

R/C Unlimiteds Big Boat Connection

by Roger Newton

Never did I realize when I started building scale model unlimited hydroplanes, some twenty-five years ago, that it would lead to an association with the full size boats. It didn't take long, after I built my first 1/8 scale unlimited, to find that the owners, drivers and crew members were just as fascinated with model hydros as they were with their own boats.

Over the years, I've gotten to know a lot of people in unlimited circles and have found myself hired or volunteering to work on several hydros including the Atlas Van Lines, Miss Budweiser, Oh Boy! Oberto, Circus Circus, Coors Dry, Winston Eagle and Pete's Wicked Ale. In 1995, I joined the crew of Ken Muscatel's U-14 and traveled to most of the races around the country. This association has also given me the unique opportunity to meet several unlimited greats such as Jack Regas, Bill Muncey, Joe Taggart, Ted Jones, Ron Jones, Bernie Little, Jim Lucero and Chip Hanauer, to name a few.

Several other members of R/C Unlimiteds have also helped out on various unlimiteds. Troy McIntire, of the Tri-Cities area, volunteered time working on the Thousand Trails back in 1981 with crew chief Jim Kerth.

Ed Fisher, a well known model racer in the Northwest, was one of the first team managers for Circus Circus in 1978. The team even built an unlimited hydro based on one of Ed's designs. The famous "canard" Circus didn't quite perform as well as hoped and is now in the Detroit Unlimited Museum.

In the fall of 1977, Jim Lucero asked me if I knew anyone that might be interested in working on an unlimited. Tim Ramsey had just joined R/CU with his model of the 1964 Notre Dame. So, I suggested to Tim to go and talk to Lucero. He hired Tim to work on Bill Muncey's 1978 "Blue Blaster" Atlas Van Lines. Tim eventually went on to join the Miss Budweiser team and became an integral crew member. Tim's talent and experience, gained over the years with the "Bud", landed him the Crew Chief job for Jim Harvey's Miss T-Plus in 1993.

Howard Price, whose father used to work on the GALE boats back in the 1950's, has carried on the tradition by working on several unlimiteds including Jim Harvey's Oberto boat and Bob Fendler's U-19. Howard currently campaigns a couple of different versions of the Oh Boy! Oberto in R/C Unlimiteds.

In 1993, one of R/CU's original members, Monte Steere and his sons were working on the restored Slo-Mo-Shun V at Seafair when they were all recruited to work on the U-19.

Another R/CUer that has gone on to become a crew member is Troy Holmberg. Starting out working on the Oh Boy! Oberto, Troy went on to become a first rate turbine mechanic with Ron Jones Jr's U-50 team and currently s working with the Close Call team.

Brad and Preston Lewis, whose parents Dr. Ralph and Mary Beth Lewis are currently URC officials, crewed on Al Thorson's U-7 along with 1991-92 R/CU High Point Champ Bill Amick. In 1995, 1988 R/CU High Point winner Rick Campbell was appointed Crew Chief by Fred Leland for the U-99.9 Miss Rock. Helping out Rick was his son Ryan, Sam DeFillips and Jim Auguston. Rick has now become owner of of the Computers & Applications and is building a new hull for 1998.

R/CU member Harry Gatjens and Chairman Don Mock have been involved with the full size boats in a different way. Working with the Unlimited Hydroplane Racing Assocation, they have helped with promotion including producing videos and writing for the UHRA media guide.

A president of an advertising firm, the late Ron Hughes served on a committee to help secure sponsors for UHRA races.

So, as you can see, the members of R/C Unlimiteds not only enjoy running replicas of hydroplanes, but many unlimited owners have recognized their mechanical talents as well. After all, what are unlimited hydroplanes anyway? They're just a larger version of our models!
