

Regatta Review

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THE NEXT GOLD CUP RACE WILL BE HELD JULY 14-16, 2006

Mark your calendar now, the next Gold Cup race will be held July 14-16, 2006!! We have already had a planning meeting focused on improving the event for 2006, especially the fan experience. We are looking at more food options, better facilities (shade tents, water mist'ers), more activities, and etc.

The DRRA is also looking at bringing the Unlimited Lights back for 2006 ... stay tuned!

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION PARTY COMING UP - OCTOBER 28TH

The DRRA would like to announce that a Volunteer Appreciation Party will be held on October 28th. Come to share in the fun, and hear about DRRA plans as well as news about the 2006 season.

Date: Friday October 28, 2005

Time: 6:00pm to 10:00pm

Place: Eagles Club (F.O.E.) - 14855 E. Eight Mile Road - Eastpointe, MI

RSVP: 586-774-0980

DETROITER MARK TATE TO BE INDUCTED INTO THE MMHOF

Detroit Mark Tate, two-time Gold Cup winner, will be inducted into the Michigan Motorsports Hall Of Fame on November 6th.

The induction ceremony will be held at the Comfort Inn in Mount Pleasant on Sunday afternoon, November 6th. The public is welcome. Tickets are \$25.00 each. Send a check or money order for the number of tickets you'd like to:

Michigan Motor Sports Hall of Fame

P.O. Box 85, Comstock Park, MI 49321

Congratulations to all the 2005 inductees:

Bruce Allen, Dennis Castele, Canfield & Johnson, Dick Decker, Tim Felter, Mike Garvey, Curt Kelley, Harold Reynolds, Donnie Roberts, Mark Tate and Bill Whittington.

For more info on the MMHOF: <http://www.mmshof.org>

THE STATE OF THE SPORT

I have had a number of people ask me about the state of the sport. It looks pretty good actually, -especially- as compared to this time last year. Kim Gregory bought the T-3 Bud

hull and will be racing again next year (he was racing as U-10 and U-15).

The Bud people are trying to sell the T-5 and T-6 (their two best hulls) with trucks and all as a package... nobody's come up with the asking price though. There has been talk that the Madison/Oberto team is trying to negotiate for one of those.

At the San Diego race, Kevin Aylesworth purchased the U-25 from Ken Muscatel, bringing another new Unlimited Hydroplane owner onto the circuit. Shortly after the purchase, Kevin made more news, unfortunately (see next story).

AYLESWORTH CONTINUES TO IMPROVE

Looks forward to getting back to racing "one of these days".

Kevin Aylesworth, critically injured in a spectacular flip at the San Diego Thunderboat Regatta in September, continues his remarkable recovery. Kevin tells www.ulhra.org that he sees doctors daily and does 90 minutes of cardiovascular workouts in the gym each day. Doctors tell him his lungs have recovered about 50% from the trauma of ingesting a huge amount of salt water while escaping the cockpit of the overturned UL-5. He adds that progress is being made daily.

The always upbeat Aylesworth says he and his entire team will be attending the ULHRA's annual meeting and Awards Banquet on November 19th in Seattle. Aylesworth serves on the Board of Directors of ULHRA Inc. in addition to co-owning Freedom Racing. He added, "I won't be the last one on the dance floor, but I will be the first!"

For updates on Kevin's condition from the Freedom Racing website:

<http://www.freedomracingteam.com/kevin.htm>

John Lynch
"Voice" of the Unlimited Lights

[Editors note:]

For photos of the accident:

<http://www.freedomracingteam.com/flipstills.htm>

MORE PHOTOS POSTED ON THE UNLIMITEDS DETROIT WEB SITE

Unlimiteds Detroit has posted a photo of the Gale "jet boat" - Photo by Bill Grunow.

<http://www.unlimitedsdetroit.com/images/BillGrunow/Gales1958JetBoat.jpg>

There are more coming... stay tuned!

Jeff Dunn

Webmaster, Unlimiteds Detroit

THE SAGA OF "IT'S A WONDER"

By Fred Farley - APBA Unlimited Historian

IT'S A WONDER was one of the very first boats in the world with sponsons on it. It was also the last hydroplane to use a time-honored Hispano-Suiza ("Hisso") engine in competition.

IT'S A WONDER first appeared in 1939 and carried the name of HERMES IV. It was a home-built Ventnor-style three-pointer not unlike Jack Rutherford's JUNO, Guy Simmons's MY SIN, and Lou Fageol's SO-LONG. Measuring 20 feet 6 inches by 9 feet 6 inches, HERMES IV originally used a Marman 16-cylinder engine with four Tillotson carburetors and some high-top pistons. Not until 1940 did the craft convert to "Hisso" power, which would become owner George Davis's trademark.

The venerable V-8 Hispano-Suiza was designed in 1914 and used in the Spad aircraft during World War I. Technically, the "Hisso" was an outstanding power plant, manufactured in the United States by the Wright Company. Its success started a series of design refinements that culminated in the Allison and Rolls-Royce V-12 engines.

Modified for installation in race boats, the Hispano-Suiza became the standard power source for the 725 Cubic Inch Class of the Mississippi Valley Power Boat Association during the years between the World Wars. "Hisso" power was used in the HERMES IV/IT'S A WONDER until that craft's final retirement from competition in 1957.

Constructed by Davis and his partner Turley Carman, HERMES IV headquartered in Vine Grove, Kentucky, near Louisville. The design was patterned after a successful series of racing hulls, produced by the Ventnor Boat Works of Ventnor, New Jersey, the firm that introduced the three-point concept in 1936 as a radical departure from the traditional step hydroplanes of that era.

The propellers of the first three-pointers-including HERMES IV-were completely submerged. (Not until the late forties did the boats start to "prop-ride.") And there was considerably more wetted surface area, compared to today. But the design of the future had most assuredly arrived. The standard of the next sixty years was set. And HERMES IV owners Davis and Carman were among the first to foresee the impact that boats with pontoon-like running surfaces called sponsons would have on the sport of hydroplane racing.

HERMES IV was the fourth in a series of five HERMES hulls, named after the Greek god of invention. The IV's three predecessors were conventional step hydroplanes. The initial HERMES was a 510 Cubic inch Class rig, powered by a Curtiss OX-5 engine. HERMES II, III, IV, and V all participated in the 725 Class.

When HERMES IV was built, the 725s had been a mainstay on the Mississippi Valley Power Boat association circuit for more than a decade. There was a considerable fleet of them around the Cincinnati and Louisville area in the 1930s. These included Bill Cantrell's WHY

WORRY, Marion Cooper's MERCURY, Jim Anderson's WARNIE, and Cam Fischer's MISS CINCINNATI, JR.

As the MVPBA counterpart of the APBA Gold Cup Class and the UIM 12-Litre Class, which was a European category, the 725s were sometimes called the "haywire class." They were in no sense Gold Cup boats as boats of that category were generally thought of being. They were usually home-built. Their "Hisso" engines, under favorable conditions, developed slightly over 200 horsepower. The boats were built for heat races of about five miles in length and had to be especially equipped to run in a Gold Cup heat of thirty miles. The boats cost around \$1500 to \$2000 to build and make race ready.

Although a popular regional class, the 725s seldom enjoyed the level of media attention of the generally more expensive and more exotic-looking Gold Cup Class boats of the American Power Boat Association. But, in the late thirties, the Detroit race committee, which was hosting the APBA Gold Cup event in those days, invited the 725 Class fleet to the Motor City for a special race of their own.

By including the 725s on the program during 1937, 1938, and 1939, the Detroit committee provided the "haywire class" with its finest national showcase.

The HERMES team had done well at Detroit during the first two years of the series. They took a first and a second with HERMES III when Marion Cooper was the driver and George Davis was the riding mechanic.

Prior to entering the 1939 Detroit race, Davis and Carman gave the brand new HERMES IV a trial run at the August 6 Evansville Jaycees Regatta on the Ohio River at Evansville, Indiana, where they finished third.

A month later, the IV and five other 725s trekked north for what was to be their final Detroit River appearance, two days prior to the Gold Cup main event. It was with HERMES IV at Detroit in 1939 that Davis first had the opportunity to move over from the mechanic's seat to behind the wheel in a major race.

The combined 725 and Gold Cup Class fleet at Detroit numbered eleven. Many veteran observers were surprised to note that five of these entries-MY SIN, SO-LONG, WHY WORRY, MERCURY, and HERMES IV-sported the new-fangled three-point configuration. And this was in a category that had been dominated by step hydroplanes for the previous quarter of a century.

HERMES IV took an overall third-place in the 725 Class event and averaged 53.954 miles per hour for the three heats. Bill Cantrell and WHY WORRY were the winners at 62.186, followed by J.S. Brown and KING STATEN at 55.144.

George Davis settled for fourth in the first two heats but then gave the crowd a thrill in Heat Three. He took the runner-up spot behind Cantrell and outran Brown over the finish line by

four seconds.

HERMES IV and WHY WORRY weren't the only three-pointers that had a successful weekend. MY SIN became the first sponson craft to ever win the Gold Cup, Jack "Pop" Cooper won the Edenburn Memorial Trophy for 225 Cubic Inch Class boats with TOPS III, and Andy Crawford claimed the 135 Cubic Inch Class prize with EDNANDY.

Moreover, Cantrell tried his luck in the Gold Cup contest with WHY WORRY and almost pulled off a victory! In both of the first two heats, "Wild Bill" had his under-financed craft in the lead before being forced out by propeller failure.

Truly, the sponson boats were here to stay. And although no one was suggesting that the step hydroplanes didn't still have a lot of life left in them in 1939, there were those who believed that only refinement of the three-point concept was all that stood between the "fast-steppers" and obsolescence.

With the advent of the 1940s, Noble Lanier of Bowling Green, Kentucky, entered the ownership picture of the HERMES team. Lanier, a former 225 Class pilot, also assumed some of the driving chores. With Lanier behind the wheel and Davis alongside as riding mechanic, HERMES IV made a start in the 1940 President's Cup at Washington, D.C., but failed to finish due to mechanical difficulties.

It was shortly after the Washington meet that the IV found itself overshadowed by a new HERMES V, another home-built three- pointer. The V was to serve as the team's primary hull from 1941 to 1948-with time out for World War II when competition was suspended and while co-owner Davis served in the U.S. Army Air Force, stationed in Greenland.

It was on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1941, that George locked up HERMES IV in a barn shed on his tobacco plantation in Vine Grove, where the craft would remain for ten years.

But for a twist of fate, HERMES IV might have spent the rest of her days in obscurity. And the world would never have known IT'S A WONDER.

When competition resumed after the War, the 725 Class of the MVPBA and the Gold Cup Class of the APBA combined and changed over to the Unlimited Class to take advantage of the huge supply of converted aircraft and other power sources developed by the War.

George Davis, Noble Lanier, and Turley Carman were anxious to jump on the Unlimited bandwagon and planned on a full-sized Thunderboat as their next standard bearer.

Unfortunately, co-owner Lanier, who was also the financial sponsor, died unexpectedly of cancer, and the team never realized its Unlimited Class ambition.

After Lanier's passing, Davis sold his interest in HERMES V, which was later renamed BOBBIE BOY, and went to work as a crew member for Marion Cooper's 225 Class

HORNET. George and Marion were boyhood friends and had been partners in the first three HERMES boats.

In 1951, Davis returned the long-dormant HERMES IV to racing with an assist from Cooper. George was married by this time, and his wife Dorris did not like the name HERMES. She once remarked, "It's a wonder it starts or runs. It's so old." So, George renamed his craft IT'S A WONDER.

Times had changed considerably in the decade that the re-christened WONDER had languished in drydock. Prop-riding hulls were now the rage. And the races themselves followed a rather different script.

Back in the 725 Class days, the boats turned to the right-rather than to the left-because their engines turned that way. So, in order to run with the modern boats, Davis had to reverse the engine. He also changed the gear to take care of the torque.

The race starting procedure was also different than before the War. As George pointed out in a 1971 interview with this writer, "We had flag starts without any blackout clock. I think the flag starts were the most fun. They really worked out the best, because it worked for everybody. They all lined up on the one boat, and they all had the same chance."

Every driver has his superstitions, and George Davis was no exception. His lucky number was 8. So, to double his luck, he requested the racing number G-88 from the APBA for IT'S A WONDER. Based upon the number of trophies, accumulated between 1951 and 1957, it would be safe to say that fate indeed smiled benignly on George and his white-with-red-trim charger.

When asked if he considered IT'S A WONDER as his all-time favorite boat, Davis replied, "It was about as easy riding a boat as any that I had. In addition to being a good-riding boat, it was a crowd pleaser, because I was always the underdog. I had a lot of fun, and the crowd always went along with me. And that made it real nice. I ran it a little bit longer than usual, and there wasn't any money to be made, but, in that boat particularly, I had the most fun and enjoyment."

George also used the craft as a sportsman's boat as well as for competition. In Tennessee, he used to take the Grand Old Opry stars for rides in it. The whole scene was reminiscent of the barnstorming days in flying. Davis once took a friend, who chewed tobacco, for a ride in IT'S A WONDER. Afterwards, when George asked how he liked it, the friend replied, "The boat ride was fine. But when I swallowed that chewing tobacco, I didn't know if I was going to make it back to the bank or not!"

The popular vintage WONDER weighed 1750 lb. in racing trim and could do 100 miles per hour on the straightaway with ease. And, on one occasion, it went as high as 127. This was commendable indeed for a boat that was a non-prop-rider and used a 40-year- old engine.

Throughout its career, IT'S A WONDER was hampered by a modest budget and the

necessity of having to forego all but those races scheduled close to home. This was on account of Davis's job as a civilian aircraft mechanic at Fort Knox, Kentucky's Godman Field.

IT'S A WONDER took home the overall third-place trophy at each of the first three Indiana Governor's Cup contests at Madison in 1951, 1952, and 1953. The former HERMES IV was likewise a perennial entry at the Louisville Marine Derby, also on the Ohio River, and appeared there every year without fail from 1951 through 1957.

In all of its races as IT'S A WONDER, George Davis occupied the driver's seat. The usual riding mechanic was George's brother-in-law Bright Whiteside.

The WONDER was a reliable campaigner and seldom failed to finish. One of its infrequent DNFs occurred after striking a piece of driftwood and sinking at the 1955 Louisville event.

Most of the races in which IT'S A WONDER competed were "free-for-alls," which didn't count for National Points and involved anything from a 48 Cubic Inch Class rig all the way up to an Unlimited hydroplane. Some of the Thunderboats that tested the WONDER's mettle included GALE II, OLLIE'S FOLLY, MY DARLING, and DELPHINE X.

The WONDER's most memorable performance occurred in the 7-Litre Class event at the 1953 Marine Derby. Then the oldest Inboard registered with the APBA, IT'S A WONDER was allowed to compete by a vote of the other drivers in the race. This was in spite of having an engine size larger than 426 cubic inches in piston displacement.

As Davis recalled, "We had an awful good day of racing, and I won the first-place trophy." It was George's first major victory since claiming the Eggars Memorial Trophy at the 1947 Marine Derby with HERMES V.

To take the top honor, IT'S A WONDER had to outpoint a tough contingent of 7-Litres, which included the nationally ranked GANGWAY and WILDCATTER, owned by Burnett Bartley, Sr. and Jr., the father and son driving team from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Davis made a picture-perfect start in the Final Heat, led out of the first corner, and left the Bartleys far astern. As the partisan crowd cheered approvingly, IT'S A WONDER settled into a safe second-place behind Sam Guarino and WATER BUG II to win the race on accumulated points. The victory has been compared to the 1971 MISS MADISON Gold Cup triumph when an underrated sentimental favorite came through when the chips were down before the hometown crowd.

With the shadows lengthening on its long career, the aging WONDER appeared in its final race on August 25, 1957, on a fishing lake in Tennessee. Running against a fleet of 266 Cubic Inch Class Inboards that included BRIAR HOPPER and LOOSE BOLTS, IT'S A WONDER won the Dale Hollow Regatta on water that was exceptionally calm and ideal for racing. With catfish jumping in the middle of the course, the WONDER made the most of its final competitive curtain call, winning both heats and entering retirement on a victorious

note.

In the years that followed, owner Davis raced a 280 Cubic Inch Class hydroplane, the MY TENNESSEE GAL, and kept IT'S A WONDER for display at boat shows and in parades.

The craft, which debuted so many years ago on the MVPBA circuit, made a triumphant return to the competitive arena in July 1979 at Madison, Indiana, where IT'S A WONDER appeared in the Gold Cup Regatta parade. George and Dorris Davis, decked out in racing apparel from another era, rode in the cockpit of their boat and waved to the crowd.

The Madison appearance preceded by four months the death of George Davis in November of that year.

After George's passing, Dorris sold the WONDER, complete with "Hisso" engine, to Geoffrey Magnuson of Alfred, Maine. Magnuson is an enthusiastic member of the Antique and Classic Boat Society, a national organization dedicated to the preservation of old wood hulls.

Over the next decade, Magnuson painstakingly restored this, the last of the 725 Class aquastars, to its former glory, and did a magnificent job.

In 1995 and 1996, IT'S A WONDER's career came full cycle. The revived G-88 made a series of high-speed exhibition runs at the Spirit Of Detroit Gold Cup Regatta on the Detroit River, the scene of its 1939 accomplishment as HERMES IV.

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The hydroplane fans of the modern era remember IT'S A WONDER primarily as an interesting old craft that helped to fill out the field when racing needed boats in the pits.

But, in a larger sense, the old WONDER is significant as an example of that trend-setting first generation of three- pointers. Indeed, it was this pioneering group of experimental boats that altered the course of competitive history and foreshadowed the mighty Unlimited hydroplanes that are today the showcase of the racing world.

- Brian Reed - DRRA Volunteer