

# UNLIMITED NewsJournal

A CHRONICLE OF SPEED

JANUARY 2023

## Katy Norton: She makes the Guntersville race go.



Chris Denslow

**G**untersville, Alabama, is surrounded by water and is known throughout the Deep South as a boating mecca. It also has a long tradition of boat racing. The city first hosted an unlimited hydroplane race 60 years ago, a year after Roy DUBY and *Miss U.S. I* became the first to crack the 200-miles-per-hour barrier in setting a world's straightaway speed record on

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Guntersville Lake. The event, first called the Governor's Cup and then the Dixie Cup, was held in 1963 through 1965, and again in 1968 and '69. Then the sport went away for nearly 50 years until it returned again in 2018. Katy Norton became the person who coordinated that effort. After hosting the Gold Cup last season, Guntersville was honored at H1 Unlimited's annual banquet as the recipient of the Race Site of the Year Award. Norton's leadership was a big reason for that honor. Craig Fjarlie caught up with Katy Norton at the Angel of the Winds Hotel and Casino near, Arlington, Washington, on October 15—just before that award was presented. The following interview is the result.

**UNJ: What is your official role with the Guntersville race?**

Norton: I am the president of Marshall County Tourism and Sports. Our organization is the fiscal body that supports the race. In other words, we're the money behind it. Our board manages the money, so therefore, I'm the event coordinator, if you will. I oversee the entire race, making sure that everything happens the way it is supposed to and making sure that we stay on budget.

**What is your background? Were you born in Guntersville?**

Yes, actually. Guntersville is my home. I was born and raised in Guntersville. I moved away to go to college, met David [her husband] so we lived away from Guntersville for many years. We moved back there in 2007, and I've been in my current position since 2013.

**What was your college major?**

I have a communications degree from the University of Alabama, journalism major. I worked for some newspapers and moved over into the PR and information side of the house.

**Were you ever at the Unlimited races back in the 1960s when they raced at Guntersville?**

No. I have some friends who are my age that remember the boats, that came with their parents, but my mom was a single mom and we didn't go down to the races when I was growing up. I don't even remember having boat races. Prob-



Chris Denslow

ably the first time I really heard about it was in my [current] position. I had been at the position probably six months and people were, like, "You need to bring the boats back." I'm like, "I don't know what you're talking about," you know? (Laughs.) Then we had a couple of folks come and see us, Ted [Grange] and the guys from over in the Gadsden area.

They have a boat, Charley Wiggins and his dad. They came to see us and pitched the idea of bringing the races back to Guntersville. That's kind of how it started.

**They did have some inboard classes that raced at Guntersville, on and off. Were you ever involved with that?**

I wasn't. They did that all the way up



Chris Denslow



Part of the crowd that appeared for the return of hydro racing to Guntersville, Alabama, in 2018.

until '86. Then they came back and did it again in 1994. We had not had another race until we brought it back in 2018.

**What were some of the things you had to do to make it happen—permits, getting the proper approvals, putting committees together, all the different chores and things?**

The biggest commitment was money. First of all, when I found out, we already did contracts for tournaments for fishing and other things, so we're used to dealing with recruitment for events and based on a contract, what we call a bid base, or a contract base. When we met with Ted and those guys from H1 and I found out how much it was going to cost for our bid base to bring the boats, and what our contract would look like, then I went to my board and said, "You know, we might want to do this." They said, "Okay, we have to have some money, we need to know the community's going to support it." So, I literally went out to see my community and raised \$100,000.

**Mmm.**

Came back to my board and said, "I have \$100,000 committed to move forward." They said, "Okay, we'll move forward," because we had that money committed. They agreed for us to move forward with the year one, based on the

fact that we had that much money already committed.

**So, then the permits started coming, you got people to volunteer for different positions...**

Yes. We actually put it in the newspaper and said, "Hey, we're looking for committees and people who want to get involved." We formed our planning committee based on who showed up. We had to make the committees based on who had been involved before, back in the day, that came to the table. We had new people who had never done it before,

thought it might be fun. They came to the table. And now, going into '23, this will be our fifth year, and my planning team is the same planning team that I came to the table with in '18. It's the same group of people.

**They've stayed with you.**

They've stayed with me for five years. Same core team. We have a great time. We're all committed to making it a success. Everybody loves it, they have a good time together. I mean, that's what makes it work.

**This last year, when you had the Gold Cup, did that take extra work to get all the other classes and the whole schedule together, to make it happen?**

It did, and you know, we did things in a different area to try to make it a special event, because we had the Gold Cup. It's interesting, even though we had the races all those years, a lot of our community didn't know the history behind the Gold Cup. They didn't understand the importance of that. We did some educating there, to bring our community up to speed on what the Gold Cup really was and the importance of us hosting that. So, it was an exciting year in '22 to be able to do that for the first time in Alabama.

**If someone came to you and said, "We are from a city that's thinking about**



Chris Denslow

A popular event on the Guntersville schedule comes when the race teams gather at a local park and the fans get to see the boats up close and meet the drivers. The boats are then taken through downtown Guntersville on their way to the pit area.



having a race," what advice would you give them? What has worked for you, and any pitfalls they should watch out for?

I think it's important that your community supports it. One of the ways we know the community supports it is through the sponsorship commitment. If the businesses get behind it and give you the sponsorship money, then you know your community is supporting it. I will tell you this, back when we first started, Kathy at Tri-Cities was great. She shared some of the different ways that she had built her program, how she had built...

**This was Kathy Powell?**

Yes. How she had tried different things, tents, corporate tents, sponsor tents, how she worked with the VIPs, all of those things that go into making your event successful. You know, she was willing to open up and share about all of that. The other thing I can say is my district, we have a great partnership with our community, our city. Our city does a lot of in-kind, and getting your city on board, your council and mayor's support behind it, has helped us in a huge way.

**That's good. Some of the people who live near the lake, or the Piggly Wiggly store, for example, were they on**

**board with it? Were they OK, it wouldn't disrupt their lives too much?**

Well, you know, we shut down a whole street.

**Yes.**

What we decided early on is that we knew we were fixin' to make all of those families that live along Sunset Drive miserable, because we were going to shut their street down. So, to be kind to them—we started this in year one, we've done it every year—we go door-to-door in that whole neighborhood a couple of weeks before the race. We give them as many parking passes, residential parking, that they need, to get on and off that street. So, if they want to have a party at their house, we give them enough parking passes for as many people as they need to park and come through that way, and we give them two complimentary tickets to the hydros.

**OK.**

We give them two weekend passes for every house, and it's several hundred tickets we give away to blanket that community. Part of it was to say to them, "Hey, we appreciate your support, we're sorry we're going to be, you know, in your back door, in your front door, in your lawn for the next two days, but we



Craig Berney

hope you'll support the race." We have not had any kickback from that community, that neighborhood. If anybody was going to hate the races it would be them, because we brought 'em here, an amazing race. They've been absolutely great. I think part of that was because that's the way we approached it.

**Well, that covers a lot of what we were going to ask. It's great that you're doing it again.**

Yeah, we're excited. Year five, we'll see what happens. We've got some changes that we're going to do this year. We're going to do some additions we hope will add some fun to the event. You know, we try things. If they work, they work, if they don't, we can try something different the next year. We've done different things almost every year just to see, get a feel for what works and what doesn't. We're doing some things different in '23 that we hope will raise ticket sales and make some more money. We'll see where it goes.

**OK.**

It's exciting.

**All right. Thank you for your time.**

You're welcome. ❖



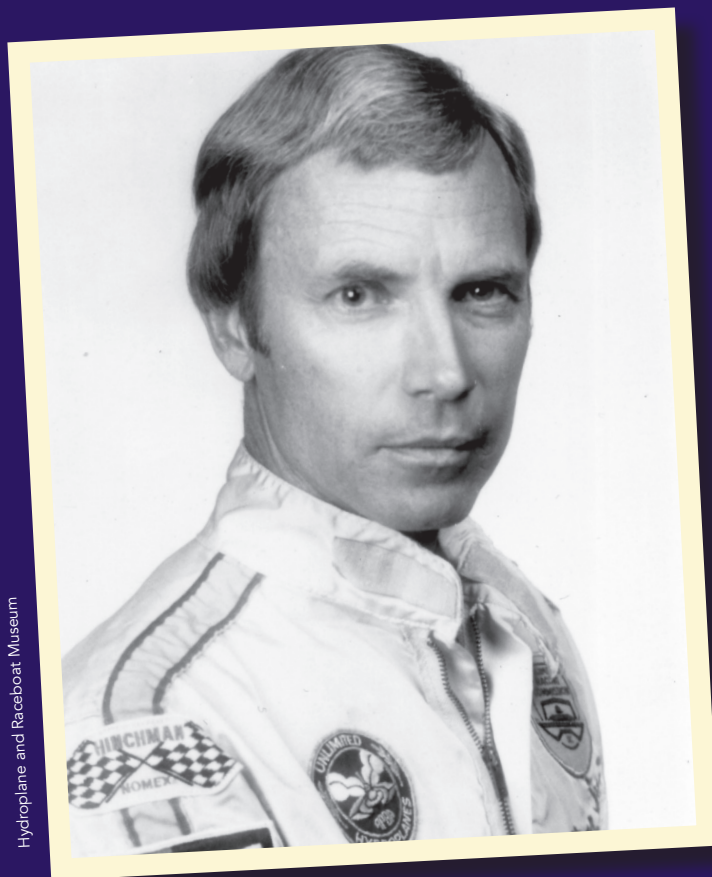
Chris Denslow

Katy Norton congratulates Jeff Bernard after a heat victory at Gunterville.



FROM THE UNJ VAULT:

# A visit with E. Milner Irvin III



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Eugene Milner Irvin III grew up in Miami, the city of his birth, and is a third-generation electrical contractor. His grandfather founded Miami's Riverside Electric Company in 1922, a family business that Irvin would eventually run as its president and CEO. As a youngster, he watched his father race outboards on the Florida "Grapefruit Circuit" during

the 1940s and early-'50s. "I kind of grew up going to boat races," he says. In the early '60s, the Irvins became involved in sports car racing. Milner worked on the crew while his father drove. In 1967, they bought a 280 hydro from Tom Sheehy and this time the roles were reversed. Milner drove and his father supplied the labor on the crew. A year later the Irvins bought a new Ron Jones 280 cabover, one of the first of its kind on the East Coast. "We pretty much cleaned up with it, at least in Florida," Irvin recalls. Milner eventually sold the cabover to Sheehy and began driving for other people, working his way up to the 7-litre class. The following interview about the early portion of his career in the Unlimited class was conducted by Craig Fjarlie in September 1978 while they were in San Diego. It was first published in the February 1979 issue of the *Unlimited NewsJournal*. The story begins in the spring of 1974.

**UNJ: You were driving the 7-litre boats.**

Irvin: That's what I was doing in the early part of 1974 when Sheehy was scheduled to drive the *Miss Madison*. He got a chance to drive *Cott Beverages* and that left *Madison* without a driver. He recommended me to Bob Hughes. I went to Madison and was interviewed by the Board of Directors and was selected to drive. My first Unlimited race was in 1974 in Miami.

**Do you know if there were any other candidates for the *Miss Madison* seat that year?**

I don't really think so. There were some other people talked about, but I came highly recommended from Tom. I'm not sure I warranted all the recommendation Tom gave me, but he felt obligated to find them a driver. They kind of grabbed me 'cause they didn't have anybody else to go with.

**You got your first ride in the boat in Miami?**

Yes. I had actually seen the boat only one time and that was when I went to Madison. It wasn't even finished being painted yet. So, I really got a chance to

sit in it for the first time in Miami. I've always said that all hydroplanes, regardless of their size, are alike. Whether it's a 280, 7-litre, or Unlimited, they're all hydroplanes. You can expect pretty much the same thing. There are obviously good hydroplanes and bad hydroplanes, but you can expect the same reactions, given any situation.

**Your first race was in Miami and they had a lot of problems. A driver was killed, boats lost rudders, and so on. Did you have any second thoughts about continuing in the Unlimited class?**

I guess I was just naive enough not to let it bother me. When I got there Sunday morning, Skipp [Walther] had already been taken away, so it didn't really give me a lot of time to think about it. When you think about it, it sure does effect you.

**You had quite a day in that race. You won two heats, including the final. You just didn't start one heat, or you might have won the race.**

Well, the final heat surprised me as much as it did everybody else. Everybody had problems, which helps if you keep running. But in the final heat, I was just chasing the *Budweiser*. He went pretty deep into the last turn of the last lap. I just turned underneath him, got inside him, and out-accelerated him. I guess he



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Milner Irvin's first Unlimited ride came aboard *Miss Madison* in 1974.



was afraid to stand on it too hard. He had the race won, all he had to do was finish. It really kind of surprised me that I got by him that easily.

**The 1974 season was the first for Madison with turbochargers. Did they have problems with them all year, or did the crew handle them rather well?**

Like any time when you try something new, you have minor problems. Of course, Fendler started in 1972 with the turbochargers, so it was still a new thing. *Madison* was among the next to try the turbochargers. We did have some problems, nothing really major. A lot of things we did then, as I look back, I'm surprised they worked at all, knowing what we know now about turbochargers. I think we've come quite a ways. There again, when it ran, it ran very well. It was just the little things that kept us from running when it didn't run. They were consistent—more than they had been the year before. We were going faster and they were encouraged by that.

**There was some good and bad at Owensboro that year. The water was very rough on the originally scheduled day. *Justa-Pest III* and *Mister Fabricator* collided. What was it like out there?**

That was kind of a strange race. I knew I could beat the two other boats—*Fabricator* and *Justa-Pest*—and I guess Leif [Borgersen, driver of the

*U-95*] had voted not to run. Bill Newton had told us to go out and vote, thumbs down or whatever, depending on what we thought of the water conditions. It was rough. I voted thumbs down, and I guess Leif did. The other two guys voted thumbs up, so it was a two-to-two thing. Newton decided to let us run. Of course, with the *U-95* out, that meant I could pretty much win the race if I wanted to.

So, all three of us made a start. I was right in the middle. I was running kind of slow, just figuring I'd stay with them, trying not to hurt myself or the boat. Going through the first turn, I was right in the middle of 'em. I said, "This is no place to be," so coming out I stuck my foot in it and went away from them. I got far enough in front of them and then slowed down and ran just as fast as they were. So, I was not with them when they had their collision, and I really didn't see it. That was just a case of Charlie [Dunn] sticking a sponson in. It hooked on him and spun in front of the *Fabricator*. It goes to show, you can get hurt in a slow boat as well as you can in a fast one.

**You were second to the *U-95* when they reran the heat the following day.**

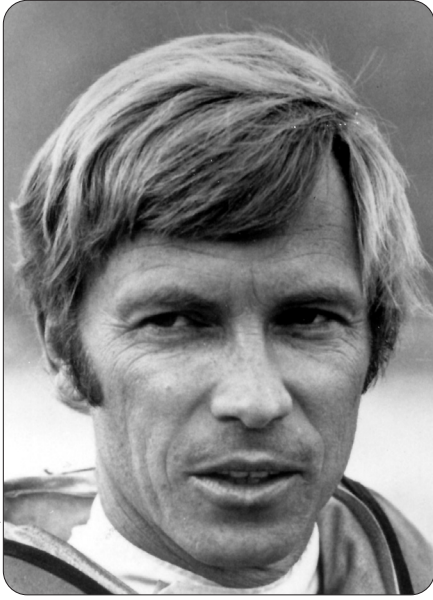
We were encouraged by our success there, at least our first lap. I started inside of the *U-95* and we ran the first lap side-by-side, although he

**"I've always said that all hydroplanes, regardless of their size, are alike. Whether it's a 280, 7-litre, or Unlimited, they're all hydroplanes. You can expect pretty much the same thing."**

In 1975, Milner Irvin was hired to driver Bob Fendler's *Lincoln Thrift*. He took second-place honors at Owensboro, Kentucky, and placed third at five races, including here at the Gold Cup held in the Tri-Cities.



Randy Hall



nosed me going across the line. He set a lap record for Owensboro and we were just a slight bit slower than he was. He went on to win the heat. I think we had some other problems. We did not start one heat.

**Later that summer in Tri-Cities, you and Bill Muncey had a good duel in one heat.**

Yeah, it's always fun to run competitively and run with someone like Muncey. You feel you're doing a halfway decent job and it's fun just to race. That's what the whole thing is about; sometimes we forget this is supposed to be fun. It becomes a business and there are a lot of pressures. But it is really fun when you get the chance to race with somebody, and Bill and I did. We ran five laps, he had the inside, and he beat me out the last lap, but we did run five pretty good, hard laps.

**How did you feel about racing in Madison? How did the people there treat you?**

Madison is strange. The people either love you or they hate you. I mean this from not just the driver's point, but anybody who has anything to do with the boats. They're either really sold on boat racing, or they hate it. No middle ground. You'd have people who come up and curse you and people who think

you're the greatest. I didn't feel any more pressure there as anywhere else, as far as driving the *Madison*. They certainly treated me fair. They always have.

**What was your overall impression of the *Miss Madison* hull? Some people felt it bounced the driver around a lot.**

Well, you took a pretty good beating. Of course, it was an outdated hull, really. It doesn't compare with what we have nowadays. Maybe I shouldn't say this, but I think it was outdated when it was built. It tended to ride hard. The air didn't carry it as well as it should. They continually added to the bottom of the sponsons, trying to get it to be light. I don't think they could ever make it light enough. It tended to hit hard when you came down. Not just the sponson, but the back end of the boat. I used to come back from a race weekend with both legs bruised from the hips down from being beaten around inside the cockpit.

In Madison in '74 I was going down the back straightaway and took one shot where the boat took off and hit nose first after I hit a wake. It hit so hard on the nose that I came out of the seat up against the steering wheel, and the seat cushion came out from underneath me and went forward to where my feet were. I had to reach down and retrieve the seat cushion. That's how hard it hit. It tended to do that. It was a very hard-riding boat.

One thing, as I think back on it, the boat did turn well. I don't think anybody faulted how the boat turned. I could turn it at 135 or 140 in Detroit, going through the wide turn.

**Didn't the crew try both inside and outside skid fins?**

Actually, they made the change between '73 and '74. They'd gone to the outside skid fin when I started driving it. But we went back and tried the inside skid fin to see what it would do. I tended to like the outside skid fin better. They put it back on. The front end wouldn't stick with the inside fin. The problem we had with the outside fin is it wanted to steer the boat to the left going down

the straightaway. You had to go down the straightaway and continually hold a right rudder to keep it going straight. That got a little tiring and also it took away from chute speed. It's a drag that's counteracting your forward progress. We did some work with it, and had the fin canted so it would steer almost straight. We almost solved that.

**In 1975 you got a ride in the *Lincoln Thrift*.**

Yeah, '75 was enjoyable. I made a deal with Fendler. I think they had a rather poor year in '74.

**Mickey Remund didn't particularly care for the boat.**

No, he had some bad experiences.

**Did you have any input from him?**

No, very little, through no fault of Mickey. He was just thoroughly disgusted with it.

**That was rather obvious.**

Yeah, I did [have some input] in '75 once I started, but what had transpired between '74 and '75 is the boat had been changed quite a bit.

**They put the wing on.**

Right, the wing went on, they rebalanced it and moved the engine around. So, any input from Mickey was not really valid. It did not apply to the boat.

**When did you get your first test run in the *Lincoln*?**

I went out in April to Phoenix and we went to Lake Pleasant and set up sort of a course. It was just us, the crew, and a bunch of media people. That was the first ride, the boat with the wing, and painted like it was going to be. Very nice boat. Impressive, although we were running on fairly smooth water, which, as it ended up, kind of fooled us. The boat stayed on the water at some fairly fast chute speeds and it seemed to turn fairly well. From the very first, I liked the boat. I liked the way it handled, the way it rode. It was much superior, comfort-wise, to the *Madison*. I really liked it.

We tended to fool ourselves, though. We got out there and it ran super in smooth water and we thought we were



closer to being ready to race than we were. Of course, when we got to Miami in the latter part of May, it tended to fly pretty bad in rough water.

**You had a lot of rocking back and forth.**

The boat had just way too much air under it. So, that was the start of our work.

**The crew spent nearly every race changing something.**

We tried something new, trying not to change two things at once. We tried to go with what we thought would do the most good all year long until we got to San Diego. But in Miami, we really weren't ready. The boat would take off and fly at very low speeds.

The wing is there as a stabilizing factor. It cannot correct a bad situation. When we put the wing down to keep the nose down on the chutes, it really had an adverse effect in the turns. It wanted to plow very bad. You came out of the turns and it would jump and hop and water would come over the sponsons. It was all right when you got up to 150 miles an hour, but it was terrible in the turns. Then if you made it good in the turns, you couldn't go over 135. The wing cannot be used as a crutch very well.

**Did you ever drive the boat without the wing?**

One time. We played with the wing quite a bit. We finally got to Madison. We decided to take the wing off, just to see, in testing on Friday. I made two laps and told 'em that I couldn't drive it that way. From that very quick test, we decided not to run without the wing.

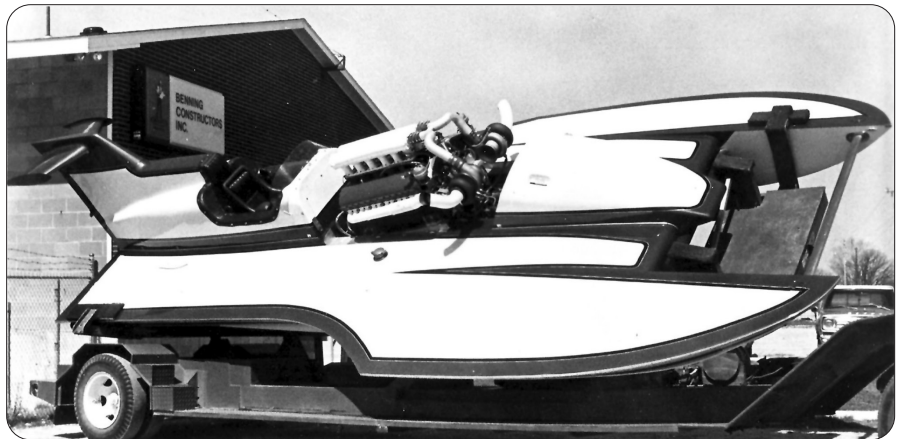
We did two things that Mickey wasn't doing in '74. We decided the boat was built to have the wing because of weight and aerodynamics. So, the wing was a very integral part of the boat. The second thing was that the boat needed a three-bladed propeller. It was also designed for a three-bladed prop. So, those two things we decided we had to stay with. The other changes we made were to sponsons and to center of balance—



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

**TOP:** The *Lincoln Thrift* team tried several different options with the tail while Irvin was driving. The boat is shown here during the two laps it ran without a tail during testing at Madison. **MIDDLE:** The team also tried vertical tails on the wing, as here on Firebird Lake near Phoenix. **ABOVE:** In 1976, Irvin drove the U-7 in three races.

moving the engine around, tanks, whatever. We progressed each race, got a little better.

**At Seafair you added the vertical slats to the wing.**

Very much like a Cessna Skymaster.  
**What effect did it have?**

Well, the idea was to counteract some of the sponson walking, the oscillations from side to side—not longitudinally. At the time, the *Weisfeld's* had a win with the center part that acted as the vertical stabilizer. We figured we'd go one better and put one on each side. Of course, we didn't have a center cowling to bolt it to. It did help a little. I could tell an obvious difference, although the boat still sponson walked.

**The week before at Tri-Cities you and Tommy D'Eath had an exciting duel.**

We ran with Tommy D'Eath for six laps. Set a Gold Cup heat record. We were right on the money. We had everything dialed in. I think we ran the six laps and averaged 113.6. We really figured we had everything set. We had everything dialed in like we wanted it. Although, in the final heat, the *U.S.* came out and ran the boost way up, they were gonna win or else. They put in a lot of boost and we knew they were gonna do it. We opted for finishing rather than going all out.

**At Dayton earlier in the season, there was a rainstorm between heats. The spark plugs got wet and the engine wouldn't start.**

That was the only race all year long that we didn't make the final heat. Very disappointing. It could have meant the difference between first and second in driver points for the year. If we'd had 300 more points...

**You may not want to answer this question, but we'd like to ask it. You had an injury at Seattle during the final heat. There was a lot of talk that Bill Muncey had made a dangerous move. Do you think Bob Fendler got carried away with that issue, or was Muncey at fault?**

No, you know, I've been very sorry about the whole thing ever since. We

made a snap decision based on what we thought happened and on what we could see. Of course, you'd think that I had a front row seat for everything because I was right there. But it's a little hard to tell exactly who does what from where I was. We looked at some films—Fendler did—and it looked like, coming out of the turn, Muncey moved over in front of me. From where I was sitting, that is what it looked like. But, as it ended up, it was a situation nobody should've been blamed for. It was as much my fault as anybody's.

Schumacher was on the inside. I was in the second lane, and Muncey was in the third lane. We went in all fairly hot. Muncey held the third or fourth or fifth lane, which ever it was. He was on a fairly constant arc all through the turn. Consequently, if you start with Muncey, and he made a perfect arc, then you can't really fault him. I was in the second lane. Let's jump to the first. Schumacher came in way too hot. This happens to all of us. He turned it. The boat took a couple hops.

**Didn't he break part of his skid fin?**

He may have. But when he came down and settled down, and he turned it again, he'd already moved over into part of my lane. Coming out past the exit pin it did it again. He got light and moved over. I'm not blaming Bill. It wasn't his

fault, either. I happened to be in the wrong place. I was between the two of 'em. The two walls of water came together where I was running.

**And you got it in the face.**

Yeah. I think Lee Schoenith probably made the classic comment, and it was very true. The throttle works both ways. I could have taken my foot out of it. But we were running for points.

**Firebird Lake in Phoenix was next, in September.**

Firebird was an interesting experience. Here again, I tended to like Firebird Lake, only because it seemed to work fine for us. The boat ran well in smooth water. That was one of the things about the *Lincoln Thrift*. We very seldom had a chance to run in smooth water, which Firebird was. The second thing I liked about it was it was small.

In '75, George Henley and I were pushing for smaller courses. Now, we didn't quite want to go that far. It was an interesting experience. I don't think we should go back there. I don't think we should race on that small a course. There was no escape. But it was fun for me. I really had a ball. We had the boat dialed in. I'd come into the turn and stand on it. The boat would slide just like driving a dirt-track car. I had the boat sideways



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

The Madison Racing Team purchased the former "Winged Wonder" *Pay 'n Pak* in 1978 and renamed it *Miss Madison*. After Jon Peddie resigned as its driver, Milner Irvin took over in the cockpit.





Milner Irvin reviews the *Miss Madison's* performance after a run on Lake Washington during the Seafair Race in Seattle.

all the way through the turn. It really was too small to race. When you can't run two boats side-by-side all the way around the course, it's too small.

**Do you think they were lucky that nothing happened?**

I think so. Anything could've happened. When I was going through the turns, I'd drift right up to the beach where the right sponson was in very little water. You know if you miscalculate much, you're going to be up on the beach.

**It takes a great deal of control to judge something that closely.**

Yeah, that's one of the things that made it fun. You're playing with something that's fairly serious, but at least it's fun. It gives us a challenge. That's why I like the smaller courses. I don't think I'd have been happy with the three-mile course like they used to run, where it's hold your foot and go forever down the straightaway. The two-mile courses we've run, I've enjoyed. It puts driving back into it.

**San Diego had a good race. Lots of side-by-side competition. Some of it may have been staged.**

Well, probably so. We had more

power here. We finally got out big turbos and we went to more boost, safely, than we had all year long. Our manifold pressure was up. We had sea level elevations and salt water, which obviously is faster. We had cool days, which gave us air density for more horsepower. We were running very well. We did have handling problems again.

If I can back up a minute, in Pasco we thought we had everything dialed in. It was a very hot day and the boat did not fly in Pasco, because air density, when it is hot, is thinner. Even at sea level, hot air is thinner than cold air. So, we left everything exactly the way it was. We went one week later to Seattle and the boat started to fly again, so we had to make some changes in Seattle. We got to San Diego, we had handling problems again. We weren't handling like we wanted. I remember one heat, I got inside of George Henley and the *Pay 'n Pak* and we ran five laps pretty strong. George did beat me at the finish.

**They said he beat you by five feet.**

It was close. I couldn't tell who won, and I was sitting in the front of the boat!

**Following that heat, Bob Fendler**

**walked through the pits shaking his head saying, "They don't let me win." At that point, did he have some idea that he wouldn't be back the next season? Was he desperate to win for that reason?**

I think at that time he was still planning on being back. Of course, I wasn't on the inside of everything that went on. I didn't really know. It took me by surprise. If he knew, none of the crew did. We had already bought the aluminum for a new boat. We were building a new boat.

We had plans for '76. We knew what we were going to have to do to make the *Lincoln Thrift* run. In other words, we could make some changes on the existing hull, or we could build a new one. It was going to be six-to-one, half-a-dozen to the other which would be easier, so they started building a new one. So, I don't think at San Diego... He may have had an inkling, but nobody else knew.

**He seemed at times almost desperate to win.**

Well, you have to understand that he spent an awful lot of money...

**...and very little to show for it.**

Exactly. Which kind of goes to show it doesn't take all money. Money is very necessary, don't get me wrong, but it is not the only ingredient. You can't buy it.

**We recently talked with Gene Whipp about the time he drove for Fendler. In your opinion, what kind of owner was Fendler to work for?**

I think Bob had made a personality change and decided he was not going to interfere with the driver. I went to Phoenix to talk with him before I signed up to drive. He went to great lengths to explain what had happened in previous years, why he had four or five drivers in one year. In a way, he sort of guaranteed me that wouldn't happen again. In each case, he had a reason for getting another driver. The way he told it, it sounded very logical. But there was very little pressure, in fact. None from Bob. He would point out things he thought I should be doing,



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Milner Irvin driving *Miss Madison* in 1979.

**“Some of the old Madison drivers said, ‘Why didn’t they have that boat when we were driving?’ I think Ron Snyder said he’d almost drive for free to drive that boat. It does have quite a reputation.”**

and in most cases he was right. I would try to follow his direction. It was not a thing of, “You’ve got to go out and win.”

**You had every intension of driving for Fendler again in 1976?**

Right. At the end of the season, that was the understanding. No talk about anything else except that. The first inkling I had of anything different was in October. We’d made a trip out there for the year-end banquet for *Lincoln Thrift* and the crew. We had a nice party out there. Everything was nice. There was some inkling of problems then. He mentioned that he was being pressured politically by whoever controlled the banking laws in the state. He was having problems. But we came away thinking we were going to run in ‘76. I got a call at home, sometime in November. That was quite a shock.

**The next season you drove Gene Benning’s U-7 in three races. Probably not a highlight in your career.**

I think Gene thought he was going to have a winning boat. He was convinced the boat was going to run a lot better, and I’m sure he was disappointed. I was, too. We didn’t have a very good three races. I like Gene and I like his whole family. There was no problem that way. He was paying me quite a bit of money to drive for him. After the Miami race, I asked him if he wanted to find somebody else to drive. I didn’t think it required a great amount of talent to experiment, to be a test pilot. I mean, they weren’t going to be competitive. I personally thought he could save himself some

money, you know, find somebody who could do just what I was doing, which wasn’t very much. But we ran three races. Then he had the chance to rent the boat to Rosenberg, and I guess it solved the situation for both of us.

**The only race of any note was the Gold Cup on the Detroit River. You managed to survive for third place.**

That was basically it. We managed to last. Gene knew it, he’d made some changes on his crew and the situation on the crew wasn’t that good. They had some ideas that used to work but they don’t anymore. They thought they could make it work. When they decided to finally hook the nitrous oxide up, it was Detroit and that made a difference. The boat would accelerate. The boat’s not all that bad. The boat should run.

**It gives the impression of being rather heavy.**

It is heavy. I don’t know how heavy, but at least it feels heavy. It took a lot of muscle, a lot of physical effort. It took a little more speed than I was used to, to get it up on top of the water—to where it would stay on top and feel comfortable. So, the illusion was that it was fairly heavy. They didn’t have the horsepower to really push it in ‘76. We managed to stick around, boats broke and crashed, and we did finish third [in the Gold Cup], which was financially rewarding to Gene.

**They were running the aux-stage Allison. How did that compare with turbos?**

Well, it didn’t, as far as I’m concerned. It was very lacking in horsepower. In all fairness to the aux-stage system, it never really performed like it



was supposed to. It didn't work. I'm not sure that was the total fault of the system, but it just didn't work during the time I was driving it. It lacked horsepower and had no acceleration. Without nitrous oxide, the boat took forever to get to 140 miles an hour. Coupled with a heavy boat and a system that was not putting the inches to the engine, it was rather disappointing for me. And I'm sure for the crew and Gene, too.

**Was this something Bill Cantrell was interested in making work?**

Both Bill Cantrell and Leo Macutza were instrumental on it. They had seen it work. It just never worked for them. It was disappointing, I'm sure, for them. The boat did run the following year with turbochargers, fairly successfully, with Ron Snyder.

**Following that, you were out of the cockpit until you drove Probe at Miami last June [1978].**

I'd sort of made up my mind to retire, basically. I figured this was a good time. You know, I've got other interests. It's not that I'm disinterested. I love boat racing. I had other things come up and decided it was a good time to get out. The driving of the Probe in Miami, I guess the best way to put it was to do somebody a favor. There was a need for some service, and I was available and in Miami, and

that was the way it was put to me. It was one other boat that we desperately needed in Miami. We needed boats, whatever we could get, and it still ended up being a poor show.

**Tell us a little about driving that boat. Bob Miller gets a lot out of it.**

I had a terrible time. It did everything wrong for me. But then, as I look back, the boat is not a smooth-water boat. The boat just will not turn in smooth water.

**It runs very well in rough water.**

Rough water is what it is made for. The Miami course is almost always smooth in the stadium end of the course. I tried everything in the world to get it through the turn and there's nothing—I could not get it through the turn. Yet, when I got out into the rough water of the bay, the boat handled fine. But it just about killed me, I was so beat. It just beat me to death. It took a lot of strength. It was an experience.

**That brings up the current Miss Madison. You're driving for them again.**

I'd like to say, I had nothing to do with Jon Peddie quitting. I was actually hired after Jon quit. Jon quit, he was not asked to leave, he was not fired. They were stuck, here again, without a driver. I'm sure there are other people who could've driven the boat for them. I per-

sonally like the Madison crew. We had a lot of fun in '74. There isn't any money involved. It was a vacation. They agreed to pay for my whole family to go to Seattle and Pasco. We had a nice time out there.

We made some comments in Miami, of course, when they showed up with their new boat [the former Pay 'N Pak "Winged Wonder"]. Some of the old Madison drivers said, "Why didn't they have that boat when we were driving?" I think Ron Snyder said he'd almost drive for free to drive that boat. It does have quite a reputation. There were two inducements for me to come back and drive the Madison: to come to the West Coast and have a vacation and to drive a pretty doggone good boat, really.

**How does it compare with other boats you've driven?**

Well, it does nice things. It does things that you don't think you should be able to do. This morning, we tried a new prop and the boat finally does what it's supposed to do, and that's go through the turn. This is the first time, of the three weekends that I've had a chance to drive it—Pasco, Seattle, and now—that I've felt satisfied in the turn. The boat finally got through the turn without doing something it's not supposed to do. This is all from prop. We haven't done anything but play with props.

To back up a second, Jon Peddie was a hard driver, but he had relatively little experience with hydroplanes. One of the things that he wasn't capable of doing, and this is just from lack of experience, he couldn't relate what the boat was doing and then give this back to the crew, to let them make changes. This was just because he was not familiar with hydroplanes. Helluva driver. He drove hard, but he honestly didn't know what the boat was doing, what it was doing bad or what it was doing good.

They really didn't have the right prop. The prop that they bought with the boat was broken after about two races. So, they've been jumping around from

## MILNER IRVIN'S CAREER STATS

YEAR	BOAT	RACE RESULTS					HEAT RESULTS					Pct.	Top 3	Pct.
		RACES	1st	2nd	3rd	DNQ	START	DNS	FINISH	1st				
1974	Miss Madison	9	0	0	3	0	19	5	16	5	0.313	14	0.875	
1975	Lincoln Thrift	10	0	1	5	0	30	1	29	7	0.241	24	0.828	
1976	U-7	2	0	0	0	0	4	2	3	0	0.000	2	0.667	
	MYR Sheet Metal	1	0	0	1	0	4	0	4	0	0.000	4	1.000	
1978	Probe	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	2	1	0.500	2	1.000	
	Miss Madison	3	0	1	0	0	8	0	7	0	0.000	6	0.857	
1979	Miss Madison	3	0	0	0	0	4	5	3	0	0.000	2	0.667	
1980	Miss Madison	8	0	1	1	0	19	6	15	1	0.067	11	0.733	
	Dr. Toyota	2	0	0	2	0	6	0	5	0	0.000	5	1.000	
1981	Miss Madison	5	0	1	3	0	14	0	14	4	0.286	14	1.000	
	Frank Kenney Toyota/Volvo	3	0	0	2	0	9	0	9	1	0.111	7	0.778	
1983	Miss Renault	8	1	0	1	0	20	4	18	5	0.278	12	0.667	
1984	Miss Renault	9	0	0	2	0	21	3	15	1	0.067	12	0.800	
	American Speedy Printing	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	0.000	1	0.500	
1986	Frank Kenney Toyota/Volvo	5	0	0	0	1	10	1	5	1	0.200	4	0.800	
1987	Frank Kenney Toyota/Volvo	2	0	0	0	0	5	0	5	0	0.000	3	0.600	
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>72</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>0.171</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>0.809</b>	



With Irvin driving in 1980, the *Miss Madison* appeared in two events as *Dr. Toyota*.

prop to prop, trying to come up with the right prop, and that's been their biggest problem. The propeller they've had all along has not been right. So, that was one of my goals, to start out in Pasco and forget about winning the race. Let's just get the boat to run like it's supposed to run.

**You had Ron Jones rework a prop for you.**

We had him rework a prop between Pasco and Seattle, and we went the wrong way with it. No fault of Ron Jones. We told him to do something, and it was the wrong thing. So, between Seattle and San Diego we had him build us a brand-new prop and take the one that he'd worked on and re-do it back to like it was before, only the other way. We thought we needed more lift in the prop. As it ends up, we need less. It seems to work. That's the one we're running now. I finally got through a turn like the boat should be able to. This is back at almost full throttle in the turn. That's what you have to have.

**What do you think the boat is capable of?**

'This morning we would've run about a 122, I think. According to my watch we were right close to it. I was using a different timing point than the officials. That's with some other problems I haven't mentioned. I was only showing 147 or 148 down the straightaway. We're not even doing 150, but it's all because

the boat's going through the corner like it's supposed to.

**Of the different boats you've driven, is one a particular favorite?**

I like cabovers. I don't know why. The *Lincoln Thrift* had its problems. It

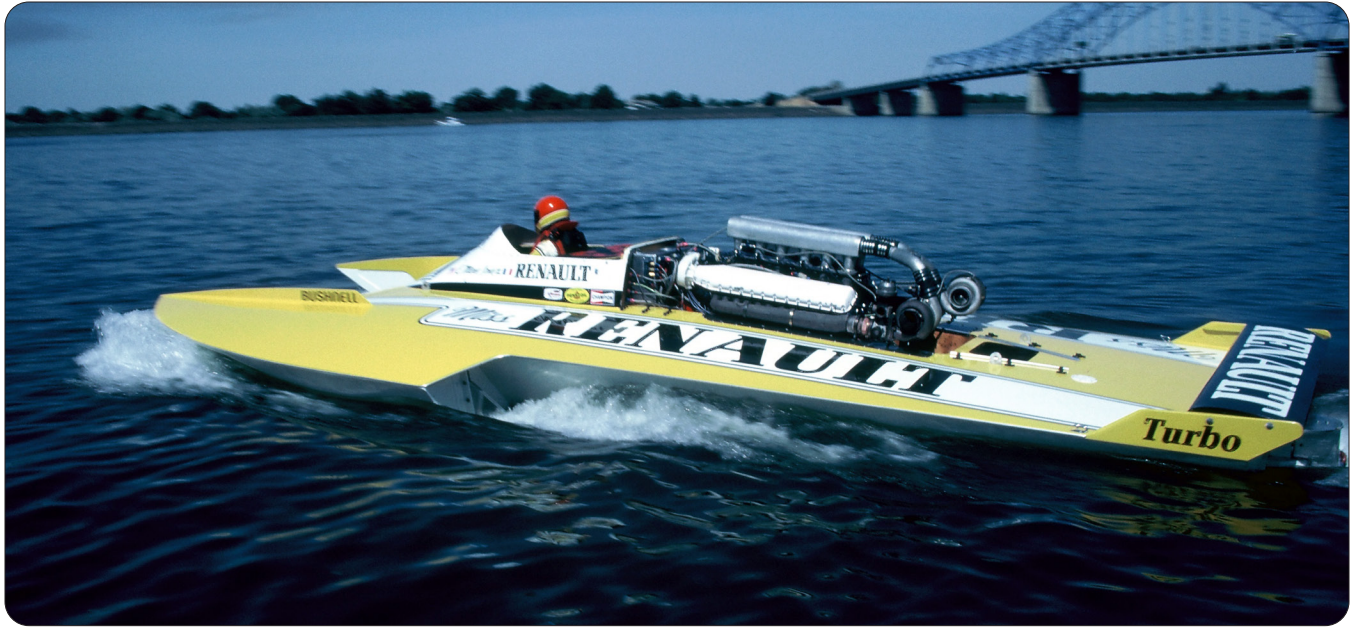
never cornered right. Never handled worth a darn in the turns. Gangbusters down the straightaways. Tommy D'Eath and I had the fastest chute speeds of anybody in '75. We'd run 180 miles an hour, no problem. Just could not turn either boat. His was a little different boat, because he was using a direct drive instead of a vee-drive.

**Was that an important factor?**

He didn't corner that much better than we did, though. It might have been a slight amount of difference. It didn't change the center of balance. That's the only difference it could've made. I couldn't run more than 115 in the turns, no matter what the radius of the turn was. If you cock the boat, turn it, the left sponson would come up and go down, up and down, all the way through the turn. The faster you went, the worse it got—the more violent it got. We thought we knew the answer, that's what we were







Russell Knox

Milner Irvin won his only race while at the wheel of *Miss Renault* in 1983. He is shown here at the Tri-Cities race earlier that season.

going to do for '76.

But I like the cabovers, and I think if you were to go talk to Bill Muncey, he could tell you more of the same thing, probably in even better terms. There's something about sitting up front. You can see better. There's no noise, no oil in your face. It's a smoother ride. You're more attuned to what the boat's doing. The boat starts to walk, you can feel it. If you're used to it, it doesn't bother you.

**Some people say that a driver in a cabover has difficulty knowing what the back end is doing in a turn.**

No, the only thing is you've got less reference in front of you to know what the back end is doing. You've still got boat in front of you. All you have to do is just shorten up your reference. When the pickle-forks out there move a little bit, you know the back's moving a whole bunch more than the front's moving. It's just a matter of getting used to it.

**So, what's next for you?**

I really don't know. Those are things that I should be thinking about, I guess. But I've kind of reached a stopping point in my thinking about next year. ❖

*Of course, more than 44 years after this interview happened, we now know the answer to that final question. Irvin stayed with the Miss Madison racing team through the 1981 campaign then sat out the 1982 season. He returned in 1983 with Jerry Schoenith's Miss Renault and in the final race of that season finally entered the winner's circle with a victory in the Budweiser World's Championship in Houston. The secret to his team's success in that race was reliability, as the two most dominate boats at the time—Atlas Van Lines and Miss Budweiser—suffered issues that took them out of the race. Irvin continued driving for Schoenith in 1984, took 1985 off, then reappeared in 1986 behind the wheel of Jerry Kenney's Frank Kenney Toyota/Volvo, the hull that started its career as the Griffon-powered Miss Budweiser. He ended his driving career with two appearances in the boat in 1987. He later had a chance for more. As the story goes, Irvin was approached by Bob Hughes to have a third stint with the Madison race team, but when Irvin sat down and tallied the reasons for and against the opportunity, the reasons against had the greater number. So, he turned down the offer and decided to call it a career.*



Don Mock

Milner Irvin's final ride in an Unlimited came aboard the *Frank Kenney Toyota/Volvo* in 1987. The boat, the former Griffon-powered *Miss Budweiser*, is shown here using an unusual turbo-Griffon engine.



# AROUND THE CIRCUIT

## Race Site News by Chris Tracy



### Museum annual meeting and holiday party

The Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum (HARM) held its 2022 Annual Meeting and Holiday Party on December 10. While museum elections and awards were part of the program, it featured a talk from 2022 Gold Cup winning driver Corey Peabody.

Peabody talked about his boat-racing career, the 2022 season, and what to expect from Strong Racing next year. He grew up in a boat racing family and has been friends with teammate J. Michael Kelly since he was a kid, growing up about 10 houses from Kelly.

Boat racing was a key connection between Peabody and his dad and 2022 was to be a special time for the two. His dad had retired and was going to go on the road with Corey, driving the boat's hauler. Unfortunately, his dad got cancer and that blocked the plan. Peabody told his dad, before he passed away, that he'd win the Gold Cup and Corey says that,



Corey Peabody (right) was the featured speaker at the hydro museum event. He and his wife, Stacey, are shown here in a discussion with one of the event attendees.

in his heart, he feels his dad knows he won. In fact, Peabody speculated that divine intervention from his dad may have caused the hiccup in the *HomeStreet*

engine in the Gold Cup final heat.

Peabody attributes being tapped to drive an Unlimited due to his hard work.

When asked about the Madison blow over, he says everyone knows that often there is a giant hole in the corner. He didn't see a roller and he went over. His first thought after he blew over was, "Dang, we are not making it to the Tri-Cities race." He explained that he is really comfortable in the driver capsule and when the boat went over, he did not panic. He assured everyone that the boat will be back next season and it will be fast. "The Campbell brothers will do everything they ever wanted to do."

Peabody explained changes in the Strong Racing program. In the past the U-8 team handled all of the U-8 things and the U-9 crew handled all of the U-9 things. Peabody is now the team manager for both boats and is working full time for Strong Racing. Crew chief for both



The entrance to the museum decked out in its holiday decorations.





Lon Erickson

The first boat to carry the name *Oh Boy! Oberto* was in front of the museum to greet those who attended.

boats is Jeff Campbell, also a full-time Strong Racing employee.

Going forward, all will be more coordinated for both boats. “Engines for both teams will get the same amount of love,” he said. “Equal props. Each team will be given the best opportunity. The goal is for one of the boats to win each race.” He explained unique things about their shop. It has a large condo, so when people come to do specialty work, they have a place to live while they are working.

When asked about why J. Michael Kelly’s boat seemed slower and appeared not to handle well in 2022, Peabody outlined issues and corrections being undertaken. The team lost its best engine in Guntersville, which impacted speed. Cupping was found on both the rudder and skin fin—the cupping likely caused the poor ride and crabbing out of the corners, which slowed the boat, too. The rudder and skin fin will be replaced for 2023.

Why aren’t there more boats racing? Peabody speculated that money is an issue. He said it costs \$50,000 to show up and race each weekend, when one counts payroll, fuel, lodging, etc. And, that does not include wear. He went on to explain

that owners own a multi-million-dollar operation for five races.

Anything that breaks is more money, over the \$50,000. He used this as an example to illustrate why it is so hard to field more teams. He also noted that more younger people need to be recruited. And he thinks that the hydro gaming/simulations might help hydros reach out to a younger fan base. He also said there are too few younger people in the sport, even crew members.

HARM Director David Williams talked to the crowd of about one hundred. He exclaimed, “We made it through the pandemic.” He noted many museums folded during the pandemic. Eleven vintage hydros ran in 2022, including eight from the museum.

The HARM Board of Directors was elected. Noteworthy was that Kathy McLemore was elected to the group. Four awards were presented plus a humorous recognition.

The Gold Cup Award, which recognizes outstanding long-term service to the museum, was awarded to Patrick Gleason. The Presidents Cup, which recognizes significant ongoing monetary contributions to the museum, was presented to Gary Hansen. The Wahoo Cup, awarded to the unsung enthusiast who has contributed to the success of the museum over an extended period of time through efforts in the trenches, was presented to John Watkins. The Motorhead Award, recognizing service in the motor shop, was presented to Dwight Malhiot. The last award, the humorous Splash Award, was presented to John Watkins, the first HARM crew member to fall in the water in 2022. ❖



Lon Erickson

The scene inside the museum during the annual holiday party



# HYDROFILE

## Race Team News by Lon Erickson



### U-1 Miss HomeStreet/U-91 Goodman Real Estate

Last month brought the announcement of Andrew Tate being named to drive the U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate* in 2023. That hull, built in 2007, will begin undergoing some major upgrades led by Mike Hanson and the team. After the retirement announcement of Jimmy Shane, the Miss Madison Racing has chosen Dylan Runne (below) to drive the U-1 *Miss HomeStreet*. The 28-year-old Runne, from Rumson, New Jersey, is a multi-time national champion across several American and Canadian categories and series. Runne has a reputation for consistent on-course success, such as being the first driver in Hydroplane Racing League history to win three consecutive championships in three separate classes. He has experience in outboard classes, 2.5, and 5-liter inboard hydros. He has driven an Unlimited before, testing the U-91 for the Miss Madison team in San Diego last September, and completed eight laps on the Mission Bay racecourse with speeds in the mid-150-mph range. Off the racecourse, Runne is CEO of Fenom Digital, which is focused on supporting e-commerce systems for large retail businesses.



Miss Madison Racing Team

### Go3 Racing

The repairs to the hull of the Turbinator are complete and the base coat of "Turbinator Red" have been applied. The Allison V-12s will get some attention in the coming months.



Go3 Racing Team photos

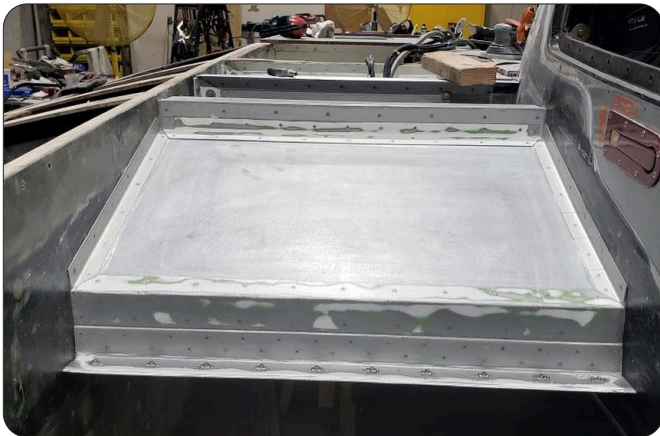
### U-12 Graham Trucking

Owner Rob Graham recently spoke with Hydro-News to share the status of his race team for the future. While he does have some team members left, he has also lost a couple key members. His former driver Andrew Tate has made the move to the U-91, crew chief Tom Anderson left the team last year, and turbine specialist Bryan Pyziak is now with Strong Racing. Contributing to the sport in which he has been a long-time sponsor and now an owner is something he wants to continue for the fans. Graham was quoted as saying, "If we have the crew and they are motivated, then we'll race. It has always been a team decision." He added taking a year off allowed him to do some other activities. But he says, "I also need to keep a healthy life balance and racing takes a village."



## U-8/U-9 Strong Racing

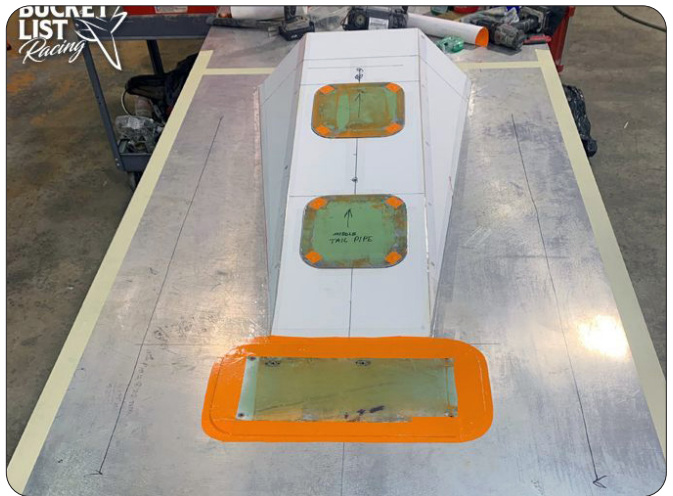
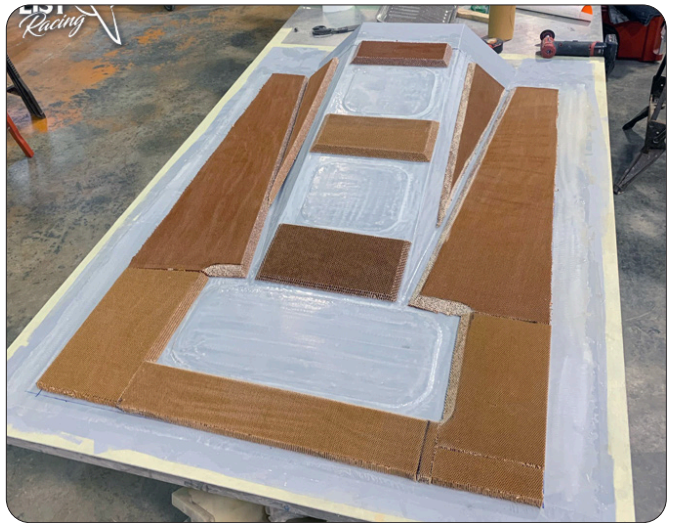
Both hulls in the Strong Racing stable are seeing a lot of attention. J. Michael Kelly's U-8 is upside down for changes and work on the bottom of the hull (below). Corey Peabody's U-9 is getting new framework for the bullnoses (below middle) and sponson rear sections (bottom).



Strong Racing Team photos

## U-40 Bucket List Racing

With more fabrication time during the off-season, the BLR team chose to build a new transom deck piece, and a spare, for the U-40. The old transom deck (below), the mold for the transom deck piece (below middle), and the fabricated transom deck (bottom).



Bucket List Racing Team photos

# MY \$0.02 WORTH

## Editorial Comment by Andy Muntz



**S**anta Claus has turned his sleigh back to the north, landed safely at the North Pole, and is now booking a well-deserved vacation somewhere warm. Like he has each year, the Jolly Old Elf left behind lots of presents for the good boys and girls all across the world. We wonder if among them were the following:

Did Santa leave another national title under the Christmas tree at the Madison Race Team's shop in Tukwila, Washington? If so, for which boat? A case could be made for either.

Andrew Tate has returned and has done it before with a boat far older than the U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, a craft that stands as the third most successful boat in the sport's history and that needs only three more wins to reach the top spot. Tate is certainly capable of making that happen.

Or could it be the team's other boat, the U-1 *Miss HomeStreet*, which will be going for its fourth national championship in a row. Dylan Runne has never driven

in an Unlimited race before and likely will need time to navigate his learning curve, but judging from his performance in testing at San Diego last fall and the continued dominance of his boat, it's safe to assume there will be at least several race victories in his future this season.

Did that 2023 title get left under the tree at the Strong Racing Team shop in Auburn, Washington, instead? It's entirely possible. Both drivers are returning for their third year, and both have scores to settle. For the U-8, the team believes it has identified the culprit that made the boat a shadow of its former self this past year. If that's so, look for J. Michael Kelly to be back in contention at every event.

There also will be lots of anticipation for the performance of the U-9, which was clearly *Miss HomeStreet's* biggest threat before it went flying at Madison. Corey Peabody will be back in its cockpit and there's lots of speculation that the rejuvenated old hull will be even better than it was before the accident.

Let's hope Santa left better luck un-

der the tree at the Bucket List Racing Team shop near Snohomish, Washington. How could it be any worse? With Dustin Echols now in the cockpit, and take away the log collision, flip, thrown propeller blade, and other foibles from last year, perhaps 2023 will see the boat's promise and flashes of brilliance finally become longer and more consistent.

More speed and better reliability would have been welcome gifts under the tree at the U-11 Unlimited Racing Group tree in Cle Elum, Washington. We hope Santa included that on his list. And, let's hope he left stronger props and more races under the tree at the Go3 Racing Team headquarters in Evansville, Indiana. Was showing up at some races wrapped in ribbons, bows, and pretty paper for both the *Graham Trucking* and *Lakeridge Paving* squads?

Of course, we hope Santa was good to you, as well, and that 2023 brings you lots of fun and excitement. Happy New Year! ❖

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