

## Leadership changes at H1 Unlimited.

BY ANDY MUNTZ

A significant change came to the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing on the Wednesday evening following Thanksgiving. During a meeting that lasted less than 10 minutes, the board of directors of the American Boat Racing Association (ABRA), more commonly known as H1 Unlimited, elected people to the board who are supportive of a new organization called Hydrotown Group, LLC. Then, after taking that action, a majority of the board members resigned their positions and left the new members in charge of governing the sport.

The brief meeting brought to an official conclusion a disagreement that had been swirling within the leadership of H1 Unlimited for the previous month, and more. While H1 Unlimited was busy making plans for a 2024 season that promised to include seven races, a partnership of boat owners was working behind the scenes to take over the running of the sport.

The action taken by the ABRA board finally settled the matter. A press release issued by the sport's new leaders called it "an exciting reorganization that will look to propel the popularity of the sport back to its rightful position within the motorsports community." But, how did this change come to pass?

The *Unlimited NewsJournal* has the full story.



### ALSO IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE:

7 **A conversation with Lee Schoenith, Part 2**

21 **Heritage** by Craig Fjarlie  
22 **Around the Circuit** by Chris Tracy

23 **My \$0.02 Worth** by Andy Muntz

## First, a little history.

For the first half century of the sport's existence, unlimited hydroplane racing was operated under the direction of the Inboard Racing Commission, a division within the American Power Boat Association (APBA), the sanctioning body for all boat racing in the United States. In addition to the Unlimiteds, the Inboard Commission was also governed limited-class inboard racing.

By the mid-1950s, though, it became clear to participants in the Unlimited-class that the Inboard Commission wasn't adequately addressing the special needs of boat racing's best-known category. So, the Unlimited Racing Commission (URC) was formed and the Unlimiteds were finally able to govern themselves.

Under commissioners such as George Trimpier, Lee Schoenith, Buddy Byers, Fred Alter, and Don Jones, the URC led the sport through the period when it evolved from a sport for wealthy sportsmen, to a commercialized enterprise—from a time when prize money was rarely awarded to participants, to a more professional approach.

In November 1995, the name was changed to the Unlimited Hydroplane Racing Association to help clarify the sport's identity, but the organization essentially remained the same until July 2000, when the APBA announced that its agreement for the operation of Unlimited-class hydroplanes would transfer to a new organization called Hydro-Prop, Inc.

Hydro-Prop was something new—a for-profit partnership that was owned by Bernie Little, the owner of the *Miss Budweiser* hydroplanes, and Gary Garbrecht, who had a long history in marketing high-performance outboard racing. The new owners wanted the sport to be run like a profit-seeking business, not like a club, and promptly rewrote the rule book to “pump new life and competitiveness into the sport.”

Among the rule changes was the elimination of clock starts to get rid of trolling before the starting gun went off. They used flag starts, instead. They also assigned starting lanes according to the results of qualifying speeds and previous heats. Most controversial, however, was the fact that they frequently changed rules and at each race would assess differing fuel-flow limits on successful boats as a way to help equalize the competition.

**The race sites thought they were paying too much for the hydros to come to their towns, and the boat owners complained that there wasn't enough money coming from the race sites and from Hydro-Prop. Pretty soon, fewer boats were entering races, and then the race sites complained that they weren't getting large enough fields of competitors.**

The competition did improve, but then came a revolt. The complaints started to become more loudly voiced shortly after Bernie Little's death in early 2003. The race sites thought they were paying too much for the hydros to come to their towns, and the boat owners complained that there wasn't enough money coming from the race sites and from Hydro-Prop. Pretty soon, fewer boats were entering races, and then the race sites complained that they weren't getting large enough fields of competitors. Eventually, the race sites colluded with each other against Hydro-Prop and started contacting the boat owners directly.

The matter finally came to a head in 2004, when three race sites decided to break away from Hydro-Prop and the APBA to host their own events. The other four continued their association with Hydro-Prop, but it was clear that the end of Hydro-Prop had come. By mid-season, the rights to the series were purchased by a Florida attorney named Trent Ling. The assets of the sport were then briefly held by the race organizers in Detroit, and, finally, the boat owners and the race sites joined forces and created the American Boat Racing Association so that, as one person involved explained, “we don't have rules that arbitrarily change every 10 minutes.”

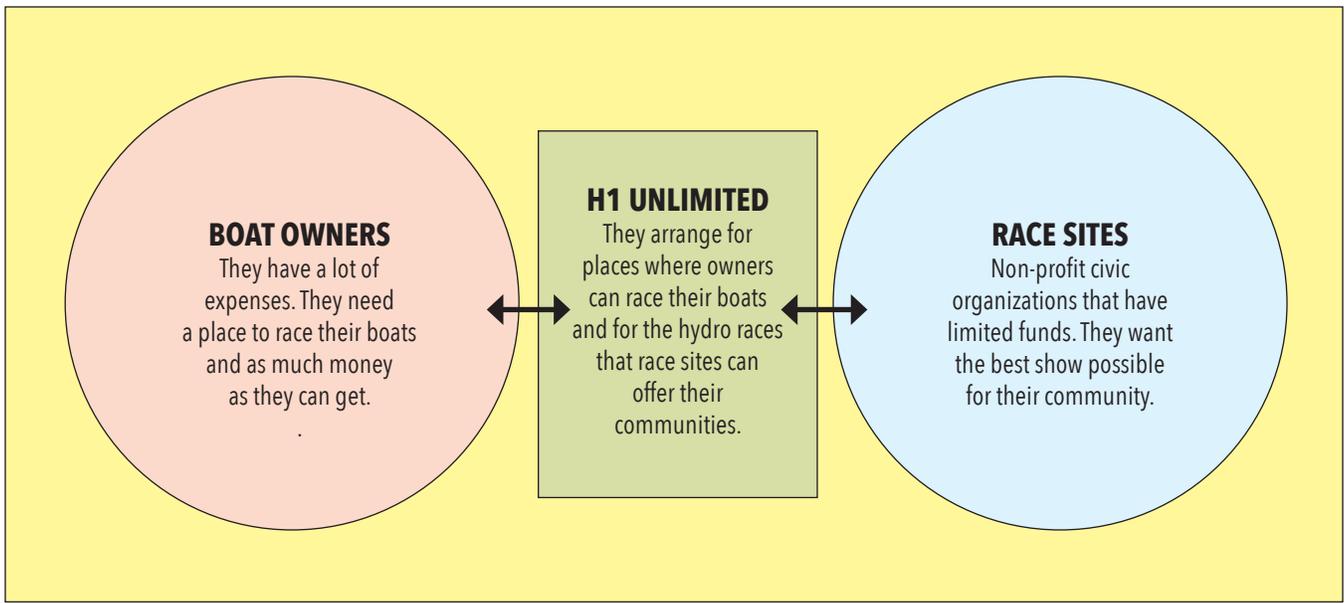
## The ABRA.

The American Boat Racing Association, which adopted the trademark H1 Unlimited in 2009, is a non-profit corporation that is registered in the state of Washington. According to its bylaws, its objective is to “create and operate a hydroplane racing series.” It does this by acting as the coordinator between the two primary parties within the sport: the boat owners and the race sites.

Here's how the relationships work:

**Owners**—Operating an Unlimited-class hydroplane is very expensive, which means that team owners want to earn as much money as possible through sponsorships and tow money in order to cover their high costs. They also need a place to race their boats because, after all, why else have a race boat?

**Race Sites**—The races are organized by non-profit civic groups that raise money through fundraisers, ticket sales, and sponsorships to put on a show for their community. They have a desire



to keep their expenses as low as possible. At the same time, the biggest attraction for their show is the hydroplane race, so they need boats to compete at their events.

**ABRA (H1 Unlimited)**—It operates between the two—arranging a place for the owners to race their boats, and the race sites with the hydros they need to put on a good show. H1 Unlimited governs the sport, adopts the rules, and provides the officials and equipment needed to hold the race.

In many ways, like the URC and Hydro-Prop before it, H1 Unlimited serves as a convenient scapegoat. It gets blamed for everything. When the boat owners don't get enough tow money, they'll say it's the fault of H1 Unlimited—even though that money comes from the race sites. And, if the race sites don't get enough boats, they blame H1 Unlimited—even though H1 Unlimited doesn't own any boats.

### Recent history.

**B**y 2017, H1 Unlimited was approaching an organizational collapse. Coming out of that season, the sport no longer had a functioning board, its chair had resigned, nearly all of its operating subcommittees had been disbanded, and the ABRA had been administratively dissolved by the State of Washington for failing to follow simple administrative procedures.

That's when Tim Austin, a tax attorney and hydroplane fan, was brought in to help straighten out the mess. He would soon become the chair

of H1 Unlimited's board of directors. In a State of the Sport message that he wrote to H1 volunteers at the beginning of the 2023 season, he said that it would not be an exaggeration to say that when the 2017 season ended, the sport found itself at a crossroads and in a critical state. "If it had been a patient in a hospital," he wrote, "it would have been on life support in the intensive-care unit."

Since then, the ABRA was re-established with the state, the board reconstituted, and the organization was restructured. But, there were also setbacks. The Covid pandemic caused the cancellation of the entire 2020 season, which not only impacted H1 Unlimited, but more severely the non-profit civic organizations that depend so heavily on the races to provide them with an income.

Nevertheless, by the beginning of the 2023 season, H1 Unlimited had finally reached a place where it was financially solvent. The competition on the water was closer than it had been for many years, too. More events were also being added to the schedule. H1 had been working for most of the past year with a group interested in holding an event in Penticton, British Columbia, and a Detroit group had already signed a Letter of Intent for a race there next summer. The 2024 H1 Unlimited Racing Series was expected to include seven races.

"We're proud of what we have accomplished during the past six years, despite some severe setbacks," Austin said. "We took over when the sport

**H1 Unlimited serves as a convenient scapegoat. It gets blamed when boat owners don't get enough money (even though the money comes from the race sites) and if race sites don't get enough boats (even though the boat owners supply the boats).**

was in a deep hole. But, thanks to the hard work of our many H1 volunteers, the sport now seems to be on the road to a full recovery.”

## Hydrotown Group

**H**ydrotown Group is a for-profit partnership of four people: Darrell Strong, the co-owner of the Strong Racing Team that operates both

the reigning national champion *Beacon Electric* and *Beacon Plumbing*; Charlie Grooms, the owner’s representative for the Miss Madison Racing Team that operated *Miss HomeStreet* and *Miss Goodman Real Estate* last season; Mike Denslow, a mortgage loan officer at CMG Home Loans in Kennewick, Washington; and Tim Story, co-founder and managing partner of Third Axiom Solutions, also in Kennewick.



Mike Denslow

The organization was created last summer to form a production and broadcast agreement with Speed Sport 1, which has produced one-hour documentaries about the sport that have been shown on their free channel dedicated to motorsports programming. The group then proposed to the H1 Board in October that they take over the sport’s marketing and media effort.

But, unbeknownst to the H1 Board, people from Hydrotown Group were also negotiating agreements with the APBA and with the race sites.

“H1 Unlimited was supportive of the group’s marketing proposal,” Austin said, “but their actions with regard to the APBA, the race sites, and even with regard to some of our volunteers, interfered with our relationships with those parties. It was clear that rather than just marketing, Hydrotown Group intended to take control of the entire series and prevent H1 Unlimited from carrying out its mission.”

### H1’s response.

**A**ustin said the H1 board considered a number of options as a result of Hydrotown Group’s interference, including legal action and possible liquidation and dissolution of



Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow

**TOP:** Darrell Strong. **ABOVE:** Charlie Grooms

## TWO SEPARATE ORGANIZATIONS:

### AMERICAN BOAT RACING ASSOCIATION (H1 UNLIMITED)

#### Non-profit entity

Governs the sport, adopts rules, registers boats, negotiates agreements with race sites, and officiates the races.

#### Current Board Members:

Mike Denslow (chair)  
Darrell Strong  
Charlie Grooms  
Shannon Raney  
Kelly Stocklin  
Brad Luce

### HYDROTOWN GROUP, LLC

#### For-profit entity

Created in June 2023 to manage the production and broadcast agreement for the appearance of H1 races on Speed Sport 1.

Proposed to take over the marketing and media efforts for H1 Unlimited.

#### Partners:

Mike Denslow (lead)  
Darrell Strong  
Charlie Grooms  
Tim Story

H1, but in the end determined that those steps would cause harm to the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing and would likely deplete the organization's cash reserves and leave it insolvent. Instead, considering its mission, its focus and objectives, the board members decided that the best course of action was to repopulate the board of directors of H1 with members who are supportive of Hydrotown Group's efforts.

"This sport can't be successful unless the people who run it are all rowing in the same direction, and that just wasn't happening," Austin said. "So, we felt it would be best to step aside and let the other group run the show."

A complicating factor in the two groups working together—H1 Unlimited running the races and Hydrotown Group doing the marketing and media—is that H1 is a non-profit entity and Hydrotown Group is a for-profit organization. That presents a significant challenge when the two work together. It's illegal, for instance, for the assets of a non-profit entity (its cameras, drones, mixers, trademarks, etc.) to be used to benefit a for-profit company.

The ABRA has no shareholders and, according to Austin, because it is a non-profit, is subject to a different set of rules than a profit-making company. The rules for non-profits are established by the State of Washington and enforced by the Attorney General's Office. Further, as a non-profit entity, H1 is able to rely heavily on uncompensated volunteers, who are the lifeblood of boat racing across all classes, and without whom this sport simply wouldn't exist, Austin explained.

"As a non-profit organization, it would have been legally difficult for H1 Unlimited to have a partnership with Hydrotown Group in the way that Hydrotown Group had envisioned the two working together," Austin said. "With control of both organizations, they can better work through the complex multiparty relationships that will result as Hydrotown Group invests money in the sport. This will allow H1 Unlimited to continue functioning under new leadership and to do what's best for the sport."

**“We wish the new group well as they take the ball and run with it,” outgoing board chair Tim Austin said. “I’m a big fan of hydroplane racing, so I hope they can continue in a positive direction.”**

## So, what’s the plan?

**W**ith the change in membership on the H1 board, that body currently consists of six people. Three of those six are also partners in Hydrotown Group and four of the six are boat owners. (Under the previous H1 organization, the number who were boat owners was always a minority.)

According to the press release issued by Hydrotown Group a week after the new members of the H1 board were elected, the organization will focus on enhanced promotion, public and media relations, marketing, and sponsorship experience for H1 Unlimited. The press release also admitted that they “have spent the past several months developing plans to revitalize and reinvigorate the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing.”

“The excitement around this revitalization is already producing exciting obligations from at least six boats pledging to compete in the full series with additional boats currently in discussions along with commitments from six race sites across the country and one in Canada,” the release continued. “And with the interest of long-term stability for the series a primary goal of the new board, the race site agreements feature multi-year commitments.”

“We all have a passion for hydroplane racing and wanted to invest in the promotion of this sport and reintroduce it to a larger audience through enhanced media and sponsorship opportunities,” said Mike Denslow, who now serves as chair of the H1 board and was a co-founder of Hydrotown Group. “We are excited about these changes within H1 Unlimited and are encouraged by the discussions with race team partners as well as race sites that have already taken place. All of us are committed to the long-term success of all our race teams and race sites as we prepare to kick off the 2024 season.”

That season was originally announced to consist of races in Guntersville, Alabama, on June 29 and 30; Madison, Indiana, on July 5 to 7; Tri-Cities, Washington, on July 26 to 28; Seattle on August 2 to 4; Penticton, B.C., on a date to be determined; the APBA Gold Cup in Detroit on August

23 to 25; and San Diego on September 13 to 15.

Since that announcement, H1 Board Chair Mike Denslow has backed off on predicting that a race in Penticton would be on the 2024 schedule. He said the event may have to wait until 2025, which would result in six races this summer.

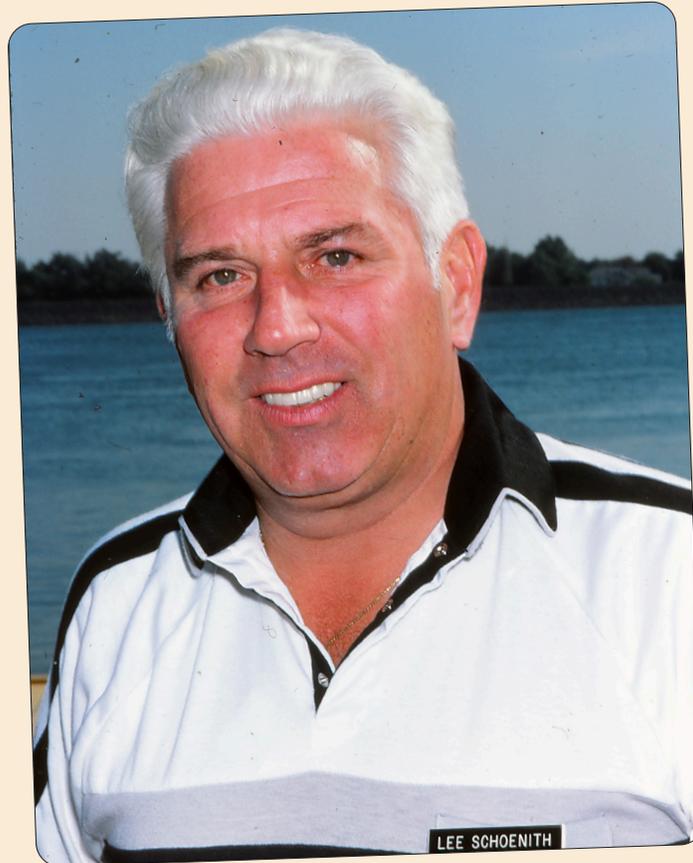
“The 2024 schedule is continuing to evolve as active discussions are ongoing with Detroit and San Diego for the upcoming season,” said Darrell Strong. “In addition to finalizing the multi-year agreements with our race sites, we are also working with them to develop better partnerships for promoting the races themselves. We will have drivers along with a display hydroplane at the upcoming Louisville Boat Show (January 24 to 28) to help promote the Guntersville and Madison races. In addition, more visibility of hydroplane racing will be seen with cross-promotional events in the various markets in advance of the events of the 2024 season and beyond.”

Hydrotown Group will also invest deeper into overall media of H1 Unlimited through enhancement of the livestream coverage as well as increased public relations and marketing efforts to further showcase the series to a new and larger audience. The group will focus efforts on series sponsorship and improved national visibility through cross promotion and public relations, which includes the hiring of South Carolina-based Moxxy 25 to serve as a dedicated PR agency.

“Historically, H1 Unlimited has attracted some of the largest partners in the country with boats adorned with Budweiser, DeWalt, Kellogg’s and Tide just to name a few,” said Shannon Raney, co-owner of the *Legend Yacht Transport* hydroplane who is continuing on the H1 board. “Our goal is to re-attract some of those high-level sponsors back to hydroplanes and give them a true VIP experience for their executives, customers and guests while enjoying the most exciting boat racing in the world.”

“We wish the new group well as they take the ball and run with it,” outgoing board chair Tim Austin said. “I’m a big fan of hydroplane racing, so I hope they can continue in a positive direction.” ❖

# A conversation with Lee Schoenith, Part 2



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Last month, we offered the first half of an interview with Lee Schoenith, a man who had a tremendous impact on the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. In the early years, he was a hero to Detroit fans and a villain to those in Seattle. To many, he would later become known as the “Czar.” He got involved when his father, Joe Schoenith, bought an Unlimited-class hydroplane and went racing in 1950. Lee eventually became the boat’s driver, would win a total of seven races, then became the commissioner of the Unlimited Racing Commission, where he led the sport in an effort to become more professional. In December’s *NewsJournal*, Schoenith talked about his experiences as a driver. This month,

the conversation centers on his team's activities in the 1960s and '70s. The interview was conducted by Craig Fjarlie while the hydro fleet visited Detroit in July 1984 and was used in the development of a story that he wrote for *Boatracing Magazine* in early 1985. It appears here for the first time in question-and-answer format.

**Fjarlie: One of the races that perhaps stands out is the '58 Gold Cup. The first heat against the Miss Pay 'n Save.**

Schoenith: Uh huh.

**You came back in and the Pay 'n Save beat you by a couple of lengths, and you were quite upset.**

Well, I used to get upset now and then. [laughter] I don't quite remember why. [more laughter] I think the most upsetting thing that year was right here in Detroit. And I don't remember if it was the Silver Cup, should be the Detroit Memorial, I guess, and the *Supertest* was here, which was, at that time, you know, a great boat. And we started the heat. And that's when you ran the final heat 30 miles, and the winner won the race. And I really drove as hard as I could drive. And I... It was the only time I ever had that twin-engine boat flat out. And I went down the whole backstretch flat out, just to beat the *Supertest*, which I did.

I averaged 107 for the heat, and then they disqualified me. Said I jumped the gun.

**Jumped the gun, yeah.**

And there were two boats in front of me, so I knew I didn't jump the gun. [laughter] In fact, I would like to have been out in front at the start and I wasn't. I was back in third place at the start.

**Cantrell got hurt that same weekend. I remember a newspaper picture of him getting thrown out of the Gale V and getting dragged by the boat, and broke his jaw.**

Boy, if that was the same weekend... I remember that happening. It happened right here at the Roostertail, in fact. He got thrown out. But I don't remember if that was the same race or not.

**Seems to me. I remember a newspaper article in Seattle: "Jumping gun drops Gale VI to second." Then there's a picture of Cantrell getting dragged.**

Well, then that's probably...

**His arm getting caught.**

I remember it happened right here comin' through this turn by the Roostertail.

**He just got pitched out of the boat and kinda looked like he fell back along the...**

He musta went back on the deck, and then we had those supporters for the tail and that's where he got hooked, his arm in there. Probably trying to hang on and stay in the boat.

**So, at that point, you pretty much ended your driving career.**

Well, it did end my active driving in competition. For two or three years or so, I'd take boats out and test them now and then.

**Um hmm. And you became very much involved in establishing the URC [Unlimited Racing Commission].**

Well, yes, I formed...

**Pretty much a leader of the whole...**



Byron Lang

The Schoenith family built a second *Gale VI* in 1959 that was driven by Fred Alter.



Bob Carver Photos

Well, I went to New York before the APBA Council and told 'em that either we got our own commission, or we were gonna leave the APBA.

**Umm.**

And, uh, they caucused immediately and gave us our own commission. [laughter]

**Now, who else was involved in the early efforts to write rules and establish...**

Well, three of us... Three of us sat in a hotel room in Chicago for 17 hours and wrote the first rule book. Two of the gentlemen are dead now: Jerry Bryant from Seattle, owns Bryant's Marina, and Chuck Thompson of Detroit, and myself. And we wrote the first rule book.

**And you were not the first commissioner.**

No, I was still a driver. And I just didn't feel a driver should be a commissioner. Be *the* commissioner. And I asked the president of the APBA at that time to appoint the immediate-past president, who was George Trimper from Buffalo. And George Trimper served as the first commissioner.

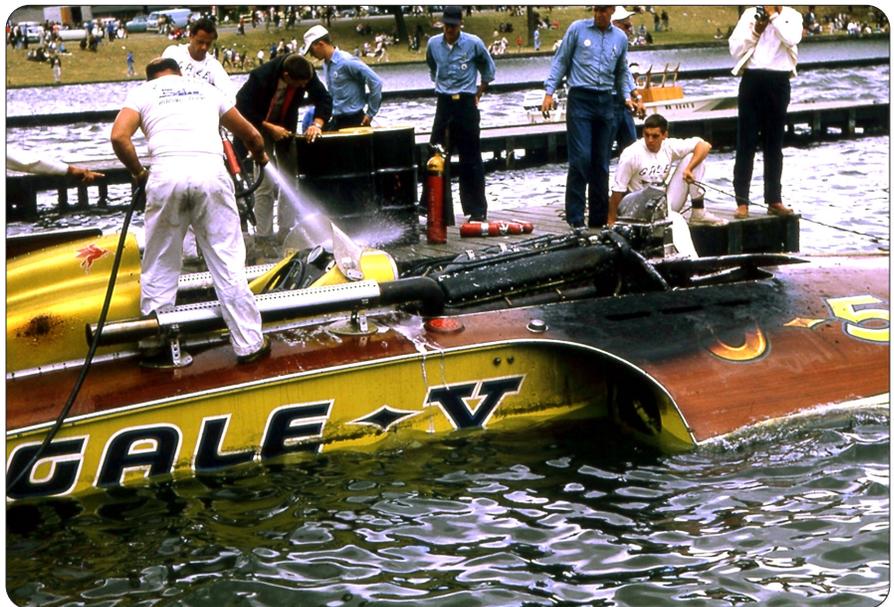
**And he served for a couple years, and then you...**

Then I, ah, asked to be nominated, and ran for the commissioner, and was elected for 11 years in a row.

**Um hmm. Well, what changes did the new URC... How did it change the unlimited racing?**



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Sandy Ross Collection

**TOP:** Bill Cantrell drove the third *Gale V* from 1958 to 1964. **MIDDLE:** The second *Gale VI* became the *Gale VII* from 1961 through 1963. **ABOVE:** *Gale V* gets hosed down by crew members after an engine fire damaged the boat in Seattle in 1964.

Well, we made it our own sport, our own rules, our own racecourses. We, year-by-year, improved safety on the racecourse, in the pits, improved the pits, improved, ah, everything. The buoys, the clock, the pits, you name it. It was a... We had a chance to do it. We didn't have to go to a race and race with all the 48s, 7-litres, and whatever. Not that we don't like 'em. We still race with 'em occasionally, but we could not race under their rules.

**Right.**

The race committees even to this day have to be told what to do. I remember, I wrote in the book that there'd be a water line for each boat, an electrical line for each boat, that we'd have cranes of 20-ton capacity, and, you know, I could tell you stories about going to races and puttin' these boats in the water that I was afraid to lift up anything, and, you know, a lot of crazy things. So, we got it unified where we could send to all the race sponsors the rules and regulations, and the things that were needed. And, of course, they've been upgraded every year, more and more, and more.

**In '58 there was another Gale V. The third one.**

Yeah. Um hmm.

**How was that boat different from the previous Gale V? That's the famous Gale V.**

[pause] No, no. The first *Gale V* was the famous *Gale V*. The second *Gale V* I sold to Jack Schafer and he called it *Such Crust*, and Freddie Alter disintegrated it in Washington, DC.

**Just a sponson, yeah.**

Then the last *Gale V*, uh...

**It ran for a number of years.**

Under a bunch of different names.

[Correction: The second *Gale V* raced as *Gale V* in 1956 and '57, as *Yeller Jacket* in 1959, and as *Such Crust IV* in 1960 and '61. The third *Gale V* carried the same name throughout its career from 1958 through 1964.] And I think that when *Smirnoff* came along as a sponsor, I built 'em a new boat. They wanted to sponsor that boat but I built 'em a new boat.

**Yeah. Well, the third Gale V basically was Cantrell's.**

Yes.

**And he won a driver's championship in '63.**

Yes.

**Can you tell me just a little how he liked the boat, and what...**

Well, the boat was a nice boat, I

mean, and Bill liked it very much. In fact, I think that's the one he nicknamed "The Rocking Chair." It was, you know, a good boat. But, you know, they all run into each other. Ah, what's good this year isn't good next year. In 1972 with the *Atlas* and Bill Muncey, we won six out of seven races. The one race we lost, we lost by a couple hundred yards, and it's because we lost a piston. Then, what did I do that winter? I went in and made big changes in the boat, and everything, went out the next year and run terrible. My wife said, "Why didn't you just cover it with a canvas, bring it out in the spring?" Well, she was right, and I was wrong.

**Ah, '59 was the second Gale VI.**

Yes.

**How was that one different from the first one?**

The design was quite a bit different, and, although we used the same engines and gearbox, that boat was designed by Cantrell, me, and Staudacher, and built by Staudacher. And, ah, we eventually got it runnin' pretty good.

**Then, a year or two later, it was just one Allison before you went to the Packard.**

Yeah, we tried it with one.

**Didn't...**

Nowhere near enough power.

**Boat was too heavy for one?**

Too heavy. Too long. Too heavy. And then we went to the big Packard.

**Yeah. That was an engine I would like to ask about. How did you come up with them?**

Bought them from a friend of Guy Lombardo's, Morlan Visel, up in, ah... Up in New York area. He had three of 'em, and I bought 'em. I think I used 'em two years and I sold 'em to him. So, they just came and went.

**Yeah, but they were V-16s.**

V-16. Extremely heavy. Extremely heavy, and no low-end torque. But, boy, when you once got that thing wound up, it had a lot of top-end speed.

**Seems to me, Schroeder felt that the supercharger was too small.**



The crew works on the *Gale V* as it sits in the Seattle pits in 1963. Bill Cantrell didn't win any races with the boat that season, but drove it to second place in five events, which earned him the 1963 national driver's championship.

It was, it was. It was the kind of an engine that if we could have had the time and money to spend a lot of money rebuilding parts, ah, taken' a lot of weight off of it, it might've become, you know, a good engine. But I only had three of 'em, and I figured by the time you get done experimenting, you're gonna run all these, and you'll have nothin', so we just ran it like it was, took some stuff off of it, and, you know, that was it.

**Do you remember what they sounded like, compared to the Allison or Merlins?**

They had a tick to 'em, 'cause they didn't turn many rpm. And they'd just, kinda, go tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, and then when they got wound up, they would sound a little bit like an Allison or a Merlin. But, we only turned a maximum 3,000 rpm.

**Oh, really? What kind of gearbox did you run 'em through?**

We built that gearbox ourselves.

**Especially for that operation?**

Yeah, and we ran about 3.25 to 1 ratio.

**Oh, that's...**

Well, the engine didn't turn that much, so we were still only getting about 10,000 on the prop.

**When you went to the Packards, did you have any hopes of perhaps using that engine in the Harmsworth?**

No, we really weren't thinking about the Harmsworth. We were just thinking about the fact it was a larger engine and more horsepower, but no low-end torque, so it didn't accelerate.

**Oh, to kind of skip ahead, in '64, Jerry [Schoenith] drove for you.**

Um hmm.

**In the Gale V. The boat burned in Seattle that year.**

We called it the *Gale's Roostertail*, I believe. [Correction: That was a different boat, and from 1965 to 1968.]

**You also... You and Bernie Little had a deal with the Tempest, that came and went...**

I bought it. Yeah, I bought it from



Eileen Crimmin



Bob Carver Photos

**TOP:** In 1964, Lee Schoenith changes the bottle of vodka on the tail of *Miss Smirnoff* to A-1 Steak Sauce in order to satisfy a Washington state law that forbid the advertising of liquor on Sundays.

**ABOVE:** The team introduced a new boat named *Gale's Roostertail* in 1965.

Chuck Hickling [sic], ah, and then raced it as the *Tempest* two or three times and then I sold it to, oh... The fellow here in Detroit.

**Wolfbauer?**

Mike Wolfbauer, right.

**In '64 you built the Smirnoff, the Miss Smirnoff that Cantrell was driving. That was another Gale Enterprises hull.**

Yes.

**Were there any noticeable improvements on that boat?**

No, that boat was a lot like the *Gale V*, with whatever little improvements we could come along with, you know.

**I was curious, in '66, that boat, you dropped the "Miss" from the name and changed the number from 90 to 80. Was there any special reason why that happened?**

Smirnoff wanted that, because Smirnoff is 80-proof, and I couldn't get the number 80. Now, they have 80-, 90-, and 100-proof, back then they only had 80-proof Smirnoff. And I forget who had the number, but it took me a year to get it, so we changed the color scheme a little, dropped the "Miss," and put U-80 on it.

**I remember at that time you had a problem, at least in Seattle, with the liquor board not allowing a picture of the bottle on the boat.**

I didn't have the problem. Smirnoff had the problem. And, uh, I told 'em to just...

**Put A-1 Steak Sauce...**

No, no. I told the liquor board to go away, don't bother me. Well, then, Ralph Hart, who was chairman of the board



Bob Carver Photos

**ABOVE:** With Bill Cantrell at the wheel, *Miss Smirnoff* takes a wild bounce during the 1964 Seafair Trophy Race in Seattle.  
**RIGHT:** Chuck Thompson in the cockpit of *Smirnoff* before his death driving the boat in 1966.

**“And Chuck went out, as you know, and won all the heats without any problem, but he was not going to let *Tahoe* beat him in the first turn.”**

of Smirnoff, came out and said, “Well, Lee, I understand the boat is yours, and you can do what you want with it, but,” he says, “we could get in trouble.” So, Heublein Corporation didn’t get in trouble, I asked, “What else do you sell?” And he named a million things. I didn’t know they sold A-1 Steak Sauce, so I said, “Get me a bottle of A-1 Steak Sauce.” So, I changed it in the pits on Saturday, and I probably got more publicity doin’ that than if they’d have just shut up and forgot about it. But, they, that’s the old rivalry in Seattle, people out there aren’t too smart, and so they went out of their way to take the name off the boat, because that was my Uncle Smirnoff from Russia, that I loved dearly. And that’s why I left the name on the boat. If you believe that, you’ll believe anything, but that’s what I told ‘em.

**And yet, I don’t recall that they hassled the *Budweiser*, and they were coming along at the same time.**

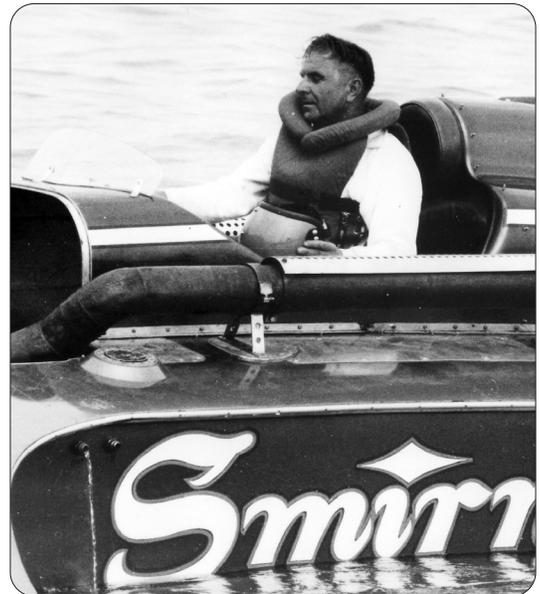
Ah, there was some discussion.

**Was there?**

And, there again, I said, “Look, if you cover up every billboard in Seattle that’s advertising liquor and beer, I’ll take the name off the boat.” But, somebody out there just got a bug to hassle me, and it wound up in my favor.

**Hmm. Uh, I don’t know how you feel talking about Chuck Thompson’s accident.**

Well, I, uh, uh, needless to say, was very sorry it happened. Uh, I begged Chuck to take it easy. He drove the boat a couple times. One of the things we had back then, that no one else had, or ever has



Phil Kunz

had, and to this day, I’m not saying I could beat the new *Atlas* or maybe not the *Budweiser*, but that bazooka, as we called it, on the Allison, Chuck came in and he told me, and he had driven other boats, he said he never saw so much power in his life. It was just absolutely awesome. And the hull, under the right conditions, the right driving, could handle it. And Chuck went out, as you know, and won all the heats without any problem, but he was not going to let *Tahoe* beat him in the first turn. Chuck made a driver error. I mean, I hate to say it, but he made a calculated risk, and it didn’t work.

**Went too fast...**

Well, no, he went inside the course and made a right-hand turn coming back out.

Oh.

Which is a no-no. And, uh, the boat just dug in, and...

**The course kinda has a funny little bend in it down where his accident...**

That had nothing to do with it. It happened right after the starting line, and he, the *Tahoe*, was on the inside, and Chuck went on the inside of the course to get by him, and had to make a little right-hand turn to get back out on the buoy line, and it just doesn't turn right... I hate to say it, uh, you know, uh, we all loved Chuck and that, and, I went ahead the next year [1968, actually] and built a... What I felt was an extremely, an extremely safe boat. In fact, I went overboard. It was too heavy and too safe. We had to make changes on... And that's what Dean [Chenoweth] started tryin'...

**The bat-tail Smirnoff. Yeah. That's kind of an interesting boat. You switched to the Rolls Merlin with that one, too, after...**

Yes.

**Years of running Allisons.**

Well, we, uh, as I say, there again, it's funny to say, but it was economically cheaper to go to Rolls than to stay with the Bazooka, as I called it. We were spending an awful lot of money on the Allisons, ah, gear-wise, and mani-

fold-wise, etc., etc. And I forget, now, where I got all these Rollses, but... Oh, I bought a bunch of 'em out of Baltimore, Maryland, for \$500 apiece.

Hmm.

And the only changes at that time that I made, I bought some quill shafts from Western Gear in Seattle for about 175 bucks apiece, bought the gearboxes from Ronnie Musson [??] out of the *Bardahl*, and for, at that time, when it was cheaper to go that way than it was a simpler installation, uh, quick changes, etc., etc.

**Another boat you had about the same time period was the step Gale's**

**Roostertail.**

That, there again, I hate to, ah, blame anybody for anything, but, [laughter] I felt that a boat... We still had the twin-engine gearbox... A boat like the *Miss Pepsi* could average 110 all day long, never break anything, and probably win an awful lot of heats and races. And that's what I wanted built. Well, it didn't come out that way.

**Yeah, it was quite different.**

It was quite different. And it was just not, too stable of a boat. And we tried it off and on, Jerry [his brother] did, and a couple other drivers did, and, uh, it just was not... It wasn't as fast as we expected



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Tony Bugeja Collection

**TOP:** The Schoenith team introduced a radical step-hull named *Gale's Roostertail* in 1967. **ABOVE:** In 1968, the team introduced another radical design with a *Smirnoff* boat that attempted many new aerodynamic ideas to make it safer. Unfortunately, it was also too heavy to be competitive.

and nowhere near as stable as we expected.

**It had... One of the things that was different was the props were at the transom.**

Um hmm.

**A lot of those early boats had the prop slightly under the...**

Amidship, yeah, yeah. Well, there again, we had the gearbox, and I spent, back in those days, which was a lot of money, I spent 10 grand on that gearbox for the *Gale VI*. And, to go through designin' another whole gearbox, and spending another 10 to 12 thousand, we felt we could use that gearbox.

**Um hmm. Now at some point in that time, you were much more involved with the racing team and your dad was stepping aside, quite a bit. Do you remember about when that happened, or... You were pretty much calling the shots by then.**

Well, I did that, really, almost all the way through. Dad would come to a lot of the races, but he was extremely busy in business and that, and I kinda, really, ran the racing teams, even back when I was driving, in, you know, in the late '50s and that.

**Mm hmm. Uh, well, you started to talk about the *Smirnoff*, er, the last *Smirnoff*. How did you get together with Chenoweth?**



Dean Chenoweth



Sandy Ross Collection

Chenoweth and the "bat-wing" *Smirnoff* at a dock in 1968.

Well, after Chuck Thompson's accident, uh, I was just looking for a driver, and the best place to look is in, you know, the big limited classes, which I did, and, uh, Bill Sterett, Sr., recommended Dean. And I watched him run, and liked him a lot, and talked to him, and had him come up here to Detroit and take a few rides, and he impressed me right away.

**And then he drove for you the next year. You made some changes in the boat.**

Yes, we made lot of changes in the boat.

**Took a lot of weight out.**

Took a lot of weight out, and other redesigns, and the boat ran much better.

**And, then he jumped ship and went to Bernie Little's team.**

Yeah, I had a habit, I never paid my drivers too much. [laughter] That wasn't the real reason, though, but, ah, no, he went over to *Budweiser* and, which you know, was all well and good with me at the time. There was, uh, well, like today, even, there's ample drivers around. There were always guys to get.

**And, when he left, Bill Muncy came to drive for you.**

No, Bill didn't come right after that [yes, he did]. Not after Dean left. Uh...

**1970**

Yeah, Dean left in what? [mumbles] I don't know if Bill was right after

him, or not. Uh, uh, but it was funny, we decided in 1962 to get out of boat racing. And, uh, of course, the Roostertail was open, and a liquor salesman came in, and he said, "Hey," he said, "I think my boss would like to sponsor a boat." And I, "Well, fine, we'll talk to him." His name was McMasters. And in Detroit, he owned Mohawk Liquors, and there was McMasters Scotch, and McMasters Canadian. And we had a deal all set, everything but signed, and he called up, he said, "Boys, I got bad news." He said, "I gotta back out of the deal." And I said, "Well, why?" And, he said, "Well, I just sold my company to Heublein," and he said, "But, let me talk to them." Well, then, I got a call a short time later from a man named Ralph Hart, who was president of Heublein, one of the finest gentlemen I've ever met. And we just became immediate friends, got together, and Heublein wanted to, uh, at that time was promoting *Smirnoff* like mad, and they said, "Well, we'll do it, but we want to call it *Smirnoff*." Well, that's how that got goin'. And, then, five years later, when Heublein had a big change in the corporate structure...

**Ralph Hart retired.**

Ralph Hart became chairman of the board and then he retired. And a whole new board came in, new chairman, new ad agency, and they threw everything

out. They had a car, they had a balloon, they had some other stuff. They just threw everything out, and were gonna go all different. So, there again, I was gonna quit. And then a fellow locally here in Detroit, Sparky Marshke, came along, owned Myr... Myr Sheet Metal, and sponsored us for two years.

**Okay.**

And, then again, I was gonna quit. And I took the boat, and I painted it pure white. No letters, no name, no anything. Got it all ready, all cleaned up, brought it down to the river here in the spring and ran it. Some guy in an apartment here, up in the building, saw it run and wanted to know what boat that was. It was O.H. Frisbie, the chairman of the board of Atlas Van Lines. And, he came to me. And we put a package together that was so interesting I stayed in.

**And you had a new boat in '71.**

Well, he wanted to sponsor the boat I had, and I insisted we build a new boat. I said, "You know, you sponsor that boat, they're gonna refer to it as the old *Myr*. The old *Smirnoff*. The old this, the old that. You don't want that. You want a brand-new boat." I built him a brand-new boat

and we split the deal for \$18,000. I paid nine, he paid nine.

**Hmm.**

And that's what it cost for the first *Atlas*.

**Yeah, and that was quite a bit better boat than the... It was sort of modeled, in some respects, after the *Smirnoff* hull.**

Well, it was modeled after it.

**It was a Dube hull.**

We took... We took all our, uh, things we had found out in that hull and put it into a new one. Much lighter.

**Yeah.**

With different construction techniques, and everything. Just fell together perfectly.

**Now, how did the deal with Munciey happen? You and he got together... I guess he came and visited you in Detroit one time, and...?**

Yeah, he, uh, had just stopped driving the *Miss U.S.*, I believe. And, he was in Detroit, and, I dunno, one thing led to another, and, uh, I says, "Well, why don't you dri-... C'mon, drive for me?" And, I didn't pay him very much, to be very honest, but then when I got the *Atlas* package, I added extra money for Munc-

ey, and then I recommended to O.H. Frisbie that he ought to look at hiring Munciey as a full-time employee in their marketing, 'cause Bill was so great at giving speeches, etc., etc. And, which he did, and did a great job for them.

**Um, '72 was the good year for you.**

'72 was almost a perfect year.

**Lost only one race.**

Yeah, yeah. Probably one of the highlights of everything I've ever done in racing. In 1972, Bill was driving the *Atlas* and Tom Sheehy was driving the other *Atlas*. And we took first and second in the World's Championship in Madison, Indiana. So, I don't know if that was ever done before, but I know it hasn't been done since. [In reality, Sheehy's boat was named *Go Gale* at Madison that year and finished third. *Budweiser* placed second in that race.]

**The second boat was called *Go Gale*.**

We called it... Oh, it was a lot of different names. Oh, well, it was *Pizza Pete* a few races, uh.

**Freddie Alter drove it then.**

Yeah, and, uh, at two different years I ran both of 'em as *Atlases*, off and on.

**Ah, I guess it was '73 at the Pres-**



Sandy Ross Collection

The "bat-wing" hull was extensively modified in preparation for the 1969 season and was given the new name *MYR's Special*.

**ident's Cup, Freddie Alter flipped the back-up boat—the second...**

Yeah.

**Do you remember that, and how that happened?**

Well, it was just...

**Muncey, I think in his column in *Powerboat*, made some remarks about how he thought it was impossible to flip the thing and yet Freddie Alter managed to do it.**

Well, that's what they said about the *Gale VI*, that is was unflipable, but I proved 'em wrong in that. I don't think any of 'em are unflipable, uh, well, you just get into a situation like, uh, Scott Pierce last week in Madison. You know, you go in a turn, all by yourself, or practicing, and you just hook it, an' they flip awful fast. You might know it's happening, but within a split-second, you can do nothin' about it.

**Now, Freddie was in a heat, was he not?**

Yes. That wasn't the first time Fred flipped. He flipped a couple other times—crashed a couple other boats.

**Had his share of dunkings.**

Yeah. That's why we called him Fearless Freddie, I think.

**Okay. At that same time, you were trying fuel injection on the Merlin in the *Atlas*, and then eventually switched to the turbocharged Allison.**

Well, that was with fuel injection, though. But we, Cantrell always wanted to work on fuel injection, and we had a dynamometer, which we'd built, a big sophisticated dynamometer, and we ran hundreds of hours on that dyno, with fuel injection that Cantrell built himself, and manifolds that he built and then we bought, and systems, and... I did get rid of all my Rolls-Royces at that time, and went back to Allison because we did think the fuel injection engine would be a better engine, and, I think anyone will agree, even the Rolls guys, that the Allison engine basically is a better engine. The thing about the Allison engine that...

**Supercharger.**

Is the supercharger and the induction manifold, that's not as good. Well...

**Doesn't have the flash screens and it's got those curled...**

Right. And we felt we could build some that would be as good or better. And that's what we were working towards then. You always are changing and trying, you know. The name of the game, eh... We've been sittin' here talkin'... I started off with a one-step hydroplane; I had a single-engine, right-hand engine; single engine, left-hand engine; single engine, twin props; twin engines, single prop; a multi-step hydroplane; and we had the first pure jet boat in the United States...

**I wanted to ask you about that.**

So, uh, we tried everything. We had Rolls, Allison, Packard, fuel injection, turbocharged, uh, pure jet, so we tried a little bit of everything.

**Um, in '75 you had the box the Jones boats came in.**

Yeah.

**What was your effort in that one? What were you trying to accomplish?**

You mean in the pure jet?

**No, the last *Atlas Van Lines*, in '75.**

[silence]

**They called it the box the Jones boats came in.**

I never heard that expression.

**Oh... It had...**

Well, that was the one that had...

**Had the blue light on the back cowling.**

Oh... Right, right. Now that boat was, uh, that was, uh... Designed by, well, all of us, really, had a hand in it, and Jon Staudacher built it for us. And, honestly, I think that was a pretty good boat.

**It was, at the start of...**

Our problem was the engines in it, more than anything. Ah, we had that lit-



Pete Kinch

Bill Muncey (left), who already had 22 race victories to his credit and was already one of the most successful drivers in the sport's history, joined the Schoenith team in 1970.



Randy Hall

Muncey drove *Atlas Van Lines* to six race victories and the national championship in 1972.

tle tail on it, which an aeronautical engineer designed. He admitted it really wouldn't do much, but it might help and look pretty. Course, the blue light on it was nothin'... Was a safety factor, that's all. Just, you know, if you got caught in a roostertail, or behind a roostertail, or in traffic, at least it was easier to see that blue light than just the boat. But, that's all that was—was a safety factor. And, I put a two-way radio in it, and Muncey didn't like the two-way radio, and I said, "Well, why?" He said, "Cause you never say anything. I keep waitin' for you to say something." I said, "Well, that was the deal we made, that I wouldn't say anything unless I had to." So, I...

You know, I was always amazed when Bill went to the cabover, 'cause Bill was on the conservative side in a lot of respects, and yet he was still fantastic, best driver ever born. And he always swore up and down he'd never go cabover. And when he did, that rather surprised me. Course, just like the radio and other things I tried, it would always be against Bill's grain. Bill never used a watch to start a race until I taught him how.

**Is that right?**

All the years he raced, he never used a watch. In fact, I don't know if you re-

member, in Washington, DC, ah, I forget exactly what year it was, probably '74, the clock broke. And, there was no clock. So, we had a meeting, and I suggested that, why don't we just start with the flags? We gave everybody the countdown, like we do now. You set your watches, you watch your watch, you know when the five-minute gun should go off, the yellow flag would be out, you know when the one-minute gun should go off, the white flag'll be out, and I think at the start, which we don't do now, just so the drivers knew, we threw out a green flag. That meant that was the start.

You know, we had some of the best starts in racing that year at that race without a clock? And after the meeting, we decided everything, we walked back, and Muncey comes over to me an' he says, "I've never used a watch." So, we had a crash program on my trailer with my watch, showin' him how to use it. Bill went out, he just loved it. He thought that was the greatest invention in the world. But, all the years Bill raced, he never used a watch until then.

**Huh. Um, by the time of the last year that you had the *Atlas*, was Bill Muncey kinda frustrated with things?**

Oh, we all were. We all were. It was...

**I thought I could detect some tensions.**

I think that's the reason, really, that we got out of racing. We were at a point we were frustrated, didn't know which way to go, I woulda had gone out bought all Rollses, or somethin', and make a complete, radical change. Uh, and, you know, enough's enough. Twenty-six years or 27 years, you know, we had good times, and bad times, and frustrating times, and... I think that any sponsor I ever had got their money's worth. I never had a contract with Smirnoff, or Myr, or Atlas, or any of 'em that just said I get "X" number of dollars. I always wrote in the contract I get so much for first, second, third, fourth, fifth. So much for national champion first, second, third. I mean, I had a contract that would give me... If I did a fair job, adequate money. If I did a good job, I got good money. But I still had a cap on it, even with Atlas. In fact, the race in Seattle in 1972, after I qualified, I had reached my cap. I didn't even have to run that race.

**Is that right?**

And, naturally, I ran it, 'cause, you know, I, ah... I think that we did as good a job that could be done for a sponsor. And when we were havin' all these monumental troubles, and I knew Bill was



Randy Hall

**“He knew I was frustrated, and I just didn’t feel fair to Atlas and say, ‘Look, if you give me ‘X’ number of dollars more I’ll go out and buy this and buy that, and do this and do that.’ So, 27 years was enough. So, we just said goodbye.”**

The Schoenith family’s career in Unlimited racing ended after the 1975 season. Their final boat was another new Atlas Van Lines.

frustrated, and I... He knew I was frustrated, and I just didn’t feel fair to Atlas and say, “Look, if you give me ‘X’ number of dollars more I’ll go out and buy this and buy that, and do this and do that.” So, 27 years was enough. So, we just said goodbye.

**And, you’d had a heart attack just shortly before.**

They never diagnosed it as a heart attack. I had a heart “incident.” Ah, to this day, they would never say it was really a heart attack, or not.

**It didn’t really cause you any difficulty?**

No.

**That had nothing to do with your decision to get out as an owner?**

No, uh uhh. No, I, after that, I mean... I probably... Bein’ active now as the chief referee is worse than bein’ an owner. [laughter]

**All the pressure?**

Now, I got everybody yellin’ at me.

**Well, I’d like to ask you about the jet boat, and then go into your duties as referee, and things like that. Uh, the jet boat was a pure jet. There’s no propeller on it?**

Oh, no. No, pure jet. J-35 jet, Allison jet. Uh, which I forget now, where I bought ‘em. I bought two or three of ‘em for a few hundred dollars apiece and took ‘em up to Staudacher’s, and we, like fools not knowing any better, we just set it on a stand, bolted it to the ground, stuck the hose in a 55-gallon drum of kerosene, and started it up. And like a couple of experts told me later on, we were idiots, that thing coulda blown up and those blades come out like spears and killed all of us.

**Yeah.**

But, then anyway, uh, Les and I talked about what type of a hull to put it in, and I just came up with the idea of an inverted three-pointer. And making very long sponsons all the way back to the transom, and putting a vee bottom up forward, and hopefully it would ride on that vee and on the back edge of the two sponsons, because you had no propeller to ride on. And you had to sit up front. Uh, so that’s how that all came about. And, uh...

**That hull design almost sounds like a little bit like the Circus Circus, funny boat.**

Uh, it was in one respect, because I remember, uh, out in San Diego I was sittin’ in the *Circus Circus* cockpit with Steve Reynolds, we were talkin’, I said, “Steve, I’ll bet I can tell you exactly what this boat does,” And I said, “You get going,” and I said, “at the speed of maybe 80, 90 miles an hour, that vee bottom comes up real nice. And as you get up to 120, 130 miles an hour, it gets out of the water and then it falls right back down like, uh, like you fell on your head. And then it just does that constantly.” He said, “You’re exactly right.” Because that’s what the jet boat did.

**You did drive the jet boat?**

I drove it here in ‘56 [1958, actually] on the... I think I averaged 85 on the course here.

**Huh.**

Between heats. I took it out for an exhibition run. And it... I don’t know what the fastest it ever went on the straightaway, out on the lake, here, up in Bay City, uh, up in the 150 area. But it just kept pounding so hard you couldn’t...

**Where was the rudder on that thing?**

The rudder was right in the middle.  
**In the... Oh, really?**

Between... No, no, on the transom, but in the middle of the hull, yeah.

**Because it seems... Gar Wood used to run his rudders up in front. Some people suggested if Circus had put their rudder in front, they...**

Uh, yeah. I had a bow rudder on a boat once. On the *Gale* I had a bow rudder...

**Oh, yeah. Okay.**

Originally, then we changed it to a transom rudder. Uh, that boat, well, it just wasn't designed properly for a jet. Ah, I guess you gotta have more like a ski-type boat. In fact, you know, we took the jet out of that and put the two Allison in it and tried it.

**I didn't know that.**

Yeah, we changed it around, put the two Allison in it, and tried different things on it. And then finally we just scrapped it.

**Was the boat built after you had acquired the engines, or...**

No, after. After, yeah. We just, at that time... Who was it? Sir Malcolm Campbell [actually, his son, Donald] had the jet boat over in England, and, ah, we just thought... Well, let's see what we could

come up with here in the United States, for one, and see what would happen. But we were... Our problem was, we were designing it for two reasons. Ah, maybe a straightaway record, and also to drive in competition.

**Mmm.**

We thought maybe it would be competitive.

**Yeah, there was a lot of talk then about jet boats in competition.**

Yeah, no one ever knew, and, uh...

**[Willard] Rhodes was talking about it, and...**

Yeah.

**There was the *Tempo Alcoa* that...**

Yeah,

**Guy Lombardo was involved with.**

Well, that was built by Staudacher, too.

**Yeah.**

So, we had two purposes in mind. See if it could be a straightaway boat, and then also maybe it would even work in competition.

**Back in the '50s, early '60s, it seemed to me that the Rolls-powered boats... A lot of the guys from Seattle were running lighter boats than the guys in Detroit were. Did you ever wonder if maybe that was the direction to**



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

**go? Yet you stayed with the Allison pretty much until '68.**

Well, we stayed with the Allison, uh, mainly because we had 'em. And, when you went to the Rolls, there again, you had to go to a big, big change in gearboxes, etc., etc. And, it was just, uh, you know, a normal thing to do, really. There was no reason why or why not. And, finally in the '60s, I did go to the Rolls.

**Um hmm. Okay. Well, I'd like to talk about your duties as a referee. Could you just tell me about your normal race activities? When you're in charge, what things you do?**

Well, I think it's a lot like a referee or an umpire in a baseball or football game. Usually when I get to the race site, I meet with the race committee, the pit chairman, the course chairman. Make sure they have the proper number of buoys, the proper number of safety boats, patrol boats, tow boats. That the pit facilities are set up adequately, and then I check the judge's stand and make sure timing, scoring are there, the clock's there, make sure that the proper flags are available, uh, smoke guns, flares, this and that. In other words, if all the physical stuff is ready.

And then, the day of the race, I have my crew, together with a man in each turn, a man in the pits, a man in the helicopter, and a man with me on the judge's



Sandy Ross Collection

The Schoeniths tested a jet-powered hydro at Detroit in 1958. The boat made a great deal of noise, but not much speed.

stand. And then we watch for all the various infractions that may occur—on the start of the race, prior to the start of the race, rounding the buoys to get to the start, rounding the turn, and then after the race starts, of course.

**What's the most difficult kinda call for you to make?**

Probably calling someone for jumping the clock is so automatic with me, that I never give it a second thought. I know, and I normally, I don't know what boat it is. I'll just say, "The first and second boat are over." Then I'll look and see which boat it is. When they're comin' down to the start, nine times out of 10 I can tell if there's going to be a gun jumping, or not. Or, if it's gonna be close.

**The fact that you were a driver, do you think helps as an official? Does it help you in your capacity?**

Well, I think it naturally... It's gotta help. But I can't relate to what they're doing today to what I was doing. I can't. We were going down the straightaways almost as fast as they are today, but we couldn't turn. We didn't have the big skid fins. We didn't have the power to accelerate.

**Yeah. You didn't get up to the high speed...**

Yeah.

**Until you were halfway down the stretch.**

And, sure. So, speed-wise, I can relate. Uh, techniques in starting, because of acceleration, and turning because of the skid fins, and that, that's a little different than what I'm really familiar with. But, uh, I definitely feel that my background in driving is helping me officiating, and I think the fact that this is, what? My 34th year as owner, driver, designer, builder, mechanic, truck driver, official, commissioner... You put it all together, somewhere along the line, I had to learn something.

**Yeah.**

And, I feel very confident in what I'm doing. Sure, I've had people disagree with me, but, uh, you know...

**If you don't, you're probably not doing your job. What is your impression of the future direction of unlimited racing? Given the new powerplants, the new hulls.**

Well, I think we're seeing a new era. It's like a Star Wars era. The noise is gone, but there's still some noise. And, the fact I think that, uh, you're gonna see more turbine boats. And, they're awfully fast.

**Yeah. And drivers continue to improve in their talent.**

Oh, sure. I mean, it all goes hand in hand. The designers of the boats, the new engines, young drivers, ah, learning that you gotta drive a little differently than you drive the other boats, and, uh...

**Um hmm. I guess that pretty much sums up what I wanted to ask you, and talk to you about. Unless there's anything in summation that you want to...**

No, no. I've said plenty, I'm sure. [laughter] ❖

**SCHOENITH TEAM RECORD**

YEAR	BOAT	HULL#	DRIVER	RACES	1st	2nd	3rd
1950	Gale	4005	Lee Schoenith	3	0	0	1
			Gene Arena	3	0	0	0
1951	Gale	4005	Al D'Eath	5	0	0	0
	Gale II	5151	Lee Schoenith	6	0	2	1
1952	Gale II	5151	Lee Schoenith	5	1	1	1
1953	Gale II	5151	Lee Schoenith	6	1	2	1
1954	Gale IV	5454	Bill Cantrell	8	2	2	1
	Gale V(1st)	5455	Lee Schoenith	7	4	0	2
1955	Gale V(1st)	5454	Doc Terry	1	0	0	0
			Bill Cantrell	7	1	0	0
			Lee Schoenith	7	1	3	3
			Joe Terry	1	0	0	1
			Bill Cantrell	2	0	2	0
			Joe Terry	1	0	0	0
1956	Gale VI (1st)	5556	Joe Terry	1	0	0	0
	Gale IV	5454	Roy Duby	6	0	2	0
	Gale V(2nd)	5655	Bill Cantrell	6	0	0	0
	Gale VI (1st)	5556	Lee Schoenith	5	1	0	0
1957	Gale III	5353	Roy Duby	1	0	0	0
			Joe Schoenith	1	0	0	0
1958	Gale V(2nd)	5655	Bill Cantrell	3	0	0	0
	Gale VI (1st)	5556	Lee Schoenith	5	0	0	0
1959	Gale V(3rd)	5855	Frank Saile	1	0	0	0
			Lee Schoenith	3	0	0	1
			Bill Cantrell	2	0	1	0
			Lee Schoenith	4	0	2	0
			Roy Duby	1	0	0	0
			Bill Cantrell	3	0	0	0
1960	Gale VI (2nd)	5956	Bob Schoeder	1	0	0	0
			Fred Alter	4	0	1	0
1961	Gale V(3rd)	5855	Bill Cantrell	6	2	0	1
			Fred Alter	1	0	0	0
1962	Gale VII	5956	Leo Mucutza	1	0	0	0
			Joe Terry	1	0	0	0
1963	Gale V(3rd)	5855	Bill Cantrell	6	1	1	0
			Bob Schroeder	4	0	0	0
1964	Gale VII	5956	Bill Cantrell	5	0	0	0
			Bob Schroeder	2	0	0	0
1965	Miss Smirnoff (1st)	6490	Danny Foster	1	0	0	0
			Bill Cantrell	7	0	5	0
1966	Gale's Roostertail (1st)	6544	Danny Foster	1	0	0	0
			Jerry Schoenith	3	0	0	0
1967	Smirnoff (1st)	6490	Jerry Schoenith	3	0	0	0
			Chuck Thompson	2	0	0	0
1968	Smirnoff (2nd)	6544	Bill Cantrell	6	0	1	0
			Roy Duby	1	0	0	0
1969	Gale's Roostertail (2nd)	6744	Roy Duby	1	0	0	0
			Bill Cantrell	1	0	0	0
1970	Gale's Roostertail (1st)	6544	Red Loomis	2	0	0	0
			Jerry Schoenith	2	0	0	0
1971	MYR's Special	6880	Bill Cantrell	1	0	0	0
			Dean Chenoweth	10	0	0	1
1972	Miss Schwepes	6544	Dean Chenoweth	7	2	3	0
			Fred Alter	1	0	0	1
1973	MYR Sheet Metal	6880	Fred Alter	1	0	0	1
			Bill Muncy	8	3	1	0
1974	Atlas Van Lines (5th)	7171	Bill Muncy	9	2	2	1
			Terry Sterett	2	0	1	0
1975	Atlas Van Lines II (2nd)	6880	Bill Muncy	7	6	1	0
			Tom Sheehy	1	0	0	0
1976	Atlas Van Lines (5th)	7171	Go Gale	2	0	0	1
			Bill Muncy	9	0	2	1
1977	Gale's Roostertail (3rd)	6880	Fred Alter	5	0	0	1
			Pizza Pete (2nd)	2	0	0	1
1978	Miss Cauffiel	6880	Miss Cauffiel	2	0	0	1
			Bill Muncy	3	0	1	0
1979	Atlas Van Lines (6th)	7171	Fred Alter	1	0	0	0
			Pizza Pete (2nd)	2	0	1	1
1980	Gale's Roostertail (3rd)	6880	Gale's Roostertail (3rd)	2	0	0	0
			Atlas Van Lines (5th)	7	0	1	0
1981	Atlas Van Lines (7th)	7571	Atlas Van Lines (5th)	8	0	1	0
			Bill Muncy	10	0	1	1
				<b>293</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>24</b>

# HERITAGE

## Historical Perspective by Craig Fjarlie



### Remembrances

find it difficult to write memorial pieces about friends who have passed away. We lost two former racers just a few days apart, and I hope I can do justice to their contributions to hydroplane racing.

George “Buddy” Byers was born in Columbus, Ohio, on December 25, 1928, and died on December 6, 2023. He attended Ohio University and made his living selling automobiles. He was a member of the Columbus Auto Dealers Association.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Byers started racing in the 1950s in inboard classes. He was prominent in the fast 7-litre class in boats such as *Miss DeSoto* and *Chrysler Queen*. He won five national championships in a row. In addition to boat racing, Byers was a pilot and served on the Columbus International Airport Commission, including three terms as president.

Byers began driving in the Unlimited class aboard *Miss Madison*. Although the boat was underfunded compared to

*Miss Bardahl*, *Miss Thriftway*, and *Tahoe Miss*, Byers used his skill to win the 1965 Guntersville race. *Miss Madison* was unable to reach the winner’s circle again until the 1971 Gold Cup, when Jim McCormick was driving.

Following Byers’s retirement from driving, he served for years as chairman of the Unlimited Racing Commission. With his leadership, unlimited racing had a full schedule of regattas and a strong turnout of boats. He was inducted into the APBA Honor Squadron in 1978 and won the Charles D. Strang Ultimate Service Award in 2010.

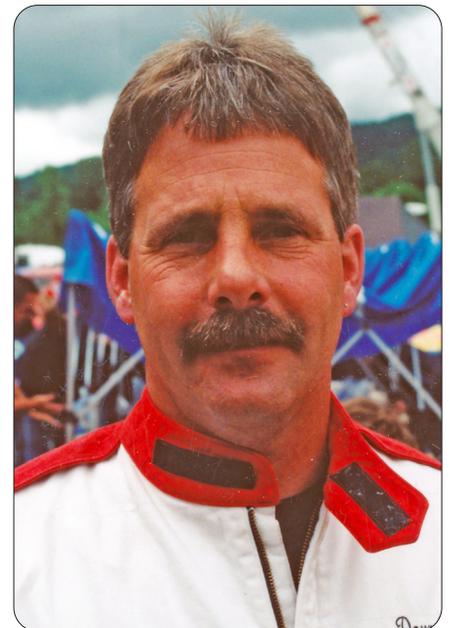
More recently, Byers was a founding member of the APBA Historical Society. In that capacity, he remained involved with boat racing until the end of his life. “He was a wonderful person,” recalls Jim Benson, author of the book, *Taming of the Slough*. “What a legacy he has left for us in boat racing.”

A few days after Byers’s passing came news that Doug Brow had died at age 67. The son of Bill Brow and younger brother of Jack, Doug began racing in the 145-inboard class. He had an opportunity to move into the Unlimited class in 1996 at the wheel of U-14 *Computers & Applications*. The next year he drove U-9 *Miss Exide* for Mike and Lori Jones. He was away from the Unlimited class until 2001 when he drove U-20 *Golden Nugget Casino*. Brow handled U-99 *Interstate Batteries* in 2003, and U-00 *Skyway Park Bowl & Casino* in 2004. Unfortunately, he never had a ride that was capable of winning.

In 2012, Brow located the remains of his father’s famous 7-litre boat *Miss Vitamilk*. With help from Don and Jerry Kelson, the boat was fully restored to its original configuration. Brow ran the boat at Mahogany and Merlot in 2021.

Brow was head referee for H1 through 2018 and refereed a Grand Prix

race at San Diego in 2021. He was always friendly, smiling, and grateful to those who helped in various capacities at the races, in spite of the pressure associated with working as a referee.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Buddy and Doug, thank you for your contributions to boat racing. We remember you both for your service and inspiration, and we will miss you. Race in peace. ❖

# AROUND THE CIRCUIT

## Race Site News by Chris Tracy



**T**he Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum (HARM) held its holiday dinner party, annual awards ceremony, and Board of Directors election on December 9. About 100 museum members and guests attended.

Museum director, David Williams, gave a summary of the what has happened at the museum since its founding 41 years ago, in 1982. Twenty-seven hydroplanes have gone through the shop for some sort of restoration. And over \$12 million has been spent on museum activities that included restoring and running vintage boats and operating the museum. The museum has coordinated building 62 J-boats for young racers. That has included Aaron Salmon and Gunnar O'Farrell, both who ultimately became Unlimited drivers.

It is a tradition for the museum to invite the Gold Cup winner to attend and speak to the crowd. This year, 2023 Gold Cup winning driver J. Michael Kelly attended, and Williams conducted a question-and-answer session with JMK.

Kelly first piloted a J-boat when he was eight years old; he quickly added that nine was the age for driving, so he was “unofficially nine.” JMK noted that in those days the top speed for a J-boat was 23 mph. J-boats go about 40 mph today. Kelly said he grew up wanting to race and he won his first outboard race at age 12—and was tossed into the water at the trophy presentation.

As a kid, his favorite driver was Chip Hanauer driving *Miss Budweiser*. In 2003, JMK was given the opportunity to drive Mike Jones's 5-litre boat. Tom Anderson, crew chief for boat owner Jim Harvey, later asked JMK to drive their Unlimited boat. His first Unlimited race was in Tri-Cities and he mentioned he had to take a crash course in scuba diving before that race. He soon found driving



Chris Tracy

the tunnel in the corners to be about the scariest part of driving an Unlimited.

JMK recalled that he was 18 when he blew over an outboard boat the first time and, in 2005, he went up a roostertail driving the U-2 and blew over. Williams observed that many Unlimited drivers pilot with boat sense and others drive with courage, and Williams asked Kelly which kind driver he was. Kelly remarked that he likes to think he drives with boat sense, but said the reality is that he probably drives with both.

He noted that this past year, in the Gold Cup, it was important to keep his foot on the throttle as so much was on the line—winning the Gold Cup and winning the national championship.

Kelly drives as many as nine hydroplane classes. He said that driving all of those classes has made him a better driver. And then he said something, most fans had not heard him talk about before. He said he plans to transition to running fewer hydroplane classes, kind of helping to foster a transition to younger drivers, and transitioning more to watching and supporting his young son as he starts racing.

The museum also gave out annual

awards. Noteworthy, Skip Young, was awarded the Wahoo Award, which honors a long-term volunteer. Young often is first at the museum and opens the doors; Young has contributed to the *Unlimited NewsJournal*.

The Dixon Smith Crew Member of the Year was awarded to brothers, Mike and Larry Hansen, recognizing their 20 years of working on various vintage Unlimited restorations. Several other awards were bestowed to deserving people associated with the museum, as well.

And a great story was told before David Heye accepted what they call the Brown Potato Chip Award from the museum. It was relayed that when working on engines in the old days, parts in great condition were called Golden Potato Chips. But there are not many Golden Potato Chips left, when working with World War II piston engines. What's left are like the burnt chips found at the bottom of the potato-chip bag—parts that need a lot of attention and work. The crew in the museum engine shop call those parts Brown Potato Chips. Heye was recognized for making really good motors out of Brown Potato Chips. ❖

# MY \$0.02 WORTH

## Editorial Comment by Andy Muntz



### There are challenges ahead

**A**s many of you know, during the past several years I have had a ringside seat to what has been going on within the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing. Three years ago, the H1 board asked if I would help them develop a long-range strategic plan for the sport, so I took the normal steps for that task. While I was doing this work, somebody suggested that I should join the board and, next thing I knew, I became a director.

It was an interesting experience. Being on the board taught me a tremendous amount about how this sport actually operates and about the things that influence how decisions are made.

My term was set to expire at the end of this year and it was my intention to move on when that term ended. Consequently, though I was asked to continue, I decided not to join the new group that took over in late November.

I want this sport to be successful and wish the new organization the very best. At the same time, with my work experience in strategic planning and issues management, I can't help but climb up to a perch in the crow's nest to ponder the future and identify issues that may be over the horizon. With that in mind, I offer the following to the new group as they assume leadership of the sport:

**THE ORGANIZATIONS**—As I write this in late December, there are now two separate organizations operating the sport. One of those is Hydrotown Group, a partnership of four people who hope to earn a profit through the marketing of hydro racing. The other is H1 Unlimited, a non-profit organization that governs the sport.

There is some overlap between the two. Three of the four partners of Hy-

drotown Group also serve as half of the membership of the H1 board. But, the two entities are different—which is the way things are supposed to be.

But, it's a perilous place to be. Any kind of close working relationship between a for-profit company and a non-profit organization is bound to ring alarm bells in some places—such as in the offices of investigators who know that such relationships can be used to circumvent tax and labor laws. It's illegal, for example, to use the assets of a non-profit organization to benefit a profit-making venture.

To mitigate this problem, it's possible that H1's new leaders might consider the dissolution of H1 Unlimited and leave Hydrotown Group to operate the sport completely on its own. It's something we on the previous board considered before taking the option to repopulate the board's membership.

To do this, the Hydrotown Group partners would need to purchase both the tangible and intangible assets of H1 Unlimited at a fair market value. The non-profit entity could then continue to operate with some other purpose related to hydro racing but not directly associated with Hydrotown Group. Or, H1 Unlimited could be dissolved entirely, in which case its assets would probably be distributed to other non-profits (not to any individuals).

Those controlling the current relationship between H1 Unlimited and Hydrotown Group will need to be very careful about these issues. If they haven't already, they should enlist the services of a good attorney who fully understands non-profit law to help guide them through this minefield.

Of course, if Hydrotown Group op-

erates the sport on its own, it will run into its own set of issues. Many lessons could be learned from the experience of Hydro-Prop, which could last for only three seasons before the race sites and boat owners revolted and the governing of the sport was handed over to the non-profit that became H1.

**VOLUNTEERS**—When I did the strategic plan for H1 Unlimited three years ago, I identified several challenges facing the sport and suggested steps that could be taken to address those challenges. As this new organization now takes over the governance of the sport, I see two large challenges that will need to be overcome. Both were addressed in my planning effort, but now grow in importance because of the different way this new organization is structured.

One challenge that stands in the way of the sport sustaining long-term growth is its dependence on volunteers.

Now, don't get me wrong. Volunteers are critically important. This sport would have failed long ago if it hadn't been for the many hours that are volunteered by experts in all aspects of organizing and holding boat races. But, as critical as volunteers are, dependence on them also acts as a limiting factor to growth.

The people who serve as crew members on the race teams, who officiate the races, and who make sure that the events operate efficiently, are for the most part employed by somebody else. They do the work that pays the rent and puts food on the family table, and, during off-hours and using vacation time, they volunteer for hydroplane racing. That makes it extremely hard to be away for long stretches. A 10-race season might pose a difficult challenge, for instance.

And, there's another problem. As a fundamental question: If the sport is run by a profit-making company, to what ex-

tent will volunteers be willing to donate their time so that somebody else can earn a buck?

But there's also a deeper issue. As a non-profit organization, H1 Unlimited was able to enlist the services of volunteers for the work that needed to be done. But, if the profit-making Hydro-town Group is running the sport, the labor laws in most states will not allow them to use volunteers. The partnership group would have to pay those people a salary for their labor in addition to providing them with other benefits, such as breaks and work-site safety standards. This will add greatly to the cost of running the sport.

**RACE SITES**—Among the action steps my plan suggested to address challenges was one that proposed that H1 Unlimited open lines of communication with the race-site organizers.

Under the governance structure the sport has had since the American Boat Racing Association was formed in 2004, that body has acted as a buffer between the sport's two primary parties: the boat owners and the race sites. It works at the connection between the two, providing a place for boat owners to race their boats, and a show for the race sites to offer their communities. As such, it finds itself as

the arbitrator between the owner's desire to get as much money as possible and the ability of race sites to afford greater costs.

But, with Hydrotown Group taking over, there will be a perception that the sport is now controlled by people who also own or sponsor the boats, which means the buffer is gone. The two sides will have to work directly with each other and can no longer blame a third party when things don't work out to their satisfaction. One of the main factors that led to the demise of Hydro-Prop in 2004, after all, was that race sites were concerned their sanction fees would increase.

**OTHER OWNERS**—The last time the sport was owned by people intending to make a profit, the effort lasted only three seasons. One of the prime reasons there was a revolt against Hydro-Prop in 2004 was that the other owners felt Hydro-Prop hadn't been successful enough at attracting new sponsors and that their teams weren't getting the prize money they expected. But there also was another factor—human nature.

Suppose you have spent many hundreds of thousands of dollars to operate a race boat that competes in a sport that is owned by one of your competitors? What does human nature say your reaction is likely to be if your boat is called for an in-

fraction that allows the sport's owner to win a race? Will you be magnanimous, or will you suspect there is foul play?

When Bernie Little was co-owner of the sport during the Hydro-Prop days, he tried his best to stay out of the fray. He avoided any involvement in writing rules and assessing penalties. He turned all of those decisions over to his partner, Gary Garbrecht. In fact, his boat was likely assessed more fuel restrictions than any of the others. Yet, perception is the reality.

It proved almost impossible to convince the other boat owners that Little wasn't getting an advantage on the race-course because he owned the sport. At a time when it's important to get new people involved in unlimited hydro racing, the perception of how the sport is governed and whether it will be fair to all participants will be a critical factor.

I'm a hydroplane fan. I have been since I was five years old and watched Bill Muncey and *Miss Thriftway* crash into the side of that Coast Guard patrol boat during the 1958 Gold Cup. I'd like nothing better than for the new group to take the sport to a place that it has never been before. But, there are dangerous shoals on the horizon, so I wish them well as they navigate the challenging waters ahead. ❖

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