



UNLIMITED NEWSJOURNAL

A Chronicle of Speed

A conversation with Mark Weber.

The Weber family has been active in hydroplane racing for generations. They have owned and driven boats in a variety of classes, served in official capacities, and shared their love for the sport with everyone who knows them. Mark Weber was born in Detroit and grew up on the city's east side. When he was in fourth grade the family moved to Grosse Pointe. "I was always within eight-to-ten miles of the Detroit River race course," he remembers. "You could hear the engines run while you were heading toward Detroit." Weber's father started racing in the inboard ranks and, before long, hydroplanes were the focal point of family activities. In the

following interview, Mark Weber recounts his early involvement in racing and his move into the unlimited class. The interview was conducted by Craig Fjarlie in the pits at Madison, Indiana, last summer.

How did your family become involved in boat racing?

My father started in 1955 when he was out of the Navy. He would write home to his mom and dad – my grandparents – and they agreed they would go boat racing. My dad came down to the river with his father all the time. In 1955 my dad bought the first boat, and it was a piece of junk. I think they burned it.

What class was that?

It was a 135. They ran a Ford flathead in it. Then the second boat they purchased was another hull with a flathead engine. Then the third and fourth boats he actually built with his father. The fourth and last boat is the one I have.

What were the names of his boats?

All his boats were called *Mom's Worry*.

OK.



Karl Pearson

After my parents were married, my other grandpa, my mom's father, in 1963 bought a 280 Farmer hull. Then he had a Staudacher, which turned into a 225 and raced until the mid-70s. His last boat was a Ron Jones. Very competitive boat. Then once he retired from work he just didn't have the funds to

IN THIS ISSUE:

- 2 My \$0.02 Worth
by Andy Muntz
- 3 H1 appoints a new
chairman
- 4 A look back at the
2016 season.
- 9 Season Summary
- 19 HydroFile
by Lon Erickson

My \$0.02 Worth

Editorial Comment



Andy
Muntz

Dear Santa Claus.

It's your busy season, I know. Lots of little boys and girls are writing thousands of letters to you at this time of year hoping that you'll bring them a certain video game or other toy when you slide down their chimney later this month. They'll give you all sorts of reasons why they think you should do this for them and, I'm sure some of them might be very touching and hard to ignore.

But, you need to know that there are many thousands of hydroplane fans out there who also want some stuff during this holiday season. Some think things are kind of desperate in the sport right now, so I figured there could also be some things for them in that big sack of yours.

More boats – Twenty years ago there were a total of 16 active unlimited hydroplanes in the sport. Thirty years ago there were 19. You want to know how many boats appeared at hydro races this past

year, Santa? Only 12, and that includes one that isn't even the same size as the others and wasn't able to qualify. We need more boats, Santa. Please, if nothing else, can you just get us more boats? Another three or four would be fabulous.

More races – On second thought, it might be more important that the sport get more races, because with more races more people might be willing to enter more boats. So, forget what I just said. This one's now my highest priority. We need more races. Ten years ago there were seven races on the schedule. Twenty years ago there were 10. Thirty years ago? Ten, again. You know how many we had in 2016, Santa? Only five. Three new race sites have expressed an interest. Do you have something in that sack that might convince the folks in Phoenix, Guntersville, Alabama, and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, to get behind holding a race in those places?

More media – There was a time when every unlimited hydroplane race was broadcasted live on radio stations all across the country. Jim McKay and ABC's *Wide World of Sports* also used to cover hydroplane races on the show. In fact, hydroplane drivers were once even pictured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. Now, the local newspapers hardly cover the sport when the boats are in town. In Seattle, talk about the second-string left guard for the Seahawks gets more air time on sports talk radio during race week than the hydroplanes. Is there something you can do about that Santa? Is there something in that sack that will get more media coverage?

That's all I ask, Santa. I'm not being greedy; just those three things. If you could pull that off, I'd greatly appreciate it. You're the best, Santa. Thanks!!

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Letters may be edited for clarity and space.

H1 Unlimited names a new chairman.

The Board of Directors of H1 Unlimited has named Doug Bernstein as the newest chairman of the sport. The managing partner of Plunkett Cooney, a legal practice in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, takes the position that was held by Steve David during the past two years.

“Steve did a wonderful job for our sport in setting us up with new race sites and leading an effort that has engaged more interested sponsors and fans,” Bernstein said. “Now, we have to build on what Steve gave us and worked to take the sport to the next level.”

The long-time hydroplane enthusiast has attended every Detroit race since 1969 and has attended over 100 races over the years.

He has served as a board member for the Detroit River Regatta Association since 2005 and, most recently, as a board member of Detroit Riverfront Events, he has been instrumental in keeping the

tradition of hydroplane racing alive on the Detroit River.

“The sport has been a passion for me throughout the years,” he said. “Then when I see passion and love for the sport its owners, drivers, crews, and especially the fans, I can’t wait to lead H1.”

In his everyday job, Bernstein focuses his legal practice in the areas of commercial litigation, commercial loan restructuring and documentation, creditors’ rights, commercial and municipal bankruptcy, receiverships, and other banking-related litigation and appeals on behalf of national and regional lenders and special services. He was the counsel for Hydro-Prop for two years, has been the legal counsel for H1 Unlimited since 2010, and a board member since 2011.

He also served as counsel to charitable foundations in Detroit during that city’s bankruptcy and played an integral part in the city’s recovery, and served as an



H1 Unlimited

analyst for local and national media outlets during those proceedings. He regularly appears as a guest on finance and general news programs on radio and television to discuss banking law and bankruptcy issues and is frequently quoted by the media that covers the business, banking, and finance industries.

He currently serves as a member of the Receivership Transition Advisory Board for the City of Pontiac and previously assisted the State of Michigan in the training of potential emergency managers and emergency financial managers. He has a number of published appellate decisions to his credit and is a member of several professional organizations. He was also a board member of the Michigan Sports Hall of Fame.

He lives in Royal Oak, Michigan, with his wife, Amy, and a daughter, Lisa.

Calling all hydroplane collectors!

Are you the type of hydroplane fan who has maybe gone a little overboard for your passion? Maybe you have a man cave that is full of hydro memorabilia or a house that is decorated with hydroplane posters and artwork?

If you have such a collection and would like to show it off to your fellow hydroplane nuts, then we have a deal for you! In an upcoming issue of the Unlimited NewsJournal, we are planning an ode to hydroplane fans. We will call it a special “Super Fan Issue.”

If you have a collection that needs to be included, please contact us with the details and send along some photos. Please contact the editor at ajmuntz@icloud.com.

A look back at the 2016 season.

The 2016 unlimited hydroplane season began with a great many unanswered questions and ended with a great many unknowns. But, though the season in between was short, it also provided race fans with some great racing and three different race winners.

It was a challenging season for H1 Unlimited, the sport's governing body. Only five races were on the season schedule again this year and getting at least eight boats to appear at each of the races proved to be troublesome. Several teams grumbled about race payouts and complained that they needed additional financial incentives to race at some venues.

Yet, the eight boats were always found and officials did their best to find additional events for future seasons. Tentative agreements were



Chris Denstow

announced for races in three new locations. H1 also worked to make their product more available to race

fans throughout the world. Leading that effort was the development of the sport's app.

Full Internet streaming coverage for the Tri-Cities and Seattle races were provided by local TV stations, but Internet streaming from Madison and Detroit were last-minute H1 deals and H1 only provided audio streaming from San Diego.

If there was any element of dissatisfaction, it probably would have to be with the calling of penalties. Some would say there were far too many impacting too many results, while others would argue that lane infractions were not called and flashing strobe lights not seen. The controversies were a continual topic among owners, drivers, and H1 officials.

On the racecourse, at least half of the boats at most of the races had a legitimate chance of ending up with the trophy. Three different boats actually did: the defending national champion U-1 *Miss HomeStreet Bank*, the U-5 *Graham*



Lon Erickson



Chris Denstow

[Top] The U-1 *Miss HomeStreet Bank*.
[Middle] The U-5 *Graham Trucking*. [Above] The U-9 *Les Schwab*.

Lon Erickson



Lon Erickson



Trucking, and the U-9 *Les Schwab*. Two others demonstrated enough speed to be in that company, but both saw action in only two events.

Here's a look at the season through the perspective of each boat team:

U-1 Miss HomeStreet Bank – The defending national champion provided to be the most consistent competitor again in 2016, but the effort wasn't without difficulty. The team's challenges began before the season started with the resignations of driver Jimmy Shane and crew chief Larry Hanson. A month later, Shane returned and Hanson was replaced with Dan Hoover only a short time before the season was to begin.

Once racing started, the Madison Racing Team, was in fine shape. They opened the season with a victory at home in Madison, placed second in Seattle and Detroit, and ended the season with

a victory in San Diego. The only negative was a lane encroachment call in Tri-Cities that converted an apparent victory to a seventh-place finish.

The other positive result from the team was its sponsor. Home-Street Bank first got involved in the sport in 2015 then increased its participation in a major way this year. The company's effort was

impressive, not only with the boat sponsorship but with other components in the marketing effort that included television, signing on as the title sponsor for the San Diego race, and even a hydroplane debit card.

U-5 Graham Trucking – It was a remarkable season for this boat, especially considering that the hull suffered severe damage when it was hit by a truck at the end of the previous season. Despite having what many considered to be a fatal crack, the crew made repairs and took victories in the Detroit Gold Cup and at Tri-Cities.

U-9 Les Schwab – At 24 years old, the hull is one of the oldest in the sport, but you'd never know it by its performance. Owners Mike and Lori Jones, crew chief Jeff Campbell, and rookie driver Andrew Tate squeezed an incredible year out of the old craft that included a victory in Seattle and a second-place finish in San Diego, a race where the boat was also the fastest qualifier at over 160 miles per hour.

U-21 Go Fast, Turn Left Racing – This team's fourth place finish in the national standings can be attributed to consistency. Brian



Lon Erickson

[Top] U-21 *Miss Al Deeby*. [Middle] U-7 *Graham Trucking II*. [Above] U-11 *Peters & May*.



Ron Harsin



Chris Denslow

Perkins won only one heat with the boat, yet it always made it to the final heat. It took third-place finishes in both Madison and Seattle, and fourth-place efforts in the Tri-Cities and Detroit.

U-7 Graham Trucking II – The team’s “other” and older hull saw action in the final heat at each of the final four races. Jeff Bernard drove the boat to a third-place finish in Detroit and a fourth-place finish in Seattle.

U-11 Peters & May – Despite the efforts of driver Tom Thompson, the team just can’t seem to get the boat running in top form. It made it to the final heat in most of the races, but always finished toward the back of the pack.

U-27 Dalton Industries – What a sad season for the folks from Alabama. After a busy winter

getting the hull into great racing shape, the year started with great hope. As the Madison race got underway, the boat appeared to be one of the fastest in the field and took victories in two of its first three heats. But, then tragedy

struck along the backstretch during the last lap of the final heat when the boat did a complete backflip. Cal Phipps wasn’t injured, but the right sponson was terribly mangled. So, it was back to the shop, where it stayed through the rest of July and all of August, thus missing the bulk of the campaign. It finally returned in San Diego, but was washed down in the first heat and called for a flagrant fuel violation in the second.

U-3 – Meanwhile, due to an arrangement made between the team’s owner, Charlie Wiggins, and Ed Cooper, owner of the Allison-powered U-3 boat, the points earned by the U-3 in the Tri-Cities and Seattle were added to the U-27 ledger. Jimmy King drove the boat to a third-place finish in the Tri-Cities and two second-place heat finishes in Seattle.

U-16 Oh Boy! Oberto – When it competed, this was one of the fastest boats in the field. The problem was, it only entered two events and its performance at one of those events was marred by penalties. Jean Theoret made it the fastest qualifier at the Tri-Cities, won two of the event’s first three



Chris Denslow

[Top] U-27 Dalton Industries. [Middle] U-3 Griggs Ace Hardware. [Above] U-16 Oh Boy! Oberto.

heats, and eventually took second-place honors. In Seattle, however, despite being the fastest qualifier there as well, Theoret was called for going too slow before the start of the first heat, jumped the gun in the second, and was called for encroachment in the third. A broken propeller shaft then ended a very disappointing performance.

U-99.9 Miss Rock – Considering the low budget with which the team operates, the season could only be considered a success. It never made it to a final heat, but Kevin Eacret did drive it to a victory during the first heat at San Diego.

U-57 Spirit of Detroit – Thanks to Dave Bartush, the oldest boat still racing was able to make an appearance in Detroit to complete a field of eight contestants. It did manage three third-place heat finishes during the running of the four Gold Cup preliminary heats, but didn't make it to the final.

U-18 Snuskitush – Owner Kelly Stocklin's experiment of using a smaller hull and the smaller Lycoming T-53 turbine engine was started in 2012, and has had essentially the same result each year he has tried. Stocklin took the boat only to the Tri-Cities this year, where it continued to suffer with gearbox issues and did not qualify.

Looking toward the future, conditions at the end of the season were as uncertain as they were at the beginning. H1 Chairman Steve David announced his resignation almost as soon as the water settled after the final heat in San Diego. He was eventually replaced with Doug Bernstein, an attorney who has been instrumental in getting the Detroit race back onto its feet.

The challenges that he faces are

formidable. The site of next season's Gold Cup remains unknown, for example, as is the number of races that will be held.

While there was some talk that a race in Phoenix might be held, there is real doubt that it will actually happen in 2017. A test session is



Chris Denstow



Lon Erickson



Chris Denstow

[Top] Miss Rock. [Middle] U-57 Spirit of Detroit.
[Above] U-18 Snuskitush.

still planned for Guntersville, Alabama, in June, and a race in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, is uncertain.

The sport's direction will also be a question that Bernstein must answer. When the 2016 wrapped up in San Diego, the sport was considering two different proposals for marketing: one using seed money from Larry Oberto and

another offered by the folks at HomeStreet Bank.

H1 funding is limited and some owners expect more money from race sites and/or H1 for them to race the entire season. H1's mysterious Mike's Hard Lemonade sponsorship is uncertain and a title sponsor is needed. The website, app, and Facebook page also will

need continuous attention to maintain interest in the sport.

And, of course, there will be the unknowns of every coming season: How many of the current race teams will be back and will there be any new teams?

Those are the questions that we'll be answering on these pages in the months to come.

Unlimiteds Unanimous Awards.

Each year, the members of Unlimiteds Unanimous, the publishers of the Unlimited NewsJournal, take a vote to determine who deserves to win a group of season awards. The results of this year's votes were as follows:

Boat of the Year – Miss HomeStreet Bank. The award goes to the boat that the members feel would most likely to win a mythical race held at the end of the season. Two other boats were considered, the U-5 Graham Trucking and the U-16 Oh Boy! Oberto, but the HomeStreet Bank was clearly the most logical choice for winning that mythical race.

Driver of the Year – Jimmy Shane. Again, if all things were equal, which driver would most likely win that mythical race at the end of the season? Four drivers were considered. Andrew Tate certainly impressed with his performance in 2016, Cal Phipps showed exceptional speed the short time he could race, and J. Michael Kelly won the Gold Cup with a boat severely damaged, but the nod went to Jimmy Shane. He was the most steady performer during the season, made few mistakes behind the wheel, and also does a great deal for his team and sponsor. His performance also was impressive given the fact that the team was in some turmoil before the season began. Besides, this year he became only the second driver in the modern history of the sport to win four straight national driver titles.

Crew Chief of the Year – Dan Hoover. Another award to the Madison Racing Team. Two others were considered for the honor: Jeff Campbell of the U-9 Les Schwab team and Tom Anderson of the U-5 Graham Trucking. Campbell did a remarkable



Miss HomeStreet Bank crew chief Dan Hoover (left) and driver Jimmy Shane accept trophies in Madison.

job getting the most out of a boat that is nearing a quarter century in age and Anderson managed to repair the heavily damaged U-5 enough to win the Gold Cup, but Hoover gets the nod. He took control of the team less than two months before the season started, and quickly put together a winning effort, doing everything that was asked of him.

Rookie of the Year – Andrew Tate. This was an easy choice. The members usually consider which rookie driver is closest to winning a race. Well, Tate already accomplished that feat, taking the Albert Lee Appliance Seafair Cup in Seattle. Not only did he win that race and turn in the fastest qualifying speed in San Diego, his performance in placing third in the final standings was the best for any rookie in many years.



Photos by Chris Denslow

2016 SEASON SUMMARY

Num	Boat	ID#	Driver	Madison 7/2-3	Tri-Cities 7/30-31	Seattle 8/6-7	Detroit 8/27-28	San Diego 9/17-18	Subtotal	Total Pts.
1.	U-1 Miss HomeStreet Bank	0706	Jimmy Shane	1st 1700	7th 1641	2nd 1349	2nd 2000	1st 1405		8,095
2.	U-5 Graham Trucking	9712 0001	J. Michael Kelly	2nd 1295						7,176
3.	U-9 Bello's Realtrac Performance Les Schwab Delta Research/Realtrac	9210	Andrew Tate	4th 943*	1st 1960 305	5th 1156 1st 1470	1st 1695	3rd 1070 2nd 1600		5,862
4.	U-21 PayneWest Insurance Albert Lee Appliance Miss Al Deeby All Access Equipment	0721	Brian Perkins	3rd 1125	4th 1161		6th 1544	2nd 1600		5,542
5.	U-7 Graham Trucking II	9010	Jeff Bernard	DNS		3rd 1027	4th 1354	6th 875		4,164
6.	U-11 Peters & May	0925	Tom Thompson	5th 637	6th 835	4th 968	3rd 1269	5th 1092		3,947
7.	U-27 Dalton Industries	0717	Cal Phipps	1100	5th 1151	480	5th 1086	4th 593	1160	3,199
U-3	Grigg's Ace Hardware Miss Dijulio	0203	Jimmy King		3rd 1174	865			2039	
8.	U-16 Oh Boy! Oberito	1496	Jean Theoret		2nd 1669	621				2,290
9.	U-99.9 CARSTAR/Miss Rock	9899	Kevin Eacret	225	818	282	30	430		1,785
10.	U-57 Spirit of Detroit	9010	Corey Peabody				844			844
11.	U-18 Snuskitush	1218	Dustin Echols		DNQ					0

* 80 points earned by the boat were not awarded to the driver because he was not qualified.

Mark Weber interview.

Continued from page 1

maintain it, so he retired from racing.

Do you remember the names of his boats?

Oh, sure, *Mom's Nightmare*. *Mom's Worry* was my dad's, then grandpa Edwards, my mom's dad, was *Mom's Nightmare*. Then my grandfather, my dad's father, after my dad quit racing, he started to build his first boat that he owned and it was called *Snicklefritz*. The reason it was called *Snicklefritz* is because that's what his mother called him and in German. When you're into mischief or you're into trouble, quit being a snicklefritz. So that's what the boat was called. He built that for my dad's brother, my uncle Dick, who tragically in 1971 was killed in an automobile and never got to race the boat. My grandma and grandpa campaigned the boat for five or six years but to be honest with you, it just was never the same after their son was killed.

Who drove that boat?

A couple different people. I know Bo Scheide drove it. I actually got him the ride in it. Chuck Kaiser drove it for my grandpa. Some of the other drivers that my grandpa Edwards had were Dean Chenoweth...

Wow.

I'm sure Kropfeld probably drove it at some point. Dave Sutton was a driver for *Mom's Nightmare* for many years. In 1977 my brother,



Craig Fjarlie

Mark Weber's first unlimited ride was aboard the U-11 *Miss Exide 2* (#9210) at the 1996 Tri-Cities race. One interesting note: the boat still competes today. During the 2016 season, it campaigned as the U-9 *Les Schwab* and won the Seattle race.

Michael, got the first Staudacher conventional. It was the 72 hydro class, which now is called the 1.5 litre. That was a conventional. Let's just say it wasn't one of Jon Staudacher's better designs, but he built it to be cost-effective. He did everything out of 4 x 8 sheets of plywood, to try to keep costs down. The boat was not big enough, so what happened was Tom D'Eath helped us; we turned it into a cabover. We lengthened it eight inches. Then in 1979 I got my inboard license. That same year I drove J Stock Hydro with Mike Jones out west when he was APBA president.

We've heard that story.

I got my inboard driver's license. We ran that boat for a few years. I put some more horsepower in it and then we sold it. I drove 2.5 litre stock with Dave Czwirwinski. Then Dick Delsener, who owned the *Southpaw*, had a Lauterbach and had just picked up had a brand new Ron Jones. He was very nice

to help me get going. I bought the boat from him. I built the motor in his basement. He taught me how to build it. We built a mild motor that ran all day long. I ran that for a couple, three years.

And that was what class?

That was the 1-litre.

OK.

Now at this point I'm married. Lori (his wife - Ed.) drove the boat down to Florida with her girlfriend. We traded for a 6-litre Lauterbach, which was a fun boat to drive. Had a 350 in it. We ran that for a few years.

What was the name of that boat?

Well, my boats were called *Why Worry?* The T boats that my brother, Mike, and I drove, the conventional and the cabover - the same hull just converted - that was called *Mom's Worry Too*. You see the trend in all the names?

Yeah.

So when I built our boat I just said *Why Worry* with a question mark, which my mother, whenever asked, would explain exactly why she worried. And that was directed at my mom, because we had *Mom's Worry*, we had *Mom's Nightmare*, and then we had *Mom's Worry Too*, and then I had *Why Worry?* My mom didn't think much of the name just because it was a smack at her.

Now, who's older, you or Mike?

Oh, Michael's definitely older. He's old.

OK.

Then Stephen is younger and I'm wiser.

Where does Sue fit in?

Sue is the matriarch. There are 10 years between five kids. There is Sue, Sandy, Mike, Mark, Steve.

OK.

Jeff Bernard is Sue's son. Then Alexis drives, you know, Mike's daughter.

Yeah.

So then the Lauterbach. We sell the Lauterbach off. Now my brother Mike is out of college and he's racing with some people. We had a situation where he was racing with a couple of his friends and there was a carburetor problem on the boat. That week they went to the next race and I don't think they really addressed the carburetor problem. The driver of the boat told

my brother, "Check out the new shoes that I got." My brother says, "You got another pair of shoes?" "Yeah, makes the boat go faster." And he says, "Blankety, blankety, blankety, blank this, I'm going to build a boat and I'm gonna do it my way." And that's when one of the winningest – probably the winningest 5-litre – as far as races and championships, was built in his garage. That was the Staudacher wood one, which is actually the driving school boat in Washington right now. That's the boat that really set our driving ability apart and allowed many things to happen for both Michael and me. We went on to win, just the two of us, four national championships. We won Valleyfield three times in the hull. We ran that boat for a long time. We won summer nationals, world championships, I mean, this thing was just very forgiving, very, very fast boat. We were never the fastest boat, but clearly we were the most consistent. We won Valleyfield with 44 entries. People say all the things in my career. They think I'm going to say unlimited, well, I'm a four-time Valleyfield champion; three times in the 5-litres. I mean, that's

tough to do. Valleyfield separates the men from the boys.

It's the layout of the course.

It's a little Detroit. It's so much like Detroit, it's great. A driver's race-course. So then, that allowed us to get with Bob Larimore. He noticed us. We were in Richmond, Ohio, one time and my brother called. We went down early with Jeffrey. He was only about eight years old. Richmond, Ohio, was a one-day boat race. Well, my brother, when you're chasing points, went to Maryland and raced on Saturday, then drove all night to race in Ohio. Lori, Jeff, and I went down to enjoy the festival and then Mike's going to show up. We get there and I get a message from the lady in reception. "Your brother, Mike, called and said you need cut spruce and plywood." Broke the boat. I knew what that meant. "See you at 6 am." I went back up to Dayton, got the parts we needed. We enjoyed the festival a little bit, went swimming in the pool, which we were going to do, and Mike shows up at whatever time in the morning. He's already sleeping in the pit area when we get



A week after his debut, Weber was at the controls of the U-9 *Miss Exide* (#8401). The boat was built in 1984 as the *Atlas Van Lines* and also had seen action as *Miller American*.

Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum

there. The right side of the sponson has to be totally replaced. They're all laughing. Randy Larimore goes to Bob, he says, "Hey, that thing ain't running." He looks at it, he goes, "Webers. That boat will race today." And 2 o'clock that afternoon we won the qualifier.

Wow.

Bob Larimore had been watching me and I did, obviously, what I was supposed to. So the next year, the week before Valleyfield, he came up to me and he goes, "I'd like you to drive my boat in Valleyfield." I said, "You want me to drive Valleyfield, the first race?" The first race, the first final I ever drove in GNH, I won. Beat Jimmy Deal in *Deal Me In*. That kind of set off the GNH. We won three national championships in GNH. We won two in Unlimited Lights. The two years we won Unlimited Lights championships we won GNH the same year. We ran two classes, we criss-crossed the country. And then, or course, Mike Jones gave me an amazing opportunity to get my driver's license.

When you got the call from Mike Jones, that was your first unlimited opportunity.

Yeah. We had talked. Now keep in mind, Mike Jones was a very good friend of the family. My parents were very good friends. Really, it was not the call to drive the boat as much as it was an opportunity to get my license. Back then – it's a little different now – but really the key thing was to have your license. Somebody had to give you the equipment to go out there and put laps on a boat and get over 130. I was doing it in the two-wing boat, which is actually some version of the boat Andrew (Tate) is driving here.

How was that to handle?

Absolutely the most ill-handling, worst hydroplane I ever drove in my life. When they took the horsepower away – and you can ask Harvey – when you got to the apex of the turn, the thing had no air underneath the tunnel and it would just crash down. It was like going from the third floor to the first floor

in an elevator. It would beat you to death. I suggested then the ABRA, or whatever it was called then, I said, "Anybody that gets a driving infraction should have to drive that boat in the opposite heat of his next, as a penalty" (laughter). It was just a handful. In a straight line it was a rocket, but as soon as you got to the apex, all the wind came out. You couldn't turn. It was because they restricted...they did the right thing by restricting the engines, but it kind of ruined that design.

You did drive Jones' other boat, which was a conventional. That is, it wasn't a two-wing hull.

I drove that, yeah, and I even tested the 7 as well. I think I've driven 11 hulls; the 11, the 7, and the 9. Of course, I drove two Leland hulls. I drove Miss Piggy, which was one of Leland's boats.

And you drove *Miss Budweiser*. And you drove for Kim Gregory.

I drove both of Kim's boats.

We didn't count, but that's quite a few.

I think 11 different hulls. Over 100 different hydroplanes. A lot of 'em I was just testing. I feel very strongly about helping and mentoring racers. I've turned programs that, you know, somebody's struggling and you can tell an inexperienced driver all you want. Finally it's just, like, let me go take a lap. I always do a warm-up lap, one fast lap, one turn, and come back in. Now you know it's the skid fin, or...You try to help people. By doing that, I mean, I used to test boats all the time. Before I got to the unlimited



Bill Taylor

Weber with his niece, Alexis, in 1996. She is the daughter of his brother, Mike.



Mark Evans (left) and Mark Weber.

I won three championships in two hours in Decatur, Illinois, one year. I already qualified for the Hall of Champions in two hours. Had three of the top rides in the country then, so I was just trying to give back to the sport, help people. So I drove a lot of boats. I tested a lot of boats. I raced a lot, but I tested more.

Yeah.

Even boats I really didn't want to. You don't want to get hurt.

Going back in history a ways, when you started they still had open cockpits, right?

Oh, yes.

How was it to put a lid on the first time?

Well, the first boat I ever drove, restrained, was my brother's 5-litre, *My Way*, which is the West Coast driving school. We didn't have a lid on it, it was an open cockpit. It's basically like the boat I'm gonna drive tomorrow.

Did it have higher cockpit sides and just nothing on top?

It just had an open cockpit, no lid. We ran it with a full-face helmet. The first thing I ever did, I was strapped in a tub that was made out of foam with fiberglass over it. I went out and I was getting on plane. I almost brought it back to the pit area because now you're strapped to the boat where before you were sitting on aluminum angle with a cushion on the seat. Well, all the harmonics through the boat you now feel. I thought, this is the most rattleous piece of junk. I thought the whole thing was going to split the drive train. Well, what it was, I was feeling everything 'cause I was strapped to the boat. I could feel all the harmonics going through the drive train. I wasn't even used to it when I think about it now, but I'm thinking, what's wrong with this thing. And then I was hooked. I mean, it was a very good boat. Ray Lynn's *Big Bird* was faster. We were probably a little more consistent. We were one of the first boats with a capsule and a lot of people thought we were crazy. What they didn't all realize is, we'd come down to this Ohio River race at Steubenville, Ironton, and all those guys are trying to hang on. I'm strapped in. I never told anybody. I had such an advantage it was almost unfair. They're all hangin' on, I'm just (gestures) no big deal. I'm strapped in, I ain't goin' nowhere.

Yeah.

I'm strapped in, I'm still gonna be in the same spot. Without straps, you flex in the air, you go up the side of the boat hoping you don't get run over. I saw that happen to somebody once. And yeah, I mean, we had such an unfair advantage. We embraced the technology early.

Well, when you drove for Mike Jones, you started in the two-wing boat at Tri-Cities. Then in the consolation you drove the other boat.

I think I did, yes. He gave me the keys to the 9, you're right.

Hoped you could get it in the final, which didn't happen. Then at Seattle, you drove the 9 more.

Yes. You couldn't get much done in that 11. And of course back then, Mike was such a supporter of the sport. He did whatever was best for the show. Mike Jones has done so much for boat racing, it's just amazing. He probably will never get the credit he deserves. Amazing guy.

You didn't drive at San Diego.

No, I didn't go to San Diego.

Did you have an obligation to drive an inboard?

No, it probably was just money, 'cause I was already there with the Lights, right? Mike couldn't fly me out because I was already there with the Unlimited Lights.

You were co-rookie of the year with Rick Christensen.

Yes, I was. I only ran two races, but we had pretty good success, I guess, with those two races.

The next year with the unlimiteds you drove for Fred Leland for the first half of the year.

What happened, there was Scotty Pierce blew over the 99 in Detroit.

Fred called me and said, “Would you like to run the boat?” He said, “We’re going to bring out – we call it Miss Piggy.” The one with the snout up front.

Yeah, had the scoop on it.

Leland’s was a heavy, heavy boat. I can’t remember how the races go, I came to, not Madison, but then we went to Norfolk. And the thing was a piece of junk. And so, I was not happy to the point where I told my brother. He said, “Well, what do you think?” I said, “Northwest Airlines has a flight out in about three hours. Why don’t we just climb on that flight and go home, ‘cause if this is boat racing, I’m going back to 5-litres. This is ridiculous.” I said, “This boat,” and of course I have no experience, but, “We know it’s the driver, right?” This is the honest to God truth. So I walked up to Fred Leland, who I actually had a lot of respect for.

Right.

We had mutual respect and it never, never, never, ever changed. And I’m sitting on the shoreline. No matter what they did to the boat this thing was garbage. I walked up to Fred and he’s sitting on the shoreline. I said, “So, what do you think of the boat?” He said, “Well, it’s not very fast.” “Yeah, I agree,” I said. “What do you believe the problem is? Just be honest.” He goes, “I think it’s the driver.” I said, “Yeah, I got that impression. He said, “What do you think it is?” I said, “I think the boat’s a piece of shit.” (Laughter.) He just kind of looked at me. I said, “Fred, why don’t we just end it. Put Evans in the boat and let’s find out. Let’s just get rid of the question mark.”



Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum



Karl Pearson

[Top] In 1997, Weber first drove a brand-new boat built by Fred Leland. Here, it carried the name U-99 *Miss Crazy Tomato* (#9701). The hull later became known as “Casper.” [Above] At the Tri-Cities race, Weber was at the controls of the U-99 *Stihl* (#9399) and managed a third-place finish.

He goes, “OK.” Mark Evans gets in the boat, he goes out and he ran, like, two tenths of a mile an hour faster than me. The guy that’s driven nine years before me. If he can’t get more than...I go, “I’m good with two tenths of a mile an hour. Mark?” And as only Mark can do, he comes bouncing down the dock, “Yo, that thing is a piece of shit.” (Laughter.) So needless to say, Fred and I didn’t speak much the rest of the day. I figured, ah well, I’ll go on with this gig. The points. I went home, whatever.

Jackie calls up, “You’re gonna be in Tri-Cities, right?” Jackie goes, “Mark, you’re all set.” I said, “All set with what?” She goes, “Well, for Tri-Cities.” I said, “I haven’t spoken

with Fred.” She goes, “You mean, he hasn’t called you?” I said, “No, I don’t think he wants me to drive the boat.” She goes, “Damn it. We had a team meeting.” She had said, “Would you give the damn kid a boat to drive and let him go show us what the hell he can do?” So they pulled Lucky out. I drove Lucky in Tri-Cities. Well, I damn near won the race. So we went in the final heat. Curt Tavenner is my crew chief. Now you gotta keep in mind, we had one propeller, one gear box, and one motor and the PICO team had everything. Now we had good parts because we had PICO’s money, right?

Yeah.

Well, lane choice was really simple. First lane choice was *Budweiser*. We know he's gonna pick two. I had second choice. I had to pick three, which left lane one open for *PICO*. I had to give up my better lane. Then Tate was in four. So it was Evans in one, Villwock in two, I was in three, Tate was in four. That's when we went in the corner and Villwock blew over. So the boat landed and of course, Dave was hurt. So then on the re-start we ended up third. Tate got around me and we ended up third. So, got a lot of attention. Lucky, it was a great running boat.

Before the re-run of the final heat, did you have any idea how badly Dave Villwock was injured?

My brother Mike, who is my radio guy, is at the other end of Tri-Cities talking to me. We already knew Dave was hurt, we didn't know the extent of his injuries. On the way back I was going to talk to my brother. I quickly got out of my uniform, 'cause how are we gonna re-strategize this? Mike was my coach. We raced together for years. He came back and he started chuckling. He looks at me, he laughs, he goes, "It just dawned on me." Shook my hand. "Man," he goes, "did you plan this one perfectly." "I haven't planned nothing," I go. "What are you talking about?" He goes, "You didn't hear about the fire. That's not what I'm laughing about. So what do you think about being the *Budweiser* driver next week?" "What the hell are you talking about?" I said, "We have to get a re-start going. Would you get serious?" He goes, "Oh, I am. Yeah, you got a lot to think about." And I'm like, "What are you talking about?"

Well, we run the final heat, Tom D'Eath comes over, now my brother Steve's godfather, so we're talking about all this and Tom D'Eath says, "Well, what are you doing tonight?" I said, "I'm on the red-eye." I don't know if I flew back to Seattle or if I drove back. It's a sprint. D'Eath goes, "Well, you need to stick in town. Bernie wants to talk to you." I'm not going to sit around talking to anybody. If Bernie Little wants to call me, here's my phone number." He says, "Well, what are you doing?" I said, "I'm jumping on a plane, I'm going to work tomorrow morning. Got responsibilities. I'm not going to sit around, Gee, I hope Mr. Little will pick me. That's not how I operate."

I go home, I take a shower. I already know that it's a possibility. I tell Lori in the morning. She's getting ready to go to work. "Hey, I got to tell you something. I think Bernie Little's at least gonna call and interview me today." She's kinda tired, she's "What!?" I go, "Just relax. This is a list of the pros and cons, let's just see if this makes sense." And I go, "I'm not burning any bridges." First I got a message from his bus driver, Joe. That was 3 o'clock in the morning. He said, "This is Joe from Budweiser racing,

Bernie's bus driver." He said, "Wherever you're at, stop, turn around, fly back to Seattle. Bernie wants to have a meeting with you in the morning." Well, first of all, that's not how I operate. I kept right on going home. Bernie called me right around noon, the first phone call, which is 9 o'clock West Coast time.

Yeah.

We had a conversation. "You know, I appreciate it," I said. "I'll be honest with you, Bernie. I'm not sure this is really good for Mark Weber." We talked about it. It just didn't seem right because I was going to burn a bunch of bridges. I said, "What's the deal with Villwock?" "Well," he goes, "I don't know if he'll ever drive again." He said, "Do you have the contract?" I said, "If Dave gets better, it's his ride." And I actually stuck to that. It's his ride. "Here's the contract." "So basically you want me to burn a major bridge to drive your boat for five races." Not really interested. It's my racing career. That did not go over well with Bernie Little. The difference was, it was my racing career, not his.

So Lori and I talked, plus I talked to my brother, and at 4 o'clock I finally call him. I said,



Karl Pearson

After Dave Villwock was injured at the Tri-Cities race, Mark Weber was hired to drive the U-12 *Miss Budweiser* (#9501) beginning in Seattle. This is him driving the boat on Lake Washington. The boat, known as T-3, would win three national titles.

“Bernie, I’d like to thank you for the opportunity, but I respectfully decline.” And I said, “It’s just not right.” Now keep in mind I’d already been talking to Fred Leland. He said, “I know you got a lot on your mind, you got a lot of pressure. I don’t want to lose you on this team. We really think you’ve got a career in this sport.” I go, “All right.” I wanted to go back to the Virginia conversation on the shoreline. That was the last race I saw him at. I was sitting there and he goes, “Look, if it’s not you it’s gonna be Evans.” I said, “Well, if Evans drives the *Budweiser*, what am I driving?” He goes, “You’re driving the *PICO*, what the hell you thought you were driving?” I thought, “Hah, I’m in the catbird seat.”

So that was all done. Four o’clock we made the decision. I called Lori, she’s at her office. I was kinda like, nah, let’s just go back out of it. Either way it’s gonna be a fun week. I’m gonna be in blue again. And I really kind of liked being with *PICO*. We had a great day in



Weber accepts the winner’s trophy at the 1997 Las Vegas Cup.



Hydroplane & Raceboat Museum

While driving the *Budweiser* in the 1997 Texaco Cup in Seattle, Weber was involved in one of the most bizarre accidents in the sport’s history when Jimmy King drove the U-16 *E-Lam Plus* onto the deck of the *Budweiser*. Neither driver was injured.

Tri-Cities. But 6 o’clock the phone rings. “Mark? Bernie Little. Listen, God damn it, I’m telling you right now I talked to Tom D’Eath. I talked to all the crew. We want you to drive the boat. I want to know what in the hell it’s going to take. I know you’re tired and you traveled all night, but you need to think about this.” I said, “Bernie, you’re taking this personally. This isn’t about you. It’s about my career. I own it, I make the rules.” He said, “Now listen, I want to know what it’s going to take. What’s your problem? What’s your problem?”

I said, “I don’t want to drive a boat for five races. I’m running the B equipment. You already got stuff trashed. You only got one boat. Think about this. I mean, we’re not the entire first row, you know. It’s not too hard to figure out if you’re really paying attention in this sport.” He said, “I want to know. I want to know what it’s going to take.” I said, “All right, let me call you back in 30 minutes.” “All right, I’m waiting here. I gotta know today.”

So I talked to Lori. We talk about it. The remainder of this year Lori goes to every race. Next year I don’t care who’s in the boat. He’s paying me to be the back-up driver at every single race. I’m getting paid. I test with the boat in the spring and I can drive any other boat I want. I can get paid by both, and if I get called down the beach because somebody wads up the *Budweiser*, then you have to reimburse whatever team I’m there driving for.

“Son of a bitch!” I said, “You asked the question, you got the answer.” He made some comment and I said, “I want bonuses for winning the championship” and I spelled the whole thing out. He had some question, I don’t remember what it was. “All right, we got a deal?” I said, “Well, actually, give me five minutes. I just need to talk to my wife about something. I’m gonna call you right back.” “All right.” Then it was like 6:30, 7 o’clock at night, I mean, right on the deal.

I told Lori, she looked at me. I said, "I don't know, I still got a pit in my stomach about this." We decided after the first conversation I had with her, which did not go very well, 'cause she got mad, "What the hell are you throwing at me at 8 o'clock in the morning?" I go, "What the hell, there's a race in five days, I don't think they're gonna wait." It's like, so we did the pros and cons and we just said, "Hey, I'll call you right back." She was aggravated as hell. Showed me, right?

So now I gotta get smart ass. So I call up Bernie. I said, "Are you done talking about this and are you just ready to go win the damn championship, or do you want to discuss it more?" "That's what I wanted to hear!" He says, "All right, call Ronnie Brown. Get your ass to Seattle." I go, "Get a contract to me, my attorney's already on notice." This is Monday night. Wednesday morning, or Tuesday night, I was on my way back to the Bud shop. Got suited up.

The next weekend was Kelowna. Ronnie Brown calls me up. He said, "Mark, you ought to fly right here." He said, "I'll be honest with you, I can't even get you first class. I really think you need to come to the Bud shop." I go, "Is it only five hours or something? I guess I'll just drive a rental car there. What do you want me to do?" He goes, "We're driving." I go, "Well, what are you driving?" "A minivan." I said, "Who are you driving with?" "Well, me, Gumby, and Dewey." I'm like, "You got room for me?" He goes, "You don't mind driving?" I'm like, "I'm a boat racer! You know, if I were really honest I'd get Bernie's jet out there. Don't you think four hours in a van with the three of you, some really good talk time?" "You OK

with that?" I'm like, "I'd prefer it." And of course, you understand, I knew Ronnie Brown growing up.

Yeah.

Can't say enough about Dewey and Ronnie and even Gumby. They were, I mean, there were some pretty stupid things that happened when I was with that team. The boat failed four times. It failed. When was the last time you saw a *Budweiser* fail four times?

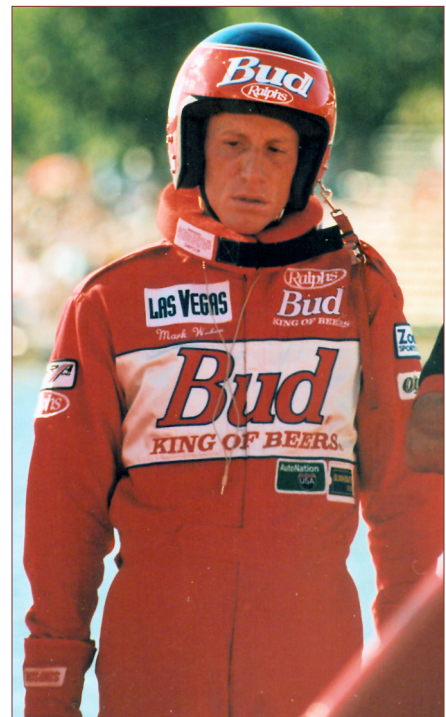
It's pretty rare.

Right. Kelowna, I had five laps in the boat and the fuel control falls off in the bottom of the boat. Then I go out the next morning and I grenade a propeller.

At Seafair you had...

At Seafair I get run over. The boat was still there, but that was it. And I warned Jimmy (King) the heat before, because that's when Evans blew over. I had the field covered and Ronnie said we had this trophy. I was really comfortable in the boat. And he ran over me. So we fixed the boat. Then we go to San Diego and Dave (Villwock) shows up. Then San Diego, I'm in a heat and the front wing breaks. They go, "What's going on?" I go, "I can't run this thing over 160 miles an hour, it'll go over backwards." And Loren goes, "What's wrong?" I said, "The wing, there's something wrong with the front wing." That's on my radio. I said, "Tell somebody to fix this f'ing thing." It was like, "Are you trying to get me in shit on purpose?" Now it's time we learned we're losing points.

Yeah.



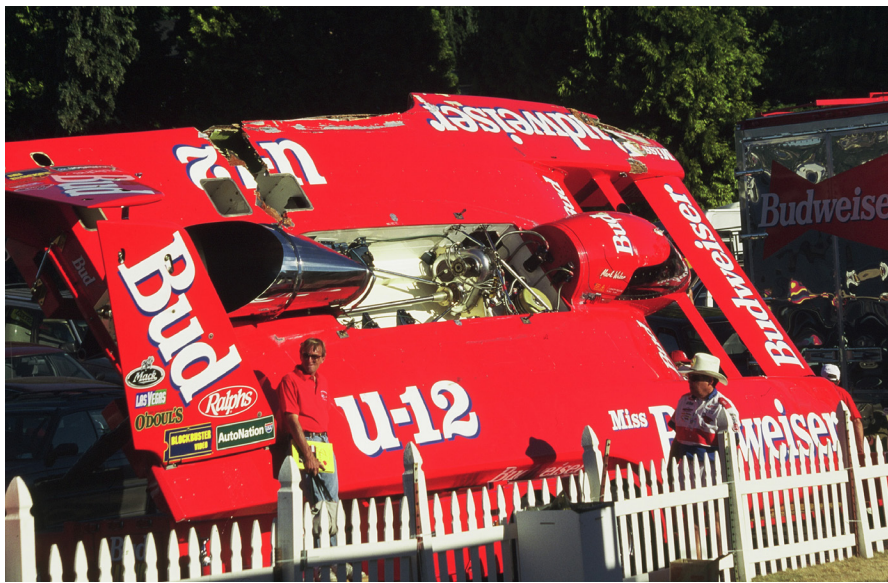
Then we go to Hawaii and we blow out the bottom (caused by a broken prop – Ed.). I mean, it was just unbelievable. Jane went to Bernie in San Diego. "When are you going to give that kid a boat that actually will last a week until he can actually go racing for you?" Jane was fighting for me. Nothing but respect for Bernie and Jane. He was the best boss ever. I go, "No problem with Bernie, none whatsoever." Big ordeal with the race boat in Vegas. There's a big showdown in Vegas. That's when things changed. That's a whole 'nother story. I finally called a team meeting and laid it out. Bernie backed me, so OK.

Then the next year Villwock was back.

That's the welcome back.

His hand...

Sure, it was his ride, which I knew. I'm on Budweiser payroll. So now,



Craig Fierlie

Cooper needs a driver. John Gysin calls me up in Detroit, which is a guy we raced with, and he said, “Mark, I know Cooper’s boat isn’t anything, but he just thinks it’d be cool to show the boat. You know, you’ve got a reputation of taking care of equipment and everything else. What do you think about that?” I said, “Sure. Now, you understand, Budweiser, he doesn’t care.” Of course, Cooper just loved it ‘cause he told everybody he got the driver of the *Budweiser*. You know, Cooper just had fun with it. We ran the boat and had a blast. We laughed so hard. It was great.

How was it to switch from turbine to a piston engine?

Not bad, because I’d driven so many inboards. So, it didn’t bother me.

There was nothing unusual about starting the engine?

No, no.

Not to step on the throttle too hard.

No. It’s all relative. Keep in mind, before I got to unlimiteds I drove three boats, three different hulls in an afternoon.

Yeah.

It’s totally different. And win in all three. So you just, you gotta be really thinking. That’s why I’m extremely quiet at races. I think a lot. It’s not, you know, it’s hard. So we ran that. I guess it was Tri-Cities. We break the bottom of the boat. The key is that it was built out of redboard or something and it just never was right. Well, then, we went to Lake Chelan for the reason that we weren’t going to run the next race. So we already had our receipts and stuff so we just went to the race and hung out and went home. So then he goes, “I’m not going back to San Diego and the West Coast market. I gotta figure out what I’m gonna do with pulling this off. All I’m doing is fixing it. The pain, the pain.” I’m like, “No problem, Coop. It’s no problem. Thanks a lot.” So I’m sitting there and Kim (Gregory) calls me. It’s funny because at that time he’s

trying to buy the boat from Lucero. It’s Lucero, because Woomer had passed.

Yeah.

I’m at an Unlimiteds Detroit meeting and we’re having a panel and at the time Mark and Joe (Tate) were thinking about buying this thing. So we’re at the UD meeting and I can’t say anything, but I already know there was a check FedEx’d. And the next morning at 2 o’clock we’re announcing that we bought the whole team and that I’m the driver, and we’re going racing.

This is the end of part one of our interview with Mark Weber. Next month, in part two, he talks about driving for Kim Gregory, his term as president of the APBA, saving the Detroit race in 2015, and offers some thoughts about the future of boat racing. Be sure to read part two of the interview with Mark Weber in the January 2017 issue of the Unlimited NewsJournal.

Steve Lacava passes away.

We have learned of the passing in late November of Steve Lacava, the sport’s Rookie of the Year in 1980. An experienced 7-litre driver, Lacava purchased the former *Valu Mart* (#7221) from Bill Wurster early in the 1980 season and entered the boat in three races as the *Oh Boy! Oberto*. His best performance was a fifth-place finish in the Tri-Cities event. He sold the boat the following year, but drove it at two events as the *Miss Kawaguichi Travel Service*.

HydroFile

Race Team News



Lon Erickson

U-1 Miss HomeStreet Bank

Crew chief Dan Hoover and the Miss Madison race team have started an extensive overhaul to the 10-year-old hull (#0706). In the works are some upgrades, including use of carbon fiber to replace aluminum framework and structural reinforcements. The team was pleased to find the sponsors in good shape, so the majority of their focus will be on the center section framework and on efforts to lighten the hull. Currently the decking is off the boat and internal inspections continue. Hoover plans to have the entire process completed and the boat put back together by early February, plenty of time before the scheduled beginning of racing next June.



David Campbell



David Campbell

Go3 Racing

Ed Cooper, along with Robert Grossman, are busy with work on the compliment of engines used during the 2016 season. All four engines sustained some level of damage during the West Coast races this summer. After engine work is done, the team will make some minor hull repairs and build some replacement parts, such as the front canard. The team has plans to compete in 2017, pending sponsorship.



Go3 Racing

Porter Racing

The U-5 Graham Trucking hull (#0001 or otherwise known as T-6), is seen here leaving the Decatur, Indiana. race shop and is now out west in the greater Seattle area for what the team is calling "some well deserved off-season pampering." The talk being the hull is getting some major, thorough repairs to fix accumulated wear and tear from over 16 years of racing.



Porter Racing

U-9 Jones Racing

Jeff Campbell and the team have the Jones Racing hull (#9210) in the shop, stripped down, and rolled over. The crew is going through their off-season maintenance steps.

Jeff Campbell



Jeff Campbell



U-11 Peters & May

The U-11 team recently had the complete team rig out on display in the Everett area near Seattle, promoting support for cancer awareness for a friend of the team.

U-11 Race Team



Hydroplanes For Sale!

Ever thought about owning an unlimited hydroplane? Now is your big chance. Three boats are currently for sale. At the top below is an unfinished hull that was being built by Go Fast Turn Left Racing, the team that operates the U-21. The hull is completely framed, hardware and trailer are included. Contact Greg O'Farrell at 206-919-5400. Pictured below that is the U-22, which was completely rebuilt four years ago. Contact Steve Webster at sw WebsterU22@verizon.net. Below that is the U-37, built in 2011 and last raced just two years ago. Listed at \$399,900. Call Keith Walsh at 206-624-1908 for more information.

Go Fast Turn Left Racing



Webster Racing



Lon Erickson



NEXT MEETING OF UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS

Sunday, December 11, 2016
Meeting starts at 2 p.m.

Bellevue Public Library, Room 3
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