

FROM THE UNJ VAULT:

HARD-LUCK REX

The following story was first published in the *Unlimited NewsJournal's* March and April 1991 editions.

BY J. MIKE FITZSIMMONS

The spray settled, and the thunder subsided. The waters of the Potomac were quiet again. The river had become a death-ridden battlefield. One of the casualties was Arlo Rexford Manchester. The 40-year-old driver had paid the ultimate price for victory. It was his first, last, and only win in a major Unlimited-hydroplane regatta. The 1966 President's Cup ended the life of Rex Manchester. It ended, also, a winless career that belied the talent and tenacity this skillful driver displayed.

Rex Manchester was born on July 17, 1927, in Pullman, Washington. Separated from his natural mother and a brother, Manchester was raised by his father. He was taught from an early age to be an independent person: quiet, intelligent, and self-reliant. At the age of 16, Manchester enlisted in the United States Marines. Although below the required age for enlistment, Rex managed to bluff his way past the recruiters; and in late 1943, he found himself in the Pacific theater.

Manchester's detachment participated in the grinding fight for Iwo Jima; and it was in the heat of battle, while his unit was pinned down by Japanese fire, that Rex Manchester showed the bravery that would become a part of his future as a thunderboat chauffeur. Fellow Marine Henry S. Aber lay wounded, exposed to constant enemy fire. Manchester risked



Rex Manchester

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

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his own life as he pulled his injured buddy out of harm's way. For his bravery, Rex Manchester was awarded the Bronze Star.

Henry Aber recovered, and at war's end returned to his home in Cleveland, Ohio, never to hear from Rex Manchester again. Repeated efforts to locate the man who saved his life met with failure. It was in 1966 that Aber learned what had become of his friend. News accounts of the tragic deaths at the President's Cup brought the name of Rex Manchester to the attention of his wartime companion once more.

At the end of World War II, Manchester was discharged from the Marine Corps, and he sought employment in Alaska where returning servicemen believed opportunity awaited them. While residing in Alaska, Rex Manchester and his friends participated in amateur powerboat racing events. Manchester became adept at handling D-utility, B-utility, and B-outboard hydroplanes, frequently capturing the prize at locally organized racing events.

By 1956, Rex Manchester had distinguished himself by winning the Alaska National Championship and the gruel-



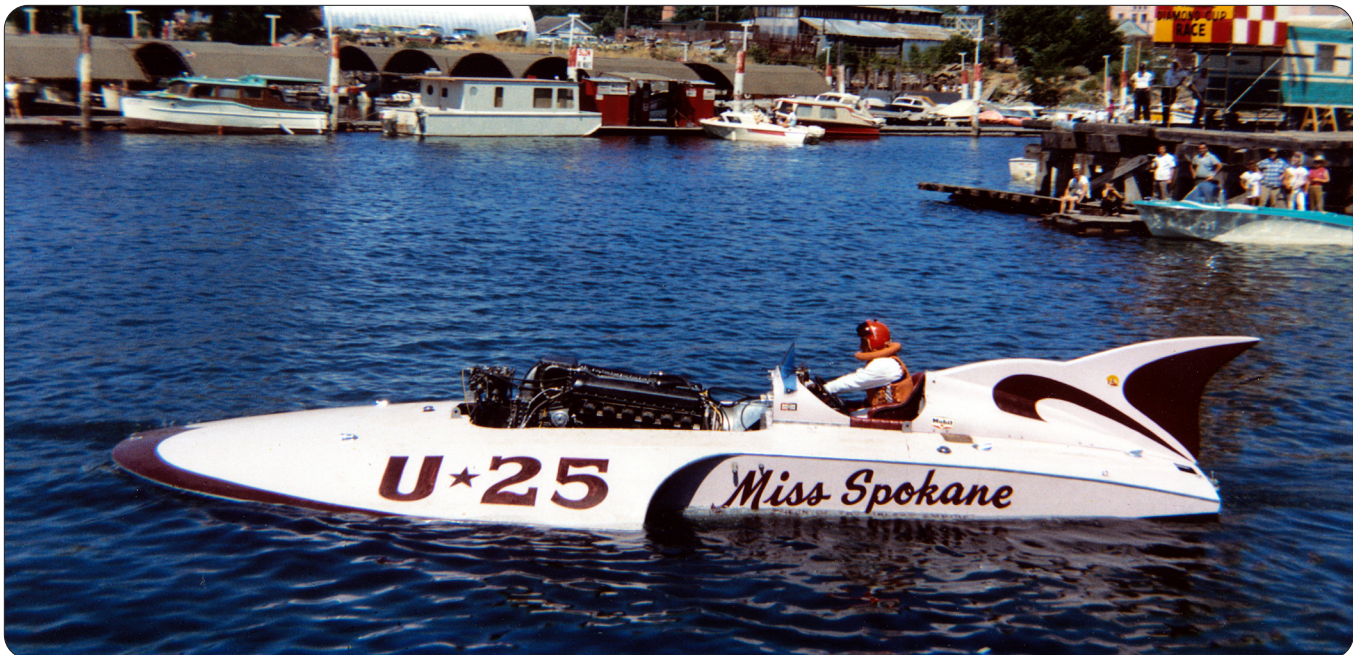
Manchester's first Unlimited ride came in the cockpit of *Miss Spokane* in 1960.

ing Alaska 300 Marathon. The marathon was something of an infamous, offshore event that often ended with authorities searching for lost participants among the islands and inlets as the racers became disoriented and ran out of fuel or daylight while looking for the finish line. Manchester himself was the object of a search in at least one marathon event.

By 1958, Rex Manchester had returned to his native Inland Empire; and while working in Spokane, he took up

boat racing again, this time the inboard variety. In Seattle that summer, driving the hot 280 *Miss Peppermint*, Manchester placed third in the Inboard Nationals on Lake Washington. The *Miss Peppermint* was owned and driven by Manchester, but his attention was attracted to a quick 266-cubic-inch hydro campaigned by the Miss Spokane Hydroplane Association, the *Lil Miss Spokane*.

Actually, Manchester looked beyond this smaller charger to the Unlimited



Manchester leaves the pits aboard *Miss Spokane* during the 1960 Diamond Cup at Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Miss Spokane; though at that time Dallas Sartz and Norm Evans were posting respectable performances in the big-sister hydro; and Rex was not considered as a replacement.

Steady performances in the *Lil Miss Spokane* won Manchester desired attention from the powers behind the *Miss Spokane*, and in early 1959, Manchester was invited to handle the Unlimited in a Newman Lake test run. Immediately, Rex Manchester wanted the permanent driving assignment.

Somehow he charmed the sponsoring committee into additional test runs, and by late spring, Manchester had become fully adapted to the larger, heavier, more powerful hull and impressed the owners into signing him for the '59 tour. Beyond driving, Manchester had devoted himself to serving the crew as a working member whose extra set of hands on a low-budget, all-volunteer team was gratefully accepted.

The year 1959 was a learning experience for Rex. The underfunded *Miss Spokane* was limited in mechanical prowess. Driving was critical to her success. Manchester performed well despite obstacles but was unable to drive to victory.

In 1960, things improved. The boat was a seasoned competitor, and Rex Manchester had honed his driving skills to a level where the competition respected him as a threat. Early in the season, Rex and the "Lilac Lady" found themselves leading the field into the final heat of the Apple Cup.

The *Miss Spokane* was the day's hottest contender on Lake Chelan, but Manchester's day ended under tow as his fragile Rolls-Merlin expired coming out of the first turn of lap one of the final, leaving him a spectator. He blamed himself. The crew felt he had been too hard on the equipment. There was tension, but there was no question that Rex Manchester was a promising Unlimited driver.

In Seattle, the *Miss Spokane* crew hoped for a win. The boat was well prepared though still not well funded. Rex

Manchester's seventh-place finish troubled him. Mechanically, the boat was not competitive. Manchester blamed himself. The crew did not agree. He drove well, but the boat was not running like a winner and could not finish the race.

The 1960 Gold Cup was run on windswept Pyramid Lake, Nevada. Although the dollars were tight, the *Miss Spokane* showed up with healthy equipment, and Rex Manchester qualified well. On race day, the water was beyond rough.

Conditions were ugly. In his first heat appearance, Rex Manchester outperformed the competition, scoring a win. The second stanza found *Miss Spokane* running away from the field again.

On the beach, the crew was elated. Manchester, too, was euphoric about his performance. He mused in the cockpit as he rounded the buoys of the last turn just how he might acknowledge the checkered flag. He was excited and pleased with himself.

Defending champion *Maverick* and prerace favorite *Miss Thriftway* had not done well in the preliminaries. Manchester knew that a safe third place in the final would win for him racing's most coveted prize. He was daydreaming and was for a fateful moment unable to see a vicious "hole" that awaited him at the exit pin.

The *Miss Spokane* buried its right nontrip, pitched violently, and in a sec-



Darlene Crawford



Bob Carver Photos

TOP: The *Miss Spokane* crew in 1960. **ABOVE:** Manchester has the inside lane on Bill Muncey and *Miss Century 21* during the 1961 World Championship in Seattle.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

ABOVE: Manchester joined Bill Schuyler's *\$ Bill* team in 1962. Here, he drives the boat onto Lake Washington during the 1962 Gold Cup. **RIGHT:** The *\$ Bill* crew works on the boat's engine.

ond was upside-down. Rex Manchester was not thrown clear. Trapped in the inverted cockpit and held fast by the buoyancy of his life jacket, Manchester could not free himself. Panic overtook him. He felt the pain of leg injuries he had suffered, but his struggle was centered on getting to the water's surface. Rescuers reached the *Miss Spokane* quickly, and divers dislodged the helpless driver and brought him to the surface seconds before certain death.

For Rex Manchester, the season was over. The Gold Cup eluded him and everyone else that day. Deteriorating weather brought an official declaration of "No Contest" in 1960. The race was not rescheduled.

Rex Manchester spent nearly three weeks in a Nevada hospital and thereafter several months recovering from his injuries. The *Miss Spokane* had survived the mishap and was scheduled for repairs, but the two would part company for a while.

Manchester was on the beach for all but three races during the 1961 tour and returned to driving as pilot of Bill Schuyler's new *\$ Bill* in 1962. The largely stock Allison craft was a solid Staudacher hull with a lot more power than Manchester was permitted to use. Schuyler insisted that Rex not exceed certain specified levels of speed and engine performance. Manchester felt that the cap on his efforts thwarted any chance of being competitive, although he recognized that the boat was capable of winning.

Money problems ended the community-supported *Miss Spokane* racing campaign; and in 1963, the hull was acquired in a confusing deal involving Seattle's Bob Gilliam, *Miss Spokane* crew



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

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member Kent Simonson, and eventually Dave Heerensperger, who returned the boat to competition as *Miss Eagle Electric*.

Manchester found himself back at the controls of the familiar hydroplane, but '63 showed nothing worth writing home about. The boat did not handle like he remembered, although it was often faster than it had been previously. The year was spent in an attempt to dial in the craft after Rex experienced wild riding characteristics for most of the team's racing appearances.

In 1964, Rex Manchester and the U-25 parted a final time. For the most part, the able pilot was without a driving assignment. Manchester accepted a brief stint in the cockpit of *Gale V* in the Detroit Silver Cup event, but by the time the tour traveled west to Coeur d'Alene Lake for the Diamond Cup, he was again without a ride.

While Rex visited with friends in the Coeur d'Alene pits not intending to compete, he was summoned by the *Notre Dame* team. Bill Muncey, who had posted an impressive win in the new *Notre Dame* at Gunter'sville to open the season, was at odds with Shirley McDonald. Officially, he was

not feeling well enough to drive. In fact, the relationship between Muncey and McDonald had been a volatile one, and Muncey was contemplating resignation.

Rex Manchester accepted a temporary offer to serve as relief driver for the “ailing” Muncey for just this one race. Clad in Muncey’s too small driving suit and feeling a little ridiculous, Manchester took his first ride in the powerful *Notre Dame* and was at once attracted to this well-groomed boat prepared by the skillful Jack Ramsey of *Miss Thriftway* fame.

Returning to the Coeur d’Alene pits wearing Muncey’s uniform and helmet, Manchester had posted an impressive qualifying speed and had demonstrated that he could handle the *Notre Dame* with suitable skill. Moreover, owner Shir-

ley McDonald liked this quiet driver who did not share Bill Muncey’s propensity to hog the limelight.

Still, Manchester looked upon the driving offer as only a one-race opportunity, expecting Muncey to return to the cockpit at the next stop on the circuit, which he did. The crew was kind to Rex, but nobody offered to refit the cockpit to meet Manchester’s larger dimensions. Despite the discomfort, Rex handled the boat, outfitted all wrong for the taller, larger driver, as the *Dame* awaited Muncey’s return.

Later in 1964, at Madison, Indiana, the Muncey-McDonald relationship fell apart. Once more Rex Manchester was offered the ride, this time with the promise of more permanence. He gladly accepted, recognizing the *Notre Dame*

team to be everything his other Unlimited experiences were not.

The camp was fully equipped. The boat shop on Seattle’s Aurora Avenue was the envy of the racing fraternity. The team had all the money it required to pay for every innovation desired. The boat was well designed, and there were more engines than Manchester had ever dreamed of having available. The only disappointment came when Jack Ramsey, whom Manchester respected as the very best, elected to resign as team manager.

Bill Muncey coached Manchester on the requirements of driving for Shirley McDonald. Muncey could not accept them. Manchester saw no difficulty in treating the boss as she desired to be treated. He did not possess Muncey’s temperament, and getting along with a demanding owner was not difficult for Rex.

The few opportunities to drive the *Notre Dame* in competition in 1964 found Rex Manchester sharpening his skills and becoming familiar with the limitations of the boat. It was the best hull by far that Manchester had ever driven. The boat was responsive, forgiving and had power to burn!

Though he did not post a win in 1964, Rex Manchester felt he had arrived. The year 1965 would be a great one for the “Shamrock Lady”, and Rex Manchester believed he had at last reached the threshold of championship form. ❖

The story of Hard-Luck Rex Manchester will conclude in next month’s issue of the Unlimited NewsJournal.



Byron Lang



Sandy Ross Collection

TOP: Manchester returned to the *Miss Spokane* cockpit in 1963, but the boat was renamed *Miss Eagle Electric* with Dave Heerensperger’s first venture into hydro racing. **ABOVE:** Manchester was at the controls of *Gale V* during the 1964 Gold Cup in Detroit.

One Hydro Fan's Odyssey

THE ADVENTURES OF A SUPER FAN AND HIS LIFE SPENT CHASING HYDROPLANES

BY BOB SENIOR

An event on June 26, 1950, would have a profound effect on my entire adult life. Stanley Sayres's *Slo-mo-shun IV* set a new world water speed record of 160.419 mph. This eclipsed Englishman Malcolm Campbell's previous mark of 141 mph in *Bluebird*.

The next day, my neighbor friend came running up to my front yard, yelling "We got a world record! A Seattle unlimited hydroplane has set a new world record!" He had been 40 mph in his family boat and was very impressed with 160 mph.

I replied, "What is a Seattle unlimited hydroplane?" Well, I guess I have now learned!

I watched on TV in 1951 when two men died during the *Quicksilver* accident, announcer Bill O'Mara fell to his knees on live TV, and recited the Lord's Prayer. I avidly watched all of the Seattle races in the '50s on TV. I attended two Lake Chelan Apple Cups. I cheered for Mira Slovak in *Miss Bardahl* in 1958 and again in 1960. I have now attended well over 150 Unlimited races,

I came home from a hitch in the US Army in July of 1963. I started making U-hydro scrapbooks. I mailed ten bucks to all race site newspapers to get race-weekend material. I began collecting boating magazines that covered the hydros,

and hydro photos, I put an ad in the *Seattle Times* seeking to buy similar items. It was through this ad that I met two lifetime friends: Roger Lippman and the late Roy Pedersen.

Roy owned the very best hydroplane button collection. At the time I only wanted the previously listed items. I had no interest in buttons. Roy gave me a 1963 *Miss Thriftway* national champion button. "There!" he said, "Now you are a button collector." Soon I bought a 1959 *Miss Bardahl* button at Pike Place Market for fifty cents, and I started serious collecting. I eventually created the second-best collection known.

At Seafair in 1964, Les Bretthauer had a big cowboy hat for sale that was loaded with valuable vintage hydroplane buttons. He sold me the hat for forty bucks. In today's hobby market, those same buttons would easily sell for about \$3,000. Collecting is a niche hobby, but very popular among hydro fans.

Roy and I drove together to the 1965 Diamond Cup on Lake Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. He had connections and got us pit passes. There, I met *Miss Madison* crew chief Graham Heath. He asked me to phone the Madison, Indiana *Courier* early Monday morning with a race report. Sports editor Graham



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Taylor got me press credentials for the Seattle and San Diego races. This led to a role as official *Madison Courier* Western representative at Unlimited races for many decades.

In 1966 I kept seeing the same group of hydro fans at the races. In early 1967 I helped form Unlimiteds Unanimous, hydroplane racing fan club, or "UU" for short. We met in Pat Fahey's basement and later at regional libraries. Doug Shultes was our first president. We had several racing personalities attend our meetings and answer questions: Bob Brinton, publisher of the original *Unlimited Hydroplane News*, George McKernan from the *Miss Budweiser* team. Elmer Linenschmidt, former *Slo-mo* crewman, and Jim McCormick when he drove for *Notre Dame*.

David Speer joined our club and created and edited the *Unlimited Newsjournal*. UNJ was originally in print format by paid subscription, but has been online and free recently.

UU leaders urged me to write this memoir. I have been described as one of the largest promoters of Unlimited racing of any non-racer. That is high praise. I can only say that

it has been a labor of love.

The Seafair Race Committee was steered by businessmen from the Seattle Yacht Club from 1951 until 1974. Then the Seafair Boat Club was formed, and members were selected to lead the various committees. I am SBC charter member #006 and chaired the Seafair pit tours committee for many years.

My wife, Karen, later took over chairmanship, and I became her assistant. Pit tours have generated a lot of revenue for Seafair. For many years I served SBC as both treasurer and *Porthole* newsletter editor.

In the mid-'80s, my friend the late Bob Williams incorporated the Unlimited Hydroplane Hall of Fame. The name was later changed to the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. They oversee the sport's history and Hall of Fame. Bob asked me to serve as a member of the board of directors. I am very proud to have helped Bob, Ken Muscatel, Eric Mann, David Williams, and others grow the museum.

About 30-some years ago at Tri-Cities, radio broadcaster Mike Fitzsimmons and his merry group of pranksters, after numerous adult beverages, formed ROTT (Royal Order of the Turbine). Karen and I joined in year two. ROTT



Tom Ormbrek Collection

Early members of Unlimiteds Unanimous meet in the basement of Pat Fahey's home sometime in about 1967. They are, from the left, Rich Ormbrek, Doug Schultes, Gene Hancock, Art Harding, Pat Fahey, Roy Pedersen, Fred Farley, Bob Burd, Bob Senior, Tom Ormbrek, and Bob Sherman.

holds a banquet and memorabilia auction on the Saturday night before the annual Tri-Cities race. I helped organize the auctions, which have generated substantial funds donated to the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum.

ROTT member Mike Kelly took a one-year job in Antarctica. He missed the races in Tri-Cities and Seattle, and when we heard he was coming home, I organized a winter welcome back pizza party. I arranged for Steve Reynolds to be

our special guest and Kirk Pagel showed 120 slides of boats that Mike had missed seeing. In turn, Mike showed slides of penguins and icebergs. Somebody said, "This is great! Why don't we have ROTT pizza every winter?"

I continued to plan ROTT pizza (minus the penguins) and over the years was able to recruit such hydro racers as Reynolds, Scott Pierce, Steve Montgomery, Jerry and Greg Hopp, Uncle Al Thoresen, Brian Perkins, Jeff Bernard, Jeff Neff, Ron Jones, Sr., Nate Brown, John Walters, Danny Walters, J. W. Myers, Jack Barrie, Tim Ramsey, Jeff Campbell, Jim Harvey, Jamie Nilsen, and Corey Peabody as our ROTT special-guest speakers. Peabody actually even brought THE Gold Cup trophy to the gathering.

Several years ago, I liquidated my memorabilia collection. However, I became a "dealer," buying and selling hydro collectibles on e-Bay and Facebook. Roy Pedersen was often called "the God of collecting." I was once called "The King," the hub of the wheel for collecting. Now in my late eighties I have stepped away from the activities listed in this essay.

The sport presented me with two awards: the Vic Nelawake Award, given to a non-compensated individual who



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Bob Senior selling hydro buttons in the Seattle pits in 1969.



Bob Senior sits in the shade with his hydro pit collection at the 2010 race in the Tri-Cities.

repeatedly boosts Unlimited hydroplane racing, and the prestigious Gar Wood Trophy which goes to someone who supports Unlimited racing over a lengthy period. I feel privileged to be involved with H1 Unlimited and was flattered and feel very honored for the recognition.

In recent years my constant cliché has been “Bob Senior does not hunt, fish, golf, or bowl. I don’t RV or barbecue. I do not work with power tools. I could not put a Philips-head screwdriver in a Philips-head screw! I just do hydroplanes!” This has been an extremely satisfying hobby.

Everyone knows David Letterman’s “Top Ten List”. Every Unlimited hydro fan could create their own Top Ten List: Favorite boats, favorite drivers, most exciting races, most memorable accidents or incidents. I want to offer my personal Top-Ten List of hydro racing events I have attended. Here are my favorite Unlimited Hydroplane banquets and parties.

◆ June 1969. I attended my first race in Detroit, the “Yankee Stadium” of boat racing, and met many new hydro friends. I urged them to form their own local fan club, Unlimiteds Detroit. I attended the trophy awards dinner at the Detroit Yacht Club. The trophy display upstairs is awesome.

◆ July 1971. I went to the Gold Cup race at Madison. You’ve all seen the movie. I had a before-dinner drink at the trophy award banquet at the Madison Elks. I said to the guy next to me, “wasn’t

that great! The hometown boat won the Gold Cup!” He replied, “Not if you are Terry Sterett’s uncle.” It was Jim Hay, *Miss Chrysler Crew* crew chief. Terry drove *Atlas Van Lines II* to second place.

◆ August 1980. The Unlimited Hydroplane Hall of Fame dinner was held at the Seattle Music Hall dinner theater. Karen and I worked with banquet chair Evelyn Manchester in planning the event. Lee Schoenith, Jim Lucero, Billy Schumacher, and others were inducted into the Unlimited Hydroplane Hall of Fame. Don Jones of Seafair asked me to organize a fundraiser auction. I got Pat O’Day to be the auctioneer. Two rides in *The Squire Shop* were sold. Winners were super-fan Tim Mulheim and *Squire* partner George Wade, who quipped, “I had to bid; I have never met our driver!”

◆ August 1984. The Seafair Hydro 100 Club party was held atop the Seattle Sheraton hotel. In attendance were \$100



Karen and Bob Senior at San Diego in 2013.

VIP donors, six Unlimited owners, seven Unlimited drivers, two astronauts, and Bernie Little's friend, the Deputy Mayor of Miami, Florida, who had 100 pounds of Florida stone crab shipped in. Yum!

I was surprised and very honored to be named the Seafair Volunteer of the Year. They hung a ribbon and medallion around my neck, similar to an Olympics ceremony. I am seldom at a loss for words, but this time I recall stammering something like "There are so many dedicated Unlimited hydroplane racing volunteers. I want to share this honor with all of them."

◆ Fall 1994. Ken Dryden set a high-altitude record when he flipped while attempting to qualify the *Miss E-Lam Plus* four-pointer at Seafair. It appeared he had no insurance. Cowboy Bob Jensen and I organized a benefit auction, I arranged for three celebrity auctioneers: drivers Mark Evans, Nate Brown, and Seafair race chairman Steve Sposari. A huge crowd attended. Every team showed up except *Bud*. We raised a couple of thousand dollars raffling off a large, framed Rusty Rae color photo. We



Chris Denslow

Bob Senior accepts an award from Seafair in 2012



Karl Pearson

Bob Senior chats with a customer as he sells hydro pins outside the Seattle pits in 2011.

raised almost \$10,000 for Dryden in the live auction.

◆ Decembers of 2003 through 2006. The Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum held their annual meetings and holiday parties. Special guests were Gold Cup winners: Mitch Evans, Terry Troxell, Nate Brown, and Jean Theoret. Always well attended, the parties were excellent opportunities to mingle with these champions.

◆ Fall 2008. Karen and I were good friends with R/C model hydro racers Kirk Pagel, Ben Keller, and Bob VandenAkker. We decided to attend their ERCU awards banquet. The parking lot reader-board at the Great American Casino read "Welcome, Special Guest, Ron Jones, Sr." After dinner, no Ron Jones. They dug up his phone number. "Gee, you guys, I hurt my back and can't join you". Mike Campbell spoke to me: "Bob, you have been around this sport for over 50 years. Could you please fill in and give a talk?" I did, speaking about many of the memories in this article.

◆ August 2009. The Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum held the initial Unlimited Hydroplane Hall of Champions awards banquet. Bill Muncey and Chip Hanauer were the first honorees. Members of both families attended.

◆ Fall 2002. Honorable Mention. Karen and I were invited to the wedding

reception for Mark and Elaine Evans at her luxurious home in Redmond, Washington. Everyone in the sport was there. I remember my first meeting with Terry Troxell and J.W Myers in the kitchen, sharing two liters of Sierra Mist on a hot evening. *Mister Home Loans* sponsor Wayne Rosburg bragged about hitting the first home run in the Kingdome during a high school all-star game.

When I look back on this enjoyable hobby I am reminded of the many interesting people I have met, and the good friendships I have made. I am reminded of a remark made by Phil Cole, former executive secretary of the Unlimited Racing Commission about his hometown of Madison, Indiana. Phil said, "Madison is a town of 12,000 wonderful folks and two old grouches." I would say the same about my many hydroplane racing friends and associates. ❖

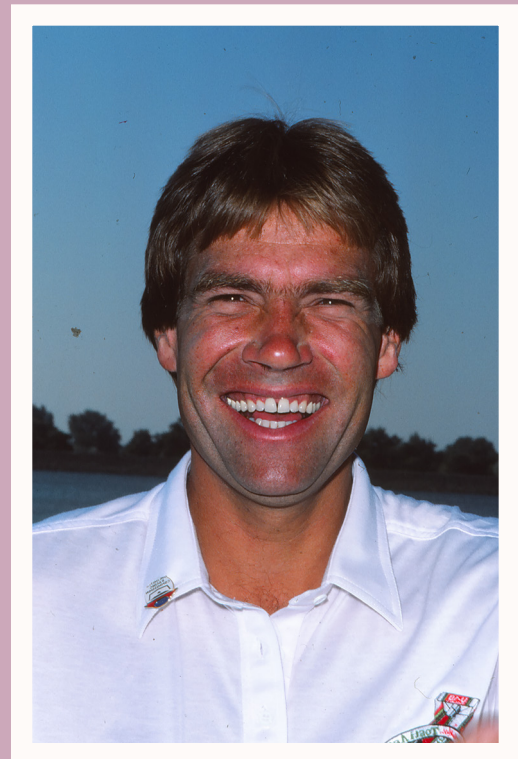
FROM THE UNJ VAULT:

A conversation with Steve Reynolds, Part 4

The past several issues of the *NewsJournal* have featured a series of interviews with Steve Reynolds, one of the most popular hydroplane drivers in the late 1970s and 1980s. The handsome, thoughtful, and outgoing Reynolds was always a good interview subject for reporters, a polished public speaker for his sponsor and for the sport., and a fan and media favorite.

In parts one , two, and three of this interview, Reynolds talked about his career driving *Miss Circus Circus* from 1978 to 1980, his experience driving *Captran Resorts* in 1981, and his time in the cockpit of *Miss Prodelco* in 1982, shortly before this interview was conducted. In this final segment, Reynolds wraps up his discussion with his views about driving an Unlimited hydroplane, about safety, and about the sport's future as he saw it more than 40 years ago.

This interview was originally published in the September, October, and December 1982 issues of the *Unlimited NewsJournal*. Reynolds would go on to drive Steve Woomer's *Miss Tosti Asti* in 1984 and *Miss 7-Eleven* in 1985 and 1986, before his career came to an abrupt end in 1987 with an accident while driving *Cellular One* that gave him serious head injuries.



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UNJ: A lot of drivers come up slowly through the ranks. They start in outboards, move up to limiteds, finally get a ride in a low-budget Unlimited, and after a few more years, land a seat in top equipment. Other guys race very briefly in smaller classes, and end up in a real hot Unlimited in short order. How much difference does it make to go the slow way as opposed to quick progress? What's best?

Reynolds: There's no comparison between driving a limited boat and driving an Unlimited. I don't think that driving limited boats, no matter how competitive you are or how many national records you get, does you anything but make you a little more comfortable when you get into an Unlimited.

I will tell you that there are rules that are written in the rule book, that the drivers' representative, the referee, and the course judges go by. There's a total different set of rules, unwritten, if you will, that we use out on the racecourse. Rules call for 10 feet between the boat on the inside of you. The outside boat is responsible for maintaining 10 feet from the boat to his inside. We'll redefine that as drivers and make it 10 inches. It's three boat lengths. Sometimes I've gotten as little as one and a half and called legal.

There's a whole different set of rules that you race with out on the racecourse. We violate those rules all the time, but they're violations that are done with kind



Sandy Ross Collection

After this interview was conducted in 1982, Reynolds joined Steve Woome's race team and drove *Miss Tosti Asti* in 1984.

of a mutual understanding amongst the rest of us. There's a certain line that you draw and say, "Now we're getting into a dangerous game." When you get competitive, you really hedge on those rules quite a bit.

Driving a limited boat, I don't think, gives you anything. I personally don't. If you have the ability to drive a hydroplane, it's obvious the first time you sit in

it. If you're not good the first time you sit in a boat, experience is just gonna make you a little bit better. If you're good, and it's recognizable that you're good the first time that you sit in one; if all the natural "instincts" that you employ are the right ones; if you have the "right stuff," so to speak, experience is gonna make you great. There are only a few of those people who come along.

I think the reason I made the transition so easily, is I was well over 30. I was 31 or 32 when I started driving hydroplanes. The pressure is the hardest thing to deal with. And what is going to make Chip Hanauer a better driver is, the older he gets and gets a little more life experience under his belt—Chip is already a very talented driver—but he'll be a far more complete driver. Once he relates better to the public and to the press and whatnot, once he gets a few years under his belt. It's easier for me, I think, to be thrown in that limelight and not feel out of place in front of a half million people,



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

With Reynolds in the cockpit, *Miss Tosti Asti* takes a wicked leap during the 1984 Gold Cup held on the Columbia River in the Tri-Cities.



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Woomer's boat was renamed *Miss 7-Eleven* in 1985 and Reynolds drove it to victory at the Indiana Governor's Cup in Madison that season.

“I mean, it’s a game. It’s a mental exercise, to go out there and push that boat around the racecourse and handle yourself physically. There’s as much racing done on the beach as there is out on the racecourse.”

or having media people sticking a microphone or asking questions, it was easier to deal with because I was already adjusted to life.

I’d been through an awful lot. I’ve been to Vietnam, I’ve been through four years in the Marine Corps, I’ve been in and out of business two or three times, I’ve been married and divorced, married again, been broke, had plenty of money, been broke again. I’d lived an awful lot by the time I got there.

Whatever I learned in limited racing, and I only drove limiteds for two and a half years before I climbed in an Unlimited, so maybe I’m fortunate in the fact ... Well, let me put it this way: When I drove the limited boat, I thought, “It’s got to be the equipment. I have to have better equipment than anybody else because I’m winning so easily.” I would take myself out of the boat, when I got hurt, and put somebody else in it. That guy lost two races in a row.

Well, it finally clicked in my head that it was easy. It was something that came very easy for me, like playing baseball. Playing all sports was very easy. I just, maybe, have some talent to be able to negotiate a boat around the racecourse. Other people don’t have the same talent. I didn’t understand that. I couldn’t accept it. Just seemed to me to be easy.

Can you put your finger what it is, the “right stuff” that you mentioned?

I think it’s because I never drove anything but a cabover. Most of these guys came up through the ranks where they drove conventional boats. That includes John Walters. John started out in a conventional 850—little, tiny hydro. Chip started out

in a conventional. Most every other driver that’s running out there now started out in conventionals or tunnel boats.

But I cut my teeth on a cabover. Everything, whatever “instincts” and reactions that I have, are tuned to a cabover boat. I’m not afraid of it, I respect it. But, I just enjoy competing. I don’t necessarily like going fast, but I love to compete. And the only time during the day that I’m really comfortable is when I’m out there in that boat with five other people.

It’s a very mental thing. I’m not there for the ego gratification with the crowd. I like it, but I’m not there for that. It’s an extremely private, very personal mental game that I play with myself. Every minute, your brain is accumulating data and you’re reacting to it. That’s why mentally you’re shot at the end of race day, physically you’re fine. But, that’s where the satisfaction comes to me.

I mean, it’s a game. It’s a mental exercise, to go out there and push that boat around the racecourse and handle yourself physically. There’s as much racing done on the beach as there is out on the racecourse. So, I like to play the game, and I enjoy competing.

Now, you had some experience in radio, is that correct?

Yeah, I guess you could call it that. I had an acquaintance who was working at a radio station, and I was on state industrial insurance—I’d dropped a 600-pound frame on my foot. So, I’d been out of work, on workman’s compensation, for about three or four months. I was getting ready to go back to work. I was going back to college, taking extension courses, and working, and trying

to get a limited boat running.

So, he had asked me to come down to the radio station. He was program director. He said, "Would you come into the control booth a minute and read this copy for me while I set the levels on the machines?" I said, "Sure." I read the copy two or three times.

He said, "How'd you like to be production manager?"

I said, "What do I do?"

He said, "You just make commercials all day."

And that's what I did. I did it for about four or five months. At the time it was KUUU (in Seattle). They played oldies. The whole thing was automated. But, I didn't get along with the program director, we had a personality problem there, and I couldn't take the politics inside the radio industry. It's cutthroat, it really is. And I didn't like the format. I wasn't comfortable. I'm an outside person. So, I left that job, which paid me about \$25,000 a year at that time, and that was in '75. I went out and started building houses, which paid me \$5 an hour. I wasn't in radio very long.

Well, you're very good with the press. You get along well with local media people. How does one deal with the media? Obviously, there are things a driver has to know.

Well, there are certain things you have to take into account, I think, when you get out and get ready to talk to the media. First of all, you have to be very protective of your sport. And then, if you have any personal problems with anybody inside, rather than attacking them in the press, which I think looks tacky, you kind of play middle of the road.

I think that you've got to hype the sport all the time. But, I think you have to do it with honest conviction. I guess the best way I can answer that was, the way that I am on camera is just about the same way you and I am right here.

When I started doing this professionally, I had a difficult time dealing with the press. I was very nervous about

it. People were looking at me differently. I asked my dad about it. I said, "Dad, how do I contend with this?"

He said, "You're not a bad person; by yourself you're an alright guy." He said, "What I'd love to see you do is just be yourself. Don't be anything different than really who you are. Treat people that same way and you'll find that they'll treat you that same way." He said, "Never forget that you're going to work and doing a job just like they are. You're no different than they are, except they're watching you on this particular day. Just be yourself."

So, I've tried to do that. I protect my sponsor. I promote my sponsor. I promote my sport, and I promote the people who are in it. Now, if I dislike some of the people in here, for instance that little ruckus I had with Ron Armstrong back when he drove the *Circus*, I can get mad at Ron, and we can exchange words. But that doesn't mean somebody outside the fraternity of boat racing can do it.

If I was to tell Ron Armstrong or Chip Hanauer or somebody else in a private moment I thought he was a jerk, and he did this and he did that and he should be criticized for it, that's between the two of us. But let somebody outside this fraternity say the exact same thing, or less, and they'll have me to contend with first. You don't do that. So, if you make your-

self accessible to the media, you make yourself accessible to the public.

I'll tell you how it is. Just remember, when I grew up around these boats, I was one of the white-knuckle kids hangin' on the fence. If Bill Muncey or Dallas Sartz or Ron Musson would have come by to say hello to me, or patted me on the head, or looked at me, I would have been a hydroplane fan forever and ever and ever! I remember that.

And my dad, when he worked on the registration committee in Seattle, probably gave away 100 passes a year. I mean, he'd steal 'em from the registration truck and hand 'em out to kids. If you're going to perpetuate the sport, you have to be more accessible to the public.

So, I'm just that. I take time to let people know who I am. I just like to be myself, and that is enjoying people. If I'm entertaining people on the beach by either racing the boat or coming out and talking to them or just making myself accessible, then I've created a bigger hydroplane fan. And if they're not having fun, if people on the beach aren't being entertained, then I'm not having any fun. I want them to enjoy it as much as I do.

When I quit driving—I don't know that I'll drive for any more than five or six more years, because I think at that time percentages are working against you—I want to get into politics. Boat-racing pol-



Reynolds drives Miss 7-Eleven during preseason testing on Lake Washington in 1985

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

itics. I want to be either commissioner or executive director.

I don't know, back to your original question, what it is. I just seem to get along well with the press. We communicate well. I don't—and this gets to the point of being frustrating—it's because I do a fairly decent job in promoting hydroplane racing, promoting Steve Reynolds, promoting whatever boat or whatever sponsor I'm working with, that's all people look at me for.

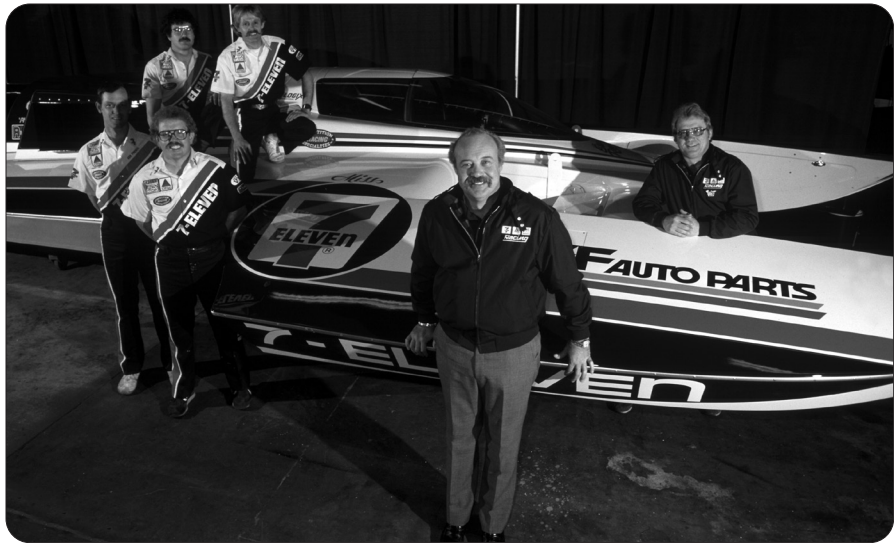
I have not had the opportunity to sit in a boat consistently for two or three years and work with the same camp and have the financial backing and equipment to go out and prove myself as a driver. I was hired into this sport for what I could do as a driver. So far, most everything people remember me for is the fact that I'm good on television or good on radio or give good interviews, or whatever. I don't want to be remembered just as a guy who can communicate well with people. I want to be known as a driver. I happen to think I'm pretty good.

Maybe we could talk about safety for a little while.

Sure.

The sport took quite a rap this summer. [With the death of Dean Cheweth, following less than a year after Bill Muncey was killed.]

It has.



Steve Woomer and his Miss 7-Eleven race team in 1986.

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Do you think it's justified?

No.

Locally, especially, they took it on the chin.

Yeah, you know, I talked to a fellow one time who was working for the P-I [*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*]. I'm not going to mention his name. He was really hard on us when we raced the four-point. He brought up a lot of comments he wasn't privileged to actually listen to and printed them in the paper. His conjecture in there was false. I asked him about it. He said, "I'll tell you what, Steve. I'm a journalist. My job is to get people to read this newspaper. So, if I can create controver-

sy, I'm gonna do it. I want people to read my article."

But is the criticism justified?

I'm glad to see it, and I'll tell you why. I don't think people come out here to see blood and guts like they do in auto racing. People always talk about the nasty accidents that happen at Indy, or something that happened on the drag strip. But I think that boat-racing fans, by and large, are very good.

The people that are running, we're really heroes of theirs. The boats are heroes. They have a love affair with some of the drivers. They identify with them. They identify with the boats. Their fans stretch across the country. I think we got so much heat here in Seattle because Seattle is such a great boat-racing community.

This is the capitol, I don't give a damn where they go. Nobody has the enthusiasm Seattle has. These people are great fans out here. They don't want to see hydroplane racing die. They don't want to see their heroes get hurt. So, I think they're concerned. If they were just the blood-thirsty people who come out to see a spectacular accident, you'd never hear any criticism about it. They would say, "Hey, this is great. What an exciting race. We killed a driver last week. We're gonna kill another one next week. This



The cockpit of Miss 7-Eleven was enclosed for the 1986 season.

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

boat's gonna flip. Man, let's go down and watch." That isn't what they're after. They want to see competition. And they want to see it done safely.

So, I'm glad, in one respect, we're taking all the heat we did, and all the people are so concerned, public and reporters alike. I don't think they're taking shots. I think they're just very dedicated fans who want to see it done safely. I don't think they want to see any of us hurt. There aren't that many of us around that do this.

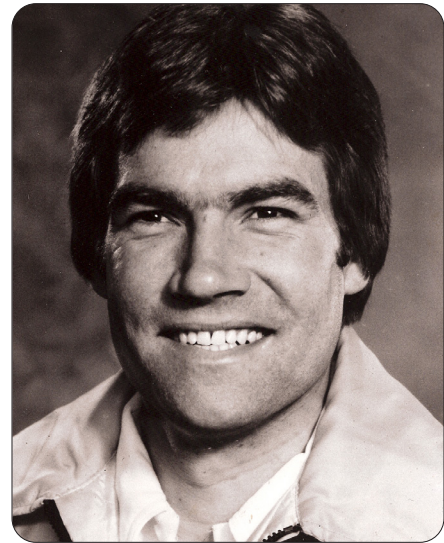
They want to make sure that the sport goes on and gets better and better. So, I think they're just concerned fans. I have yet to hear anybody say, "Man, did you see Chenoweth go over backwards!" or "Did you see the pictures of Muncey do his flip?" I've never heard any of that. I always hear what a shame it was that this happened. These are good, dedicated fans.

I think there's a little too much push on the safety side. We've existed... The way that I see it is that a driver in 1955 had no more responsibility than he does in 1982. Driving the same way. You've got a steering wheel, pedals, and a nitrous-oxide button. That's it.

Look how the hulls have advanced since then. We're not driving through the water any more, we're flying over it. Yet the driver has no more control over how the boat is gonna handle than he did in 1955 or '54 or whatever. I think that we should be able to give drivers a little more responsibility in the cockpit.

If an Indy driver can whip around the Indianapolis 500 a foot off the wall at 200-plus miles an hour and take time to dial in and dial out his boost; he can take a hand off the steering wheel to shift gears, or change the stack on the suspension from inside the cockpit, I don't see any reason why a driver can't have more responsibilities. What if we had surfaces on the boat like the leading-edge flap on an airplane, and a driver could trim that up or down while he's driving? Not something that made drastic moves, but in a matter of 10 or 15 seconds may move no more than a quarter or three-eighths of an inch, so the change is very slow.

For instance, when you drive a race boat, the fuel load that you take on is maybe 45 gallons. You get three laps into the race, and you've got a diminishing weight factor. Now, that changes the ride of the boat. Well, if you had the boat



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

set up to ride well carrying that much weight, and the longer you got into the race the water got different, maybe the wind picked up, you certainly have a diminishing weight factor. The boat rides a little differently. Now the driver can dial that boat in a little better.

Maybe he has some controllable devices from inside the cockpit that can trim the boat down. I mean, we're flying more than we're driving them across the water. Why don't we give 'em some of the responsibilities that a pilot has? I see nothing wrong with that.

Career Driving Stats for Steve Reynolds

YEAR	BOAT	HULL#	RACE RESULTS					HEAT RESULTS						
			RACES	1st	2nd	3rd	DNQ	START	DNS	FINISH	1st	Pct.	Top 3	Pct.
1978	Miss Circus Circus	7474	1	0	0	1	0	3	0	3	1	0.333	3	1.000
1979	Miss Circus Circus	7931	9	1	3	0	0	24	3	21	9	0.429	20	0.952
1980	Miss Circus Circus	7931	10	0	5	1	9	28	3	22	4	0.182	20	0.909
	Miss Circus Circus	8031	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.000	0	0.000
1981	Captran Resorts	7207	1	0	0	0	0	4	0	4	2	0.500	3	0.750
1982	Miss Prodelco	7612	5	0	1	0	0	10	7	5	2	0.400	4	0.800
1984	Miss Tosti Asti	8410	8	1	1	0	0	14	5	11	6	0.545	11	1.000
	Miss Tosti Asti	8025	2	0	0	1	0	5	1	4	0	0.000	3	0.750
1985	Miss 7-Eleven	8410	9	1	2	0	0	23	2	15	9	0.600	15	1.000
1986	Miss 7-Eleven	8410	9	0	1	3	0	26	2	22	4	0.182	17	0.773
1987	Cellular One	8410	3	0	2	0	0	6	1	5	2	0.400	5	1.000
TOTALS:			58	3	15	6	10	143	24	112	39	0.348	101	0.902

Between heats of the Seafair race, you and Ron Jones got up on the deck of the *Miss Prodelco* and talked about an enclosed cockpit—a capsule. Your conversation was broadcast on KING-TV. How do you feel about an enclosed cockpit?

Well, first of all, you have to understand that Ron Jones is like a family member to me. I love the man and his wife. Ron and Bev Jones are very, very close to me. I have a tremendous amount of respect for Ron Jones and his ability to do what he does. He designs and creates boats better than anybody else does.

Ron is a man who looks at performance second and safety for his driver first. If he was going to build a boat with disregard for the driver's health, he could build you a boat that would run 150 mile an hour laps, but he couldn't guarantee that it'd stay on the water from one straightaway to the next.

Ron has worked on what he calls a cocoon for the driver, over the last two or three years. He actually has a drawing of it, a total capsule, that he made back in the middle '60s.

Schumacher wanted one back then.

Did he? Ron, what he wants to do is, he's talked to some people down in Phoenix, Arizona. He's also talked to astronaut Gordon Cooper several years ago. The material that he'd like to make the capsule out of is a space-age-type plastic, the same material they put in the windows of the capsules they send up into outer space. They're virtually bullet-proof. And what he would like to do is, in reviewing statistically what happens when drivers have been injured or a boat has gone over backwards, they don't sink anymore.

The *Executone* did because it was all wood. Now, with honeycomb and foam, the hulls aren't going to sink anymore. And they usually wind up right-side up. Even if they do wind up upside-down, they don't sink. So, the problem and the injuries have come when a driver has either been thrown free or has stayed in the cockpit.

He's talking about having a com-



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Reynolds's driving career ended when he suffered serious head injuries during an accident while driving Woomer's *Cellular One* at Madison, Indiana, in 1987.

pletely independent life-support system inside this capsule, all of the steering mechanisms and everything else that goes through it; its own complete, enclosed cocoon, if you will. It is actually incorporated into the front cowling of the boat. It's one pod that's set down inside. A driver would be strapped into it in not an upright position like we're driving in now, but in a reclining position.

He's done analyses and found out that depending how you sit, how your legs and how your back is situated, that stress can affect your strength and your coordination. There's been a lot of research done on it. Ron found if you're in a semi-reclining position, that you're actually mentally far more alert. Strength-wise, you retain your strength much better, you don't have to work quite so hard. So, that is an advantage.

The driver would have shoulder harnesses, a lap belt, his legs would be tethered to the seat itself because it would go all the way down to your leg. It would follow the contour of the body. The helmet would be tethered to the seat itself. You'd have straps going from your helmet similar to what some of the drivers wear now that keeps you from throwing your head from side-to-side.

The back of the helmet would be tethered to the seat so it can't throw you forward and snap your neck. Your arms would be tethered so they wouldn't flail around inside the cockpit, and your legs wouldn't either.

The theory behind it is that if a boat does flip, does blow over backwards, that a driver has about 30 or 45 minutes of his own air supply on the inside. I mean, all of the accidents that have happened, if you take a look at the two fatalities we've suffered, the accident that Chip got into, the one where John Walters went over backwards in Pasco, and then his accident here in Seattle, if any one of those men had been inside a capsule, two of 'em would be alive, and I don't think we'd have had any injuries. Now, that's only one alternative. I've heard of the parachute, which I'm definitely against. The ejection seat which I have reservations about.

This parachute is what *Squire* is testing?

Yes. I think that's very, very dangerous. I would never, never put that on a boat. But, that's what Ron has been working for. If you're going to make these guys run safer, we've got to do something, protect the driver a little more. But, I think you can only go so far, and then you're going to have to draw the line and say gentlemen, let's do something with these hulls, or if you're going to drive these things you're going to accept a certain amount of physical injury risk.

If you look at it now, I made the point to Ron, I said, "You know, Ron, if you took all the front cowling off, just stuck a steering wheel in here, and a couple gauges in the dash board, no windshield, no cowling around you, just sat a

driver down inside the seat, with nothing around him, hell, I'd be afraid to drive that over 120 miles an hour. But you surround yourself with no more than 10 or 15 pounds of thin fiberglass, and all of a sudden you feel like you're protected. It's a false sense of security.

You have more protection in a car door.

Far more. Far more protection. So, we don't have anything protecting the drivers, and we should do that. But I think that just as much concern should be put on the way these hulls are designed. You understand that the *Budweiser*, weighing over 7,000 pounds, runs 180-plus miles an hour. Did you know that a 200- or 300-ton 747 will lift off the ground at 135?

You see how critical and how difficult it is to design an Unlimited hydroplane by today's standards. So, I think that what Ron has come up with, and you're probably going to see next year, is a hull that will be just about impossible to blow over. I think the *Atlas* made a stride in the right direction, but I still don't think it's infallible. And I have my own theories about it. Mine go right along with Ron's. They were spawned from some of Ron's ideas.

What things do you see coming in the next few years?

I have a couple things working right now. I don't know what boat I'll be driving next year, but I'll be in a new boat next year, for sure. I think it should be automotive-powered. I think twin-automotive power with the talent of Keith Black and some of the other people today, the technology is far better than it was a few years ago.

I think the only thing that's going to save Unlimited racing from going on and just being stagnant, having one or two competitive boats and that's it, is to bring in automotive power. You make it work in a nice, light hull, you'll bring anywhere from three to seven more people into the sport.

There are a lot of sponsors sitting

out there that would love to get into boat racing. They can buy a boat, truck, trailer, they can hire a crew. Where do you find the engines? And once you find 'em, where do you find a qualified guy who can take a World War II engine and make it run?

We understand one of the principle reasons Coors never got involved was that they couldn't find a qualified crew chief to build engines.

That's right.

Maybe, in some respects, Jerry Verheul contributed something, because he proved he could go from auto engines to Merlins.

Well, I knew that. That's why I hired him.

You knew it, but a lot of other people didn't.

I also have been thinking about automotive power for a long time. The year before Jerry and I went to work together, I'd talked about putting together a program with automotive power. The engine he puts in his Funny Car puts out more horsepower than a Merlin, on a dyno. That's one single V-8 engine. You take two of those and detune 'em back, the numbers on both sides far favor the automotive engine.

Parts are available. Tear an engine down and rebuild it in a half an hour. He's not breaking any parts on his dragster motor. That's run twice as hard as you'd have to run an automotive engine in a hydroplane. Keith Black is very confident that the engines will live. Cost factor: It would cost you right around \$100,000 to \$130,000 to set yourself up with six to eight engines, where it would cost you \$250,000 to set up a comparable Merlin program.

Your expense of maintenance every year after that is about a fifth or sixth what it would cost you to upgrade 10 or 11 Merlins or Griffons or Allisons to run a season. Compare that to a turbine. There is no comparison.

I don't think the turbine has solved all its problems yet either. When you look

at some of the talented people that are running on the drag strip, for instance, they run 45 to 60 events a year. They can get far more exposure by running 10n events in a hydroplane. There are a lot of people out there that know how to make the engines work.

Speeds continue to climb. What's next in terms of speed? How much more?

I personally don't like to go fast. If I could win races at 150 miles an hour, that would be great. There's a certain thrill going that fast, but it's awful scary. I don't like going over 175 or 180.

With the designs of the boat, are they going to be hitting 200 in a few more years?

I don't think so. I think we'll stay with the 2 ½-mile race course. I don't know that I'm in favor of going to two miles. If the new boat that Ron has conceived—and automotive engines come into play—I think what you'll see is a boat that probably will never have to run over 165 miles an hour but once, and that's down to the first turn.

It's getting into a sprint game so much so now that it's the guy who can go into the corner and through it faster than anybody else, the guy who can accelerate from the exit pin to the midpoint faster than anybody else. I guarantee you, once I get out front of somebody, it'll take 'em seven to 10 miles an hour just to stay even with me on the outside. And then I'll push 'em where they don't want to go and I'll make life miserable for 'em. Very difficult to get around somebody who's out front.

I think it's gonna come to light boats that are so much aerodynamically designed to stay down on the water and do more flying than they do right now—more flying, more stable. You do it with automotive engines, you'll be able to get down to the first turn and you'll get through it and off the corner faster than anybody else. It'll just come down to a matter of a sprint game. ❖

News From the Museum

BY BRAD HASKIN, EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR OF THE HYDROPLANE
AND RACEBOAT MUSEUM



Things have been very busy here at the museum. Work has been progressing on our new storage facility north of Seattle. The building is in the process of being electrified with plans for 50 feet worth of palate racks installed across the back wall. This will allow for our extra engine and gearbox parts, memorabilia, and boats to be safely stored in one place. Not only will it get several of our boats (some of which are currently outdoors or stored on other people's property) indoors, but it will also effectively free up space in the museum proper. If you've been down to see us lately, you'll know the definition of crowded. That's not necessarily a bad problem to have, but it's not conducive for a proper visit to view what we have to offer.

We recently had the *Squire Shop* on display at the Tacoma Yacht Club Commodore's Ball, and the Boeing U-787 hull down on the Seattle waterfront for Seafair's Winter on the Water celebration. Even this time of year, the museum is out in public showing our wares to the public.

Virtually every weekend we have been hosting events at our facility: Region 10 and the Pacific Northwest Boat Racing Association had annual meetings and banquets. The family memorial for boat racer Brad Sanchez. And the an-

nual Roger Newton Memorial R/C Hydroplane show, with nearly 50 stunning scale radio-control boats on display, in conjunction with the museum's annual garage sale, which raised money for our operating budget as well as clearing out a backlog of memorabilia and inventory.

Winter maintenance continues on the museum's fleet of boats. The *Atlas Van Lines* team is in the process of preparing the 1982 boat for summer exhibitions, while pickling Bill Muncey's "Blue Blaster" for intermediate storage. The *Bardahl*, *Wahoo*, *Notre Dame*, *Pay 'N Pak* and *Squire Shop* teams are all working with our engine shop to tear down, replace, and repair the wear and tear of last season's running.

Allison and Merlin parts are becoming more rare and expensive each year, so it takes a lot of tender care and feeding to preserve what we have. Our volunteers are amazing and while the boats get the glory on the water, it is the crews who spend tireless hours and effort to make it happen—the kind of thing that people along the shoreline never see and can rarely appreciate.

The 1979 *Circus* crew is busy installing battens along the sponson sides and non-trips, as well as the internal skid fin bracketry. A special shout out to Tim Matson, Kerry Hesse, Bob McCormack and the crew of the 1960 *Miss Burien* hull. They have been working virtually every day to give some much-needed TLC to one of the workhorses of the museum fleet.

The museum will be having our spring online auction April 13–19. We are going to have some pretty cool items up for bidding, but I wanted to extend a heartfelt thank you to Darrell Strong for partnering with HARM to offer a crew member for a race experience. The win-

ner will be able to pick which race on the 2026 H1 schedule they would like to participate at and will become embedded in the Strong Racing Team for the entirety of the event—team meetings, uniform, dock access—actually doing. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bid on. Details to follow on the museum's website.

Set aside the date of Sunday, August 9 for the museum's annual gala. This year we are finalizing a move south to a new locale at the Tacoma Yacht Club. While the last few years have been outdoors, the weather has been brutally hot and windy at our old venue. The TYC offers a breathtakingly beautiful indoor setting on the water near Point Defiance, overlooking the ferry terminal and Vashon Island.

I have received feedback that it seems like the museum is always asking for money. Well, this is just a reminder that that is how we operate. It takes money to keep the doors open, to keep the lights on, to pay for fuel, oil, property taxes, vehicle registrations, wood, screws, glue, paint thinner, solvent, even the food that we feed to our volunteers. It would be great to be able to just find some rich guy, but that's not the nuts and bolts of keeping the museum running. It's the memberships and donations of hydro fans that keep this happening. It's YOUR museum. Please remember that when you receive your annual membership renewals. IT LITERALLY DOES ALL COUNT! ❖

AROUND THE CIRCUIT

Race Team and Race Site News by Chris Tracy



Recognizing Dave Villwock's exceptional contributions to powerboat racing, Villwock was inducted into the Motorsports Hall of Fame in Daytona Beach, Florida. In a March 2026 Motorsports Hall of Fame press release, they note this about the inductees:



H1 Unlimited

“Their achievements and dedication serve as an inspiration to current and future generations in the industry.” BWR Racing noted, “Dave Villwock is a legend in the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing. The retired U-27 driver, and winningest driver in the history of the sport with 68 victories, 10 national championships, and 11 Gold Cups to his name, was inducted into the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America last night in a black tie gala ceremony that was well attended not only by members of our teams, but by a broad swath of folks from all over the sport's past, present, and still to come.”

While Villwock's driving accomplishments are legendary, he is well known for his contributions as a team manager, boat technician, and skilled propeller craftsman, too. Congratulations to Dave Villwock, for the well-earned recognition.

The U-11 Unlimited Racing Group announced that FLAV-R-PAC is returning in 2026 as their primary sponsor. Owner and crew chief Scott Raney noted in a press release, “FLAV-R-PAC has been a tremendous partner to us, and their continued support will help us perform at our best this season. With their partnership last year, we had a very successful season.”

The press release continued, “FLAV-R-PAC brand frozen vegetables can be found in the frozen aisles of a wide variety of grocery stores throughout the country. Next time you pick up a bag of veggies, choose FLAV-R-PAC and support a company whose loyalty and dedication help power Unlimited Racing.”

H1 has announced some changes in the H1 Board. The H1 Unlimited Board of Directors is responsible for governance of the sport, such as rules, officiating, and boat registration. The board ensures the integrity, consistency, and competitive structure of Unlimited racing. H1 announced that after two years at the helm, Mike Denslow has stepped down as the H1 chair and H1 board member. Denslow remarked, “Over the last two years, we've put some excellent individuals in key positions to help things run more smoothly. Now it's time for me to refocus on my mortgage business.”

Darrell Strong, an H1 principal, is the new H1 chair. Strong was previously the treasurer. Charlie Grooms, affiliated with the BWR Racing team, has been added as an H1 board member as vice-chair. Brad Luce continues as secretary, plus Shannon Raney and Bruce Ratchford continue as board members. No treasurer was named.

As now constituted, the H1 board is completely made up of racing insiders—Strong, Ratchford and Raney are owners, Grooms is a consultant to the BWR team and Luce anchors the H1 streaming programs. Previous H1 chair Denslow was not associated with any team.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

The Roger Newton Memorial RC and Model Show was held February 28 at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. Owners and drivers proudly displayed and answered questions about their boats to the large crowd attending. The boats really looked like artwork, so precisely built.

Jane Schumacher is testing the waters for sponsor recruitment for the U-37, Legacy Racing. Kevin Nolan has been tasked with assessing sponsor interest and sponsor recruitment.

Locally owned Jacobs Radio will broadcast the Tri-Cities race this year on FM 95.3, U-Rock. There will be new voices for

the stereo broadcast and likely some 80s music in-between. KONA AM has been the radio partner for decades, so this is a major shift.

Rumors.

The off-season is the silly season, when rumors abound and truth is sometimes hard to decipher. Here are some of the rumors circulating—remember, don't bet the farm on any of them.

Decatur, IL was rumored as a likely race site in 2026, but it was determined that the venue was too small to stage an Unlimiteds race there.

Did a Detroit group deliver proposal to H1 to race there in 2026 or did H1 make a proposal to a Detroit group to race there? Likely there were some discussions. Tom D'Eath was at the Tri-Cities race in 2025 and inferred there was a 2026 Detroit race proposal. In any case,

there will not be a race in Detroit in 2026.

Detroit sources tell the UNJ that much of the land where the race has been staged has been sold for redevelopment; they speculate that it is unlikely there will ever be a race in Detroit going forward. Moving the racecourse may not be an option, as the water is too rough going toward downtown Detroit.

Fans that attended the Doha race think the pits at the former Doha, Qatar, race were destroyed in Iranian strikes, after looking at news reels.

KONA Radio officials are reportedly upset about losing the broadcast rights for the 2026 Tri-Cities race and air show, and there are rumors that KONA may air sports counter-programming during race weekend.

The San Diego race appears to be a go in 2026 as some teams have made hotel reservations, but rumor says the

race committee suffered financial issues in 2025 when a sponsor did not come through with their sponsorship payment.

Fans are speculating about how the new start procedure will be implemented at races, such as Madison and San Diego if there is a hiccup. Likely six boats will attend Madison and San Diego—what will happen with the new rules if a boat withdraws before the race or during the race? Round robin was the choice with five boats, but that does not appear to fit the new start procedure and point rules.

Rumor circulating, from multiple sources, that Strong Racing is hunting for primary sponsors for both of their boats.

Has Dustin Echols joined the H1 streaming team for the 2026 season? He was a natural when he helped out in Tri-Cities last season. ❖

MY \$0.02 WORTH

Editorial Comment by Andy Muntz



So, H1 Unlimited has devised another starting procedure for the sport. For those of you keeping score, according to the tally of starting procedure changes we included in our February issue, the sport has modified the method for starting a race 28 times since 1990. Who knows? After trying and retrying so many different versions of this procedure, maybe the 29th attempt will be the charm? Maybe this time they'll get it right?

According to the officials at H1 Unlimited, the objective of the change was to benefit the race fan. But, I'm concerned. One of the things that has been missing in the past is a starting procedure that would be easy for fans to understand.

When this new procedure was announced several weeks ago, I decided to do something old-school—I printed it. The description of the new rule con-

sumed five sheets of paper. That's not a good omen for simplicity.

The intent of the new procedure is to make every session count, to reward consistency, and to create a clearer path from time trials to the final heat. To accomplish that, the change will do away with the tradition of drivers fighting for lanes before the start and, instead, starting from assigned lanes.

The change starts with awarding more points during time trials. The objective was to make the time trials a more important part of the event—so that they do more than provide bragging rights, but to help shape the rest of the weekend.

The fastest qualifier will now be awarded 200 points instead of the previous 100. The second-fastest gets 180 points, instead of 80. The third-fastest gets 160 points, instead of 70, and so on.

Then, when race day arrives, the

boats will be assigned to the sections of the first heat according to qualifying speed, with assignments done so that the boats will be distributed evenly (the fastest in one, the next fastest in the other, the third fastest with the fastest, the fourth fastest with the second fastest, and so on.) Within those sections, the drivers with the slowest qualifying speeds will get to choose their starting lanes before those who were faster.

For the second and third heats, the boats will be distributed to heat sections according to the points they've earned so far. (The boat with the most points to one section, the boat with the second-most points to the other, and so on.) Then, in the winner-take-all final, the boats with the most points will compete and the drivers will choose their lanes in the order of the number of points they

have earned so far. But, here's the twist: A driver can only choose lane one once in the season, same goes with lane two.

But, what happens when only five boats appear at a race or remain able to compete by the time the racing starts?

If this new system sounds familiar, it's similar to what happened in 1991 when the sport adopted something called the Fan Plan, where the faster and slower qualifiers raced against each other in separate heats. But, there was a significant different between then and now. In 1991, the season consisted of eight events and saw the appearance of 15 different boats. Last year, there were half as many races and just eight boats.

Besides, even with more races and more boats, the procedure wasn't a success. The Fan Plan was scrapped after only one year and, while the lanes were assigned by random draw that year, the drivers complained enough that a process was introduced in 1992 that was more like today's new version. Drivers were allowed to choose their own lanes in the order of their qualifying speed and then according to their finish in previous heats. Yet, by 1998 drivers had complained so much about the assigned lanes, that, with the exception of brief

rule changes in 2001 and 2010, the sport went back to fighting for lanes.

The new starting procedure for the 2026 season was developed by the sport's Competition Committee, which is made up of crew chiefs and others on the technical side of things. They were motivated by a desire to get rid of the park-and-starts we have discussed so much, the confusion caused by score-up buoys, and to eliminate the benefit that sometimes fall to competitors because somebody else made a mistake (a driver who wins a race because another driver jumped the gun, for example).

While drivers eventually killed the lane assignment ideas that were tried more than 30 years ago, we've so far heard from drivers who support this change. One who preferred to remain anonymous told us he thought the change was way overdue. "The die-hard fans that have loved our sport forever will hate it for awhile, but the only way for us to bring new fans in and make our sport grow is to make it relatable to a new audience."

Eliminating the advantage of team driving could be one positive result of the change, this driver says. "When there were more teams racing, it was a huge ad-

vantage to team boats to fight for lanes," he pointed out. "It is unfair to have one driver pitting against other teams, making opportunities for his other team driver. It happened more times than I can count and makes it nearly impossible for a single-boat team."

Jim Sechler, the crew chief for the Strong Racing Team, admitted in a recent video that he's not a fan of assigned lanes. He said he's always enjoyed the fight for lanes before the race and said the change could be a disadvantage to his team, which has spent a lot of time and effort to develop strategies for getting the inside lane. "But, it's not about what's good for Strong Racing," he added. "It's about the race fan. So, I believe we should try it."

Sechler said he likes how the new procedure will spread the talent amongst the heats and allow lower-point boats to start from the inside. "It should create good deck-to-deck racing, in theory."

We'll see what happens this summer. If it doesn't work, what's the worst that could happen? Would a 30th attempt be the breaking point? As Thomas Edison once said after trying unsuccessfully many times to create a light bulb. "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." ❖

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