

Jekyll and Hyde

Tenth Anniversary Running of the Antique Race Boat Regatta

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I am not an alarmist. But, evil lurks in our midst. I have seen beautiful, sophisticated boats turn into monsters on the water. They are all around us. People who you know and respect—I don't know if I can continue, but must—people who you know and respect, they're part of this evil. Look in the Directory; they live amongst us. I must tell this story lest you, also, fall to its lure, as I have.

As you will recall from your high school reading list, Dr. Jekyll was a highly respected man with a twist to his personality personified by Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll's secret potion transformed him from a socially acceptable member of society to a monster that preyed on people around him. The more potion Dr. Jekyll consumed, the more he realized he was truly Mr. Hyde. Dare I go on? I must. The risk we take is the more we run these monsters, the more we want to run them; like Mr. Hyde, he liked that part of him more than Dr. Jekyll. I envision fields of Chris-Craft, Gar Wood and Ditchburn boats adrift for want of an owner. Okay, maybe I'm taking this a little too far.

Since 1992 the Antique Race Boat Regatta (RBR) has been held every two years at the Antique Boat Museum (ABM) in Clayton, New York. The first RBR was sanctioned by the ACBS and the American Power Boat Association (APBA). The APBA is the governing body for power boat racing in the US; the Canadian Boating Federation is the governing body in Canada. The first RBR was born as the result of three former hydroplane racers attending the Antique Boat Show at the ABM; Fred Alter, Buddy Byers, and Bob Schroeder. Shortly thereafter, and through the efforts of Buddy Byers, Tom D'Eath (three time Gold Cup Champion) and Mike Jones, the APBA president at the time, the Vintage and Historic Division of the APBA was started. Today, less than 20 years later, it is the fastest growing division of the APBA.

So what does the Vintage and Historic Division of the APBA do? Their vision is nearly identical to the vision of the ACBS, except the vision is to preserve the rich history of power boat racing in the US. Back in the early days of boat racing a boat had a chance of surviving,



Top: How you launch a hydroplane. Note the skid fin at the rear of the left sponson and the rudder. These are heavy duty hunks of metal. Above: Five hydros ready to go in the pits. Their release onto the course is tightly controlled. Below: Number boats near Heart Island. Below: Start them young! Alexandra from Quebec skipping *Zipper* and an unidentified young racer in the making.



not a great one, but a chance. If it wasn't destroyed in the quest for more speed, boats that weren't competitive out of the shop, or that simply lost their competitive edge due to advancement in technology were often just left to rot. After all, a race boat that wasn't competitive wasn't much of a race boat, or a family boat.

But there's a twist to the RBR that does not exist at a boat show, and that's the fly-by. When you go to a boat show you walk around the grounds and docks looking at boats. At the RBR you can do that too, but the all-day focus of the RBR is what is happening on the water. These boats were built to go fast, and that's what they do. These boats are run on a course (not a race course, a fly-by course) solely for the enjoyment of the spectators to get a feel for what these boats were like in their day. They're run and run hard. I can truly say there is nothing quite like the sight and sound of four vintage Grand Prix hydroplanes (about 30 ft. long, 11 ft. wide with 1000 hp engines) making turn 2 and then "putting their foot into it" on the back straight away headed directly at the ABM docks at more than 100 mph.

There's a critical component to the Vintage and Historic Division, and I can't stress it enough. It was constantly discussed in planning for and ever present during the running of the 10th RBR this past August 12-15. That component is safety. Any boat can kill you if operated in a foolish manner, if not properly maintained, etc. A race boat has a much higher probability of getting you and getting you bad. A classic or historic power boat might be capable of 50 to 60 mph at best. Some of the hydroplanes and outboards in the Vintage and Historic Division are capable of speeds to 160 mph. That's not fooling around. That's serious speed on the water that can easily kill you, kill people running next to you and kill spectators if something goes horribly wrong.

The safety component of the APBA is one of the most impressive aspects of the organization. There are very strict rules in place for boats and drivers. These aren't just rules in a book. These are rules in a book so owner/drivers know how to prepare their boats and themselves for a vintage regatta. Then when you arrive at the RBR, or any APBA event, your boat is thoroughly inspected by a qualified APBA safety inspector. The owner/driver is responsible for maintaining a hull logbook and



A pair of Switzer wings side by side, and *Dust in the Wind*, a Switzer wing T-351, on the water.



presenting that to the inspector. For the big boats like the Grand Prix, drivers must have in their hull log book proof of a satisfactory medical examination, signed by the performing physician. If the boat doesn't pass muster, the boat stays on the trailer and the deficiencies are recorded in the log book and must be corrected before running. If it does pass muster, you record that in your logbook and your boat is given a sticker signed by the inspector. All personal safety equipment must meet rigorous APBA standards including APBA approved helmet, life jacket, eye protection, long pants and long sleeves, and close toe shoes. Helmets and life jackets must be red, yellow or orange for good visibility in the water. Every boat is equipped with a kill switch

wired to the driver's life jacket. This is done for a reason. Imagine the consequence of a Grand Prix hydroplane in a turn (which is ALWAYS to the left by the way) with two or three boats running next to it when the skid fin breaks away from the hull because of bad fasteners or deteriorated hull. Not pretty at all.

Accidents do happen from time to time; boats can flip, stuff, and drivers and/or riders can be ejected. The APBA mandates that a safety team be present at any APBA sanctioned event, and the RBR is no different. The safety team for the RBR, and for most of the previous RBR, was Brian Small's team out of Dracut, Mass. They come fully prepared with specially modified Carolina Skiffs (front has been converted to allow the bow to drop into the water to slide a stretcher onto the boat), personal watercraft that a paramedic in SCUBA gear rides, medical supplies and equipment needed for rapid extraction and rescue. They are the first boats onto the fly-by course and the last boats off the fly-by course. The safety team makes the calls on the course for safe operation and has the power to flag a boat off the course for unsafe operation if deemed necessary. A series of colored flags provide the signals to drivers of course status; green is course open, blue and white is use caution there's a problem, black is return to pits, and red is kill your boat there's an accident.

The RBR weekend began formally with a Thursday morning driver's clinic taught by Marv Hart, current owner and driver of *GP-222*, the largest of the five CANADIANA boats built. *GP-222* set the 1965





World Speed Record at over 155 mph. Marv is passionate about the Vintage and Historic Division. That passion is contagious because Marv preaches inclusiveness and helping people. V & H is not about winning an award or a fly-by heat. There are no awards in V & H, and notice the checkered flag is missing from those used in a fly-by. It's all about history, that's it. Again, the main focus of the clinic was safety. But the clinic also discussed how to bring yourself and others along in the sport, hooking up with a mentor to watch your driving and give you pointers. Marv also has a vision as V & H grows that requires each of us with a vintage race boat to consider; preserve the hull's racing history for posterity and present that on a poster when displaying; do a quality restoration so that the boat looks original but is strong and ready to run; and deliver a quality vintage fly-by. A quality vintage fly-by is not one with the fastest boats way out ahead of the pack displaying superior speed. Rather a quality vintage fly-by is when the group stays together and passes the spectators as a group. This was done well in many fly-bys during the weekend, but done best by the Gar Wood Speedsters. They cheat a little bit, though, because they have a neutral and reverse. Vintage hydroplanes don't have anything but direct drive forward so they need to keep moving. The Gar Wood Speedsters at the end of their fly-bys drove nose up to the spectators on the docks and stopped for a photo op and waved to the crowd. What a thrill to see all those beautiful boats lined up.

Thursday afternoon the ABM provided three classic and antique boats for a three-hour river cruise for attendees. We went west then north around Grindstone Island, and then downriver through the Canadian islands, and around the foot of Wellesley Island. Rounding Wellesley Island we met up with three Number boats near Heart Island where they were reenacting the 1st running of the Number boat races 100 years earlier. One boat was an original owned by the McNally family and two were replicas built in Ogdensburg, New York, by Everett Boat Works. George Boldt's two original Number boats, *This* and *That* are in the ABM collection. The group then ran upriver back to the museum. I was aboard a 41-ft. commuter launch named *Zipper*, what a thrill!

Friday morning at 7 a.m. was a mandatory drivers meeting for those who did not attend the drivers clinic on Thursday. Fly-bys began at 8 a.m. with the small outboard boats and progressed throughout the day to larger and faster boats. Fly-bys occurred all day long with only a break for lunch. Friday evening there was a reception and auction of race boat memorabilia, equipment, and even boats. The event raised about \$8000 for the ABM.

Saturday continued with fly-bys and people touring the museum grounds. Saturday evening was a special event, the Legends of the Past award dinner. The ABM has an entire building devoted to the "Quest for Speed" on the water. Inside the building you will find amazing Gold Cup boats and motors from the museum collection displayed. The Legends of the Past awards honor past owner/drivers, designer/manufacturers and restorer/collectors. Begun in 2006 past inductees include Harold Wilson, Tom D'Eath, Fred Alter, Art Asbury, Curt Brayer, Buddy Byers, Bob Schroeder as owner/drivers; Henry Lauterbach as a builder/designer; and Jeff Magnuson as a restorer/collector. They are recognized in a display in the Gold Cup Building. In 2010 Tom Mittler was inducted posthumously as a restorer/collector, and owner/drivers Bob



Cabana (Canadian), Chris Hall, and Larry Lauterbach were inducted as owner/drivers. The Daniel P. Murphy Award, an award supported by the Murphy family and given to an individual who personifies the spirit of the V & H division, went to Marv Hart in 2008, and in 2010 to Tom Bertolini, immediate past head of the APBA V&H division. The event was held in the beautiful McNally Yacht House and attendees were surrounded by vintage boats in the water. It was a magical evening.

Some amazing boats were displayed at the ABM during this 10th Anniversary Race Boat Regatta. There were two restored Switzer wings side by side. One of them ran in fly-bys and was amazing to watch in the water. There were two Allison outboards completely restored that looked beautiful and both ran fly-bys. There were several Molinari pickle forks present that flew fast and are very steady on the water. There were a number of early outboard utility and hydroplanes including Sid-Craft, DeSilva and Neal. Inboard hydroplanes came in all sorts and sizes and power with Lauterbach very well represented (there are more than 400 built to date) Gar Wood was well represented, and there was a beautiful Chris-Craft racing runabout in attendance.

At the end of the weekend, three days of fly-bys produced a very bored safety team. That's just what they hoped for. But it also produced a lot of smiles, cheers, and waves. The event was a Yellow Ribbon Event honoring Fort Drum and the 10th Mountain Division of the US Army. Fort Drum is only 20 miles from the ABM. We hope the RBR offered some good family time for our service men and women who were given free admission to the event.

Mark your calendar now for August 16-19, 2012, and the 11th running of the Race Boat Regatta at the Antique Boat Museum. I guarantee you'll have a great time and see some amazing boats.