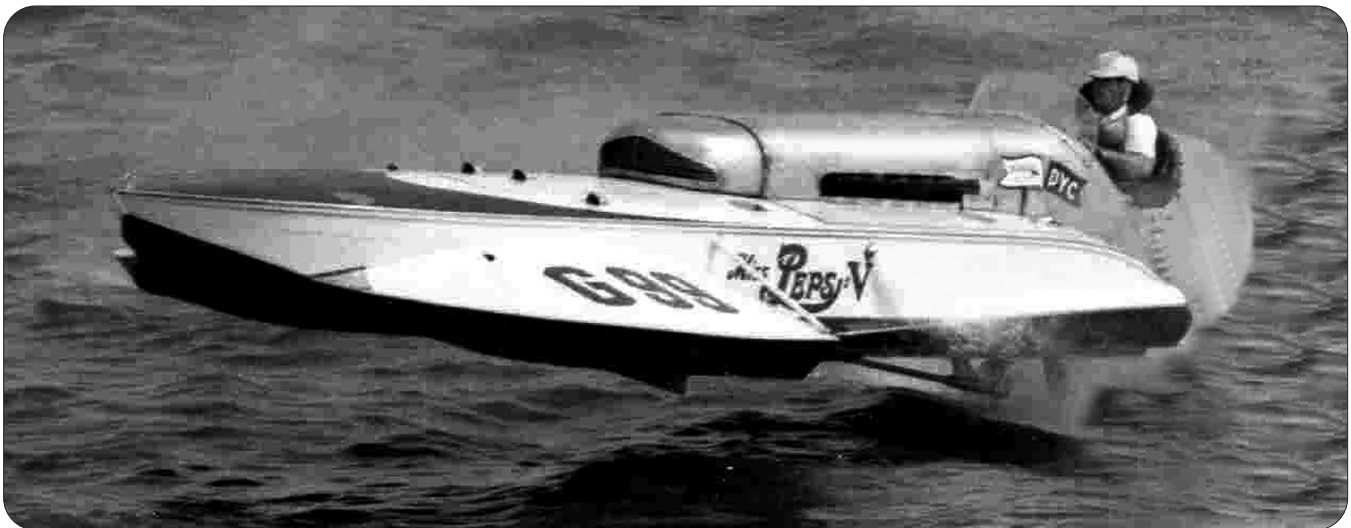




APRIL 2025

FROM THE UNJ VAULT:

Robert Dossin talks about his family's famous race team.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

With Danny Foster driving, the Dossin family's *Miss Peps V* skips across the waves on its way to a national championship in 1947.

Among the most influential owners of Unlimited-class hydroplanes during the late 1940s and early '50 were the Dossin brothers. Walter, Roy, and Russell Dossin were the sons of Ernest J. Dossin, who started selling fresh-grated horse-radish from a horse-drawn cart in 1898 and built the company into one of the largest beverage distributors in the upper Midwest. The company, known as Dossin's Food Products, would eventually receive the franchise to manufacture and distribute Pepsi Cola throughout Michigan and Northern Ohio and would have bottling plants in Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Toledo.

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The Dossin brothers got into boat racing in 1946 because a supervisor in one of their bottling plants was spending part of his free time as a mechanic for a hydroplane named Dukie. At one point it became apparent that his race team needed some financial support, so he asked the Dossins if they'd help cover some of the team's expenses in exchange for the opportunity to name the craft.

With that experience, the Dossins then caught the hydro bug. In the years ahead, they'd campaign three more boats, win three national championships, and win a total of 13 races, including one Gold Cup. It also happened that in lending their product's name to that boat, the Dossins would change the sport in a fundamental way. They broke a longstanding gentleman's agreement among the sport's millionaire participants that established boat racing as strictly a hobby—certainly not an enterprise that could be used for crass commercial purposes.

Robert Dossin was the son of Roy and, along with his cousin, Ernie, the son of Russell, was actively involved in his family's boat-racing adventures throughout their involvement in the sport into the mid-1950s. During the summer of 1983, Robert Dossin sat down with NewsJournal correspondent David Greene to discuss his family's career in the sport. The following was originally published in the January and February 1984 issues of the Unlimited NewsJournal and is repeated here for your reading pleasure.

UNJ: After the 1946 Gold Cup, Howard Hughes got the Dossin brothers interested in sponsoring his boat for the upcoming President's Cup. How did this come about?

Dossin: The fellow that rode as mechanic in the *Dukie* the race before was named Bill Stroh and he was a close friend of Whitey Hughes. Bill Stroh worked as a supervisor for our company in selling Pepsi Cola. We had five sales supervisors and he was one of them.

He's the one that came in and talked to my dad about sponsoring a boat. After a couple hours of discussion, we decided to get into it for the rest of the season.

Practically all the races had been completed for that season, but there were two races left to go. One was at Wash-

ington, D.C. and the other was at New Martinsville, West Virginia. We decided to go with the boat to Washington and that was our first race ever. *Pepsi Cola III* was the name of the boat.

How did the racing fraternity view this first commercial sponsorship in Unlimited or Gold Cup racing?

We didn't hear too much about it until Mel Crook mentioned that he didn't like advertising involved in Gold Cup racing. As far as the other owners were concerned, there were no complaints. Mel Crook just had a bug about it and didn't like it. He would never mention the name of the boat in his magazine articles. He would just call it U-99.

In the first heat of the 1946 President's Cup, the *Pepsi Cola III* beat the *So*

Long of Henry Slocum, who had not been a winner. What led you to purchase this boat instead of building a new one?

That was another case of being approached by a Gold Cup driver. Danny Foster came to us and suggested that we give him a chance to reconstruct the boat and put it in all the races including the Gold Cup. He had plans as to what he was going to do. One of them was to buy the old *So Long* and extend it seven feet with an overhang for the driver to sit in. He also wanted to take the original engine out and put in an Allison.

Ha had a close friend, who was an expert at welding aluminum, which was a very difficult thing in those days. Danny brought him to Detroit. The overhang that was attached to the boat was all alu-



ABOVE: The *Miss Pepsi III* on its trailer in 1946.

LEFT: The Dossin brothers with a few of the race trophies they earned. From the left, Walter, Russell, and Roy.



minum and it was constructed by Bob Allinger, a friend of Danny Foster.

Danny Foster was the main mechanic on the boat and also the driver. He instructed everybody as to what he wanted done. He was with the boat continually during its building. I can remember that the people working with him worked to one or two o'clock in the morning every day on that boat preparing it for the races in 1947.

The Ford Memorial race was the first event that we entered in 1947, and we won. The water was very choppy, consequently the speeds were very slow. There were a lot of boats that fell by the wayside.

The old *So Long* had a Curtiss engine that had half the cubic-inch displacement of the Allison that you were about to install. What were the problems in installing the Allison engine?

We had to put new stringers in, but I don't think there were an awful lot of problems. Danny Foster had helped Dan Arena install the Allison in the *Miss Golden Gate III* so he had experience. Danny seemed to know what he was doing.

The first time they installed it in our plant, it started up right away with no problem. The only problem that it seemed like we had was when we put it in the water. The boat dug in since it was unbalanced. In order to correct the problem, we had to shift the Allison engine back until it got the right balance. Then it was OK.

What attracted you to the Allison engine as a power source?

We bought 22 Allison engines from a war-surplus dealer. We paid between \$50 and \$100 apiece for them, but we also bought two Rolls-Merlins. We never did use the Merlin.

How did Danny Foster decide to get involved in your racing team?

I think Danny felt he could work with a larger budget with the Dossins in perfecting a relatively new boat. He figured that Al Fallon [the owner of *Miss Great Lakes*] was limited with his boat expenses because his company was smaller and he had just so much money that he could budget for this type of thing. Danny figured he could get a better opportunity with the Dossins.

Al Fallon and Danny were very close, and they always were years after. After Danny left Fallon, he advised the *Great Lakes* camp in different things and gave them help in repairing their boat when they had problems.

In fact, everybody used to help each other out in those days. They used to borrow from each other—anything we needed: tools, additional piec-

"[Danny] Foster came to us and suggested that we give him a chance to reconstruct the boat and put it in all the races including the Gold Cup."



A rebuilt 7-Litre hydroplane, *Miss Peps V* dominated the sport in 1947.

es of tubing, or whatever. We would go from one to the other and borrow from each other.

Walter, Roy, and Russell were the original Dossin brothers. How were the other members of the Dossin family that were involved in the racing activities related to these brothers?

The only other ones that had anything to do with the racing were myself and Ernie Dossin. I have a brother, and Ernie has a brother, and Walter had a son, but they never got involved in the racing of the boats.

I used to travel with the boats and so did Ernie. Ernie was the managing crew chief or the boat manager on all the *Pepsis*. He worked with Chuck Thompson and Danny Foster when we raced the boats. He had a crew of about two or three people.

Were you first attracted to boat racing as an advertising vehicle? How did it fit your marketing plan?

In a way it ended up that way, but we were nuts about boating. We were nuts about racing too—watching races. It was more of a hobby when we first got into it, but we were fortunate that we could write the expenses off, or 70% of the expenses off, in advertising. It ended up both a hobby and also advertising—public relations for our company.

Was the Pepsi sponsorship out of the national office or did it originate

from your local Pepsi distributorship in Detroit?

In 1947, when we had the race in New York City for the Gold Cup, a party was given for our family and all the people who were involved with racing the boats by the Pepsi Cola Company, which had New York as its home office. We were the franchise bottler in the state of Michigan and Northern Ohio for Pepsi at the time. We asked them if they would be interested in helping finance our expenses. They had to take it to the Board of Directors. We got an answer back about two months later that by one vote we lost out in getting the national sponsorship. So, we went ahead and did all the spon-

soring ourselves—handling all expenses from our company here in Detroit.

You said that 70% of your expenses were written off. Let's say you were going to Washington, DC, or out to Seattle or anywhere out of your market area, were you able to charge that off?

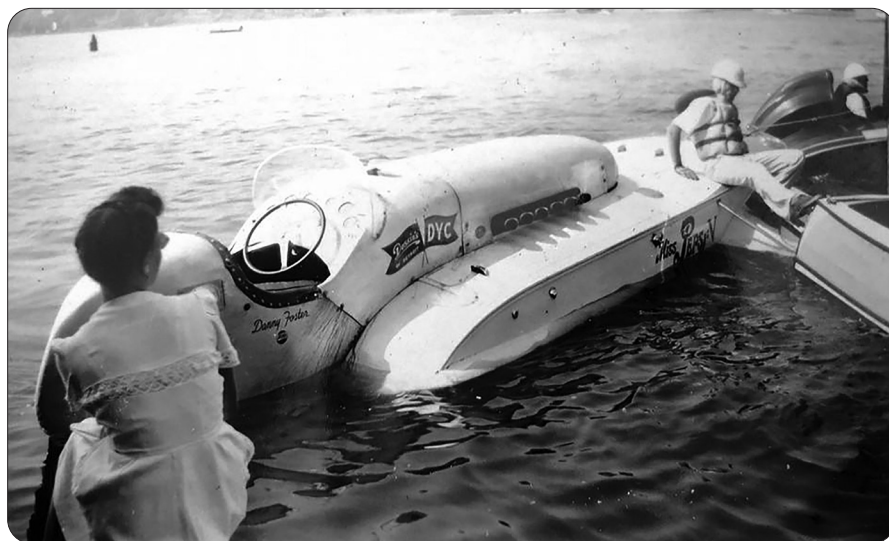
Yes. We did do that and at one time we thought we could get 100% off. But the argument from IRS was that a lot of this advertising was being wasted because we were in other cities.

I remember going down there and arguing with the IRS about it. I guess we were fortunate that they allowed us 70%.

This also happened with Jack Schaffer, who had the boat called *Such Crust*. He owned a bakery in Michigan here and the name of his bread was Such Crust bread. He had the same problem we had. So, we got together before we went down and argued our point with the IRS. They did the same thing to him.

That's how I started this scrap book. I took the scrap book down there and showed them the headlines we were getting. I showed them articles mentioning *Pepsi* being owned by Dossin Food Products in Detroit, bottlers of Pepsi Cola. It wasn't too hard to sell them once they saw all the information I had.

How did you determine that your boat racing activities were helpful to



Danny Foster tends to his boat between heats at Red Bank, New Jersey, in 1947.

your business?

Well, we were doing pretty good anyway—Pepsi sales were going up. We were involved in sports a lot with our company here in Detroit. We had a baseball team that won the national championship twice. We had hockey teams, and we had basketball teams.

We even sponsored some race cars—the midgets. So, we got involved in anything like this—anything that would put our name before the public.

Now you can't say because we did this that it sold Pepsi Cola, but it made people aware of us. It's just like the Belle Isle Zoo and the Detroit Zoo. We used to donate animals—monkeys, hippos, and so forth. We used to have our sign on the cage there.

How did the name *Miss Peps V* come about?

In 1946, when we raced under the name *Pepsi Cola III* the chief referee for the APBA, who was Mel Crook, did not like advertising combined with boat racing. He called it a gentleman's sport.

But to get into the sport you had to be a multi-millionaire, and I am speaking of owners like Horace Dodge and Herb Mendelson. These people had millions of dollars. But nobody else could get into it. It limited the field of racing.

Before the racing season in 1947 began, the ruling was made by the APBA Gold Cup Committee, that Mel Crook was in charge of at the time, that no boat could use any product name on their boat. What we did was to call the boat *Miss Peps V* instead of *Miss Pepsi*. We left the “i” off, but we brought the curly-cue on the capital P out to look like an “i.” So, anybody looking at the boat going by would see “Miss Pepsi.” The reason we named it number V is that Pepsi Cola cost five cents at the time.

The story behind naming our first boat *Pepsi Cola III* is that my dad had *Pepsi II* on his cruiser. That was why we put number III on the race boat. I didn't think it made too much sense, but that is the way it worked out.

In her initial race in the 1947 Detroit Memorial, the *Miss Peps V* won by attrition in a rough-water race. What problems did you experience with the boat and how did you correct them? Hughes's *Dukie*, Fageol's *So Long, Jr.*, and Bill Stroh's *Nuts and Bolts* led the *Miss Peps* at various times during the day.

The first thing that we did after that race was to remove the sponsons that were the original sponsons of the *So Long*. They were too small in the first place and should have been eliminated in favor of larger sponsons.

Before the race we could see that the boat could not get up. The hull was too heavy for the size of the sponsons. It just couldn't get up on the three points.

After the Ford Memorial—they called it the Detroit Ford Memorial Race because the Ford Motor Car Company spon-



Sandy Ross Collection

Danny Foster has a rough ride in the cockpit of *Miss Peps V*.

sored the race—we knew we had to do something with the boat to make it faster or we just wouldn't have a chance. We almost tripled the size of the sponson in weight and in size. It gave the boat a lot more stability.

The *Peps V* won her second straight race at the Gold Cup appearing to pick up speed on the entries referenced in the previous question and showing an ability to run with *Notre Dame* and *Tempo VI*—two of the leading boats at the time. How did the boat improve between Detroit and New York?

In the second race, the Gold Cup at New York, we had the new sponsons on. Thank God that we did because we would never have finished the race otherwise. Even then those sponsons were so beat up that we had to rebuild them after the Gold Cup race. Everybody else had to rebuild their boats too. They were all splintered.

In the three races at Red Bank two weeks after the Gold Cup the *Peps V* improved even more, being able to dominate the *Tempo VI*. How did you further improve the boat?

Red Bank was well known for its smooth water. It seemed like boats always used to set records there. Compared to the water at Detroit, the Potomac, or New York, Red Bank had a lot smoother water. There is no doubt about that.

Guy Lombardo's boat still had the Miller engine in 1947. It was not until the following year that he put in an Allison.



TOP: *Miss Pepsi* in Detroit in 1948. **ABOVE:** *Miss Pepsi* outside of its shop.

Danny Foster had a lot of fun at that race since he won all the heats as I remember. He just wiped them out.

***Miss Peps V* appeared to have a lot of trouble in the first heat of the Silver Cup running behind the *Miss Canada III* and the *Notre Dame*, which won the race. After Red Bank the boat appeared ready to dominate the field. What was the problem in the second Detroit race of 1947?**

In the first heat, when Danny finished in fourth place, he was way at the other end of the course when the gun went off. All the other boats had already started and he was trying to catch up with them.

In the second heat, *Miss Peps* was leading the field by over half of the course. Then Danny Foster hit a floating can by the Detroit Boat Club, and it went right up through the sponson. The boat

looked like a whale the way it porpoised. Danny was still under power, but he had to slow down to half speed and I guess he felt that the boat was vibrating so much that he pulled into the infield.

We just missed the gun in the first heat and Danny got the hole in the second.

At New Martinsville, Danny Foster and the *Peps V* defeated Lou Fageol's new 7-Litre *So Long* to take her sixth win in the eight regattas she participated in during 1947. How did you view your first full season in boat racing?

It was a very happy experience. It made us feel like getting into it more heavily, expense wise, than we had in 1947.

In the winter of 1947, Clell Perry approached us on a design he had for a two-step hydroplane. His arguments

must have been pretty good because my father and uncle went along with him on building that boat from scratch out at Algonac, Michigan. So, we told Danny Foster that we were terminating the contract that we had with him, which was terminated anyway after the racing season. We told him that we were going ahead with the new boat we were designing and building.

We sold the *Miss Peps V* to Stanley Dollar, who ran it out on Lake Tahoe. He used it as a plaything and I guess he did get involved in racing out there. Then we went ahead and built the new boat, which we called *Miss Pepsi*. The new *Miss Pepsi* was a beautiful, beautiful boat but it wasn't very successful.

After the success of 1947, why did you decide to go with a new boat and driver in 1948?

For one thing, the *Miss Peps V* was pretty well damaged after the season. When we took the engine out of the boat, some of the stringers were cracked and it is a wonder we ever finished the last race of the season. We figured there was no way we could race another season with that boat. So, it was a matter of building another one and Danny Foster never came up with a new design or a new boat or gave us any information on how to get a new boat.

It was Clell Perry, during the winter of 1947, who approached us. He sort of filled a vacuum. Clell Perry had been in years previous, connected with Herb

Mendelson and the *Notre Dame*. Perry designed the first low-profile step boat in 1935 and that was a very successful *Notre Dame*, winning the Gold Cup and the President's Cup in 1937.

But Perry had a very serious accident in one of the *Notre Dames* and he had quite a few scars from that accident. He had the design, and he wanted to build the boat. However, he also wanted to drive it. We were a little leery about that since he had not driven a boat after his accident in the *Notre Dame*.

After he built the boat, he brought it across Lake St. Clair from Algonac. It was completed about a day before the first race in 1948—the Detroit Memorial. The reason it did not make the first race is that it would not plane. So, we took it back out of the water, trying to figure out what was wrong.

We retained a boat designer from the Lawrence School of Technology—Professor Erdman—and he told us what the problem was. We were creating a suction under one of the steps, which was holding the boat down. So, he advised us to put vents under the step. After we drilled the hole in the step, the bow came down on a plane.

The new *Miss Pepsi* was a step boat rather than a three-pointer. How did you decide to go with this design?

That is what Perry came up with. Clell Perry was sold on a two-step dis-

placement boat because that is all he ever knew. For one thing, when he raced boats back in the 30's, for the most part, they didn't have such things as three-point hydroplanes. Evidently his arguments were good in talking to my dad and my Uncle Walter. They were convinced that it was a good boat to build.

The new boat was called simply *Miss Pepsi* rather than *Miss Peps*. How did this go over with the boat racing fraternity?

They rescinded the rule preventing a commercial name on a race boat at the end of 1947 at one of the meetings of the members of the APBA.

After bowing out of the Gold Cup after one lap in second place in Heat 1A, the new *Pepsi* looked reasonably good in battling eventual race winner *Miss Canada III* in maintaining second place in the 1948 Silver Cup. How did you feel about your new boat's performance at this point?

We were disappointed. We didn't think the boat was fast enough. For one thing the boat was really too heavy for the amount of power we had in it.

Chuck Thompson told us the next year that he could floor that boat, and it just wasn't fast enough. He said that it accelerated fast and went into turns good because it banked, as all step hydroplanes do, but on the straightaway, it just couldn't get enough speed.

Again, at the President's Cup, the

***Pepsi* was second while running. At the time, what did you think it would take to make the G-99 a first-place boat?**

We felt we had to change drivers. Clell Perry recommended Chuck Thompson, who was a friend of his.

Up to that time, Chuck Thompson raced only outboards. He never raced a limited much less an Unlimited. The first time he got into an Unlimited it was new to him, and it took a while for him to get used to it.

From 1949 on, he worked with our boats. After a period of time, Chuck told us he didn't think there was much future in the first *Miss Pepsi*.

In 1949, Chuck Thompson replaced Clell Perry in the cockpit. Could you make any further comment as to how this change came about?

In the final analysis, Clell Perry did not want to race any longer. He'd had it. He didn't think he could do it. The accident that he had had with the *Notre Dame* was still in his mind.

At Detroit in the Gold Cup and Detroit Memorial and again at Gull Lake, the *Pepsi* was not a front-runner nor a second-place boat, but appeared to be a middle-of-the-pack entry. What were your problems with the boat at the time?

Again, the boat was just too heavy with the one engine. At the time we were still having some problems with the suction or vacuum behind that one step, and it really slowed the boat down. It wasn't planing right in the early races of 1949.

According to our records, the *Miss Pepsi* did not run a qualification lap in the 1949 Harmsworth trials. What was the story behind this?

We felt the boat just didn't have a chance. ♦

*The Robert Dossin interview will continue next month with memories about the new *Miss Pepsi* that would debut in 1950.*



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

As three-point hydros were becoming the rage within the sport in the late 1940s, the Dossins instead opted to build an old-style step hull to compete in 1948.

The Grand Old Lady's Sister

PART TWO



In last month's issue, we introduced you to Slo-mo-shun V, a hydroplane built in 1951 that was among the most successful in Seattle hydro history, yet was overshadowed by its older sister, the beloved Slo-mo-shun IV, also known as the Grand Old Lady. In the first part of Slo-mo V's story, we discussed the intrigue that surrounded its construction and its victory in the first Gold Cup race held in Seattle.

In part two, we'll cover the team's effort to improve the powerplant for the boat, its short involvement in the 1952 Gold Cup, the accident that took it out of the running for the 1953 event, and its tour of East Coast races in the fall of 1953. The story is based on excerpts from the book *Slo-mo-shun*, which was written by NewsJournal editor Andy Muntz. The book, loaded with over 200 photographs, is available on Amazon.

The boathouse and the Sayres home were busy places in the late spring of 1952. Sayres had outlined the improvements he wanted to see for his boats in a memo. He asked for air vents to be installed on the cowl and stern of both boats, streamlining around the wind screens, and heavier steering gear. He wanted a canvas cover for the mechanic's seat on *Slo-mo IV* and a nose piece for *Slo-mo V*. But, with reports of powerful new hydro-

planes under construction in Detroit, the biggest improvements he had in mind were new engines for both boats.

During the past six years, most of the hydro race teams had used the American-built, 12-cylinder Allison engine. But there was another option: the almost-identical, British-designed Rolls-Royce Merlin. The biggest difference between the two was their supercharger. The Allison had a one-stage supercharg-

er while the later-model Merlin had a two-stage supercharger. The extra stage made the Merlin more efficient.

Yet, even though the Merlin offered more power, the race teams in the late 1940s and early '50s tended to use the Allison. There were a couple of reasons for this.

Engineers had designed the Allison to use a down-draft carburetor, meaning the air entered from above the engine—

the same setup it would have in a boat. The Merlin, on the other hand, used an updraft carburetor. The air intake was at the bottom of the aircraft's cowl, below the engine, which wouldn't work in a boat. Also, the Merlin's crankshaft rotated in the opposite direction of the Allison—and opposite of what was ideal for a hydroplane.

This meant it took much more work and expense to prepare a Merlin for boat racing as compared with an Allison. So, the race teams took the easier route. But still—the added horsepower was tempting.

Lou Fageol understood the potential. During World War II, he had done some work for Packard, which built over 55,000 Merlins under license from Rolls-Royce. He was influential in getting the Merlins used in P-51 Mustangs, his son says. Seeing the possibility of their use in boat racing, he went to England shortly after the war to discuss with the engine's designers how they could be adapted for use in boats. He then bought about 500 engines off the assembly line at the Packard factory in Detroit and had them stored in a warehouse—waiting for the day when boat racers would want them.

Shortly after *Slo-mo V* was completed, Fageol flew out to Seattle, took the boat out for a run on Lake Washington, and saw immediately that it would benefit by having a Rolls Merlin engine.



Stanley Dollar (left) in the *Slo-mo IV* cockpit with Stan Sayres.

So, with Fageol's encouragement, Sayres decided to make the switch for the 1952 season.

As for *Slo-mo IV*, he opted to stick with the Allison, but had in mind a change there, too. He bought a more powerful model of the Allison called the G6, which offered an auxiliary supercharger that gave it better performance than the standard Allison. It was the last and most advanced of the 50 or so different Allison variants. The government had just made them available for purchase, so Sayres ordered two that were modified by Howard Gidovlenko in California, a wizard at getting horsepower

from any engine.

As the testing progressed in the spring of 1952, the Allison G6 showed early signs of success but the Merlin project struggled. The gearbox was the issue. Western Gear, which built the gearboxes for the team's Allisons, was too busy to put one together for the Merlin, which forced the *Slo-mo* team to find another supplier. Unfortunately, that gearbox didn't work out. So, after much effort to get the thing to function, the team abandoned the project.

But, when news of the Merlin issue reached the press, it became clear that the engine was only part of the problem. A headline in the June 15 issue of the *Seattle Times* told the devastating story: "SLO-MOS HAVE ENGINE WOES; GOLD CUP RACE'S FUTURE HERE PERILED."

According to the article, there were ominous rumblings that the *Slo-mo* boats were in serious trouble. *Slo-mo V* was high and dry without an engine and *Slo-mo IV* might need a major engine overhaul. Sayres said the new Rolls Merlin engine planned for *Slo-mo V* had proved to be a dud—incapable of powering the boat to victory against the improved Detroit boats. In addition, the crew had found metal shavings in the *Slo-mo IV*'s engine—a sign of serious trouble. It's



Slo-mo IV is on the monorail hoist at the boathouse that Stan Sayres built for his race boats next to his home on the tip of Hunts Point.



Lou Fageol

possible, he said, that his team can only put one of his boats in the water.

But as the race drew closer, many of the Eastern entries dropped out. *Gale II* would not make the trip, Schoenith said, because his son, Lee, the boat's driver, was on duty with the Army in Korea. Dick Riley withdrew his *Miss Birmingham* because test runs showed that it wouldn't be competitive. Then *Such Crust III* broke a steering gear, and *My Darling* had gearbox and oil-line issues—both

were scratched. When the Detroit boats started their trek across the Great Plains and through the Rocky Mountains, there were only three: *Such Crust IV*, *Miss Pepsi*, and *Miss Great Lakes II*.

On Lake Washington, meanwhile, the two *Slo-mo* boats were getting a workout. The team installed an Allison G6 engine in *Slo-mo V*, which resulted in some marathon test sessions to get it ready. On one Sunday, Sayres, Joe Schobert, Elmer Linenschmidt, and Anchor Jensen took turns driving the boat a total of 400 miles around the lake during a session that lasted eight hours and 20 minutes.

Such Crust IV was the first of the challengers to arrive, pulling into town on the Friday before the course would open for qualifying. *Hurricane IV* arrived from California the next Monday afternoon and both *Miss Pepsi* and *Miss Great Lakes II* arrived that night. But, by then, both *Slo-mo* boats were already in the field.

As was Sayres's custom, he had his boats make their qualifying runs as soon as possible after the officials opened the course. And so, shortly after noon on Monday, a day that would reach 92 de-

grees and become Seattle's hottest day of that year, Stanley Dollar drove *Slo-mo-shun IV* down from Hunts Point and turned three laps at an average of 93.028 mph. A half hour later, Fageol appeared in *Slo-mo-shun V* and made a much better run—102.564 mph, a new Gold Cup record. He kept going and later turned a lap of about 105 mph, but that wasn't factored into his qualifying attempt.

Although there were only three entries from the Motor City, the Detroit fleet seemed poised to make a strong challenge. "We'll be running as a team this year," Cantrell promised in his deep Kentucky drawl, "and that will make us tough to beat. One after another we will try to burn out the *Slo-mos*. The *Slo-mos* have been pretty lucky, they've run a long time without mechanical trouble in a race. The time is running out. We mean business this year. We really want that cup back."

Saturday, race day, arrived with brilliant clear skies and a faint haze hanging over the placid waters of Lake Washington. The hot summer weather continued—the temperature would reach 88 degrees late in the afternoon. A crowd estimated at 300,000, according to some



Bob Carver Photos

Lou Fageol in *Slo-mo V* and Stanley Dollar in *Slo-mo IV* circle the racecourse before starting the first heat of the 1952 Gold Cup.



the largest gathering of people to one place in the history of the Pacific Northwest, watched from vantage points around the racecourse.

Shortly before one o'clock, a cannon blast echoed across the lake to announce the first heat. Like the year before, the *Slo-mo* team put their finishing touches to their boats as they sat on the dock at Leschi north of the Floating Bridge. The *Miss Pepsi* team did the same nearby in the Lake Washington Yacht Basin, as did the crews of the other three entries operating at Mt. Baker Park. Soon, the loud murmur of the huge crowd was interrupted by the roar of Allison engines starting and the sight of the big boats plowing their way onto the racecourse.

Fageol and *Slo-mo V* grabbed the lead from the start and surged further ahead coming out of the first turn. Chuck Thompson and *Miss Pepsi* were close behind. The powerful *Miss Pepsi*—skipping across the water—turned sharp and clean, tight to the buoys, while *Slo-mo V* leaped and hopped through the turns. But, the latter had the advantage of greater speed in the straightaway and danced to a 100-yard lead.

Joe Taggart stayed right behind *Miss Pepsi* through the first lap aboard *Miss Great Lakes II*, but as his boat rounded the south turn at the beginning of its second time around, it went dead with a split gearbox. That gave the third position to Stanley Dollar in *Slo-mo IV*, following about a half mile behind the leaders. In fourth place was

Morlan Visel in *Hurricane IV*—the hefty craft was now painted bright red with white trim and carried a large white tail. Cantrell, trying not to put too much strain on a new engine, followed in last place aboard *Such Crust IV*.

During the fourth lap, Thompson made a move on Fageol going up the backstretch. He pulled even with *Slo-mo V*. But Fageol tromped on his throttle going into the north turn and shot ahead by a few hundred yards then moved to his left to take the inside lane and close the door on *Miss Pepsi*.

Meanwhile, behind the leaders, Dollar was completing his fourth lap in *Slo-mo IV* when the boat's engine let off a short scream—its propeller gone. Dollar shut the engine off and steered for the inside of the course as a mournful groan burst forth from the shoreline.

Then trouble struck the other Seattle boat. As *Slo-mo V* rounded the first turn on its sixth lap and was about to pass the lagging *Such Crust IV* and *Hurricane IV* from behind, its engine lost power and the boat slowed to a crawl. Another cry of anguish erupted from the huge crowd. Thompson roared past in *Miss Pepsi* and completed the lap with a speed of about 105 mph as *Slo-mo V* struggled around the course—water spurting from the exhaust stacks on the engine's right side. As the boat passed the official barge, it finally slowed to a stop. *Miss Pepsi* finished the heat with an average speed of over 101 mph.

Crossing the starting line during the first heat of the 1952 Gold Cup are, from nearest the camera, Lou Fageol in *Slo-mo-shun V*, Chuck Thompson in *Miss Pepsi*, and Joe Taggart in *Miss Great Lakes II*.

Fageol and *Slo-mo V* grabbed the lead from the start and surged further ahead coming out of the first turn. Chuck Thompson and *Miss Pepsi* were close behind.



The view from above Slo-mo-shun V.

The *Slo-mo* crew towed both of their boats back to the dock at Leschi and, as the *Miss Pepsi* group celebrated nearby, they hoisted them onto their wooden cradles, where they could assess the damage. *Slo-mo V*'s new Allison G6 engine had been running so hot it burned a cylinder and cracked the engine block. Sayres and the others discussed their options and decided that *Slo-mo V* was through for the day; it would be impossible to get the boat running again. Instead, they'd merge efforts. They would take the propeller off of *Slo-mo V* and give it to *Slo-mo IV*.

"We figured she was the better competition boat in that particular situation," crew chief Mike Welsch explained. "She was more reliable and that was the thing that we were most concerned about. The *Four's* engine setup was much better for the situation."

The Detroit teams were giddy about their chances of

taking the Gold Cup back to the Motor City. Team owners Walter and Roy Dossin talked with happiness of their upcoming victory, according to the report in the *Seattle Times*.

By three o'clock it was time for the second heat. Seattle fans, gloomy about the prospects for their hometown boats, finally saw something that deserved a cheer—*Slo-mo IV* arriving from the other side of the bridge. But they also saw only three boats. *Slo-mo V* was gone, as was the *Miss Great Lakes II*—also with-

drawn from the race. And, as the boats roared to the start, the *Hurricane IV* still sat drifting off the Mt. Baker pit area, unable to get its engine started.

Stanley Dollar and *Slo-mo IV* were about 75 yards behind *Miss Pepsi* at the start of the second heat with *Such Crust IV* a length or two behind him. As Thompson took *Miss Pepsi* around the first turn and up the backstretch with *Slo-mo IV* nipping at its heels with the borrowed propeller, *Such Crust IV* suddenly turned loose a heavy explosion while it rounded the south turn behind them.

"She was just enveloped in flames," Cantrell explained later, "and I rolled over the side out of the cockpit. She was working fine. I was just sitting back there waiting for the leaders to knock themselves out of it." As rescue boats converged on the burning hydro, the other two continued up the backstretch at high speed. Then, as they circled the far turn, *Miss Pepsi* suddenly fell silent and drifted to a stop—its gearbox overheated.

That left *Slo-mo IV* as the only boat still running. Later that afternoon in the third heat, *Slo-mo IV* saw a brief challenge by *Hurricane IV*, but that ended when its drive shaft snapped, which left Dollar circling the course alone for the second time that day. That meant the Gold Cup would stay in Seattle, this time thanks to the Grand Old Lady.

In preparation for the 1953 campaign, Fageol again encouraged Stan Sayres to install one of his Rolls-Royce Merlin engines in *Slo-mo-shun V*. To those watching from outside, the project seemed to be going



Lou Fageol waves to the photographer from the cockpit of *Slo-mo-shun V*.

better this time, although *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* columnist Royal Brougham reported that in nosing around he had the vague impression that the *Slo-mo V* wasn't behaving as well as it should. "Something about gearboxes," he wrote.

But the *Slo-mo IV* was ready, able, and willing, Brougham added. "The V is potentially faster but you get the impression from Sayres that her less temperamental sister is the ace. She is still the darling of the *Slo-mo* team. She is the old gal they are depending upon when the blue chips are on the line. And why not? It was the old reliable *IV* which came zooming out of the pits to save the day a year ago, her proud roostertail shooting cascades of frothy water into the skies, just when all hope seemed lost."

Brougham's instincts were correct. While the team was delighted with the performance of the Rolls Merlin engine in the *Slo-mo V* and its "pep to burn," the gearbox was again causing the team worries, as it had the year before. Martin Headman, a member of the *Slo-mo* crew and an engineer at Western Gear, did an evaluation and found several issues. "It is difficult to explain the seriousness of the defects found by this inspection as they may not seem too severe at the first glance," he wrote in a report to Sayres. "I can say without qualification however than in my opinion this unit would not have lasted for the Gold Cup race even

without the testing time that it has experienced to this date."

This time Western Gear came to the rescue. They rebuilt the gearbox, and the tests were promising. About two weeks before the race, the team planned to run *Slo-mo V* through a grueling five-hour test—then they would decide: Go with the Merlin or switch to an Allison G6.

The test didn't go as planned, however. The engine was damaged and had to be rebuilt while another was being installed in the boat. Meanwhile, though the gearbox had been tested for only four hours, it was torn down to see if there had been any damage. There, they found

good news. It was perfect. Some slight discoloration on the edges of the gear teeth, but nothing of concern. So, the crew voted unanimously—go with the Rolls Merlin.

"At first we were just going to test them to see what we had," Welsch said. "But once we tried the Rolls, there was no life for the Allison as far as we were concerned." There would be just enough time to test the boat once more before the course opened for qualifying the following week. So, the *Slo-mo* team seemed set for another Gold Cup.

On Sunday, August 2, the day before the course would open for qualifying, Fageol arrived at Hunts Point in the morning, but didn't plan to take *Slo-mo V* out for a run until that afternoon. The crew was busy fixing a problem that had occurred the day before when engine builder Howard Gidovlenko took the boat out for a test run. He had punched the accelerator as it was cruising at 120 mph and the engine not only came apart, but the propeller was lost. So, the crew spent most of Saturday night and Sunday morning removing the shattered Rolls Merlin and replacing it with another.

Once that work was completed, Fageol climbed into the cockpit at about midday, fired up the new engine, and



A plume of smoke rises from the burning *Such Crust IV* as *Slo-mo-shun IV* passes.



Joe Taggart (left) joined the *Slo-mo* team immediately before the 1953 Gold Cup race. With him are Stan Sayres (middle) and Lou Fageol.

roared out onto Lake Washington to make sure things were ready to qualify. As he steered *Slo-mo V* back toward Hunts Point at about 1:30 p.m., he reduced his speed to where the boat was more plowing through the water than skipping across it. The rumbling craft rounded the corner past the Sayres's home and into Cozy Cove, it thundered past the team's boathouse, then Fageol turned it to his left toward the Yarrow Point side of the cove. That's where he gave the throttle a quick punch to see how fast *Slo-mo V* would accelerate.

"I'd just reached 160 mph when I felt the sheer drop in speed," Fageol said, "the engine raced, and debris started flying all around me." A propeller blade had broken off as it was revolving at about 185 times a second. With the spinning thing suddenly out of balance, it put such a huge force on the drive-shaft that, in the time it takes to snap one's finger, the 10-foot-long, one-and-a-half-inch thick piece of K-Monel steel was

twisted into the shape of a corkscrew and had whipped around enough to tear a hole four feet long and a foot wide into the bottom of the hull.

The blast of the explosion echoed across Cozy Cove as *Slo-mo V* settled to a stop about 100 feet offshore from William Worden's home on Yarrow Point.

A Coast Guard patrol boat, which had been helping to control boat traffic during the test run, raced to the stricken hydroplane, as did a pleasure boat named *Shutter Bug* with Ken Ollar at the helm. Across Cozy Cove at Sayres's boathouse, *Slo-mo* team members dashed to their tender boat, *Seaflo II*, and set off toward the hydro as its stern sank deeper into the water.

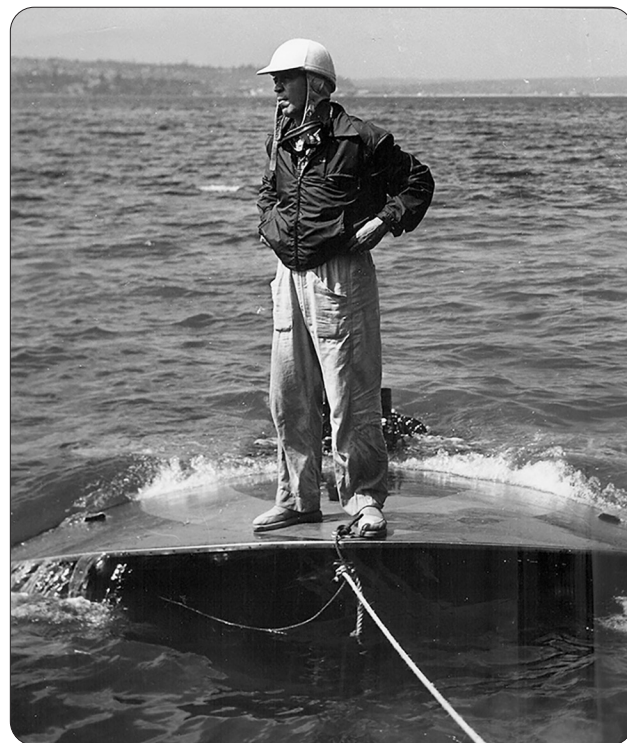
The lake was about 25 feet deep where *Slo-mo V* was sinking, so those coming to its rescue decided they needed to tow it to shallower water, where a recovery would be easier. They tied a line to the cleat on the hydroplane's bow and coaxed it

toward the dock in front of Worden's home. There, *Slo-mo V* finally settled to the bottom in about six feet of water—its nose pointed to the sky.

The team summoned the Navy crash boat *Mary Ann* from Sand Point Naval Air Station across Lake Washington to lift *Slo-mo V* from the water with its big crane. Once the hydro was on the ship's deck, the crew could see the damage for the first time. There was a huge gash in its bottom that started behind the driver's seat. The *Mary Ann* ferried *Slo-mo V* back across the lake to Anchor Jensen's shop, where the shipwrights could give it a closer examination. At least three frames were broken, great hunks of planking were torn, and the stuffing box, battery boxes, and strut were missing.

The Gold Cup race was less than four days away and the qualifying period would end on Friday afternoon, which meant fixing *Slo-mo V* in time would take a miracle, but Sayres decided they may as well try. So, the crew, already exhausted from the effort to get the boat ready for qualifying, went to work with the help of the boatbuilders at Jensen's.

By midweek those thrashing over the boat promised a reporter that they were making good progress and hoped to make it by the end of the qualifying period on Friday evening. In case they didn't, however, Sayres made a plea to Referee Mel Crook asking if they could qualify after Friday,



Lou Fageol on the bow of the sinking *Slo-mo V* after it threw a prop on Cozy Cove at the end of a test run in 1953.

as *Gale II* had been allowed after almost sinking during a test run two years before. Permission was therefore granted, as long as the attempt wouldn't delay the scheduled start of the race. The *Miss U.S.* team, plagued all week with hull and prop-shaft issues, also would get another chance.

When the morning of race day arrived, *Miss U.S.* got into the Gold Cup field with a run of over 88 mph, but *Slo-mo V* still wasn't ready. Sayres asked if the boat could compete without qualifying, so Crook took that option to the other owners—who voted it down. “If we had had eight more hours, we would have been ready to go at full speed,” Welsch said. “If we had been allowed to qualify Sunday morning, it would have been a patched-up job.”

Meanwhile, *Slo-mo V*'s teammate was experiencing its own controversy. Stanley Dollar had decided not to drive the Grand Old Lady in 1953—his family compelled to get out of competitive boat racing. Stan Sayres had selected a talented limited-class driver named Paul Sawyer to instead drive the boat. Sawyer had great credentials but had his own way of doing things, which was rarely the way his crew preferred.

His primary task was to break-in the boat's new Allison G6 engine, which had been used to set another speed record the previous summer, but which had been rebuilt by Howard Gidovlenko during the winter. According to reports in mid-June, *Slo-mo IV* was perking with new vigor, with acceleration fast enough to snap the driver backward against the cockpit cushion.

Although he was the holder of several speed records, Sawyer seemed uncomfortable pushing *Slo-mo IV*. One day before the start of Gold Cup qualifying, he took the boat out for a high-speed trial run as crew chief Mike Welsch sat in the passenger seat. Sawyer let off the throttle when the boat reached 145 mph, and when Welsch motioned to him to go faster, he responded by shaking his head. Welsch then reached over with his left foot and pushed on the throttle himself. That started an argument that continued long after the boat returned to the boathouse.

“He won't open up the damned boat,” Welsch complained to Sayres, so Sayres said he'd go for a ride with him. Same thing. The boat got to about 145 mph, and that's where he stayed. And, when Sayres motioned for him to go faster, he refused—shaking his head. “Paul, you can't win a heat if you

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with the
Slo-mo team,
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“Hey, Joe,”
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don't get up to about 160 on the straightaway,” he told Sawyer when they got back to the boathouse. “Hell, it will do over 200!”

When the exasperated Sayres told Fageol what happened, the veteran driver's solution was simple: “Fire him,” he suggested. “I know a lot of good drivers that would jump at the chance. In fact, Joe Taggart back in Ohio is one of the best and he's available.”

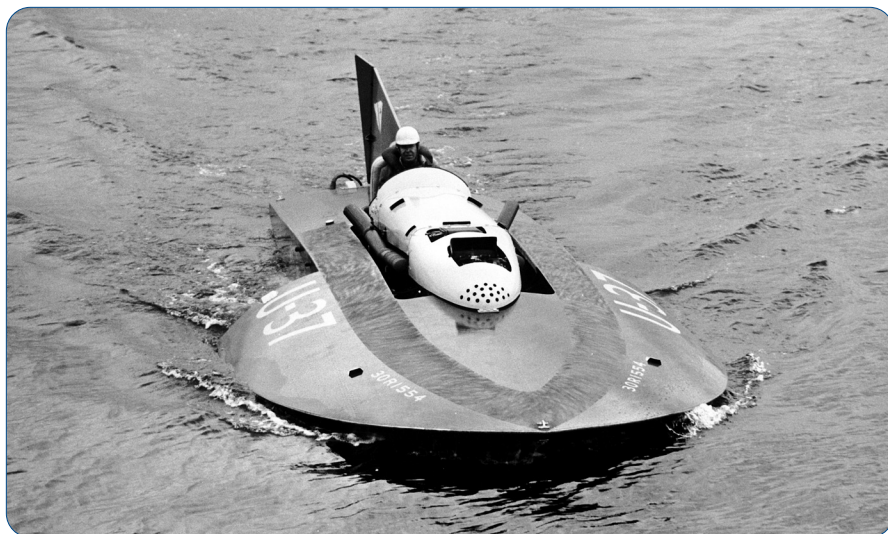
So, on the Tuesday morning before the Gold Cup, Sayres pulled the plug on Sawyer's career with the *Slo-mo* team, and Fageol made a phone call to his friend in Canton, Ohio. “Hey, Joe,” he said, “how would you like to drive the world's fastest boat?”

In making the announcement to reporters, Sayres said he released Sawyer because he “couldn't get along with the maintenance crews which have been with me since I started with the *Slo-mos* some years ago. Friction had been developing for two and a half months. This is no reflection on his driving or other activities.”

Sawyer said he was “terribly, terribly shocked” when told of his dismissal from the team. Meanwhile, Taggart was on his way from Ohio to fill the open seat in the *Slo-mo IV*'s cockpit and on Thursday he qualified his new ride in stunning fashion. With mechanic Martin Headman along for the ride, he circled the course three times aboard the Grand Old Lady at an average speed of 107.5 mph—shattering the record set by *Miss Pepsi* the year before. Then on race day, with his boat operating alone from the dock at Leschi, he drove the Grand Old Lady to a convincing Gold Cup victory.

But, Jack Schafer was not happy. “Never again,” he told a reporter when the race was over. “Win, lose or draw, I'm not coming back next year.” He then told reporters he and other Detroit owners would propose a rule change that would limit the number of consecutive Gold Cup races one city could stage. “We feel that two years in one city is plenty,” he explained. “We had the Gold Cup in Detroit too long, and now we feel that Seattle has had it long enough.”

But the issue was deeper than that. The Detroit racing establishment seethed not only because they kept making the long journey to Seattle only to lose, but because Sayres never returned the favor. He didn't enter his boats in the Silver Cup or in any other race east of the Cascade Mountains.



Slo-mo-shun V comes to a rest after a test run on Lake Washington.

Although he was invited to participate in the Silver Cup race on Labor Day weekend of 1951, Sayres decided not to go. As a result, as soon as Jack Schafer arrived in Seattle for the Gold Cup the year before, he arranged a meeting with Sayres, Greater Seattle, and people from the Seattle Yacht Club to insist that one or both *Slo-mo* boats go to Detroit later that year, and he implied that if they didn't, the Detroit boats might not show up in Seattle in 1953. The group promised they would try to make it happen, but exhaustion and an attack of high blood pressure had put Sayres in the hospital after the 1952 race, thus putting those plans on the shelf.

In response, the Detroit owners considered making good on their promise to boycott the 1953 Seattle race—but they didn't. Five Detroit boats made the long trip back and forth, but Jack Schafer wasn't happy about it. When he grumbled to the Seattle reporters after losing again and said that he might never return to Seattle, it was more than his hurt feelings talking. And, when he suggested changing the rules about how many consecutive Gold Cups a city could host, it wasn't idle chatter. It was a serious threat.

The next day, Schafer met with the other owners at the Seattle Yacht Club, where his threat became an ultimatum. Either one or both Seattle boats would

race in the east, or there would be no Detroit boats in Seattle in 1954. Simple as that.

A letter from Carl Johnson, executive secretary of the APBA, tried a gentler approach. After congratulating Sayres for his victory in the Gold Cup and calling his boat "the finest piece of boat racing machinery ever put together by the hands of men," he reminded Sayres he would be more than welcomed in Detroit. "All of us here along the Detroit River are looking forward to seeing the Seattle Yacht Club colors flying in the Silver Cup regatta over the Labor Day week-end," he wrote.

The people at Greater Seattle sprang into action and tried to raise the money Sayres would need to make the trip. Roscoe "Torchy" Torrance, the new president of Greater Seattle, announced the fundraising effort only six days after Schafer delivered his ultimatum. On the top of the front page of the Sunday *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* a headline proclaimed: "WAKE UP SEATTLE—GOLD CUP RACE AT STAKE."

"We have a real crisis," Torrance said, "because some of the Detroit drivers, headed by Jack Schafer, have threatened to not come back to Seattle next year. If we fail to send the *Slo-mos* east this year—thus giving these reluctant Detroit owners their only real argument

for not coming to Seattle—and if we fail in our civic obligations to Stan Sayres to keep his boats going—the Gold Cup race, as far as Seattle is concerned, may well be a thing of the past."

As contributions arrived, Sayres decided to send *Slo-mo V* on the trip while the Grand Old Lady would stay home. "Lou Fageol wanted to drive back east in the competition and Lou would sooner drive *Five*," Mike Welsch explained. But, Royal Brougham speculated on another reason. "First, builders and mechanics have full confidence in the *V*. They think she can take care of anything the East has. Second, and this is just a guess, the Old Lady is Sayres's ace. She is his Gold Cup champ. If anything happens to the Seattle hydroplane back there, Sayres has the *IV* in the barn, ready for the 1954 Gold Cup defense. It is what you would call an ace in the hole."

Strapped to a Boat Transit Company trailer, *Slo-mo V* left Anchor Jensen's boatyard early on the rainy morning of Wednesday, August 26. Then, escorted by a State Patrol car, they went east over Stevens Pass and across the Columbia Basin to Spokane. The boat arrived in Detroit five days later and, like its older sister three years before, was parked at the Chrysler Boat Well. There, crew members Joe Schobert, Martin Headman, Elmer Linenschmidt, and Welsch were waiting for it.

During the few days they had leading to the Labor Day race, the crew gave the boat what they described as a marvelous invention: power steering—something only used so far in cars and trucks. Fageol took the boat on test runs on Sunday and on Monday morning before the race and reported that it was superb. "I could drive five more years with this help," he proclaimed.

The racecourse conditions were typical of the Detroit River. A stiff breeze from the northwest caused the water to be so rough that the boats sometimes leaped 10 feet into the air. Fageol was almost tossed out of the cockpit in his run

to the starting line in the first heat, but he held on, took the lead, and won the heat without a great deal of effort. Bill Cantrell finished second in *Such Crust V* and Lee Schoenith was third in *Gale II*.

Joe Taggart took a turn at the controls for the second heat and had a more challenging time. Following only a few yards behind Danny Foster, who was taking a turn in *Gale II*, Taggart stepped harder on the throttle, only to find the engine balking at the idea of going faster. The boat's speed dropped to almost nothing before he could get it running again, and by then the others were gone. Also, he had no acceleration and had to settle for third place.

Then things got worse. At the start of the third heat, with Fageol back in the cockpit, *Slo-mo V* was among a cluster of four boats in what the reporter from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* called "the most sensational start we've ever seen. You could have put a plank over the four of them as they got away." Unfortunately for Fageol, his boat's engine sputtered at the exact wrong time. The roostertails and spray from the others came raining down upon him. *Slo-mo V* coughed and fell silent, and that was the end of the day's action. The boat would not appear for the final heat.

The experience left the crew wondering three things: Why wouldn't the engine restart after its drenching? What caused the lack of acceleration? What caused the boat to careen so wildly across the water that they called it "Leaping Lena"?

The failure to restart, they discovered, happened because the manifold was filled with enough water to fill a goldfish bowl. They figured the leaping issue was related to changes they made to the hull the previous spring, but didn't have time to work out. As for the acceleration problem, that was a mystery. The Rolls Merlin engine had behaved beautifully during its test runs on Lake Washington.

The *Slo-mo* team had taken two engines on the trip east: the Rolls Merlin



Tony Bugeja Collection



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

TOP: The competitors gathered together near the banks of the Potomac River in Washington, DC, before the 1953 President's Cup. The *Slo-mo-shun V* is well hidden near the upper right corner. **ABOVE:** Lou Fageol accepts the President's Cup Trophy from President Dwight Eisenhower at the White House.



That's Joe Taggart in the cockpit of *Slo-mo-shun V*. Perched on the deck of the hydroplane are members of the *Slo-mo* team, from the left, Don Ibsen, Marsh McCann, Mike Welsch, Elmer Linenschmidt, Martin Headman, Wes Kiesling, George McKernan, Joe Schobert, and Stan Sayres.

used for the Silver Cup and an Allison G6 that had never been used in competition. Before leaving for the President's Cup in Washington, D.C., the crew decided they should switch to the Allison. So, as the other teams hit the road for the nation's capital, the *Slo-mo* team remained behind at the Chrysler Boat Well a couple of days to make that switch and to test their boat on the Detroit River.

The boat arrived in the nation's capital three days before the President's Cup and looked great in winning the first heat. Fageol had started behind Danny Foster in *Miss Great Lakes II*, was in second place coming out of the first turn, and despite hitting a swell on the Potomac River that caused *Slo-mo V* to walk along on its tail for a good 50 feet, he finally caught Foster during the fourth lap—before *Miss Great Lakes* faltered with a fuel-pump problem. "She responded whenever I called on her," Fageol said of his boat.

In the second heat, Fageol started behind Doc Terry in *Miss Wayne* and Cantrell in *Such Crust V* but was ahead of them by the time they reached the first

turn. From there he built a lead of 300 yards and cruised to a second victory. With a sizable lead in points, his only task for the final was to finish.

Then came controversy. Heading into the first turn of the final heat, Fageol was about two boat lengths behind and to the inside of Chuck Thompson in *Such Crust III*. Fageol then punched the throttle of *Slo-mo V* and closed that distance. Just then, Thompson swerved to his left and into the path of the oncoming *Slo-mo V*, which forced Fageol to let off his throttle and swerve to avoid the gigantic hydro. That caused *Slo-mo V*'s sponson to dig into the water, which threw Fageol from his seat and into the boat's windshield and then back to his seat. In the process, he suffered a three-inch-deep gash in his leg.

Fageol finished the heat in second place and claimed the victory, which two days later let him visit the White House, where President Dwight Eisenhower gave him the President's Cup trophy. But the incident with Thompson had rattled him. He later filed a formal charge with the Inboard Racing Commission rec-

ommending that they give Thompson a penalty.

The team's final stop on their eastern tour was the Imperial Gold Cup, held on the Ohio River in New Martinsville, West Virginia. Taggart drove *Slo-mo V* in that event because Fageol was nursing his leg wound and because the race was on Taggart's home turf—after all, he had convinced Sayres to race there. "Stan wasn't very enthusiastic about going there after the pounding the boat took in the D.C. race," Taggart's son Tom recalled, "but he did it as a favor to Joe."

Taggart didn't like driving the boat—he thought it was dangerous because the front end tended to lift when it exceeded 160 mph. But, lucky for him, his day didn't last long. The boat went dead with a blown oil cooler only two miles after crossing the starting line in the first heat. And, that was it. *Slo-mo V* did not return. The crew loaded the boat on the truck, packed up their gear, and two and a half weeks later, delivered it home to Seattle.

Fageol, meanwhile, had been under increasing pressure from his family and business associates to retire from driving hydroplanes and instead focus his attention on his duties as president of Fageol Motors. This time, he announced, he would listen to them. ♦

We'll conclude our series about Slo-mo-shun V in next month's issue, when we cover the boat's victory in the 1954 Gold Cup, its breathtaking accident before the 1955 race, and its career as an also-ran until finally being rescued from a junkyard and restored to be a member of the hydro fleet at the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum in Kent, Washington.

AROUND THE CIRCUIT

Race Team and Race Site News by Chris Tracy



More and more news is unfolding about the 2025 season. Darrell Strong, owner of the U-8 *Beacon Electric* and the U-9 *Beacon Plumbing*, provided much of the information when he was interviewed on a recent Chasin' Tails podcast.

Here's a reminder about how it all works with Unlimited racing. Last year, the series was basically operated by two groups: H1 Unlimited, a non-profit organization, made the rules and put on each race. The other group was Hydrotown, LLC, a for-profit company headquartered (headquarters pictured below) in Richland, Wash., was responsible for marketing the sport. It had four people on its board of directors: Mike Denslow, Charlie Grooms, Tim Story, and Darrell Strong. Some of those people were also on the board of H1 Unlimited.



Chris Tracy

Hydrotown Racing

Hydrotown, LLC, was dissolved at the end of 2024 and replaced by Hydrotown Racing, Inc., and is now headquartered at Strong's home in Pasco, Wash. Gone from the new company's board are Denslow, Grooms, and Story. The new company has only one governor: Darrell Strong. I mentioned last month that the *UNJ* had heard that Bruce Ratchford, founder of Apollo Mechanical, likely would join Hydrotown Racing, Inc. In the Chasin' Tails podcast, Strong confirmed that Ratchford is now a Hydrotown Racing, Inc. partner.

More details were provided about the Hydrotown Racing's 2025 initiatives in both the Chasin' Tails podcast and on Hydro News on Facebook. Hydro News reports that \$600,000 will be invested into streaming the races, about five hours or so each day of each race weekend. Two-Plank Productions from Colorado has been hired to produce the race. The *UNJ* has heard that one person formerly associated with Unlimited streaming, will rejoin the streaming team. As mentioned last month, a streaming/production trailer is being outfitted. Two-Plank has no experience producing boat races, but does have experience producing events where reliable Internet is an issue.

Two-Plank is bringing in more drones to the production and trained fliers that should provide even more dramatic visuals for viewers, in addition to the drones previously used. Strong hinted that Unlimited racing may be branded as an Extreme Sport.

The substantial investment in the Unlimited streaming product brought about an interesting discussion at the last *UNJ* publication committee meeting. All found it revealing that the streaming product appeared to be the highest priority for Hydrotown Racing, as opposed to such things as subsidizing race-site development, subsidizing additional teams to attend more events, or hiring a full-time H1 manager, etc. Our *UNJ* publication committee includes people with extensive professional experience in media—including streaming sports—public relations, information management, accounting, etc.

The feeling was that this investment is a signal of what may be coming: more of an emphasis on presenting the races via visual media. It was also discussed that streaming via satellite during the day is quite expensive, no matter if Westwind is used or less expensive Starlink. Some wondered if down the road that the races will be edited and streamed in the evening, instead of live, as the costs would be substantially less. Or, will the streaming product be a pay-for-view presentation? Time will tell. One TV media professional told the *UNJ*, "A five-hour live streaming production each day is an ambitious project."

H1 Unlimited

Unlike in the past, there were no H1 meetings associated with the 2024 season banquet and no information about rules or other changes have been communicated. But Darrell Strong did address part of this in the Chasin' Tails podcast. He mentioned that the chief referee has been meeting with crew chiefs during the off-season, so all are onboard with understanding the rules and how they are enforced. Strong also mentioned that the same start procedure used in 2024 will be used in the 2025 season.

Race Team and Race Site News.

The silly season is the off-season when rumors and gossip are circulated, so it is possible that not all of the following is completely correct, but likely close!

U-2 (former Leland boat):

Eric Christensen claims to have purchased the Madison display boat with the intention to race it this season. As I write this, the boat is still in Madison, Indiana and Christensen lives

in Washington state, but we hear Christensen is en route to pick the boat up, after stopping off at the Bartush shop in Detroit to drop off another old hull he owns. The boat in Madison does not come with an engine, running gear, etc. This hull will need a lot of work. Many feel it is only a pipe dream that it will hit the water this season.

U-6 Miss Madison:

See the news story on page 21. The boat known as T-3 is a former *Budweiser* that last raced in 2012 as *Degree Men*. It is owned by Detroit's Dave Bartush. The *UNJ* heard that the Miss Madison group was kicking tires on that boat in March, but that a decision to purchase it was not made. The *UNJ* has been told that is it the most race-ready of all the boats that Bartush owns, and he owns a fair number of Unlimitees. In a surprise move, as we were putting this month's *NewsJournal* together, the Miss Madison board announced that they had hammered out an agreement to lease the T-3 for the Guntersville and Madison races. It's a lease/option deal that includes two engines and two gearboxes.

A little history: After its one season as *Degree Men*, the T-3 sat in the Budweiser shop in Tukwila, Wash. The boat and trailer were eventually sold to Dave Bartush. The new Madison team announced they will race the former T-3 in Guntersville and Madison.

In the true fashion of the Silly Season, the Madison boat entry has caused some off-season commotion, this time at the South's fastest water in Guntersville, Alabama. *UNJ* sources say H1 had told Guntersville that five boats would attend their race. With that news, the Guntersville site decided to invite two vintage boats with the money that would have gone to a sixth boat. Hence, there was an unfortunate Facebook post from the Guntersville site basically saying the new Madison/T-3 boat would not be able to race there this year. The next day, H1's evidently new public relations person, Janick Tétreault-Moïse, posted a press release saying all was good, and the Madison boat would be welcome to race at Guntersville. (BTW, Tétreault-Moïse is the Director of Communication for the Hydroplane Racing League in Canada and owns Zel, a marketing and public relations firm with about 12 employees that is based in Valleyfield, Quebec. She has been a Valleyfield hydroplane volunteer since she was 16 and is given a lot of credit for building the successful Valleyfield Regatta and Festival.) HRL driver Brandon Kennedy will be the Madison driver, but key crew appointments have not been publicized.

U-11 Mercurys Coffee:

A source fairly recently contacted the *UNJ* and said he had asked executives at Mercurys Coffee if they are sponsoring again in 2025, and he was told by a Mercurys official that a decision has not been made. Mercurys made a big splash in 2024 and it's hydro brand; let's hope they are back. Recently, I

was at a Mercurys store, that has seating (not a drive-through), and they were showing hydro races on their reader board next to the menu. Cool.

U-12 Graham Trucking:

Gossip said that they were planning on running the whole circuit, but the latest rumor says that probably will not happen as there is a lot of hull work that needs to be done on the boat, and they don't have the largest crew.

U-27 Apollo Mechanical and U-91 Goodman Real Estate:

While it is no secret that Bruce Ratchford, founder of Apollo Mechanical, has purchased the former Madison team including last year's U-91 and hull #0706—plus he has purchased the U-27 from Charley Wiggins, there has been no official press release about anything. Both boats are completely absent from the H1 website (which needs updating, as I write this). That said, work is being done on the U-91, as crew members have told the *UNJ* that they are working on the boat at the Tukwila, Wash. shop and they are planning to test at spring training in Tri-Cities in May.

U-37 Legacy Racing:

Rumor says they don't have a shop yet and maintenance work has not commenced. Earlier, Brent Hall was named driver. He recently said he has left the team. The *UNJ* hears that the team is still meeting with potential sponsors and hopes to race at the Pacific Northwest races, but it appears that may be a long shot.

U-40 Bucket List:

Rumor was the boat would probably only race at the Pacific Northwest races, but the team announced in late March that it would not race at all in 2025. In a cryptic announcement, the team explained that it is unable to disclose the reason for the decision because "H1 has a rule stipulating that 'making any statement tending to distract from the integrity or reputation of H1' may be subject to disciplinary action by H1." Stocklin has been a member of the H1 Competition Committee, but we are not certain if he still serves in that capacity.

Summer is almost here!

Tickets are on sale for the Guntersville, Madison and Seattle races!

River City Printing is the title sponsor of the Madison Regatta.

Apollo Mechanical will be the title sponsor the Tri-City race in year two of a three-year contract. STCU Credit Union will sponsor the air show.

Apollo Mechanical had a one-year deal to sponsor the race in Seattle in 2024, but appears they have renewed and will be the title sponsor for 2025, as well. Thank you, Apollo Mechanical! Boeing is back to sponsor the air show, including the Blue Angels performance. ❖

Miss Madison will race this summer.

Miss Madison, Inc., an organization that has operated Unlimited hydroplanes for the City of Madison, Indiana, since 1961, has acquired a former *Miss Budweiser* hydroplane and plans to enter the boat in the first two events of the 2025 season. Throughout its history in the sport, Miss Madison Racing has won a total of 42 races, the second-most by any owner in the sport's history, six Gold Cups, and 12 national titles, including last year's title.

Late last year, the team sold the defending national champion boat to Bruce Ratchford, the founder and CEO of Apollo Mechanical, a construction services company based in the Tri-Cities, Washington. The boat (Hull #1801) entered competition as *Miss HomeStreet* and raced last season as U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate*. Included in the sale was Hull #0706, which won 25 races and eight national titles for Miss Madison Racing under names such as *Oh Boy!*



Steve Montgomery

This year's Miss Madison entry last appeared in 2012 as *Degree Men*

Oberto and *Miss HomeStreet*.

To replace those boats, Miss Madison, Inc., negotiated a deal with Detroit Unlimited owner Dave Bartush for a craft commonly known as T-3 that last saw action as *Degree Men* in 2012. The boat was originally built in 1989 as *Miss Budweiser* and collected 16 race victories (including two Gold Cups) and three national titles before that team completely rebuilt the hull after the 1994 season. Considered a new hull in 1995, it then went on to win another 18 races (including three Gold Cups) and another three national championships. If the boat's tally was combined, it would have 34 race victories to its credit and would be the most successful hydro in the sport's history.

Miss Madison chairman Kyle Bipes, Madison Mayor Bob Courtney, and Deputy Mayor Tony Steinhart III, and others, "worked tirelessly to make this agreement a reality," according to a press release issued by the group. "Their efforts have ensured that Miss Madison Racing continues to thrive, providing thrilling competition and community pride for the citizens of Madison, Indiana," according to the release.

"This is an incredibly exciting op-

portunity for Miss Madison Racing and our fans," said Bipes. "Getting back to our roots and seeing the community rally behind this team is truly special. We can't wait to hit the water and put on a great show for our supporters. Be on the lookout for more updates as we move forward."

Miss Madison Racing has long been a source of pride for the City of Madison since Samuel DuPont donated his *Nitrogen* hydroplane to the community in 1961. As the only community-owned team in H1 Unlimited racing, it represents the passion and dedication that the historic river town of Madison has for the sport. Over the years, the team has celebrated numerous victories, including an iconic Gold Cup win in 1971 that was portrayed in the movie *Madison*.

"With this agreement, it allows Miss Madison to get back on the water to give loyal fans a chance to see this historic team at least two more times, it also opens an opportunity for the community to lend the support necessary for the team to continue into the future in 2026 and beyond," Bipes said. "The fans, the city, and everyone who has supported this team over the years deserve to see *Miss Madison* at least one more time." ❖

EDITOR/WEBMASTER: Andy Muntz
ASSOCIATE EDITORS: Craig Fjarlie, Chris Tracy
TREASURER: Dick Sanders

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PLEASE JOIN US AT THE NEXT MEETING OF UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS

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