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A Chronicle of Speed

Remembering a legend: Dave Heerensperger.

by Stephen Shepperd

The world of hydroplane racing has lost another of its legendary owners with the passing of David Heerensperger at the age of 82.

Heerensperger died on December 2 of complications from a medical procedure. Members of his family were at his bedside.

Born on June 5, 1936, in Longview, Washington, Heerensperger made his initial fortune as a Spokane and Seattle electrical/plumbing supply company owner. His Eagle Electric and Plumbing, Little Buzzard, and Pay'n Pak stores were highly successful in the Pacific Northwest region.

As his fortune grew, so did his involvement and success with unlimited hydroplane racing. Over the 19 years he was in the sport, Heerensperger invested in seven different unlimited hydroplanes, winning 25 races, two APBA Gold Cups, and three straight national high point championships.

The list of Heerensperger hulls



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Heerensperger poses next to his "Winged Wonder" *Pay'n Pak* in 1973.

includes such iconic boats as the 1968 "Screamin' Eagle" *Miss Eagle Electric*, the 1973 "Winged Wonder" *Pay'n Pak*, and the ground breaking 1980 turbine-powered *Pay'n Pak*, which was the first non-piston powered unlimited to win a race.

Because of his innovative spirit and commitment to the sport, Heerensperger was inducted into the Unlimited Hydroplane Hall of Fame in 1980.

In his early years, he was an avid fast-pitch softball player and

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sponsored highly successful teams in the Spokane area on which he also played. He later sponsored fast-pitch and semi-pro baseball teams in the Seattle area, as well. His greatest success came with the Seattle fast pitch team that won three national championships and two international titles.

In his later years, Heerensperger became involved in the world of thoroughbred racing and became a successful owner and breeder. His horses won 25 stakes races from 1995 to 2014 and his horse Millennium Wind placed 11th in the 2001 Kentucky Derby with Laffit Pincay, Jr. aboard. Trapped along the rail after starting in the second position, Heerensperger's horse faded after the first third of the race.

He was also reported to be a significant investor in Emerald Downs race track near Auburn, helping to open it there in 1996.

Heerensperger is survived by his children, Joe, Julie, Karen and Corey, as well as his brother, Barton, and fiancée Nikki Johnson.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Dave Heerensperger's career as an unlimited owner began as an act of civic charity in 1963. The community organizers who had been campaigning the *Miss Spokane* issued a plea for sponsorship money to keep their effort going. Heerensperger, the owner of a small chain of electrical supply stores in the Spokane area, saw it as an opportunity to advertise his business and agreed to give the group \$5,000 as long as they named the boat *Miss Eagle Electric*. He remained the boat's sponsor for two seasons, until he elected to get out of the sport because the \$28,000 he had spent on the effort was too much.

The family is planning a memorial service for sometime early in 2019.

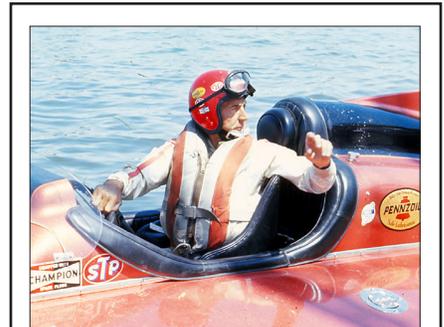
Heerensperger was a dynamic force and touched so many people

through his many interests. He will be missed. I feel blessed to have known him, even in a small way. May he rest in peace. ❖



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Less than two years after quitting his sponsorship of the *Miss Spokane* boat, Heerensperger got back into the sport with the purchase of a hydroplane that had competed since 1962 with the name *\$ Bill*. Although the boat had been driven by the likes of Bill Muncey and Bill Schumacher, it had never won a race until Heerensperger owned it. The *Miss Eagle Electric* started the 1968 season with a victory in Guntersville, Alabama, and followed that with first-place finishes at the Atomic Cup and the President's Cup.



A large part of the credit for *Miss Eagle Electric's* success in 1968 was its hard-charging driver, Col. Warner Gardner, a former Air Force fighter jet pilot. By the time the team reached the Gold Cup in Detroit, they had already collected three race wins. But, that's when tragedy struck. Gardner drove the boat too fast into the tight Roostertail Turn. It pitched onto its right side, rolled over, and landed upside down in a shower of spray. Gardner was pulled from the water with severe head injuries and died in the hospital the next day.

Photo from Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



[Left] Dave Heerensperger on the deck of the ill-fated *Miss Eagle Electric*. [Right] Warner Gardner's death hit Heerensperger hard, and he was also one to embrace a new idea, so he contacted Les Staudacher and asked him to build a boat that would solve the stability problems that had plagued the sport and cost several driver lives. The radical new boat carried the name of his new chain of stores called Pay 'n Pak. The trimaran outrigger attracted a great deal of attention, but was a disappointment on the race course. One reporter joked that it looked like a South Seas war canoe and that he expected a dozen guys with spears to come pouring out of the craft. Except for a third-place finish in the 1969 race in the Tri-Cities, it performed terribly. Driver Tommy Fults complained that it was like driving your car with the emergency brake on. The team pulled it from the circuit before the 1969 season ended.

Heerensperger Field at Tam O'Shanter Park.

by Janine Manny -

Printed in the Kelso Daily News, May 8, 2010

Dave Heerensperger was 19 years old when his mother, Leona, passed away.

"I didn't get a chance to see a lot of things," he said Saturday under sun-drenched skies at Tam O'Shanter Park, moments before a softball field dedication in honor of him and his wife, Jill.

"My mom ... she was only 45," Heerensperger said, his voice cracking slightly. "I am very proud to be able to share this with her on Mother's Day weekend."

If she were around today, Leona Bailey Heerensperger would be the proud one. Her oldest son, Dave, a 1954 Kelso High School graduate, grew up to be one of the most successful businessmen in the Northwest.

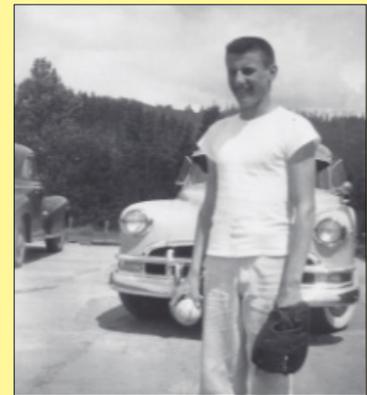
Yes, the guy has money. But he also has a heart as big as the beautiful ballpark that bears his name, one that will be used by thousands of girls and young women as they hone their softball skills for years to come.

The official name is Heerensperger Field at Tam O'Shanter Park. It might as well be known as

Dave's Place.

Heerensperger and his wife (at the time) donated \$150,000 toward the project, which also benefited from many other donations and volunteer hours. The Lower Columbia College softball team has been playing on the field since March, along with the 34 teams and 400 players that comprise the Kelso Girls Softball Association.

"Mom was quite an athlete. She played three years of volleyball, basketball and softball (1926-28), and graduated from Kelso in 1928," Heerensperger said. "This is a great day for my mom's family, the Baileys, and the Heerenspergers. We're so pleased to be here and experience this. I didn't realize what a large program Kelso has for softball. It's quite impressive."



A young Dave Heerensperger with his baseball glove in 1954.

Julie Heerensperger-Warren collection



After high school and working for Stanley Thurman’s T&T Electric & Plumbing in Longview, Washington:

“Within three years he was making ads and running the store. “Timing was perfect, right place at the right time. Families were converting from wood stoves to electric. Everything fell into place,” Dave said about his first job after high school. “I loved the business and was self-taught at an early age.”

July 19, 1970, Atomic Cup:

Pak driver Tommy Fults, realizing that he needed only to finish the race to win the Atomic Cup, pushed *Notre Dame* for three laps, but then slacked off and was content with second place to insure the overall championship. “I told him [Fults] to stay within one position of the (Miss) *Owensboro*,” owner Dave Heerensperger said after the race. “That’s all we had to do to win. He knew the *Owensboro* hadn’t started. Oh, if I’d had a walkie talkie then – or a hammer!”

Del Danielson, Seattle Times

Prior to the 1971 season:

“Dave Heerensperger is getting the headlines he hoped for, now he wants those headlines to include the word “win.”

“As a businessman, Heerensperger knows the full value of the exposure and publicity generated by sponsorship of an unlimited hydroplane. And as a sports fan and fierce competitor, he couldn’t find a better outlet for his emotions.

“Heerensperger, 34-year-old president of a building-supplies chain, owns the *Pride of Pay ‘n Pak*. “It’s a sound financial investment,” Heerensperger said last week after his boat had gone through its sixth on-the-water test of the spring.

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



[Top] Heerensperger campaigned two boats in 1970. This is the *Pay ‘n Pak’s Lil’ Buzzard*, named for another brand of stores operated by his company. The boat won the Atomic Cup with Tommy Fults at the wheel. [Middle] The other boat that year was the *Pride of Pay ‘n Pak*, a craft built by Ron Jones with a cabover design and powered by a pair of Chrysler Hemi engines. The crew turned out to be so busy keeping the engines running, they could never address its serious handling problems. [Above] After the 1970 season, the team rebuilt the boat so that the driver sat behind its Rolls-Royce Merlin engine. The change did wonders. With Bill Schumacher driving, it won the last three races in 1971 and placed second in the 1972 national standings while driven by Schumacher and Billy Sterett, Jr.

“People recognize the name. If we win, or even have a good chance of winning, then people will associate with us. They become Pay ‘n Pak fans. “It generates business. I got into the sport because I thought it would be good exposure for the stores. I’m even more convinced of it now.”

Atomic Cup, July 23, 1972:

On commenting after the *Pride of Pay ‘n Pak* set the fastest two-lap qualifying mark ever at 120.163 mph. A photographer asked Heerensperger to pose near the hydroplane. The owner’s reply: “You bet! You want me to stand on my hands?”



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Bill Schumacher won the last three races of the 1971 unlimited campaign aboard the *Pride of Pay ‘n Pak* and finished second in the standings.

Selling the Pride of Pay ‘n Pak.

From the book “At the Ragged Edge” by A.J. Muntz

“Everything clicked for Bill Muncy in 1972. He won both preliminary heats at the season’s first race in Miami and was about to head onto the course for the final when he received sage advice that he would follow to the letter for the rest of the year. With a serious look on his face, his crew chief, Bill Cantrell, leaned over the cockpit and, in his deep, Kentucky drawl, told Muncy to “get out in front and then improve your position.”

“He not only followed Cantrell’s instructions in Miami, but also continued running ahead of the field at each race, winning in Owensboro, Detroit, Madison, the Tri-Cities, and in Seattle. The Detroit victory had been the most satisfying, giving him his fifth Gold Cup, a mark that tied him with the great Gar Wood.

“It seemed Muncy and *Atlas Van Lines* could do nothing wrong that year. The team won 18 of the 21 heats started, placed second in the other three, set a number of lap, heat, race, and qualifying records, and earned Muncy his fourth national driver’s championship. “We didn’t expect to have this kind of a season,” Muncy said. “Who’d ever believe 10 years ago that I’d bring Lee Schoenith a national championship?”

“As Muncy dominated everything in *Atlas Van Lines*, Bill Schumacher and Billy Sterett, Jr. combined to take runner-up honors aboard the *Pride of Pay ‘n Pak*. In the process, the team also won the only race Muncy didn’t, the President’s Cup, and set a world record qualifying time of 125.874 miles per hour.

“Meanwhile, Bernie Little’s Karelsen-designed *Budweiser* began to show its age. With Terry Sterett at the wheel, the three-time national champion managed only

two second-place finishes and ended the 1972 season a distant third in the national standings.

“Bernie Little didn’t like being third in anything, so he again turned to the same strategy he used in 1966 when he bought *Miss Exide* and again in 1969 when he enticed Dean Chenoweth to join his team: He acquired the very thing he couldn’t beat.

“The day after the season’s final race, Little announced that he had purchased the *Pride of Pay ‘n Pak* from Dave Heerensperger for \$30,000.

“Heerensperger was willing to part with the boat because he already had plans for a new hydroplane. Months earlier, he had asked Ron Jones to design and build a new *Pay ‘n Pak* that would be even better than the “Pride.” Jones did just that, producing a boat that would stun the hydro-racing world and become one of the most successful race boats in history.” ❖

The sport meets a "Winged Wonder."

The tranquility of Stan Sayres Park was interrupted on the afternoon of April 9, 1973, when a crowd of hydroplane groupies and reporters gathered to witness the christening of a craft that promised to introduce the latest in hydroplane technology: a boat named *Pay 'n Pak*.

A few details about the new boat began to emerge from Ron Jones' Costa Mesa, California, shop while the thing was still under construction early in 1973. A press release said that it would be "new and revolutionary" and that it would look like Heerensperger's previous boat, but much stronger and with other changes, such as aerodynamic cowlings.

But, the biggest innovation was



John Crouse

under the deck. The entire structure was built with a strong but lightweight material called Hexcel, a sort of aluminum sandwich, thin

sheets of the metal on the top and the bottom and a core made of aluminum and set in a honeycomb pattern.

Heerensperger race victories

YEAR	RACE	BOAT	DRIVER
1	1968 Dixie Cup (Guntersville, Ala.).....	Miss Eagle Electric	Warner Gardner
2	1968 Atomic Cup (Tri-Cities, Wash.).....	Miss Eagle Electric	Warner Gardner
3	1968 President's Cup (Washington, DC).....	Miss Eagle Electric	Warner Gardner
4	1970 Atomic Cup (Tri-Cities, Wash.).....	Pay 'n Pak's 'Lil Buzzard	Tommy Fults
5	1971 Seafair Trophy (Seattle).....	Pride of Pay 'n Pak	Bill Schumacher
6	1971 Oregon Emerald Cup (Eugene, Ore.).....	Pride of Pay 'n Pak	Bill Schumacher
7	1971 Atlas Van Lines Trophy (Dallas).....	Pride of Pay 'n Pak	Bill Schumacher
8	1972 President's Cup (Washington, DC).....	Pride of Pay 'n Pak	Billy Sterett, Jr.
9	1973 Champion Spark Plug Regatta (Miami)	Pay 'n Pak.....	Mickey Remund
10	1973 Indiana Governor's Cup (Madison, Ind.)	Pay 'n Pak.....	Mickey Remund
11	1973 World Championship (Seattle)	Pay 'n Pak.....	Mickey Remund
12	1973 Clearwater Regatta (Toledo, Ohio).....	Pay 'n Pak.....	Mickey Remund
13	1974 President's Cup (Washington, DC).....	Pay 'n Pak.....	George Henley
14	1974 Kentucky Governor's Cup (Owensboro, Ky.).....	Pay 'n Pak.....	George Henley
15	1974 World Championship (Tri-Cities, Wash.).....	Pay 'n Pak.....	George Henley
16	1974 APBA Gold Cup (Seattle).....	Pay 'n Pak.....	George Henley
17	1974 Hydroglobe (Dayton, Ohio)	Pay 'n Pak.....	George Henley
18	1974 San Diego Cup (San Diego).....	Pay 'n Pak.....	George Henley
19	1974 Indiana Governor's Cup (Madison, Ind.)	Pay 'n Pak.....	George Henley
20	1975 Hydroglobe (Dayton, Ohio)	Pay 'n Pak.....	George Henley
21	1975 Indiana Governor's Cup (Madison, Ind.)	Pay 'n Pak.....	George Henley
22	1975 APBA Gold Cup (Tri-Cities, Wash.).....	Pay 'n Pak.....	George Henley
23	1975 Seafair Trophy (Seattle).....	Pay 'n Pak.....	George Henley
24	1975 Weisfield's Trophy (San Diego).....	Pay 'n Pak.....	George Henley
25	1982 Thunder-in-the-Park (Geneva, NY)	Pay 'n Pak.....	John Walters

As the boat arrived for the christening, the crowd saw that it had a wedge shape, an effect created by the aerodynamic cowling that seemed to enclose the cockpit more than usual. The color scheme also was eye-catching, brilliant white decks with the name "Pay 'n Pak" painted in large orange and black letters.

What really caught their eye, though, was something that hadn't been discussed in the accounts of the boat's construction: a wing.

Standing about five feet above the deck and resting atop two vertical tails was a horizontal stabilizer, a four-foot wide slab of Hexcel, plastic, and epoxy that was as long as the transom was wide.

According to crew chief Jim Lucero, who played a significant role in the boat's design, the wing had two purposes: to add some lift to the rear of the boat and provide the hull better directional stability and control.

It also grabbed attention.

Fans argued over the merits of the wing. Would it cause the boat to become airborne? Would it come off when the boat hit high speed or ran into a large swell? It was just the kind of debate the sponsor side of Heerensperger dreamed about.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Through Heerensperger's most successful years of racing hydroplanes, Jim Lucero was there at his side as his crew chief. Known as one of the most innovative technicians the sport has ever known, Lucero washed parts for the *Notre Dame* crew in 1965, served on the crew of the radical *Smirnoff*, then joined the Heerensperger team midway through the 1970 season. The following winter, at only 24 years old, Lucero led the effort to transform the *Pride of Pay 'n Pak* to Rolls Merlin power and would thereafter play a key role in fulfilling each novel idea Heerensperger would have until he left the sport in 1982.

During a boat's first season, especially a boat as innovative as *Pay 'n Pak*, there typically is a period of fine-tuning. The crew will try different props, shift the weight around, and make small changes to the sponsons. So, while the *Pay 'n Pak* team and the boat's driver, Mickey Remund, worked on these things in 1973, their chief nemesis was their old boat, now painted *Budweiser* gold, red, and white and with Dean Chenoweth back in the team's cockpit.

Remund and Chenoweth were locked in a struggle throughout the 1973 campaign. The *Pay 'n Pak* won the first race it entered, the Champion Spark Plug Regatta in Miami, then Chenoweth took his turn at the winner's circle. And, so it went all year, with both boats winning four races. but, in the end, when all the points were tallied, *Pay 'n Pak* came out on top by a mere 275 points, giving Dave Heerensperger his first national championship.

Although the points race had been close, the record book was one-sided in favor of the new

hydro. During the year, *Pay 'n Pak* had shattered 26 of 29 existing speed records.

In the years that followed, the Winged Wonder would win another national title in 1974 with George Henley behind the wheel and another the following year with Henley and Jim McCormick sharing the driving duties. In three years of racing, the boat had won a total of 16 races.

Heerensperger pulled off another stunning deal after the 1975 season, this time selling his entire team to Bill Muncey. With the boat's new owner behind the wheel in 1976, it won its fourth straight national title, this time with the name *Atlas Van Lines* painted on its hull.

In 1977, while Muncey raced a new boat, the Winged Wonder appeared in the two Pacific Northwest races as the *Pay 'n Pak*, but was showing its age. The sponsons came apart twice. Then it was sold to the City of Madison, Indiana, and spent the next 11 seasons as either the *Miss Madison* or carrying the names of various sponsors. ❖



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

George Henley was the most successful driver Heerensperger would have, winning a total of 12 races.

My memories of Dave Heerensperger.

by Steve Montgomery

My first encounter with Dave Heerensperger really didn't go all that well. It was 1967 and I was selling television advertising in Yakima. Dave had just built a new store in Yakima and it was my job to try to get them on board as an advertiser.

I was told I would have to talk to the owner in Spokane, so I made plans to do just that. I put together a nice presentation on the market, our station, and other information and headed off to visit family in Spokane. I marched into Eagle Electric's home office and told the receptionist who I was, why I was there, and could I please see Mr. Heerensperger. After a moment on the phone, she told me he was busy and didn't want to talk to me.

I went back to Yakima having learned a valuable lesson: Always make an appointment. Years later, when we finally met, I reminded



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

him of my first attempt to meet him and he smiled that big smile that was always so great to see. He jokingly asked if I would like to try my sales pitch again.

A big moment for me came after a meeting in Chicago. I was sitting in the hotel lobby when Dave and his wife walked by. At

that point I did not know him well, so I was very pleasantly surprised when he stopped and asked me if I was going to Seattle. I said yes I was waiting for my ride to the airport. He asked if I would like to sell my ticket (you could do that back then) and ride home with him. I jumped at the chance and got into the limo to the airport with him, his wife, and George and Mary Henley.

We flew to Seattle in his Lear Jet with a brief stop in Rapid City, South Dakota, for fuel. Dixon Smith was the pilot. When I got home, I had trouble believing what had just happened. It was an exciting experience for the new kid in the sport. I felt like I belonged.

Over the years we had many conversations, but there are a couple that come to mind immediately. I remember the day in the Seafair pit area when he was describing the new turbine boat he was going to build. It would have a bigger engine with more power than the previous effort had with two smaller turbines. His excitement and enthusiasm were memorable.

One evening we were at dinner with Bernie Little, Buddy Byers, and some other friends. Dave was describing an idea he had for his stores that would not have displays like a department store. Customers would buy appliances and other merchandise in the boxes and take them home that way. His friends told him his idea would not work. People wanted to shop for those things in the department store format. Dave's concept became the stores which he eventually sold to Lowe's for a billion dollars.

Years later, we were comparing memories about his time in the sport and he had big smile and a lot of great stories. This led me

The often forgotten "Pak."

When Bill Muncey purchased the Pay 'n Pak team from Dave Heerensperger after the 1975 season, included in the package

was an unfinished boat that was taking shape in Norm Berg's shop near Tacoma. It was a project that Heerensperger and Lucero started almost a year earlier, a craft that would take advantage

of some of the lessons they had learned while running the Winged Wonder. It would be more streamlined, have a deeply cut pickle-fork bow, a low wing in the back, and the cockpit in the front. Muncey would finally introduce the craft in 1977 and it would be forever known as "Blue Blaster" *Atlas Van Lines*. In five seasons of racing, it would win a total of 24 races, including three Gold Cups, and two national championships.



Photo from Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

to ask why he left and went horse racing. A sadness came over him as he talked about drivers who had been killed and injured. He was especially affected by the injuries John Walters had suffered driving the new turbine boat. He said you almost never lose a driver in horse racing.

In the years that followed, Dave was always very cordial when our paths crossed, whether at the Hydroplane and Race Boat Museum or one encounter at the Palm Springs Airport. He was never one of those successful people who made you feel inferior.

In my 40 years covering boat racing, I was privileged to know some of the country's most dynamic individuals and businessmen. They were the larger than life sportsmen who made the sport so big and exciting in the '60s and '70s. Nobody fit that description better than David Heerensperger. ❖

Steve Montgomery is known as the voice of unlimited hydroplane racing. He has been a long-time radio and television broadcaster and served as the director of public relations for the sport. The NewsJournal published a three-part interview of Montgomery in the April, May, and June 2016 issues.

A Celebration of Life for Dave Heerensperger is planned for January 19, 2019. For information, email PayNTributeToTheEagle@gmail.com. In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation in David's name to either the Seattle Children's Hospital or to the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum in Kent.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Dave Heerensperger's time away from the sport after selling his team to Bill Muncey lasted only four years. He was back in 1980 with another innovative craft, this one taking the idea of turbine power to a place that hadn't been tried. It wasn't the first turbine-powered boat, but it was the first to be successful. The boat is shown here at the Tri-Cities, Washington, about to be launched for the first time. Moments later during its first run, the hydroplane did a spectacular end-over-end flip. It was repaired and entered its first race the following season. With John Walters at the wheel, the turbine *Pay 'n Pak* had two second-place finishes in its first year and became the first turbine-powered boat to win a race when it won the 1982 Thunder-in-the-Park event in Geneva, New York. Later that season in Seattle, the boat was involved in an accident during Heat 1B where it collided with the *Executone*, did a barrel-roll, and sent Walters to the hospital with spinal fractures, a broken leg, and other injuries. Two days later, Heerensperger announced that the *Pay 'n Pak* team would no longer compete.

Seafair: A proud tradition.

by Gary Dougherty
Dave Heerensperger's biographer

Back in the day, one of the most anticipated weekends each year in Seattle was the unlimited hydroplane race that takes place on Seattle's Lake Washington. This extravaganza is the finale for the annual Seafair summer celebration. The inaugural Seafair race took place on August 4, 1951.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Dave Heerensperger's *Pay 'n Pak* and Bernie Little's *Miss Budweiser* put on a dazzling display in front of hundreds of thousands of onlookers. The two magnates won the regatta six times during a seven-year span with Heerensperger's boat getting the checkered flag four times.

The two well-financed camps had huge followings with the *Pak* being the hometown favorite. Fans lined the beach in droves and packed the log boom surrounding the course. The crowd watched these machines produce glistening roostertails and heard the deafening "roar" of piston-powered engines.

This race was the culmination of Seattle's biggest summer spectacle. Heerensperger was cementing his legacy and doing his part in keeping the rich tradition continuing decade after decade.

Thank you, Dave and Bernie. You have etched so many indelible memories for so many hydro fans throughout the Pacific Northwest!

Heerensperger and horse racing.

by Gary Dougherty

David Heerensperger got involved in owning and racing thoroughbreds during the summer of 1981, when he purchased a New Jersey-bred at a New York Yearling Sale held at Saratoga. Dave went to the Kentucky Derby earlier that year with his wife, Jill, and caught the bug.

The colt was named Dave's Reality. The following year he won

his first five starts as a 2-year-old at the now shuttered Renton oval Longacres in Washington state.

Both Daves were off and running ...

Heerensperger raced his horses primarily on the highly competitive Southern California circuit. He purchased most of his runners privately; typically, early in their racing careers. Many were born outside the United States. These horses were bred to compete at

long distances up to a mile and three-quarters.

Why the emphasis on turf route races? "I wanted to be different," Heerensperger said. "The longer races are easier on the horse."

His horses were victorious in 25 North American graded stakes events (the most important contested races). Heerensperger's color bearers competed in some of the richest and most-storied races in the world: the Kentucky Derby, Breeders' Cup World Championships, and invitational stakes races held in the United Arab Emirates, Japan, and China.

His most prominent horses – Bourbon Bay (seven graded stakes wins), Hawksley Hill (IRE) (five graded stakes), Millennium Wind (won grade I Blue Grass S and competed in the 2001 Kentucky Derby), and Artiste Royal (IRE) (victorious in grade I races at Santa Anita and Hollywood Park).

When horse racing was fighting for survival in Washington, Heerensperger stepped to the plate and became a lead investor in Auburn's Emerald Downs, which opened in June 1996. ❖



Benoit Photo

Heerensperger's Bourbon Bay wins the San Juan Capistrano Handicap at Santa Anita in 2012

Gary Dougherty:

I first met Dave at Emerald Downs in the early 2010s knowing so much about what he did from so far away.

I first heard the roar in the mid-to-late 70s when growing up in Renton. Hydroplanes became an integral part of my life. Yes, we dragged wooden hydros on a neighborhood street with a 90-degree turn.

Renton also meant Longacres and horse racing. Mr. Heerensperger's exploits in both sports made him an absolute idol to a teenage kid. Later, Dave asked me to chronicle his amazing run through life! My heart beat accelerated, and a dream came to fruition.

The history of Mr. Heerensperger's life is available in a book dedicated to his early years, business prowess, sponsorships, unlimited hydroplanes, and horse racing.

To get a copy, email Gary at garypony@yahoo.com



Benoit Photo

FROM THE UNJ VAULT:

A talk with Bob Schroeder.

Bob Schroeder was what one could safely describe as a journeyman unlimited driver. During a career that spanned the years from 1957 to 1974, he would see action behind the wheel of seven different hulls, yet would never hoist a trophy in a winner's circle.

Perhaps his greatest claim to fame was that he was the first of many drivers to sit in the cockpit of a Miss Budweiser hydroplane and also the first to drive an Atlas Van Lines. Born in North Tonawanda, New York, on New Year's Day in 1927, Schroeder was the son of a mechanic who ran a garage that did general repairs. He would say that he was "born and raised in a collision shop." As a result, he grew up with a well-rounded background in mechanics.

Known as "Rapid Robert," Schroeder was working in Bell Aircraft's rocket lab when he and a co-worker decided to become racing associates. The two even became partners in an excavating business so they could adjust their work hours to accommodate their racing schedule. The early years of Schroeder's racing career would be in 225-class hydros, primarily in a boat named My Ambition, then eventually to an invitation to drive an unlimited named Wildroot Charlie in 1957. Meanwhile, his professional career led him to make outboard motor control parts for a company in Canada, as a plant manager for Shepherd Boat Company, as a pile driver, and into the business of crushing cars. He would pass away on June 28, 2009, at the age of 82.

The following interview 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: How did Wildroot Charlie come about?

Schroeder: George Trimper was, at that time, the Unlimited Race Chairman. George and I had been very good friends for years from the Buffalo Launch Club. We just thought Buffalo should have an unlimited boat. Before Wildroot Charlie was in existence, Gordon Deneau let us take the *What A Pickle!* We brought it to Buffalo just to show everybody and put it in the water and ran it around. That really did get the interest started, but they didn't think that was the boat they wanted. [Trimper] had been talking



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

to Mr. Schoenith, unbeknownst to me. He had other friends from the Launch Club and was very good friends with the Wildroot Charlie people.

It was the Friday before; the race (Detroit Memorial) was on



The boat that would become *Wildroot Charlie* originally raced as the *Gale IV* in 1954 to 56 with Bill Cantrell and Roy Duby in the cockpit.

Saturday. I was in the excavating business putting in a sewer line. Friday at noon somebody came to get me and said George Trimper was on the phone. He said, "How soon could you get to Detroit? We're going to buy a boat."

There was an airplane out in an hour and a half. I didn't have time to get the check. He ran to the airport with the check. I ran for the airport and got on the plane. Fellows that, worked for my dad and my business partner threw some tools in the car and headed for Detroit. Of course, this was all new to us. It all happened in an hour. One of the stipulations with Wildroot was that the boat was to be painted yellow with *Wildroot Charlie* on the side.

When I did get there, they didn't have a trailer for the boat. *Gale*, at that time, carried all their boats flat. Their shop was up in Troy and it's now Friday afternoon.

The price was \$7,500. We got \$10,000 for the year to run it from Wildroot. Joe [Schoenith] would accept the check, but Lee didn't think that was a good idea. Now, Lee and I had met quite a few times before, but we weren't real close friends then. Joe said, "Don't worry about it. We'll take the check."

The boat got down there about

6:30 or seven in the evening. I had bought some yellow paint and a brush. A fellow by the name of McGloughlin did the running for me. He lined up a sign painter. So, I started painting the boat yellow on one side and the sign painter started lettering the boat right on top of the wet paint.

Qualifying back in those days started at six in the morning. I think the qualifying speed was 80 mph. Cantrell came down in the morning. We put the boat in the water. Everybody was getting yellow paint on them because everything was soaking wet. My first ride, I was a little disgusted. The motor ran well, but for as big as the engine was, and compared to all the other boats I was running, it just didn't seem to go fast enough. And I didn't know that much about an aircraft engine at that time. I did start leaning it out and it started to go pretty well. I leaned it out a couple times too much and it coughed and sneezed, and everybody said I was going to blow the engine. But, we just kept going the same way. We qualified that day and I won the first heat. It had a tach, but no tach cable. We didn't get the tach cable with it. Of course, our tools were limited to a very small tool box. All we were really worried about was pouring

oil in it. We had more oil leaks... Today they probably wouldn't even let us run because there were so many oil leaks and we were polluting the river.

Freddie Alter was running pretty good that day with the *Such Crust* and he did beat me in the other two heats. Probably, if I'd had a little more experience at the time, I could have beat him easily enough.

What was the ownership of the boat?

We all of a sudden collected a bunch of owners, more or less like Madison. The guy who had the trucking outfit... We needed a truck, so he was an owner. There got to be 10 of us involved as owners. Actually, I was the only owner because I had the least to lose if anything went wrong. Back in those days, you didn't have insurance coverage like you do now. They just put everything in my name because, if something did happen, I didn't have that much to lose. They assured me they would take care of me if anything happened. Actually, on paper, I was the owner. But we did have 10 owners.

We went on with *Wildroot* again not knowing as much as we should about the Allison. We just kept playing with it. The most we did with it was fix the oil leaks. We didn't do that much to the engine. We ran the same engine, I believe, all summer.

When you picked up the boat, what kind of condition was it in?

Oh, pretty decent shape...

It hadn't been abused? It looked well cared for?

Yes, yes. And, of course, as soon as dad got there he checked it over real well. He figured we weren't in any trouble running it. As long as my dad said it was all right, I figured it was all right.

What kind of equipment did you get?

Oh, one prop and that was on the end of the shaft. No equipment. I don't even think we got a bow line. We just got a boat and the engine that was in it. They hadn't even started it in the shop. We started it in the pits for the first time. Of course, to get it started, [Bill] Cantrell leaned into the cockpit, pulled up alongside of me, and showed me how to get the thing started.

At Buffalo that year the Wha Hoppen Too burned. You tried to douse the blaze with your roost-ertail. Do you remember that?

Yes. That boat belonged to Chet Bourne and Marv Henrich. I remember the boat catching fire. I thought with all the water I could put on it, I could put it out. I don't know, I just thought the thing to do at that time was splash it as much as I could and put the fire out, which did work.

But the boat was beyond repair.

Yeah, it gutted the inside of that thing pretty well.

At DC in '57, you had a tight race with both Shanty and Maverick. Do you remember that?

Oh, yeah. Very well. We actually had the thing won. I remember I was real tired and all of a sudden



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Wildroot Charlie in Seattle for the 1958 Gold Cup

I was out in front. The first buoy I came to, after coming down the straightaway, I turned on. Once I turned the wheel, I realized it was the wrong buoy, but once I straightened out, they passed me. But I had 'em beat up until then. It was just one of those days everything ran well.

At the close of the '57 season, when you look back, how did you feel about your rookie year with the unlimited?

Everybody was enthused. All the owners were enthused. We got \$25,000 from Wildroot [towards the 1958 season]. They were very happy. We started talking of a new boat, but we were going to run this one. We built a tilt trailer and talked

of going west. I worked steady on the boat; the rest of the crew used to come in at night.

You accumulated parts and equipment. Who did you get engines from?

I remember one in particular. We needed an engine one night. We went to a chicken coop up in Wilson, New York. Carried the darn engine. Six guys. We never did realize how we did get it out. In the crate the thing weighs 2,000 pounds. We carried it out of the chicken coop and put it in the back of a pickup truck.

Carried it by hand?

Yeah. Rushed back to the shop with it. I always remember, we opened it up and all of a sudden we realized it turned the wrong way. So, by now we were very good friends with Chuck Thompson. We talked to Chuck about it. He said, "Well, just throw that one on a truck and send somebody to Detroit and I'll swap you for a right-hand engine." See, everybody else was running lefts. I was running right-hand engines on account of that gear box. It was a fabricated gear box. That was one of our big, rude awakenings, that the engines came both ways. Nobody even gave it a thought. I think we paid \$100 or \$150 for it in the crate.



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Making a run to the starting line at the 1958 Silver Cup in Detroit are Bob Schroeder in *Wildroot Charlie*, Bob Hayward in *Miss Supertest II*, and Chuck Thompson in *Miss Detroit*.

Going into 1958, did you make any changes to the hull? You changed the tail fin.

Not really in the hull. We changed the runners a little bit. Not that much. The boat had a tendency to get in on the nose all the time. I think, back in those days, everybody's boat did.

You had a lot of breakdowns in '58, as compared to the first year.

Yeah, we started getting into gear box problems. We had one gear box. The first time I really tore it up badly was in the President's Cup. We started playing with water injection. Oh, that wasn't the reason we were breaking down. I think the equipment was getting worn out. Then we realized we had to start really thinking of a new boat.

In '58 at Buffalo, Wildroot Charlie and Miss Bardahl had a real close finish in the second heat. Mira Slovak was driving the Bardahl.

That was another day. That was 30-mile heats again. That was just one of those days when everything ran well. If you're going to do anything, run well in your home town, you know.

How did the Wildroot Charlie sponsorship end?

After we got through with the 1958 season, Wildroot sold out to



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

The *Wildroot Charlie* begins its cross-country journey to the Seattle area after being sold to Bob Miller.

Proctor and Gamble. They didn't think boat racing had anything to do with selling cream oil. So, that's how we didn't have a sponsor any more.

You sold Wildroot Charlie to Bob Miller.

That was an amazing thing. I think we sold it to him for \$2,500. I'm just guessing. He just ended up there. He went out and found an old truck. He figured we could get this thing right on top of the old truck, over the cab, and the whole thing flat. He would more or less bullshit his way across the country. We built a rack on top of the truck. I helped him build it. He pulled under our rail and we set the boat up on the roof of the thing. I couldn't believe it. He took off. He got stopped in Michigan; they

put him in jail for the weekend. He thought that was good. At least he ate and slept that weekend. They didn't even really fine him because he didn't have anything to pay with anyhow, so they just told him to get out of Michigan. He actually went all the way across the country with the thing flat on top of a ton-and-a-half Chevy truck. It sat right over the roof and the whole thing. He drove it all the way. And that was the last I saw of *Wildroot Charlie*.

In 1959 you ran the U-188 Miss Buffalo. What was the ownership of that boat?

That was a group of fellows from the Launch Club by the names of Chet Hardt, Bob Schutt, Bill Aikens, and Bill Conners. The four of them formed the HACS Corporation and financed our next venture.

Everything was again in your name on paper?

Yes.

They were able to afford the type of operation Wildroot Charlie had backed?

Oh, yes.

How did you come up with the U-188 designation?

All the boats I ever had were 88s or 188s. We just stayed with that.

And Gilliam had 88 at that time.

Yes, that's why we didn't have



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Bob Schoeder in *Wildroot Charlie* battles Mira Slovak aboard *Miss Bardahl* during the 1958 Buffalo Launch Club Regatta



Schroeder drove the new *Miss Buffalo* in 1959 and 1960.

88. We went to 188.

One of the innovations on the *Miss Buffalo* were full-length non-trips on the after-plane. What was the reason for trying that?

What we wanted was a boat like the *Gale V*, only we did want to bring the non-trip down the sides, so we could get through the turns a lot faster. When we first started running the unlimiteds, people didn't seem to worry about getting through the turns fast. That was the first thing I noticed in my first race. They left a lot of room at the buoys. I started diving in on the inside. I caught a lot of guys who said that wasn't the way to do it. But, that's the way you did it in a limited, so that's the way I did it in the unlimited. This is one reason we wanted this boat, so it would more-or-less glide through the turns; get rid of a lot of that drag in the turns.

But, when we got the boat, and after we did play with it for a while, we did some measuring with our *Gale* plans and we found out we were six inches short on the sponsons. That's when Les [Staudacher] told me that's all the longer the wood was. And, this boat had this tendency of dropping the right front corner. We played with it, but it was always there. It was

there when we had it, and it was there when Chuck Thompson had it, and it was there when [Henrich] wrecked it.

What things did you do to try to correct that problem?

We tried changing all kinds of angles on the bottom of the sponson. But, mostly it was deck pressure. We were working on deck pressure all of the time. Chuck drilled these holes around in the deck, trying to get rid of some deck pressure.

The problem, then, was the shape of the deck?

The shape of the deck, yes. This was one of the things when It really made me feel bad that he wouldn't build the dropped sponson, because that would've really helped. We'd

have gotten a lot of lift out of that. We were trying to do what they're doing now, trying to get the boat to float. Get it to fly, get it loose. I think all of Staudacher's boats had the same tendency to be nose heavy. They all came in hard on the nose. It finally was the end of the boat, because of that problem.

Aside from dropping the right sponson, how did the boat handle at various speeds and in different kinds of water?

The boat handled well.

Did the non-trip help it through the corners, or did the nose-dropping problem counter-act that?

I think we were on the right track. Like I say, we had this biggest working problem, getting it to stop dropping the right front corner. Most of the boats after that all started turning on the non-trip; got rid of that square corner.

In the '59 Gold Cup at Seattle, you drove *Gale V* in Heat 2B. How do you remember that boat as compared to the *Charlie* or *Miss Buffalo*?

The boat was pretty fast. The *Gales* had some good equipment back in those days. That happened just on the spur of the moment. Bill Cantrell got his hand hurt when they were putting the coupling together. I just happened to be there



Schroeder drove the *Gale V* during one heat at the 1959 Gold Cup in Seattle.



The gigantic *Gale VII* was Bob Schroder's ride in 1961.

and they gave me a jacket, helmet, and goggles and told me to go race. I don't remember, really, that much about the heat or where we finished or what I was told to do. Of course, like I said, by then I was getting to be pretty good friends with Lee.

When you got out of racing with the *Miss Buffalo* at the close of the 1960 season, do you think that more-or-less "did in" the *Buffalo Regatta*, too?

Yeah, you know, I was running another company and it was taking a lot of time. I think the same fellows had been putting on the race for 12 to 13 years. There were no new people coming in. The kids of the group that was doing it weren't old enough yet to take it over. Another four or five years later, if I had really bugged 'em, or even right today, if I went in and bugged 'em, we would race again.

When the *Miss Buffalo* was sold, what year did you sell it to Chuck Thompson? You last raced it in '60, but he didn't run it until '62. Did he have it for that year, or did it sit?

No, it sat for a year, until they decided what they were going to do.

Had the group run out of time, or money, or what?

A little of everything. None of 'em ran out of money. More time

and interest. The boat scared the hell out of 'em a couple of times. We had a couple of bad fires. I had to get out of it a couple of times. Broke a couple of engines in two. They just figured they'd spent enough money on it, I guess. They were losing interest, also.

The next boat you drove was the Packard-powered *Gale VII*. You did not drive the boat when it was *Gale VI*, did you?

No.

Where did the V-16 Packards come from?

Joe Van Blerck had these engines out on Long Island. Joe was playing around with some other marine conversions at the time. I really don't know what the connection was with Lee and Joe, but they made some kind of a deal where they could use the engines. And they finally did go back to Van Blerck when they were through with them. I don't know if they were bought or lent, but the engines did originally come from Joe Van Blerck.

What kind of work did they have to do to prepare the Packards for the boat?

Oh, it was very simple, more or less. The gear box wasn't a real big problem. I think we had one gear box and we never had any trouble with it from the time we, put it on.

This is a gear box they made?

Yeah, we made up the casting.

As far as the engine and gear box and that part of it in *Gale VII*, there was no problem at all. It was just that we were trying to run 3,420 cubic inches with enough blower for 1,700 inches. There just wasn't enough blower up there.

You ran just the Allison blower on it?

Yeah.

Didn't the Packard come with a blower? What was the problem?

It had a very small blower on it. This was an experimental engine. They were going to PT stuff. They were looking more for something that lasted than speed. Just a great, big engine. I forget how much it weighed.

And they never changed the engine all season?

No, never changed.

Strictly blower problems.

Strictly blower. We never had an engine problem.

Do you remember what the gear box ratio was?

I believe we were about the same as *Supertest*. We were getting up, like 4 to 1. We didn't turn over 2,700 or 2,800 rpm. After I left, they started turning it 3,200 or 3,300.

Well, how did the *Gale VII* handle?

It was a heavy boat, but once you got it going it was as light as anything else that ran. It just was a lot of boat, you know, the way it was built. We were a lot wider than the other boats. We had enough air under it. It was a little hard coming out of the turns.

Did the engine accelerate all right, or was it sluggish?

With the right blower ratio, boy it would really come out of the turns. The fastest I ever came out of a turn in my life. One day on the Detroit River, we blew a blower all

to heck. That's when we realized we just had to have more blower.

What things did they do to try to get more blower?

We really didn't. We just knew we needed more. Most of the attention was to *Gale V*. We were kinda... There was just Leo [Macutza] and myself and whoever we could steal off the *Five* to help us work. We didn't have a big crew.

I always remember, Lee said if I could build a trailer that would tilt up, we could take it out west. We tried it, everything was in the way. They told me it was impossible. I remember takin' a cutting torch and just cutting everything off that was in the way, tilting it up, and then rebuilding the trailer right there. That's how we went to the Gold Cup. But, it was just a lot of boat to tip up. I think with the sponsons out, we were about 14 and a half feet wide.

You say you got out of the corners fast, but the boat always seemed sluggish, in our recollection. You don't seem to describe it that way. Where did it have weak points? Did you have to slow way down to go into a turn?

It just slowed down. I mean, it was just all that weight. It just slowed down by itself. It bogged down.

You really had to work it through a turn?

Yeah, we just didn't have enough blower in the boat. That was all. That was the problem.

You had a W-24 Allison blower?

Yeah, my own.

But they never tried it?

We never put it on. It was quite a bit of machine work. Like I said, most of their attention was devoted to the *Five*, so the *Seven* never got the attention it should have.

How was it to work for a two-boat camp? Did you feel frustrated because the *Five* got all the attention?

Oh, no. Really, we worked more or less independently. We were all in the same shop. They didn't put any more money in the other boat than this boat. If we wanted something, we could get it.

But the other boat had the crew.

Yeah, had all the crew. We were really experimenting is what we were doing. They were on the right track, really. They just needed more blower.

In the '61 President's Cup, Freddie Alter disintegrated the *Such Crust IV*.

I happened to be alongside of him when the boat disintegrated.

Freddie was still sitting in the seat. He and I were kind of sliding along the same rate of speed. I saw Freddie wasn't getting out and the boat was going down, so I just jumped out and hung on him, pulled him out of the seat. The boat went on down. Well, we swam on over to the sponson of the *Seven*. I told Freddie to wait there, the Coast Guard would be there in a minute. Freddie was trying to climb up on the deck and he was jumping all over the place. He was excited and just wouldn't listen. Finally I told him there was blood running out of his ear, to just stay where he was. That kind of stopped him right there. He didn't hurry up on the deck. As it worked out, Freddie wasn't hurt that bad. I don't know if it was a concussion, or the water, or what.

When he dumped, was he running right alongside of you?

Yeah, just a little bit ahead of me on the left. The boat just stuck its nose in and came all apart.

You parted company with *Gale* in the middle of the '62 season. Can you tell us why?

Oh, I just think Joe Schoenith didn't think I was driving it as hard as it could've been driven, or should've been driven. There were no hard feelings.

It was all right with you?

Oh yeah, we just kind of slid out of it. I started as plant manager of Shepherd Boat Company in Ontario and I was hurting for time. I was devoting more time to making a living, I guess. The kids were starting to grow up. I don't know, I really didn't have any race plans in my mind. I'd sold all my limited boats. I was strictly going to go to work. ❖

But, Schroeder's career as an unlimited driver wasn't over. Next month, we'll learn what happened after he received a phone call from Bernie Little.



Sandy Ross Collection

Schroeder in the *Gale VII* comes to the rescue of Freddie Alter during the 1961 President's Cup after Alter's *Such Crust IV* disintegrated.

Heritage

Historical Perspective



Craig Fjarlie

Thinking about Ed Karelsen.

Ed Karelsen was a boat builder his entire adult life. Specifically, he built some of the best race boats to ever take to the water. His work includes outboards, inboards, and unlimiteds. As a young man, he drove outboards in the Pacific Northwest.

As this column is written, Karelsen is in failing health. His racing friends are taking turns visiting him regularly and maintaining a vigil at his hospital bedside.

Karelsen was an innovator with hull design. He was one of the first to incorporate full-length non-trips on the after-plane of a hydroplane. Fans who rarely witnessed outboard and inboard races saw his advances in hull design on the 1967 *Miss Bardahl*. The boat was able to turn more quickly than those with a more traditional after-plane.

The first unlimited that Karelsen built was *Miss Exide* in 1963. The boat crashed in its second race, the Diamond Cup at Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Although Karelsen built the craft, it was a Ted Jones design.

After the cabover *Bardahl* crashed at the 1966 President's Cup, Ole Bardahl elected to give Karelsen's ideas a chance. The success of the '67 *Bardahl* encouraged other owners to choose Karelsen boats. The next unlimiteds from his shop were *Miss Budweiser* in 1968, *Notre Dame* in 1969, and *Parco O-Ring Miss* in 1970. Karelsen was in line to build a new *Tahoe*

Miss until William Harrah abruptly left racing.

Karelsen continued building outboard and inboard boats and often oversaw repairs to unlimiteds at the Seafair pits and in his small shop in Seattle's north end. His boats in outboard classes, which were made of wood long after honeycomb aluminum and then composite materials were regularly used in larger boats, were consistent winners.

Karelsen's contribution to boat racing is summed up in Jim Benson's book, *Taming of the Slough*, a fascinating document about



Ed Karelsen

outboards competing on the Sammamish Slough just north of Seattle.

"Eddie, as he was called by his friends, is a lifetime Seattle Outboard Association member best known as one of the premier race boat builders in the Northwest. He raced the Sammamish Slough Race and built outboard race boats at Benson's boat and motor shop in Lake City [a district in Seattle – Ed.] and at Kenmore's Uplake Marina in the early days of his career. Ed built the first fast-turning limited hydros in the 1960s and unlimiteds including three-time national champion *Miss Bardahl* in the years following. ... He received a number of national awards including the American Power Boat Association's highest honor as an 'Honor Squadron' inductee for his contributions to the sport."

Our thoughts are with Ed Karelsen as he copes with failing health. His contributions and achievements enable us to hold him in high regard as an integral part of boat racing. Those of us who knew him will always be grateful for the time we could spend with him. His boats are still running in smaller classes, which will keep his memory alive long after he departs this earth.

Thanks, Ed, for the memories and all that you did for boat racing. ❖

Editor's Note: Ed Karelsen passed away peacefully in Edmonds, Washington, on the morning of Saturday, December 29. He was 86 years old.

Unlimited racing loses a friend.

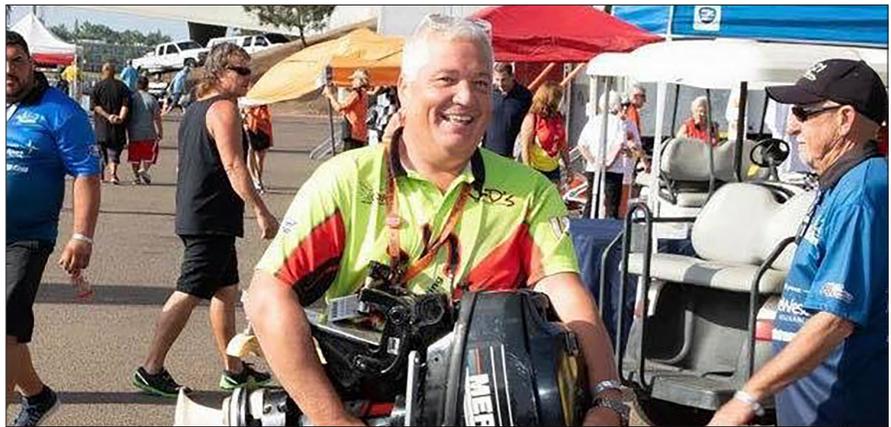
The sport of unlimited hydroplane racing suffered a terrible loss on December 17 when Eric Peterson, a crew member on the U-11 Reliable Diamond Tool presents J&D's, drowned near his boat, which was moored at a marina in Seattle. He was last seen playing with his two dogs near the boat, according to witnesses. One of those dogs was also found to have drowned. Scott Raney, who co-owns the U-11 Unlimited Racing Group with his wife, Shannon, sent us the following about his friend several days after his death was announced:

I have spent days wanting to write something about Eric, but just can't seem to come up with the words. Eric was a true friend to Shannon and myself, our team and extended team family and also to the sport of hydroplane racing.

He was a lifelong fan of hydroplanes, making the trek from his childhood home on Bainbridge Island with his friends to the Seafair race year after year. He specifically told me about the time he got to meet *Pay 'n Pak* driver John Walters and his excitement to spend time and get to know him on a personal level at the U-8 shop.

Eric was a 747 pilot for UPS and traveled around the world flying, which he also really loved. He was the youngest captain to pilot a 747—Tower Air. He was married to Kerry, and had two sons, Jack and Fynn.

My first introduction to Eric was in the early 2000s when I was the crew chief of Bill Wurster's U-8. He came to the shop one day, he lived nearby in the Magnolia area of Seattle, and continued helping when he could all the way through the U-37 days. He helped the 37 team until the Schumachers



stopped racing.

About three or four years ago, Eric and the boys started coming to our shop and helping. No job was too petty for Eric. He helped on the boat and engines, and would grind, drill, and clean. He was especially proud when one day he sat back and watched his two sons completely disassemble one of our T-55 engines that needed an overhaul.

Eric loved everything about our country. He loved to randomly give Starbucks cards to the police to show his appreciation for their work. I also have heard stories from his pilot friends about the many times when he was flying to a location for work and how he would always give up his first-class or business-class seat for a soldier.

When Eric came to the races, he was always the first one at the truck in the morning and always had a huge container of coffee for everyone. He always had a smile and always had a great story.

I haven't even covered his extreme joy when he was able to race the outboards with his two boys. They both have had quite a bit of success, but with his guidance and humble nature, you would never hear them boast. They would only offer help and encouragement to the others, including loaning a

boat and motor to others (multiple times).

To end, I will steal a quote from Matt Yarno, who is with Seattle Outboard Association and a good friend of mine. "Our sport of hydroplane racing needs 10 more like Eric!" ❖

Former unlimited president/CEO passes away.

Bob Gobrecht, a former president and CEO of the Unlimited Hydroplane Racing Association (UHRA), passed away on November 11. He was named to head unlimited racing in October 1998 and resigned from the organization a year later.

When he was hired to lead the sport, the UHRA needed a business leader with event and marketing experience, and Gobrecht was just that person.

Prior to joining the UHRA, he had been the vice president of sales and marketing for the Seattle Mariners. Before that, he had been the CEO of Seattle's Seafair celebration from 1988 to 1993.

Before his retirement in 2014, Gobrecht was the president and managing director for Special Olympics International in North America. ❖

Around the Circuit

Race Site News



Chris Tracy

The Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum (HARM) held its annual dinner, awards presentation, holiday party, and Board of Directors election on December 8. About 120 people attended and the museum was festively decorated.

Museum Director David Williams summarized 2018 events. He remarked that “H1 put on races in five states, but HARM boats appeared in seven states” and the museum ran a total of 10 boats.

There were several highlights in 2018. One was filming in California of the T-Mobile commercial, which had 23 million views. Another highlight was the Lucas Oil biplane race/exhibition with Dixon Smith’s *Miss Bardahl* at the HAPO Columbia Cup race in the Tri-Cities. And, 10 unlimiteds were in Chelan, Washington, in October.

Williams also highlighted additional museum accomplishments. He noted that in nine out of the past 10 years, the museum had a budget surplus at the end of the year, and that there would be a surplus in 2018, too.

The museum raised about \$550,000 in 2018 and \$8 million over the past 15 years. Williams explained that 82 percent of museum funds go toward its non-profit mission; that compares favorably to other non-profits such as the Salvation Army and Easter Seals and is a considerably better ratio than non-profits such as the Smithsonian.

With the 20th anniversary of the *Madison* movie coming up next summer, the holiday party program was about making the film. Williams proudly noted that

while making the movie, the boats generally ran reliably, fast, and safely. Williams, Ike Kielgass, and Ken Muscatel all talked about the filming and the difficulty of trying to stage filming when traveling 130 mph.

Williams told a story of a boat turning in front of him too quickly and, to avoid an accident, he was almost thrown out of the boat and broke five ribs. If he had taken the ambulance to the nearby Madison hospital, filming would have stopped because an ambulance was required to be on-site during filming. So, Williams walked to the hospital so the show could go on.

At the hospital, Williams saw actor Bruce Dern, who was finishing his hospital physical; Dern greeted Williams with a slap to the back!

Four recipients of perpetual awards were announced at the HARM gathering.

◆ The Gold Cup Award is the museum’s highest award and recognizes outstanding long-term service in both grass-roots and leadership roles. Jere Heiser is this year’s recipient.

◆ The President’s Cup Award honors a member who had made significant ongoing cash contributions. Mike and Lori Jones were honored with the award this year.

◆ The Wahoo Cup is awarded to the unsung enthusiast who has contributed to the museum’s success with efforts in the trenches. Gale Whitesteine received the award.

◆ The Motorhead Award name speaks for itself and Larry Kraemer was selected.

David Williams noted that there has been interest in possibly turning his book about Mira Slovak, *A Race to Freedom*, into a movie or into a series of TV programs. Williams has meetings scheduled to pursue both leads.

Unlimiteds Unanimous Awards

Each year Unlimiteds Unanimous (UU), the club that publishes the Unlimited NewsJournal, votes awards for the season.

◆ The Rookie Driver of the Year Award is not always given each year, as the criteria includes that the rookie driver must show potential to win a race in the future. This year members voted to name a rookie of the year and awarded it to Aaron Salmon.

◆ The criteria for Crew Chief of the Year includes getting the most out of the boat. Jeff Campbell was the winner with Taylor Evans of the 440 getting honorable mention.

◆ Driver of the Year is awarded to the driver who got the most out of his boat. Andrew Tate was selected, but UU members noted the accomplishments of Dustin Echols.

◆ Boat of the Year was the most contested award this year. The criteria is which boat would likely win a mythical year-end race. Some members thought the new *Home-Street* boat would win. Others pointed out that the U-9/Jones Racing boat won most races in 2018. In the end, the U-9/Jones Racing was Boat of the Year. ❖

HydroFile

Race Team News



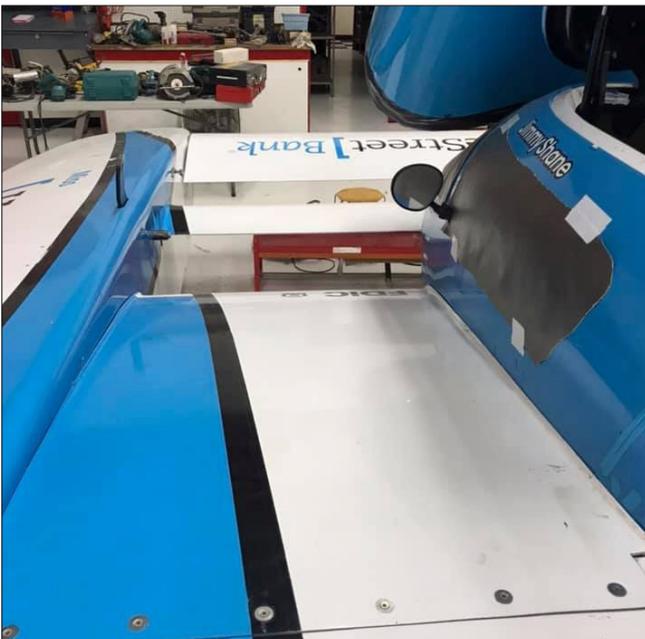
Lon Erickson

U-1 HomeStreet Racing/Miss Madison

Customary off-season work continues at the HomeStreet Racing shop in Tukwila, Washington, on both racing hulls. The newer 2018 hull will be the primary raceboat for the 2019 season, while the #0706 hull will be race-ready.



HomeStreet Racing



Cindy Shirley

U-11 Unlimited Racing Group

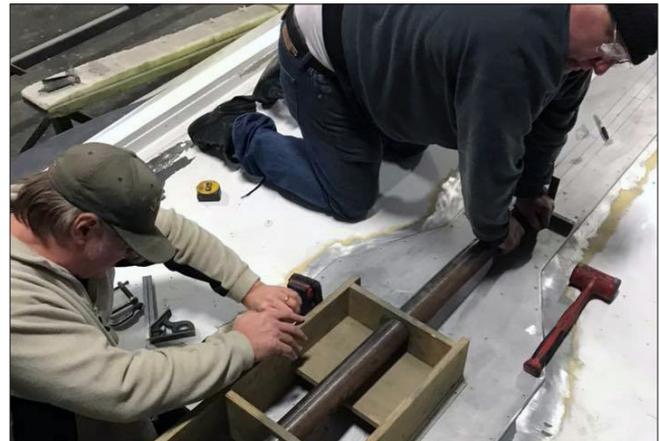
As a result of some damage incurred to the hull this past season, the *Reliable Diamond Tool* presents *J&D's* team drilled a new shaft line through the bottom of the hull. The team used a 10-foot long hole saw to pierce through the inner and outer honeycomb skin. Scott Raney has also been busy working on the inventory of turbine blades.



Unlimited Racing Group



Unlimited Racing Group



Unlimited Racing Group

U-27 Wiggins Racing

Charley Wiggins reported a major rebuild is underway for their raceboat. As you can see from the photos, entire new center-section construction is underway around the existing cockpit. Still to be determined is the direction they will go on the rebuild for sponsors.



Wiggins Racing



Wiggins Racing

U-99.9 Leland Miss Rock-KISW/CarStar hull

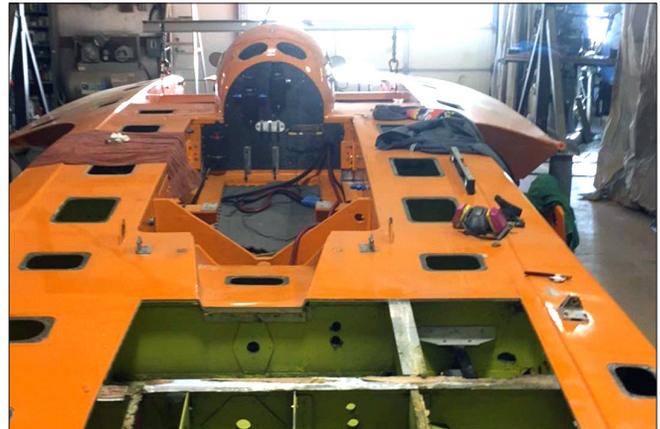
Spotted recently south of Seattle, along Interstate-5 on the Graham Trucking lot, was the *Miss Rock* hull and trailer. The hull has since been moved inside, out of the weather at the same location. More details will be coming on the status of this hull and equipment.



Jon Schonert

440 Bucket List Racing

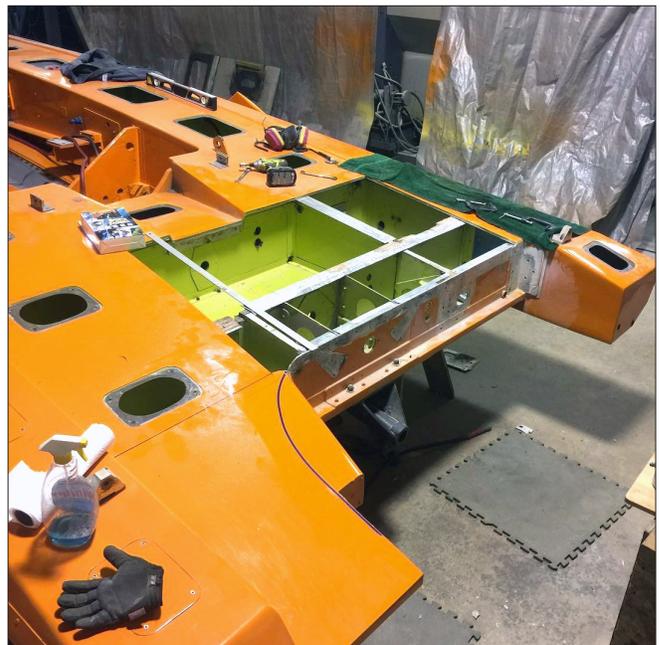
The BLR team continues to seek more handling and speed from the 440 hull. They feel steering improvements are the way to go and have removed a portion of the rear deck to access the transom of the boat. Strengthening of the transom to handle a stronger rudder bracket will enable them to run a bigger and deeper rudder.



Bucket List Racing



Bucket List Racing



Bucket List Racing

Evans Brothers (Chelan)

Work continues in Chelan, Washington, on the former Ellstrom hull, which was acquired by the Evans team. Currently working on prop shaft alignments to determine engine and gearbox locations and specs.



Mark Evans



Mark Evans

Bogert Racing Enterprises (Detroit)

The UR5 hull and equipment has been delivered to Bogert Racing in Detroit, but we have not heard from this group recently on updates or specific plans moving forward.



Denise Garl

U-16 Ellstrom Racing

There have not been any recent developments regarding Erick Ellstrom and racing the U-16 unlimited hull. The hull remains in storage at the Jones Racing shop. The Ellstrom family continues to compete in the Pro Turbo ATV class off-road racing series.



Danielle Garner

T-3 Hull (#8901/#9501)

The former *Miss Budweiser/USA Racing/Degree* hull was recently moved from the HomeStreet shop to the Jones Racing shop and has been under some scrutiny and interest. Paul Steidl spent some time checking out the condition of the T-3 hull and shared photos of the hull on Facebook. Since that time, the status of the hull and trailer is still not known. We have reached out to Paul, and as of this date no response to inquiries on his interest in the hull.



Danielle Garner



Paul Steidl

My \$0.02 Worth

Editorial Comment



Andy
Muntz

We have devoted a good share of this month's issue to the memory of Dave Heerensperger, who passed away on December 2 at 82 years of age. Many thanks to Steve Montgomery, Stephen Shepperd, and Gary Dougherty for their roles in giving our retrospective several different viewpoints of Heerensperger's career.

His achievements were remarkable. He stands in seventh place on the list of owner race victories, but his impact on the sport was much deeper than winning race. His biggest mark was his innovation.

Largely in response to the death of his driver Warner Gardner in 1968, he introduced a radically designed boat the following year with the idea that it would be more stable on the water. The infamous catamaran hull may have been stable, but it also wasn't very fast and was eventually pulled from competition. But, Heerensperger at

least had the guts to try.

He was back the following year with an auto-powered cabover, a move that again caught the interest of people throughout the sport. This was only four years after Ron Musson had been killed driving the cabover *Miss Bardahl*, so the idea of sitting in the bow was still seen as foolhardy. The concept of using auto engines to power an unlimited also had many detractors.

And, once more, the boat turned out to be a failure. The result was bad enough that he switched the boat around the following year so the driver sat behind a Rolls Merlin engine, but at least Heerensperger tried. In fact, he was ahead of his time. Today, the driver of every boat sits in the bow

More importantly, his experience with the *Pride of Pay 'n Pak* in 1970 didn't deter him from trying something innovative three years later. Good thing, because

that time he changed the sport.

The *Pay 'n Pak* that he introduced in 1973 incorporated many new ideas, such as the material used in its construction, a light and strong aluminum product called Hexcel. The boat also introduced the horizontal stabilizer, which soon became a standard component of every hydroplane.

His next boat also revolutionized the sport. It wasn't the first to be powered by a turbine, but was the first to make it clear that turbine engines could be successful. The pattern he set with the *Pay 'n Pak* launched in 1980 has since become the standard.

Heerensperger fully understood that big innovations will sometimes fail. But, he also knew that important change will never happen unless someone is willing to try. ❖

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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, January 13, 2019

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