones somehow had it in his mind that morning he was going to drive for the record—at least that's the story he would tell for the rest of his life. According to his version of what happened, when the two climbed into the cockpit, Sayres grabbed the seat behind the steering



Seattle Museum of History and Industry

Slo-mo-shun IV on the hoist that moved the boat from its cradle inside the boathouse at Stan Sayres's home to the dock on Cozy Cove.

wheel. “And, I said, ‘What’s this?’” Jones later told people. “And he said, ‘This is going to be mine! This, I want—I want the straightaway!’”

Problem is, everybody else remembered the event differently. Years later, crew chief Mike Welsch recalled there was a dispute about who would drive, but thought the matter was settled long before the day of the run. Anchor Jensen agreed, saying it was always known that Sayres would drive the boat for the speed record.

They, and others, thought Sayres made the final decision several weeks earlier when Jones expressed an interest in driving for the record. Sayres told him he would drive the boat himself—owner’s discretion. Besides, that’s the deal Sayres had with his wife, Madeline—that he could drive the boat in testing and the record run, but not in a race. Sayres told Jones he could drive the boat in all the races he wanted, but that he would drive it during the record run. And when Jones protested, Sayres pulled rank. “Ted, it’s my boat and my decision is final,” he said. “Take it or leave it.”

As a result, by half past six o’clock in the morning on Monday, June 26, as Jones stood on the dock next to the boat and wearing his driving suit, the others watched him do what he’d been asked. Jones strapped on his life jacket, grabbed his helmet, climbed into the cockpit, and sat in the right-hand seat next to Sayres—who was behind the steering wheel.

They both waved to the crowd as the crew nudged the boat away from the dock. Sayres activated the booster pump, set the magneto, pushed down on the starter toggle, and tickled the primer. The Allison roared to life. The acrid smoke shot from the exhaust. *Slo-mo IV* threw both Sayres and Jones back in their seats as it lurched forward and climbed on top of the water.

They cruised north toward Kenmore as two radio announcers described the action in hushed tones from an airplane flying overhead. Once the boat

reached the north end of Lake Washington, Sayres turned a lazy circle to the left and headed it south toward Sand Point, where newsreel camera operators and a small crowd of reporters and curious spectators had gathered.

It’s also where the official timers were waiting. The group, under the supervision of APBA official Kent Hitchcock of Newport Harbor, California, had set up their equipment days earlier and were ready for action. Hitchcock stationed himself at the north end of the mile trap with Art Shorey of Seattle, who was acting as the chief timer. Precisely one mile away at the south end of the course was the other timer, Ren Ludlam, of Newport Beach, California.

Shortly after seven o’clock, Sayres punched the accelerator. The boat’s roostertail shot high into the air as it gained speed heading toward the mile course. Shorey watched the boat through a scope mounted on two-by-fours exactly at the beginning of the course. As he kept the boat in his sight, the scope swung around until it activated the clock at the instant the boat’s nose reached that line. Those standing nearby heard the audible click as the clock started.

Exactly one statute mile away, at the other end of a telephone cable, stood Ludlam, who was looking through a

scope like Shorey’s to stop the clock the instant *Slo-mo IV* crossed the line in front of him. But as the boat approached his position, his telephone set fell and knocked his sight out of alignment—at the worst possible time. It meant Shorey couldn’t stop the clock, and the run didn’t count.

Meanwhile, Sayres brought *Slo-mo IV* to a crawl and slowly turned it around. According to the rules, they needed to make their two passes through the course within 15 minutes of each other. So, once he pointed the boat north, Sayres hit the throttle again.

Ludlam had fixed his scope by this time and was talking over the telephone line as the boat approached. “The roostertail is up,” he announced. “A half mile ... a quarter mile ... really screaming this time ... 300 yards ...” Then there was the click. The clock had started once more.

Because they had lost the propeller shaft in the trial run three days before, the *Slo-mo IV* team wanted to hold the engine speed down to a minimum—just enough to break the record, but not so much they would risk damaging equipment they would need at the Gold Cup only a month away.

While the boat was screaming north through the course, Jones watched the instruments. As the boat reached their



The APBA officials who handled the timing of *Slo-mo IV*'s record attempt on Lake Washington.

Kent Hitchcock



TOP: *Slo-mo-shun IV* during its record-breaking speed run off Sand Point in Seattle.
ABOVE: After the boat's triumphant return to the boathouse at Stan Sayres's home on Hunts Point. Sayres is covering his ears with his hands and Ted Jones is standing behind him.

agreed limit, Jones waved his hands downward to tell Sayres to back off a little. But the boat kept accelerating, so Jones waved more wildly to get Sayres's attention. Sayres misunderstood the signal, thought something was wrong, cut the engine clear off, and *Slo-mo IV* slowed to a stop—short of the north end of the course.

Those watching from the shore of Sand Point could see Sayres and Jones discussing the matter for a moment. Then they restarted the engine and cruised over to the tender boat *Seaflow*

II to get more fuel—and learned that neither of their runs had counted.

Sayres started the boat's engine again for another attempt and this time there were no problems. With its roostertail flying, *Slo-mo IV* again raced south. At the point that the boat crossed into the mile course, Shorey's scope activated the clock with a click—five seconds, 10, 15, 20. Then it clicked again when Ludlam stopped the clock precisely one mile away. The time was 21.98 seconds—163.785 mph.

Sayres was concerned that waves

from the passing Kirkland ferry and from a tug hauling a raft of logs might pose a hazard, so he turned the boat around and made the return run in the opposite direction, heading to the north—10, 15, 20—click! Slightly slower at 22.95 seconds, or 156.862 mph, but enough to give Sayres and Jones a two-run average of 160.3235 mph.

Slo-mo-shun IV had shattered Sir Malcolm Campbell's record by nearly 20 mph.

The headline on the front page of the *Seattle Daily Times* that afternoon proclaimed: "SLO-MO-SHUN IV SETS 160-M.P.H. RECORD ON LAKE WASHINGTON." When the reporter asked Sayres if he was worried during the run, Sayres said, "I didn't have time to worry about anything but trying to keep the boat in a straight line." As for his wife, Madeleine Sayres admitted she was worried about her husband. "It was a little nerve-racking, and I'm glad it's over."

In the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, the next morning, both Sayres and Jones claimed that had the timers recorded their first run through the course, the record would have been even higher. Even so, they were happy with the result. What was it like to rocket over the water at 160 mph? the reporter asked.

"Just like sitting in a comfortable chair in your living room," Sayres answered. ❖

AROUND THE CIRCUIT

Race Site News by Chris Tracy



Assessing the new hydro leadership.

With the 2024 Guntersville and Madison races in the books, let's review the progress of the new H1 Board of Directors and HydroTown efforts, as we review those races.

H1, HydroTown, Boat Count, and Racing

H1 leaders have said that the goal was for at least six boats to enter each race. That goal was met as six boats entered the Guntersville race, thanks to Apollo Mechanical stepping up to sponsor the U-27, the Wiggins team. The U-27 crew rushed to finish their boat, including flying in some crew members to get the job done. It appears the Guntersville race was used primarily as a testing time for the new boat.

Bad weather hit Guntersville again this year, but H1 was able to cancel some heats and rearrange how points were computed and, thankfully, ran and completed a final heat.

As the series moved to Madison,

five boats entered the race, so the six-boat goal was not reached. H1 adopted a modified round-robin format, so there were four boats in each heat and good racing. But there was some controversy.

After the Madison qualification period ended, the Strong team complained to officials that the rule book required three laps for qualification runs, and only their two boats had completed three laps. All other teams ran two laps or fewer.

Yes, this is a rule. Sometimes that rule has not been followed in the past, though. The U-3 turned only one lap in qualifying last year in Tri-Cities, yet was admitted into the field and awarded points, not as a commissioner's option. In 2022 the U-3 completed only two laps in qualifying in Tri-Cities, with no negative ramifications.

But one owner said, "The Strong team demanded that all qualification speeds be thrown out, except theirs." After the Guntersville race, the Strong boats were behind in the national points race, so the additional qualification

points would be helpful, especially if no other teams were awarded any qualification points.

The H1 chair capitulated to the Strong team's complaint and all qualification speeds and qualification points for all boats, except the two Strong boats, were tossed out. The other three boats could race with a commissioner's option and didn't earn any points. The following statement was issued from H1 chair Mike Denslow:

Following yesterday's qualification session at the Madison Regatta Indiana Governor's Cup, it was brought to the attention of the H1 officiating group that there was a stipulation within the H1 rule book stating that each boat attempting to qualify must complete three continuous laps above 130 mph.

Of the five boats entered in the event, only two boats completed the three continuous laps, the U-1 and U-9 of Strong Racing. The other three boats, including the U-91, U-40 and U-11 all fell short of the three-lap requirement at minimum speed.

The issue is being rectified with points being reassigned and the boats affected have chosen to take the commissioner's option which allows them to qualify for the race. We're disappointed by this development and are taking all the necessary actions to rectify the situation and ensure all boats are in their proper positions as we prepare for today's heat races. We simply missed this rule and that's



The H1 officials on the official tower at Guntersville.

Chris Denslow

not acceptable, but all we can do at this point is correct the situation and learn from it to ensure it doesn't happen moving forward. Both our leadership team and our officiating team are new this season and while that's not an excuse, there are learning curves and unfortunately, this has been one of those. Although we know this will not be popular with our loyal fans, we need to follow the rule book to maintain our integrity.

The H1 Board will meet prior to our next event in Tri-Cities, Washington to discuss potentially changing this 'forgotten' rule. I would like to personally extend an apology to our competitors and our fans. We will do better and we will now look ahead to the upcoming heat races and tomorrow's main event at Madison.

By the way, the rule book doesn't say that a boat must complete three continuous laps above 130 mph. It says a boat must complete only ONE of the three continuous laps above 130 mph.

The action prompted this statement from Steve David who, among other things, is a retired Unlimited driver, former H1 chair, and former APBA president. "Every team is competitive and looks for every advantage. The problem, as I see it, is that in search for that technical advantage, be it an arcane rule, etc., is that the sport loses sight of the customers. Which are the race sites and fans. They keep this stuff up and they'll win their race in front of 50 people with no TV, no web viewers, no media no coverage of any kind."

The controversy was even more complicated. The complaint was made after the qualification period had ended, so teams could not make another attempt to run and qualify. Darrell Strong, whose teams were the only beneficiaries of the ruling, and H1 chair Mike Denslow, are partners in HydroTown, the group providing financial support for the series. And, remember, the rule has not always

been applied in past races.

But things got even more tangled for the Strong team as the race was run. After Heat 2, the *Beacon Electric* was disqualified. It was determined that the U-1 violated Technical Rule A4(b) when the data from the boat's data box was not recorded. The boat was disqualified, and no points awarded.

The Strong team was feeling some push-back from their qualifications complaint and that may have influenced their Facebook response from owner Darrell Strong. "I have had conversations with all owners and H1 referees. As a team owner I understand and support yesterday's ruling on lack of data, even though it had a negative impact on my team. Going forward we all need to respect and endorse following the rules in order to demonstrate the integrity of the sport. I fully support all the H1 Unlimited officials."

As a principal in HydroTown and as a H1 board member, Strong hired the officials, so he should support them.

So far, the new starting procedure seems to be an improvement. No one misses the 80-mph rule. Heat competition has been generally good. Some concern was expressed about the final heat in Madison, where it appeared that the two Strong boats may have participated

in coordinated driving (aka teaming) during the score up. That potential issue is one that would be hard to solve with rules.

Streaming, Facebook, Internet, Press Releases, Communication.

All teams seem to have stepped up their social media presence. For example, the U-40 has added a special feature to their Bucket List Facebook page, Bucket List Racing All-Access. Most teams posted updates on their travels to and from races. The Strong teams especially highlighted their travels.

Teams such as the U-11 *Miss Mercurys Coffee* have featured runs, their driver, and their crew on their frequently updated Facebook page. All have increased fan engagement.

It is my understanding that H1 invested in new streaming equipment, software, and drones. Thanks go to H1 for providing streaming free of charge to viewers. The streaming was somewhat problematic at testing and only somewhat improved at Gunter'sville. Audio was an issue and there appeared to be other technical issues at Gunter'sville. Madison coverage was not perfect, but widely viewed as much improved.

Brad Luce calls the heats well. Some drone shots were impressive. The new pit



The broadcast team for the H1 streaming production: Brad Luce and Erica Allred.

Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow

H1 drone pilot Brian Montgomery captures his drone after the flying has been finished.

reporter is enthusiastic, but needs to focus on asking drivers more specific questions about each heat—strategy, close calls, etc. I know there are bandwidth and electrical issues and other problems for streaming, but if the sport is to grow, this product needs to work seamlessly. And H1 streaming staff: brace yourself. You need to get ahead of all the streaming issues you will encounter on Fiesta Island in San Diego. Don't say you weren't warned!

Communication has not been perfect at the first two races. H1 internet coverage and H1 Facebook coverage were sometimes not timely or well coordinated, especially for Guntersville. Speeds, points, order of finish for all boats, etc, were sometimes not quickly reported or not reported at all.

In Guntersville, the heats were

called 1A and 1B, etc., on the H1 Facebook page, but were reported as Heat 1, 2, 3, etc., on H1 streaming. It seemed like Luce, who was calling the race on streaming, was surprised, as were those watching the race, that there were four laps for each heat conducted on Saturday at Guntersville, instead of three. And when some heats were eliminated, the issue of how points would be counted was a mystery to most spectators and to those following on the H1 website, on Facebook, or watching on streaming.

Communication was better coordinated in Madison, but points, speeds, the order of finish, etc., were sometimes not quickly reported on the H1 website or H1 Facebook page and generally not presented as well as they were last season.

H1 has hired a public relations firm that is charged with writing the press releases for the races. There was no press release issued after Saturday's racing at either event and race press release for the Guntersville race wasn't issued until the late afternoon on Monday after the race.

Two points: Press releases need to be sent out the same day that the event happened, one on Saturday and another on Sunday, in order for the information to be considered current news by the various media outlets that will receive it. If the hope is to get media coverage for the sport, a press release issued an entire day after the race ended is too late. To a

sports reporter, it's already old news at that point.

And the press release needs to be formatted in a way that conforms to journalistic standards and so the information can basically be taken and used as a news article by newspapers or read by radio and TV stations without too much effort. That's not how they were composed by the PR firm. I'm concerned about the current efforts from the H1-hired PR firm.

Lessons Learned and Recommendation.

From the two races that have been completed, it appears that a high priority for H1 and/or HydroTown should be to hire an independent director of race operations to oversee the facilitation of all H1 aspects of each race, water and land side operations—racing, streaming, website, social media, communication, etc.

HydroTown funders and H1 board members likely should not be part of making decisions during a race, as they could have a conflict of interest. A director of race operations removes all of those insiders from the mix and makes it all more transparent, plus hopefully, the entire product will be better presented with one person overseeing the entire H1 product at each race. ❖

EDITOR: Andy Muntz

ASSOCIATE EDITORS: Craig Fjarlie, Chris Tracy, Dick Sanders

HYDROFILE EDITOR/WEBMASTER: Lon Erickson TREASURER: Bob Senior HISTORIAN: Bob Greenhow

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Letters are welcome, but may be edited for clarity and space.
Send comments to: ajmuntz@icloud.com