



Dave Villwock announces his retirement from driving

BY ANDY MUNTZ

The most successful driver in the sport's history has announced his retirement from racing. Dave Villwock, with 68 victories to his credit and, at 71 years old, also the oldest person to ever drive an Unlimited hydroplane in competition, has decided to wrap up a career that has spanned three decades.

Villwock's final season as a driver was spent with BWR Racing last summer, for whom he sat in the cockpit of *Miss Apollo*. "I was privileged and excited to help get the new team BWR started last year and was blessed with another Gold Cup win, which would be the first for this fantastic new team," he said in a statement announcing his decision to retire.

"I committed to drive for one year, which is complete and I couldn't have asked for more. After over 30 years of driving these awesome boats it's time to step away and enjoy some other passions like family, home, and model airplanes. All of which helped me enjoy the successes I've had over the years."

Villwock, a life-long resident of the Seattle area who has recently moved to LaGrange, Indiana, has a record of success in the sport that likely could never be duplicated. Next spring he will be inducted into the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America, joining hydro racing luminaries such as Bill Muncey, Chip



Robert Peters

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Villwock's first victory came at San Diego in 1992, driving *Coor's Dry* in the first race he entered as an Unlimited driver.

Hanauer, and Gar Wood.

Name a performance record in Unlimited-class hydroplane racing and Villwock probably holds it. We've already mentioned his 68 race victories, more than any other person who has ever sat behind the wheel of an Unlimited since 1903.

What about national championships? Yep, during 27 seasons of racing, he's earned 10 titles—seven is the best anyone else has ever done.

Most Gold Cup victories? That, too. Last summer he won the sport's most prestigious race for an 11th time, thus putting him in a tie with Chip Hanauer to have the most in the event's 122-year history. And, remarkably, he took that checkered flag at the age of 71 years old.

Villwock also leads all other drivers in the sport's history with the most perfect weekends (28), the best percentage of races won vs. races entered (43.3%), the most total heat victories (350), and the most races as the fastest qualifier (82).

For good measure, he also holds several speed records. Among them, he claims the current world's kilometer straightaway speed record (220.505 mph), the all-time record for the fastest qualifying attempt (173.384 mph in *Miss Budweiser* at San Diego in 1999); the all-time record for qualifying on a two-mile course (171.796 mph in *Ellstrom* at Nashville in 2005), and the all-time record for

a competition lap on a two-mile course (161.565 mph, again with *Ellstrom* at Nashville in 2005).

He is without question the most successful driver the sport has ever known. And much of that success comes through his technical expertise. His knowledge in what makes a boat go fast, mixed with immense driving ability, has made him a champion like no other.

The knowledge can be traced to his passion for flying radio-controlled airplanes. Hydroplanes, after all, are just funny-shaped airplanes that skitter across the surface of the water—the same laws of aerodynamics apply.

He found that hobby through his Uncle Al, a sheet metal worker who liked to fly model airplanes and who drove a flatbottom inboard on weekends. So, guess what? Villwock became a sheet metal worker who flew model airplanes and, by the time he was 16 years old, started racing flatbottoms. He'd eventually become the national champion in 6-litre hydros driving Jerry Yoder's *Sunset Chevrolet Special* in 1988 and would set a 6-litre record on a 1.25-mile course at over 104 mph.

But it was his technical skill that earned him his start in the Unlimiteds. William Bennett, the owner of the Circus Circus casinos in Las Vegas and Reno, also enjoyed flying model airplanes, and through that connection he got to know Villwock. Bennett also owned an Unlimited hydroplane, the *Miss Circus Circus*.

One day while they were flying model airplanes together at Bennett's private airstrip, Bennett asked Villwock if he'd put together a budget for his boat and a plan to win the national title. While returning home to the Seattle area in Bennett's private jet, Villwock realized that he couldn't say no.

So, with Villwock as crew chief and Chip Hanauer as their driver, the *Miss*



Villwock would win 10 national championships during his racing career. His first came while driving Fred Leland's *PICO American Dream* in 1996, shown here at the San Diego race that season.

F. Peirce Williams



F. Peirce Williams



Villwock's greatest success came while driving for the *Miss Budweiser* team from 1997 through the 2004 season. During that time he won 30 races for team owner Bernie Little, the most that any one driver has ever won for an owner in the history of the sport. During those eight seasons with *Budweiser*, Villwock also won a national title for the team in each of those years and won seven national titles for himself.

Circus Circus won the championship in 1990. Two years later in San Diego, Villwock was asked if he'd like to drive new radical, tandem-winged-hull named *Coor's Dry*. He said yes and won the race. Then, the tally of victories just kept growing from there. It just happened, he seemed to admit to a reporter recently, "You get qualified as a driver and if you're too stupid to quit, you end up where I am."

During his first years as a driver, he struggled with the transition from having been a crew chief. "Sometimes I thought I had too much of my old job as crew chief in me," he told hydro historian Fred Farley. "I worried too much about the equipment when I was out there. I finally got it in my head that my principal job was to run the boat as

hard as I could and bring back what was left."

He joined the Fred Leland race team in 1994 and, two years later, began to enjoy consistent success. When the fleet of Unlimited hydros gathered near Phoenix to begin the 1996 season, there was little doubt among the experts how things would turn out in the end—the winner was likely to be Chip Hanauer and the *Miss Budweiser*, which had won each of the previous five national titles and had arrived with a new boat. Let's just say that Dave Villwock and his low-budget *PICO American Dream* had a different result in mind.

Competing on a Firebird Lake racecourse that was so tight only two boats could be on the lake at a time, Villwock earned the choice of lanes for the final heat, selected the inside lane, and beat



Paul Kermiel

After the *Budweiser* team shut down its operation following the 2004 season, Villwock started driving for Erick Ellstrom and would win another 21 races and two national titles. The boat that he drove for the team, shown here at Detroit as *Ellstrom E-Lam Plus*, won more races than any other individual hull in the sport's history.

Hanauer to the finish line. Villwock then made it two wins in a row with a victory in the Gold Cup on the Detroit River and, as the season continued, added wins in Evansville, Indiana; the Tri-Cities; Seattle; and Kelowna, British Columbia. The team ended the season with a 1,610-point margin over *Budweiser*, giving Villwock his first national championship.

Hanauer stepped aside as the pilot of *Miss Budweiser* midway through the 1996 campaign, which left an opening aboard the Beer Boat. Villwock was happy to accept a compelling offer from Bernie Little to switch his allegiances and join the *Budweiser* team in 1997. "Dave brings a lot to the party," Little said at the time. "He's a tough competitor and very strong technically. Dave has a great desire to win, and he's become a top driving talent."

The move began a relationship that would have historical proportions. During the six seasons that he drove for Bernie Little, Villwock would claim six national team titles, five national driver titles, and 30 race victories—the most that any driver has ever won for a single owner in the history of the sport. He would also add another eight wins and two titles for the team during the two seasons following Bernie Little's death in

2003.

Villwock's time with *Budweiser* included one serious accident, however. While racing in the final heat of the 1997 Columbia Cup at the Tri-Cities, *Miss Budweiser* blew over backwards and landed upside down. When rescuers arrived and opened the emergency hatch at the bottom of the cockpit, they found that Villwock was not breathing, his helmet having been torn from his head and his oxygen mask ripped away. They

revived him and rushed him to the hospital, where they treated an open fracture in his right hand. He lost two fingers in that hand because of the accident.

The story about the incident that best typifies Villwock, was his message to the crew. From his hospital bed, Villwock told them: "Don't send flowers; send points."

After the *Budweiser* team closed shop following the 2004 season, another opportunity presented itself in the form



Chris Denslow

Villwock's final race with the Ellstrom team came at the 2012 World Championship Oryx Cup in Doha, Qatar, where his *Spirit of Qatar* caught fire and was so heavily damaged it would never appear at another event.

of Erick Ellstrom's *Miss E-Lam Plus*. The team had been somewhat successful before he arrived, having won seven races during the previous five seasons, but with Villwock they reached new heights. They won the national championship in 2005, three of seven contests in 2006, and four of six events, and another national title, in 2007.

Disaster nearly struck again during the stop at Valleyfield, Quebec, in 2006. During a qualification run on an extremely tight racecourse set on St. Francis Bay, *Miss E-Lam Plus* suddenly lost its skid fin and careened out of control onto the rocky shore. The boat's left sponson was destroyed, and its bottom was severely damaged, but Villwock emerged painfully, but not seriously, injured.

Later that season, during the campaign's stop in the Tri-Cities, the vivid orange boat caught air as it was leading in the second heat, performed a spectacular end-over-end flip, and landed hard but right-side up. Villwock quickly radioed to his crew that he was okay, refused to be taken to the hospital, and, before the boat could be towed back to the pits, had already started the repair work. With



Villwock drove briefly for Billy and Jane Schumacher in 2014. Here he is about to step on the deck of their *Miss Beacon Plumbing* at Seattle.

its propeller, gearbox, canard wing, and rear stabilizer all replaced, the hydro managed to start the day's next heat and went on to win the event's first-place trophy.

The Ellstrom boat was renamed *Spirit of Qatar* in 2010 and the winning continued—three of six races that first season, three of six again in 2011 plus another national title, and two more victories in 2012. The boat that he drove during these years would become the most successful in the sport's history—finishing its career with 27 race victories, 21 of those with Villwock in the driver's seat.

But, for all the race victories that Villwock would collect during his career, he also attracted a good bit of controversy. That aspect of Villwock's career had its most memorable incident at the 2012 UIM World Championship Oryx Cup at Doha, Qatar. Villwock was disqualified from the event's first preliminary heat for a flagrant fuel violation, then was docked a penalty lap as he entered the course for the second heat and drove *Spirit of Qatar* through a safety zone. That apparently made him so frustrated that he mowed down most of the marker buoys around the racecourse, which earned him another disqualification and caused enough damage to his boat that it could not start the third preliminary heat.

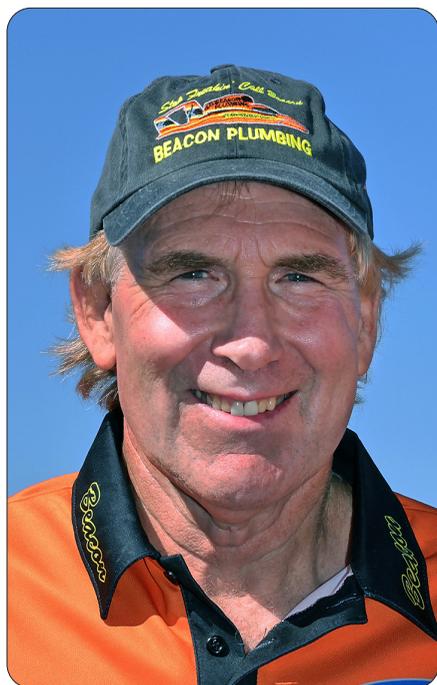
But that was not all for that unhap-

py event. While competing in the fourth heat the following day, the *Spirit of Qatar* collided so heavily with several large waves, that the engine mounts broke, which caused the engine to fall to the bottom of the hull, which severed the fuel line and started a fire that damaged the boat badly enough that it would never race again. It was also Villwock's last appearance with the Ellstrom team.

He returned in 2014 as the pilot of *Cost Less Carpets presents Miss Beacon Plumbing*, a hydro owned by Billy and Jane Schumacher. That relationship lasted for just three races and featured a disqualification and a points penalty for colliding with another hydro at the Tri-Cities, and another disqualification for the same reason a week later in Seattle plus the added penalty of a suspension from driving in the following race.

Villwock then joined with his longtime friend Kelly Stocklin to drive Stocklin's *Miss Beacon Plumbing* in 2021. After contending with gearbox issues in Guntersville, Alabama, Villwock placed second in each of his preliminary heats at the Gold Cup on the Ohio River, was penalized with a flagrant fuel violation in the Tri-Cities, and appeared to win the winner-take-all final heat of the San Diego race, but was disqualified later for having violated the minimum-speed rule before the start.

He started the 2022 season with an-



Dave Villwock in 2021

Chris Denslow

Chris Denslow

Villwock's Driving Stats

| YEAR | BOAT | HULL# | RACE RESULTS | | | | | HEAT RESULTS | | | | | | |
|------|----------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|--------------|-----------|------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| | | | RACES | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | DNO | START | DNS | FINISH | 1st | Pct. | Top 3 | Pct. |
| 1990 | Miss Circus Circus | 9031 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.000 | 0 | 0.000 |
| 1992 | Coors Dry | 92102 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 8 | 3 | 0.375 | 6 | 0.750 |
| 1993 | Miss Circus Circus | 92102 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 10 | 3 | 0.300 | 5 | 0.500 |
| | Miss Circus Circus | 8401 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 11 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 0.333 | 7 | 0.778 |
| 1994 | PICO American Dream | 9399 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 27 | 2 | 22 | 12 | 0.545 | 20 | 0.909 |
| 1995 | PICO American Dream | 9399 | 11 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 43 | 1 | 41 | 13 | 0.317 | 34 | 0.829 |
| 1996 | PICO American Dream | 9399 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 22 | 0 | 22 | 16 | 0.727 | 22 | 1.000 |
| | PICO American Dream | 96100 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 15 | 10 | 0.667 | 14 | 0.933 |
| 1997 | Miss Budweiser (T-3) | 9501 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 0 | 13 | 12 | 0.923 | 13 | 1.000 |
| | Miss Budweiser (T-5) | 9712 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 7 | 7 | 1.000 | 7 | 1.000 |
| 1998 | Miss Budweiser (T-3) | 9501 | 6 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 24 | 0 | 24 | 21 | 0.875 | 22 | 0.917 |
| | Miss Budweiser (T-5) | 9712 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 17 | 15 | 0.882 | 17 | 1.000 |
| 1999 | Miss Budweiser (T-3) | 9501 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 10 | 9 | 0.900 | 10 | 1.000 |
| | Miss Budweiser (T-5) | 9712 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 33 | 0 | 33 | 29 | 0.879 | 32 | 0.970 |
| 2000 | Miss Budweiser (T-5) | 9501 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 1.000 | 4 | 1.000 |
| | Miss Budweiser (T-3) | 9712 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 17 | 10 | 0.588 | 15 | 0.882 |
| | Miss Budweiser (T-6) | 0001 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 6 | 4 | 0.667 | 6 | 1.000 |
| 2001 | Miss Budweiser (T-5) | 9712 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 17 | 10 | 0.588 | 15 | 0.882 |
| | Miss Budweiser (T-6) | 0001 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 8 | 5 | 0.625 | 8 | 1.000 |
| 2002 | Miss Budweiser (T-5) | 9712 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 16 | 0 | 16 | 10 | 0.625 | 13 | 0.813 |
| | Miss Budweiser (T-6) | 0001 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 9 | 4 | 0.444 | 7 | 0.778 |
| 2003 | Miss Budweiser (T-5) | 9712 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 1 | 7 | 4 | 0.571 | 6 | 0.857 |
| | Miss Budweiser (T-6) | 0001 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 18 | 0 | 17 | 6 | 0.353 | 14 | 0.824 |
| 2004 | Miss Budweiser (T-5) | 9712 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 0.857 | 7 | 1.000 |
| | Miss Budweiser (T-6) | 0001 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 17 | 14 | 0.824 | 16 | 0.941 |
| 2005 | Ellstrom E-Lam Plus | 0116 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 0 | 15 | 10 | 0.667 | 14 | 0.933 |
| 2006 | Ellstrom E-Lam Plus | 0116 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 18 | 1 | 16 | 11 | 0.688 | 15 | 0.938 |
| 2007 | Ellstrom E-Lam Plus | 0116 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 24 | 0 | 22 | 18 | 0.818 | 21 | 0.955 |
| 2008 | Ellstrom E-Lam Plus | 0116 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0.500 | 3 | 0.750 |
| | Amos W. Hoss | 0116 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 1.000 | 4 | 1.000 |
| 2009 | Ellstrom E-Lam Plus | 0116 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 23 | 0 | 21 | 14 | 0.667 | 18 | 0.857 |
| 2010 | Spirit of Qatar | 0116 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 26 | 1 | 24 | 19 | 0.792 | 21 | 0.875 |
| 2011 | Spirit of Qatar | 0116 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 24 | 1 | 23 | 20 | 0.870 | 22 | 0.957 |
| 2012 | Spirit of Qatar | 0116 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 23 | 1 | 19 | 12 | 0.632 | 18 | 0.947 |
| 2014 | Miss Beacon Plumbing | 1188 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0.500 | 2 | 1.000 |
| | Miss Seattle | 1188 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0.000 | 1 | 1.000 |
| 2021 | Miss Beacon Plumbing | 0721 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 14 | 3 | 11 | 1 | 0.091 | 9 | 0.818 |
| 2022 | Miss Beacon Plumbing | 0721 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 9 | 4 | 0.444 | 6 | 0.667 |
| 2024 | Miss Apollo | 2427 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 14 | 0 | 12 | 1 | 0.083 | 9 | 0.750 |
| 2025 | Miss Apollo | 2427 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.000 | 0 | 0.000 |
| | Miss Apollo | 0706 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 16 | 0 | 16 | 3 | 0.188 | 10 | 0.625 |
| | | TOTALS | 157 | 68 | 16 | 17 | 2 | 598 | 14 | 555 | 350 | 0.631 | 493 | 0.888 |

other disqualification, this time for going outside of the outer boundary markers, at Guntersville. He then struggled through a series of foibles in the next three events—hitting a log and severely damaged the boat while testing before the Madison race, flipping the boat at the start of the second heat at the Tri-Cities, and getting disqualified from the final heat at Seattle for that minimum-speed rule. He was replaced as the boat's driver before the team finished the season in San Diego.

Villwock's last involvement as a driver resulted after helping Charley Wiggins rebuild his boat (which was severely damaged at Seattle in 2018) and piloting it in 2024 as *Miss Apollo*. That resulted in a third-place finish at Seattle and a fourth-place finish at Guntersville. Before the 2025 season started, the sponsor of Wiggins's boat, Bruce Ratchford, decided to become an owner and formed BWR Racing.

Villwock started the season with the hydro he had driven the year before, but when it flipped and was heavily damaged at Guntersville, he took the controls of another boat operated by the team, a craft that once had its best success while named *Oh Boy Oberto* and *Miss Home-Street*. He wrapped up his career with the Gold Cup victory, a third-place finish at Seattle, and a fourth-place finish in San Diego.

"I owe so much to so many, including my lovely wife," he said when announcing his retirement. "I so enjoyed racing boats for Apollo, the Ratchford family, and all the Apollo employees at all the Apollo companies. Thank you to all the fans and race team members for all of their support and dedication for so many years." ❖



Chris Denslow

Villwock drove for Kelly and Sharon Stocklin in 2021 and 2022. Above, he is driving the team's *Miss Beacon Plumbing* at Guntersville, Alabama, in 2021.

In recognition of Dave Villwock's retirement, we thought we might unlock the vault and go back in time more than 33 years to revisit our report of the 1992 race in San Diego, his first competitive experience in the cockpit of an Unlimited hydroplane. The following was first published in the October 1992 issue of the *Unlimited NewsJournal*.

FROM THE UNJ VAULT:

Damaged Coor's carries rookie Villwock to victory

BY BOB BRAUN

Rookie driver Dave Villwock struggled with *Coors Dry* through the last lap of the final heat trying to keep his boat from sinking. The tandem-winged sensation had a three-foot hole in the left rear bottom. Dave succeeded. He won at San Diego in his first Unlimited race, capping a week-end of surprises.

Chip Hanauer wasn't there to congratulate Villwock, who served as his crew chief on the 1989 and '90 *Miss Cir-*

cus Circus. Chip spent Sunday afternoon in the hospital with another batch of broken ribs from another *Budweiser* flip.

Testing and Qualifying

Miss *Budweiser* ('87) was first on the course at 9:30 a.m. Friday (Sept. 18). Chip faced smooth water and little wind. He ran stunning, back-to-back laps of 170.710 and 170.953 mph, which beat the 2.5-mile world record he established at Detroit this year. Oh! But it won't count, because scheduled qualifying

didn't open until 10 a.m. Then Hanauer qualified the '89 *Bud* at "only" 168.016, a jot off the local record he set with *Circus*. Hanauer did top that mark on Saturday driving the '89 boat at 169.802.

Of the 14 Unlimiteds in the pits, 13 qualified, nine doing better than 150 mph. *Budweiser* and *Winston* each withdrew the slower (!) of their two respective hulls, the '87 *Bud* and the '90 "Winston Select." Stiles Racing's Griffon-powered U-89 (Rod Zap) broke the gear that drives the five fuel pumps. It registered a DNQ, leaving 11 starters for Sunday.

Heat 1

The day's excitement began in the first tum of Heat 1A. Officials sent off a sloppy start after telling *Bud* and *Winston Eagle* (Mark Tate) to decelerate. *Bud*, chasing *Tide*, cornered very hard and very fast into a fresh breeze. It rose from ruffled waters, tilted leftward, then twisted in midair and landed upside down.

The canopied cockpit and action by rescuers saved Hanauer. Heat 1A was re-run following Heat 1B.

Meanwhile, *Budweiser* was towed back to the pits. The *Bud* crew did an amazing job of repair. They would have had their boat ready to race again before the last-chance heat, but their driver



Kirk Johnson

The eventual winner of the 1992 San Diego event was the radical tandem-winged *Coors Dry* driven by rookie Dave Villwock. The boat is shown here in the pits before the race.

Jim Vota



wasn't ready.

Steve David, in *Miss T-Plus*, won the B section. Mark Tate in *Winston Eagle* ('87) set lap and heat records while taking the IA rerun.

Heat 2

Tate came back in 2A with a higher heat speed and won again. David set no records (he was 10 to 15 mph off the "fast flight" pace) but matched Tate's finish. Behind him, Ken Muscatel and Mark Evans had a good match.

Kenny's *Ms. POG* edged out *The Spirit of San Diego*, sponsored by National Dynamics.

Heat 3

Tate ran even faster, another heat record, and completed his sweep of the preliminaries. George Woods, in *Tide*, finished second each time. *Coors* counted two thirds and a fourth—enough to make the final. The Ron Jones, Jr., team used an engine built up from spare parts. Villwock had qualified with their one strong engine, which they saved for the final heat. The strategy paid off.

David, not to be outdone by Tate, won his third-straight B section. *T-Plus*

Jim Vota



Jim Vota



TOP: Two of the favorites for the San Diego race, Chip Hanauer in *Miss Budweiser* (left) and Mark Tate in *Winston Eagle*. **MIDDLE:** The *Miss Budweiser* arrived in San Diego as the defending national; champion and was coming off a victory in the season's previous contest at Kansas City. **ABOVE:** Four Unlimiteds side by side put on a spectacular show for the fans watching from the shores of Mission Bay. From the top, the boats are Kellogg's *Frosted Flakes* driven by Mike Hanson, *Miss T-Plus* driven by Steve David, *Tide* driven by George Woods, and *Miss Budweiser* with Chip Hanauer driving.

STATBOX

Budweiser Mission Bay Cup

San Diego, California; September 20, 1992
2.5-mile course on Mission Bay; 42.5-mile race

QUALIFYING: (1) U-1 *Miss Budweiser* (#8901), Chip Hanauer, 169.802, 40 points; (2) U-1 *Miss Budweiser* (#8701), Chip Hanauer, 165.427, W/D; (3) U-10 *Winston Eagle* (#9210), Mark Tate, 161.832, 30; (4) *Tide* (#8808), George Woods, 160.917; 23; (5) *Winston Eagle* (#8700), Mark Tate, W/D; (6) U-102 *Coor's Dry* (#92102), Dave Villwock, 17; (7) U-99.9 *Miss Hanalei Hotel* (#9299), Nate Broen, 152.524, 13; (8) U-2 *Miss T-Plus* (#8200), Steve David, 152.065, 0; (9) U-6 *Kellogg's Frosted Flakes* (#8808), Mike Hanson, 151.572, 0; (10) U-19 *Ms. POG* (#9019), Ken Muscatel, 149.282, 0; (11) U-50 *Spirit of San Diego* (#8401), Mark Evans, 0; (12) U-106 *Miss Mid-Mark Distributors* (#7455), Jack Barrie, 121.098, 0; (13) U-7 *Miss Properties* (#7902), Jerry Hopp, 105.763, 0; (14) U-89 *Stiles Special* (#8501), Rod Zapf, DNF.

HEAT 1A: Heat stopped when *Miss Budweiser* flipped in the first turn.

HEAT 1B: (1) *Miss T-Plus*, 142.268, Steve David, 23 Points; 23 cumulative pts.; (2) *Spirit of San Diego*, 139.938, Mark Evans, 17, 17; (3) *Kellogg's Frosted Flakes*, 132.763, Mike Hanson, 13, 13; (4) *Ms. POG*, 108.892, Ken Muscatel, 10, 10; *Miss Properties*, DNS, Jerry Hopp; *Miss Mid-Mark Distributors*, DNS, Jack Barrie.

HEAT 1A (Restart): (1) *Winston Eagle*, 153.036, Mark Tate, 40, 70; (2) *Tide*, 147.666, George Woods, 30, 53; (3) *Miss Hanalei Hotel*, 135.499, Nate Brown, 23, 36; (4) *Coor's Dry*, 132.601, Dave Villwock, 17, 34; *Miss Budweiser*, DNS, Chip Hanauer, 0, 40.

HEAT 2A: (1) *Winston Eagle*, 154.467, Mark Tate, 40, 110; (2) *Tide*, 149.816, George Woods, 30, 83; (3) *Coor's Dry*, 123.649, Dave Villwock, 23, 57; *Miss Hanalei Hotel*, DNS, Nate Brown, 0, 36.

HEAT 2B: (1) *Miss T-Plus*, 144.922, Steve David, 23, 46; (2) *Ms. POG*, 138.566, Ken Muscatel, 17, 27; (3) *Spirit of San Diego*, 138.235, Mark Evans, 13, 30; (4) *Miss Properties*, 84.634, Jerry Hopp, 10, 10; *Kellogg's Frosted Flakes*, DNS, Mike Hanson, 0, 13.

HEAT 3A: (1) *Winston Eagle*, 155.383, Mark Tate, 40, 150; (2) *Tide*, 150.470, George Woods, 30, 113; (3) *Coor's Dry*, 128.450, Dave Villwock, 23, 80; *Miss Hanalei Hotel*, DNS, Nate Brown, 0, 36.

HEAT 3B: (1) *Miss T-Plus*, 143.294, Steve David, 23, 69; (2) *Spirit of San Diego*, 135.481, Mark Evans, 17, 47; (3) *Miss Properties*, 74.979, Jerry Hopp, 13, 23; *Ms. POG*, DNS, Ken Muscatel, 0, 27; *Kellogg's Frosted Flakes*, DNS, 0, 13.

LAST CHANCE HEAT: (1) *Kellogg's Frosted Flakes*, 144.305, Mike Hanson, 0, 13; (2) *Spirit of San Diego*, 137.789, Jerry Hopp, 0, 23; *Ms. POG*, DNF, Ken Muscatel, 0, 27.

FINAL HEAT: (1) *Coor's Dry*, 145.177, Dave Villwock, 400, 480; (2) *Miss T-Plus*, 131.406, Steve David, 300, 369; (3) *Miss Hanalei Hotel*, 129.312, Nate Brown, 225, 261; (4) *Kellogg's Frosted Flakes*, 129.312, Mike Hanson, 169, 182; (5) *Tide*, 109.168 (penalized one lap for destroying a buoy), George Woods, 127, 240; *Winston Eagle*, DNF, Mark Tate, 0, 150.

joined *Winston*, *Tide*, *Coors*, and U-99 from the "A" section as finalists.

Last Chance Heat

Mike Hanson made a token appearance in IB, then *Kellogg's Frosted Flakes* sat out the other prelims. The Madison team figured that they couldn't race with *T-Plus*. Therefore, they risked everything on the well-named "Last Chance." They put in their "C" engine. It proved to be enough against crippled competition: *Spirit* had a bad gearbox. By winning, *Kellogg's* "Tony" became the trailer for the final heat.

Final Heat

In the first two laps, the lead changed four times among *Tide*, *Winston*, and *Coors*. Woods led at the start, but Tate, inside, took over in the first turn. Woods regained the lead going down the backstretch. Rounding the south turn, Tate nipped a buoy. (He claimed later that Woods forced his infraction.) Next lap, Woods hit a buoy. Both *Winston* and *Tide* drew one-lap penalties.

Early in lap three, at the end of the long Fiesta Island straight, Villwock brought *Coors* around the outside and into the lead, where he stayed. Tate, clocking the heat's fast lap (152.596), pulled even with *Coors* in lap four, but *Winston's* turbine succumbed to salt build-up and stalled. *T-Plus* finished the five laps in second place.

Third went to Nate Brown in U-99, which bore a "Hanalei Hotel" label and similar advertisements on its cowling. *Kellogg's* was fourth. *Tide* got fifth after the penalty, and *Winston* posted a DNF.

Coors Dry averaged 154.177 for the final heat, by far its best speed of the day. It lapped in the low 150s, showing much potential. Ron Jones Sr. designed the "water airplane" from an idea his father, Ted, once had. *Coors* doesn't depend on air trapped in the between-sponsons tunnel to support its weight. It has two center sections of advanced airfoil shape, one forward and one aft, which lift the



In the outside lane, Villwock drives *Coor's Dry* ahead of George Woods in *Tide* and Mark Tate in *Winston Eagle*.

boat off the water. Jones Marine built *Coors* of carbon-fiber material in only two months. San Diego was its second race.

The happy crowd, estimated at 90,000 by the *Union-Tribune* newspaper, got its money's worth. Mission Bay is record water, but the Unlimiteds often disappoint their fans here. This time, they put on an exciting race with a surprising outcome.

And without *Miss Budweiser*. ❖

VILLWOCK ON WINNING

After his first career victory at the 1992 San Diego event, Dave Villwock sat down with Mickey Kress of the *NewsJournal* staff and had the following short conversation, also first published in the October 1992 *NewsJournal*:

UNJ: Pardon this unimaginative question, but what was it like winning your first unlimited race?

Villwock: It was a great boat race, one we've all been waiting to see almost wish I could have been on the shore to see it! It was the fastest final of the year. There was not enough testing time and not enough equipment, so we had to make some assumptions. JR and the crew gave me such an enjoyable, comfortable ride.

That made my job as driver easy.

Tell us about that last heat.

I didn't know initially what had happened to Winston. I just drove as fast as I could. The boat allowed me to do that. I got around George [Woods] just as he hit the buoy. Then Danny Walters [Coors radio spotter] told me not to worry about Winston and Tide. I checked and saw we had some damaged parts, so at that point we put the boat on cruise control.

What changes were made between Seafair and San Diego? Your qualifying speed hinted at a major improvement.

We made a host of changes. We drew a lot from both Circus Circus boats ('90 champion and three-wing) about

hydrodynamics versus aerodynamics. One afternoon, JR and I got out the grinders and the saws and kind of rolled the dice.

How about crewing and driving?

I see it as a real advantage. I've worked with JR for 10 years developing boats for other people. He asked me to test because he knew we could communicate well. We can decide what to do with the boat 30 seconds after it's out of the water. Another asset was being able to design a propeller to fit this boat.

Is the two-wing concept the design of the future?

We still need to learn more. Is this what we've all been searching for? Well, the jury's still out. The three-wing was a stepping stone for the two-wing. But the two-wing is a step out on the edge. I'd say, it looks like it's here to stay.

What's the strategy for Hawaii?

With the equipment we have, we just aren't able to hurl ourselves at the race course. I can't really go out and abuse the equipment, so every move we make has to be intelligent. However, in order to get national sponsorship, we have to show strength and not just give lip service. ❖

Jimmy Shane will return to Unlimited racing next season

One of hydro racing's most successful drivers will end a three-year absence from the sport and will return to action in 2026, according to an announcement by BWR Racing. Jimmy Shane, 40, a seven-time national champion, returns with a renewed focus and determination after stepping away from competition following the 2022 season so he could spend more time with his family.

During an Unlimited career that started in 2007, Shane had driven boats such as *Graham Trucking*, *Oberto*, and *Miss HomeStreet* to a total of 25 race victories, which ties him with Dean Chenoweth for having the fourth most in the sport's history. Among those wins are five Gold Cups, tying him with the legendary Gar Wood in that category.

Known for his precision, clean driving, and respect for competitors, Shane has long been recognized as both a champion on the racecourse and an ambassador off it. "Signing one of the greatest and most accomplished drivers in H1 Unlimited is a statement of intent," said Bruce Ratchford, owner of BWR Racing. "Jimmy's record, character, and commitment to excellence align perfectly with our team's values and goals."

BWR Racing operated three boats last season: the *Miss Goodman Real Estate* that Andrew Tate drove to the 2025 national championship, the *Miss Apollo* that the retiring Dave Villwock drove to victory in the 2025 Gold Cup, and a *Miss Apollo* that was heavily damaged during the season's first race at Guntersville, Alabama. The selection of which boat Shane will drive in 2026 is still under review, according to BWR Racing, and will be announced later.

"We are proud to welcome him to BWR Racing as we look ahead to what will be a defining season," Ratchford said. "I'm incredibly proud of the group

of drivers we have under contract. Each one brings something unique to our program, and together, they represent the strength, depth, and future of our organization and sport."

Although Dave Villwock, the most successful driver in the sport's history, will no longer drive for BWR Racing, he has pledged to offer his help. "I wish Jimmy Shane and all the BWR team members the very best and will be there to help anytime Bruce or the BWR team

needs it."

"I'm beyond excited to be back in H1 Unlimited racing, especially with BWR Racing," Shane said about his return to the sport. "Stepping away in 2022 to focus on my family was the right decision, but the passion for this sport never left. Bruce and his team have built something truly impressive, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to contribute to that vision. I'm coming back motivated, focused, and ready to give everything I've got." ❖



Jimmy Shane at his last appearance as an Unlimited driver with *Miss HomeStreet* at San Diego in 2022.

Chris Denslow

The 2025 season in review

BY CRAIG FJARLIE

In the early hours of 2025 came word of the passing of Tony Steinhardt of Madison, Indiana. He had worked on the crew of *Miss Madison* and served as Madison Regatta president. In spring, there was news of two other passings, former driver Todd Yarling and Unlimited racing's oldest fan, Bob Burd.

A minor change was made to the race schedule. Guntersville would be the first weekend of June, rather than late in the month, in the hope that problems with inclement weather could be avoided. A May test day was scheduled in Tri-Cities. Scott and Shannon Raney's U-11 would have the FLAV-R-PAC sponsorship that had been associated with Kelly and Sharon Stocklin's U-40, which would be sitting out the season. Other boats at the test session included U-8 *Beacon Electric*, U-9 *Beacon Plumbing*, U-12 *Graham Trucking*, U-21 *Lakeridge Paving*, U-27 *Miss Apollo*, and U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate*. The U-6 *Miss Madison*, a boat leased from Dave Bartsch, was being prepared in Madison and would make its first appearance at Guntersville.

The Tri-Cities test day went smoothly in the morning then, following the lunch break, *Lakeridge Paving* with Gunnar O'Farrell driving, blew over at the end of the backstretch. O'Farrell escaped without serious injury and the team assured everyone that the boat would be ready for the Gold Cup in Tri-Cities the last weekend of July.

There were six Unlimiteds in the pits at Guntersville. *Miss Madison*, with rookie driver Brandon Kennedy, was unable to qualify. That left *Goodman*

Real Estate, the two *Beacon* boats, *Miss Apollo*, and *Miss FLAV-R-PAC*. The first heat was stopped when *Miss Apollo* had an accident exiting the first turn. *Beacon Plumbing* went through *Apollo's* prop blast, which tore off its front canard. *Apollo* driver Dave Villwock was unhurt,

but the boat's left sponson was damaged.

The course was cleared and before the heat could be rerun, wind came up. It blew all weekend and caused the event to be canceled. A few days later, the Guntersville race committee announced they would be dropping off the H1 circuit.



Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow

TOP: The Guntersville event got underway with a gathering in a park by all of the race teams, including the *Miss Madison*. **ABOVE:** *Miss Apollo* flipped in the event's first heat, and then strong winds canceled the remainder of the contest.



J. Michael Kelly drives the U-8 *Beacon Electric* on the Ohio River at Madison, Indiana.

The Madison Regatta was held on its traditional July 4 weekend. The Ohio River is unpredictable, and it was true to form in 2025. On Friday, the water level was high, and cranes had to be repositioned before the course could open. Only two Unlimiteds moved into the pits on Friday afternoon, *Miss Madison* and *Miss Apollo*. The latter was a substitute for the *Apollo* that was damaged at Guntersville. From Madison to the end of the season, *Miss Apollo* would be the name on the boat that began racing in 2007 as *Oh Boy! Oberto* and later carried the name *Miss HomeStreet*.

Miss Madison was the first to test at 3 p.m. The boat ran three laps, and it displayed evidence that the hull was in need of work. *Apollo* ran next as Dave Villwock needed to become comfortable in the substitute boat. No other Unlimiteds moved into the pits; they were all lining up for the Regatta parade.

On Saturday, the talk among officials was who could drive *Miss Madison* should Brandon Kennedy be unable to qualify as a driver. It turned out to be a non-issue as Kennedy completed his required laps.

Preliminary heats would have two sections with three boats in each. In Heat 2B, *Miss Madison's* steering cable broke, and the boat spun out. With that, it was done for the weekend and for the season.

Heats 3A and 3B were scheduled for Sunday but were canceled because of wind. Late in the afternoon the wind eased and the final heat was held. The top four boats would run; *Miss Apollo* was eliminated. *Goodman Real Estate* ran away

with it, winning by a half-lap. *Beacon Electric* was second and *FLAV-R-PAC* finished third. *Beacon Plumbing* went dead in the water and restarted a lap later, but Corey Peabody had two driving infractions and was disqualified.

An interesting aside is that announcer Jeff Ayler repeatedly encouraged fans to cheer for *Miss Madison*, which they obligingly did. However, it was evident that many fans on the beach were pulling for Andrew Tate in *Goodman Real Estate*.

The next race was the APBA Gold Cup at the Tri-Cities. *Graham Trucking* and *Spirit of America* (the new name for *Lakeridge Paving*) brought the field up to seven boats. During testing, it became obvious that changes had been made to *Miss Apollo* and Dave Villwock was becoming more comfortable in the cockpit. *Graham Trucking* performed better every time Jeff Bernard took the boat out, and Gunnar O'Farrell was more confident driving *Spirit of America*. Still, *Goodman Real Estate* was the fastest, most stable boat in the Gold Cup field. Could Andrew Tate pull off a win?

The two sets of preliminary heats on Saturday suggested Tate would have to avoid mistakes and drive hard if he hoped to win the Gold Cup. He finished second to *Beacon Plumbing* in the first heat and second to *Beacon Electric* in the second heat. Jamie Nilsen earned a heat win with *Miss FLAV-R-PAC*.

Sunday morning, *Graham Trucking* broke a prop blade while testing, which caused damage to the bottom. The boat's weekend was over early, but the crew members expressed confidence repairs would be finished in time for Seafair.

The Madison Regatta was held on its traditional July 4 weekend. The Ohio River is unpredictable, and it was true to form in 2025.

2025 SEASON SUMMARY

| Num | Boat | ID# | Driver | Guntersville Southern Cup 6/6-8 | Madison Ind. Gov. Cup 7/5-7 | Tri-Cities APBA Gold Cup 7/25-27 | Seattle Apollo Cup 8/1-3 | San Diego Bill Muncey Cup 9/12-14 | Total Pts. |
|-----|--------------------------------------|------|------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|---|------------|
| 1. | U-91 Miss Goodman Real Estate | 1801 | Andrew Tate | 100 | 1st 1125 | 3rd 1150 | 1st 1700 | 2nd 1900 | 5,975 |
| 2. | U-8 Beacon Electric | 1496 | J. Michael Kelly | 70 | 2nd 1060 | 5th 1356 | 6th 1165 | 1st 1560 | 5,211 |
| 3. | U-27 Miss Apollo | 2427 | Dave Villwock | 60 | | | | | 60 |
| | U-27 Miss Apollo | 0706 | Dave Villwock | | 595 | 1st 1664 | 3rd 1035 | 4th 1243 | 4,537 |
| 4. | U-11 Miss FLAV-R-PAC | 0925 | Jamie Nilsen | 50 | 3rd 875 | 2nd 1350 | 5th 1002 | 3rd 1250 | 4,527 |
| 5. | U-9 Beacon Plumbing | 0009 | Corey Peabody | 80 | 880 | 4th 1849 | 2nd 605 | W/D 70 | 3,709 |
| | | | J. Michael Kelly | | | | 225* | | |
| 6. | U-21 Spirit of America | 1999 | Gunnar O'Farrell | | | 6th 1175 | 4th 563 | | 1,738 |
| 7. | U-12 Graham Trucking | 0001 | Jeff Bernard | | | 490 | 1100 | | 1,590 |
| 8. | U-6 Miss Madison | 9501 | Brandon Kennedy | DNQ | 225 | | | | 225 |

* Points count toward the boat only, not to the driver.

With *Graham Trucking* out, that left six boats. The two *Beacons* finished first and second in Heat 3A, while *Goodman Real Estate* was disqualified for an N2 violation. *Miss Apollo* gave the BWR Racing team something to cheer about when it won heats 3B and 4A. Was that a portent to things to come? *Goodman Real Estate* could only take third place in Heat 4B, behind *Beacon Plumbing* and *Beacon Electric*.

Andrew Tate, who had been leading the high point chase, was watching his lead almost slip away to the two *Beacon* boats, along with his odds of winning the Gold Cup. The final would have all six boats, five on the front line with a trailer: *Goodman Real Estate*.

As the fleet came down for the start, it appeared some boats were early. When they were in the first turn, there was an announcement on the public address that the start was under review. On the course, the two *Beacon* boats had a great duel. *Miss Apollo* passed *FLAV-R-PAC* and physically settled into third place. On the last lap, *Goodman Real Estate* caught *Spirit of America*.

As the boats were returning to the pits, one of the radio stations covering the race reported that the two *Beacon* boats had jumped the gun at the start. Some people in the crowd cheered the news, while others shrugged and headed for their cars. In the pits, there was confusion. One source said U-27 had also

jumped the gun.

If true, that would have meant *FLAV-R-PAC* was the winner, and the team started to celebrate. The announcement was incorrect, U-21 had jumped the gun, not U-27. Dave Villwock was the winner in *Miss Apollo*. When his boat was secured at the dock, Villwock carefully climbed on the engine hood and raised his arms in victory. The *FLAV-R-PAC* team watched in shattered disappointment.

The gun jump penalties moved *Goodman Real Estate* to third, which kept the national high-point chase tight. The Gold Cup almost always produces surprises, and the 2025 race was no exception. What would happen in Seattle the following weekend?

The same seven boats from Tri-Cities were in the Seafair pits. *Graham Trucking* was the last to arrive, but repairs were complete. Also on hand was the "Blue Blaster" *Atlas Van Lines*, which NASCAR racer Jimmie Johnson would drive in an exhibition run.

The first heat produced a forecast of the outcome. *Goodman Real Estate* won handily. *Beacon Plumbing* was damaged when it ran into prop blast from other boats in the first turn. *Goodman Real Estate* won all three of its preliminary heats, *Graham Trucking* won two preliminary heats, and *Beacon Electric* captured one



Chris Denslow

With the original *Miss Apollo* heavily damaged in its flip at Guntersville, Dave Villwock finished the season in a replacement, a boat that has won 26 races during its career, under names such as *Oberto* and *Miss HomeStreet*.

heat.

The course on Lake Washington has more room than the Tri-Cities course, so all seven boats would be in the final. Everything went right for Tate, and he had a comfortable lead at the finish. *Beacon Electric* and *Miss FLAV-R-PAC* jumped the gun. It was one of the rare instances when Jamie Nilsen mistimed the start by a fraction of a second. Jeff Bernard in *Graham Trucking* was disqualified for driving infractions.

The Seafair win gave *Goodman Real Estate* a cushion in the season points standings, although *Beacon Electric* still had a mathematical chance to take the title. Things were tightening in another part of the standings. *Miss Apollo*, which had been far down in points after the Madison regatta, was moving up.

A few days after the race, photographer Chris Denslow reported he would have to miss the San Diego race because of a medical issue. Then, at the end of August, came the news that he had contracted pneumonia and passed away. He was a respected and beloved individual, and his passing was difficult to comprehend.

Only five Unlimiteds went to San Diego. A number of other classes were



Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow

TOP: Two boats joined the circuit at the Tri-Cities. Gunnar O'Farrell was driving *Spirit of America* (left) and Jeff Bernard was in the cockpit of *Graham Trucking*. **MIDDLE:** Bruce Ratchford, owner of the BWR Racing team, celebrates their Gold Cup victory with driver Dave Villwock. **ABOVE:** Gold Cup action on the Columbia River as four boats speed side by side to the starting line. They are, from the left, Corey Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing*, Jamie Nilsen in *Miss FLAV-R-PAC*, Dave Villwock in *Miss Apollo*, and Jeff Bernard in *Graham Trucking*.



Chris Denslow

ABOVE: Andrew Tate, the driver of *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, won in Seattle by having a perfect weekend. He was the fastest qualifier and won every heat entered. **RIGHT:** Corey Peabody and *Beacon Plumbing* had a rough start in Seattle when the boat's sponson was damaged in the first heat.



Chris Denslow

Some heats—most notably the final at San Diego, but others, too—had great, competitive racing.

on the program, which meant there was limited time for testing. *Goodman Real Estate* was the fastest qualifier, but the second fastest was *Miss Apollo*, which was significantly faster and more stable than it had been earlier in the season. A round robin format would be used for the preliminary heats, rather than a draw format.

Trouble occurred in the first heat when *Beacon Plumbing* slid into the skid fin spray of *Miss Apollo* and flipped. Corey Peabody was unhurt, but the boat was done for the weekend. The result was only four boats for the remainder of the race. Andrew Tate and *Miss Goodman Real Estate* cinched the high point championship in the last preliminary heat. Their accomplishment, however, took nothing away from the final heat.

The boats in the final produced one of the

best races in recent memory. J. Michael Kelly had *Beacon Electric* in lane one, Dave Villwock took lane two with *Miss Apollo*, Jamie Nilsen was next in *Miss FLAV-R-PAC*, and Andrew Tate was outside in *Goodman Real Estate*. *FLAV-R-PAC* fell behind after the first turn, but the other three had a duel through the middle of lap two, when *Apollo* slid into the spray of *Goodman* and slowed. *Beacon Electric* and *Goodman* had a side-by-side race until the last turn. *Apollo* was outside but running slowly, a lap behind.

As the leaders rounded the final turn, *Goodman* bounced in *Apollo's* wake, which allowed *Beacon Electric* to take the checkered flag. Some observers were critical of Villwock for staying on the course and finishing, but by doing so, *Miss Apollo* nabbed third in season points, barely

Robert Peters



Robert Peters



Robert Peters



TOP: Corey Peabody and *Beacon Plumbing* were eliminated from the San Diego race in the day's first heat when the boat was caught in the skid-fin wash from *Miss Apollo* and blew over.

MIDDLE: Jamie Nilsen in *Miss FLAV-R-PAC* leads J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric*.

ABOVE: Andrew Tate and J. Michael Kelly ended the 2025 campaign with a tight battle in the final heat at San Diego.

eclipsing *FLAV-R-PAC*.

On Sunday morning, word went through the pits that former driver Ron Snyder had passed away. He was always a fan favorite and approachable when someone wanted to talk. Another former driver, Ed Morgan, who had a brief run in *Miss Owensboro*, also passed away earlier during the summer.

In sum, the 2025 season had five regattas scheduled. Four were completed, but one, *Guntersville*, was canceled because of inclement weather. A total of nine hulls appeared for the races, but there were two hulls with the *Miss Apollo* name, so point totals show only eight boats and drivers. There were six sponsors and six owners. Some heats—most notably the final at San Diego, but others, too—had great, competitive racing.

There were some heats, however, that had only two boats that finished a half-lap apart. Every regatta included smaller classes of boats, in particular the Grand Prix class, and some included vintage Unlimiteds. Most boats showed improved performance over the 2024 season, but the margin between the fastest qualifier and the slowest qualifier has widened.

At the conclusion of the season, there were four solid race sites with searches under way to identify new venues. Unlimited racing is capable of producing a fine show, but it is inconsistent. There are no laurels upon which to rest; there is always work to be done. ❖

AROUND THE CIRCUIT

Race Team and Race Site News by Chris Tracy



The H1 annual banquet and meetings took place on November 15 in the Tri-Cities. Longtime Unlimiteds Unanimous member Bill Moore attended the banquet and relayed many of the following details.

The Banquet:

The banquet was held at the upscale Terra Blanca Winery, located in Benton City, about a half hour away from Richland, in the Red Mountain area. Red Mountain is known for growing the best and most expensive grapes in Washington, and the boutique winery provided a unique and elevated banquet experience. Shuttle service was provided from the Richland host hotel to the winery.

The traditional season review video was shown, beginning with spring testing and then included highlights from each race. This year's video also included some of the supporting events at each race, from the concert in Madison to J-Stock hydros running in Seattle.

A number of people and teams were honored with awards at the banquet, some for their work behind the scenes and others for their performance at the races. Here are the 2025 awards:

Volunteer of the Year—Jim Riley. Pastor Riley is the H1 chaplain. A Texas resident, Riley did not attend, but his written remarks were read.

Official of the Year—Chris Denslow. H1's official photographer passed away recently and was honored for his contributions.

Race Site of the Year—Tri-Cities, Washington. Water Follies officials attended and accepted the award.

Crew Chief of the Year—Taylor Evans, *Miss Apollo*. Evans attended and accepted. Evans formerly headed the U-40 crew and moved to *Apollo* this past season. He got his first crew chief victory



Bill Moore

H1 Unlimited's annual banquet and awards ceremony was held at the Terra Blanca Winery in Benton City, Washington, about a half-hour drive from the Tri-Cities.

when the *Miss Apollo* won the Gold Cup in the Tri-Cities.

Rookie of the Year—Brandon Kennedy, *Miss Madison*. Kennedy sent written remarks that were read.

Outstanding Contribution—Don Agopsowicz and Janick Tétreault-Moïse. Agopsowicz drives the H1 truck from race site to race site and coordinates the setting of buoys and the operation of patrol boats during races, plus he works with H1 logistics. Tétreault-Moïse was in charge of public relations for H1 this past season.

Excellent in Media—Brent Hall and Robert Miguel. Hall is part of the on-air talent for Internet streaming. Miguel is the lead videographer for Internet streaming and assembled the season review video. Both Hall and Miguel attended, and both appeared genuinely touched and emotional for being signaled out for their contributions.

High Points, Third Place—*Miss Apollo*, Dave Villwock. Villwock, who lives in

Indiana, did not attend, but much of the *Apollo* crew was present, including owner Bruce Ratchford.

High Points, Second Place—*Beacon Electric*, J. Michael Kelly. Kelly attended and accepted the award. Much of the crew attended, as did owners Darrell and Vanessa Strong.

High Points, Martini and Rossi National First Place Champion—*Miss Goodman Real Estate*, Andrew Tate. Tate was present to accept the award. Many crew, including crew chief Michael Hanson attended.

Brad Luce, part of the Internet streaming team, spoke, too. His comments touched on the social responsibility of the sport and the Hydros and Heroes initiative, that honors fallen law enforcement officers. This initiative, in connection with the Behind the Badge Foundation, brought remembrance to the water, as each hydroplane carried a memorial decal serving as a high-speed salute to those who gave everything.

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STORIES: Several of our contributors have passed away in recent years. Fortunately, a few readers stepped up this year to provide new stories, and our small staff *upped their game, too. Thank you. If you have a story to tell, want to interview someone related to the sport, or have an idea you'd like to write about, please step up! If you'd like to cover a race for us, let us know and we can talk about it. You don't have to be an accomplished writer. We have a qualified staff who can edit your piece. Feel free to contact our editor, Andy Muntz, at ajmuntz@icloud.com.*

Some surviving families were welcomed for special race-day experiences, creating moments of connection and honor amidst the races.

H1 Meetings

Meetings were held in conjunction with the banquet. All four race sites sent representatives and almost all race teams were represented. Kelly and Sharon Stocklin, owners of the U-40 that did not race in 2025, attended the meetings, as well.

A feature of the H1 meetings included a round-table presentation about best practices. For example, the Madison

site representative talked about how the race is partnered with a concert, and explained the process of setting up and conducting a concert. Sites plan to have monthly joint video calls over the off season. Another topic that was addressed is cooperation between various other race classes and the Unlimited class.

There was some chatter that a possible race site to investigate for 2027 might be at the Quad Cities, on the Iowa-Illinois border. The riverfront is being redeveloped and may be a potential race site on the Mississippi River.

It is early into the off season, so there

was no surprising or new 2026 racing information shared. The announcement that the 2026 Gold Cup would be held in Madison was made a few days before the banquet and meetings. Before the banquet it was announced that Jimmy Shane would replace retiring Dave Villwock as the driver for the *Apollo* team.

News About Detroit:

The UNJ did learn that there is some recent talk about the site of the former Detroit race. The UNJ reached out to our Detroit contacts, and this is what we learned:

Apparently Gregory's Marina and Docks, which is next to the judges stand, has been sold and will be turned into condos. Also, the area that staged the limited boat pits, next to the grandstands, is probably being sold for condos, too.

These developments would make it difficult to race at the traditional spot in Detroit. Our Detroit contacts also are concerned that if the racecourse was moved to the other side of the Belle Isle Bridge, closer to downtown Detroit, that the river water would be too rough to race on.

Meanwhile, a local Detroit group, is still talking with the city about Unlimited racing in Detroit, but certainly nothing is remotely definite. ❖

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