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# UNLIMITED NEWSJOURNAL

A Chronicle of Speed

## Calling the boat races.

*To the fans watching unlimiteds along the shore at many race sites, and to many who listen on radio, the voice of the unlimiteds is Brad Luce. Few announcers can describe the excitement of a deck-to-deck battle around the buoys like he can. But, the job of being the voice on the Public Address system and on the radio involves more than just describing race action. Luce explains:*

by Brad Luce

**T**he fraternity of hydroplane announcers and broadcasters is a small one. And, over the years, I have had the good fortune of working with the very best within that fraternity, from Jim Hendrick to Jeff Ayler, and everyone in between. No two announcers are alike, and I have learned from each of them.

Over time, and like all sports broadcasters, each of us developed our own broadcast style. That individual style, however, is most often associated with our play-by-play call of the boats on the water. That's what people hear most. But, more often than not, the announcing of the racing on the water is only a small part of the announcer's overall responsibilities. There are many others. Some of which are perhaps more important than the on-the-water race coverage.

While specific roles and obliga-



Craig Barney

tions can vary from venue to venue, the announcers are cognizant of certain core responsibilities to the race sites, the fans, the teams, sponsors, and H1 Unlimited. Over the years, I have been afforded plenty of latitude how to approach and cover an individual race weekend. I approach each event by reminding myself of these core responsibilities.

The MOST important people at an H1 event are the fans. I have

always felt this way. Without them, we don't race. Our sport can be complex and confusing, which means that my number-one job as the announcer is to keep the fans informed of what is happening, whether on the water or not.

It speaks to the fan experience. I am the link between H1 officials, race sites, race teams, participants, and those who pay their hard-earned money to watch us race. Toward that end, and to insure my

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Chris Denslow



Brad Luce with some of the announcers who share the microphone to describe the race action.  
[Top] Jeff Ayler [Middle] Kay-Dub Myers Brewer [Above] Mark Allen

preparedness, I have a hard and fast rule not to announce at an H1 event without attending the driver's meeting.

To keep fans correctly informed, first and foremost I myself must understand the specific course rules. Fans might be surprised to learn how certain rules can vary from site to site. If unable to attend the driver's meeting, I will make sure to spend a few minutes, one on one, with the chief referee to review the "ground rules."

Long before I became an announcer, I was a fan of unlimited hydroplane racing. Thus, I am always asking myself: "If I was a fan on the beach watching this race, what would I want to know?" That single question guides the vast majority of my effort and dialogue on race weekend. It may lead to a driver interview, or perhaps a discussion with an H1 official concerning a call or decision.

In addition to understanding the rules, the announcer must ensure that the fans, all of them, have a good understanding of what is happening throughout the weekend. Why we do what we do, and how does it all fit together?

At each event on the circuit, we have long-time veteran fans in attendance, coupled with those who may be attending for the first time. The fans' knowledge of our sport on any given weekend covers the entire spectrum and we need to speak to all of them at the same time. The trick is to not alienate either group with your dialogue.

Last June in Guntersville was a real eye opener for me. I made notes to myself beforehand to constantly remind the fans of what was happening. I needed to describe the rules and objectives of each activity, like qualifying and testing. The vast majority of those in attendance had never seen an unlimited hydroplane before, let alone see them race.

It was important to explain qualifying, scoring, heat draws, and race format, let alone fuel flow and N2. I explained skid fins, sponsors, air traps, and what constitutes a good versus poor boat ride.

Sometimes that explanation is hard to do in simplistic fashion. Imagine a new fan asks you to explain the H1 racing start procedure. Gunter'sville was unique given we hadn't raced there in 49 years. But, as announcers, whether in Tri-Cities or Gunter'sville, there are always new fans at our events and we must remember to continually review and explain what is occurring and why.

Our sport can get technical; I previously mentioned fuel flow and N2. J. Michael Kelly lost points in Seattle last year for an N2 violation on Saturday afternoon. As an announcer, I must go beyond the simple mention of the infraction and the associated loss of points. I have to explain it, in layman's



Chris Denslow

Being the Public Address announcer at an unlimited race also often means being the emcee for the trophy presentation after the event. Here, he talks with Jimmy Shane and his son, Colton.

terms, along with what it means for that team moving forward through the weekend.

Sometimes I announce an event only on the Public Address system.

Other times I may be on live radio. There are also those occasions, like Seattle, where I am on both simultaneously. And, while the specific requirements of each might be slightly different, the underlying responsibilities are the same.

Additionally, at some events I may work alone, while at other times I may be part of a broadcast team. When working with others, it may be someone with whom I have worked for years, while on other occasions it may be for the very first time.

Sometimes I have two bosses: the race site that might have hired me, and a radio station that does the same. Working with an announcer for the first time, or working for multiple bosses, can complicate things. But, at the end of the day, the mission is the same.

One does well to remember the core responsibilities and that most important person: the Fan!

Sponsorship dollars are the life blood of motor sports racing. H1 Unlimited is no different in this regard, and competes very hard for those dollars. As the announcer,

## A hydro fan since he can remember

Brad Luce grew up as a hydroplane fan. As a child living in Tacoma, Washington, he went to his first race with his grandmother long before he can remember. His first solid memory of the boats was in 1958 when Bill Muncey and the *Miss Thriftway* ran into the Coast Guard cutter and, like so many kids growing up in the Seattle area, he looked forward every summer to when the circus came to town.

He first got involved in 1966 when he found himself on a committee boat with a friend. An official in a helicopter would take an aerial photo of the start of each heat then would put the photo in a sealed plastic container and drop it down to the boat as it milled behind the official barge. It was Luce's job to retrieve the container and deliver the photo to the officials on the barge.

After graduating from Washington State University in 1974, Luce's college roommate, Frank Murray, got a job as the sports director at KONA Radio in the Tri-Cities and, while Murray knew the boats at some level, Luce helped fill in the blanks when the boats came to town each summer. Through that connection, he got to know the people at the station and in 1998 was asked to do play-by-play and pit reporting for the station. He has had those roles at every race since.

Luce has also been the PA voice of the Gold Cup since 2006, has been the lead PA announcer at the Seattle race for the past five years, traveled the H1 circuit for two seasons as the series announcer, and has done the PA at numerous inboard regattas in the Seattle area. He has also served as the emcee for the annual H1 awards banquet.

there is a level of responsibility to those who spend money in our sport. It is important we do our part to ensure they experience a positive return on their collective investment.

At some events, prepared advertising copy, written by the sponsors themselves, needs to be read at certain times during the event. At other events, these prepared statements are recorded prior to the weekend for playback at certain times. In each of these cases, every time the spot is read, the times are logged and catalogued in case of sponsor audit.

Sometimes, and particularly with race team sponsors, an interview is required to understand exactly WHAT a sponsor company actually does. I did this with Znetix back in the day, and more recently with Delta Realtrac.

Lastly, regarding sponsor recognition, all announcers strive to mention every boat in the heat race each time it crosses the start/finish line. This can be difficult when you have a final heat as we did in Guntersville last summer where everyone was focused on the leaders. When I watched the Race Rewind of that one, I could hear myself struggling in that regard.

At certain race sites, I participate in formal opening ceremonies as part of my announcing activity. Detroit is probably the most formal in this regard, as their opening ceremony has a strictly choreographed cadence and sequence to the proceedings. I enjoy greatly my participation in Detroit's opening.

Similarly, I often participate in the post-race award ceremonies. Again, speaking specifically of Detroit, being a part of the Gold Cup presentation is an experience I will always covet. But, whatever the structure or need, it is part of the announcer's responsibility to the race site and event organizers.



Brad Luce interviews Tom Thompson after a race.

Chris Denslow

There is a responsibility to the individual race teams to get their story out. Whatever it may be. They may be racing for a charity, or in honor of some person or event. That story also needs to be told, often in their own words in the form of an interview. But, most importantly, the race teams are made up of people. Individuals who in many ways are no different than our fans.

Said another way, there is a human-interest side to our racing activity, and it is often very compelling. Our fans want to hear these stories, and H1 Unlimited has done a great job in recent years helping to get these stories published and shared with race fans via the website and Facebook.

As a fan, I feel responsible to the sport of unlimited hydroplane racing. As the announcer, I am in a powerful position of sorts in that I have the "ear" of the H1 fan, if only for a weekend. That is maybe the strongest statement in this dialogue, but it is true. What I say gets heard. As long as we understand that, we as announcers can use it to the sport's advantage.

On race weekend, I always try and get time with the H1 Chairman in a live interview about the state of

the sport, the future, etc. It affords the sport a strong platform at each venue. As a result, what THEY say gets heard by that most important person: again, the FAN!

Ultimately, the boats and the racing on the water are the show at an H1 Unlimited event. I believe strongly that if we can give the fans a good show, with good value for their entertainment dollar, we can take a positive step toward ensuring they return the following year.

I have been fortunate to be a very small part of H1 Unlimited racing for over 20 years. The ride has been a good one for sure. Along the way, I have met and made lasting friendships with some of the finest people on the planet. But, perhaps my favorite aspect of traveling the circuit with H1 Unlimited is having the opportunity to interact with fans across the country.

H1 Unlimited fans are some of the most knowledgeable and passionate on the sports landscape. They love to talk about the boats and their memories. They are so very important to all that we do. I was a racing fan long before I became an announcer. I remain that fan today. ❖

# Jerry Schoenith knows hydroplanes.

Born into one of Detroit's most prominent boat racing families, Schoenith drove unlimiteds for his father in the 1960s.

*For many years after, he mingled with fans and boat crews alike as a night club manager at the famous Roostertail Restaurant, perched on the edge of the Detroit River race course. In 1980, he served as executive secretary of the Unlimited Racing Commission and a few years later owned and campaigned his own boat, the Miss Renault. Throughout his colorful life, Schoenith has had a front row seat to the people and events that have shaped the sport. Today, at age 75, he is still passionate about hydroplane racing and is overflowing with ideas he hopes will inject some excitement back into the sport.*

by Steve Nelson

**S**choenith's father, Joe Schoenith, owned a successful electrical business, the W. D. Gale Company of Detroit between 1950 and 1975. He and his wife, Mildred, raised three sons. Lee was born first, followed years later by twin brothers Tom and Jerry. "Lee was 15 years older and he acted more

like a father," says Jerry. "We were more afraid of him than we were of father."

Joe bought his first hydroplane in 1949 and competed the following year, hoping to win races and promote his company in the process. It was the first of 26 racing seasons for the Schoenith family, resulting in 27 race wins and four national championships.

It was natural for Joe Schoenith

to race boats. He loved to water ski and, after World War II, he built a summer cottage on the shores of Lake St. Clair in Ontario, Canada. The cottage was about eight minutes by boat from Detroit. Jerry remembers one time in the early 1950s that his brother Lee made a much faster trip, aboard one of the family's brand new hydroplanes.

"That would probably have been the *Gale IV*," Jerry remembers. "Lee drove past the Gold Cup course [in Detroit], and crossed the freighter line at the Canadian border to our cottage in Windsor, Ontario. I didn't even like crossing the freighter line in a regular ski boat!"

## The Cottage

Soon, the sprawling cottage in Canada became an entertainment center for the Schoenith family and was expanded to include three kitchens, four living rooms, a putting green, a swimming pool, and a professional water ski jump



Schoenith Family

Joe and Mildred Schoenith with their boys: Lee and the twins, Tom and Jerry.



Joe Schoenith's first unlimited was the *Gale*, a boat that first raced as the *Notre Dame*

in front. Jerry spent summers there and says the family hosted many famous guests, including well-known hydroplane drivers.

"We always had the drivers over because it was a place for them to relax and let their hair down, and water ski, and play around. Ronnie Musson and all these drivers would come over and we would teach them how to ski. They would get out there and I remember mother would say, 'Oh, they might hurt themselves' before the race."

Before long, the Gale Racing Team fielded multiple boats. Bill Cantrell and Lee Schoenith shared most of the driving duties, but over the years, Danny Foster, Fred Alter, and a host of others were also in the mix.

In its brightest years, the Gale team won three straight national championships in 1953, 1954, and 1955. The most sensational victory was in Seattle in 1955 when Lee drove the *Gale V* to a much-heralded Gold Cup win. But at that time, at the age of 12, Jerry was still a rambunctious kid whose family happened to race hydroplanes.

### The Roostertail Restaurant

Joe Schoenith loved the boats, but wanted a place of his own to wine and dine his business clients. So, in 1957, he began construction on a spacious new restaurant overlooking the Gold Cup race course on the Detroit River.

Jerry remembers watching the 1957 Detroit Memorial Cup from the construction site. "When they built the Roostertail, they started with the elevator," he says. "Father and I watched the race from the Roostertail scaffolding. But, my first race, where I really got into liking racing, was in 1958 when we opened the Roostertail."

The Roostertail became a magnet for people and personalities, especially during race weeks. In a few years, the restaurant began sponsoring big-name acts to draw larger crowds.

Jerry says the venue introduced him to the world. "Believe it or not, I was afraid to walk around the dining room and shake hands. I was extremely shy! But, when the Roostertail was started, we would go down there and bring our friends and see the younger acts there. I became accustomed to entertaining people. I just made up my mind that I'm going to learn how to do it."

Jerry watched his father host clients at the Roostertail night after night. He says it taught him some lifelong lessons about customer care. "Everything that I ever saw with my parents was customers. Take care of them and give them what they want. And, make sure they know what Gale was. That was it."

### The Company Line

By the end of the '50s, Joe Schoenith had been racing for a decade,



Jerry Schoenith was given a choice: drive the tow boat as his dad water skied early in the morning (above), or drive the family hydroplane. He picked the latter.

acquiring boats, hiring drivers, and competing around the country. The name dropping he heard was enough to make any kid's head spin. But, what got Jerry's attention was how his father used race boats to promote his business.

"I was always taught that it [racing] was a business, even as a kid. When we'd go to our W. D. Gale shop, they had this huge room with all the Gale merchandise: the wallets, and lighters, and you name it. Father had everything with the name Gale on it. That's how I was brought up. It was strictly a way to promote the name."

### Following in Lee's footsteps

Older brother Lee Schoenith retired from driving after 10 years behind the wheel, citing back pain from punishing rides aboard his father's hydroplanes. Jerry was only 15 at the time, but the dye was cast and five years later he had a conversation with his father about driving.

"Tom and I would have to get up early, at 5:30 in the morning, to bring father water skiing. Of course, we had to learn to drive him to the ski jump and turn around. And I hated cold water. To this day, I hate cold water. And early mornings, too. We'd go back to bed when we got back. I remember father saying 'You know, we have the *Gale V*. I'll give you a choice. You can



The principle members of the Gale Racing Team, from the left, Lee Schoenith, Joe Schoenith, and "Wild Bill" Cantrell.

Sandy Ross Collection

take me water skiing or drive the boat.' I said, I'd rather die in the boat then to get in this cold water one more time. So, father actually pushed me into it!"

Jerry knew he could handle a ski boat, but a 6,400-pound hydroplane was a completely different beast. Jerry was only 20 and obviously needed some serious driving tips. "I was never in any type of race boat. Never in it when they fired it up and never in any race boat at all, until two weeks before my first race."

### "Here, grab the wheel"

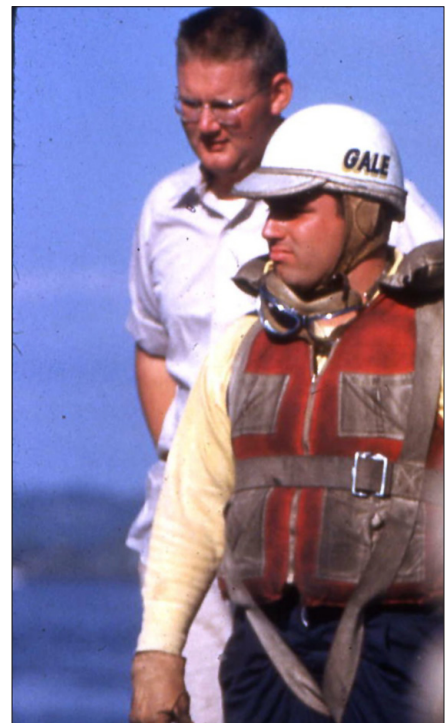
Jerry Schoenith's driving instructor, days before the start of the 1964 season, was family friend and

former Gold Cup winner, Bill Cantrell. "My introduction was nothing more than a ride," he says. "There was no 'how to start it' Cantrell put a board down [in place of the driver's seat] and took me out in the Five.

"I sat here and Cantrell sat there. We took one and one half laps and he put my hand on the steering wheel and then kicked my foot onto the accelerator. I had no



Sandy Ross Collection



Sandy Ross Collection

Jerry Schoenith's first ride came in 1964 aboard the *Gale V*. [Right] Schoenith with Roger Murphy.



Jerry Schoenith in the cockpit.

idea what any of the gauges were. I didn't know how the engines ran, nothing. And my first race was two weeks later!"

At age 21, Jerry was barely 5-foot-4-inches tall and weighed maybe 150 pounds, a true featherweight compared to the broad chested 'Wild Bill' Cantrell. As Jerry slid into Cantrell's spacious driver's seat and gripped the wheel, he realized he had very big shoes to fill.

"The seat was Cantrell's seat, so it was a lot bigger on me than I needed. We kept bending the seat in as much as you could and then overstuffing everything. I tried to drive as close to the steering wheel, which I wasn't supposed to, so I could wrap my feet around something. But, my God, it was like driving a 1950 Packard with all the dials and knobs shooting out at you. There wasn't one safe thing in the boat. Nothing!"

Jerry says he was too dumb to be scared during a time when it just wasn't manly to think about safety. "In the beginning, Cantrell wouldn't wear a uniform. He had to wear his sweatshirt, which was the most dangerous thing in the world to wear. A sweatshirt!"

"In the first races I went to, you sprayed your uniform with some type of fire retardant because they

didn't have fire retardant uniforms back then. The helmets were just motor bike helmets; the life jackets were horrible. They would turn you upside down immediately once you went in."

The first time he drove in a race was aboard the *Gale V* at the 1964 Dixie Cup in Guntersville, Alabama. For Jerry, the race ended abruptly, on the rocks.

"Nobody told me what pre-igniting was. In the Allison, it pre-ignited as I was coming in to the boulders. I shut it off and it barked back to life and started up again and all I saw was the *Smirnoff* on one side and the *Bud* on the other. I thought, 'head for that rock'. I knew I was going to be in trouble. I could hear my brother Lee saying '(expletive) I'm not going to let my baby brother get killed in a boat'. And, the next thing I see

was Cantrell standing on the rocks, laughing. I knew I was OK then, with Cantrell laughing."

## Trial by Fire

In Seattle six weeks later, Jerry had a bigger scare. "I don't think I made it a lap-and-a-half and I blew up the boat and the shrapnel from the blower hit the fuel tank. That started the boat on fire. Then I remembered at the drivers meeting, they said 'Be sure you know where your fire extinguisher is' and all that.

"So, there are three TV stations live, my boat is burning, and I dove behind the seat to grab the fire extinguisher. Then I read the instructions. 'Pull tab to start.' I'm asking myself, why didn't I read how to operate the fire extinguisher? By the time I got it ready, it was



Sandy Ross Collection



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

[Top] The *Gale V* caught fire while in Seattle in 1964. The crew is dousing any embers that might have remained after the boat returned to the pits.  
[Above] Schoenith spent the 1965 and '66 seasons driving *Gale's Roostertail*.





Schoenith Family

The 1967 *Gale's Roostertail* used a step hull like those popular in the 1920s and '30s and was powered by twin Allison engines.

like a toy fire extinguisher that you wouldn't even want in a kitchen, it was so small."

Jerry says he learned to drive, by driving. "I wasn't brought up as a mechanic or anything," he says. "I went to a fancy high school here. Everything I ever learned on a boat was because I burnt it, blew it up, exploded, did everything.

Despite the growing pains, Jerry earned Rookie of the Year honors at the end of 1964 and, over the next few years, he drove right through the most deadly period of racing the sport has ever seen. It was both tough and exhilarating, for the youngest driver on the circuit.

"I never thought I was young, but I look at the pictures now and it's hysterical. The long sideburns, and long hair, all black. I'm still the youngest driver to ever compete in an unlimited in five straight years."

### Jerry's most unusual ride

When the Schoenith's unveiled the 1967 *Gale's Roostertail*, the racing world asked, "What are they thinking?" The new twin-engine boat was narrow, heavy, and never qualified for a race. Jerry says he suggested the design after the carnage of 1966. He is still convinced the boat could have been

competitive, but says his concept got lost in the translation.

"That was me thinking. Me thinking and them doing it all wrong. When you're in a race where three other drivers are killed and they seemed to be getting killed in every other race, I just said that we've got to come up with a way to stop the boats from kiting and flying.

"I looked at the stats of the *Miss Pepsi* and I figured, with two better engines and a light boat and modern technology, we should have no problem running in five-foot rollers in Detroit and Seattle. I'll beat them to the first turn."

Jerry says the boat was easy and fun to drive, except for one thing.

It didn't turn. "They built the boat 3,000 pounds too heavy and they moved the prop back that was supposed to be under my seat, and did everything to change it. Well, you can't take a design and then change everything and expect it to work. They just built it all wrong. They said it had to be safe, had to be safe, but then they almost kill me going into the turn."

After a few test runs, the boat was quickly retired and was never heard from again.

### His Favorite

Jerry says his favorite ride was in 1968, because the boat was beautiful and ran so nice. "That was



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

When the *Gale's Roostertail* was on its trailer, one could more easily see the hull's underside and the steps that pushed the boat to the water's surface.

the year of the beautiful paint job. I look at it today and I say what would happen if it got wrecked? All the numbers on that boat and all the letters were in pure gold leaf. It was all gold leaf.

“That was the year that I pretty much knew I’d been banged up enough that it was probably going to be my last year. Plus, I was more interested in the Roostertail Restaurant.”

## PR at Heart

Even as a young man, Jerry says he loved developing new ideas to promote his team. It energized him. At the same time, he was frustrated when others said his ideas couldn’t be done. Early on, he says he suggested that Gale sell team merchandise directly to the fans. Shirts, hats, anything. He says in the 1960s, nobody in sports was doing that.

“I remember, when I started driving, Cantrell and I wanted to sell *Gale V* and *Smirnoff* shirts. Lee wouldn’t let us, that stupid ass. There’s another Lee stunt. He’d say, ‘Hell, we can’t turn this into a circus.’”

Fifty years later, Jerry still bristles at Lee’s advice. Like his father,



Tony Bugeja Collection

In 1968, Schoenith was back in the boat he drove in '65 and '66, but the *Gale's Roostertail* now sported a pickle-fork bow and a paint job with real gold leaf.

Jerry feels he was born to promote. “My biggest thing in racing was I wasn’t a driver! I was a promoter. So, I only did well when I had to do well. Live on TV? I did much better!”

“I was the first young person to go right to the audience and I remember coming home from Seattle with bleeding hands every day because the kids were grabbing it. I went there and just signed, signed, and signed. And the crew was happy because I had nothing to do with the boat, except drive it!”

## Long Live the Roostertail

In addition to driving Gale hydroplanes, Jerry also helped move the Roostertail Restaurant toward becoming one of Detroit’s top entertainment spots.

“We started in 1964 with bringing big-name acts in, opening the first major rock ‘n’ roll club upstairs, the Upper Deck, and bringing in big superstars. Everyone said you couldn’t do it. If someone says to me, ‘You can’t do it,’ to me, that’s the first thing I do! We were bringing in Diana Ross, Tony Bennett, and you name it. It was unheard of in a small 500-seat club.”

Unfortunately, Detroit’s economy was eviscerated during the hot summer of 1967 in the Detroit riots, the most violent and destructive riots in U.S. history. The National Guard and U.S. Army were eventually called in when the burning and shooting left 43 people dead, 1,700 stores looted, and 5,000 people homeless.

“It hurt us that summer, but after that it was the white flight.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Schoenith goes for a wild ride in *Gale's Roostertail* during the 1968 season.



The Roostertail Restaurant is located on the banks of the Detroit River right where the tight hairpin turn of the hydroplane racecourse is located, which is why that turn is still known as the Roostertail Turn.

They moved out of the city. Everybody left. It got harder and harder to keep the name up and to bring in the acts. It was a scary city back then. It was the murder capital. Every day people were getting murdered. The acts didn't want to play the club."

That legacy of fear and destruction forced many businesses to close. The Roostertail, however, survived and 60 years later still opens its doors at its original



location on the edge of the Detroit River. Jerry's twin, Tom, operates it under a completely different business model, catering primarily to weddings and special events. A lot changed since 1958.

### A Colorful Resume

Since the 1960s, Jerry Schoenith has continued to study hydroplane racing. He is always outspoken, sometimes on the fringe and sometimes in the fray. Over the decades, his racing resume has grown beyond driving:

- ◆ Served as executive secretary of the Unlimited Racing Commission in 1980.

- ◆ Owned an unlimited hydroplane and campaigned the boat in 1983 and 1984 under the sponsorship of the Renault Car Company of France. The boat was powered by a turbocharged Allison and won the 1983 UIM World Championship Race at Houston, Texas.

- ◆ Introduced an entirely new piston-powered class of race boat in

1987 called the Automotive Thunderboat Association (ATA). Schoenith wanted the ATA to put the noise back on the water by racing twin-automotive-powered boats. The idea fizzled after a year due in part, Jerry would say, to resistance from the unlimited racing community.

- ◆ In July 2018, he formally announced his interest in becoming the next commissioner of H1. Schoenith says he got good feedback from drivers and crews, but nobody from H1 ever called him.

### The Next Challenge

In November 2018, Schoenith switched gears once again. His newest project is to work alongside a new boat owner, Alex Bogert, who is bringing back Schoenith's old *Renault*. The wooden hull will be powered by twin automotive engines and the team plans to travel the entire race circuit in 2019. Schoenith guarantees the boat will be loud. By raising the decibels, he hopes to inject some excitement back into boat racing.

"I'm a person who lives the concept on why the sport isn't making it and why we can't get people to buy it," he explains. "I've had a mind like that for 50 some years, thinking of ways and things and what works and what doesn't. But boy, right now, if you say anything about me, it is that now is the time to throw out everything and try stuff. Don't try one thing. Try a bunch of new things. Be daring."

What daring ideas does Schoenith want to promote? What can be gained by using automotive power to race an old hull when the competition has newer equipment that is powered by turbines? Join us next month for a closer look at this next chapter in the life of Jerry Schoenith. ❖

# FROM THE UNJ VAULT:

## A talk with Bob Schroeder.

### PART TWO

*In last month's issue of the Unlimited NewsJournal we learned about the first years of Bob Schroeder's unlimited driving career. His first ride came in 1957 aboard the Wildroot Charlie, a race team hailing from his hometown of Buffalo, New York. Next, he drove the Miss Buffalo and in 1961 was behind the wheel of the gigantic Gale VII. Midway through the 1962 season, however, team owner Joe Schoenith decided it was time for a change in the driver's seat.*

*Schroeder held no hard feelings, though. He realized he needed to spend more time making a living and being with his children. But, his passion for boat racing was strong and his time away from the sport wouldn't last long.*

*What follows is part two of an interview that was conducted by a young Craig Fjarlie while in Madison, Indiana, during the summer of 1979. The Unlimited NewsJournal originally published the interview in three parts in the December 1979 issue and in the January and February 1980 issues.*

#### **UNJ: You came back the following year as driver of Bernie Little's Tempo.**

Schroeder: One night the phone rang right at supper time. It was Lee [Schoenith]. He said, "There's a fellow down in Gunter'sville going to call you as soon as I hang up. He wants to know if you want to drive his boat. I told him you could do it for him." So, after Lee hung up, the phone rang, and it was Bernie. You know Bernie. He didn't ask if I could do it or would I do it. He just told me to be there. "I'll take care of everything; you be there." Well, that's Bernie.

#### **He was the same then as he is today.**

Oh, yeah. Same thing. I got there (Detroit) and the boat was in

the water. He told me to give it a run. I thought the boat ran real well. In fact, it was a good running boat.

#### **You hadn't seen the four-seater up to this time?**

No. Never heard of it. It was a big surprise.

#### **How did the boat handle, and what did you think seeing four seats?**

Well, it was a big cockpit, plus you weren't sitting in the middle. All of a sudden you're over on the side, which, to this day, never really did hurt. It doesn't make any difference if you sit in the middle or over on the side. The boat ran real well. Took an awful lot of people out for rides. There again, all we had were a couple boxes of spark plugs and a truck to pull it with. There was absolutely nothing in the back of the truck. It was really something. We borrowed everything. Borrowed a spark plug wrench.

#### **Bernie just getting started.**

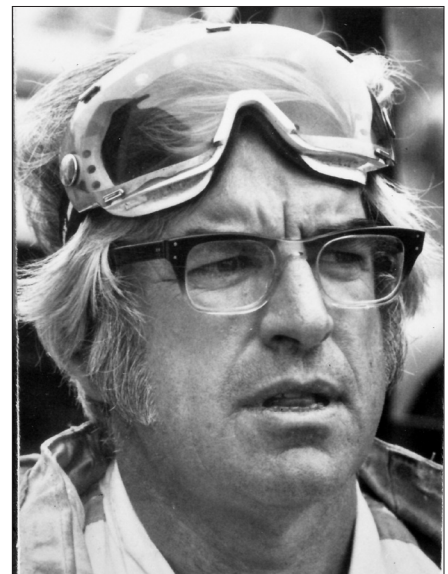
Yeah! That was it.

#### **Who did he have on the crew?**

He had a fellow named Bob Hovey and Carl Joshlin. Bob Hovey worked in a gas station, and that was the crew.

#### **One engine?**

Oh, yeah. One engine, no



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

wrenches, no nothin'. With Bernie, you had paint and rags so you kept everything shined up. That's what we had.

#### **The next year, Bernie had a different boat, the former Maverick, which he ran as Miss Budweiser. You drove for them that year.**

Well, Bernie and I got talking about a sponsor. I had gone down a couple of times in the winter and late fall, talking to Bernie. Oh, this goes back to the Phil Cole days. Phil and Bernie had gotten to talking to Auggie Busch, who Bernie knew from before. The first time they went, they got turned

down because, I guess they went right directly to Auggie. Then they finally realized they'd better go to the advertising agency, because if they go directly to Auggie, then the advertising agency won't get its commission. So, once they went through the right channel, they got \$25,000 to run the boat.

**The advertising agency was willing to go this route? It's kind of surprising. A lot of agencies prefer TV or newspapers and don't want to race a boat.**

Yeah, of course. I didn't get into that much of that end of it with Bernie. But we were going to do it. He's going to get the boat. He got a hold of Bill Newman to crew chief it. Carl was going to stay with it, and Bob Hovey. We had Eddie Ray. Then again, there we are with the boats, the limousines, more rags, more polish. At least with Bill Newman we had tools. Probably to this day, the fastest thing I ever drove was that boat. It did a lot of funny things.

**It was not, maybe, as good a boat as the first Maverick. It had a tendency to spin or hook...**

Again, most boats up to 150 miles an hour didn't do too much. That boat would run 170 real easy. This boat also had a tendency of



Sandy Ross Collection



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

[Top] The four-seat *Tempo* at the dock in Madison, Indiana.  
[Above] Bob Schroeder, Bernie Little, and the crew of the *Tempo* in 1963.

taking water over the bow. Oh, we discussed this an awful lot with Bill Stead and Bernie. Bill always said, "Well, just drive through it."

We went to Guntersville with the thing and it ran pretty good down there. Then we went to Detroit. We had new everything for the Gold Cup. They really were gonna win the Gold Cup. We ran, like, 60 laps, all at 114 miles an hour that week. With Bernie you went out and ran and ran and ran and ran. We saved a brand-new engine and new blower setup and everything for the race, which we put in the day before the race.

So, I'll always remember, it was 20 minutes after 11, the race started at 12. Put the boat in the water. I came down the backstretch and there was no power at all. I ran right back to the dock. They picked us out of the water. Well, the coupling on the aux stage is so hard

## Schroeder Unlimited Driving Stats

YEAR	BOAT	RACE RESULTS					HEAT RESULTS				
		RACES	1st	2nd	3rd	DNQ	START	1st	Pct.	Top 3	Pct.
1950	My Ambition	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
1957	Wildroot Charlie	7	0	3	1	0	20	4	20.00%	15	75.00%
1958	Wildroot Charlie	9	0	2	1	0	23	2	8.70%	13	56.52%
1959	Miss Buffalo	3	0	0	0	1	6	0	0.00%	4	66.67%
	Gale V	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
1960	Miss Buffalo	5	0	0	0	0	8	0	0.00%	1	12.50%
1961	Gale VII	2	0	0	0	2	4	0	0.00%	2	50.00%
1962	Gale VII	2	0	0	0	0	4	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
1963	Tempo	6	0	0	0	0	14	0	0.00%	9	64.29%
1964	Miss Budweiser	5	0	0	0	0	9	1	11.11%	6	66.67%
	Tempo	3	0	0	0	0	5	0	0.00%	2	40.00%
1967	Atlas Van Lines	9	0	0	0	0	21	0	0.00%	5	23.81%
1968	My Cupiee	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	0.00%	3	100.00%
1974	CU-22	3	0	0	0	1	4	0	0.00%	3	75.00%
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>57</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5.65%</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>50.81%</b>



Bob Schroeder pilots the *Tempo* onto the racecourse.

to work on. It was easier to change the whole aux stage blower, motor, everything. We put everything back in that we were playin' with all week.

So, they shoved me off. It started just as the one-minute gun went off so that we were legal. But I was already heading the wrong direction, so I got a real late start. We just had all kinds of power and it was a little rough. The boat was really running good. Finally, I got into that Roostertail Turn a little bit too fast and went on my head. It tossed me out. According to the pictures I've seen, the boat went all the way around and over and back up again. Then it idled up on shore.

**It hit the sea wall.**

It really didn't hurt nothin'. It just idled up onto the wall. Freddie Dube was there and he jumped over the fence and went over and turned it off. Up until that time, the boat wasn't hurt. Then the Coast Guard got a hold of it and towed it backwards. Sunk it and backed over the top of it and chewed the deck all up. So, in the meantime, I was in the hospital not feeling too well.

**Next came Minot, North Dakota. What was that like?**

Oh, of course it was just a place

out in the middle of no place, you know. They'd had a bad storm, so I guess a couple of days we should have been running we weren't. Now, I was a little leery of the boat. After just falling out of the thing, I wasn't going to... Bernie was pumping me up between heats. Chuck Thompson, I believe, won the first heat. He said he knew I could beat him. So, I went out after him, and he blew. Buddy Byers was along

side of me with the *Madison*. Then I blew. All the pieces of my blower, carburetor, and everything stuck into the *Madison* deck. But, I was hurtin' bad still, from Detroit. It was only two weeks apart. The boat still had this tendency to take water over the bow.

**At Seattle, you ran fifth and last in the first heat. Then Chuck Hickling took over the boat.**

I was just hurting all over and I wanted to change the boat. We were back to "Bill Stead drove it this way, that's the way we're going to leave it." So, I said, "Well, I'll find you somebody." I told 'em I would drive it if I couldn't find anybody. I'd known Chuck, and Chuck said he would drive it. Of course, Chuck proceeded to go to San Diego and tear the whole side off the boat. We could've changed it. It didn't have to happen. Very easy sponson change.

**Was it Bernie who opposed the change?**

Yeah, because Bernie was kind of new in it, and what Stead said. If it was all right, it was all right.

**Later that season you drove the four-seater again. It had been**



Bernie Little purchased the former *Maverick* in 1964 and renamed it *Miss Budweiser*. It became the first hydro to carry the famous name, which would grace the hulls of unlimiteds for the next 40 years.

**sold and had gone over a cliff in a highway accident. Then Bernie got it back.**

Right, and he called me and asked me how I was feeling. We went and picked it up and took it out west. The boat was runnin' real well.

**Having been over a cliff didn't hurt it any?**

No, the boat was running as well as it ever was. We blew an engine up in the truck and we were late getting to Tahoe.

**Following Hickling's accident in the *Miss Budweiser*, what became of that hull?**

I ended up with it, with the idea we were going to fix it.

**You didn't race again until 1967, when you came back with the former 1964 *Miss Budweiser* as the *Atlas Van Lines*. How did all of that come about?**

We went to Florida to the St. Petersburg race [for limiteds]. Norm Manson and I were business partners. Saturday afternoon we were waiting to go someplace, and Norm says, "Who do you know we could get for a sponsor for an unlimited?" I said, "Well, I've heard of a trucking outfit that was more or less interested." We were going to the St. Pete limited race the next day. There was a fellow there by the name of Thompson, from Texas, who had given Atlas the pitch on sponsoring a boat and he was turned down. I asked him if he had any objection to talking to them. He says, "No, I've been turned down." So, we talked to Phil Cole about it, who was just living around the corner from where we were staying in the motel. Phil said yeah, he'd go down and pitch 'em.

So, we got some movies. I always remember we set the movie projector up in just the right place. Put the film in, had everything all set. Phil had talked to O.H. [Frisbie]



Sandy Ross Collection



Sandy Ross Collection

Three seasons after racing as the *Budweiser*, the former *Maverick* boat reappeared in 1967 with Schroeder again in the cockpit. This time it was the first *Atlas Van Lines*, a name that would appear for the next 16 seasons.

and he says, "Well, I'll spend 10 minutes with you." We did go down and he was at The Diplomat, and we showed him the pictures. About six hours later, before we even left, he got real interested in it. Before we left, he wanted to know if we'd paint the boat green and white and wear green pants. You know, we'd do anything, whatever he said. He gave us the money to go racing. We never did tell him we were going to rip the world. We were just going to run a nice, clean show and finish all the heats, see if he was going to be that interested in racing. It turned

out he was. He really wanted us to go the next year with him, but our business was getting to where neither Norm nor I had any time left. That's why he picked up Fendler.

**Did you do the repair work on the hull?**

Yeah, and we made the change that I wanted to make. That was one reason I wanted to do it. I wanted to make the change. It did exactly what we thought it was going to do. If we'd just done that in the first place, we wouldn't have had all those problems.

**You ran a conventional Allison. No more aux stage.**

We really wanted to go out and finish every race. We did very well, we thought. We had one crewmember, Lou Macutza. He did all the work. We did buy a new truck and a little bit of equipment and went racing.

**What was the ownership of the boat? Did Manson own it, or did you own it, or both of you?**

We ran it through his corporation. That was before I was a part of his corporation. Through the deal, I became part of his corporation.

**Had he been around in the days of Wildroot Charlie and Miss Buffalo?**

Yeah, but we weren't business partners, then. Norm was in the dredging dock business. He used to put out all the buoys, the course. He did all the water work for 'em. All the work at the Launch Club. That's how I got to know Norm.

**In '68, you drove the boat again as Want-A-Sponsor and My Cupiee.**

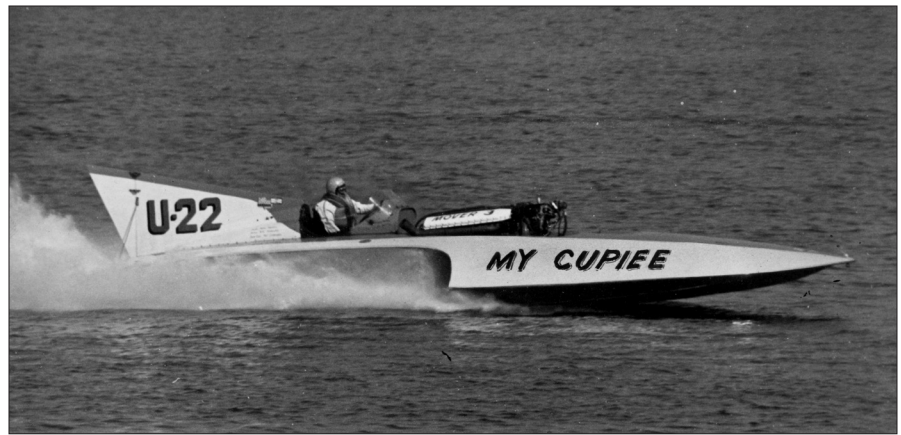
Yeah. We just let the boat sit. All we did was cover up the engine. When we got through racing, I drained all the water out of it, covered it up. Jack Love says, "How 'bout coming to Detroit?" So, we did. Took it to Detroit, ran it, took it home, drained the water out. That's all we did.

**The boat stayed at your shop during this time? The same shop you had used for the Buffalo?**

Yeah, but we never tested, never put it in the water.

**You didn't race again until 1974, with CU-22. What can you tell us about Paul Sawyer? How did all that happen?**

Well, Paul Sawyer is a very good friend of mine and we'd been racing together since, oh, 1952. Paul was the kind of guy that, when everybody else was going 90 miles



In 1968, the former *Maverick*, *Budweiser*, and *Atlas Van Lines* appeared as *My Cupiee*, with Schroeder again at the wheel.

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

an hour, Paul was going 120 miles an hour. He went out and drove the *Slo-mo* and they got into a big problem. Paul's idea was, he was going to come back and whip the *Slo-mo*. So, he spent six years building that boat. Him and Lawrence and his wife. Lawrence was the guy that actually built the boat. He worked for Staudacher. Of course, he couldn't touch the boat until Paul got there and Paul liked to sleep late, so he wouldn't get there until 10 o'clock. Every time he'd glue on a piece, he would glue a sample, and the sample was sent out and checked. So, it took a long time. They were always waiting for some test work to come back from the Pittsburgh testing lab to see how things worked out. Paul was, well, he's that kind of fellow today. There is no big hurry. If we don't do it today, we'll do it tomorrow.

**When was the boat actually completed?**

I'd say '62 or '63.

**He never ran it?**

No. Never has seen It In the water. Just the pictures I've sent him. Oh, I don't know, just being real good friends. He always wanted me to have the boat, so I just made him a deal one day. More of a token thing. Really, Paul wanted a straightaway record. I still think today it will do it.

**How did you like driving the boat?**

Well, it made me feel more like I was back in a 266. It got loose.

**Pretty light?**

The boat weighs 5,700 pounds. A 32-foot boat. I don't know if you've seen the inside of the boat. It's really built, really a piece of art. Everybody said with the birch and all that, how heavy it was going to be. But, fully gassed and ready to go in the water, it weighs 5,700 pounds. We only had one prop the year we ran it. I only meant to go to Detroit and run it. The next thing you know, they talked me into going to Dayton and Madison. Definitely was going from there because we had a carburetor problem. I didn't have time. The next thing you know, we're in Jacksonville!

**According to the Jacksonville newspapers, there were some hard feelings between you and the URC [Unlimited Racing Commission] after the race there.**

Oh, yeah. Still are. It was one of those deals where the starting line was right at the pits. Bernie had some sponson problem. He was letting the water out of the boat, hanging on the crane I needed. I didn't get in the water until, oh, after the five-minute gun went off. It didn't fire right up. It just idled. I couldn't get it to clean out. The gun



went off and I idled across. When I got to the buoy, I shut it off, Newton charged me \$100 for starting up after the one-minute gun went off. That's a big thing. Oh, it's a joke, really. But I was mad. Buddy was mad. I didn't talk to Buddy for a whole year.

**When you drove in '74, it had been several years since you'd last driven in a race. How did it feel to get back in a boat?**

Well, I liked it because, for one thing, my son was big enough to go with me. My son's very interested in it. But, like I say, I thought the boat felt more like I really wanted an unlimited to feel. It was loose and it was ready to go.

**Now, you ran it once in connection with a limited race. Was that the same year?**

The year before that. Had never been in the water, so I just took it down. At Tonawanda.

**What kind of shape is the CU-22 in now?**

Isn't a scratch in the boat. It's like brand new. I keep it in a place where it's not too dry, and not too wet. Shined up.

**How did you come up with the CU-22 designation? And why didn't you name it?**

I didn't want to register it in the United States. During my limited

days I raced in Canada all the time. I didn't want to put a name on it in case I wanted to get serious and go racing. It would always have been the former so-and-so. It would never have had its own name. A boat, for some reason or other, gets its first name and it sticks. It's always the former, some other boat. So, we thought I would register it in Canada. Then if we did register it over here in the states, it would just be a fresh start.

**Hardly anyone knows it as Alter Ego since it never raced that way and the name wasn't on the boat.**

Right. So, we just left it. And, I don't know, if I found somebody that wanted to go racing... It isn't the money, just somebody that wants to be sincere and go racing. We ran out of kids. I think everybody in unlimiteds is finding out, too, that the kids don't want to go and spend the time.

**They'd rather watch than get down and work.**

Right. Before, we certainly didn't have any trouble getting crewmembers. They'd devote all their Saturdays and Sundays and any spare time they had. All they ever got out of it was, maybe, a plane ticket to Seattle. There wasn't any money in it. They were devot-

ed boat racers. Now, everything's professional.

**Any boats you wish you could have driven?**

Yeah, the year I drove *Gale V* in the Gold Cup, I was going to drive *Thriftway Too*. They proceeded to bust it before I got a chance. Ted Jones and Jim Arnez were foolin' around with it and busted something. So, that was the end... I always wanted to ride in that boat. I liked that boat. Going machine. I never sat up in the front. I think I feel safer sitting in the back. That's my personal feeling. The way they're building 'em now, there isn't any room back there for you.

**Who did you admire as a driver? Anyone you looked to for advice?**

Oh, I think because I was always with Cantrell, I always talked to Bill. He always had a lot of good ideas. Bill always seemed to get caught in the wrong place on the race course. I always thought Ronnie Musson was sticking his neck out too far. He was really stretching things. Even in the limited days. I would say Bill Muncey, if there was anybody I wanted to beat. Strictly on a friendly basis. I think if anybody sits down and figures it out, he does. All the rest of us might be out going to a cocktail party, Bill's back thinking about racing tomorrow. That's his profession. It seems like in any sport, when you're on top, there are a lot of people who want to take a shot at you. I think a lot of people have taken a lot of unfair shots at Bill.

**Looking back on your career, is there a highlight?**

Oh, I think my *Wildroot Charlie* days. You know, finally making the big time from the limiteds to the unlimiteds.

Just to touch one, I guess, at one time, was a big thrill. ❖



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Although it was built 10 years earlier with the name *Alter Ego*, this handcrafted hydro didn't race until 1974 as the *CU-22*. After this interview was conducted, it would appear in 1982 and '83 as the *Miss Kentuckiana Paving* and as the *Miss Tosti Asti*. It is currently on display at The Boathouse Restaurant in the Walt Disney World Resort near Orlando, Florida.

# HydroFile

Race Team News



Lon Erickson

## U-1 HomeStreet Racing/Miss Madison

Jimmy Shane recently spent some time at the HSR shop in Tukwila, Washington, working on his “office.” He made some adjustments to the steering shaft, lowering it for better visibility and comfort in the cockpit.



Jimmy Shane



Jimmy Shane

## Go3 Racing

Ed Cooper and Robert Grossman are busy in the Go3 shop with the winter ritual of V-12 Allison rebuild and maintenance (below). With the focus in the engine room, the hull is put away until spring.



Go3 Racing

## U-27 Wiggins Racing

Charley Wiggins and the team has completed the removal of the existing sponsions from the old center section of the damaged hull. Charley has been consulting with other boat builders and decisions are being made as to the direction they will go for sponsions on the newly built center section of the “new” U-27 Wiggins Racing hydro.



Charley Wiggins

## U-21/U-48 Go Fast Turn Left Racing

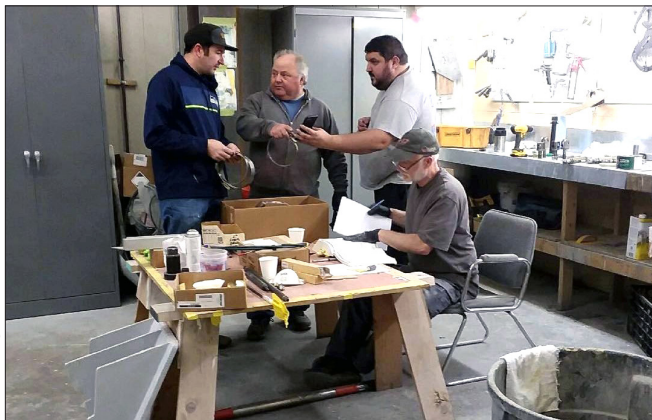
Work continues at the Go Fast Turn Left Racing shop getting the final preparations done on the new U-48 hull. Mike Hanson (below) has been brought in to assist with the final stages of the new hull. Off-season maintenance continues on the U-21 hull (right). Plans are still in place to test both hulls at H1 spring training in early June in the Tri-Cities. From the testing, decisions will be made by the team for both hulls in the 2019 season.



GFTL Racing



GFTL Racing



GFTL Racing

[Above Middle] Brian Perkins working on the new U-48 hull. [Above] From the left, Brian Perkins, Mike Hanson, Dave Lem, and Dave Bell.



GFTL Racing

## Evans Bros. Racing

Mark Evans catches us up with some activity on winter progress on the auto-power plans for the former Ellstrom hull, which the Evans brothers now have in Chelan. They have been working on getting all the hardware and components back in the hull. A sponsor search is underway also, but he reports both hull work and sponsor search are “painfully slow.” Any interested parties should contact Mark Evans. The initial powerplant plans are for one Eagle engine (double overhead cam configuration) built to their specs, producing approximately 3,000 hp, and with close to 1,500 lbs. of torque. A custom multiple-speed gearbox is being designed to compliment the engine specs. Once all the components are put together, testing will determine any further adjustments to the hull, propeller, and center of gravity, if needed. Renowned artist Ron Tully has prepared a preliminary paint scheme for the EBR team.



Ron Tully

# My \$0.02 Worth

## Editorial Comment



Andy  
Muntz

**B**eing it's the middle of the winter, I thought it was a good time to tell a story. It's a tale that came to mind because lots of folks on Facebook and elsewhere are worried about the lack of boats in this sport. The point of my story is just to let you know that this has happened before.

After Gar Wood won the Gold Cup five times in a row, APBA officials decided they needed to do something about his dominance and rewrote the rules in 1921 to outlaw planning hulls. As a result, while Wood attracted huge crowds to the banks of the Detroit River as he defended the Harmsworth Trophy during the late 1920s and early '30s, the Gold Cup boats raced in relative obscurity.

The competition suffered, too. The Gold Cup races became inconsistent. The winner was typically the last boat standing after all the others had capsized, caught fire, or

fallen victim to some mechanical woe. So, finally seeing the light, APBA officials decided in 1927 that they would allow planning hulls back into the competition.

The winner for the next few years after this change were old boats that had been unsuccessful as runabouts, but suddenly became competitive after being refitted with steps.

Horace Dodge of Detroit saw this trend, took an old boat named *Solar Plexus*, put shingles on its bottom, renamed it *Delphine IV*, and proceeded to win the 1932 Gold Cup. George Reis of Lake George, New York, saw the same thing and bought a boat that was built in 1922 as *Miss Mary* but had seen little success. He gave it steps, renamed it *El Lagarto*, and proceeded to win the Gold Cups in 1933, '34, and '35.

Reis and Dodge were pretty much all the sport had in those days. Only six boats entered the

1932 Gold Cup, there were six entrants again in 1933 (including four owned by Dodge), six again in the 1934 event, and only five in 1935. Then it got worse in 1936 when Dodge's boat *Impshi* won because all of the other competitors were too poorly prepared. "All in all, it was a pretty sad affair," wrote the reporter from *The Rudder*.

Admittedly, much of the problem was caused by the Great Depression; racing speedboats just didn't measure up when compared with the other concerns people had in those days. Yet, I suppose there are lessons we can take from this time in history.

If nothing else, we can be assured in the knowledge that our sport has pulled itself from harder times before.

We can at least be assured that it is indeed possible. ❖

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Letters may be edited for clarity and space.

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

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

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