

EXTREME | HISTORIC RACING
PERFORMANCE





The Prize

This Rudder is from the Miss DeSoto V, which set a UIM One Mile Straightaway record at New Martinsville, WV on 9/27/58, driven by George "Buddy" Byers, Jr. His record speed of 151.271 mph was never broken.

Historic Racing West Virginia

MORE THAN 40 TEAMS CONVERGED IN WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA TO RELIVE THE PAST, SHARE WAR STORIES, AND PUT ON A SPECTACULAR SHOW FOR FANS WHO CAME FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY.



THE EVENT | Debbie Joseph, a long-time Wheeling resident has been around race boats for many years and wanted to bring the vintage boats to her hometown. Her husband Dan Joseph recounts the birth of the West Virginia regatta. "We were coming home from the APBA Gold Cup in Detroit when Debbie looked out on the Ohio River from the Wheeling Bridge and said, "We should have an event here. I agreed to support her, but it is her event."

"Last year was our first regatta and it was a huge success. The people of Wheeling supported the event, we have a perfect location, and more than 40 boats here this year." The venue is perfect. The course sits in the downtown

section of Wheeling, West Virginia, along the Ohio River. Boats run close to shore and pass under a suspension bridge, so the viewing possibilities are spectacular.

Debbie continues, "My entire family is involved. My husband Dan loves the boats. For years, he and I helped at the Evansville unlimited race and we have been to vintage events all over the East. We looked at what each site did well and noted their shortcomings. At our regatta, we tried to do all of the good things and avoid the pitfalls which beset other events."

Debbie and her team succeeded on all counts. Last year's event was awarded "Vintage Event of the Year." Not bad for a first-year race! Her four children, all young adults participate as officials and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 66 ▾



*Captions
I need captions
here. I need
captions here.
I need captions
here. I need
captions here.*

run their boat, The Judge, a 1966 145 cubic inch class hydroplane.

Dan explains how it all began. "In 2000, I had a passion for boat racing. At one point my brother Brian said, 'I would like to have a wooden race boat.' We found a boat on Ebay. Brian liked it. We watched it disappear with no bids. Debbie and my mother gave me a hard time about not buying the boat. My mother and I bought Little Fission as a surprise birthday present for Brian. It was the best birthday present ever. Brian runs that boat and every one in the family gets to drive it. Both my daughters Kristen and Annie drove Little Fission at West Virginia this weekend."

In 2001, Dan bought "The Judge" which was built in 1966 by Will Farmer of Richmond, Virginia. It was the twin to the 1969 national champ Wanton Duchess. The Judge was a regional boat that could have been a national player if it had better equipment.

Dan laughs as he recalls buying the boat. "We bought it from a man who wanted the motorcycle that was next to the boat. He wasn't a racer, so we bought the boat, complete with Falcon engine and a water-break dyno. Larry Lauterbach repaired a couple of broken frames and re-decked the boat in time to run in 2002. Will Farmer gave us a cowling that was too heavy for the Wanton Duchess, but it was perfect for us."

"In 2002, we took The Judge to Larry and showed him pictures of a boat we had seen in West Virginia. We knew this special boat existed. It had very little varnish. The license plate on the trailer was 1959, so it was apparent that it was a boat that had never been run, but what was this mystery boat?"

Dan bought the boat and took it to Larry's shop. "Henry Lauterbach remembered the it. The boat was built in 1952 and it was sold to a couple of sprint car racers. It ran once and they dropped a propeller shaft, so the boat never raced. We wanted to name the boat as it was never named. It was Henry's tenth boat, so hence the name, Henry's 10th. This is the only known Lauterbach boat that is all original. The glue they had in 1952 was never intended to last 50 years, so we have decided to never run the boat."

What causes a highly-successful orthodontist get so excited about these boats? Dan Joseph continues. "For me it's simple. These guys who raced at New Martinsville, West Virginia were my heroes. Boat racing was my favorite activity. I joined APBA when I was 12."

So, why didn't Joseph ever race boats? "Having watched a number of my heroes get injured and others die, it wasn't compatible with going to orthodontist school, so I enjoyed racing as a fan." Like so many people who, for various reasons never raced, the vintage class has provided people

Passion! No other word can explain why a person would buy a twenty year-old race boat, spend thousands of dollars and countless hours - just to run it a few times a year.

like Dan Joseph an opportunity to drive race boats. "I think we appreciate it more because this came later in life."

OLD FRIENDS | Ron Snyder and Howie Benns shared some good laughs when they compared notes about their racing careers. Both men started young and in the end, they both drove one of Bernie Little's Miss Budweiser unlimited hydroplanes. Benns brought a reputation as a hard-charger when he took over driving for Little in 1974.

"George Henley and I had some epic battles. His Pay'n Pak was faster than Miss Budweiser, but I was willing to push it hard, so we were competitive." Benns won his first race at Miami when the highly-favored Pay 'n Pak faltered. Throughout his time with Bernie, Howie was always waiting for the other shoe to drop. "I knew I wasn't Bernie's first choice. He wanted Dean Chenoweth to come back, but Dean was involved in running his Budweiser distributorship and wasn't available." After winning his third race of his rookie season, Howie celebrated with a motorcycle ride near Phoenix. He crashed the bike and broke his leg. The severe fracture knocked him out of the Bud ride for a year.

After a year recuperating, Howie returned to drive for Bernie. With the 1976 APBA Gold Cup within his grasp, Benns was injured when Miss Budweiser crashed in the final heat. Bernie was livid after the

wreck. Howie only needed a third-place finish to win the total-points event. Instead, he blazed into the Belle Isle turn and crashed hard. Bernie felt Howie pushed too hard and should have won the race. "I knew Bernie wasn't real happy with me after Detroit. It seemed like nothing I did was enough. If I lost a heat, he was mad. If we broke while I was trying to win, he got madder. At one event, we won and he was still unhappy. All he could say was, 'You just got lucky today.'"

After his stint with Budweiser, Howie Benns went back to the GP class. The smile returned and Benns was a major force, winning nearly half of all the heats he entered. At the West Virginia event, Howie drove Miss Dinomytes, a powerful Lauterbach GP boat that he drove in its prime. GP 1001 won the 1988 American, Canadian, and World Championships. Miss Dinomytes added a North American championship to its resume in 1991.

The 24 foot Lauterbach is still a fan favorite every time it hits the water. "The boat is so much fun to drive. I can take it out and not worry about winning or losing, just go out and run it hard enough to put on a good show for the fans." It was so good to see Howie smiling. Who says you can't go back home again?

Another smiling face belonged to the pride of Piqua, Ohio, Ron Snyder. Ron honed his skills racing in the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 68 ▾





*F-77
Built in 1946,
this boat
survives to this
day - running
strong!*

competitive Ohio River Valley limited circuit. In 1976, Snyder was tabbed to drive Gene Benning's U-7. Although the boat was underpowered, Snyder acquitted himself well, garnering praise from the unlimited fraternity.

When Bernie Little needed a new driver for the 1978 season, Snyder was given the ride. It was no-win situation. Bill Muncey's Atlas Van Lines was dominating the series while Miss Budweiser was a distant second-place boat. Snyder drove Miss Budweiser for the 1978 season and then was replaced by Dean Chenoweth who was given a new, state-of-the-art Ron Jones cabover unlimited.

"My Budweiser year was challenging to say the least. Bill Muncey had a new Jim Lucero cabover, that was a rocket, yet I was expected to win. I won one race at Tri Cities, Washington, but that was about it. There was always a lot of pressure to win, regardless of the equipment."

Snyder made the most of his West Virginia weekend, driving Tim Settle's E-4 Sir Ron III, Barracuda, and Tom and Jacq Bertolini's Country Boy. "It doesn't get much better than this. I was in three boats this weekend and the only thing the owners told me was to have a good time." In between runs, Snyder mingled with the fans and swapped war stories with Benns. While the historical accuracy of their

stories was questionable at times, the two men symbolize what the vintage thing is all about. Fun, and more fun!

THE GRAND OLD LADY | The oldest boat in the event, F-77 Barracuda is owned by Tim Settle from Brookville, Ohio. The history of the boat is almost unbelievable. Fred Wickens, a noted California builder constructed the boat in 1946. Two years later, Lou Butler of Zanesville, Ohio set a 10-mile competition record at New Martinsville. The boat never had the funding to make the entire circuit, so it faded into obscurity.

In 1963 Tim's father, Glenn Settle purchased the boat as a pleasure craft from Ray Smith. According to Tim, "We took the boat down to Lake Cumberland and ran it all over the lake. I can't tell you how much fun we had with it! We knew nothing about its history, just that we had a neat toy."

After many years as a play thing, the boat sat in a garage in Brookville, a suburb of Dayton, Ohio until Phil Kunz, a fifty-year veteran photographer discovered it. Phil knew the boat immediately. "My jaw just about dropped. No one knew what they had. Here was a one-of-a-kind boat that had set records and even raced with the unlimiteds at New Martinsville. Fred Wickens built twelve hulls with this design, but this was the largest of them all.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 70 ▾



*Rum Runner
Built in 1980,
powered by
a 283 Chevy
engine.*

Historically, this is a huge find, because it's the only one we know that still exists." Phil talked Tim into restoring the boat back to its original configuration.

"It took two years to rebuild the boat," Tim says almost like a proud papa. "I totally took everything apart. I do mean everything. Every nut and bolt was replaced. At one point, I had to cover part of the boat because the stench of rodent urine was almost overpowering. Inside, everything was bad, so it was a lot of work, but I wanted it to be right." The results are stunning. "The boat weighs 1,250 pounds without me in it. Now, that's another story!"

Originally, the boat had a Merc flathead engine. The last engine it used was a 1955 Corvette 265 with Stromberg carbs. The engine was resleeved with original manifolds. It has '58 Corvette heads and today, the boat is set up as close as it was the last time it raced. The workmanship on the boat is spectacular. Fred Wickens would be proud.

"I have collected cars and motorcycles, but this is the best thing I have ever done in my life. The people are absolutely great. If one of us has a problem, someone is there to help. As for the boat ride, every time out, it's a new experience." In keeping with the theme of sharing, Settle turned over the controls to Ron Snyder so, "I could see the boat run from the beach. It does look good out there." It seemed only fitting that the 61 year-old girl logged the most time on the river. With a smile as wide as the Ohio River, Settle laughed at comments about his time on the water. "We may have to quit running today. I think we are running out of fuel!"

THE RUM RUNNER | Jersey Speed Skiffs were developed as a boat that could handle conditions in the bays of the east coast where the water could get very rough in a short time period. Legend has it that these boats were used to transport alcohol during prohibition. The truth of the matter according to Rum Runner owner Robert Wagoner is, "These boats were used mainly for fishing. They couldn't hold enough liquor and they weren't fast enough, but it makes a good story."

Co-owner David Wagoner lights up when discussing the history of his boat. "It was built in 1980 by Dave Paraskevas who wanted to create a race boat that could win. Unfortunately, he didn't know some of the rules for the class. His idea was to lower deck to make the profile lower and make the boat faster. He also installed an Ameson surface drive system. While the deck was barely legal, the surface-drive propeller was not, so it was not allowed to race."

Paraskevas took the boat to St. Petersburg, Florida and ran it once. Not only was the boat illegal, but it didn't run well either. The boat stayed in Florida, until Jeff Magnuson bought it and took it to Maine. He raised the deck, replaced the surface drive, and installed a 283 Chevy engine, but never raced, citing safety concerns. Too many people died racing boats, so Magnuson sold the boat to Mike Micheau.

Micheau wanted the boat to look like a traditional Jersey Speed Skiff, so he raised the front of the deck and redid all of the work to the look it has today. He did a great job of restoring the boat, but his interests changed. He built a replica of Miss Detroit and sold the Rum Runner to Ken Edwards who used it to water ski in Maine. Robert and David Wagoner bought the boat from Edwards, and set it

CONTINUED ON PAGE 72 ▾



up the way it is today. According to David, “We replaced the trim tab, propeller, and tuned up the 350 engine which was now the powerplant.”

H-1 Built in 1965.

So, why do all of this work? Robert Wagoner explains. “David and I crewed for Eddie Aleksandrowicz from the mid 1950’s to the mid 1960’s in the 266 class. There, we saw the jersey Speed Skiffs and we fell in love with them.” The hull is beautiful and the love and care that the two brothers shower on the boat is obvious. Just another example of the passion these people have for their boats.

A CRAZY THING | One of the crowd favorites was H-1 Miss Crazy Thing, the last in a series of boats carrying that name owned by the Sterett family of Owensboro, Kentucky. It all started in when Bill Sterett brought home his Henry Lauterbach, 7 liter hull, much to the surprise of his wife who asked, “What is that crazy thing?” The name stuck and the legend was born. Sterett won the national championship and the national high-point title in 1965 driving his boat.

Sterett and his brother-in-law crew chief Jim Hay built a two-engine version of the boat and raced it on the unlimited circuit as Miss Chrysler Crew. The boat featured two 426 cubic inch Chrysler hemispherical head engines. In 1967, Sterett drove Miss Chrysler Crew to victory in the U.I.M World Championship on the Detroit River. One year later, Chrysler pulled the plug on sponsorship and Miss Chrysler Crew was no more.

Sterett drove Bernie Little’s Miss Budweiser to an APBA Gold Cup and a national championship national championship in 1969. Citing pressures from the rigors of running his crane service in Owensboro, Sterett left the unlimited circuit and focused his racing efforts to Miss

Crazy Thing. The current H-1 was built by Henry Lauterbach in 1973 and was restored by Billy Sterett Jr. and Larry Lauterbach in 2004. Billy took the boat to events all over the Midwest and was a crowd favorite at every site.

After Billy was killed in Owensboro while testing Travis Hickman’s H-35 Petti’s Pet, Mike Tucker took over Miss Crazy Thing and runs it in Billy’s memory at every event. The beautiful mahogany hull is always well prepared and runs like it did more than thirty years ago. For those of us who were fortunate enough to know the Sterett family, watching Miss Crazy Thing is extremely emotional. Bill Sterett and his two sons Billy and Terry are no longer with us, but a part of them lives on in Mike Tucker’s Miss Crazy Thing.

THE LAUTERBACH LOVE FEST | As Dan Joseph looked over the roster of boats at the event, he said, “Each year we want to honor the contributions of someone within the sport. Our choice this year was Henry Lauterbach who built hundreds of hulls which raced all over the country.

If you wanted to win limited hydroplane races, a Lauterbach hull was a necessity. Henry was a man who loved boat racing and hand built each boat as if it was his own. The workmanship was always immaculate and each boat performed very well.” Over the years, his designs varied only slightly. Why mess with success?

One of Henry’s biggest fans is Tom Bertolini of Detroit. He and his wife Jacq have owned multiple Lauterbach hulls. Their first boat, Country Boy was originally built by Lauterbach in 1971 for Joe and John Siracusa. When Siracusa’s ordered the boat, they insisted on a “wide transom.” Henry Lauterbach protested, but they held firm and the first boat of its kind was born.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 74 ▾



*The Fastest Man on Water
Ken Warby made a special appearance at the event.*

After the success of the Country Boy, all Lauterbach's were built with the wide transom. Mike Weiner bought the boat in 1972 and put the legendary Jim Kropfeld in the cockpit who drove to a national championship in 1975 and the national high point championship in 1977.

Tom bought the boat from a veterinarian from Council Bluffs, Iowa who had it sitting in a barn, along with two other Lauterbach hulls. Carl Wilson, who owned The Tiger, another 225 Lauterbach helped Tom find the boat.

It was in running condition, but it had been stretched one foot longer and one foot wider to run as a six liter. Tom found the man who did the modification and found out that they had built "around the boat" to make it into a six liter. When Bertolini stripped off the "added parts" there was the original boat. Amazing! After considerable work, Country Boy looked better than ever, just another example of the passion that vintage racers shower on their prized race boats.

At first, Tom was protective of the hull, not letting others drive the beautiful blue boat, but at the Wheeling event, Jacq Bertolini spent most of the time behind the wheel. While Jacq conceded that Ron Snyder was faster in the boat, she said, "He may be faster, but I am better looking!" Everyone, including Ron Snyder agreed. The two drivers shared a lot of laughs, just more of the fun at West Virginia.

What possesses a seemingly normal person who owns a construction company, specializing in home remodeling to do this? "I think I must have been hit in the head with a propeller, because none of this is logical. I have always had a love affair with boat racing. I hooked up with Mark Weber and was going to race inboards. When I saw Carl Wilson's boat, I became hooked on vintage racing. I enjoy taking old boats and restoring them." That's an understatement. Since

restoring Country Boy, Bertolini has restored Lady Payne, a Longtin six liter and Deepwater Special, a Luaterbach GP, and most recently he now owns the fourth Advance United Lauterbach GP. "We call vintage racing the 'Wish Camp' for boat racing. It gives those of us who could never race an opportunity to have a lot of fun."

One of Henry Lauterbach's most successful hulls was the GP-200 Lauterbach Special, built in 1976 for Henry Lauterbach's brother Norman Lauterbach. The 22'6" GP class boat won the Nationals five times, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1981, and 1983. Lauterbach Special also won the national high point championship four times, 1977, 1979, 1980, and 1981. The Lauterbach Special driver's roster reads like a Who's Who of racing: Terry Turner, Chip Hanauer, Tom D' Eath, Larry Lauterbach, Butch Kropfeld, Claude Campeau, and Howie Benns. Today, the boat is owned and driven by Bill Gmeiner Jr. of Detroit, Michigan.

While some classes of boat racing are suffering from reduced fields and fewer venues, the vintage events continue to grow. Thanks to the efforts of the Joseph family, the West Virginia Regatta is one of the best events in the country.

Vintage hydroplaning is all about the people. It has become Mecca for retired racers who want to have the feel of a race boat under them and for those fans who, for a myriad of reasons never raced. If you are looking for something different, plan to attend the 4th Annual Wheeling West Virginia Vintage Regatta, but leave your checkbook at home, otherwise you might get hooked and take home one of these beauties! •