



JULY 2025

GUNTERSVILLE:

Mother Nature always wins

BY BILL STRYHAL

The Guntersville HydroFest got underway with the U-boat fleet participating in the Guntersville Street Party on Thursday evening, just off a Guntersville causeway. The U-6, U-8, U-9, U-27, and U-91, plus their respective drivers, shook hands, signed autographs, and answered questions for the fans. Included were multiple brightly colored and heavily sponsored Super Stock offshore boats, some Grand Prix boats, plus one marathon runabout outboard from Michigan.

Friday: Practice

There were six Unlimiteds in the pits on Friday morning with each enthusiastically ready to hit the two-and-a-half-mile oval course at Lake Guntersville, Alabama. The course conditions could not be any better, as weather services were predicting a weekend of stormy weather. The crews, some with new colors, such as the U-11 *FLAV-R-PAC* and U-6 *Miss Madison*, were busy checking systems, harnesses, and each nut and bolt to make sure the morning's test session would run smoothly.

The U-27 *Miss Apollo*, with Dave Villwock as the pilot and supporting the same red, white, and blue color scheme as it did last year, plus a little BWR Racing logo, took out onto the large lake course first at 10 a.m. sharp. It ran three mostly hot laps and did a little cruising for timing marks. Roughly 10 minutes later, the U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate* took off toward the course, which is about a two-mile distance from the pits. Andrew Tate, drove the gold-, white-, and black-trimmed hydro (also with a BWR sticker) for four laps at a good speed and then a tolling speed lap before heading back to the pits.



Chris Denslow

The black flag flies at the Guntersville racecourse

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Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow



TOP: Fans gathered for the Guntersville Street Fair on Thursday to meet the drivers and see the hydros up close. At left is the *Miss U.S.* / that set a world speed record in Guntersville in 1962. **MIDDLE:** J. Michael Kelly poses for a picture with a young fan. **ABOVE:** The crew of the U-11 *FLAV-R-PAC* work on the boat's skid fin on Friday.

The Strong Racing team were the next two out of the pits, and they flashed the same paint schemes as last year. Cory Peabody guided the mostly white with blue and yellow trimmed U-9 *Beacon Plumbing* out first at 10:30 and ran five laps at speed. His teammate, J Michael Kelly, cruised out 10 minutes later in the U-9 *Beacon Electric* with its familiar red hull with white and yellow trimmings. Kelly ran just two laps before calling it quits and heading to the dock.

Then Villwock took the *Miss Apollo* back out and stopped a mile or so out before reaching the actual racecourse and had to return to the dock at the back of a tow rope. When asked a short time later what happened, Villwock admitted "We ran it out of gas. I was hoping there was enough in it to get a run down the front stretch."

The next craft out was the U-11 *FLAV-R-PAC* sporting its new sponsor's colors of blue and yellow. Jamie Nilsen was at the controls and put in five laps around the course before coming back in.

Unfortunately, the new *Miss Madison* boat was all dressed up in white with a yellow trim but could not get off the trailer. Their new rookie driver, Brandon Kennedy, stayed upbeat and later in the day qualified his GP-35 for the Grand Prix event being held. And then promised on his social media page that the crew would continue to work on the problematic electrical issues that the team was having with *Miss Madison*.

Friday: Qualifying

Qualifying started out fast and furious with *Goodman Real Estate* taking the first turn at a qualifying speed. Tate took advantage of great conditions and looked good, but a buoy had been dislodged from the course and was not noticed until after the boat had returned to the dock. Therefore, the time was revoked.

Miss Apollo was next and set a speed of 165.119 mph with Villwock driving. Jamie Nilsen was next and pushed his

Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow



ABOVE: Andrew Tate drove the U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate* to the event's fastest qualifying time of 171.040 mph. **LEFT:** Dave Villwork and *Miss Apollo* were the first on the course when testing opened on Friday

[Tate] gave notice to the field that last year's top qualifier at each event was not a fluke.

FLAV-R-PAC hull to an average speed of 159.371 mph. Then, J Michael Kelly took a shot at the pole. His *Beacon Electric* sped around the 2.5-mile track at an average speed of 163.200 mph. The crowd then got excited as *Beacon Plumbing* posted an average speed of 169.036 mph with Cory Peabody in the seat.

H1 announced that Andrew Tate would be able to come back out because the buoy issue was out of his control. And, boy did he come back out—and gave notice to the field that last year's top qualifier at each event (I know about what happened at Madison) was not a fluke. He laid down a top lap with a speed of 171.040 mph!

Saturday: Open Practice

With the pits opening at the crack of dawn and the water open at 7 a.m., there was a lot of hus-

tling around the big boats on Saturday morning. The *Goodman Real Estate* and *Miss Apollo* boats took off across the lake at 7 o'clock sharp and each made several hot laps around the course. Tate and Villwork looked like the BWR team was ready to go.

Kelly watched his *Beacon Electric* being lowered into the water then watched his crew remove the cowling and study the issue for quite some time as the boat floated next to the dock. Meanwhile, the *FLAV-R-PAC* ran multiple hot laps on the Gunter'sville course. Then Jamie Nelsen brought it back in with a smile on his face.

Peabody took the second *Beacon* boat in a different direction than his teammate, as he drove the *Beacon Plumbing* through numerous laps at speed before returning the pits.

All the while, most of those in the pits

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Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow



TOP: The *Miss Madison* was never able to perform well enough to qualify. Brandon Kennedy stands on the boat's deck after one of his attempts to get onto the racecourse failed.

MIDDLE: In the run to the starting line for the event's first heat, Jamie Nilsen in *FLAV-R-PAC* grabbed a lane to the inside of *Miss Goodman Real Estate* and *Beacon Plumbing*. **ABOVE:** *Goodman Real Estate* and *FLAV-R-PAC* rounding the final turn before their run to the starting line.

watched in great anticipation as the new *Miss Madison* was being craned from its trailer into the water. Then after several minutes, Brandon Kennedy stepped into the cockpit. And as everyone held their breath, the engine came to life, and he took off to a small round of applause. He was leaving the dock with excitement in the air and a nice roostertail in its wake. Unfortunately, about two miles out, the boat glided to a stop as the Lycoming motor came to halt. You could feel disappointment in the pit area for the startup *Madison* team, as everyone noticed what had happened.

The *Beacon Electric* ended up being pulled out of the water and was placed back on its trailer without even leaving the dock.

Saturday: Heat 1

Participants: U-11, U-27, U-91, U-9:

The heat included the top three qualifiers, plus Jamie Nilsen, who made up for his lack of speed by seemingly always getting the inside lane. *FLAV-R-PAC* entered the course first followed by *Goodman Real Estate* and Tate, and by *Beacon Plumbing* and Peabody. The *Miss Apollo* did a mid-speed troll down front straight to show that Villwock meant business, as he ran just fast enough to gain the inside lane.

As the four boats continued to warm up, Peabody cut the course to get inside *Goodman Real Estate* on the south of the circuit, as this was the only place on this course to do so legally. That pushed Tate into lane four. There were no other pre-start shenanigans, as the four lined up from the inside to the outside: *Apollo*, *FLAV-R-PAC*, *Beacon Plumbing*, and *Goodman Real Estate*.

As the participants entered the second turn trolling together, lining up for one-minute-15-second score-up, *Beacon Plumbing* suddenly died in the water. This allowed Tate to slide over into lane three. The *Apollo*, *FLAV-R-PAC*, and *Goodman Real Estate* were cruising around the course at half to three-quarter speed

as their drivers looked for their timing marks. Meanwhile, Peabody was attempting to relight *Beacon Plumbing's* engine. When it finally came to life, he took off to make up the half-mile distance that he had fallen behind his competitors.

Peabody came roaring around the outer edge of the track like it was a qualifying lap. *FLAV-R-PAC* hit the starting line first, followed by *Goodman Real Estate*, and then closely followed by *Miss Apollo*, which had the inside lane and the shortest line around the circuit. The flying *Beacon Plumbing* was bringing up the rear in lane four and closing fast, as Peabody hit the green flag at full tilt.

FLAV-R-PAC came out of turn one in first place with the nose of *Goodman Real Estate* starting to peak out from time to time through the U-11's faring uprights running second. *Beacon Plumbing* was out there, too, in lane four, hidden behind the long roostertails, which began flattening out as the racers were putting their foot in it.

Not to be forgotten, *Miss Apollo* was back just a few dozen yards from *FLAV-R-PAC* and was in hot pursuit as it came



In the sequence above, *Miss Apollo* crosses the path in front of *Miss Goodman Real Estate* as its bow climbs into the air then (above) crashes into Lake Guntersville with a huge splash.

Photos by Chris Denslow

STATBOX

Guntersville Lake Hydrofest - Southern Cup

Guntersville, Alabama; June 7-8, 2025

2.5-mile course on Lake Guntersville; 42.5-mile race

QUALIFYING: (1) U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate* (#1801), Andrew Tate, 171.040, 100 points; (2) U-9 *Beacon Plumbing* (#92102), Corey Peabody, 169.036, 80; (3) U-27 *Miss Apollo* (#2427), Dave Villwock, 165.119; 70; (4) U-8 *Beacon Electric* (#1496), J. Michael Kelly, 161.829, 50; (5) U-11 *FLAV-R-PAC* (#0925), Jamie Nilsen, 1158.450, 40; U-6 *Miss Madison* (#9501), Brandon Kennedy, DNQ – blown engine, 0.

HEAT 1: U-27 flipped on the first lap causing the heat to be stopped. The re-run and scheduled races on Saturday were postponed due to stormy weather.

The race was canceled on Sunday because high wind caused unsafe water conditions.

COMPILED BY ALLEN STILES

into turn two in third place. As Nilsen, in the lead boat, was completing turn two, you could see *Goodman Real Estate* was still within a boat length or two, and *Miss Apollo* was hustling along the inside lane, also making up ground. That is, until the boat's skid fin unhooked.

This caused *Miss Apollo* to skim across and over the water, eventually into *FLAV-R-PAC*'s roostertail. That propelled the boat up 40 to 50 feet into the air for a moment. On its way down it also caught the roostertail of *Goodman Real Estate*, which probably helped reduce the descending speed of the hydroplane. The boat tumbled down and spun around, landing upright with smoke bellowing out from the exhaust areas.

Then *Beacon Plumbing* came screaming around the outside lane with the intention of making up time and came upon the landing *Miss Apollo*. Peabody had to veer to the left sharply to avoid an even larger crash. The water from the crash landing of *Miss Apollo* tore off *Beacon Plumbing*'s front canard wing as Peabody plowed through the spray. The boat also suffered some other fiberglass damage.

Within 30 seconds the *Apollo* team's radio man gave those of us in the pits a

thumbs-up that Villwock was alright. Nilsen's dad said, "We gave him plenty of room in the turn," which they did.

The emergency crews raced to the drifting *Miss Apollo* to check on Villwock, as the *Goodman Real Estate* and *FLAV-R-PAC* cruised down the front stretch and came to a halt as the red flags came out to stop the heat. Villwock unbuckled himself and left the cockpit to evaluate the damage to his boat (as he was already thinking about how his team would put it back together).

The rescue crew arrived and asked Villwock to step onto their boat to receive any medical attention. Fortunately, he checked out just fine. It was an incredible start to the season.

Saturday: Afternoon

With the weather turning worse, the rest of the day for the Unlimiteds was called after lunch, with no further racing for the big boats. This turned out to be the correct call by the Marshall County EMS/ weather reps, as the wind and lighting knocked out power for the city during the most intense portion of the afternoon storm. A bass boat near where I was watching was torn from its mooring and proceeded to partially sink in another

area on the lake.

Sunday: Morning

The morning started out with high hopes with the re-running of Heat One on the docket at 8 a.m. The boats were ready, the spotters were ready with their radios, and then the winds picked up, AGAIN! And, it never stopped. The water was so rough that two of the Super Stock ocean racers flipped, independently of each other, during their outing later that morning.

Sunday: Afternoon

After many weather delays and holds, race officials finally called off the event at 5 p.m., the last time that there would have been enough time to run a race. Everyone went home disappointed but safe. And, as it has said: Mother Nature always wins.

So, off to Madison in three weeks. Will we see a rebuilt *Miss Apollo*, or will the BWR Race Team bring out "Sharky," with a new wrap? After all, they own three race-worthy boats.

And as has been said many times in the last few years, the boat count is a little low, but the competition is at a high-water mark. I have my tickets for Madison. Do you? ❖

Bill Stryhal is a new volunteer to the Unlimited NewsJournal staff. He has attended H1 Unlimited races regularly and, in the process, has made it a point to meet nearly all of the current drivers. When we issued a plea for new contributors to our publication last winter, he was among the first to step forward. Welcome aboard, Bill!

GOLD CUP WINNERS:

Where are they now?

With the APBA Gold Cup coming to the Columbia River in the Tri-Cities later this month, we thought it would be a good time to revisit those who have won the sport's most prestigious event during the modern era of the sport, since World War II, and to answer the question: "Where are they now?" with respect to the boats that have won the race. Our thanks to Jim Sharkey, the creator of Hydro Who's Who, for compiling this information:

1946, Detroit:

Guy Lombardo, G-13 *Tempo VI* (Hull #3813)—The current owner is Lee Anderson. Boat is at the Classic Boat Museum, Nassau, Minn.

1947, Jamaica Bay, NY:

Danny Foster, G-99 *Miss Peps V* (Hull #3910)—Cut apart and hauled to the dump at Lake Tahoe in the late 1950s.

1948, Detroit:

Danny Foster, G-4 *Miss Great Lakes* (Hull #4601G)—Sank during the 1950 Silver Cup at Detroit.

1949, Detroit:

Bill Cantrell, G-3 *My Sweetie* (Hull #4803)—Horace Dodge had the boat burned at Les Staudacher's shop in Kawkawlin, Michigan, in 1951.



U-27 *Slo-mo-shun IV* Gold Cup winner in 1950, '52, and '53

1950, Detroit:

Ted Jones, U-27 *Slo-mo-shun IV* (Hull #5027)—On display at the Museum of History and Industry, Seattle.

1951, Seattle:

Lou Fageol, U-37 *Slo-mo-shun V* (Hull #5137)—Owned by Bruce McCaw. On display at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum, Kent, Wash.

1952, Seattle:

Stanley Dollar, U-27 *Slo-mo-shun IV* (Hull #5027)—On display at the Museum of History and Industry, Seattle

1953, Seattle:

Joe Taggart, U-27 *Slo-mo-shun IV* (Hull #5027)—On display at the Museum of History and Industry, Seattle

1954, Seattle:

Lou Fageol, U-37 *Slo-mo-shun V* (Hull #5137)—Owned by Bruce McCaw. On display at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum, Kent, Wash.

1955, Seattle:

Lee Schoenith, U-55 *Gale V* (Hull #5455)—Intentionally destroyed in the early 1960s



U-55 *Gale V* Gold Cup winner in 1955

1956, Detroit:

Bill Muncey, U-60 *Miss Thriftway* (Hull #5560)—Destroyed during the Indiana Governor's Cup at Madison in 1957. A replica often appears at vintage hydro events in Washington.

1957, Seattle

Bill Muncey, U-60 *Miss Thriftway* (Hull #5560)— Destroyed during the Indiana Governor's Cup at Madison in 1957. A replica often appears at vintage hydro events in Washington.

1958, Seattle:

Jack Regas, U8 *Hawaii Kai III* (Hull #5608)—Given a "Viking Funeral" in the San Juan Islands in the early 1960s. The former *Breathless II* hull was painted to look like *Hawaii Kai* and appeared at vintage hydro events in the Pacific Northwest for several years.

1959, Seattle:

Bill Stead, U-00 *Maverick* (Hull #5900)—Intentionally destroyed in the early 1980s.



U-00 *Maverick* Gold Cup winner in 1959

1960, Las Vegas:

Race was cancelled due to rough water.

1961, Reno, NV:

Bill Muncey, U-60 *Miss Century 21* (Hull #5960)—Owned by Steve Hayden, Ellensburg, Wash.

1962, Seattle:

Bill Muncey, U-60 *Miss Century 21* (Hull #5960)—Owned by Steve Hayden, Ellensburg, Wash.

1963, Detroit:

Ron Musson, U-40 *Miss Bardahl* (Hull #6240)—Owned by Dixon Smith. Restored to operating condition and often seen at vintage hydro events in Washington.

1964, Detroit:

Ron Musson, U-40 *Miss Bardahl* (Hull #6240)—Owned by Dixon Smith. Restored to operating condition and often seen at vintage hydro events in Washington.



U-40 *Miss Bardahl* Gold Cup winner in 1963, '64, and '65

1965, Seattle:

Ron Musson, U-40 *Miss Bardahl* (Hull #6240)—Owned by Dixon Smith. Restored to operating condition and often seen at vintage hydro events in Washington.

1966, Detroit:

Mira Slovak, U-3 *Tahoe Miss* (Hull #6403)—Owned by Steve Hayden, Ellensburg, Wash. Was recently restored to operating condition and is seen at vintage hydro events in Washington.

1967, Seattle:

Billy Schumacher, U-40 *Miss Bardahl* (Hull #6740)—Destroyed in an accident during the 1971 Gold Cup in Madison.

1968, Detroit:

Billy Schumacher, U-40 *Miss Bardahl* (Hull #6740)—Destroyed in an accident during the 1971 Gold Cup in Madison.



U-12 *Miss Budweiser* Gold Cup winner in 1969 and '70

1969, San Diego:

Bill Sterett, U-12 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #6812)—On display at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum, Kent, Wash.

1970, San Diego:

Dean Chenoweth, U-12 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #6812)—On display at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum, Kent, Wash.

1971, Madison, IN:

Jim McCormick, U-6 *Miss Madison* (Hull #6079)—Owned by Randy Mueller. Being restored by the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum.

1972, Detroit:

Bill Muncey, U-71 *Atlas Van Lines* (Hull #7171)—Owned by Dave Bartush. In storage in a Detroit warehouse.

1973, Tri-Cities, WA:

Dean Chenoweth, U-12 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #7025)—Owned by Unlimited Excitement. Awaiting restoration by the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum.

1974, Seattle:

George Henley, U-25 *Pay 'n Pak* (Hull #7325)—On display at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. Appears frequently at vintage hydro events.



U-25 *Pay 'n Pak* Gold Cup winner in 1974 and '75

1975, Tri-Cities, WA:

George Henley, U-25 *Pay 'n Pak* (Hull #7325)—On display at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. Appears frequently at vintage hydro events.

1976, Detroit:

Tom D'Eath, U-2 *Miss U.S.* (Hull #7402)—Owned by Eric Mann. Boat is painted as a *Budweiser* display hull.

1977, Tri-Cities, WA:

Bill Muncey, U-1 *Atlas Van Lines* (Hull #7701)—Restored to operating condition and on display at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. Appears frequently at vintage hydro events.

1978, Owensboro, KY:

Bill Muncey, U-00 *Atlas Van Lines* (Hull #7701)—Restored to operating condition and on display at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. Appears frequently at vintage hydro events.



U-00 *Atlas Van Lines* Gold Cup winner in 1977, '78 and '79

1979, Madison, IN:

Bill Muncey, U-1 *Atlas Van Lines* (Hull #7701)—Restored to operating condition and on display at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. Appears frequently at vintage hydro events.

1980, Madison, IN:

Dean Chenoweth, U-12 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #8012)—Owned by Eric Mann. On display at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. Appears frequently at vintage hydro events.

1981, Seattle:

Dean Chenoweth, U-1 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #8012)—Owned by Eric Mann. On display at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. Appears frequently at vintage hydro events.

1982, Detroit:

Chip Hanauer, U-00 *Atlas Van Lines* (Hull #8200)—Owned by the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. Currently on loan to and displayed at the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America Museum in Daytona Beach, Fla.

1983, Evansville, IN:

Chip Hanauer, U-1 *Atlas Van Lines* (Hull #8200)—Owned by the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. Currently on loan to and displayed at the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America Museum in Daytona Beach, Fla.

1984, Tri-Cities, WA:

Chip Hanauer, U-1 *Atlas Van Lines* (Hull #8401)—Owned by Mike and Lori Jones. Currently being used as a display hull for Tri-City Water Follies.

1985, Seattle:

Chip Hanauer, U-00 *Miller American* (Hull #8401)—Owned by Mike and Lori Jones. Currently being used as a display hull for Tri-City Water Follies.



U-00 *Miller American* Gold Cup winner in 1985, '86, and '87

1986, Detroit:

Chip Hanauer, U-1 *Miller American* (Hull #8401)—Owned by Mike and Lori Jones. Currently being used as a display hull for Tri-City Water Follies.

1987, San Diego:

Chip Hanauer, U-00 *Miller American* (Hull #8401)—Owned by Mike and Lori Jones. Currently being used as a display hull for Tri-City Water Follies.

1988, Evansville, IN:

Chip Hanauer, U-31 *Miss Circus Circus* (Hull #8700)—Currently owned by Dave Bartush and is being stored in Detroit.

1989, San Diego:

Tom D'Eath, U-1 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #8901/T-3)—Was so extensively rebuilt before the 1995 season, it was considered a new hull and reclassified as Hull #9501.



U-1 *Miss Budweiser* Gold Cup winner in 1990 and '93

1990, Detroit:

Tom D'Eath, U-1 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #8701/T-2)—Owned by Bernie Little's son, Joe Little. Currently sits on a trailer at a

Budweiser distributorship in Lakeland, Fla.

1991, Detroit:

Mark Tate, U-10 *Winston Eagle* (Hull #8700)—Currently owned by Dave Bartush and is being stored in Detroit.

1992, Detroit:

Chip Hanauer, U-1 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #8901/T-3)—Was so extensively rebuilt before the 1995 season, it was considered a new hull and reclassified as Hull #9501.

1993, Detroit:

Chip Hanauer, U-1 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #8701/T-2)—Owned by Bernie Little's son, Joe Little. Currently sits on a trailer at a Budweiser distributorship in Lakeland, Fla.

1994, Detroit:

Mark Tate, U-10 *Smokin' Joe's* (Hull #8700)—Currently owned by Dave Bartush and is being stored in Detroit.

1995, Detroit:

Chip Hanauer, U-1 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #9501/T-3)—Owned by Dave Bartush. Currently leased to Miss Madison Racing, Inc, and is racing as *Miss Madison*.



U-1 *Miss Budweiser* Gold Cup winner in 1995, '97, and '98

1996, Detroit:

Dave Villwock, U-100 *PICO American Dream* (Hull #9399)—Currently owned by Greg O'Farrell.

1997, Detroit:

Dave Villwock, U-1 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #9501/T-3)—Owned by Dave Bartush. Currently leased to Miss Madison Racing, Inc, and is racing as *Miss Madison*.

1998, Detroit:

Dave Villwock, U-1 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #9501/T-3)—Owned by Dave Bartush. Currently leased to Miss Madison Racing, Inc, and is racing as *Miss Madison*.

1999, Detroit:

Chip Hanauer, U-100 *Miss PICO* (Hull #98100)—Mounted onto a pole that sits at the entrance to Columbia Park in the Tri-Cities.

2000, Detroit:

Dave Villwock, U-1 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #9712/T-5)—Owned by Dave Bartush. Last appeared in 2019 as the U-7 *Spirit of Detroit*.



U-1 *Miss Budweiser* Gold Cup winner in 2000

2001, Detroit:

Mike Hanson, U-9 *Tubby's Grilled Submarines* (Hull #92102)—Currently owned by Vanessa and Darrell Strong and races as the U-9 *Beacon Plumbing*.

2002, Detroit:

Dave Villwock, U-1 *Miss Budweiser* (Hull #0001/T-6)—Owned by Rob Graham and currently races as the U-12 *Graham Trucking*.

2003, Detroit:

Mitch Evans, U-3 *Miss Foxhill Chrysler-Jeep* (Hull #0203)—Owned by Ed Cooper. Last appeared in 2023 as the U-3 *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware*



U-3 *Miss Foxhill Chrysler-Jeep* Gold Cup winner in 2003

2004, Detroit:

Nate Brown, U-10 *Miss D.Y.C.* (Hull #9210)—Owned by Dave Bartush. Last appeared in 2016 as the U-57 *Spirit of Detroit*.

2005, Detroit:

Terry Troxell, U-13 *Miss Al Deeby Dodge* (Hull #8700)—Currently owned by Dave Bartush and is being stored in Detroit.



U-13 *Miss Al Deeby Dodge* Gold Cup winner in 2005

2006, Detroit:

Jean Theoret, U-37 *Miss Beacon Plumbing* (Hull #0308)—Owned by Scott and Shannon Raney. Extensively rebuilt in 2011. Last appeared as U-11 *Legend Yacht Transport* in 2022.

2007, Detroit:

Dave Villwock, U-16 *Ellstrom E-Lam Plus* (Hull #0116)—Still owned by Erick Ellstrom. Last appeared as the U-1 *Spirit of Qatar* in 2012.



U-96 *Ellstrom E-Lam Plus* Gold Cup winner in 2007 and '09

2008, Detroit:

No Contest – High winds

2009, Detroit:

Dave Villwock, U-16 *Ellstrom E-Lam Plus* (Hull #0116)—Still owned by Erick Ellstrom. Last appeared as the U-1 *Spirit of Qatar* in 2012.

2010, Detroit:

Dave Villwock, U-96 *Spirit of Qatar* (Hull #0116)—Still owned by Erick Ellstrom. Hasn't appeared since 2012.



U-96 *Spirit of Qatar* Gold Cup winner in 2010, '11, and '12

2011, Detroit:

Dave Villwock, U-96 *Spirit of Qatar* (Hull #0116)—Still owned by Erick Ellstrom. Hasn't appeared since 2012.

2012, Detroit:

Dave Villwock, U-96 *Spirit of Qatar* (Hull #0116)—Still owned by Erick Ellstrom. Hasn't appeared since 2012.

2013, Detroit:

Kip Brown, U-96 *Spirit of Qatar* (Hull #0717)—Heavily damaged in a blow over at Seattle in 2018. Was so extensively rebuilt that it's now considered a new hull, which raced last year and started the current season as the U-27 *Miss Apollo*.

2014, Detroit:

Jimmy Shane, U-6 *Oberto* (Hull #0706)—Owned by Bruce Ratchford. Currently serves as a backup boat for the BWR Race Team.



U-6 *Oberto* Gold Cup winner in 2014 and '15

Team, will appear in Madison as *Miss Apollo*.

2015, Tri-Cities, WA:

Jimmy Shane, U-6 *Oberto* (Hull #0706)—Owned by Bruce Ratchford. Currently serves as a backup boat for the BWR Race Team, will appear in Madison as *Miss Apollo*.

2016, Detroit:

J. Michael Kelly, U-12 *Graham Trucking* (Hull #0001/T-6)—Owned by Rob Graham and currently races as the U-12 *Graham Trucking*.

2017, Detroit:

Jimmy Shane, U-1 *Miss HomeStreet* (Hull #0706)—Owned by Bruce Ratchford. Currently serves as a backup boat for the BWR Race Team, will appear in Madison as *Miss Apollo*.

2018, Detroit:

Andrew Tate, U-9 *Delta RealTrac* (Hull #92102)—Currently owned by Vanessa and Darrell Strong and races as the U-9 *Beacon Plumbing*.

2019, Madison, IN:

Jimmy Shane, U-6 *Miss HomeStreet* (Hull #1801)—Owned by Bruce Ratchford. Currently races as the U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate*.

2020, Madison, IN:

Season canceled due to Covid-19

2021, Madison, IN:

Jimmy Shane, U-1 *Miss HomeStreet* (Hull #1801)—Owned by Bruce Ratchford. Currently races as the U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate*.

2022, Guntersville, AL:

Corey Peabody, U-9 *Lynx Healthcare* (Hull #92102)—Still owned by Vanessa and Darrell Strong and currently races as the U-9 *Beacon Plumbing*.

2023, Seattle:

J. Michael Kelly, U-8 *Beacon Electric* (Hull #1496)—Still owned by Vanessa and Darrell Strong and still races as the U-8 *Beacon Electric*.

2024, San Diego:

Corey Peabody, U-9 *Beacon Plumbing* (Hull #92102)—Still owned by Vanessa and Darrell Strong and still races as the U-9 *Beacon Plumbing*.

FROM THE UNJ VAULT: **The Budweiser Griffon from the inside**



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Within hydroplane history there is a mystique about the Rolls-Royce Griffon engine, the bigger, more powerful brother of the Rolls Merlin, a liquid-cooled V-12 that many believe was the most accomplished of all fighter-plane engines used during the Second World War and that served as a mainstay of Unlimited hydroplane racing for 30 years. With a displacement of 2,240 cubic inches, compared with the 1,650 for the Merlin, the Griffon continues to have a fabled reputation among hydro fans, but because there was a limited supply available, the Griffon was used only sparingly in hydroplanes. The engine first appeared at the 1949 Harmsworth Race in the hull of Ernest Wilson's *Miss Canada IV* and after J. Gordon Thompson purchased the boat, he began campaigning it as *Miss Supertest* in 1951. He later used Griffons in his *Miss Supertest II* and *Miss Supertest III*. After appearances in *Harrah's Club* in 1968 and in *Budweiser Malt Liquor* in 1971, the engine's best-known use came when Bernie Little had it installed in a new *Miss Budweiser* boat in 1979. At hand to witness the use of the Griffon in that boat, and

the other that followed in 1980, was *Budweiser* crew member Jeff Neff, whose sister, Jenny, also happened to be married to the boat's driver, Dean Chenoweth, who was later killed driving the boat in 1982. Readers of the *Unlimited NewsJournal* read his first-hand account of that experience in an interview that was originally published in the December 1983 issue. We now bring it back to our pages for your enjoyment. The interview was conducted by *UNJ* contributor Mickey Kress in 1983.

UNJ: How long have you been working for the Budweiser camp?

Neff: Going on six years now, since 1978.

Did you come on board when they started thinking about the Griffons?

Yes. I had known Dave Culley for several years. We had talked about the Griffons. I had first been turned on to the Griffons in 1968 when the *Harrah's Club* had them. Being an aviation enthusiast I thought, "Wait a minute. Those things are bigger blocks, just what exactly are they?" When I found out the cubic inch, I wondered why anybody is bothering to run anything else. When the *Budweiser* guys acquired them, I'd stop in and see Nelson Kenney, Tom Frankhouser, and Culley. I would tease them about how

they could legally run 30 percent more cubic inch and weren't doing it. When Dave became crew chief, he asked me if I was interested in going boat racing again and if I wanted to be involved in the Griffon project in a new Ron Jones boat, and that did intrigue me.

Did you work on another boat before?

I got started boat racing with Dave Seefeldt and Bill Muncey. I got involved with them because by sister Jenny went to school with Dave Seefeldt. He started taking my brother and me to the races with him in the summer of 1965, before Muncey and Seefeldt took over the *Miss U.S.* project; we started going limited boat racing with them. I can't remember being more excited than I was meeting

Bill Muncey and getting to ride in the same car to the boat races. I did that, then started working on the *Miss U.S.* as a gopher. Bill was really particular about who even touched the motor and Seefeldt knew my mechanical capabilities. I had been building automotive engines a few years before I could drive a car, so by the time I was 15 or 16 I was getting to help behind Bill's back, helping Dave on the Merlins. When I'd go to the races my duties were strictly changing spark plugs, throwing the boat rope or washing the trucks. I swore off it in 1969 when Dave and Bill got out of the *Miss U.S.* By that time, I was graduating from high school and wanting to pursue my flying.

Dave ended up being a combination father-big brother to my brother and me, and I owe Dave Seefeldt a ton, just literally a ton. I was close enough to him and I found it real odd to be competing against him. Honestly, it did take a little bit out of our winning in 1980 with the fact that we were beating up on everybody and beating up on Dave Seefeldt. I didn't like competing against him. He knew that going in, we'd talked about it. I thought the handwriting was on the wall in 1979. The last of the season in Ogden and San Diego the boat started running. In San Diego we were the fastest boat on the racecourse, but we couldn't keep the blower drives hooked up. I told Dave Seefeldt that our newer, lighter boat with the blower drives rebuilt was going to be really hard to beat. "It's gonna be a real tough thing for you to come in behind Jim Lucero."

It ended up almost exactly like that. I don't think to this day that a whole lot



Dean Chenoweth exits the cockpit as the first Griffon-powered *Miss Budweiser* was destroyed during an attempt to set a world straightaway speed record on Lake Washington late in 1979.

Cary Tolman/Seattle P-I



of people really know the depth of Seefeldt's ability. I always like to point out that Jim Lucero built the boat, and it was an excellent deal, obviously. They went to San Diego in 1979 with Jim and ran 133.5 [mph] and, to Dave's credit, in 1980 Bill put seven or eight miles an hour on a boat that was that old. I think that it was Dave's propeller expertise that did that.

What's your specific duty with the Budweiser team?

When I was hired, Dave Culley told me that the Griffons were going to be my duty mostly, but you're going to race the boat and do the standard things that have to be done. Loren Sawyer came on and he was supposed to be mostly the boat guy, and I was supposed to be mostly the engine guy. In the real world, however, if you're needing to work on the engine then everybody works on the engine. I get asked that all the time and I say, "Well, I was hired as an engine guy, but I'll do anything—drive the truck, polish the wheels, and put Armor-All on the tires." When I was going to college I worked as a janitor, and this reminds me a lot of a janitor's job. You do the same thing over and over; you get it fixed once and the next day it's dirty again.

How did you come about your Griffon expertise?

We constantly get asked, "How did you guys ever learn to work with these great big engines?" I had, from the time I was a little kid, I liked to fly airplanes, fly model airplanes, drive go-carts, and my only means of doing that was to build it first. I

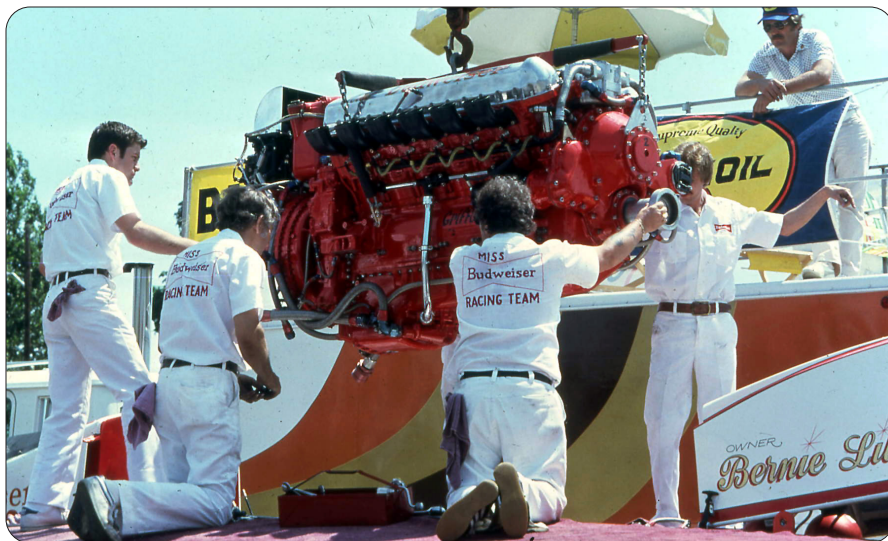
was in love with cars and in love with machinery. Since I was fascinated with machinery, I started learning about the mechanical end of things. I read every hot rod magazine and engine-building magazine from the time I was 11 or 12 years old. By the time I was 14 or 15, my older sisters' boyfriends, who were 17 or 18 and seemed like old men to me, were working on their cars and I started picking up here and there and, by the time I was 15, I was building Chevrolet motors. I shouldn't say building but assembling stock motors. I did have enough knowledge to put them together and get them to run.

Then when you start racing, whether it's outboards or go-carts, you start learning what it is to stretch a motor to its limits. Then transferring to a Merlin or a Griffon or any big V-12, it's just an engine.

You don't come on board as a crew chief, and there's been standards for years. You have a Rolls-Royce manual, you have engine knowledge, and you look at the piece of equipment with your experience and say, "Well, this looks like it's going to fail," or "I've been through this with smaller motors and you're just working with bigger pieces, that's all." There are things that are unique to this big engine but usually all you find out that a problem has been run across before, and you know that it was tried a few years ago like this and, if you're not hard headed, you stand up, take notice and say, "Well, we better do it like that." That's how you become an expert.

The team's second Griffon-powered *Miss Budweiser* was launched in the spring of 1980. Dean Chenoweth kneels next to the cockpit as the boat drifts back to the dock after taking its first test run.

"When you start racing, whether it's outboards or go-carts, you start learning what it is to stretch a motor to its limits. Then transferring to a Merlin or a Griffon or any big V-12, it's just an engine."



Budweiser crew members guide a Griffon engine into position in the boat.

It was Dave Culley's idea to go with the Griffon?

Yes, it was. Dave Culley is a common-sense guy and not big headed at all. I think he has a particular knack for seeing "wives' tales." He said the same thing that I did: "Hey, it's just an engine. Let's take it apart and see what it's made of and where its weaknesses are." We knew that Dax Smith and Jim Lucero had gone down and looked the equipment over and turned it down. We often thought that if we know more about the Griffons, maybe it would have scared us away also. Maybe we just had that balance of smarts and stupidity that led us into the thing.

What airplanes were your Griffons built for?

Essentially, we run a 57 Griffon with a 74 blower on it. The single-stage 57 is the later model. It was used on the Shackleton bomber [a four-engine, land-based patrol bomber]. The earlier, two-stage 74 was used in the Fairey Firefly, a shipboard fighter-bomber, the British version of our Avenger. The 60-series Griffons, which if I saw them side-by-side with the 74s, I don't know if I could even tell them apart until I looked at the model number, were used in the Spitfires.

Where did you guys buy your motors.

They came from the *Harrah's Club*. Bernie Little bought Bill Harrah's whole

inventory in 1971, and they ran the *Harrah's Club* boat as the *Budweiser Malt Liquor*. They hired, I believe, a lot of the old *Harrah's Club* guys to come and run it for the Dallas race. Bernie had four complete Griffons—two 74s and two 57s—sitting in their shop.

Nelson always laughed about how they leaked oil all over the shop. There was something like 23 crankcases and crankshafts but not 23 complete motors. They arrived in 40-foot vans, just boxes of parts, and all of us started unpacking all these parts that we couldn't identify. That's where Randy Scoville of the Red Baron team came in. He said, "Well, this

piece here that you're calling an 850 rudder bracket," because it was a cute little piece that looked like Dave could take it home and put it on his outboards and use it as a rudder bracket, "is really a piece that goes in the accessory case and you'd better hang on to it." Randy was able to identify the parts for us.

What was the toughest engine problem that you had to overcome?

It was definitely the blower drives. The *Harrah's Club* guys ran the engines stock and immediately had trouble trying to keep the blower hooked up, just as the guys did when they started running the Merlins. These great big, powerful blowers take a lot of power to turn and when you start slamming it back and forth, it's a great big flywheel. The Griffon doesn't have any clutches in it like a Merlin does to let the blower free wheel. The blower comes up and down with the motor and it slams the blower drive around quite a bit. So, the teeth go one way, and the blower goes the other in a lot of cases.

Is the blower drive a specially made part now?

Yes, most of the accessory case stuff, the blower drive, is custom made.

Can you guess what kind of horsepower you get out of it?

That's all it would be is a guess. We



Miss Budweiser on the Columbia River in 1980.



Dean Chenoweth drives *Miss Budweiser* to victory at the 1981 Stroh's Silver Cup in Detroit.

commonly say 4,000 horsepower. Bruce Boland and Pete Law, two free-lance engineers, worked up a torque curve on it based on power settings and what it was putting out stock and what it was heat-energy wise. A power setting of 3,800 rpms and 110 inches is right on the 4,000-horsepower line. If you look at it in terms of cubic inch, take a 427 Chevrolet and put a good blower on it and run gasoline and without ever any nitrous oxide it'll put out two horsepower per cubic inch—800 horsepower is not an unreasonable number. So, if you take a 2,200 cubic-inch engine that has an excellent blower on it like we have, two horsepower per cubic inch isn't an unreasonable number at all. Boland and Law figured out that with the Red Baron P-51, to pull that air frame through the air at 500 miles an hour they needed 3,500 horsepower. And they did go 500 miles an hour at considerably lower power settings—I think 3,000–3,100 rpms most of the time.

What was its design rpms?

Twenty-seven fifty.

How much do you guys run?

We run 3,800-plus a lot of times. We've heard numbers come back to that, well, I'd better not put in print.

Do you see getting any more power

out of the Griffon?

Trying to get more power is a trade-off for longevity. You can turn the engine higher, but then it's going to get less reliable. The weak link is still the blower drive. If we get that fixed, I'd say that the valve train is the weak link. We've already faced that with camshafts flattening and swallowing valves and valve springs. That's something the car guys haven't really licked. They limit their rpms so that they can finish 500 miles. It would cost a lot more money to get more power. It's easier to get miles an hour out of the boat than it is to get more power out of the motor.

What kind of a relationship did you guys on the crew have with Dean Chenoweth?

We had in the 1980 and 1981 season that can only be referred to as a Camelot-type thing. I look back on it as, gee whiz, it was really magic. Sure, we had arguments, but they were always constructive debate-type arguments.

Dean was lots of fun. You could tease him constantly and he was mellow and easy going, and you never shook him up. He could be torn up inside and never show it outside. I found out later on that he was having a horrible time right

there in his life, but boat racing was his release. You get him around boat racing he'd show us only the easy-going Dean Chenoweth. Any problems he had, he locked them up inside and wouldn't discuss them with anybody. He was plain a lotta fun.

That's why it's been really tough to replace Dean with another driver. What a tough job for anybody to come in place of him. That's why Kropfeld has been just something to see—the same size guy, virtually, he wears the same helmet and visor, he has that same ability to lock everything inside him and he's real easy going. We tease and joke with him constantly, too. He's real calm. He approaches it the same way as Dean—just go out and have fun and do my best.

What kind of job does Kropfeld do in telling you what the boat did on the course?

He's excellent. He's especially helpful and different from anybody I've ever worked with. He can spout off any gauge reading and tell you where it was on the course and he's not shy. If he didn't get the reading, he won't give you a story. I think that crews put lot of pressure on the driver to give readings back and the drivers put a lot of pressure on themselves to drive the boat and perform

well, and gauge reading becomes secondary. It's secondary right up until the time he catches the boat line, and we ask him what it did and what were the gauge readings, and that's where the pressure is on and snap: "I was busy driving, I didn't notice." I think that a lot of drivers have come up with some good numbers that they can spout off and they didn't always make sense. But Jim, he'll level with you. He'll say "No, I was busy driving, and I didn't get it," or "Well, the last time I looked was on that part of the course and I was running so fast and so many inches of manifold pressure and here's what the manifold temp was..."

Why are you in racing?

I was attracted to it years ago with my love of machinery and the competitive desires inside me. The competitive thing is still in there somewhere. I keep thinking that it's burned out, then the first mention that someone is going to

blow into the weeds I find that fires it all back up. No matter how modest we think we are, we must have some big competitive ego in there somewhere. I do enjoy seeing what can be done with a piece of equipment and it is satisfying to see it go out there and run. Johnny Rutherford mentioned that no matter how much everybody thinks you win, you always spend a lot more time—I hate to use the old saying—paying your dues. Racing can either be a great big high or a real low and overcoming the lows is what's the satisfying part of it.

Overcoming the lows—how were you able to cope with Dean's accident?

You know in the back of your head that when you put him in the boat, there's a chance that you won't get him back. You cope; it's not something you want to do but something that you're forced to do. It's very similar when you call somebody and they say, "I'm gonna put you

on hold." You don't have any choice but to cope.

When people find out that he was my brother-in-law, they think that made it a lot tougher, but I've often thought, what if he wasn't my brother-in-law, what if my family didn't know him, I would have been just as close to him, and then I wouldn't have had the comfort of my family knowing him and we could talk things over amongst ourselves. Unfortunately, around our shop we've had to cope with it quite a bit. Mike Welsch was working around our shop, and we lost him, we lost Bill, and we lost Bob Espland all within two months.

On top of that, in Dean's case, you know that you've not only lost a good friend, but you've lost a team member, and you naturally start playing games with how much responsibility did I have to do with his death. I think all of us played that game. ❖

AROUND THE CIRCUIT

Race Team and Race Site News by Chris Tracy



The Guntersville Lake HydroFest team worked hard to stage a great event, and all were disappointed that bad weather forced the cancellation of the Unlimited race. That said, there are lessons to be learned.

Lesson One:

Six boats showed up to race in Guntersville. The new *Miss Madison* team had a number of gremlins with its leased boat that had not raced in many years, and in its only ill-fated run, it started—sounded awful—ran half a lap and went dead, destroying the engine in the process, and withdrew before heat one. (I was told that even though the *Miss Madison* team had leased two engines, the team is unable to get the second engine to work.) That left five boats to race.

In the only Unlimited heat that started, *Miss Apollo* blew over in the first corner. That left four boats left to race, even if the weather would have cooperated and the race continued—and here was the H1 plan:

H1 decided to do a kind of unusual round-robin, with three-boat preliminary heats. If that format would have been run the *Goodman* boat would not have earned any points in its third heat. H1 had few options and evidently felt this was the best show they could have delivered, given only four boats were left. I use the word show, instead of race, since heat three would have been more of an exhibition, rather than a real race, since it was a no-points heat for *Goodman Real Estate*.

So, here's my point. I have been told

that HydroTown leadership has been pretty vocal that a six-boat field, with round-robin racing, can provide a good race. What happened at Guntersville demonstrates that a six-boat field does not guarantee a good race, because there can be attrition.

The editorial board of the *Unlimited NewsJournal* had an interesting discussion in June, after Guntersville. Here's the gist. It appears that the primary focus of HydroTown funding this year is to improve the H1 Internet streaming product, to the tune of \$600K, the number that has been tossed around for the total investment. *UNJ* editorial board members emphasized that no matter how good the streaming product is, there must be a good program to stream. And six boats are not enough to guarantee a

good race.

Probably the most important issue for HydroTown to address is boat count, even if that means offering (lots) of extra money for some teams to run more than two races, figuring out how to re-engage the Stocklin team, finding buyers for boats that might be for sale, etc. As one UNJ editorial board member suggested, there needs to be a reason to run hard in preliminary heats and likely the best reason to run hard is because at least one boat will not be in the final. Most UNJ editorial board members seemed to agree that a minimum of eight boats is necessary to guarantee a successful race and amassing at least eight boats at each race should be HydroTown's absolute top priority. Period.

Lesson Two:

In Guntersville, the *Miss Apollo* blow over in the corner was a split-second from causing a horrific crash with *Beacon Plumbing*. There was some damage to the front of the *Beacon Plumbing* boat, but fortunately there was no direct collision. Last season, *Graham Trucking* had a similar incident and Dave Villwock, driving *Miss Apollo*, barely avoided being hit by

Graham Trucking. And the *Beacon Electric* went over in the corner in the Tri-Cities last year, too.

It's time for all participants—drivers, crew chiefs, owners, referees, etc., —to address this issue. I'm no expert, but it may be time to mandate some different or alternate hardware specs, such as the skid-fin size and/or modify the racing rules (width of lane, etc.), to try to mitigate all.

This is an issue that appears not based on the age or experience of the driver. Younger driver Bobby King almost clobbered *Miss Apollo* last season, and many say that Villwock's experience helped him avoid being rammed by *Graham Trucking*. Mid-career driver J. Michael Kelly went over in the corner last season. And older driver Villwock went over in the corner in Guntersville, almost colliding with *Beacon Plumbing*. Hopefully, the racing stakeholders can figure out how to more safely get boats through the corners, before there is a disastrous collision.

Other topics:

The Tri City Water Follies are using a display boat to publicize the Apollo Me-

chanical Gold Cup race, and it has been stationed at various community events. Water Follies has been using the 1984 *Atlas Van Lines* hull, now owned by Mike and Lori Jones. The boat did display duty for Mercurys Coffee last season. The air show sponsor, STCU Credit Union, will be displaying the display boat at its Richland (Queensgate) Branch on Wednesday, July 23, from 1–3 p.m. And the boat and air show pilots will be on hand at the (West) Pasco STCU branch on Friday, July 25, from 3–5 p.m.

NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson announced that the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum is going to let him drive the late Bill Muncey's *Atlas Van Lines* at Seafair on Friday, August 1. I have been told he'll get a driving lesson in the 1973 *Pay 'N Pak*, which has a bench seat that can accommodate two people, before he will take the *Atlas* out by himself.

I have been told that the *Miss Madison* team is looking for an engine to lease to use at their hometown race in Madison, Indiana. ❖

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