

The second running of the Gold Cup fast boat section was slightly smaller in size. Sponson damage from the madhouse start caused Muncey to withdraw the Atlas, so the first turn was not nearly as crowded, as the second section got under way. Chenowith put Miss Budweiser out front coming out of the first turn and they were followed by the Oberto, Squire Shop, and the Pay n' Pak. The Thousand Trails went out early with a broken crankshaft.

On Lap 2, Hanauer pushed the Squire ahead of a faltering Oberto and the Pak did the same on Lap 3. From there it was pretty much a boat parade as they continued to put distance between one another. The Bud averaged 113.782 for the win, nearly two miles per hour faster than the Squire.

It was then all Miss Budweiser, wire-to-wire, as Chenowith produced a record setting performance in a hotly contested Gold Cup championship final. The beer boat's five-lap average was both a Gold Cup and Lake Washington course record of 123.814 mph, as was the Bud's Lap 3 circuit of the course at a blistering 127.728.

While Hanauer and the Squire did their best to contend, the Pak was the closest pursuer for nearly the entire final. Staying on the Pak's heels for three laps, Hanauer made his move at start of Lap 4 on the front straight and then gained significant ground on the Pak in the south turn. Cornering hard, he put the Squire into Lane 1 to make a final run on Walters as the two boats sailed through the floating bridge turn. But Walters saw the move and was able to hold off the late challenge, reopening more space on the Squire on the straightaways during Lap 6.

So close was the gap from first to third that all three boats broke the previous Gold Cup and Lake Washington heat record. The Bud produced an average of 123.814 to set the record, and the Pak and Squire tallied six lap averages of 122.223 and 121.105 respectively. The other three finishers were well off the pace, with the Oberto clocking in at 110.911, the Frank Kenney Toyota averaging 108.048, and the Captran Resorts timing in at 95.932.

On September 9, the Squire Shop trailered the boat to Stan Sayres pits for what was described as a routine test run on Lake Washington in preparation for the Circus Circus Trophy race in San Diego.

While traveling at less than full speed down the main straight at approximately 2:45 p.m., a gust of wind suddenly caught the boat and lifted the bow section off the water, causing it to flip over backwards in a nearly complete circle before smashing back onto the water, leaving the lake littered with debris.

The flip activated the Squire's parachute safety system, but the chute became entangled with the tail of boat and failed to open fully, causing Chip Hanauer to be dragged for a short distance between the boat and the water.

Hanauer complained of back pain, and a large gash was carved into his helmet by the crash, but he never lost consciousness. He was taken to Harborview Hospital, where he was confined for rest and observation.

The boat was quickly towed to shore by a chase boat used during the testing. It was then lifted onto its trailer where the extent of the damage was clearly visible. The hull had literally been broken in half by the impact.



**A screen capture from a film of the accident that shows the damage that occurred as a result of the September 21, 1981 end-over-end flip by the '79 Squire Shop on Lake Washington. The hull was nearly broken in half at its mid-point.**

Initially, it was felt that the boat could be repaired in time to race in San Diego, but the hull's life as the Squire Shop had essentially come to an end. Facing a monumental effort to put the boat back together, the decision was made to purchase the now idol Norberg Circus Circus hull as a replacement. It was a Norberg for a Norberg.

### **The Circus Becomes A Squire and Atlas Departs**

Apparently unable to fully prepare the Circus-Squire hull for San Diego, the team skipped the September 20 race. Repainted in the livery of the Squire Shop, it debuted as the U-2 at the ill-fated UIM World's Championship regatta on Laguna De

Coyuca, a fresh-water lake about five miles north of Acapulco, Mexico. Not unexpectedly, it looked very much the same as its predecessor in both paint scheme and profile.

Hanauer qualified the Circus-Squire at 122 mph, placing it at fourth on the qualifying ladder behind Chenowith and Miss Budweiser (139), Muncey and Atlas Van Lines (136), and Pay n' Pak (135). That placed the boat in the modified-Fan Plan fast heat for the Acapulco race with the three "hot" boats along with Jack Schaefer Jr. and Oh Boy! Oberto (119).

The boat's inaugural heat of racing as the Squire did not quite meet expectations. The boat went dead in the water and failed to finish in the first fast boat heat that day.

In the second fast boat section, the Squire acquitted itself much better, putting up a challenge to eventual heat winner Miss Budweiser while averaging 111.077 behind the Bud's 113.350 effort. This provided the team enough points to make the final.

Having seen the video of the Acapulco final in its entirety only a few times, key moments still remain seared in my memory. Muncey appears to navigate one of his patented near perfect starts, and he is seen leading the field through the first turn. Close behind him are Chenowith and the Budweiser and John Walters in the Pak with E. Milner Irvin and Hanauer trailing them by a short distance in the Madison and the Squire.

Muncey grew the lead slightly over his nearest pursuer as he thundered down the backstretch, but instead of decelerating at the entrance pin to the turn at the end of the straight as was customary, Muncey seemed to profoundly pick up speed. Perhaps it was because of the bright afternoon sun blinding him or perhaps it was a bold attempt to grow his lead even farther by going deep into the turn at full blast, but he seemed to be radically pushing the envelope with the move.

Just as he appeared to begin to finally set up for the turn, the nose of the Blue Blaster began to slowly lift off the water. Instead of settling back to water, the boat took flight turning a reverse somersault that was an estimated one and one-half boat lengths in duration. It then slammed back to the surface in a huge spray of water.

Seeing the Atlas suddenly kite in the air ahead of them, both Chenowith and Walters were able to make it past the crash site without striking any debris from the wreck. Knowing that something terrible had happened, Chenowith quickly slowed and turned the Budweiser back to where the wreckage lay in the water.

About the same moment as the Bud began to turn back, E. Milner Irvin in Miss Madison and Hanauer in the Squire Shop roared into the debris field at full tilt. No flares had yet been fired, so the two continued to race into the northwest turn unabated.

Seeing the wreckage approaching in front of him, Irvin tried to avoid it by spinning the Madison hard to the right, bringing it a full 360 degrees around in the process and causing injury to his ribs. Blinded by the late summer sun's glare off the water, Hanauer raced over the top of the deck and cowl of the disabled Atlas, damaging the sponson of the Squire. It would later sink while it was under tow from a patrol boat back to the pits.

Muncey had been thrown from the boat as it turned over in mid-air. According to the physicians that attended to his injuries, the great racer succumbed from a broken neck and serious head injuries. He had also suffered a collapsed lung and other serious injuries. At least one observer described him as being dead at the scene, but the attending physician described Muncey as rallying several times on the way to the Navy hospital where he was flown before passing from his injuries.

The race was cancelled and Miss Budweiser was declared the winner based on the 800 points it had earned in the two preliminaries. Muncey and the Atlas were awarded second place with 469, followed by the Pay n' Pak at 450. Hanauer and the Squire Shop placed fourth overall with 300 points accrued.

Besides the sport of hydro plane racing losing one of its all-time great drivers and arguably its best ever ambassador, the sport had suddenly lost perhaps its best ever race hull in the Blue Blaster Atlas Van Lines. The hull landed upside down when it returned to the water and the impact nearly broke it in half, leaving a mangled mess of metal and wood.

The Blaster was taken to the Kelson boat shop when it was returned to Seattle. It was then patched back together cosmetically after the accident, but it was not fully repaired. My friend, Bob Bolam, has told me that he was among the volunteers that helped piece the boat back together in preparation for its donation to the Smithsonian Institution, and he remarked on the eerie feelings he had while standing in the boat's cockpit before it was raised onto barrels so he and others could work on the hull.

Apparently never having been displayed in any of the Smithsonian's Washington, D.C. museums facilities, the hull sat in garages and warehouses for nearly 30 years where it was largely untouched. Then the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum acquired the hull, and under the direction of Crew Chief and expert museum restoration man Don Mock, numerous volunteers worked for nearly four years to rebuild the venerable race boat. On each trip to Seattle, I personally would stop to watch Don and others work their magic on the hull, restoring it to true museum quality condition.

On July 31, 2014, the Blaster returned to the water for the first time in an exhibition run at Seafair, appropriately with Chip Hanauer at the wheel. It is now part of the

Kent, Washington museum's permanent collection of hulls, the first of the three Berg hulls that it is hoped will receive such treatment.

### **The Circus-Squire Continues On – But With A New Pilot**

In the words of Chip Hanauer, the Circus-Squire Shop was "bent quite a bit" when it ran over the bottom of the Atlas Van Lines in Acapulco.

"Once a bottom is bent," Hanauer told the Seattle Times, "it's pretty difficult to make it straight again."

For the better part of four months, owner Bob Steil pondered whether he would fix the boat, build another, or get out of the sport. Then in early February of 1982, he announced a five-year commitment to the sport along with plans to redesign the hull damaged in Acapulco.

The plan he announced for renovating the hull called for trimming upwards of 1,100 pounds from the 6,600 pounds it was currently carrying, adding a ship-to-shore telemetry system to send information from the boat's gauges to the crew trailer, and installing computerized timing equipment to help Hanauer better time his starts. In addition, a redesigned horizontal stabilizer was to be installed to increase the hulls stability.

Steil also indicated that he had assembled materials for an entirely new boat and was considering using a turbine engine as its power source -- another harbinger of the design and propulsion revolution that was building momentum in the background of the sport.

In late April, Steil announced a driver change, introducing former Miss U.S. 1 driver Tom D'Eath as Chip Hanauer's replacement for the 1982 season. Hanauer had left the Squire team when he was hired by Fran Muncey to drive her new Atlas Van Lines hull.

Corollary to the driver change announcement, Crew Chief Jerry Zuvich revealed that the team had followed through on proposed modifications to the boat by lowering the horizontal wing and lightening several areas of the boat to increase boat speed, thereby hoping to push up the competitive lap speeds from the 123-124 mph range the boat had been averaging up to 125-127.

Zuvich said additional testing was necessary, and revealed that the team was purposely skipping the opening race of the season in Miami to get the boat in better trim. The team dedicated testing in late May to finding the proper weight balance and came out of it with what D'Eath had termed to be an improved ride.

The performance of the Squire in its season opener at the weather delayed Thunder In The Park Regatta on Seneca Lake near Geneva, New York was somewhat below

expectation, however. The boat had qualified at 114.769, a full 17 miles per hour slower than the top qualifier, and in Heat 1, D'Eath drove to a fourth place finish that was even more off the pace with a speed of 103.152.

The problems continued while performing in the championship final when the Squire failed to finish when the boat's water line separated near the end of Lap 3.

In a special consolation heat, the Squire placed second in a "hotly" contested race with Miss Madison when the other two boats went dead in the water. The two "raced" at parade lap speeds, mostly side-by-side, which seemed to entertain the small crowd in attendance. The margin of "victory" for Miss Madison was only .024 mph at the finish to illustrate how closely they were running during the majority of the heat.

[Note: The Seneca Lake race is historically notable in that I believe it represented the first win ever by a turbine powered unlimited, the Pay n' Pak.]

D'Eath next put the Squire into the APBA Gold Cup field in Detroit with an average speed of 123.950 mph and then upped it to 125.723 to place it fifth on the qualifying ladder. That time put the boat in the Fan Plan fast flight along with Atlas Van Lines, Pay n' Pak, Miss Budweiser and U-30 Miss Prodelco (the '76 Miss Budweiser hull) piloted by Steve Reynolds.

The Squire scored a third place in the first section, but failed to start the second. Because of attrition that hit the rest of the field, the 225 points from the first heat was just enough to place the boat in the finals, where it again placed third. With speeds in the low 90s for both heats, the Squire never really challenged for the lead in either heat, sections that were both won by boats traveling in the 120 mph range.

At the next race in Madison, D'Eath saved the equipment after a strong start and held on to place second in Heat 1-B with the Squire. He then secured a win in Heat 2-B after the race was stopped after four laps when Miss Rock's driver Bob Miller jumped into the water as his boat began to sink. The rest of the field had either failed to start or went dead in the water before the race stoppage.

In the winner take all final, D'Eath nailed the start and then held on as his chief competitors, the Atlas Van Lines and the Miss Budweiser, faltered behind him to take the Governor's Cup. The win also represented the first for the Circus hull as the Squire Shop.

Observing in the preliminaries that the two hot boats were late getting to the line, D'Eath charged the Squire down the front straight and then slowed just long enough to ensure that he was precisely crossing the line as the one-minute gun fired. The Atlas suffered electrical problems and dropped out on Lap 1, removing that challenge, and then after being in contention early, the Bud broke a blade off its

propeller and lost speed, opening the door even further for the win. The Squire averaged 114.242 for the five laps and the trophy..

The unlimited circuit moved on to Evansville next, and D'Eath put the Squire into that race fourth on the ladder with a qualifying speed of 121.417 mph. The speed placed the Squire in the fast heat of the organizer's new modified "Fan Plan". With only seven boats on hand, the new format for the race placed the five fastest boats in two head-to-head preliminary heats. From that match up, the three boats with the most points automatically moved into a winner take all final. The two boats not making the final would then join two unqualified boats in a consolation heat out of which the top two finishers would make up the other two boats in the five boat final.

D'Eath and the Squire easily won the first heat when both Atlas Van Lines (supercharger problems on Lap 3) and Miss Budweiser (thrown rod on Lap 4) succumbed to mechanical issues.

Both the Squire Shop and the Prodelco went dead in the water in the narrow upper turn and Heat 2 had to be halted because the stalled boats had created an unsafe situation. The heat was rerun, but neither of the boats was allowed to compete because they had stopped competition. The DQ, however, automatically seeded the Squire and Prodelco into the second chance Consolation Heat.

D'Eath mistimed his start in the consolation and jumped the gun with the Squire. He was able to pass one of the unqualified boats (Miss Kentuckiana Paving) to place third, but since only two boats moved on to the final from the heat, it looked like the Squire team's day was done.

Fortunately for the Squire team, race officials added the Squire to the final field at the last minute, but in order to be able to compete, D'Eath was forced to start his boat at least a roostertail behind the five boats that had qualified for the heat. Given the opportunity to compete, the U-2 overcame the handicap and placed a strong third with a speed of 107.784 mph, giving the team third place overall.

Next up on the circuit was the Columbia Cup, and qualifying there wasn't without its difficulties for the Squire team. The boat qualified by turning an average of 125.323, but D'Eath took the boat out later in the day in hopes of improving the team's position on the ladder. As he drove the boat out of the first turn, the blower backfired and exploded. The explosion severed the fuel lines, and the engine burst into flames. Fuel had splashed on D'Eath's driving suit and the arm of the uniform erupted into flame from the heat of the engine fire.

Fortunately, as the Squire slowed to a stop, a heavy spray was sent up from the bow area and sponsons, and D'Eath was able to quickly douse the flames by sticking his arm into the spray. The engine fire was quickly extinguished and did little damage to the hull. However, the fire crew bumped the hull with the patrol rescue craft as it arrived on the scene, leaving the deck slightly dented and scratched in the process.

The Squire's pre-fire qualifying speed of 136.633 put it in the "Fan Plan," fast flight, and after around the clock repairs were made to the fire damage to the hull, the boat made it into Heat 1.

D'Eath took advantage of Frank Kenney Toyota-Volvo and Atlas jumping the gun to nearly eke out a win. He battled with the Pay n' Pak for three laps before the U-25 gradually pulled away for the win.

The Squire was awarded first place in Heat 2 when all of the competition dropped by the wayside. The Pak bent a propeller blade and returned to the pits. The Toyota-Volvo developed turbo problems and a hole in the hull kept that boat in the pits. The Aranow was withdrawn before the heat, and so with only one boat still running, the race was called after three laps were completed.

Racing luck aided the Squire team even further in the final. D'Eath grabbed the lead at the start and held on as both the Atlas (fuel primer electrical failure) and the Pak (turbine flameout) went dead in the water. The Squire registered a first lap speed of 120.482 as it pulled away from the Toyota-Volvo and two of the slow heat participants to take the Columbia Cup win with an average speed of 110.348 mph.

The Squire's speed in the final was remarkable given the fact that D'Eath had signaled twice to race officials before the final that he was uncomfortable with the wind-swept conditions of the racecourse. High winds and a heavy chop had plagued the course all day.

Notably, the Columbia Cup win pushed the Squire Shop team into first place in the National High Point race ahead of Atlas Van Lines and Miss Budweiser. But just when the Squire's racing luck was looking up, along came rookie George Johnson in Heat 1-B of the Emerald Cup race in Seattle.

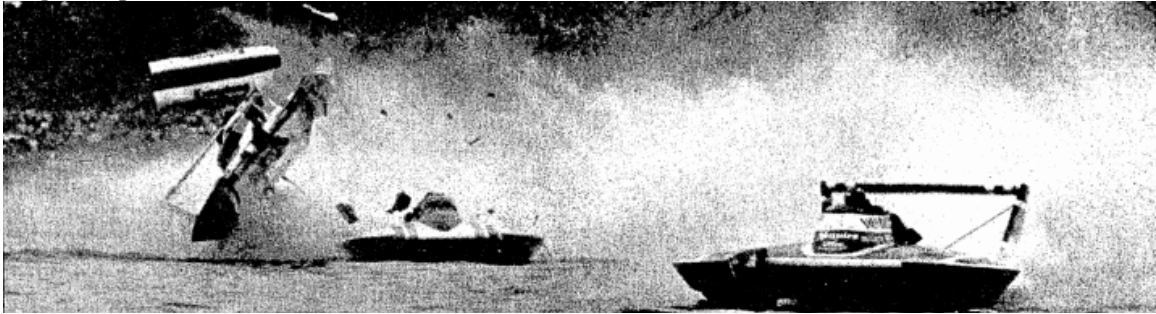
Driving the Executone in the far outside lane near the end of the front straight after the start, Johnson hit a deep hole and then swerved hard left while rising up on the boat's right sponson.

With the sudden whip action by the Executone, D'Eath found himself suddenly heading broadside into the careening boat. He rapidly decelerated and simultaneously turned the Squire sharply to the left. Meanwhile, the Executone had settled back to the water, but instead of slowing, the boat again hooked hard to the left and into the infield. D'Eath once again made an evasive move to the left, but was unable to avoid colliding with the Executone this time.

Behind the two came a hard-charging John Walters and Pay n' Pak. Perhaps blinded by the spray sent up by the dicing around and collision of the two boats, Walters zoomed the Pak into the wreckage, then made his own hard left turn while running



up onto the Executone's left side. The Pak went airborne after contact, made a 360-degree spin in the air, and then slammed back down on the Executone.



**The Pay n' Pak careens off the left side of the Executone and goes airborne as the D'Eath and the Squire try to escape further collision. – Greg Gilbert Seattle Times Photo**

As the Pak violently bounced onto the water's surface, driver Walters was tossed from the Pak's cockpit, suffering serious injury. Pulled from the water, he was taken to Harbor View Hospital where the attending trauma team placed him on a ventilator when he struggled to breathe on his own because of the water that had invaded his lungs. Emergency surgery was done to repair three spinal fractures, and Walters also received treatment for a broken leg, a broken right elbow, a bruised lung, three broken bones in his cheek, a concussion (a diagnosis that was later amended to several severe frontal lobe contusions), and damage to his left eye. Following the surgery, he was placed in the intensive care unit in serious condition.

Johnson suffered a leg laceration as he was tossed up and partially over the windshield. D'Eath escaped the fracas uninjured.

Not so fortunate were the three race boats.

The Executone sank quickly as Johnson scrambled along its deck. It first tilted on end and then went down tail first. The driver then clung to a stricken Pay n' Pak floating nearby until he was rescued by one of the patrol craft.

The Pak suffered rips and tears all along the hull and a major hole on the right side of the cockpit. As a result, the boat was deemed done for the season.

Crew Chief Jerry Zuvich reported that the Squire Shop was repairable but done for the day. The left sponson had been destroyed, the transom ripped up, and the frame of the air tunnel between the two sponsons had been severely damaged.

D'Eath angrily laid the blame for the accident on Johnson, telling reporters "the guy should have a sponson up his butt."

With the death of Dean Chenoweth at the Columbia Cup during testing and the serious injury to Pay n' Pak's John Walters in Seattle in successive weeks, Squire

owner Bob Steil moved in late August to hire award winning Indy 500 race car designer Roman Slobodinsky and Indy car fabricator and builder Don Edmunds to examine the hull and recommend design changes or additions to the hull to make it more stable on the water.

Preliminary ideas from Slobodinsky included redesigning the back stabilizing wing, so that the ends adjusted like an airplane wing to force the nose of the boat down when it started to become loose. The wing would automatically adjust when a speedo tube at the bow end of the boat lifted free of the water. The designer also felt there was room for change in the deck and rear transom design of the Squire.

In mid-September, D'Eath and the team tested a drag chute system designed to settle the Squire back on the water if the nose began to lift. Controlled by the driver, the chute was stored on the horizontal wing and was designed to break away when a certain level of drag pressure on the device was reached.

With repairs completed and drag chute ready for action, the Squire team headed to San Diego in mid-September. D'Eath wasted little time in qualifying the U-2 with a speed of 120.321. On day two of qualifying he upped that speed to 123.288, which placed the Squire fourth on the ladder and in Heat 1-B under a modified Fan Plan that placed the "even" and "odd" qualifiers in separate sections.

Oil pressure problems that had plagued Miss Budweiser during testing and qualifying continued into 1-B, and new Miss Budweiser driver Jim Kropfeld watched the heat from the sidelines. Also succumbing to equipment issues, Frank Kenney Toyota-Volvo also went out early, leaving D'Eath and the Squire to more or less coast to victory. The Squire averaged 123.288, beating the closest competition by just over 22 mph.

After the first section, the boats were redistributed, this time putting the two first place boats from the first sections into the same heat with a third place and a fifth place boat, so the Squire was seeded into the fast flight of Heat 2-A. Again, the Squire waltzed to a lopsided win when attrition slowed or eliminated the nearest competition. The margin of victory was nearly 19 mph although the Squire had averaged a much slower 113.265 mph.

It looked like it would be the Squire Shop's day as D'Eath took the lead at the start of the final and led the field into Turn 1. But that was where the race ended for the U-2, when the supercharger suddenly went crackers with a loud bang. The resulting Did Not Finish status and the zero points earned for the heat relegated the Squire to a disappointing fourth place finish overall.

The season ending race for the '82 season was the Bluebonnet Class - UIM World Championship near Houston, Texas. D'Eath qualified at 122.783, third fastest on the ladder, thus insuring the fast flight under the Fan Plan in use.

Bad racing luck again struck the team when the Squire broke down while returning to the pits after a malfunctioning start clock postponed the start of Heat 1-B. The team was unable to make the needed repairs in time, and the boat missed the start of the rerun.

The luck was no better for Heat 2-B when despite getting a good start, the boat went dead in the water. Relegated to the consolation heat, the U-2 was again unable to make a start and finished the day with zero points.

Despite the disappointing showing at Houston, the team finished third in the National High Point race – mirroring how it had often finished many of the races during the season...behind the Atlas and the Budweiser. D'Eath finished the season in second place in the driver National High Point standings.

In mid-March of 1983, Tom D'Eath announced that he was leaving the Squire Shop team, citing failure to receive a salary increase and the ownership's decision to not build a new hull for the coming season as his reasons.



**New Squire Shop driver Earl Hall – Seattle Times Photo**

A week or so later, Squire Shop owner Bob Steil announced D'Eath's replacement, a highly successful 7-litre driver from Virginia named Earle Hall. A ten-year veteran of limited racing, Hall was the 1982 7-litre class champion, but had no experience driving an unlimited. Steil also announced that the Squire would enter all of the races on the 1983 circuit, something the team had not done in prior years.

A May 5 Seattle Times article revealed that the Squire Shop team was continuing its efforts to find ways to stabilize the ride of their unlimited. Tests on Lake Washington had taken place the day before, and the engineering firm of Associated Consulting Engineers to measure air flow across the surface of the Squire's hull in association with some upcoming air tunnel tests to try to improve the boat's aerodynamics.

Crew Chief Jerry Zuvich also shared that he had already altered the airflow pattern on the Squire's bottom side by narrowing the tunnel area between the sponsons in another effort to make the boat less flighty at high speeds.

Hall got his rookie season underway impressively by qualifying the boat fifth out of the seven entries at 122.783 mph at the season opening Missouri Governor's Cup at Lake of the Ozarks and placing the boat in the fast flight. He also had little trouble passing his driver's qualification.

The success didn't carry over for Hall to actual racing, however. As the boats were scoring up before Heat 1-A, he hooked the Squire in the first turn and spun out,

killing the engine. He was then unable to get the boat restarted, and slowly floated on the racecourse, becoming an obstacle to the boats coming through the turn. Eventual winner, Jim Kropfeld in Miss Budweiser was able to use the disabled U-2 to set a pick on the Atlas Van Lines, forcing Hanauer to take a much wider arc and opening up what had been a tight race at the time.

Hall was able to keep his boat running for Heat 2-B, but was well off the pace as he scored a third place finish behind the Atlas and Rich Plan/Miss Madison with a speed of 106.660.

Because of mechanical issues for other boats, the 225 points earned in the prelims was enough to get Hall and the Squire into the final. Hall appears to have driven conservatively though, following the faster boats through the first turn and then watching as the others dropped out one-by-one until he had moved into second behind the Rich Plan/Madison at the finish, putting the Squire third overall for the day with 525 points.

Next on the circuit was the Champion Spark Plug Regatta in Miami. Hall wasted no time in placing the Squire Shop in the field with a “take it easy” speed of 101.695 mph on the smallish 1 2/3 mile course. The team had spent the prior week making small improvements in the areas of propellers, gearboxes, and trim, so the “easy” run was meant to test some of the changes in running conditions.

Originally intended to be a “Fan Plan” format race, the Miami race organizers reverted to the old-school “draw for heats” approach, and the Squire Shop was drawn into Heat 1-A with Miss Budweiser. The team had increased its qualifying speed to 108.303, making it the second fastest boat behind the Bud in the four-boat heat.

Jim Kropfeld took the Bud into Turn 1 in the lead, but Hall and the Squire pulled even at the exit buoy. The boats then went deck-to-deck for 4¾ laps with the Budweiser winning a drag race to the finish. The speeds reflect how close the battle was – Budweiser 103.790 and Squire Shop 102.020 mph.

The Squire was drawn into Heat 2-A and this time was matched with the top qualifying Atlas Van Lines. Not surprisingly, it was the Chip Hanauer and the Atlas this time that blasted into the lead at the start with the Squire in chase mode. As the two boats raced down the backstretch, Hanauer inexplicably seemed to wait for Hall and the Squire to catch up and then the two ran deck-to-deck for 3½ laps. (This led to several critics saying some of the racing action that day was being ‘staged’.) On the final lap, the Atlas put distance on the Squire when the two lead boats moved to lap the ailing Miss Tosti Asti and the Squire was caught in the traffic jam for a while.

The Squire joined the Atlas and Bud in the five-boat final along with Miss Pure D’Lite and Miss Tosti Asti. It was over early, as Kropfeld took the Bud to the lead on the

inside and stayed there. The Squire slipped to third, where it averaged 95.580, nearly 17 mph slower than the winner.

It was then on to Thunder in the Park on Seneca Lake near Romulus, New York for the third race of the season. I could find no qualifying speeds listed, but the Squire apparently was third fastest behind the Atlas and the Bud because the draw was done under the Madison Fan Plan that matched the even and odd qualifiers in the first set of heats and the Squire was placed in the odd heat with top qualifier Atlas Van Lines as the second seed in the three boat heat.

In what was becoming a predictable starting scenario, the Atlas took the inside lane and led all the way, opening a full straightaway lead over the Squire by the final lap. Hall managed to average 98.441 in placing second.

Under the Madison format, all five of the surviving boats were seeded into Heat 2, so the Squire now went head-to-head with the Atlas and the Bud. This time it was all Miss Budweiser, as Kropfeld took the lead in the first turn and ran away from the field. Hall wasn't able to overtake a fading Atlas, finishing third while averaging 98.576 mph.

Again all surviving boats – this time there were six – made it into the final. Predictably, the Bud and Atlas battled it out ahead of the Squire, as Hall held things together to take third place points, this time averaging an even 100 mph.

Race number five was the Stroh's Spirit of Detroit on the Detroit River, and Hall put the Squire in the nine-boat field with a strong run of 118.734 mph. That made it the fourth fastest qualifier overall and seeded the boat into the Fan Plan fast flight in Heat 1-A along with the Atlas Van Lines, Miss Budweiser, Rich Plan Food Service/Miss Madison, and the U-5 Richard Buick Special (the '75 Lauterbach Special) with Terry Turner at the wheel.

Sadly, the Squire hit debris in the river during testing on race day, knocking a significant hole in the bottom of the boat. Repairs could not be completed in time for the boat to make it onto the water for either Heat 1-A or 2-A, but the team worked hard to get it ready for the last chance consolation heat before the final.

The patched up Squire's only hope for making the final was to place first in the Consolation Heat, and Hall did not disappoint. Starting from the far outside lane, he took a commanding lead with the Squire by the time he had exited the first turn. His lead widened with each lap as he eased to a 106.800 average for the win.

The Squire's day-long streak of bad racing luck carried into the final where despite a good start, the boat failed to finish, going dead in the water with a blown engine on the backstretch of Lap 2. Sporting only 400 points from the consolation, the Squire finished in fifth place overall when the points were tallied.

The fleet moved next to Madison for Dean Chenoweth Memorial Indiana Governor's Cup. Flooding and debris postponed qualifying for a day, and when it finally got underway, the Squire was in familiar territory as the third fastest qualifier at 118.110 mph in the eleven-boat field. Under the Bob Hughes-Madison fan plan, that speed was fast enough to place the boat in Heat 1-A with top qualifier Atlas Van Lines.

Winds of up to 20 knots and roiling waters greeted the field on race day, leading to a 3½-hour delay. Race officials went ahead with the program despite protests from several teams, and the decision to race led to a vicious back and forth between race officials and drivers.

Chip Hanauer with the Atlas took the lead at the start and quickly put good distance on the rest of the field. Behind him, Hall and the Squire hooked up in a battle for second with Jack Schaefer Jr. in Bob Taylor's Special (the former Miss Prodelco). The two battled back and forth for four laps before the Squire got a slight edge at the finish for the second place points, averaging a scant .095 mph faster for the five turns of the course.

The second place finish position in 1-A matched the Squire with the other second place finisher (Rich Plan/Miss Madison), the two fourth place finishers (Miss Renault and Executone), and the sixth place finisher (Miss Pure D'Lite) in Heat 2-B. The Rich Plan and Squire both charged the line at the start, but Hall was just a smidge too early and was penalized a lap for jumping the gun. The Executone went dead on Lap 1, and the Squire was able to catch up to and lap a struggling Pure D'Lite to secure third place points and make the final with a penalty slowed average of 86.472.

In the final, Kropfeld and Miss Budweiser led the pack into the first turn and was never headed. The Squire got a good start, but as Hall set up for the turn, he was judged to have cut the Rich Plan/Miss Madison off, resulting in a one-lap penalty. Suddenly down a lap, Hall was unable to recover and averaged another penalty slowed 85.812 on the way to a dead last sixth place finish.

The final race of the eastern swing landed the fleet in Evansville for the APBA Gold Cup. Hall put the Squire into the field with two-lap average of 117.350, but the speed wasn't good enough to put the boat in the Fan Plan fast heat this time, a situation that made it imperative that the Squire finished well, since only one boat could emerge from the slow heat prelims and into the final.

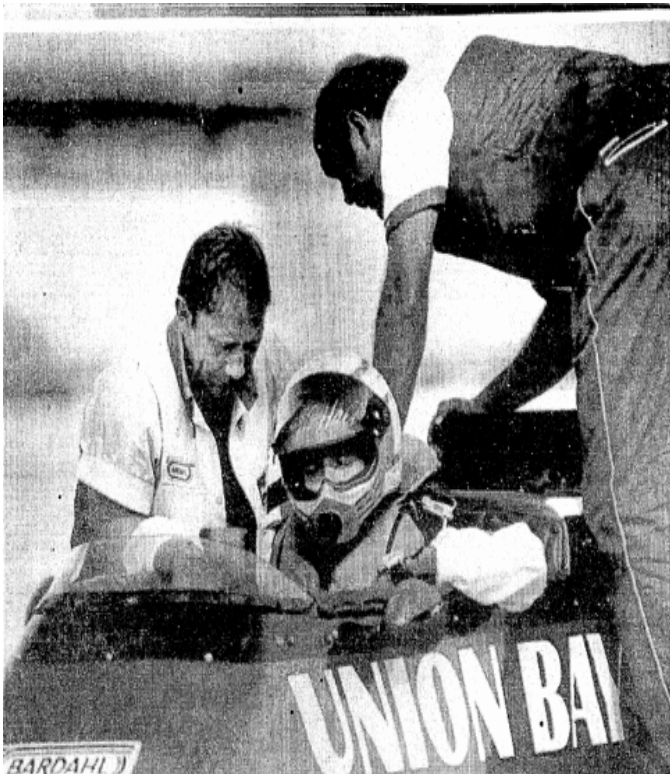
Hall got off to a slow start in Heat 1-B, trailing slightly both the Tosti Asti and Risley's Express into the turn, but he caught both boats by the exit pin of the second turn to take a lead that was never relinquished for the balance of the heat. The Squire's average for the heat was a conservative 99.333.

In the second section, Todd Yarling and the Tosti Asti again held the lead into the first turn, but Hall pulled the Squire even with them on the backstretch. The two battled for the lead for the first three laps, but Yarling was forced to cross the Squire's wake at the start of Lap 4, bouncing badly and slowing momentarily. By the time the Tosti Asti recovered its momentum, Hall had a full straightaway lead and its second win of the day, insuring a place in the finals. The pace was slightly faster with an average speed of 101.766 mph.

In the final, Hall found himself back in the pack through the first turn, but battled back to capture third overall for the Squire team when Miss Budweiser went airborne in the first turn on Lap 5 and then went dead in the water, allowing the U-2 to move up a spot. The average speed for the Squire was a respectable 110.119 mph.

The fleet moved back to the west coast and the Tri-Cities for the next event on the circuit – the Columbia Cup.

Citing business commitments, Hall was absent from a commercial film session involving the Squire Shop. Steve Reynolds took his place for the filming, and in the process, recorded the boat's fastest qualifying time of the season.



Earl Hall (in crash helmet) prepares for a Columbia Cup qualifying run in Pasco – Barry Wong – Seattle Times Photo

Reynolds' average for the new shorter two-mile Tri-Cities course was 122.658. That set a new Columbia Cup record, since the Squire's run was the first ever on the newly established racecourse. The run also earned the Squire team \$400 for posting the fastest time of the day. Perhaps most importantly, it placed the boat in the Fan Plan fast flight.

Reynolds' qualifying of the boat opened a discussion of Hall's inexperience in the big boats and the effect that it was having on the success of the Squire Shop team. The team was clinging to third place in the National Championship chase, but in doing so Hall had produced only three heat wins, and two of those had been in the less competitive Fan Plan "slow heats."



The fact that Hall was living in Virginia was also thought to be having an effect on the team's ability to test, as they had been forced to cut back on the activity considerably over what they had done in previous years.

Advancements by the "moneyed" teams had also had an effect. Newer hulls like the Atlas and Bud had design factors that gave them advantages in power to weight ratio. No longer was the Norberg Circus Circus/Squire hull on par in that regard with the most competitive boats, and changes in the hull did not seem to measurably close the gap. The team's strategy had changed from one that had them running head-to-head on an even playing field to one where they were hoping attrition would knock out the competition.

The Atlas was first across the start line in the first hot section of racing, and traded places with Miss Budweiser ahead of Hall and the Squire who held onto third for most of the first two laps before being caught and passed by American Speedy Printing in Turn 2. In the midst of Lap 3, the Squire's engine let go, and Hall drove it off the course for a Did Not Finish.

In Heat 2-A, the Squire took its now familiar place behind the Atlas and Bud, and then was given an unexpected gift when it was ruled that Kropfeld had taken the Budweiser across the start too early. Hall held his position in second for the balance of the heat while averaging 110.294. The 300 points earned placed the Squire in the final.

Unfortunately, Hall and the Squire didn't make it to the starting line for the final heat. Scoring up for the start, the driver mistimed his start and was way too early approaching the starting line. He eased off the accelerator, and as he did so, he thought he felt a rod let go, so he immediately shut down the engine and watched the race from a position in the midst of the first turn. It was later determined that a faulty electrical switch had caused the loud misfiring that had led to the shutdown.

With just 300 points, the Squire team finished fifth overall.

Action moved some 200 miles west the following week for the Sea Galley Emerald Cup race on Lake Washington. Hall and the Squire Shop were among the first to attempt to qualify when the course opened on Thursday, and the boat posted the fastest time of the day at 124.344 mph. Hall was quoted as saying that the speed achieved had surprised him since the team was not trying "to run fast" in light of the engine problems they had encountered in Pasco.

Adjacent to the article in the Seattle Times about the Squires qualification success was another article sharing the details of Bernie Little's plans to build a "space age" hydro using aerodynamic principles, adjustable surfaces, and light-weight composite materials. Ron Jones Sr., in collaboration with Lockheed engineer Doug Ford and Seattle-area aerodynamics expert Jim Raisbeck, had developed the design.



The piece also revealed that included in the new design concept was a driver “pod,” a completely enclosed cockpit made of space age plastic called Lexan. The report also noted that the driver would be tethered to the inside of the pod on a semi-reclined couch with escape hatches on the top and bottom of the pod.

[Note: This announcement was yet another signal of the change that was taking place in the unlimited ranks and affecting the NCB partnership’s further involvement in hydroplane racing.]

After the success of the qualification run, the bad luck streak that had plagued the Squire team on Pasco again abruptly settled down around them in Seattle. Later on Thursday afternoon and during a Friday test run, rods were thrown through the sides of two of the team’s engines.

Down on equipment, the Squire team’s elation with having one of the five fastest times of qualifying (and easily making the fast flight for the race), likely rapidly gave way to feelings of immense concern. Rather than being free to run hard all day on race day as had been hoped, the team had to proceed with a certain level of caution in order to preserve what equipment they had left.

The fast flight Heat 1-B was pretty much a walk over for the Atlas Van Lines as Hanauer quickly separated himself from Hall, the Squire, and the rest of the field at the start. Miss Budweiser had gone dead just before the one minute gun. As a result, the best racing came between Frank Kenney Toyota-Volvo and the Squire Shop on the last lap. Ron Snyder had built a considerable lead over Hall, but the as the Toyota-Volvo approached the finish, it suddenly died, coasting the last few yards to the line just head of the U-2. The Squire averaged 111.579 behind the Toyota-Volvo’s 112.247.

Hall and the Squire team again appeared to adopt the strategy in Heat 2-B of settling back to preserve equipment, waiting for attrition to take its toll. They were amply rewarded when the Toyota-Volvo went out with a bent wing and the Atlas threw a rod, both events occurring on Lap 4. Kropfeld and Miss Budweiser set a course record lap of 131.579 mph to take the win, followed by American Speedy Printing and the Squire Shop.

Safely in the final with two third places, Hall curiously took a less conservative approach. It was deck-to-deck-to-deck at the start as the Squire joined Hanauer and the Atlas and Kropfeld and the Budweiser in nearly jumping the gun in what was a near perfect start for all three boats. But the start and hot pursuit of the leaders was wasted when Miss Rock/KISW dropped into hole in the south turn, spun, hit a buoy, and tossed out driver Fred Leland out the right side of the cockpit, drawing red flares and a race stoppage. Leland was uninjured.

In the re-run, Hall again seem to challenge the hot boats, giving chase to Kropfeld in the Bud and Jack Schaefer Jr. in American Speedy Printing at the start. It was close

for two laps before Kropfeld was able to put distance on the Speedy and the Squire. The U-2 held third place heading into the final lap, but Milner Irvin and a charging Miss Renault (113.608) caught the Squire to push the U-2 (113.151) into fourth place.

After nearly a month off, the tour began the trek to San Diego for the next stop on the unlimited season, and it was there that Squire Shop owner Bob Steil opted to make a driver change.

Claiming that Hall had a “business conflict” which precluded his driving in the Miller High Life Thunderboat Regatta at San Diego, Steil brought back Tom D’Eath to drive the Squire.

In accepting the position, D’Eath claimed Steil had made him an offer he “couldn’t refuse”. Originally the agreement was for the San Diego race only, but D’Eath stipulated that he would come back only if he also could drive the Squire for the Houston/Clear Lake, Texas Budweiser World Championship race. Steil agreed to the stipulation and Tom was back in the Squire cockpit

Hall had signed a one-year contract with an option for a second year. At the time of the switch, Steil had not revealed whether he was taking up the second year option for Hall’s services.

D’Eath’s return to the cockpit for qualifying at San Diego produced the boat’s fastest time of the ’83 season, with the Squire landing on the third rung of the Fan Plan fast flight ladder at 131.965 and assuming its usual place behind Atlas Van Lines (138.462) and Miss Budweiser (134.731).

Heat 1-B saw the Squire make it through four competitive laps before the supercharger blew on Lap 4 for a Did Not Finish and no points. The boat didn’t even make it to the start line in Heat 2-B, as the engine died moments before the start.

The Squire team’s only hope was to attempt to earn the Consolation Heat place in the Final Heat, and D’Eath was able to hold it together five full laps this time for the win. The Squire took an early lead at the start and led through the first lap, but an electrical issue slowed the U-2 on Lap 2 where Frank Kenney Toyota-Volvo then passed it. The Frank Kenney then went dead on Lap 5 and the Squire slipped by it to take the needed first place golden ticket to the final.

Predictably, Atlas Van Lines and Miss Budweiser dominated the final from start to finish while D’Eath, the Squire Shop, and the rest of the field played chase after the leaders. The Squire benefited greatly when American Speedy Printing lost its horizontal wing on the last turn of Lap 3 and then blew an engine in the first turn of Lap 4. The Squire averaged 116.129 mph in securing a third place overall despite failing to score points in either preliminary heat of racing.

The fleet moved next to Clear Lake near Houston, Texas for the Budweiser World Championships on the first weekend in October. The Squire again qualified in the top five, placing it directly into the Championship Flight of the 10-boat field, but I could not find a reference to the speed produced by the Squire to make the field..

Heat 1-A saw the Atlas and Bud carrying on their own race at speeds 10 to 12 mph faster than the rest of the field. D'Eath and the Squire placed fourth behind Milner Irvin and Miss Renault, posting a speed of 111.940 mph.

In Heat 2-A, the Squire held a similar position behind the Atlas and Renault, but moved up to third place this time when Miss Budweiser failed to finish. The speed was slightly slower at 109.867.

Ultimately, the poor showing in the first preliminary heat cost the Squire team a place in the six-boat final. In fact, Kropfeld and the Bud had bumped the Squire by a mere 6 points.

The failure to make the final dropped the Squire to ninth overall for the race. It can only be characterized as a disappointing finish to an otherwise successful season, culminating with a third place in the National High Point behind the dominant duo of the Atlas and the Bud for the second straight year.

In early December, Bob Steil announced that he was replacing departing Crew Chief Jerry Zuvich with Jim Harvey, and that he was considering one of three options for the 1984 season – modify the Circus/Squire hull to improve its performance, buy an existing hull (likely the existing Atlas Van Lines), or build a new hull to race.

On January 20, 1984, the Squire Shop era of the '79 Circus Circus hull ended with the announcement that Steil and the Squire team had acquired the '82 Atlas Van Lines hull. There was no indication in the short article that announced the purchase in the Seattle Times as to what would be done with the '79 Circus hull.

On April 26, it was announced that the '79 Circus hull had been sold to R.B. "Bob" Taylor, owner of the Miller Lite All-Star team for use as a display hull. The team was based in Houston Texas.

The Seattle Times article announcing the sale revealed that Unlimited Hydroplane Hall of Fame President Bob Williams was in the process of transporting the hull to its new home. [Note: Williams had swung south, towing the boat to Houston, and then had swung way back north to pick up the Gale V and tow it to join the museum fleet back in Seattle.]

The '79 Circus hull returned to racing after sitting out the entire 1984 season while on display. At some point in mid-1985, it was acquired by veteran owner/driver Bob Gilliam, who repainted it blue and orange, re-numbered it with U-30, and dubbed it the Domino's Pizza. The transaction between Taylor and Gilliam apparently took

place prior to the Columbia Cup in the Tri-Cities in late July, but there was no announcement of the sale in the media at the time.

For undisclosed reasons, Gilliam failed to arrive in Pasco with the boat until after the course closed at 5 p.m. the day before the race. He was given a two-hour window on race day to try to meet the qualification minimum with the U-30, but the record shows that he failed to qualify and sat out the race.

The next opportunity for Gilliam and the Domino's to make the field was the following weekend in Seattle for the Budweiser APBA Gold Cup. Getting the boat qualified became quite a struggle for Gilliam's team, however. On one run, the Domino's threw a rod and on another the engine failed to produce enough power to get the boat up on plane, but driver George Johnson was able to finally make the minimum, registering the slowest qualifying time of the 10 qualifiers at 107.094 mph.

As a reward for making the field, Johnson and the Domino's were drawn into Heat 1-A against three of the top five qualifiers. Not surprisingly, the boat never mounted a challenge and finished fifth and last in the heat while averaging only 91.969.

Johnson then failed to get the U-30 started for Heat 2-A, and Heat 3-B didn't go much better with Johnson once more unable to get the boat started before the one-minute gun. With only 127 points to speak of, the team finished tenth and last.

The Domino's Pizza team made one more appearance for the '85 season at the Greater Oklahoma Thunderboat Regatta near Oklahoma City. Again, Johnson failed to qualify the boat, and the team finished the season 11<sup>th</sup> and last in the National High Point Race.



The '79 Circus hull as it appears today, still sporting the Seaco Aviation Fuels/Domino's Pizza colors. It is in the queue to be restored by the Hydroplane and Race Boat Museum as the '79 Squire Shop -- Hydroplane and Race Boat Museum photo

Gilliam entered the hull at only one race for the entire 1986 season, the Budweiser Emerald Cup in Seattle as the U-30 Greater Peninsula. With young Andy Coker driving, the boat failed to qualify.

The last hurrah came for the '79 Circus hull one year later, when Gilliam brought it to Seattle for the Seafair Budweiser Cup and entered it as U-30 Seaco Aviation Fuels.

Like the season before, the boat failed to make the grade. It was unable to complete one lap under power, which led to Seattle Times columnist Steve Kelley to pose the question in his column – “Would Olympic swimmer Mark Spitz in his prime have beaten the Seaco head-to-head?”

The hull was quietly retired at the end of the '87 season. It somehow made its way into the Dave Bartush hydro museum collection in Detroit and languished there until just recently when it was reacquired by the original Squire Shop owner Bob Steil and donated to the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. It has since been added to HARM's restoration queue to be restored as the Squire Shop rather than the Circus Circus

### **The Norberg Squire Shop and The “Thor” Years**

Meanwhile, as the racing life of the Norberg Circus hull was playing itself out, the Norberg Squire Shop was quietly repaired and returned to competition.

The heavily damaged Squire was purchased in 1983 and, from what I was able to gather, Everett's Bob Miller rebuilt it. It was, in turn, purchased in early 1984 by another Everett resident, Jim Grader, but sat out that season in its entirety.

The hull finally returned to racing 1985 as the U-33 Tri-Cities Savings and Loan at the Columbia Cup in Pasco and was driven by Ron Snyder. The boat failed to qualify there, and for the Budweiser APBA Gold Cup in Seattle it was rebranded as U-33 Crown Nissan Volvo. It arrived late in race week and failed to qualify there as well.

The unsponsored U-33 then tried to qualify at the Greater Oklahoma Thunderboat Classic where it kept its string of DNQs alive for a third straight race, capping that with a DNQ at the season ending Miller American Thunderboat Regatta at San Diego as the Handyman Home Center.

The Squire hull was sold again in the off-season, this time to veteran crewman and crew chief Al Thoreson and his partner Jerry Hopp. They based the boat out of Snohomish under the banner of Thor Racing and renumbered the hull as the U-7. The team also outfitted it with a turbo-Allison.

Operating on a shoestring most of the next seven seasons, the team raced the hull from 1986 through 1993 while making it to most of the races that were held each season. Often running unsponsored, the team finished in bottom of the top ten finishers each season, with its highest placing the National High Point race coming in its second season at seventh.

The name of the boat often changed as many times as there were races, and by the time it was retired from racing in 1993 by Hopp and Thoreson, it had raced under 18 different monikers: U-7 Horizon Air, Knight and Carver Yacht Center, Nevada Palace (1986) -- U-7 Garrett Turbo (1987) – U-7 Miss Paddock Pools (1988) -- U-7

Jackpot Food Mart, Paddock Pools, Nevada Palace, Miss Expert Automotive, Miss Mid-Mark Distributors [A Canopy was added.] (1989) -- U-7 Miss Paddock Pools, Thor Racing, Garrett Turbo (1990) Thor Racing, Miss Sundex, Miss Go Bowling, The Marshall and the Lady, Gaylord's Too (1991) – and Thor Racing, Miss Sundex, Miss Go Bowling, Arby's, Miss Properties, Miss Ford Island (1992).

The boat sat out the 1993 through 1995 seasons and then was sold by Thoreson and Hopp to Leslie "Budd" Green and "Cowboy" Bob Jenson in 1996. It did not race under that ownership or when Green had it in solo ownership from 1997-2012.

The hull was then sold to Jim Dickinson in 2012 before being traded to Gary and Kristy Laws and their partners Edwin Glenn, Carol Glenn, and Doug Brown for the 1963 Tahoe Miss hull and trailer in 2013.



**The '79 Squire Shop as it appeared in 2012 – Now owned by a consortium, the intention is to restore the boat as the '79 Squire Shop -- Jim Dickinson Photo**

At last report, the Norberg Squire hull currently resides in Monroe, Washington where the ownership group is working to raise funds to restore the hull as the Squire Shop, no easy feat given the condition of the hull after years in the sometimes-harsh western Washington elements and the structural changes needed to return it to its original state sans an enclosed canopy.

### **The Norberg Collaboration – What Became of Them?**

With the history of the three hulls now complete, our attention now turns to what happened to the Norberg Custom Boats collaborators.



While the history of the Norberg boats is well documented, what happened to the partnership after a brief, but productive period in building the unlimiteds has been far less documented. As my Hydromaniac friend pointed out, they seemed to have just “disappeared”.

To get some answers to my question, I reached out to Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum Director Dave Williams for help in developing the back-story of what happened to Berg and Knowlen. He quickly responded to my e-mail inquiry and confirmed that the partners were both still very much alive and well, and that they occasionally drop by the Kent hydro museum for visits.

In fact, David told me, Dave Knowlen had made his most recent visit to the museum about the time I started writing this article a few months ago.

To my surprise, David then contacted Knowlen, extending to him an e-mail introduction as to who I was, and encouraging the designer to contact me about my project. A short while later, I received my first message and subsequently received answers to several of my questions as to what had happened to the partnership.

Knowlen told me that he and Norm Berg continued with their arrangement through the early-to-mid-1980s. He indicated that he did some marine consulting independent of the NCB partnership and that Berg did a lot of repair work on a number of unlimited boats during that time and well into the 1990s.

Berg told me that he and Bob Mackey did repairs for both the Squire Shop and Circus Circus after they were built. They would pack up their tools and head up to the Squire Shop boat shop or wherever else they were needed by a boat team to have something really quickly done and they did it.



**E-747 – Slippery When Wet**  
**Owners: Robert and Mike Herrington**  
**Baton Rouge, Louisiana**  
**-- Photo Credit: Joey Nolan Collection**

For a time after the unlimiteds were built, NCB sold a number of limited hydros to teams from both inside and outside the northwest.

For example, the collaboration produced several successful 145-class hydros including the 1975 National High Point Champion for that class, “Hoagy’s Hornet,” owned by Hoagy Carmichael of Whitefish, Montana.

In the period from 1980 to 1982, NBC built a total of five 280/5-Liter class limiteds based on a third generation design by Dave Knowlen. These included "Top Wop 2," "Mercury Marine Special," "Slippery When Wet," and Ritchie Landaiche's "Hydro-Therapy." All were very competitive hulls.

"We had a good reputation for doing the job and doing it well while doing it at a fair price, so we had plenty of work."

At least one Hall of Famer got his first ride in a NCB hull during this era -- Retired unlimited hydro champion and former H1 Commissioner Steven David.

"I drove a Norberg at the '86 Dayton Nationals," David recalled. "The owner was Neal Carnathan of Oviedo, Florida and the boat was sponsored by Mercruiser. [Note: My research shows that the boat ran as the E-747 Ditty Wa Ditty.] We won convincingly only to fail inspection by running a non-Chevrolet starter motor."

"That was my one and only Norberg experience. That boat was sold to a fellow in Louisiana [Landaiche] and renamed "Hydro-Therapy". The boat was amazing, not merely in speed, but in handling as well."

"I built another boat for a couple of guys down in Louisiana," Berg said. "It was the Herrington brothers and they bought a couple of boats."

"The Herrington guys (Mike and Robert) from Baton Rouge were quite colorful guys. Every time he called me up, he would go through this whole thing and say 'Mr. Berrrrrg. (Berg mimicking a southern drawl). This is so and so, Bob Herrrrington, in Batooooon Rouuuge," and, of course, right away with his accent I knew who it was."

"They bought a couple of boats. One was probably a twin to the "Bandit" and the other was an earlier model. They were quite successful guys there."

The clone to the "Bandit" hull that Berg spoke of was raced as the E-747 "Slippery When Wet." That boat competed in the 1980 Nationals at the Dayton Hydroglobe in Dayton, Ohio with Robert Herrington driving and was quite successful on the southern circuit of races.





**N-40 Intent (Top) and Miss Linda Gail**

**Owner: Glen Koutney**

**St. Petersburg, Florida**

**--Photo Credit: Gary Nolan (top) Joey Nolan (bottom)**

NCB then built a clone to the "White Lightning" for a marina owner from the St. Petersburg area in Central Florida named Glen Koutney. Interestingly, it would be the only other hull the team would build from the "Lightning" plans.

"I remember when Glen flew to Seattle", Steve Reynolds recently recalled about Koutney's purchase of the hull. "He came to my house on Mercer Island and saw my "White Lightning." We drove to Norm Berg's shop and met Dave Knowlen there."

"Glen saw some of Norm's work and workmanship and ordered his 225 right then and there. To celebrate the deal, Glen took us all out to a late lunch before catching his flight home!"

As part of the purchase agreement, Koutney made special arrangements to get the new hull to his shop in Florida.

"He wanted us to build a box all around it," Berg remembered of the shipping arrangement. "He had a marina down there [St. Petersburg Marina] and he had these big trucks to haul the boats around. He had one of these companies come by the shop when it was all done, and we had to build a great big plywood box totally around this thing so that couldn't get any dings or anything else in it going down there."

"I built bunts...bunts are what the boat sits on when on a trailer...so the bunts were made for the bottom of that boat...and that is what it sat on in the container. He took the boat, took the bunts off of that and bolted them to the trailer when it got down there."

"It was a neat looking boat...a lot of the boats were all painted and they looked neat, but this one had part of the deck with all natural clear on it, so there was a lot of mahogany showing. It was a beautiful boat.

That hull would first race as the N-40 "Intent," but the name was changed to "Miss Linda Gail" when Koutney's daughter was killed in an accident. According to Dave

Knowlen, Linda was just graduating from high school and her death came at the time of the purchase of the hull. Another source indicated that it was a prom night accident that took her life.



**E-16 Bandit**  
**Owner: Eddie Sharp**  
**Clearwater, Florida**  
**--Photo Credit: Gary Todd**

Another hull that received a similar manner of shipping for its long trip to Florida was Eddie Sharp's purchase from NCB, the E-16 "Bandit". That boat was a second-generation Norberg hull and according to Berg was quite successful. The sale of the boat to sharp took place in the late summer of 1978.

In early June of 1979, the record shows that the two Florida Norbergs faced off in a Miami Marine Stadium Gran Prix event that was run between the unlimited racing heats of the Champion Spark Plug Regatta, and Dave Knowlen was a witness.

"Sharp's "Bandit" 280 won over Glenn's 225 by a boat length," Knowlen said of the race. "I was there and saw it."

[Note: Reports are that the "Bandit" today is in Madison, ID, owned by Joe Johnson and awaiting restoration. The "Linda Gail" eventually became the N-30 Nan-Net owned by James Potter, and finished up as "Summer Wine." One source told me that the hull was destroyed at a Lake Tonawanda, N.Y. race.]

The designing and building of the unlimited class boats died with the completion of the two NCB hulls. I asked Knowlen why this happened and he responded:

"Boat racing was evolving fast in the early '80s. New aerospace materials and manufacturing processes were now available and the impact of material costs meant we could not continue to be competitive in the business."

"It was simple 'Boat Building Economics 101'. The cost to design/build a new boat went sky high. The new advanced composite materials -- Kevlar, Nomex honeycomb, prepreg epoxies, carbon fiber, vacuum bagging and manufacturing requirements for an autoclave oven, etc. -- all used in new boat building in the 1980s and later years -- caused the consumer costs for even the smaller classes of limited hydroplane to rise well above what the marketplace could tolerate."

“Add to that the racing regulations that mandated that boats have safety canopies and there was a large potential liability for all boat builders. That about sums it up.”

Berg said that as time went on that he had added more shop space, buying commercial property on Highway 167 where he built a 7,200 square foot building with 20-foot ceilings. He said that this location was an excellent place to paint the boats that the business built, renovated, or repaired.

“I built a couple of other buildings down there also, and moved to like a half a building.”

“I did a lot of work for Competition Specialties and Jim Lucero,” said Berg of some of the work he attracted after building the unlimiteds. “I spent months up there, working either in my shop or up in the shop in Kent. I finally got to where I was working so much that I said (to Lucero) “Do you want to hire me full time?” I knew that another outfit wanted to take over my building anyway, so I went to work for Competition Specialties full time.

Berg also did some work for Nate Brown at Brown’s shop in Preston. Nate had a small wooden boat that needed repairs, so he worked on it for a month or two (or three).

The opportunity also came for Berg to go to work for Steve Woomer. He was working at Woomer’s shop when the boat owner passed away in late April of 1998. Berg had spent two to three years there working until the Woomer family shut down the shop completely after the owner died. During that time he had helped the team with the Winston Eagle/Smokin’ Joe hull.

Berg said that NCB also found a niche doing repair and restoration work on classic mahogany boats and vintage yachts from around the region and that it became a good portion of NCB’s work in the latter years.

Steve Reynolds said this about Berg’s evolving business:

“Norm never really stopped building boats. Building hydroplanes was not his primary occupation. Norm was...and still is...reputed to be one of the finest craftsman, or “wood butchers” as they’re sometimes referred to, of classic wooden Chris Craft and Century inboard speed boats in the United States.”

“Owners of these classic boats, living all across the country, have had their boats shipped to Norm’s shop. He’s that well thought of for his craftsmanship among that group of vintage boat owners.”

“Norm doesn’t build BOATS,” Reynolds added, “he builds beautiful hand made pieces of ART...that happen to pass off as boats!”

This was high praise coming from Reynolds, effectively summing up the similar high esteem that Berg holds in the rest of the boat racing community.

Today, Berg has retired from the boat business pretty much entirely, and as his friend Reynold's also told me, he is "enjoying the good life" with his wife at the home they built in 1999 in beautiful Gig Harbor, Washington.

Norm told me he intended to continue working on boats at the Gig Harbor location and even had a large shop built alongside the new home. Despite having all his tools and equipment stored in the shop, not much woodworking has happened there during his retirement, however.

Perhaps this was because the Bergs purchased an ocean going yacht in 2007. They dubbed the big boat "Miss Norberg" and used it until just last month to travel extensively along the northwest coast.

"We've taken the boat up to Alaska and British Columbia, staying up to 70 days on the boat at a time. 'Miss Norberg' went all over the place. We recently closed on selling it...August 22<sup>nd</sup> actually."

Career-wise, Dave Knowlen used his background and training as a mechanical engineer to build a successful livelihood in the aerospace industry working for the Boeing Company for over 45 years. During that time, he was involved in the aerodynamic engineering and development of many of the planes created by Boeing's commercial division and would eventually become their Director of Business Affairs. He has most recently headed up the Boeing 'Special Projects' team, a broad based position that included managing several large-scale airplane recovery and restoration projects. Many of those airplanes are today in prominent aviation museums.

Knowlen also kept his interest alive in hydroplanes and in particular preserving the history of vintage race boats, enough to become a board member of the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum. It is my understanding that while on the board he played a crucial part in a project that produced one of the centerpieces of the museum's vintage unlimiteds collection.

When Bill Boeing Jr. first saw the beautiful new recreation of the Vashon Island group's 1955 Miss Thriftway replica, he expressed regret that his Miss Wahoo no longer existed. The story goes that this verbal observation by Boeing spurred Knowlen to hatch a plan, and he assembled a group of local businessmen that included Boeing, Jr.; Scott Carson, president and chief executive officer of Boeing Commercial Airplanes; Bruce McCaw, philanthropist and member of the Board for the Museum of Flight; and Joe Clark, a member of Boeing Aviation Partners board, to fund a full-scale replica of the Miss Wahoo.

That project was successfully completed in 2009, and the boat was donated to the museum to become one of the centerpieces of its permanent collection.

Together Berg and Knowlin had a tremendous impact on the history of the vintage piston era, albeit with much of it occurring over a relatively short period of time. Many of the innovations that transformed the sport of hydroplane racing grew out their brief, but successful collaboration.

What hasn't died over time is Knowlen and Berg's close personal relationship. Both Dave and Norm emphasized to me that they remain very close friends.

I am honored to have had the opportunity to be able to share at least a part of their intriguing story with you.

### **Acknowledgments:**

Thanks are in order to Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum Director David Williams for connecting me with Dave Knowlen, and in turn to Dave for helping me to establish a connection that resulted in an interview with Norm Berg. Both Dave and Norm gave generously of their time to fill in the blanks in my narrative about their collaboration, and thus made it better by their involvement..

Thanks also to Bob Bolam for sharing photos from his personal collection for use with the story, and for connecting me with his longtime friend, the legendary driver Steve Reynolds. Much depth was added by both of their contributions.

The same can be said of Gary Todd and Joey Nolan, both members of the Vintage Hydroplane Lovers Facebook site, who shared their photos of the Norberg boats that were owned and raced in the southeastern region with me. Their sharing of the photos on that site led to discussions that revealed some of the history of those boats, and I was able to further flesh out the story of those hulls.



Extra Photo Gallery:



**N-30 Nan-Net (formerly Linda Gail)**  
**Owner: James Potter**  
**-- Photo Credit: Gary Todd**



**E-747 Slippery When Wet and E-16 Bandit go head-to-head**  
**Photo Credit: Joey Nolan**

Pay n' Pak Flip Sequence - Green Lake 1979 - Photo from Bob Bolam Collection -  
Photographer Not Identified

