

Getting to know Dylan Runne

When Dylan Runne took U-91 Miss Goodman Real Estate for some test laps on Saturday at San Diego last September, rumors began swirling that he may be in line for an opportunity to drive an unlimited hydroplane. A few weeks later, the announcement was made. He would take over the cockpit of U-1 Miss HomeStreet for the 2023 season. In the following interview, conducted on January 27 by Craig Fjarlie during the American Power Boat Association's annual meeting in Seattle, Runne reflects on his involvement in racing and ponders the incredible opportunity he now has driving the defending national champion.



Miss Madison Racing

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"I met with Jimmy Shane at one of the national meetings that year and said, 'Hey, listen, this is something I'm interested in doing, do you have any advice?' He kind of steered me in the right direction."

Dylan Runne driving *Pleasure Seekers* in the Pro-Lite event at Guntersville, Alabama, last summer.

UNJ: Will you tell us a little about when and where you were born and your early life experiences?

Runne: I was born in Red Bank, New Jersey, home of the 1941 Gold Cup. Overlooked the race-course, actually, at the hospital I was born in, Riverview Hospital. I grew up in Rumson, New Jersey, which had a history of boat racing, as well. Actually, my parents met at a boat race in Rumson, back in the early '70s. So, raised in Rumson, which is a couple of miles from Red Bank. Strong boat racing history on the East Coast, all in that area.

Yeah.

Stayed there through high school. Went off to college at Moravian University, which is a small school in Pennsylvania. Ended up playing baseball there through my four years of college. It was a D3 school. Moved back to the Red Bank area when I left college.

What was your degree in?

I have a degree in business management and finance. But, kinda going backwards, growing up in the Rumson area, I started racing boats in 2003. I'm a third-generation racer. My grandfather, Hank Runne, started racing in North Jersey in the early 1950s, outboard boats.

Do you know what class he raced?

He raced C Stock Runabout, which was his main class, with a Mark 30H Mercury. Then my two uncles and my dad started racing in the mid-to-late-'60s, in outboard boats. They started in J class and progressed their way up. My dad started racing in 1969. He was 10 years old at the time.

And what is his first name?

Rich Runne, Richard Runne. He still races, actually, every once in a while, today, with me. We've actually raced against each other a few times in stock outboard classes. He's still better than me, too! [Laughs.] But, yeah, it's been a family thing my entire life. All my cousins race on both my mom's and dad's side, so growing up we were going to boat races, racing outboards, and really, just a family thing. My uncle, Ed Runne, passed away in July...

Yes, the announcement was in *Propeller* magazine.

He was heavily involved in stock outboard racing. He was a manufacturer of the Sidewinder racing engines, which I did R&D development. I was a test driver for that engine when it was coming about. I was 14 years old, helping in that regard. My dad did a lot of the manufacturing side, helping to support that. But he was heavily involved in all aspects of stock outboard racing. And then my other uncle, John Runne, is more involved in boat building for stock outboard. My history and roots, both sides of my family for three generations, has been deep in stock outboard and APBA.

When you started racing, did they build your boats for you?

They did, my dad actually built my first boat for me in 2002. It was a J Stock Hydro. It was a kit boat from BeZoa's Hydroplanes, Shanon and Craig Bowman, a family in boat racing. Built it in the garage, my dad, when I was eight years old. So, that was kinda my first boat. My first boat ride,



Chris Denslow



Dyan Runne pilots *Pleasure Seekers* on Guntersville Lake

by myself, I was seven years old, at Lockhaven, Pennsylvania. I was hooked. Five to seven, I raced quarter midgets and got my first taste of racing at a pretty young age.

Then, as soon as I was old enough to race boats, I moved into boats. 2003 was my first race in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. My birthday is July 3, and that race, I think it was July 8, so five days after turning nine, I was allowed to race. That was my first go at it. I was hooked ever since. Raced J Class until I was 13 years old. Won two nationals in J. I was inducted into the Hall of Champions in 2008, five years after starting racing. Then I moved on to some of the bigger classes and kind of progressed through the ranks.

In outboards?

In outboards, yup.

Did you have a favorite class?

My favorite class was B Stock Hydro. It's a fast, light boat powered by one of my uncle Ed's Sidewinder engines, which was cool, you know, to help develop and be a part of. I had success racing outboards. I was racing against Jimmy Shane, Andrew Tate, and J. Michael, all those guys. I kind of grew into racing with them in outboard stuff.

Went off to college. I slowed down in racing for the four years I was in college. Focused on playing baseball. Toward the end of college, I started thinking about what I wanted to do next in racing. I was

ready to get back into it. It was 2016, the Shane family actually took me to Valleyfield.

Oh!

It was my first really big inboard race. From what I saw, I was immediately hooked. My dad is in the automotive industry, so he can adjust the valve train. He does all the valve train components for NHRA, NASCAR, IMSA, street applications, and pretty high-performance rocker arms, belt drives, lifters, things like that. We have this kind of automotive background and understanding of how to go racing, but never were able to apply it to the stuff we were doing at the time.

What's the name of the company?

Jesel Valve Train, Inc. We're based in New Jersey, been around for 42 years. It's really kind of high-end racing components. Anyway, I went to Valleyfield and I saw just the size of the event and the speed and the sounds and was immediately hooked on high-end inboard racing.

Were you one of the first in the family to go inboard racing?

I was the first in the family to go inboard racing.

Everybody else stayed in outboards?

Everybody else stayed in outboards, yeah. So, I said I was going to call my dad. I said, "Hey, we need to figure out a way to do this. I don't know where we

start, but this is something I feel really passionate about that I want to do and take my racing career to the next level." That was 2016, so not that long ago.

Talking to Jimmy Shane and J. Michael, they were moving on at about that time, too. Did they encourage you in any way?

They did. Jimmy, the Shane family, were really important pieces of me going inboard racing. I met with Jimmy Shane at one of the national meetings that year and said, "Hey, listen, this is something I'm interested in doing, do you have any advice?" He kind of steered me in the right direction.

Actually, the Hearn family, Richard Hearn, he's my business partner as well, and I was working with him at the time, and he was going inboard racing from outboards as well. The Hearn family knew a lot of history in APBA, they were kind of making the switch from outboard racing to inboard racing. I tagged along a little bit with them, too, and I learned they were going 350 racing with Donnie Allen. I crewed a little bit that 2016 year



Runne was the winner of the Pro-Lite event in Guntersville

to learn more about what it would take to go do it.

In the meantime, my dad and I were working on our plans to buy a 2.5-litre hydroplane and go racing on the Hydroplane Racing League series. We bought Bobby King's boat, Jimmy King's son's 2.5-litre in September 2016, and we redid the entire boat, rebuilt the engines, and the Shane family helped us put together our trailer and helped us navigate where we needed to go inside HRL. We were off and running. We started the 2017 season in the 2.5-litre boat.

With HRL.

With HRL, yup. My first inboard race was actually in Lakeland, Florida, and it was a winter race. We went down in March and I got some seat time there. Then we went to Cambridge, Maryland, my first HRL race in the series. We were really fast, and I had a starter go in the final. I didn't make it into the final that year, didn't get off the beach. But I actually won the next race in Canada, Ontario, I think.

We were starting to see some success early, and I ended up winning the 2.5-litre HRL championship that year. So, the way HRL works is you graduate from class to class, essentially, if you want to go up.

The next class was the Formula 2500 class, which is essentially the same boat and motor just more experienced drivers. We went out the next year and got second in the first two races and I won the next two races in the 2500 class. Bobby King and I actually went head-to-head pretty much all season. I was in the same boat, and he was driving for a guy named Al Thompson. I ended up winning the championship that year, 2018, in 2500 by about four points total on the year. It was really close, down to the last final. I ended up winning the last final of the year in Beauharnois, Quebec. I ended up winning the driver of the year, the championship, and team of the year with HRL, in 2018.

That's when Roger Mahan Motor-



Jimmy Shane (left) encouraged his friend Dylan Runne to get some experience in an Unlimited.

Chris Denslow

sports approached me and asked if I'd be interested in taking over for Jimmy King in 350. Jimmy was kind of focusing more on the Unlimited stuff and working with Bobby. So, I took over that ride and my dad took over the engine program at Jesel. We kind of put this team together to say, "We're gonna go race the 5-litre class."

So, I moved up another class the following year. This is getting me into 2019. We ended up having some early success there as well and won some races early on in the year. We were really fast, and we ended up winning that championship for the third consecutive year. So, we won the 350 championship in HRL.

I made a deal with Roger Mahan that if I won the championship for the third year in a row, he would put a GP program together for me. I don't know if he expected us to win that year, but he stuck by his word and he ended up buying two brand-new Grand Prix boats from Henderson Hydroplanes and Jamie Auld. We've been working on that program ever since the 2019 season.

In 2020 when Covid hit, we didn't do much racing that year. Then 2021 came around and I didn't have a ton of plans. We weren't going back to HRL because they were still shut down. We raced the 350 one or two times that year, but I

also ended up putting together a Formula 1 tunnel boat program, Richard Hearn and myself. We built an F1 program and won a couple races on the F1 circuit for 2021. That's part of where I learned how to drive something new, which actually taught me a lot about different styles of boat racing and things like that, which was valuable.

Yeah.

Then fast forward to 2022 and we were ready to go back to the GPA series. We were still working on our GP boat, but we were going to take our 350 back out. Earlier in the year, I started having conversations with Jimmy Shane, understanding a little bit about what his trajectory was and where he was with his career. He kinda indicated that, you know, he was exploring retirement and asked if I'd be interested in possibly driving an Unlimited at some point. My response was, "A dream come true, I would love to do so."

We just kept the conversation going. I ended up going to Gunterville and we won the Pro-Lite race there, 350. Spent some time with Jimmy. Sat in the U-1 and just started getting a little bit more familiar with how the sport was working in regard to H1. A couple more races on, we had more success with the 350 class at a couple of races.

July came around and Jimmy called me up and said, “Hey, I think there’s an opportunity for you to get some seat time at San Diego, if you’re still interested in driving Unlimiteds.” I said, “Absolutely, I would love to.” So, we showed up at San Diego and I showed off my gear and walked up to Charlie Grooms and said, “Hey, I’m Dylan Runne and I’m here to drive the boat, I guess.” Haven’t looked back since.

We watched you take the U-91 out.

It was awesome, I really enjoyed the experience. Totally different type of boat ride. I got to start integrating with the team a little bit, understanding how these boats work and what the procedures are. I learned a lot in just that first weekend.

Did they go through the starting procedure for the engine, and everything?

Yup. I spent some time with Jimmy on the starting procedure on both. I started the 91 and the 1 and kind of went back and forth just to understand. So, I learned that piece of it and I don’t think I slept that night. You know, this is the first time in the boat, right? I think it’s easy for a lot of people to forget their first time in an Unlimited because they’ve been doing it so long. Andrew [Tate] was really good just coaching me

through, how to think about it. Then I got with Jimmy and he kinda eased some nerves, too. Jimmy was just great through the whole process as well.

So, anyway, got to take out the 91 that Saturday morning and got to experience what an Unlimited hydroplane was. It was just a dream come true at the time, and still is. I thought it went well for my first time in the boat. Had some good conversations with Charlie and Mike Hanson after, about what the potential for this coming year would look like. We didn’t call too much, just said, “Hey, we all have to work some things out in the time being and we’ll get back together in the next few months as we have more visibility for next year.”

Charlie called me in the October time frame and we sat down and talked about me coming on to drive one of the boats. It was kind of up in the air whether it was going to be the 91 or the 1 at that point. It was really based on where Andrew was gonna land with the Madison team.

Yeah.

And obviously, Mr. Goodman wanted Andrew in the boat and thinks he will do a great job, and I do, too. Andrew’s one of my best friends but also just a phenomenal boat racer.

He comes from a family that has been involved...

Another family that has been involved for a long time. I’ve known the Tate family, influenced my life for a long time. So, when Andrew went in the 91 with the Goodman guys, Charlie called me up and asked me if I’d be interested in taking over the 1 and obviously, a dream come true again.

You know, you don’t get a lot of those opportunities in life, so I did a lot of self-reflection about what my future was and it was kind of one of those things that if you pass up an opportunity like this, it probably won’t come around again. So, I called him, I said, “I’m all in, let’s go do it.”

Andrew and I flew out to Seattle in November and just started working around the team a little bit, getting an understanding of how the year was going to look. That’s really where we are today. I’m spending a lot of time with the team this week, trying to get acclimated over at the shop and getting in the boat, starting to figure out what I need to change in the cockpit. I had a good time taking Jimmy Shane’s name off the boat yesterday!

After you drove the 91 at San Diego, we heard that you were a little surprised at how much effort it took, the strength required. Have you started a workout procedure?

Absolutely. You know, it’s going to be a learning curve for sure, but I think having the right people around me and having the team around me is going to shorten that learning curve. The better physical condition I can be in, I think it shortens it even more. We’re out there competing for wins every weekend.

How does it feel to go from, maybe, a semi-professional 350 class up to a professional class, and possibly doing public relations sometimes?



Chris Denslow

Runne with his driving gear, getting ready to drive an Unlimited for the first time last September in San Diego.



Runne prepares to take a test drive in *Miss Goodman Real Estate*.

It's certainly different, that's for sure. I feel I'm generally prepared for it. In my personal life, I started a business in 2019, heavily focused in e-commerce for retail companies. We help major, big-box retailers such as Home Depot, PacSun, Hot Topic, and David Yurman, luxury brands that sell product online. Through that, I've gotten a lot of experience speaking in public. I speak on stages frequently; I do a lot of trade shows.

So, that was part of the conditions when I spoke with Charlie at first. There are a lot of expectations from a sponsorship perspective and a lot of expectations on a race weekend to be able to do public speaking and fan engagement. That was really exciting for me. I think it's great for the sport. I think the value I can add to the sport is being able to engage with people and being able to help drive the next generation of Unlimited racing with the fans and with H1, and with our sponsors and the race sites. I've already been working with Charlie on a lot of exciting ideas and working with our media people at HomeStreet about things we can do to bring it to the next generation of boat racers.

One of the things people have commented on is that there are not a lot of people who are hard-core fans, like there were when I was growing up. I don't know how they change that to draw them in, but it's something they need to

work on.

Absolutely, and I think my conversations have really been around putting personalities behind the boats. I think there's a lot of, "The blue boat's fast, the red boat's fast, the Strong boats are fast," but they don't really do a ton of, "Who's in the boat" and the story behind that person. I think it's really important as to what is the future, putting a face behind all of it and putting some level of the story of how we all got here, right?

If we all have a unique perception of it and a unique view of boat racing and of how we all interact together and how we got here, I think that helps build that connection to the sport, connection to the people who are in the seats. And also, from the lower level, the power that kind of builds up, to opportunities

to drive Unlimited hydroplanes. Myself, I'm really one of the first newer folks in this sport in the last few years in a competitive boat.

Starting out.

Starting out in the best boat.

Not many people do that.

I think it starts to tell this story, if you watch Formula 1, how they bring people through Formula 3, Formula 2, into Formula 1, right? But they're putting younger and younger people in the best cars, right? I think this starts to show the younger generation of racers that there is an opportunity for you to go race the highest level, and if you work hard and you are focused and represent yourself well, if you continue to do well racing-wise, it creates opportunities for you to drive at the highest level.

I think that's another thing that we need, to show people a path to be able to do what I've been able to do here. It's no secret that there have been a lot of great people behind me and a lot of support to get there, but anyone can do it, right? I think any kid racing J Hydro today should have aspirations that this is what they want to go do.

Yeah, yeah. Well, we've covered a lot and that's great. This interview is like an introduction of you to people who read the *Unlimited NewsJournal*. This is really great.

I appreciate it, thank you. ❖



Runne turned several laps above 150 mph on Mission Bay.

Gold Cup goes to Seattle.

The H1 Unlimited Board of Directors has awarded the 2023 APBA Gold Cup to Seattle. The race will be held on Lake Washington on August 4 to 6.

This will be the 113th running of the Gold Cup and the first time the sport's most renowned event has been held in Seattle in 38 years. The winner of this year's HomeStreet Bank Cup hydroplane race will also win the coveted Gold Cup trophy.

"We are thrilled to award the APBA Gold Cup to Seattle," said Tim Austin, the chair of the H1 Board. "Seattle has a long tradition of Gold Cup racing and remains the home of most of the unlimited hydroplanes that compete in our racing circuit, which includes events across the nation. Bringing this prestigious race to Lake Washington after so many years away will spark new excitement into the annual race here and provide Seattle race fans with a tremendous show."

Seattle's tradition with the Gold Cup goes back to 1950 when Stan Sayres built the *Slo-mo-shun IV*, set a new world's straightaway speed record, then went to Detroit and dominated that year's Gold Cup race. That victory brought the event to Seattle for the first time in 1951.

In the years since, Seattle has hosted the Gold Cup 14 times and has honored champions such as Lou Fageol, Joe Taggart, Stan Dollar, Bill Muncey, Jack Regas, Ron Musson, Billy Schumacher, and Dean Chenoweth. The winner of the last Gold Cup held in Seattle was Chip Hanauer, the driver of *Miller American* in 1985.

The race will be part of Seattle's annual Seafair Festival, a multi-week celebration with events across the Puget Sound area that touch more than two million people. Eric Corning, the president and CEO of Seafair, said they are excited for the return of the APBA Gold Cup to Seattle after so many years.

"This event has a rich history in the Pacific Northwest, and we are proud to be a part of that tradition," he said. "The Gold Cup is the premier event in hydroplane racing, and we are excited to showcase the world's fastest race boats and top drivers on Lake Washington. We invite everyone to come out and experience the excitement of this iconic race and enjoy all that Seafair has to offer."

Bill Cahill, the president of Beacon Plumbing in Seattle, will be a sponsor of the event. "As a company rooted in Seattle and committed to supporting our local community, we are excited to participate in this historical event and witness the world's fastest race boats in action at Seafair 2023," he said.

Tickets for the Seattle Gold Cup are on sale at Seafair.org. ❖



Chris Denslow

Detroit will host an H1 race in 2024.

Race organizers in Detroit have signed a Letter of Intent with H1 Unlimited to hold a race in the Motor City during the weekend of July 12 to 14, 2024. The agreement holds that date on the 2024 H1 Unlimited Racing Series schedule and provides the race organizers with the assurance they need to seek sponsors for the event.

The agreement was announced in an article that appeared in *The Detroit News*.

"We wanted to firm it up sooner rather than later, and we couldn't get any guarantees of what we would have as a show," said Doug Bernstein, a board member for Detroit Riverfront Events, the race organizer. "We thought with an additional year of planning, it would be much better rather than scramble to put the event together. We decided to do it right."

Detroit has a long history of hosting the fastest race boats in the world. The city's first event was the APBA Gold Cup in 1916. The unlimiteds last raced at Detroit in 2018.

Two groups had expressed an interest in bringing the unlimiteds back to Detroit in 2023, but neither was able to get the financial support needed to hold the event. With their agreement with H1 Unlimited in place, Detroit Riverfront Events will use the next year to find a title sponsor.

"We didn't want to go to sponsors without knowing what it was that we were offering them, in a way of a show," Bernstein told the *Detroit News*. "We didn't want to go to sponsors and ask them to put their money behind a show that we couldn't guarantee would be what the people wanted." ❖

THE RIDE THAT LED TO A DYNASTY



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

BY A.J. MUNTZ

Sixty years ago this month, people visiting Lake Maggiore Park in south St. Petersburg, Florida, one Monday morning heard an unusual, rumbling, warbling sound off in the distance. Others in the city heard it, too. It seemed to come from the southwest and, sure enough, if one was near the campus of Eckert College or the old Sunshine Skyway Bridge, the sound was even louder.

Four miles farther in that direction was Tierra Verde, a collection of islands at the threshold between the Gulf of Mexico and Tampa Bay. A road and bridge to the islands was completed the previous December. A crowd gathered on the eastern shore of Tierra Verde could not only hear the sound clearly, but they could also see that it was coming from a strange-looking speedboat. The thing was flying across the water's surface and throwing a plume of white water high into the air behind it.

As fascinating as the peculiar boat might have been, however, that wasn't what had attracted most of the people who were there watching that morning. Instead, the object of their interest was the filming of an episode for a popular television series called *Route 66*.

The series chronicled the adventures of two young men as they drove around the nation in their Corvette, working at odd jobs, helping people, and searching for adventure. The production crew was filming an episode titled "But What Do You Do in March?" and the boat was playing a key role. According to the script, one of the main characters was hunting down a speedboat driver who wrecked his dinghy and, in doing so, the pair got mixed up with two rich spoiled women. The episode would be broadcast in early May during the show's regular Friday night time slot on CBS.

The thing that compelled most of the people to cross that new bridge onto Tierra Verde that morning was the prospect of catching a glimpse of the show's handsome star, Martin Milner, or perhaps his new co-star, Glenn Corbett. But one man wasn't concerned about that. He was smitten by the boat and was eager to meet the person who was driving it.

In his late thirties, tall with dark hair, the man looked every bit the part of a wealthy Florida sportsman—from his expensive slacks, to his diamond-studded watch, to the open-collared shirt that framed a gold medallion hanging from his deeply tanned neck. The day before,



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

Guy Lombardo behind the steering wheel of *Goldcupper*.

while at home on his 11-acre estate in Lakeland, about 50 miles away, he read a newspaper article about the filming of the *Route 66* episode. But what fascinated him was the accompanying photograph. It showed the famous bandleader Guy Lombardo standing beside a strange looking race boat with four seats.

Intrigued, the man flew his helicopter to Tierra Verde that morning so he could see the thing in action. He watched intently as the craft roared back and forth across the sapphire-blue waters of Tampa Bay for the camera crews then saw it slow down, turn toward the island, and drift to a stop next to a pier.

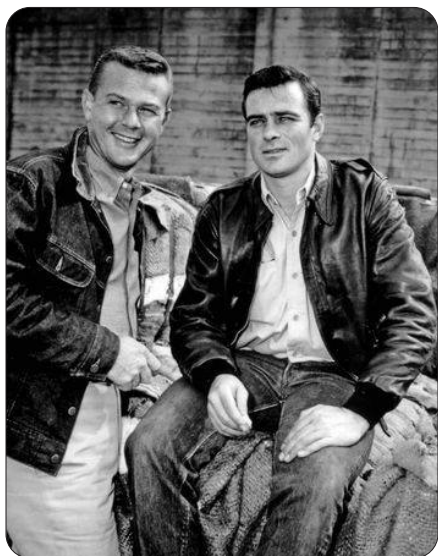
The boat was shaped like a flying saucer. It had a striped mahogany deck, a bright red fiberglass shell covered a huge engine that sat in front of an open cock-

pit with four seats, and mounted behind the passengers atop a section of red cowl-ing stood a triangular-shaped white tail fin. The name "*Goldcupper*" was painted in simple blue letters on the boat's side.

The driver climbed from the boat's cockpit and stepped onto the dock. The tall man from Lakeland recognized immediately that it was Lombardo.

In most circles, Guy Lombardo was better known than the two stars of the television series he was helping to film. He was the leader of one of America's top dance bands: Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians, known for playing "the sweetest music this side of heaven." They packed dance clubs from coast to coast, sold millions of record albums, and introduced over three hundred hit songs.

His greatest fame, however, was for



The stars of the TV show *Route 66*, Martin Milner (left) and Glenn Corbett.

a gig that the CBS Radio Network broadcasted live to the nation each New Year's Eve from the ballroom of The Roosevelt Hotel in New York City. At the stroke of midnight, Lombardo's band would always play "Auld Lang Syne" with its distinctive sound—an exaggerated saxophone vibrato and clipped brass phrases.

But Lombardo had two lives—the other a contradiction to the soothing music that his band played. The kindly looking man who stood on the dais each New Year's Eve wearing a bow tie and with baton in hand, had a fierce passion for speeding across the water in race boats.

Lombardo became hooked on the sport in the 1920s, devoured the motor-

boat magazines as he traveled the country with his orchestra, and got involved as a participant when he ordered a limited-class hydro in 1939. After the war, he bought a craft named *My Sin* that had won the Gold Cups in 1939 and 1941, renamed it *Tempo VI*, and drove it to victory on the Detroit River during the 1946 Gold Cup. In total he would win five races as a driver and nine as an owner.

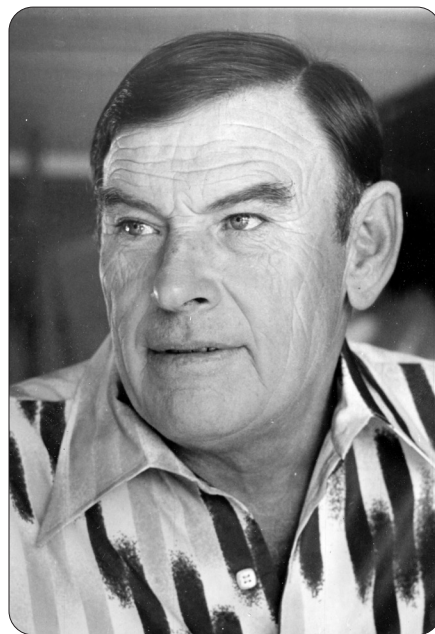
Lombardo's success as a race-boat driver made him the ideal person to pilot the speedboat for the filming of *Route 66*. But he also was there at Tierra Verde for a more self-serving reason. In January he had opened his Port O'Call Resort on the island—a place that would feature stars such as Frank Sinatra, Liberace, and Mel Torme in the years to come.

As Lombardo stood on the dock next to the speedboat, chatting to a couple of men wearing coveralls, the curious man from Lakeland approached to take a closer look at the strange boat. He introduced himself to the band leader and to a fellow named Les Staudacher, the boat's owner.

He told them his name was Bernie Little.

Life was never dull around Bernie Little. A millionaire with a hearty appetite for the finer things of life—the best food and expensive cars—Little had a special affection for things that were loud, fast, and attractive. He was the kind of person who knew the first name of every headwaiter at every fine restaurant in town. Smooth in social circles, he could walk into a crowded room, wouldn't hesitate to strike up a conversation with a stranger, and always knew what to say.

Influencing people was his greatest skill. He was a shrewd negotiator who had honed to an exact science the art of winning people to his position and getting whatever he wanted. He'd tell a joke with his booming voice, erupt with a hardy laugh, slap the other guy on the back, and would close the deal. As he watched *Goldcopper* rattle the windows on Tierra Verde, Little decided that this race



Bernie Little

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

boat—perhaps the fastest “pleasure boat” in the world—was something he needed to have.

Bernie Little was born in the small town of McComb, Ohio, a place forty-five miles southwest of Lake Erie. It was a place where life was slow and that exemplified the simple values of Midwest America. He developed a strong work ethic at a young age, dropped out of high school when he realized it was easier to make money than do schoolwork, and joined the Navy in 1943. He was assigned to the attack transport ship *U.S.S. Marathon*, a ship that supported the invasion of the Ryukyu Islands in the spring of 1945. During the early morning hours of July 22, 1945, while anchored in Buckner Bay in Okinawa, *Marathon* was hit by a Japanese suicide submarine. Little became one of only thirty-five crew members to survive the explosion.

When he returned home, he opened a restaurant with his brother. But when he bought a 1941 Chevy for \$800, drove to the West Coast, and sold it for \$1,800, he discovered that wheeling and dealing was more profitable. He opened a used car lot in the nearby city of Findlay, Ohio, then moved to Florida, where he landed a job selling cars in Miami. He eventually

This article is adapted from a chapter in the book *At the Ragged Edge*, which tells the story of Gar Wood, Bill Muncey, and the first 100 years of unlimited hydroplane racing. Copies can be purchased through the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum and are available on Amazon.com.



TOP: Bernie Little's four-seater *Tempo* during its stop in Madison, Indiana, in the 1963 season.
MIDDLE: Little taking a group for a ride on Lake Washington. **ABOVE:** With Bernie Little behind the steering wheel, his race team poses for a photo during his first season of racing in 1963.

bought an interest in a Chrysler-Plymouth dealership in Tampa, then invested in a fleet of aircraft and went into the business of chartering and selling airplanes.

As his business grew, the extravagant Bernie Little lived the good life. He bought yachts, buttonholed potential clients in some of the most exclusive private clubs in Florida, and bought the estate near Lakeland. Then he saw the intriguing photo of Lombardo and that incredible speedboat.

Les Staudacher was not only the boat's owner, but was its builder. He built the unique, four-seater *Goldcupper* as a cross between a pleasure boat and a race boat. It would be an ideal tool for getting people interested in boat racing, he thought. Nothing would be quite as convincing than taking a lap around a racecourse at 150 miles per hour.

The boat was not intended to be a racer, though. It barely met the minimum requirements for competition. As a result, it spent its first year of existence largely ignored. Its first real appearance had been the run on Tampa Bay, arranged both to benefit the *Route 66* film crew and to help promote Guy Lombardo's Port O' Call Resort.

Bernie Little didn't know beans about the standards for boat racing competition. All he saw was a boat that went fast, made lots of noise, and would be the gosh-darndest, most impressive pleasure boat anyone would have in all of Florida. He had to own it.

He persuaded Lombardo to give him a ride, so he climbed into one of the passenger seats, Lombardo fired up the engine, and they roared back onto Tampa Bay. Lombardo even let Little take a turn behind the wheel. "When we hit 130 miles per hour, it was the greatest thrill of my life," he remembered. "I had no idea what that boat was worth, but I had to have it."

Little then started dealing with Staudacher. He had a new 38-foot Chris-Craft cruiser, valued at about \$40,000 that his

wife had just redecorated. Would he take that boat in trade for *Goldcopper*, the truck, and the trailer? The boat builder wasn't sure. Little then tightened the net. He got Staudacher aboard his helicopter, flew him to Lakeland, and showed him the big cruiser. That sealed the deal. Staudacher agreed to the trade, and Bernie Little became the owner of an unlimited hydroplane.

Among the first to take a ride in Little's new boat was one of his dearest friends, August A. Busch III, the heir to Anheuser-Busch, Inc., one of the largest brewing companies in the world and makers of Budweiser beer. Busch took a 130-mile-per-hour spin on Tampa Bay, at one point even taking the controls himself, and returned to the dock full of enthusiasm about his friend's new toy. Little then offered a proposal: "Why don't you sponsor the damn thing and we'll go racing?"

Busch asked how much it would cost. "Oh, \$5,000 to buy a little gas," Little replied.

The boat, renamed *Tempo*, debuted about two months later at the 1963 Alabama Governor's Cup race in Guntersville, Alabama. Soon after he arrived, Little introduced himself to the other racers and immediately felt out of place. The crews for the other teams—*Miss Bardahl*, *Tahoe Miss*, *Notre Dame*—were dressed in matching uniforms and in their trucks were loads of tools, spare engines, and parts.

Little had none of that. His team had one engine, few tools, and a two-person crew that included a mechanic who worked at a service station and who knew virtually nothing about Allison's. "What in the hell am I getting into," he said to himself.

He didn't feel any better the first time he sent his boat onto the course—or tried to, that is. His boat's engine let out a loud bang and went dead only feet from the dock. Once the team pulled *Tempo* back to the pits and had it lifted back onto its trailer, Little's mechanics started

taking the engine apart. But they couldn't figure out what had gone wrong. The mystery was only solved when the crew chief of another team happened by. He noticed the puzzled look on the mechanic's face, looked at the partly dismantled engine, and suggested that it might have run better if they had installed the crankshaft pointed in the right direction.

For the rest of the week and during the awards banquet after the race, the unlimited fraternity roared in laughter at the bumpkins from Florida. They poked fun at the strange boat with four seats and at its gas station mechanic who had installed the crankshaft backwards.

But Little didn't find the banter amusing. He hated being the butt of jokes. So, he resolved to do things differently. He went home and got organized. He bought new engines and equipment, and hired an experienced crew and driver.

Although *Tempo* appeared at every race in 1963, and even placed fourth in Seattle, it spent most of the season toward the back of the pack. Yet, the boat was also reliable. From 1963 through 1966, it finished a percentage of the heats that it started that remains among the highest in the sport's history.

The strange boat also made a big impression with the famous actors, politicians, newspaper reporters, and radio personalities who took rides in it. The \$5,000 contribution also made Busch happy enough he increased his involvement to \$25,000 the following year.

Little reciprocated by getting a stronger competitor, the four-year-old former *Maverick* hull and by painting the name "*Miss Budweiser*" on its side. For the paint job, he kept the same Old West motif that William T. Waggoner had used when he owned the boat: gold with red and white trim. It was a color scheme that Little would use on his *Miss Budweiser* hydroplanes for the next three decades.

The \$25,000 deal in 1964 turned to \$40,000 the following year and eventually grew to seven figures—and become the longest running sponsorship in all of motor sports. From the filming of that *Route 66* episode sixty years ago and that embarrassing debut in Guntersville, Bernie Little would go on to win 134 races, over three times that of anyone else in history. Along the way he'd also win 14 Gold Cups and 22 national titles, making him by far the most dominate owner the sport has ever known. ❖



After his team's rough start at its debut in Guntersville in 1963, Bernie Little got more serious and enjoyed enough success during the rest of the season that Anheuser-Busch signed on as a sponsor. In 1964, he bought the former *Maverick*, renamed it *Miss Budweiser*, and the rest is history.

Sandy Ross Collection

The Way We Were: A Race Shop Time Warp.

BY LON ERICKSON

Photos by Lon Erickson

It's a given that for over half a century the majority of the Unlimited race teams have either been owned, based, or at least had their race shops in and around the Seattle area. Considering race history, the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum, and the overall number of race teams, owners, and supporting industries, the greater-Seattle area is truly "Hydrotown."

The race shops in themselves are a side of racing that most fans don't get the opportunity to see "behind the scenes." Depending on the nature of the team, owners, their budgets, and other factors, these shops come in all sizes, shapes, and uses.

Below are photos that were taken in and around hydro race shops in the Seattle area. Some of them are still active. Some have changed ownership or locations, and some have closed their doors and no longer exist. Here is just a sampling of Seattle race shops from the past few decades.

Ken Muscatel/Jay Leckrone/Denise Garl, SeaTac, Wash.

The race shop was used for a series of hulls that were campaigned by Muscatel, then by Leckrone and Garl. It is also used to store Muscatel's vintage collection of multiple-class hulls. The shop was closed when the property was developed for other use.



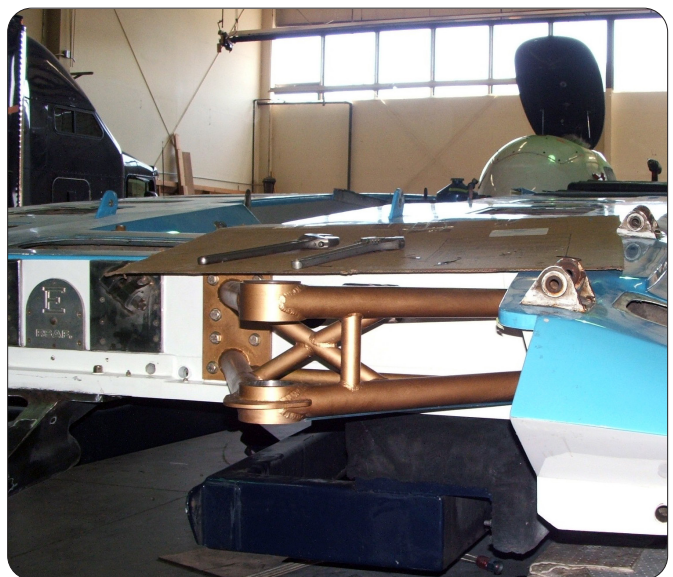
Our Gang Racing/Nate Brown, Preston, Wash.

Home of the U-17. The boat and equipment were sold to Charley Wiggins and the boat is currently undergoing a major rebuild at the Wiggins Racing shop in Gadsden, Alabama.



Ellstrom Racing/5 Axis Industries, Ballard Area, Seattle

Home of the U-16/U-96 race shop and 5 Axis Industries (a propeller design and fabrication business). The racing team has been sold and 5 Axis Industries has moved to Arlington, WA.



Ron Jones Jr. Racing/Strategic Composites, Pacific, Wash.

Primarily boat design, fabrication, construction, and composite work for multiple industries. The business is no longer at this location.



Schumacher Racing, Interbay Area, Seattle

Originally the home to Wurster Racing, sold assets to Billy and Jane Schumacher, and active through 2014. Shop has subsequently been closed.



Unlimited Racing Group/Scott and Shannon Raney, Edmonds, Wash.

After moving on from serving as crew chief and team manager for Schumacher Racing, the Raney's formed their own race team in 2011. The team was first based in Edmonds, Wash., and has since built a new race shop and moved operations to Cle Elum, Wash.



Leland Racing, Kirkland, Wash.

The owner of multiple hulls, Fred Leland built this shop along with complete dyno facilities and paint shop. Even after his passing in 2012, the shop continued as the home for Leland Racing hulls through 2018. Eventually the Leland estate, property, and shop building was acquired by outside interests.



Bernie Little/Hydroplanes Inc., Miss Madison Racing, Tukwila, Wash.

You can't talk about Unlimited hydroplane race shops without discussing the absolute top of the class. The facility started as the home for Bernie Little's Hydroplanes, Inc., and is now the shop for *Miss HomeStreet* and *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, aka Miss Madison Racing, Inc.

After outgrowing race shops in Seattle, Bernie Little wanted the absolute best and most complete facility. Just south of the Lake Washington racecourse, the shop has housed all the *Miss Budweiser* turbine hulls at one time or another, including the design, development, and construction of the *Budweiser* fleet. Other teams also worked out of the facility for repairs and off-season maintenance. To this day, the shop continues to be at the top of the list with the capacity, resources, and means to handle the demands of an Unlimited race shop.



HYDROFILE

Race Team News by Lon Erickson



Go3 Racing

Winter work at Go3 Racing has turned to the Allison in the engine shop.



Go3 Racing

Strong Racing

The U-9 (below) now has the decks on and the cowlings are getting trimmed and fitted. Strong Racing also has announced that Beacon Plumbing, a sponsor of multiple boat teams since 2004, will sponsor the U-8 for the 2023 season. The company's sponsorship coincides with the launch of its new electric division. As a result, the boat will be named *Miss Beacon Electric*. "We are excited to continue our involvement in the unlimited hydroplane community and to support a top-tier team that shares our passion for performance and excellence," said Bill Cahill, CEO of Beacon Plumbing. "This new partnership is a perfect fit for us as we launch our new Beacon electric division, and we are excited to see the team and our brand at all 2023 H1 Unlimited races, reaching new heights of success." The Beacon Electric logo and branding will be prominently featured on the Strong team's U-8 as well as on merchandising. "We are thrilled to have Beacon Electric as sponsor of our U-8 driven by J. Michael Kelly," said team owner Darrell Strong. "Their reputation for quality and excellence is a perfect match for our team and we look forward to a successful partnership."



Strong Racing



Wiggins Racing

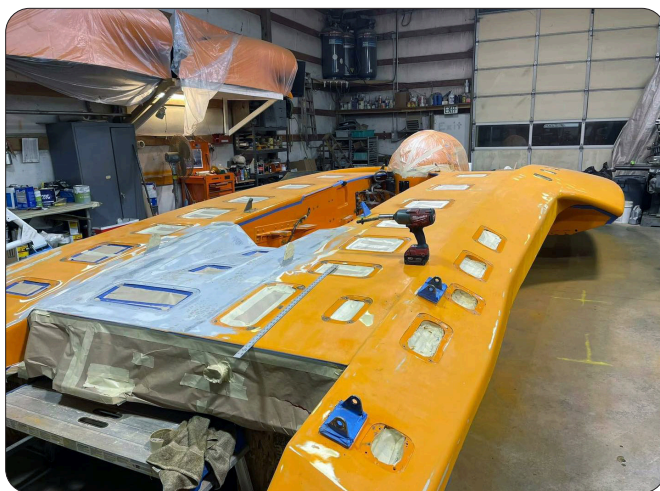
The crew at Charley Wiggins's shop continues work on the new build. Dave Villwock is providing his expertise on the partially finished hull.



Chris Martin

Bucket List Racing

Fabricating additional sets of wings, uprights, and parts for the U-40 have kept the team busy. The U-40 hull will be getting a refresh of paint as we get closer to spring and sponsor commitments are firmed up. Bucket List Racing announced Mike Lemler will be the crew chief of the 440 this season as Brent Hall takes over the driving. Mike has been with the Bucket List team since 2018.



Dustin Echols



Photos by Chris Martin



Bucket List Racing

MY \$0.02 WORTH

Editorial Comment by Andy Muntz



Change is often uncomfortable. Take the new Showdown format, for example.

When the topic is discussed on social media, some people object to the idea. At the core of their concern is that it's not the traditional way to hold a race. Which makes me wonder:

What is a traditional boat race?

I'd suggest that nothing could be more traditional than the first, so let's start there.

When the new-fangled speedboats appeared with internal-combustion engines shortly after the turn of the 20th century, there came a need for some rules to help organize the haphazard races that popped up. So, a bunch of New York yacht club representatives got together early in 1903 and formed the American Power Boat Association. Then, after a summer of running races, they devised an event that might get them some attention. They called it the APBA Open Challenge Cup.

The first of these races was held on Thursday, June 23, 1904. Three boats

lined up on the Hudson River in front of the Columbia Yacht Club and, at 3:05 p.m., somebody fired a starter's gun. So, off they went, headed north. A boat named *Fiat I* got away first but soon hit a log and was taken out, which left *Standard* and *Water Lily* as the only two in the running.

Sixteen miles later, *Standard* reached the halfway point of the race—a yacht named *Queen Bess* that was anchored off the long wharf in Piedmont, New Jersey. Six minutes ahead by this time, *Standard* went around the stake boat and headed south downstream back to the Columbia Yacht Club. It completed the course in one hour, 37 minutes, and 48 seconds—about 23 minutes ahead of *Water Lily*.

Then, if they had such a thing in those days, the calculators would have come out. They had a handicapping formula to equalize the various sizes of boats and engines. (If you must know, they multiplied the area of one piston in square inches by the number of cylinders, times the stroke in feet, times the maxi-

mum rpm, divided by 1,000.) After conducting two more races in the following days, and using that "simple" formula, they then determined who received the fancy Gold Cup trophy they had ordered from Tiffany & Company.

Is that the traditional way to run a boat race? Nope. It has changed since then—many times.

It turned out, fans didn't enjoy watching a race where the boats disappeared up a river. They also didn't like the race winner determined by a complicated formula that only math professors might appreciate. Some of those changes came quickly. The starting procedure had changed by the time the second Gold Cup was held the following September.

And that's my point. Better ideas come up all the time. Tastes change. What people liked 50 years ago, they may not like today. So, like everything, the sport must evolve—especially if it wants to have a future. ♦

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