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# UNLIMITED NEWSJOURNAL

A Chronicle of Speed

## Kelly crawls to inside lane and to victory in San Diego.



Chris Denslow

by Mac Clouse

**A**fter the Seattle race, there was a lot of speculation about what boats would be in San Diego for the season-ending race. One story had the Bayfair directors wanting only the top six national high points boats to be there. The race would be described as “The Race for the National Championship.” The six invited boats would have been U-6, U-12, U-7, U-1, U-98, and U-11.

One problem for H1 and that

plan, however, was that the U-1918 *Oberto Super Salami*, with budgeted money from Oberto, would not be invited. When Mike and Lori Jones announced that the U-1 *Delta Realtrac* would not go to San Diego, an invitation spot opened for the U-440 *Bucket List Racing*. Owner Kelly Stocklin declined the invite saying the economics did not justify the trip. The good news for H1 was that now the U-1918 could be the sixth boat.

The six-boat field was U-1 *Miss HomeStreet* (Jimmy Shane), U-12

*Graham Trucking* (J. Michael Kelly), U-7 *Spirit of Detroit* presented by *Boitano Homes* (Bert Henderson), U-98 *Graham Trucking American Dream* (Cory Peabody), U-11 *J&D’s* presented by *Reliable Diamond Tool* (Jamie Nilsen), and U-1918 *Oberto Super Salami* (Jeff Bernard).

With a 1,443-points lead over Kelly in the national championship chase, Shane pretty much had the title before the boats hit the water. He clinched his sixth championship by being the fastest qualifier and then by winning the first prelim-

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[Top] The U-6 *Miss HomeStreet* with Jimmy Shane driving and its sister, the U-1918 *Oberto Super Salami*, hot on its tail. [Middle] The U-7 *Spirit of Detroit* presented by Boitano Homes. [Above] The U-98 *Graham Trucking American Dream* leaves the dock.

inary heat. It was Kelly who won the final and the Bill Muncey Cup, however, and closed the season with his third win in a row.

**Friday:**

The original schedule did not have the boats touching the water on Friday. A revised schedule included a testing period from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. To increase the length of time that boats would be on the water, the drivers were told by the referee that only one boat at a time would test.

Shane was the first boat out and *HomeStreet* did a fast lap of 155.212 mph. Next was Bernard, who drove the *Oberto* to a fast lap of 146.984 mph. Henderson in the *Spirit of Detroit* did 146.273 mph and Nilsen in *J&D's* did 148.220 mph. Peabody's final lap in the *American Dream* was his fastest at 138.514 mph, but he slowed to a stop after the lap. Kelly did 147.248 mph in the *Graham Trucking*.

Peabody explained what happened at the end of his fast lap. "I let off the gas to slow down and come in," he said. "The engine then popped and blew the hot end. The crew is working on building a new one."

Most people thought the session ended at 4:30 p.m. The officials kept the course open, however, and at 4:40 p.m., back-up driver Patrick Haworth took the *Spirit of Detroit* out. He did four laps, all above 143 mph with the fastest at 149.967 mph. Owner Dave Bartusch plans to run two boats next year and Haworth will join Henderson as the team's other driver.

Even later, Nilsen went out again in *J&D's* and did the fastest lap of the day at 156.857 mph. Owner Scott Raney said, "I'm very happy with the speed, but I'm sad that no one was here to see it!"

## Saturday:

**A**t the Friday driver's meeting, H1 officials announced a change in the competition rules and the format for the racing. The boats would be in each of four heats of racing before the final. "The strobes don't work," the referee said. So, there would be no 80-mph minimum speed. There would be no minimum at all. Lanes would be established at the entrance buoy for the second turn before the start.

On Saturday, there would be qualifying from 12:30 p.m. to 2 p.m. There would be two heats: Heat 1 at 3 p.m. and Heat 2 at 4:15 p.m. Each heat would have four boats and be three laps. Heats 3 and 4 would be on Sunday. Each would have five boats and be three laps. All six boats would be in the five-lap final.

Each boat would race in three of the heats and "sit out" one heat. How the boats were determined for each heat was not disclosed. Here are the heat line-ups.

◆ Heat 1: U-6, U-7, U-11, and U-1918

◆ Heat 2: U-12, U-98, U-11, and U-1918

◆ Heat 3: U-6, U-12, U-7, U-98, and U-11

◆ Heat 4: U-12, U-98, U-1918, U-6, and U-7

Meanwhile, the weekend also included racing action by smaller limited-class hydroplanes, and several Unlimited drivers saw

double duty in those cockpits.

Jimmy Shane drove the GP-10 *The Charger*, a Grand Prix West entry from Arizona, Jamie Nilsen saw time in Scott Pierce's GP-55 *Cabo Marine Motorsports* and would actually win the final on Sunday, and both J. Michael Kelly and Jeff Bernard drove in the 1-Litre event.



Chris Denslow



Robert F. Peters

[Top] The crowd along the shoreline of Mission Bay. [Above] The boats head for the starting line for Heat 1 with the U-11 *J&D's* presented by *Reliable Diamond Tool* on the outside (left), the U-6 *Miss HomeStreet*, and the U-1918 *Oberto Super Salami* on the inside.

## Testing:

Four boats tested. The first out was Nilsen in *J&D's*, who did two laps. His second was 159.019 mph, which was over 2 mph faster than his Friday afternoon speed and the best ever for the boat. Bernard did three hot laps with *Oberto* and posted a weekend best of 160.167 mph. Henderson's best of two laps in *Spirit of Detroit* was 143.797 mph. Kelly did three hot laps with a best of 157.326 mph.

## Qualifying:

Bernard in *Oberto* was the first out for qualifying. He did 157.499 mph. *J&D's* with Nilsen did 154.421 mph. Peabody did a lap of 133.160 mph in the *American Dream* and then slowly returned to the pits. Henderson did 141.262 mph in *Spirit of Detroit*. Kelly did a lap of 156.220 mph in *Graham Trucking* and then died in the first turn during his second lap. The last qualifier in the first round was Shane and *HomeStreet*, who posted the first round's top speed of 158.023 mph.

Peabody explained why he did only one lap. "The engine tempera-



Jeff Bernard drives the U-1918 *Oberto Super Salami* onto the Mission Bay racecourse. On the right is the U-7 *Spirit of Detroit* presented by *Boitano Homes* sitting at the dock.

Craig Fjarlie

ture was rising," he said. "We came in rather than risk any problems with the equipment."

As for Kelly's one lap? "I shut it down when I had a huge shudder," he explained. "It was rudder flutter. I've never had that before."

All of the speeds were lower than in the morning testing. "The water was about the same," said Bernard, "but the air temperature

was higher and there was some wind in the backstretch. Everyone's speed was down about 3 mph."

When asked about his plans for the second round of qualifying, Shane said, "We'll see if anyone beats my speed. The water was calm, but there was a steady breeze. I was going pretty hard. We didn't have much more. All the boats are close, quality boats."



Competition during Heat 3. From the left is J. Michael Kelly driving the U-12 *Graham Trucking*, Jimmy Shane in the U-6 *Miss HomeStreet*, and Jamie Nilsen in the U-11 *J&D's* presented by *Reliable Diamond Tool*.

Robert F. Peters

The only boat to go out in the second round was *J&D's*. Nilsen increased his speed to 157.585 mph, which moved him to the second fastest qualifier. Since nobody beat his speed, Shane did not go out. His top speed in qualifying gave him 100 points while Kelly got 60 points, which meant Shane's national points lead had increased to 1,483.

### Heat 1:

In Heat 1, *Oberto* was in lane one, *HomeStreet* in lane two, *J&D's* in lane three, and *Spirit of Detroit* in lane four. Nilsen was first across the start line, but Shane and Bernard used the inside lanes to pass him and be side-by-side down the backstretch. Shane had about a two-second lead over Bernard at the end of the first lap. Nilsen was third with Henderson in fourth.

Shane extended his lead to a roostertail during the second lap and moved out to lane four. Using the inside, Bernard was able to close to within one half a roostertail at the end of the final lap. Nilsen finished third and Henderson was fourth.

Shane was pleased with the win and its consequences. "I tried to stay clear of everyone," he said. "Once I got the lead, I moved outside away from the other boats. That let Jeff catch up a bit in lap three. With the 400 points we just got, we should have clinched the national championship."

Shane was correct. His 400 points from Heat 1 gave him a lead of 1,883 points over Kelly. If Kelly won all three of his preliminary heats and the final, he could earn only 1,600 points.

### Heat 2:

In Heat 2, Kelly moved into the inside lane very early and went slowly, below 80 mph, to keep it. *Oberto* was in lane two, with *J&D's* in lane three. *American Dream* was

# STATBOX

## HOMESTREET BANK BAYFAIR

San Diego, California, September 14-15, 2019  
2 1/2-mile course on Mission Bay; 35 mile race

**QUALIFYING** (1) *U-1 Miss HomeStreet*, Jimmy Shane, 158.623, 100 points; (2) *U-11 J&D's presented by Reliable Diamond Tool*, Jamie Nilsen, 157.585, 80; (3) *U-1918 Oberto Super Salami*, Jeff Bernard, 157.499, 70; (4) *Graham Trucking*, J. Michael Kelly, 156.220, 60; (5) *U-7 Spirit of Detroit presented by Boitano Homes*, Bert Henderson, 141.262, 50; (6) *U-98 Graham Trucking American Dream*, Corey Peabody, 133.360, 40.

**HEAT 1** (1) *Miss HomeStreet* 151.276, 400, 500; (2) *Oberto Super Salami* 151.268, 300, 370; (3) *J&D's presented by Reliable Diamond Tool* 143.870, 225, 305; (4) *Spirit of Detroit presented by Boitano Homes* 132.716, 169, 219. Fast lap (2) *Oberto Super Salami* 154.339.

**HEAT 2** (1) *Graham Trucking* 152.341, 400, 460; (2) *Oberto Super Salami* 147.612, 300, 670; (3) *J&D's presented by Reliable Diamond Tool* 143.762, 225, 530; (4) *Graham Trucking American Dream DNF* – engine overheated, 0, 40. Fast lap (3) *Graham Trucking* 153.680

**HEAT 3** (1) *Miss HomeStreet* 153.531, 400, 900; (2) *J&D's presented by Reliable Diamond Tool* 151.847, 300, 830; (3) *Graham Trucking* 137.788, 225, 685; (4) *Spirit of Detroit presented by Boitano Homes* 131.157, 169, 388; *Graham Trucking American Dream DNS* – Returned to the pits, 0, 40. Fast lap (2) *J&D's presented by Reliable Diamond Tool* 160.213.

**HEAT 4** (1) *Miss HomeStreet* 153.056, 400, 1300; (2) *Graham Trucking* 152.100, 300, 985; (3) *Oberto Super Salami* 139.915, 225, 895; (4) *Spirit of Detroit presented by Boitano Homes*, Patrick Haworth, 103.167 (penalized one minute for not being five seconds back at the start), 169, 557; *Graham Trucking American Dream DNS* – , 0, 40. Fast lap (3) *Graham Trucking* 154.461.

**FINAL** (1) *Graham Trucking* 150.490, 400, 1385; (2) *Miss HomeStreet* 146.307, 300, 1600; (3) *Oberto Super Salami* 133.589, 225, 1120; (4) *Spirit of Detroit presented by Boitano Homes* 116.318 (penalized one minute for jumping the gun), 169, 726; (5) *Graham Trucking American Dream* 106.856, 127, 167; *J&D's presented by Reliable Diamond Tool DNF* – Ingested water, 0, 830. Fast lap (4) *Miss HomeStreet* 152.583.

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late leaving the pits but did start in lane four. Kelly, Bernard, and Nilsen were close down the backstretch, but the inside lanes paid off. Kelly led Bernard by half of a roostertail and Nilsen was half a roostertail behind Bernard. Peabody crossed the start line but returned to the pits before completing a lap due to the overheating engine.

The order stayed the same for all three laps. Kelly beat Bernard by four roostertails, with Nilsen trailing Bernard by two roostertails. "I didn't have much time yesterday on the water," said Kelly. "I wanted to be in lane one, but with the new rules I didn't have any marks. I just went by the seat of my pants. It is much easier to start without the rules."

Robert F. Peters



Bill Osborne



H1 Unlimited



[Top] The start of Heat 3. From the inside lane, the U-11 J&D's presented by Reliable Diamond Tool, the U-7 Spirit of Detroit presented by Boitano Homes, the U-6 Miss HomeStreet, and the U-12 Graham Trucking.  
[Middle] Jamie Nilsen (left), driver of the U-11 J&D's presented by Reliable Diamond Tool, and Shannon and Scott Raney, owners of the U-11 team.  
[Above] The U-6 Miss HomeStreet clinched the 2019 national title in San Diego.

**Sunday:**

**A**t 8 o'clock on Sunday morning, a fog bank settled on the course making it invisible. Fortunately, it burned off quickly and was gone by 8:20 a.m. Soon the temperature was rising to the mid-80s, which was true for all three days. Heat 3 was scheduled for 10:30 a.m., Heat 4 for 2:45 p.m., and the final for 4:10 p.m.

The crowd along the shoreline seemed smaller than usual. While the RV spots on Fiesta Island looked full, there were a lot of spots on Vacation Island (north of the pits) where a fan could have set up chairs and such right on the beach line, whereas in the past that fan would have had to set up behind people who were already there.

Perhaps the smaller turnout might have had to do with the fact that although there were other limited classes competing, the action didn't include any of the usual Super Stock flatbottoms. As a result, there were long breaks in the action between heats on Sunday when nothing was happening on the water.

The 9 a.m. test session had two boats and five laps. *Oberto* did two laps with the fastest at 151.714 mph, and *Spirit of Detroit* did three laps with the fastest at 149.285 mph.

**Heat 3:**

In Heat 3, J&D's was in lane one, *Spirit of Detroit* was in lane two, *HomeStreet* in lane three, and *Graham Trucking* in lane four. *American Dream* returned to the pits before the start.

Nilsen was first across the start, but Shane and Kelly were soon past him to take first and second. Shane led Kelly by a little over a second at the end of the first lap while Nilsen was about three seconds back and Henderson was in fourth.

In the second lap, Shane stayed in lane three, pushing Kelly outside. Nilsen was able to use the inside and the day's fastest lap of 160.213 mph to pass Kelly for second. Shane won by three quarters of a roostertail over Nilsen. Kelly was a long way back in third with Henderson in fourth.

Shane was again pleased with the result. "I wanted to race smart," he said. "I didn't want to fight for lane one. I was OK with lane three, especially with Michael outside of me in lane four."

Kelly commented on his third-place finish. "I was getting pushed outside in lap two, so I backed off in lap three to save the equipment for the final."

#### Heat 4:

In Heat 4, Patrick Haworth drove in his first unlimited heat. He had done all of his qualifying laps, but because it was his first heat, he was told to start on the outside, five seconds behind the front line.

Kelly was very early on the backstretch trying to get lane one for *Graham Trucking*. *HomeStreet* was in lane two, *Oberto* in lane three, and *Spirit of Detroit* in lane four. *American Dream* didn't leave its trailer.

All four boats were together at the entrance buoy to the second turn and all four accelerated at the same time. Shane was first across the start and led Kelly by half a roostertail at the end of lap one. Bernard was a roostertail behind Kelly and Haworth was in fourth.

In the second and third laps, Kelly used the inside lane to catch up to Shane in the turns, but Shane would get separation in the straightaways. In the final turn of lap three, Kelly was ahead of Shane by one boat length, but Shane used his superior straightaway speed during the run to the finish line and got a



H1 Unlimited

The U-12 *Graham Trucking*, the winner of the Bill Muncy Cup.

two-boat-length win. This was the day's closest race. *Oberto* was third and *Spirit of Detroit* was fourth.

After the heat, Bernard filed a protest against Haworth. Rather than being five seconds back, Haworth was even with the other three boats while going through the turn prior to the start. He said he wanted to slide out to scrub off some speed, but he couldn't because Haworth was right there outside of him. The officials agreed and Haworth was given a one-minute penalty for not being five seconds back at the start.

In spite of the penalty, Haworth was positive about his experience. When asked if he had fun, he said, "Yes, I did. I stayed outside to see what it would be like racing in rough water. Then I moved inside when I felt comfortable."

#### Final:

In the final heat, Kelly was very early in the backstretch, almost parking, to get lane one. Nilsen settled in close to Kelly, but couldn't take the inside lane away. He was in lane two. Shane was in lane three, Bernard in lane four, and Henderson in lane five. *American Dream* died in the backstretch before the start.

Peabody restarted it, but was very late to the start. Henderson jumped the gun.

Kelly was first to and through the first turn. Using lane one, he led Shane by three quarters of a roostertail at the end of the first lap. *Spirit of Detroit* was in third, *J&D's* was in fourth, *Oberto* in fifth, and *American Dream* trailed the field.

Kelly stretched his lead over Shane to a roostertail in the second lap and they were followed by Henderson, Bernard, and Peabody. *J&D's* died in the first turn.

During the third lap, *HomeStreet* got caught in a bit of mess in the first turn. *J&D's* was dead in the water and *American Dream* was also there going slow. Shane had to back off a bit, which enabled Kelly to stretch his lead to two roostertails. Henderson was in third, Bernard in fourth, and Peabody in fifth.

The order stayed the same for the last two laps and Kelly sped away to win by half of a straightaway ahead of Shane. On the water, Henderson was third, Bernard fourth, and Peabody fifth. Henderson's one-minute penalty for jumping the gun moved Bernard up to third, however. Because Peabody was so slow, Henderson still

finished ahead of him to get fourth.

Peabody commented on his boat's problems. "We had fuel control issues and the engine was overheating," he explained. "I asked about shutting down but was told to keep going."

Bernard had problems at the start. "Bert was outside of me and jumped. He got to the turn first and I had nowhere to go. The fact that I was late to the start didn't help."

Owner Shannon Raney explained what happened to *J&D's*. "Initially we thought it was a fuel control failure because the engine went to ground idle and wouldn't accelerate," she said. "When the boat got back to the trailer, we cleaned the engine really well, restarted it, and got it to act normal. We're pretty certain that the engine took a gulp of Mission Bay from the boat in front of us."

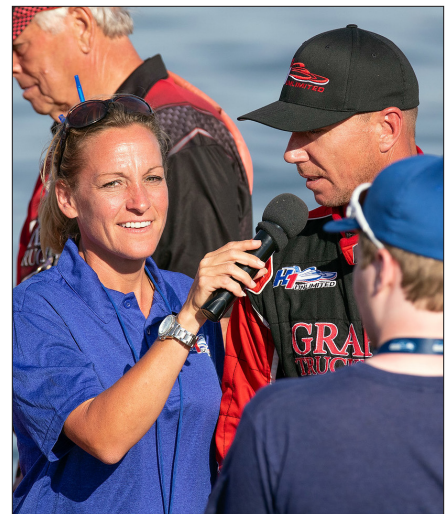
Henderson was pleased with his finish and his first full year. "We tried everything we could do, and things worked in the final. I love the Unlimiteds and all the people. We are looking forward to having two boats next year."

Shane was disappointed with the final but pleased with the year's

performance. "I knew Mike would do what he did to get lane one," he said. "It's not good for the fans, but that's the result from the rules for this contest. I had a good start and things were close until lap three. It was hard for me to see in turn one because the 11 and the 98 were both there. I had to back off and Mike got away from me. But it was a wonderful year. It is an honor to drive for my team. The 2019 national-points championship was our main goal and we achieved that. Thanks to my crew for giving me the best equipment all year long."

Kelly explained his strategy. "I knew I couldn't beat Jimmy from the outside," he explained. "I also didn't want Jamie or Jeff to be inside of me. My best chance was to be in lane one. I was going really slow in lane one on the backstretch, but I did keep the boat running. I wasn't sure what the other guys were going to do and got nervous when Jamie pulled up near me. But I got lane one and it was the lane to be in. It has been an honor for me to drive for all the Graham people. Three wins this year says a lot about this team."

HomeStreet Bank was a very



Chris Denslow

Kay Brewer interviews J. Michael Kelly.

important part of the 2019 season as a boat sponsor and the sponsor of both the Seattle and San Diego races. "We are proud of the team and Jimmy," commented CEO Mark Mason. "It was a nice bounce-back year. However, the sport needs some changes. We were embarrassed by the confusion at the end of the Seattle race. We are hopeful of changes in the rules and the enforcement of the rules. Decisions need to come from one well-defined focus. The experience needs to be enhanced for everyone—the fans, the competitors, the sponsors, and the officials."

With the 2019 season completed, there are many questions to be answered about 2020. There were rumors in the pits about HomeStreet's future involvement in the sport. There also are questions about the future of some of the race teams and race sites. Will the old sponsors and sites stay with the sport? Will there be any new sponsors? Any new teams? Any new boats? How many races? What will be the competition rules and race formats? Will there be changes in the race officials? Will there be organizational changes within H1?

So many questions, and at this time, there are no answers. ❖



Robert F. Peters

The podium finishers for the HomeStreet Bank San Diego Bayfair event. From the left, second-place finisher Jimmy Shane, Bill Muncy Cup winner J. Michael Kelly, and third-place finisher Jeff Bernard.





Craig Fjarlie

# Classic race boats appear at Mahogany and Merlot.

by Craig Fjarlie

Over the years, the Hydroplane and Race Boat Museum's Mahogany and Merlot event on Lake Chelan has grown in size and in local interest. The 2019 renewal attracted 11 vintage Unlimited hydroplanes, two vintage Grand Prix hydroplanes, plus close to two dozen vintage inboard boats.

The weather was crisp at night with hints of fall in the air. Daytime, however, was sunny and pleasant. On Saturday, a breeze put ripples on the water, but conditions were ideal on Sunday. The winged *Pay 'n Pak* and the 1962 *Miss Bardahl* were pitted across the lake from everyone else so there would be adequate space for a crane to lift them in and out of the water.



Craig Fjarlie

[Top] A featured participant in Mahogany and Merlot was a replica of the 1939 *Notre Dame* with its unique 24-cylinder Duesenberg engine. [Above] The 1957 *Miss U.S. IV* (left) and a replica of the 1956 *Miss Wahoo*.

Craig Fjarlie



Chris Denslow



Craig Fjarlie



[Top] The 1958 *Shanty II* captured a great deal of attention in the pit area. [Middle] The Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum provided rides on their boats, such as the 1958 *Miss Bardahl*. [Above] The *Blue Chip*, which was built in 1957.

Boats in the park included the 1958 *Miss Bardahl*, *Miss Wahoo*, *Blue Chip*, *Oh Boy!*, *Oberto*, *Miss U.S.* (formerly known as *Miss U.S. IV*), *Hurricane IV*, *My Sin*, *Shanty II*, and the craft that attracted the most attention, *G-5 Notre Dame*. The latter was a replica of the hull built in 1939, but it contained the one-of-a-kind 24-cylinder Duesenberg engine that was used in the original boat.

The two vintage Grand Prix boats were *Deepwater Special* and *Advance United*. Famous vintage inboards included *Miss Washington*, *D.C.*, *The Gold Streak*, *Miss Vitamilk*, *Annie's Dodge II*, and *Madam Blue*.

*Mahogany and Merlot* attracts more than just boats. It also draws current and former participants in Unlimited racing. Among those on hand to witness the proceedings were Jeff Bernard, Owen Blauman, Doug Brow, Ronnie Brown, Ed Cooper, Tad Dean, Tom D'Eath, Tim Donery, Mark Evans, Mitch Evans, Dan Heye, David Heye, Mike and Lori Jones, Joe Kettner, Ken Muscatel, Scott Pierce, Kathy Powell, John Rheinberger, Aaron Salmon, Jack Schafer, Jr., Dixon Smith, Kelly Stocklin, Mark Weber, and the busiest man at the event, Museum Director David Williams.

Trouble struck the '58 *Miss Bardahl* on Saturday. A major engine failure put the boat on the beach for the remainder of the weekend. *Miss Wahoo* was busy both days, giving rides and making exhibition runs. Among those who received a ride was hydro historian Jim Sharkey. *Blue Chip* ran several times, as did *Oberto*. *Hurricane IV*, *Pay 'n Pak*, and the '62 *Miss Bardahl* ran only on Saturday.

A number of exhibition inboard heats were held both days. Between races, Unlimiteds made exhibition runs. Boats on trailers drew crowds of devoted fans and curious on-lookers. People stared at *Shanty II*

and one current participant was heard to remark, "Why did they ever think this boat was going to work?"

The craft that drew the most attention, however, was *Notre Dame*. Dan Arena, the son of Gene Arena, and Dan Foster, the son of Danny Foster, held interested fans in rapt attention with their stories about building the replica hull and saving the engine. They even located historic spark plugs like those used when the Duesenberg ran in races. Dan Arena said when his uncle Dan Arena built the original hull, he was 22 years old and kept a daily diary of the work performed. He also said when Herb Mendelson sold the boat and an Allison engine was going to be installed, the original hull was cut in half and lengthened, to accommodate the larger power plant.

The 24-cylinder engine was started with the boat on the trailer. The sound was unique, unlike the deep roar of an Allison or Rolls, yet different from a high-performance automobile engine. One person who witnessed the activity made the comment, "Just seeing this made my whole trip worthwhile."

The program came to a close shortly after 3 p.m. on Sunday. Fencing was taken down and boats were towed out of the park for their trips home. People who were on hand for both days saw one of the best Mahogany and Merlot events in recent memory.

The only obvious concern is, if more vintage boats participate next year, where will they put them all? It was a tight fit this year, and available space is limited. The good news is the event continues to produce interest in the local community and boat racing still has a devoted following. The natural beauty of Lake Chelan is just icing on the cake. ❖



Chris Denslow



Craig Fjarlie



Craig Fjarlie

[Top] A hydroplane fan celebrates the completion of a ride aboard the *Miss Wahoo* on Lake Chelan. [Middle] The cockpit of the 1939 *Notre Dame*. [Above] The 1948 *Hurricane IV*.

# My \$0.02 Worth

## Editorial Comment



Andy Muntz

## More discussion about starting hydroplane races.

In last month's column, I discussed the subject of starting an unlimited hydroplane race, a process that has seemed to elude the sport's officials for well over two decades. I reviewed the various methods that have been tried and offered a suggestion that might simplify what happens before the starting gun fires and that might make watching a boat race more understandable for the fans sitting on the beach.

In short, I suggested two changes: to greatly reduce the amount of time that passes from when the boats can leave the pits to when the start happens, and to require the boats to circle the course at least once during that starting period. The idea was to eliminate the possibility of a driver slowly creeping along before the start in order to grab the lane that he wants.

My suggestion was offered from the perspective of a fan who has been watching the start of hydroplane races for more than 60 years. I'll admit, it's a perspective that is highly influenced by what I remember racing to be like back in the olden days.

I concluded my thoughts with a call for others to offer their opinion. I said that I especially wanted to hear from drivers. And, so I did.

I had a long discussion about the issue with one of the most successful drivers this sport has ever seen, and he helped me learn a few

things. I learned that my perspective of racing might need some updating, for example. He told me that the conditions that today's drivers experience are vastly different from those seen by Bill Muncey, Dean Chenoweth, and the other heroes of yesteryear.

Back in those days, the starting procedure called for the boats to remain "on a plane" during the one-minute period before the starting gun fired. It was during this time that a chess match was played as drivers maneuvered for their preferred lane. The rule of staying on a plane could be easily enforced because it was easy for officials to see. The old shovel-nosed hydroplanes didn't handle slow speeds very well, it took them a very long time to get up to speed, so there was a big difference between a boat that was on a plane and one that wasn't.

What's more, the drivers back then sat in open cockpits. They could turn around and look to see where the other boats were located. They were also careful not to be too aggressive in fighting for lanes because, sitting there in the open without so much as a seat belt holding them into their seat, they knew how extremely vulnerable they were. A wrong move could have very real and tragic consequences to themselves and to their fellow drivers.

Today's drivers live in a different world, I was told. Today's boats

can accelerate from a crawl to top speed in a matter of seconds, so it's much harder to tell when a boat is actually on a plane. What's more, today's drivers have grown up racing in enclosed cockpits, where visibility is greatly restricted and where the attitude about the vulnerability of their fellow competitors is much different than it was in the old days.

In today's limited races, it's very common for the boats to bump into each other while the drivers fight for lanes. But, while playing bumper boats might be okay in the limited ranks where the hydroplanes weigh maybe 800 pounds, it's a different thing altogether when you're talking about bumping 7,000-pound unlimiteds together. Yet, that's how today's drivers have learned to drive.

With those factors in mind, my driver friend maintains that today's hydroplanes are no longer suited to fight the old battles for lanes that we saw long ago. Besides that, he believes it's confusing for new fans to understand. He says that the only way to start an unlimited race safely and fairly in today's environment is for the lanes to be assigned to the boats before the drivers go onto the racecourse.

And, this comes from a driver who won many races because he was good at fighting for and getting the lane that he wanted.

He suggested that the unlimiteds adopt a starting procedure that is similar to that used by the Hydroplane Racing League (HRL), where the competitors are assigned lanes according to the points they

have earned in previous events and, in later heats, by how the boats have performed so far in that race. He called it an "Earned Lane Format."

He was careful to point out that this would not be a flag start, as was tried previously. The start would still be controlled by a clock and competitors would still be penalized if they crossed the starting line too soon.

That brought up another discussion. What about penalties? How do we get away from this thing that has happened in Seattle the past three years where the boat crossing the finish line first is not really the winner? How can we assure that the winner will cross the line first, as the winner does in pretty much every other form of racing?

In car racing, for example, if there is an infraction against a

competitor, the driver is sometimes waved off the racecourse and told to wait in the pits for a certain period of time before re-entering the race.

Is there a way for something similar to be done in hydroplane racing?

By the way, speaking of penalties, my driver friend also had some choice words about the rules in general. He is particularly bothered by the fact that there are too many protests. It's become commonplace for a driver returning from a race to immediately call for the driver's rep because he has some beef about a ruling that was or wasn't made. All the complaining and protests, and the changing of race results hours later, just make the sport look foolish to the fans, he said.

He suggested that all of the officials and participants read Rule 4, Section P, Item 2 of the H1 Rule-

book, which says: "All decisions of the Referees shall be final regarding violations of starting, driving, and course rules. There shall be no appeals or protests from a decision based on the judgment of the Referees on violations of course rules."

It's not such an outlandish concept to have a restriction on making a protest, after all. In baseball, your opportunity to appeal a decision by the umpire ends as soon as the pitcher throws the next pitch. In football, it ends when the center snaps the ball for the next play. Why should boat racing be any different?

What do you think of the input from this former champion driver? Does it give you a different perspective?

Let's hear your thoughts. ❖

## We love to hear from our readers.

*Last month's comments about the starting procedure caused several readers to respond, including a boat owner and a former race site chair. Here's what they say:*

Hello from a fan in Detroit. Regarding the Seattle Fiasco editorial, I'd like to send you a piece I wrote two years ago, inspired by years of watching similar such things. No ill intent, just would like to share a few thoughts with you guys. How many more of these messes are we to suffer through before we say "enough"?

With the multitude of challenges facing Unlimited hydroplane racing, it's easy for fans and supporters of the sport to wonder what direction we might be heading. Larger concerns such as sponsor involvement, boat counts and viable race sites notwithstanding, here is one suggestion intended to improve the show, lessen safety concerns, and clear up much of the confusion that seems to turn off the casual fan.

By adopting the general concept used by the Hydroplane Racing League regarding lanes, the time prior to the start and the use of the infield, we would see the following net gains:

- ◆ Elimination of the sub 80 mph rule. (Who wouldn't like to see this end?)
- ◆ Less infield and DMZ violations. (A huge improvement in safety for infield personnel)

- ◆ Fewer course markers struck (and the resulting disqualifications)
- ◆ Improved heat racing. (Want a good lane for the final?)
- ◆ Referee's job requires less judgment calls. (i.e., overlap moves prior to start, 80 mph, etc.)
- ◆ Reduction in apparent winner reversals. (This is a big one.)
- ◆ Improved driver safety. (This is THE big one!)

Though this is usually characterized as "assigned" lanes, it would more accurately be termed "earned" lanes. Lanes are earned by results on the racecourse, either from qualifying speeds for the first round, points for the second round, and points inverted for the third round. If you're fast, you get rewarded, as you would expect. Do well in your qualifiers and you'll see the results in your placement for the final. Slower boats (and drivers on restriction) are placed out of harm's way for the final heat. Drivers are to maintain their lane from the middle of the backstretch prior to the start to the exit of turn one after the start.

During the five-minute period, drivers may only enter the infield from the backstretch between the exit of turn one and the mid-field marker. Boats on the racecourse have priority over boats reentering from the infield. Safety improved here for everyone? You bet.....

In general terms, this format does reward the faster boats. Most boat races are won by the faster boats, so there isn't much difference in the outcomes. This year [2017] we saw a Grand Prix rookie driver win in Tonawanda, N.Y., driving the (new to him) GP-101, starting in lane five, with a great start and a very determined effort. Donnie Allen, filling in for Andrew Tate, showed us how it's done! A few hours later that day, Andrew drove with the same determination in Seattle, only to have his apparent victory voided by a course marker infraction prior to the start. Two similar drives, two very different results. If you're looking at optics, look no further.

I understand the concept of the "race within the race" with the existing rules and the "fight for lanes" approach. Drivers are "earning" their lanes with this approach as well, but the results just aren't there. Too many times the fans are left wondering "what just happened?" We're also very lucky to have avoided tragedy here in Detroit this year in the first attempt of the Gold Cup final.

Though some veteran observers and participants will want to stick to their guns and stay with the "tried and true" ways, I'll invite you all to head down to the first turn at the Valleyfield Regatta and watch the Grand Prix's hit that first turn five wide and tell me this doesn't work. See you there!

**Robert Conner**

Fellas: Great job on your newsletter.

I am a lifetime fan and worked for Procter & Gamble when they sponsored the Pringles and The Tide, so I have a pretty good understanding of the sport.

The people in charge better make some positive changes or the vintage boats we be all that is left. I had to read the details of the controversial decision at the end of Seafair in the Madison Courier. The Seattle Times didn't have a single word about what really happened....mainly because they don't care. I don't think you explained it either. Not the delay, but the reasoning (or lack of) behind the decision.

The H1 website gives no meaningful reports about the real happenings in the sport. You guys are the only hope. How about some accurate information on:

- ◆ The financial condition of each race site.
  - ◆ The ACTUAL ATTENDANCE at each race...notice they never show the crowds on the broadcasts.
  - ◆ Can the sport survive without both Seattle and Detroit.
  - ◆ Can they fix the rules? The San Diego "park a boat" start was a joke.
  - ◆ How many boats will run in 2020 on the full schedule.
- Without some good answers to the above issues the

hydroplanes will fade into a "club sport." Thanks for the effort you put in

**Dave Torrell**

Thanks for the nice issue.

**Jim Codling**

Just read your article regarding the H1 starting process. I have always thought that the hydro with the leading point total should be given lane one in the final. All other lanes assigned by point total as well. Your idea could be used for all preliminary heats. My idea is based on the fact that it would motivate drivers to actually race for heat wins rather than simply run with the goal of securing enough points to get into the final. Lane one would be earned over the course of the weekend using this process.

In the final heat, the hydro in lane one would bring the field down to the start line similar to a NASCAR or Indy Car start. This would also eliminate any infraction for crossing the line early.

Yes, it would give the hydro in lane one an advantage, but one that was earned over several weekend heats as well as qualifying.

Very much enjoy your publication!

**Joe Hertz**

**Past President, Madison Regatta, Inc.**

Thanks for your thoughtful column. But I thought it left one question unanswered: There was a rule that boats had to stay on a plane. What was wrong with that? It's simple, verifiable, and seems to solve the problem we now face, of boats practically shutting down to hold the best lane. Why not just re-institute that rule, low-tech as it is?

**Roger Lippman**  
**Seattle**

MY \$0.50 WORTH

I read with some interest your comments and suggestions re: "How to start a Hydro race" and, as a result, decided to take you up on your suggestion for ideas to improve the current format.

First and most important, let's look at the root of the problem. H1 is currently relying on an old-fashioned method to start and control a race. The current procedure requires a referee to observe the entire racecourse and make calls almost immediately before and during a race. Even if it was possible to do so, the end result of the rule infraction with corresponding penalty, which often effects the race outcome, is SLOW to be conveyed and more often than not, never announced to an uninformed viewing audience either during the race and in some cases hours after completion.

In today's fast-paced world where instant communication is the norm, this procedure is not acceptable. Simply stated, a

race cannot be controlled by watching a video of the event after it has been run and then declare infractions, penalties, and an ultimate winner. The NFL can do it by stopping play, watching instant replay, and making any adjustments and continuing the game. Obviously, any form of racing cannot be stopped to make a correct call. So, what is the answer?

To paraphrase the statement made before old Six Million Dollar Man TV programs, "WE have the technology," so let's use it! H1 needs to forget, forego, and dump ALL antique methods of running a race and, as Andy Muntz suggested, consider the fans who pay to watch. How do we do this? Let's start by utilizing computers (all unlimited's have them) to make the instant calls referees are currently asked to make. NASCAR and Indy cars can do it with pit lane speeds, etc., and no one ever creates a furor, simply because it is an immediate call everyone is aware of and no one can argue with a computer. Simply stated, the referee is taken out of the procedure.

If anyone has ever seen a video from the judge's stand of six unlimited boats thunder across the starting line, it is easy to understand how difficult it is, due to turbulent water conditions, to sometimes pick out someone edging across too early. I am not a computer whiz by any means and I do not know how NASCAR does it, but it would seem to me that a laser line or radar beacon across the start/finish line activated by a devise attached on the tip of all boats could activate a computer clock in the judge's stand, which would give an instant call with regards to a valid start by each boat.

In addition to this sponson-tip devise, all boats would have a large red (yellow or whatever color) beacon attached in a very visible location (seen by all spectators) that would light up (flash) immediately if any particular boat jumps across the starting line too early. To increase fan excitement and improve the racing experience, once this beacon goes off, the boat incurring

the violation would be required to slow down (within a required distance) and fall immediately behind the last boat crossing the start/finish line, after which it would be allowed to continue to race at full speed. Eliminate the one-minute and/or one-lap penalty completely.

As an added benefit to this new computer referee, the pre-race milling for favorable lane position could also be controlled by setting the minimum speed required (80 mph or more) to a maximum number of seconds allowed (i.e., 5-10) set inside the boat's computer. Once this time is exceeded, the red violation beacon, visible to all spectators, would automatically begin to flash. The violating driver would be required to give up his lane position and move safely to the outside lane (if possible) or at the starting line, fall behind the last starting boat. Again, no further penalty would be incurred, and the violating boat would be allowed to race at full speed. From a spectator's standpoint it would seem faster boats incurring this violation, rather than be eliminated, would now create some exciting racing attempting to go from last to first.

Maybe none of the above is a new idea, and obviously the cost factor comes into play with some tweaking involved to perfect the system, but there is no question now is the time to forget the past and move into the 21st century. It is possible that without such changes, we may be relegated to history.

**David R. Bartush**

**Detroit**

**Owner of the U-7 Spirit of Detroit**

Just a quick note to give Andy a BIG GREAT Column!! Well written, Andy, with a well-reasoned recommendation. Only hope the H-1 gurus get the point and adopt your recommendation.

**Terry Herring**

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**PLEASE JOIN US AT THE NEXT MEETING OF UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS.**

2 p.m. on Sunday, November 10, 2019

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