



SEPTEMBER 2025

## A surprise win for the ages



Chris Denslow

Dave Villwock (right) and members of the *Miss Apollo* crew celebrate Villwock's record-tying 11th career Gold Cup victory.

BY MAC CLOUSE

As the hydroplanes came to the Tri-Cities to battle for the 2025 Gold Cup, there were three prerace favorites. The two Strong Racing boats, *Beacon Plumbing* and *Beacon Electric*, have been successful on what they consider their “home” course. In the only completed race this year, *Miss Goodman Real Estate* was dominant in its win in Madison. However, the surprise winner was Dave Villwock in the *Miss Apollo*.

The 71-year-old Villwock is the oldest driver to win a race. He last won the Gold Cup in 2012 in Detroit and is now

tied with Chip Hanauer with 11 Gold Cup wins. It was win number 68 for the winningest driver in history. The win was also the first win for Bruce Ratchford, the Tri-Cities resident who bought the Madison racing team boats in the winter.

### Friday: Testing and Qualifying

The seven boats in the pits were U-8 *Beacon Electric* (J. Michael Kelly), U-9 *Beacon Plumbing* (Corey Peabody), U-11 *Miss FLAV-R-PAC* (Jamie Nilsen), U-12 *Graham Trucking* (Jeff Bernard), U-21 *Spirit of America* (Gunnar O’Farrell), U-27 *Miss Apollo*

(Dave Villwock), and U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate* (Andrew Tate). The Friday schedule had testing at 8 a.m. and qualifying at 1:50 p.m.

This year’s course was different. Last year, there was a problem with shallow water at the entrance to the second turn. So, the entrance to turn two was moved in towards the Kennewick side of the river. The result was that the second turn was now tighter. To keep the course at 2.5 miles, turn one was widened. The course was now shaped like a tear drop, not an oval. “It will be a different course, but it is what it is. Past comparisons are out. All

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Chris Denslow

**ABOVE:** Dave Villwock qualified the U-27 *Miss Apollo* at 161.603 mph to become the third-fastest in the field. **RIGHT:** As has been his custom all season long, Andrew Tate piloted *Miss Goodman Real Estate* to the fastest qualifying speed. At Tri-Cities he was timed at 164.647 mph.



Chris Denslow

**Most teams were working on combinations and fuel flows, which resulted in three fuel-flow violations.**

the courses are now almost unique,” said Tate.

All seven boats tested twice, with *Goodman* posting the fastest lap of 165.733 mph. *Beacon Plumbing* was the next fastest at 162.651. Most teams were working on combinations and fuel flows, which resulted in three fuel-flow violations.

*Miss FLAV-R-PAC* owner Scott Raney said, “We are chasing things. We tried a new engine and a new fuel control, and we only got a 4.02 for our fuel. Our goal is 4.17 or 4.18, close to the allowed 4.20. We made adjustments for our second run and got a fuel flow violation with a 4.28. We can make adjustments, but we need to be on the water to see if they are working.”

The qualifying speed for the Gold Cup is the average of two consecutive laps. The first boat out in the first round was *Graham Trucking*, which did 151.722 mph. *Spirit of America* did 147.967, *Miss Apollo* did 159.812, and *Miss FLAV-R-PAC*

did 152.504. *Beacon Plumbing* did 162.277 but lost it due to an N2 violation. *Beacon Electric* did 160.588, and *Goodman* did 164.647 to end round one.

In the second round, *Apollo* increased its speed to 161.603. *Beacon Plumbing* qualified with a legal 161.679 to move past *Apollo* for the second-fastest speed. *Graham* did two laps but did not increase its speed.

Shortly after leaving the dock for its second attempt, *FLAV-R-PAC*’s short shaft broke, sending the prop to the bottom of the river. “I’m glad it happened before we got on a plane and to speed. There is no damage. We have another short shaft, and we have the GPS coordinates to help some divers look for the prop,” said owner Raney. The divers could not find the prop and would try again on Monday.



# Notes and quotes from the pits.

BY MAC CLOUSE

## **Shannon Raney:**

“Our sponsor from last year, Mercurys Coffee, decided to use their money to expand their business. The FLAV-R-PAC people were going to sit out this year after Kelly Stocklin decided not to race this year. So, we were connected to the FLAV-R-PAC people and we finalized a deal at the end of April, three weeks before the May testing session.

“We scrambled to get the boat and the trucks re-configured to FLAV-R-PAC’s blue and yellow and their logos. For testing, we had everything done except for new uniforms. The FLAV-R-PAC people wanted to do the full circuit. It was very much a family decision. They have a home on the Pasco side of the course, and they will all be there to cheer for us. Like last year, we will have lots of merchandise, just no free coffee or frozen vegetables.”

## **Darrell Strong:**

“Thank God we are out west. The advice in Fortune Cookies should say “Don’t race in the South in June.” We are looking at some race sites north of Madison.”

## **Corey Peabody:**

“We have done well here. I need to get in the right spot before the race begins and have the boat speed to get in and out of turn one. In the Madison final, I wanted to be in lane three, but I ended up in lane two. In the first turn, I started to see the hole, but there was nowhere to go. It grabbed the boat and turned it into lane one for an encroachment. The water should be okay here.”

## **J. Michael Kelly:**

“My boat ride is a lot better this year, and it handles better. We are down on power, and we haven’t had much time to be on the water at the first two races. I have never had the fastest boat, but if I am in the final, I have a chance to win. I am not sure what I would do if I did have the fastest boat!”

## **Greg O’Farrell:**

“There was very little damage from the flip in testing in May. Our competitors here are helping to sponsor us, and we are representing our country. Gunnar’s grandmother and I told Gunnar not to do anything risky this weekend.”

## **Jeff Bernard:**

“I drove this boat in 2006 to 2010 for the Formula team.

It drives easy. We redesigned the canard system, and we will test to get speed. We have three engines and 12 props. These two weekends will be a big test for us to see about a full-season for next year.”

## **Bruce Ratchford:**

“Last year I got involved as a sponsor. After the season, I talked with Dave Villwock every night for about six months. He helped me decide to buy the Madison team. So now I owned two boats. I wanted to help Charley Wiggins so I bought his boat that we sponsored last year. The hydroplane community is a tight family. I hope I can help. Darrell Strong is great for the sport, and we have good competition. This is a real pleasure for me. I want to keep the U-91 running well and hope to get the U-27 to the same level.”

## **Vanessa Strong:**

“Prior to being hydroplane fans, Darrell and I were big fans of rodeos and race cars. Then we watched our first hydroplane race from the Pasco side of the river, and we became longtime fans. In 2012, one of the teams here needed a sponsor. So, we sponsored them with the PayneWest Insurance name and also got some local friends involved. We sponsored some teams in Tri-Cities and Seattle with that name, until we made a big decision in late 2020. We bought the Elstrom’s boat [now the U-8] and the Jones’s boat [now the U-9]. We are now big time involved. We want to save the sport and support the racers and their kids, who are now driving. I love the Tri-Cities, Madison, and Seattle races. The Madison parade is stunning. We plan on being involved for a long time.”

## **Tom D’Eath:**

Long-time Detroit boat racer Tom D’Eath was in the Tri-Cities pits and was also going to be in Seattle. D’Eath drove the *Miss U.S.* boats for the George Simon family in the 1970s and drove the *Miss Budweiser* for Bernie Little in the 1980s and 90s. He won the Gold Cup in 1976 in the *Miss U.S.*, the first cabover to win the Gold Cup. He upset Bill Muncey. He won the Gold Cup in San Diego in 1989 and in Detroit in 1990 in the *Miss Budweiser*.

In addition to watching two races and visiting with many friends and fans, D’Eath was in the Tri-Cities to present a proposal to H1 for a 2026 race in Detroit. He is involved with the committee that is working on this effort. The race could be either the week before or the week after

the Madison race. He said he has the support of the city and the city's business leaders. At the race site, the pit tower needs work, the judges stand at the start/finish line is gone, and the grandstand needs to be cleaned up. There was no mention of the financing.

D'Eath is now 81 years old. He lives in Florida and the Detroit area. In his possession are two vintage boats that he raced to championships. *Miss Washington DC* was

in the 266-cubic-inch class and *My Southern Style* was in the 150-cubic-inch class. Both are Lauterbach hulls, and they do not go on the water. He said he has a record that will never be broken. It was 13 years between his first Gold Cup win in 1976 and his second win in 1989. That is likely to be true, but Dave Villwock matched Tom's 13-year gap; it just happens to be between his 10th win in 2012 and his 11th win in 2025. ❖

## Saturday

**T**he schedule for Saturday had Heat 1A at 2:45 p.m. and 1B at 3 p.m. Heat 2A would be at 5 p.m. with 2B at 5:15 p.m. Since this was the Gold Cup, the heats would be four laps. The five-lap final would have six boats in the front plus a trailer.

### Heat 1:

The weather for Tri-Cities was tolerable all weekend with temperatures in the low 90s and mild winds.

During the milling for Heat 1A, Kelly in *Beacon Electric* told his spotters that he was having a steering issue. They told him to stay back and on the outside and just finish to get the fourth-place points. The other boats were *Apollo* in lane one, *Beacon Plumbing* in lane two, and *Goodman* in lane three.

Tate was first to turn one, but Pea-

body used his speed and the inside to lead down the backstretch. At the end of lap two, Peabody had about three-quarters of a roostertail lead over Tate, with Villwock in third, and Kelly trailing on the outside. At the end, Peabody won by a roostertail over Tate with Villwock third and Kelly fourth.

After the heat, Villwock called for the drivers' rep because he thought both Peabody and Tate encroached on him. "You don't get to move around that much in your lane", he said. No penalties were given.

Tate recognized Peabody's advantage of being on the inside. "Everyone prefers lane one here."

After the scoring up in Heat 1B, *FLAV-R-PAC* leapfrogged the other two boats in the backstretch to get lane one. *Graham* was in lane two with *Spirit* in lane three. The boats entered turn one together, but Nilsen took the lead com-

ing out of the turn and used the inside to win by one-and-a-half roostertails over O'Farrell, with Bernard in third.

Nilsen was partially pleased. "I wanted lane one, but I always want more speed."

O'Farrell was completely pleased. "The water wasn't too rough. We made a lot of different changes to the boat over the winter, and it is good. This is my first second-place in a heat."

### Heat 2:

Prior to the second set of heats, Kelly was concerned. "We have a low-fuel problem. This morning, we made some changes to get more fuel flow, but in the test session we had too much and got a fuel-flow violation. I wanted to see in 1A if we fixed the problem, but we couldn't really tell because I had to run at reduced speed because of the steering problem. The steering is fixed, but I am in bad shape for points and still don't know about our fuel problem."

In Heat 2A, *Graham* was in lane one, *Apollo* was in lane two, *FLAV-R-PAC* was in lane three, and *Beacon Plumbing* was in lane four. Villwock was first to turn one and used the inside to lead Peabody by less than one second at the end of lap one. Nilsen was in third with Bernard in fourth. Villwock kept his narrow lead in lap two, but Peabody passed him in the backstretch of lap three and pulled away to win. Villwock was second, Nilsen was third, and Bernard was fourth.

However, after the boats returned to the pits, it was announced that Villwock encroached on Peabody after the score



Jeff Bernard in *Graham Trucking* (the red boat) was side by side with Gunnar O'Farrell in *Spirit of America* going into the first turn of Heat 1B.

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up as the boats went into turn one. He got a one-minute penalty, which made the official finish *Beacon Plumbing* first, *FLAV-R-PAC* second, *Graham* third, and *Apollo* fourth.

In Heat 2B, *Beacon Electric* was in lane one, *Goodman* was in lane two, and *Spirit* was in lane three. Kelly was first in and out of turn one and from the inside led Tate by a roostertail at the end of lap one, with O'Farrell in third. Tate reduced Kelly's lead to three-quarters of a roostertail in lap two and to one-half of a roostertail in lap three. But Tate couldn't get any closer, and Kelly won by one-half of a roostertail, with O'Farrell finishing third.

At the end of the day, the Strong Racing Team's success on the Columbia River was still evident. Peabody had two heat wins, and Kelly had just beaten Tate in 2A. "I am happy for both boats, and JMK was okay for fuel in 2B," said Peabody.

## Sunday

**T**he Sunday schedule had Heat 3A at 10:20 a.m., with 3B at 10:45 a.m. Heat 4A was scheduled for 2:30 p.m., with 4B at 3 p.m. The final would be at 5:25 p.m.

In the Sunday-morning testing, the field was reduced to six. *Graham* left the pits, went down the backstretch, and entered turn two. At the apex of the turn, one of the blades broke off of the propeller. The result was serious damage to the bottom and rear of the boat, especially in the area of the strut. It was a long tow back to the pits, and the boat was taking on some water. They got back to the pits okay, but their day was done, and there would be a lot of work to do to have the boat ready for Seattle.

## Heat 3:

Gold Cup rules do not allow a redraw. So Heat 3A would still have four boats as drawn, but Heat 3B would have only two boats. Heat 4 would have two sections with three boats in each.



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**TOP:** In a scene that typifies racing in the Tri-Cities, the boats speed onto the racecourse from the dock that parallels the pit area immediately after the five-minute warning is given. **MIDDLE:** Andrew Tate in *Miss Goodman Real Estate* enjoys a narrow lead over J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric*. **ABOVE:** Cory Peabody brings *Beacon Plumbing* back to the pit area after a run on the Columbia River.

Miss FLAV-R-PAC was also having some problems. Raney said, “We found a problem with the gearbox this morning in our trailer test. So, we took it out and put in a different one. We have now fixed the original problem, but we will have to race this next heat with the replacement. We may not be as competitive, but we need to get points for the final.”

Heat 3A turned out to be a three-boat heat, but it had the best racing of the day. FLAV-R-PAC’s replacement gearbox didn’t get a chance as the engine wouldn’t start and the boat never left the pits. Their crew suspected a fuel-control issue. In the heat, Beacon Electric was in lane one, Beacon Plumbing was in lane two, and Goodman was in lane three. Kelly was first to turn one, but Peabody was first out of the turn. All three boats were close together down the backstretch.

At the end of lap one, it was Peabody in first, Kelly in second, and Tate in third. All three boats were within one second of each other. In lap two, Tate passed Kelly and was about five boat lengths behind Peabody at the end of the lap.

Peabody kept his narrow lead over Tate in lap three. In turn one of lap four, Goodman hit some rough water and hopped a bit. This gave Beacon Plumbing the opportunity to pull away. Peabody won by one-half a roostertail over Tate with Kelly finishing third.

While the heat was a good show for the fans, things changed a bit after the boats returned to the pits. Kelly was given a one-minute penalty for encroaching on Tate in the backstretch as the boats were heading to score up. Peabody was given a one-minute penalty for bearing out on Tate in turn two for lap three. That would have made Tate the winner of the heat, but his orange box didn’t pass the tech inspection. He was disqualified for an N2 violation. The official finish was Peabody first, Kelly second, and Tate with a DSQ.

Heat 3B went as expected. Apollo was in lane one and Spirit was in lane two. At the start, Villwock led by three-quarters of a roostertail as he entered turn one. He

# S T A T B O X

## Apollo APBA Gold Cup

### Tri-Cities, Washington; July 26-27, 2025

### 2.5-mile oval on the Colombia River; 52-mile race

**QUALIFYING:** (1) U-91 Miss Goodman Real Estate, (#1801), Andrew Tate, 164.647, 100 points; (2) U-9 Beacon Plumbing, (#92102), Corey Peabody, 161.783, 80; (3) Miss Apollo, (#0706), Dave Villwock, 161.603, 70; (4) U-8 Beacon Electric, (#1496), J. Michael Kelly, 160.568, 60; (5) U-11 Miss FLAV-R-PAC, (#0925), Jamie Nilsen, 152.504, 50; (6) U-12 Graham Trucking, (#0001), Jeff Bernard, 151.722, 40; (7) U-21 Spirit of America, (#1999), Gunnar O’Farrell, 147.967, 30.

**HEAT 1A:** (1) Beacon Plumbing, 152.968, 400, 480 (cumulative points); (2) Miss Goodman Real Estate, 152.071, 300, 400; (3) Miss Apollo, 134.960, 225, 295; (4) Beacon Electric, 96.338, 169, 229. Fast lap: (2) Beacon Plumbing, 156.304.

**HEAT 1B:** (1) Miss FLAV-R-PAC, 144.936, 400, 450; (2) Spirit of America, 144.158, 300, 330; (3) Graham Trucking, 140.165, 225, 265. Fast lap: (3) Miss FLAV-R-PAC, 147.550.

**HEAT 2A:** (1) Beacon Plumbing, 152.312, 400, 880; (2) Miss FLAV-R-PAC, 136.743, 300, 750; (3) Graham Trucking, 133.568, 225, 490; (4) Miss Apollo, 116.590 (one-minute penalty for encroachment on U-9 prior to the start), 169, 464. Fast lap: (3) Beacon Plumbing, 157.199.

**HEAT 2B:** (1) Beacon Electric, 155.703, 400, 629; (2) Miss Goodman Real Estate, 155.598, 300, 700; (3) Spirit of America, 135.213, 225, 555. Fast lap: (1) Beacon Electric, 157.538.

**HEAT 3A:** (1) Beacon Plumbing, 124.968 (one-minute penalty for bearing out on U-91 turn two, lap three), 400, 1105; (2) Beacon Electric, 115.817 (one-minute penalty for encroachment on U-91 prior to the start), 300, 929; Miss Goodman Real Estate, DSQ – N2 violation, 0, 700; Miss FLAV-R-PAC, DNS –, 0, 750. Fast lap: (4) Beacon Plumbing, 159.413.

**HEAT 3B:** (1) Miss Apollo, 146.416, 400, 864; (2) Spirit of America, 144.194, 300, 855; Graham Trucking, W/D – broke propeller blade during testing causing significant hull damage, 0, 490. Fast lap: (3) Miss Apollo, 150.278.

**HEAT 4A:** (1) Miss Apollo, 151.271, 400, 1264; (2) Miss FLAV-R-PAC, 146.455, 300, 1050; (3) Spirit of America, 141.151, 225, 1080. Fast lap: (3) Miss Apollo, 153.557.

**HEAT 4B:** (1) Beacon Plumbing, 153.938, 400, 1680; (2) Beacon Electric, 151.761, 300, 1229; (3) Miss Goodman Real Estate, 142.546, 225, 925. Fast lap: (2) Beacon Plumbing, 157.886.

**FINAL HEAT:** (1) Miss Apollo, 141.505, 400, 1664; (2) Miss FLAV-R-PAC, 139.186, 300, 1350; (3) Miss Goodman Real Estate, 138.609, 225, 1150; (4) Beacon Plumbing, 126.844 (one-minute penalty for jumping the start), 169, 1849; (5) Beacon Electric, 126.118 (one-minute penalty for jumping the start), 127, 1356; (6) Spirit of America, 118.395 (one-minute penalty for jumping the start), 95, 1175. Fast lap: (4) Beacon Plumbing, 156.644.

COMPILED BY ALLEN STILES

led all four laps and won by two roostertails. O’Farrell got another second-place finish.

#### Heat 4:

With only six boats left, race officials decided that the final would have five boats

in the front line and a trailer starting five seconds behind the clock and on the outside. The results of Heat 4 would determine who would be the trailer.

In Heat 4A, FLAV-R-PAC was in lane one, Apollo was in lane two, and Spirit was in lane three. Villwock was





Andrew Tate in *Miss Goodman Real Estate* (left) next to Corey Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing*.

first to turn one, and he and Nilsen excited together. Villwock pulled away in the backstretch and led Nilsen by one-half of a roostertail at the end of lap one. O'Farrell trailed in third. Villwock added a roostertail to his lead in each lap and won by four roostertails over Nilsen. O'Farrell finished third.

In Heat 4B, *Goodman* would again go against the Strong Racing Team boats. Because of the points earned in 4A, *Goodman* needed a good finish to avoid being the trailer in the final. During the milling period, before the score up, *Goodman* died in turn two and could not restart in time to join the other two boats as they headed to the score up line. *Goodman* finally did restart, and Tate chased Peabody and Kelly, but by the time they crossed the start line, he was already half a straightaway behind.

For the start, *Beacon Electric* was in lane one and *Beacon Plumbing* was in lane two. Kelly was first to turn one and led Peabody by one-half a roostertail in the backstretch. Peabody passed Kelly in turn two and was about one second ahead at the end of lap one. Tate still was half a straightaway behind. In lap two, Peabody was first into turn one, and Kelly was first out of the turn. Peabody pulled ahead of Kelly in the backstretch and increased his lead to a roostertail by the end of lap four. Tate still trailed by half of a straightaway and finished third.

Tate explained what happened. "I was in ground idle waiting in turn two. The engine fell off of ground idle and when that happens, it shuts off. I started it again, but some rough water put out the fire. By the time I finally got going, it was too late to catch the other boats."

The field was now set for the final. The front-line boats would be *Beacon Plumbing*, *Beacon Electric*, *Miss Apollo*, *Miss FLAV-R-PAC*, and *Spirit of America*. *Miss Goodman Real Estate* would be the trailer.

### Final:

In the milling before the run to the score-up line, in turn two *Beacon Electric* slipped between *FLAV-R-PAC* and *Beacon Plumbing* to get lane two. Then in the backstretch before the start, Kelly leap frogged Nilsen to take lane one. For the start, *Beacon Electric* was in lane one, *FLAV-R-PAC* in lane two, *Beacon Plumbing* in lane three, *Apollo* in lane four, and *Spirit* in lane five. As the trailer, *Goodman* was at the start line while the other boats entered turn one. It looked like some boats jumped the gun, and the start was under review.

Kelly was first to turn one, and he sped away from the field. At the end of lap one, Kelly led Peabody by a roostertail. Villwock was in third, O'Farrell was in fourth, Nilsen in fifth, and Tate in sixth. In lap two, Kelly maintained the

same lead and Nilsen passed O'Farrell to move into fourth. In the backstretch of lap three, Peabody moved to within half of a roostertail of Kelly and at the finish line, he only trailed by about three boat lengths.

In lap four, Peabody passed Kelly and led by half a roostertail at the end of the lap. In lap five, Peabody stretched his lead to a roostertail, and Tate passed O'Farrell to move into fifth. The order of finish on the water was Peabody first, Kelly second, Villwock third, Nilsen fourth, Tate fifth, and O'Farrell sixth.

As the boats returned to the pits, everyone wanted to know the result of the review of the start. At first, some people heard that the jumpers were U-8, U-9, and U-27. If so, Nilsen in *FLAV-R-PAC* would be the winner.

The *FLAV-R-PAC* team began to celebrate what would be their first-ever win. Other people heard that the jumpers were U-8, U-9, and U-21. If so, Villwock and *Apollo* would be the winner. A TV reporter asked Villwock for an interview, and he asked her to wait until everyone knew the official results.

Not much later, the official results were announced. The jumpers were U-8, U-9, and U-21. The official order of finish was Villwock, Nilsen, Tate, Peabody, Kelly, and O'Farrell.

Villwock got started in the Unlimiteds when he joined the crew of the *Miss*



*Circus Circus* driven by Chip Hanauer. Now his 11th Gold Cup win tied him with Chip. He was pleased and appreciative of the *Apollo* team. "It has been a long time since I got to lift the Gold Cup in an award ceremony," Villwock said.

Nilsen was disappointed. "Second place is successful, but now that we were so close to winning the Gold Cup, it makes me want to win it even more."

Kelly commented. "I thought I was good. I needed a good start to win."

Peabody was ready to move on. "Next week is coming. We'll now work on things for next week."

Tate did not like his experience as a trailer. "The rough water beats up you and the boat, and you have no chance of winning. Never again!"

Villwock talked about his final-heat strategy, "Many boats were going slow in turn two before the start. There is a lot more gun jumping now in boat racing, and you have to adjust your start as you hear the time counted down from your spotter. So, I decided to take lane four and make a good run with adjustments. The jumpers took off and didn't let up to adjust. I was sure I was okay. I lost my radio after the start, but I knew I would be okay as long as I kept Nilsen behind me."

Apollo owner Bruce Ratchford was very happy. "Thank you to the hydroplane community and all the Water Follies people. I feel for Darrell Strong and his team. Their boats were great today. I am thrilled for us. This wasn't supposed to happen, but our team has jelled and we are very blessed.

"After a disappointing start to this season, this Tri-Cities race reminded everyone of what we want each race to be—good weather, good competitive racing, a safe event, and a time to be with family and friends. Thanks to all who made this happen." ❖



H1 Unlimited



Chris Denslow



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**TOP:** The start of the final heat. We've added the start line and labeled the boats on this image from the H1 Unlimited YouTube broadcast. It clearly shows that J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric*, Gunnar O'Farrell in *Spirit of America*, and Cory Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing* were across the starting line too early. **MIDDLE:** The two legal starters of the final, Dave Villwock in *Miss Apollo* (closest to camera) and Jamie Nilsen in *Miss FLAV-R-PAC*. **ABOVE:** The waters of the Columbia River had turned rough by the time Villwock finished the heat to win his 11th Gold Cup.



# TATE DOMINATES AT SEAFAIR

## Kelly's four-year Seattle streak is broken



Chris Denslow

Andrew Tate and Miss Goodman Real Estate get the checkered flag to win the 2025 Apollo Mechanical Cup at Seafair.

BY DICK SANDERS

After a four-year drought on Lake Washington, Andrew Tate drove the *Miss Goodman Real Estate* to a flawless victory to claim the Apollo Mechanical Seafair Trophy, thus relegating the team's disappointing outcome the week before at the Gold Cup race to the rearview mirror. Meanwhile, Tate's chief competition, the two-boat Beacon team, suffered another week of double setbacks.

### Friday

**T**esting on Friday was under hot, sunny skies that would hold through Saturday. Friday's crowd on the beach, particularly south of the pits, was as large as I've seen in decades. Noteworthy testing among the seven Unlimited performances saw the U-12 *Graham Trucking*, the bottom repaired after losing a propeller blade in Tri-Cit-

ies, running strong and smooth with Jeff Bernard at the helm. On the third lap of the morning session, Andrew Tate recorded a 158.332 mph lap in Goodman, which would have been a course record if it were a qualifying lap.

The highlight of Friday was a noon-time exhibition run by seven-time NASCAR series champion Jimmie Johnson, driving Bill Muncey's "Blue Blaster" *Atlas Van Lines*. Johnson performed well once he got the balky Rolls Merlin to fire. The Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum normally limits the drivers' speeds in their boats to a maximum of 130 mph. Per the *Atlas*' onboard systems, Johnson reached 135 mph on several of the six laps he turned. Former *Atlas* team owner Fran Muncey posed with Johnson on the boat after the run in front of a large phalanx of photographers.

### Saturday

**S**aturday's morning qualifying session was uneventful, except for insufficient data collection penalties initially called against the *Goodman* and *Beacon Plumbing* boats. Those penalties were eventually rescinded by H1, with lap speeds reinstated, as the fault was determined to lie with the H1 equipment rather than with the teams. The top qualifier of the day was the *Goodman Real Estate*, driven by Andrew Tate, at 155.349 mph.

**Heat 1A:** Jamie Nilsen in *Miss FLAV-R-PAC* started the racing by doing what he does best, grabbing lane one in the four-boat field, but it was J. Michael Kelly making a perfect start in *Beacon Electric* and leading into the first turn, with Corey Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing* and Tate in *Goodman* outside of him. At the



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Chris Denslow



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TOP: From left, Beacon Plumbing, Beacon Electric, and Miss FLAV-R-PAC speed side by side on Lake Washington. MIDDLE: Dave Villwock rides the flying Miss Apollo. ABOVE: Corey Peabody stands on the deck as his damaged Beacon Plumbing returns to the pits following Heat 1A.

apex of the first turn, Peabody drifted out into *Goodman's* roostertail and the *Plumbing* boat went dead.

Kelly led for one and a half laps until Tate's ride showed a burst of superior acceleration and took the lead for good, collecting 400 points. *Beacon Plumbing* was towed to the pits partially submerged, with several missing or broken pieces, plus a gaping hole in the left sponson. The crew then put forth a masterful, coordinated effort to patch the hull and replace the numerous parts with the clock ticking to the start of the second heat.

**Heat 1B:** It was a wire-to-wire win for Jeff Bernard in *Graham*. Gunner O'Farrell, in the *Spirit of America*, held off Dave Villwock in *Miss Apollo* for half a lap before settling into a third-place finish.

**Heat 2A:** Gunner O'Farrell's *Spirit of America* never left the dock, victim of a bad ground strap. Elsewhere, a family emergency forced Corey Peabody to temporarily leave the race site. J Michael Kelly would fill in his place to drive the freshly repaired *Beacon Plumbing* in 2A.

(The rules say that if a driver is in the cockpit of more than one boat entered in the same flight of heats, the driver can only earn points from one of those boats. Given that he would drive *Beacon Electric* in Heat 2B and was likely to get more points driving that boat through the en-



# Notes and quotes from the pits.

BY MAC CLOUSE

## **J. Michael Kelly and his four-race Seattle win streak (prior to the race):**

“It will be cool if I can keep the streak going. A lot of the streak has involved luck and being in the right place at the right time. We need to put a boat together that works for the final. Last year, we got better with each heat. Bill Muncey is the only other driver to win four Seattle races in a row. It would be great if I could beat a Bill Muncey record.”

## **Jeff Bernard:**

“The crew did a lot of work this week to repair the boat. It threw the whole blade, which caused a lot more damage. We used a new engine in qualifying. I think we did a 149, but we lost it due to a fuel violation. We will use the rest of the morning session for testing.”

## **Steve David's return:**

Steve David was in the pits on Sunday. He and Nate Brown covered the race for KONG, KING-TV's second station in Seattle. He was greeted by many friends. There were lots of hugs and photos. This was Steve's first attendance at a race since San Diego in 2016, when he was the H1 Commissioner.

Saturday night in San Diego in 2016, Niles Mayfield, Bill and Dee Moore, and I went to dinner with Steve. We closed down Rockin Baja Lobster after a night filled with lots of conversation about what Steve wanted to do with H1's future, our suggestions, and all sorts of other fun things.

All of us left the restaurant with a positive feeling about H1 with Steve's leadership. Sunday morning, Niles and I went to the pits to begin the Live Chat that we did for H1 at the western races. To our huge surprise, we were told that Steve had resigned his H1 Commissioner position earlier that morning.

At an early Sunday morning meeting with the H1 Board, Steve learned that many Board members and owners were not going to work with him on his plans for changes. Without a Board and owners that would support him and that he could work with, he did not want to be the H1 Commissioner. He left San Diego even before the race ended.

Steve now lives in South Carolina and Key West. He spends his time flying his airplane (he is a certified instru-

ment pilot), playing golf (not well, he says), and playing competitive pickle ball (well, he says). He is still teaching real estate classes, conducting seminars, and speaking at events. He and his wife Sabrina are enjoying his “retirement.”

## **Dave Villwock going in circles:**

When Dave brought the U-27 back to the dock after the final heat ended, the engine would not shut off. He quickly turned back away from the dock and went in slow, small circles trying to shut off the motor. He opened the cockpit and reached outside for the emergency shutoff. But that didn't do anything.

Finally, two of his crew members got a ride to his boat and jumped on it to help. They discovered the problem. Dave said “This boat has a heel and toe gas pedal, not a pedal that is attached at the heel. My air hose got under the heel position of the pedal. It kept the throttle in an open position so fuel will continue to flow no matter what you try to do. We moved the hose and closed the throttle and the engine stopped.”

## **Darrell Strong:**

“Our team's grade so far this year is probably a B-, maybe a B because we did get second place here. We do have one test left in San Diego. One thing that I am discovering is that as I get more involved with the series, I am getting more satisfaction from the success of our series than just winning a race.”

## **KONG's Sunday TV schedule:**

Seattle's only live TV coverage was KONG, with Nate Brown and Steve David. Their coverage was from Noon to 5 p.m. This was strange. The only heat racing on Sunday was Heat 3 for the Unlimiteds. Heat 3A was from 11:10 a.m. to 11:25 a.m. Heat 3B was from 11:25 a.m. to 11:40 a.m. So, both heats were over before Nate and Steve went on the air. From Noon to 5 p.m., the only boat races were the 2:30 p.m. GPA final and the 2:50 p.m. H1 Unlimited final. Not much boat racing for Nate and Steve to talk about, but there was a lot of air show time. ❖

tirety of the race than he would driving *Beacon Plumbing* in one heat, Kelly opted to take the points from *Beacon Electric*. It meant that he could not earn points substituting for Corey Peabody in Heat 2A.)

Jamie Nilsen once again showed the tremendous value of snagging lane one. While Andrew Tate quickly passed Nilsen in *Miss FLAV-R-PAC* coming out of the first corner, the *Goodman's* roostertail provided a barrier to keep Kelly in lane three from passing Nilsen. Kelly challenged through the second lap to no avail. Tate coasted to an easy win, followed by Nilsen and Kelly.

**Heat 2B:** J Michael Kelly crossed the dock and hopped from the *Beacon Plumbing* into the cockpit of the *Beacon Electric* for Heat 2B. Bernard in *Graham* and Villwock in *Miss Apollo* rounded out the field. Bernard not only grabbed lane one, he aced the start by a roostertail and would hold it to the finish. Villwock in lane three drove a hard first lap, challenging Kelly in the *Electric* before backing off after *Apollo* got a little light crossing the start line.

## Sunday

**Heat 3A:** Sunday saw a heavy overcast that would last past the final heat. It would force the other crowd favorite, the Blue Angels, to alter their post-race aerial demonstration. Corey Peabody was back in the *Beacon Plumbing* for 3A. In the prerace fight for lanes, Andrew Tate positioned the *Goodman* to take lane one away from Bernard in *Graham*, but then oddly left it open. Peabody was in lane three. O'Farrell in *Spirit of America* hit the start perfectly in lane four but was in last place by the entrance pin to turn one. It was a terrific battle up the backstretch, with Tate pulling away and Bernard and Peabody dueling for second around the *Goodman's* roostertail. They were close until the final turn. For the second consecutive heat, the *Beacon Plumbing* boat found itself on the wrong side a roostertail and Peabody had to settle for third.

# STATBOX

## Apollo Mechanical Cup at Seafair Seattle, Washington; August 2-3, 2025 2-mile oval on Lake Washington; 28-mile race

**QUALIFYING:** (1) *U-91 Miss Goodman Real Estate* (#1801), Andrew Tate, 155.349, 100 points; (2) *U-9 Beacon Plumbing* (#92102), Corey Peabody, 153.652, 80; (3) *U-8 Beacon Electric* (#1496), J. Michael Kelly, 150.385, 70; (4) *Miss Apollo* (#0706), Dave Villwock, 149.703, 60; (5) *U-11 Miss FLAV-R-PAC*, (#0925), Jamie Nilsen, 145.410, 50; *U-12 Graham Trucking* (#0001), Jeff Bernard, DNQ - fuel-flow violation, used Commissioner's Option, 0; *U-21 Spirit of America* (#1999), Gunnar O'Farrell, DNQ - N2 violation, used Commissioner's Option, 0.

**HEAT 1A:** (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 146.830, 400, 500 cumulative points; (2) *Beacon Electric*, 144.758, 300, 370; (3) *Miss FLAV-R-PAC*, 134.584, 225, 275; *Beacon Plumbing*, DNF - went through roostertail causing hull damage, 0, 80. Fast lap: (2) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 149.170.

**HEAT 1B:** (1) *Graham Trucking*, 142.787, 400, 400; (2) *Miss Apollo*, 139.605, 300, 360; (3) *Spirit of America*, 134.558, 225, 225. Fast lap: (2) *Graham Trucking*, 144.770

**HEAT 2A:** (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 145.061, 400, 900; (2) *Miss FLAV-R-PAC*, 142.876, 300, 575; (3) *Beacon Plumbing*, (J. Michael Kelly drove in place of Corey Peabody due to a family emergency, team points but no driver points), 225, 305; *Spirit of America*, DNS - starter failure, 0, 225. Fast lap: (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 148.309.

**HEAT 2B:** (1) *Graham Trucking*, 142.215, 400, 800; (2) *Beacon Electric*, 139.324, 300, 670; (3) *Miss Apollo*, 225, 585. Fast lap: (3) *Graham Trucking*, 142.979.

**HEAT 3A:** (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 142.625, 400, 1300; (2) *Graham Trucking*, 139.648, 300, 1100; (3) *Beacon Plumbing*, 138.738, 225, 530; (4) *Spirit of America*, 126.195, 169, 394. Fast lap: (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 145.181.

**HEAT 3B:** (1) *Beacon Electric*, 146.256, 400, 1070; (2) *Miss FLAV-R-PAC*, 143.275, 300, 875; (3) *Miss Apollo*, 137.376, 225, 810. Fast lap: (1) *Beacon Electric*, 147.737.

**FINAL HEAT:** (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 137.673, 400, 1700; (2) *Beacon Plumbing*, 128.154, 300, 830; (3) *Miss Apollo*, 121.758, 225, 1035; (4) *Spirit of America*, 120.771, 169, 563; (5) *Miss FLAV-R-PAC*, 111.229, 127, 1002; (6) *Beacon Electric*, 109.524, 95, 1165; *Graham Trucking*, DSQ - safety zone violation prior to the start, 0, 1100. Fast lap: (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, 143.024.

COMPILED BY ALLEN STILES

**Heat 3B:** The final prelim featured a nice battle between Kelly in the *Beacon Electric* and Nilsen in *FLAV-R-PAC*. Nilsen found lane one without any opposition and used it to stay deck-to-deck with Kelly for a full two laps. Kelly won by a 'tail, while Villwock trailed through-out in *Apollo*.

### Final Heat

The trolling strategy had only been hinted at in the prelims. For the final, it was on full display. From the extreme distance that the north turn

is from most of the fans on the beach, it could best be described as looking like a bunch of kids splashing in a distant neighborhood wading pool.

By the time the race to the "prestart" had taken place and lanes were sorted out for the sprint to the "real" start, Nilsen had secured his normal spot in lane one in *Miss FLAV-R-PAC*, Bernard was in *Graham Trucking* in lane two, Andrew Tate in *Goodman Real Estate* in lane three, and J Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric* in lane four. Far back at the start were Dave Villwock in *Miss Apollo*-



lo, Gunner O'Farrell in the trailer-boat *Spirit of America*, and even farther back, Corey Peabody was in *Beacon Plumbing*, which took a couple of waves over the bow while trolling towards the prestart and took thirty seconds to get re-started from ground idle.

The fans saw an exciting duel up the backstretch of lap one with Nilsen leading Tate and Kelly. At the end of lap one, Nilsen was still abreast of Tate but the *Goodman* boat showed better acceleration and pulled ahead. It was about this time that drivers and fans were informed that at least two drivers, Kelly and Nilsen, had jumped the gun, leaving Tate with a huge lead. To the fans' delight, Nilsen continued to press and stayed in Tate's roostertail until the last turn, but the finish was long decided. A large contingent of *Goodman* team supporters welcomed Tate back to the dock.

Officials announced after the finish that Bernard had been disqualified for driving through the Safety Zone three and a half minutes before the start, with an additional penalty for jumping the gun at the start. Overall, it was a thoroughly messy final heat, with numerous driving errors, but thankfully, there were no post-race surprises of the kind that had become a staple of Seafair races.

After the race, J Michael Kelly was asked if he knew he would be over the start line early. "Not really until I got close," was his answer. Andrew Tate summed up his team's performance, "This win was a relief after last week. It was a relief because it showed that I can get the job done."

The *Goodman Real Estate* team simply had the field covered in every respect at Seafair. If they can continue this performance at San Diego, the national championship will be theirs.

But with the point totals so close between the top five boats, one slip-up could open the door to top competitors and dark horses alike. ❖



Chris Denslow



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**TOP:** With the large Seattle crowd filling the shore of Lake Washington in the background, *Miss FLAV-R-PAC* and *Graham Trucking* leave the pits at the start of a heat during the Apollo Mechanical Cup. **ABOVE:** *Beacon Electric* and *Miss FLAV-R-PAC* side by side on the Seattle racecourse. In the background are some of the thousands of fans who watched the race from yachts and pleasure boats that each year are tied to the logboom that runs the length of the backstretch.

# National Points Standings

## AS OF AUGUST 4:

1. U-91 <i>Miss Goodman Real Estate</i> (Andrew Tate) .....	4,075
2. U-8 <i>Beacon Electric</i> (J. Michael Kelly) .....	3,651
3. U-9 <i>Beacon Plumbing</i> (Corey Peabody).....	3,639
4. U-27 <i>Miss Apollo</i> (Dave Villwock) .....	3,354
5. U-11 <i>Miss FLAV-R-PAC</i> (Jamie Nilsen).....	3,277
6. U-21 <i>Spirit of America</i> (Gunnar O'Farrell) .....	1,738
7. U-12 <i>Graham Trucking</i> (Jeff Bernard) .....	1,590
8. U-6 <i>Miss Madison</i> (Brandon Kennedy) .....	225

# Jeff Bernard talks about refurbishing *Graham Trucking*

Jeff Bernard joined the *Graham Trucking* team in early 2025. He worked with the crew as they refurbished the hull. In the following interview, conducted Saturday morning of the Tri-Cities race by Craig Fjarlie, Bernard recounts the work involved in upgrading and refurbishing the boat, and the progress the team has made made to improve the boat's performance.

**UNJ: Will you tell us what you did to the boat this past winter? How is it different from the last time you drove it?**

Bernard: This winter we took the right deck all the way from the sponson tip to the back of the boat off. Assessed what was going on with the right air trap inside and outside. Over the years there had been repairs and doublers and stuff like that, so the boat had gained a lot of weight. I think there are seven doublers. We took six of them off and repaired the air trap inside and out.

There were seven to 10 broken frames. We replaced that. Last year, when Bobby and Dave's accident happened here, they did a quick repair to get it back for Seattle. We cut all of that out. Repaired the box beam going forward. The outside of the sponson, we put a new tip on it.

Then, while we were in there, since we had it all apart, we decided to make sure the spar was okay. Couldn't find anything that was cracking, but saw a lot of rust in there. We decided to cut the spar out. Actually, in the left air trap inside it was cracked all the way around. There's a new spar in there, new spar covers, new carbon fiber back put down, so everything on the right side of it and the spar is all new now.

That was about all the time we had. Got to flip it over in the [coming] winter, adjust some issues on the bottom and hopefully build some new wings, fairings, cowling, and all that stuff. I guess we didn't bite off more than we



The U-12 *Graham Trucking* during a Friday run at the Tri-Cities race.

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could chew because we made it here, but it was a thrash the last month to get it painted and back.

**The guys were obviously working on it when you went to Madison with your GP boat.**

I went to Madison and then I stayed back for Valleyfield. When I left, body work was 80 percent finished. The guys continued to body work it and I think Monday after Madison they shot the red and continued on through that week and then Monday after Valleyfield shot clear over the whole thing.

When I got back it was just assembling everything we took out, clean it, and I still had to build the seat. So, Valleyfield through here we were there every night. Group of guys on the team, there every single night until nine o'clock, 10 o'clock at night. Worked in the day and then go there. We made it, though.

**How does it compare with the handling now to the last time you drove it?**

Well, 2010 was the last time I drove T-6, from 2006 to 2010, and then in 2011 I drove T-5. Decided to switch boats that year. And then when I came back for Ted's last year, that was also when it was *Graham*, that one was T-5, too. So, it has been a while since I've been in there, so I don't remember every particular about the boat.

Right now it's easy to drive, everything handles well. We're fighting a little bit of an issue that I don't like, leaning toward the rear wing, but the boat's doing a lot more walking than I would like it to do. There are good things about walking, it means spilling the air, but it's walking to the point that it's slowing it down. So, we're going to keep addressing that issue.

We were fighting a fuel issue all day yesterday. Looks like we got that



handled, the fuel issue. Now it's just fine-tuning the boat ride. Everything other than the walking part of the boat ride is perfect. It's good, everything is good.

**Are you a little down on power maybe, or props, gear ratios?**

No, yesterday we had a fuel issue so this morning when we went out we're a lot closer and I think the speed will come up. Because of that, it was defueling so much that it was running way under 4.1 and it gradually got worse during the day.

Last night the boys found something and this morning it went out running better than it had all day yesterday, so now we gotta just sneak on good

fuel and N2 just perfect and we should be good going in Heat 1B. Our draw's good so we're happy to have a good first race and see how we stack up. We're a middle-of-the-pack boat right now, but we're not going to give up.

**How does it feel, in general, to be back in an Unlimited?**

It's good. Our team's jelling well. We got some old faces that were around even in the Ted Porter days. We got some new people, and everybody seems to be jelling well and we're having fun. We laugh a lot at the shop, so that's a good thing. That's always the biggest determinant in Unimiteds. The pressure and sometimes drama makes it not fun, but we don't have any of that on this

team right now and it's been fun so far.

When I left, you know, I didn't like the 80 mile an hour deal and was having way more fun in the GPs, but the new starting procedure, I expect we'll be having fun. It's more my style, the starting procedure anyway.

**That's basically what we wanted to find out, what you've been doing, all the work.**

We're rebuilding the team, essentially. Their team was depleted three years ago, so we had to bring on new guys and some new ways of thinking. Gearing up to go full time next year is the plan, so that's what we're working toward.

**Okay, well, thank you. ❖**

## News and updates at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

BY CHRIS TRACY

**L**ate July and early August are not only busy for the Unlimited class, but is about the busiest time of the year for the vintage boats and personnel from the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum (HARM), too.

Joined by the vintage *Blue Chip* and *Miss Thriftway*, HARM ran the round-nosed 1958 *Miss Bardahl*, *Notre Dame* and *Wahoo* boats in exhibitions at the Apollo Gold Cup in Tri-Cities, the last weekend of July. The highlight was the Dash for Cash exhibition run late Friday afternoon, sponsored by the Confederate Tribes of the Colville.

Saturday night of the Tri-Cities Gold Cup race was the annual Royal Order of the Turbine (ROTT) informal dinner and silent auction to benefit the museum. This year brought with it a few surprises. Museum director David Williams attended and spoke.

Williams noted that over the years, the ROTT auctions have raised more than \$60,000 for the Hydroplane muse-

um. He talked about his more than 30-year career at HARM, from its humble beginnings in the South Park area of Seattle to the modern museum in Kent, Wash. And then he made the formal announcement that he would be retiring at the end of the year. This had not been a secret, but this was the first time I had heard the formal announcement from Williams to a group. Williams also introduced his successor, Brad Haskins. A former Navy aviator and *Miss Budweiser* crew member, Haskins has long been a HARM volunteer.

At the ROTT dinner, two awards were presented. The Potted Palm award, given to dedicated fans, was presented posthumously to Don Mock, a longtime HARM Board member who headed up the restoration of the 1982 *Atlas Van Lines* and was the leading force that produced many of HARM's videos. Mock was also a successful R/C racer.

The other ROTT award is presented to recipients to recognize their ac-

complishments in the sport. This year, Mike Noonan was recognized. Noonan is a longtime official and crew member, including being the chief Unlimited referee for many years. Currently, Noonan crews on the *Goodman Real Estate* boat. He talked about his work with hydroplane racing and captured everyone's full attention with his detailed description of the fateful Acapulco race in 1981 where Bill Muncey was killed.

Also, attending the ROTT dinner was past Gold Cup-winning driver Kip Brown. Brown talked about his Gold Cup win. Key to the win was the sponsorship they had secured that allowed them the budget to be more competitive.

In Seattle, HARM ran a special event during the Apollo Mechanical Seafair weekend. Former NASCAR driver Jimmie Johnson drove Bill Muncey's vintage "Blue Blaster" *Atlas Van Line* boat on Friday of race weekend. Johnson became a fan of Muncey and the *Atlas* when he was a kid watching the races from Fiesta Is-



NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson pilots Bill Muncey's *Atlas Van Lines* at Seattle.

land in San Diego. At one race, Muncey's boat went dead and drifted to the shore where young Jimmie and his dad were watching. He waded out to the boat and Muncey invited him to climb aboard. He was a big fan ever since.

The HARM staff gave Johnson a quick course on driving and Johnson took the *Atlas* out. HARM's vintage *Budweiser* boat acted as a pace boat for the *Atlas*. Spectators were impressed with Johnson's rookie driving and Johnson appeared to be having a great time. His radioman from the shore (Chip Hanauer) was heard telling him it was time to "bring it back" to the shore. HARM also ran the pickle fork boats in exhibitions at the Apollo Mechanical Cup at Seafair, and *Pay 'N Pak*, *Budweiser*, *Atlas* and *Squire Shop* vintage boats all ran laps.

The Sunday after the Apollo Mechanical Cup, August 10, was the HARM gala garden party and fundraiser, held at the Seattle Yacht Club. This year the gala was presented by Goodman Real Estate. About 200 people attended and much of the Goodman crew was present, including crew chief, Mike Hanson and sponsor, John Goodman. Near the end of the gala, the Seafair Trophy was presented again to the *Goodman* team. The gala theme was honoring the 1985 *Miller American* team and their turbine Gold Cup win. Members from that team, including John Walters, Mike Campbell and Chip Hanauer, were present.

Museum Director David Williams spoke and reflected on many of the museum's accomplishments. He noted that in the past 19 years, 60 families participated in the J-Hydro program, introducing kids to the entry-level outboard class

of racing. Two of those young racers, Gunnar O'Farrell and Aaron Salmon, went on to drive Unlimited-class boats. Williams formally announced his retirement and his successor, Brad Haskins, also spoke.

Ed Clark, from the HARM staff, made a special presentation to Williams, in honor of his pending retirement. It was a photo of David Williams, Chip Hanauer, and Mira Slovak with *Miss Wahoo*. Williams plans to continue writing nonfiction in retirement. The gala raised about \$77,000 for the museum and maybe the most interesting item auctioned off was a dinner made by David and Linda Williams. Every year the Williams's auction off preparing dinner for eight at the purchaser's home; this year the dinner auction item was appropriately titled, "the last supper." ♦



Dick Sanders



Chris Denslow

**TOP:** A crowd of photographers working to capture an image of Jimmie Johnson, Fran Muncey, and others on the deck of Bill Muncey's famous "Blue Blaster" *Atlas Van Lines*.

**ABOVE:** Jimmie Johnson (right) with David Williams, executive director of the hydro museum.



# AROUND THE CIRCUIT

## Race Team and Race Site News by Chris Tracy



**T**he last weekend in July and the first weekend in August brought Unlimited races to the Pacific Northwest: first the Apollo Gold Cup in Tri-Cities and then the Apollo Mechanical Cup at Seafair in Seattle.

The Tri-Cities—Kennewick, Pasco and Richland, Wash.—bills itself as Hydro Town and two team owners, Darrell Strong and Bruce Ratchford, call the Tri-Cities home. The hydro races and the STCU Air Show probably attracts the largest three-



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day crowd on the beach of all events on the Unlimited circuit. The racing was generally good and there were several things to note.

KONA Radio broadcast the race and their coverage was tied into the venue's PA system. What was new was the KONA color commentator, former U-40 driver Dustin Echols. I don't think Echols had ever called races before, but he proved to be a natural, often providing racing insight that only an experienced driver could give. And his expertise was clearly conveyed when calling all the heats in all the various classes of boats that ran.

In addition, SWX covered the race live on TV on Sunday, with Kay-dub Myers Brewer handling interviews. She does her homework and provides knowledgeable coverage.

This year, H1 provided full streaming coverage on its YouTube channel all three days, anchored by Brad Luce, Tanner Foust, Arica Alread and Brent Hall. The UNJ Executive Board is made up of folks from many professions, including broadcasting, and our board member from broadcasting complemented H1's Brent Hall, and SWX's Kay-dub Myers Brewer for their outstanding coverage. The Tri-Cities H1 YouTube coverage was not without hiccups, however, especially after the final heat.

Some background: I viewed the final heat near the start/finish line. The PA/KONA radio simulcast broadcast made it clear to listeners soon into the final heat that the start was under review, and that the order of finish on the water might not be the official results. A few minutes after the heat ended, as I walked to my car, the voices on the PA/KONA announced that the U-8, U-9, and U-21 had all jumped the gun, which made *Miss Apollo* the likely winner, subject to passing tech inspection. By the time I got to my car and was leaving the parking lot, KONA Radio announced that *Miss Apollo* had passed tech inspection and was the winner. So, I, and those listening to the PA and/or KONA Radio, were crystal clear on what had happened in the final heat.

But, the PA/KONA simulcast was not heard in the pits! So, here's where it all gets murky and confusing. Apparently, someone misheard, misspoke or made a mistake and thought the U-27 had jumped the gun. (Remember, it was the U-21 had actually jumped, and that was clearly the announcement on the beach.) The U-11 team started celebrating, apparently thinking the U-27 had jumped and they had won.

And to add insult to injury, somehow H1's Arica Alread decided, or was directed, to interview an emotional, tearful Jamie Nilsen as the winner on the H1 YouTube broadcast. Anyone viewing the YouTube broadcast could see that Brad Luce and Tanner Foust were confused when the Nilsen interview started.

A few minutes later in the H1 YouTube broadcast, viewers watched Alread interviewing Dave Villwock as the winner, with no reference or clarification whatsoever about the previous interview with Nilsen. Mistakes are sometimes made in live broadcasts, but they need to be corrected, not skipped over.

By the time the awards ceremony was held, all had been sorted out in the pits. Nilsen acknowledged some things had gone haywire when he accepted second place, but took the high road, implying he was now motivated to work even harder to win in the future.

At the awards ceremony, the *Apollo* team was excited. While this was a historic win for Dave Villwock and the first race win for crew chief Taylor Evans, owner Bruce Ratchford was clearly touched by his first hometown and Gold Cup win and said, "I'm lucky to get with Dave Villwock." Then Ratchford gave Villwock a kiss on the cheek! Ratchford also thanked team manager Mike Hanson and remarked that it was his privilege to give back to his community.

The Tri-Cities race also included extra prize money for first, second and, third place, beyond what H1 pays teams to

attend. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla sponsored the prize money and symbolic checks were presented to the podium teams at the awards ceremony.

The Apollo Mechanical Cup in Seattle ran pretty smoothly. It was the first race that Seafair's Emily Cantrel has led since she took over as CEO. In Seattle, the hydro races are paired with the Boeing Air Show, that features the Blue Angels.

While the Tri-Cities race likely has the largest crowd on the beach, the Seattle race probably has the largest total attendance, because the event includes a long log boom where boats tie up and spectators view the race from their boats. The Seat-



tle race also has a large variety of special viewing areas, from corporate skyboxes, tents and reserved beach areas, to grandstands and other special viewing areas that include food and drink. The general admission crowd this year was especially large on Friday and Saturday of race weekend.

I'm sure Seafair was pleased with attendance. And locals appreciated a new food truck addition: the Fisher Scone truck was parked outside of the pits and sold raspberry filled scones. Fisher scones are a signature attraction at fairs across the Pacific Northwest.

Spectators on the beach most often tried to get heat details by trying to connect to the H1 YouTube coverage, but

cell phone bandwidth and cell phone connectivity issues were common, generally resulting in long, halting gaps in coverage. If one was not near a PA speaker, it was sometimes hard to follow the races, especially if there were heat penalties that changed the order of finish.

KONG-TV covered the race and air show on Sunday afternoon, but it was a little odd. All but one section of one Unlimited heat and the final had already occurred before the KONG broadcast started. There were taped races and lots of airshow. It was difficult for color commentators Steve David and Nate Brown to carry the show with so little live action during the broadcast.

And the final heat had a clear victor, the *Goodman Real Estate* boat. This was sponsor John Goodman's first win in his hometown and it was clearly special. Goodman was all smiles. And driver Andrew Tate was understandably happy, especially after a not-so-great weekend the week before.

The awards ceremony was rushed. It kind of concluded and then Andrew Tate was brought back and talked, where he thanked his team and sponsor. A few minutes later the Goodman team all posed for photos on the podium. Andrew Tate stayed well after much of the crowd had dispersed, kind of soaking up the win and redemption from the week before.

On Monday, the *Goodman* win was on the front page of the *Seattle Times* and on the front and back page of the of the sports section, as well.

### Late-Breaking News:

Darrell Strong has fired his team's crew chief, Jeff Campbell, as well as Campbell's brother, Mike. The two have been involved in Unlimited hydroplane racing since the 1980s and have proven to be among the most successful in the sport—having won multiple national titles and Gold Cups. The sport has named Jeff Campbell its crew chief of the year five times.

The Strong Racing Team has promoted data and electronic systems engineer Jim Sechler to be crew chief for both *Beacon Electric* and *Beacon Plumbing*. The Campbell brothers will now serve the team as salaried hull configuration and set-up consultants ❖

## We love to hear from our readers

### To the Editor:

Boy did you nail it when it comes to coverage in the *Seattle Times* and local TV. I'm one of those (in the minority today, I suppose) that still gets the newspaper delivered to my home address, and reads

it with my morning coffee, and watches evening local news. I have for years witnessed the gradual deterioration of hydroplane racing coverage in the *Times*, to where it is almost non-existent.

For crying out loud, NASCAR,

European soccer, bicycle racing, and a host of other minor sports news gets more coverage than our beloved hydroplanes—still the most exciting and colorful big-time boat racing event with the largest single-event attendance anywhere



on the planet. I have lamented for years that the only time we see local coverage here is when Seafair comes along, with no news preceding it about the season's other races that build up to the national championship. This year was maybe the worst omission ever—absolutely nothing about the Tri-Cities race in Monday's paper!!??

Lots of blame to go around in my view, starting with H1. Why couldn't I find news and race results on their website, presumably the same day? Other sports websites give same day coverage on the current day's results and stats. This may be symptomatic of why our local news outlets are oblivious to hydroplane news. But the local media doesn't care anymore for a variety of other reasons, too—sports writers and broadcasters with no history of Seattle sports culture are more concerned about the pageantry of Seafair for a quick few days, then move on to something else. I think we got more coverage on the loud-mouth infinitesimal few who want to end the Blue Angels performance than we did on hydroplanes leading up to Seafair this year.

Finally, the lack of boats and lack of race sites is contributing to the sport's demise. If this is inevitable, then the solu-

tion is to make these events a true annual boat-racing spectacle, involving multiple classes of race boats all weekend, like the Quebec Valleyfield Regatta, wall-to-wall racing, with only brief intermissions. Get more noise, with smaller boats leading up to the Unlimiteds being the premier event at the end, say right after the vintage exhibition.

Forget the long, drawn-out heats over two days since there are only a few participants anyway—they all make the final like in the early days of hydroplaning. I know, this is all ridiculous, the owners would never agree, but it's sad to see the present situation, and I don't believe it is in the long-term interest to keep trudging along with only a few race sites and fewer boats each year, with even fewer boat owners now too that are fielding multiple boats.

What happens when one of them quits? Reducing the field from six or seven to just three or four? Maybe it's time to treat it for what it is, a spectacle—a premier boat racing expo, if you will. Encourage more experimentation, seek to break records with the latest and greatest ala Gar Wood era. Those events drew hundreds of thousands to the shores of the Detroit River.

Quite frankly, I get more entertainment out of Mahogany and Merlot these days.

In any case, keep up the good work and carrying the torch my friend!

Best personal regards,  
Ron Suttell

Hello Andy,  
Dixon Smith here.

Thanks for the great article on the *Bud* enclosed cockpit. Jeff Neff has not gotten the credit due for his work, design and implementation of the enclosed cockpit. I was a consultant to the *Bud* team when Jeff was working on the enclosed cockpit, and I can verify from personal experience and knowledge that Jeff deserves FULL CREDIT for the enclosed cockpit. He sold the concept to Bernie, designed and had manufactured the enclosed cockpit.

Also, your "My \$0.02 Worth" article is SPOT ON!! I hope somebody associated with H1 public relations, takes note and does something about the lack of coverage.

Best regards,  
Dixon Smith

Keeper of the 1962 Green Dragon,  
*Miss Bardahl*

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