

# ***Dumas Hydros; Getting a Generation Started***

*by Don Mock*

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I've been a fan of Unlimited Hydroplane racing since I was a kid watching the Thriftway and Bardahl go at it on Lake Washington in the mid to late fifties. Like all youngsters in Seattle at that time, I carved wood models of my favorite hydros, towed them behind my bike and hung around the pits hoping to catch a glimpse of the likes of Bill Muncey or Ron Musson, etc.

When [Dumas Products Inc.](#) came out with their first model Thriftway kit, I must have built ten of them, and as the years went by, I think I built all of their hydroplane kits. I was lucky as a kid to have a summer cabin on a small lake where I could run the boats around. Most of the hydros were not radio controlled, so I would simply fire up the motors ( I still have the burn marks on my hand from string starting those little buggers) and let them go. Of course most of them ended up on the beach or crashed into the side of the rowboat I was in. But Dumas kept on supplying me with bigger and more sophisticated hydroplane models to play around with. The sport 40 size Atlas Van Lines models were great for learning about R/C, although I never considered racing (or even knew you could). I just had fun running the things around on our little lake.

I moved to Los Angeles in 1977 to further my music career but never missed an Unlimited race in San Diego or Seattle. It was in San Diego that I caught my first glimpse of a 1/8th scale hydro. A group of them were on display near the pits, and I was completely dazzled by their size, workmanship and great paint jobs. I wanted one! I finally saw scale hydros race in Seattle, as R/C Unlimiteds put on a demonstration race on the west side of the Stan Sayres Pits during Seafair. I was amazed seeing all these exact replicas of my favorite hydros racing around a course laid out with scale buoys. I didn't know at the time that the rough waters of Lake Washington forced the mini hydros to run at around half throttle to keep from flipping. It wasn't until 1984 while attending the Gold Cup in Tri- Cities that I finally saw the models racing on smooth water at full speed. It was spectacular! I knew it was only a matter of time before I got involved with this incredible sport.

About that same time, Dumas came out with a 1/8 scale unlimited model of the 1983 Atlas Van Lines and of course, I immediately bought one and went to work building it. As the construction proceeded, I became more and more interested in racing and started making some phone calls on how to go about it. I had heard about R/C Unlimiteds, not only by seeing the club race, but I had also bought copies of their programs in the early eighties. My calls eventually led to the "Czar" of scale hydro racing Roger Newton. He told me all about the club and how to join. He also explained the clubs "no two boats alike" registration process. I inquired about racing my model of the '83 Atlas, but Roger informed

me that the registration was taken. I would either have to build a different boat or modify the one I was building into another hydro. Then he mentioned a third option, which was to [buy a used boat](#). He said that guys were always building new boats and frequently sold their old ones. This sounded to me like a great way for a new person to enter the sport, as you would instantly have a complete and proven boat. You'd be able to see how the boats are set up and maybe even learn a few speed tricks. I was thrilled when Roger told me that there was a model of Bill Muncey's "Blue Blaster" Atlas Van Lines for sale, complete with the clubs registration. I bought the boat right then and there, sight unseen!

The "Blaster" was a beautiful piece of craftsmanship. Designed and co-built by Bob Brackett of Kennewick, Washington, the model had won Best of Scale trophies and was totally setup to race. I turned my attention from the Dumas kit and spent the next four months testing and learning how to drive the "Blue Blaster". As my first racing season drew to a close, I had become friends with several club members and had learned a lot about what it took to race one of these things. It became obvious that if I ever wanted to be competitive with my Dumas Atlas, a lot of changes would have to be made to the boat. The hull at that point was just about complete including having the deck and cowling installed. Because I had spent over a year building the boat, I decided to go ahead and finish it. One painful change that appeared to be necessary was that the hull needed to be widened in order to turn quickly. The Dumas Atlas kit is very true to scale, as far as dimensions go, and they did a great job of recreating the real boat. Only problem is, perfect scale model hydros are sometimes not very competitive. To overcome the problem of scale hull instability, R/CU rules allow members certain distortions in boat dimensions. Most of the models in the club are either scratch built from plans or are molded fiberglass. Very few are kits. Designers like Roland DeSteeze and Roger Newton draw scale plans that include many of these modifications. The rule book states that the length can be changed to plus or minus one inch and width can be plus or minus ten percent of the original scaled down dimension. Tolerances are also allowed on other major dimensions of the hull. The goal of these rules are to allow a modeler to make almost unnoticeable changes to the hull to make it more competitive, but still retain the correct "look" of the real boat. The one modification that is almost always used, and even sometimes pushed to the limits by modelers, is width. Scale hydros go around turns at nearly 400 mph to scale, much faster than the full-size design was intended. The additional width adds stability not only in turns but also in rough water.

Well, to get to the point, I decided to perform radical surgery on my Dumas boat. I literally sawed the boat into three parts by running it through a band saw length-wise, twice! I then jiggled the pieces back together leaving a 1/2 inch gap on each side which would widen the hull one inch (the allowable 10%). Using small wood slats and plenty of fiberglass I completed the modification. Now, the only problem was, which real hydroplane could I model the boat after? About half way through the 1986 season, Pringle's Potato Chips joined the Unlimited ranks and signed on

to sponsor Bill Wurstor's U-8, the former Executone. Also designed and built by Jim Lucero, the boat was almost identical to the 1983 Atlas Van Lines. Since the Atlas registration in R/CU was still taken, I decided to enter the club's drawing to win the rights to the Pringle's. I figured that with a few small modifications, I could easily convert the Dumas kit to the U-8. That fall, I did in fact win the registration and began the final changes to the hull to make it into the orange colored Mr. Pringle's. I enlisted the talents of super model craftsman Roland DeSteese to paint the boat. Roland had recommended that modifications should also be made to the sponsons which he agreed to also perform. Several months later, Roland delivered the finished boat and wow! was it gorgeous! All I had to do was some minor detailing, mount the engine and hardware, and the boat was ready for its maiden test run.

On its first time out, Mr. Pringle's proved to be a pretty fast running boat and cornered great. However, as the 1987 R/CU race season got under way, I decided to stay with my trusty "Blue Blaster" as my primary race boat and only raced the Pringle's a few times. I let several club members drive the boat at races when they were either "in between" boats or had damaged their own. Drivers like Roger Newton, Roland DeSteese, Harry Gatjens and Steve DeSteese all tried their hand at the controls of the mighty Pringle's, all with some degree of success. Roger came the closest to winning a race, but while leading the final heat, the engine conked-out and the Pringle's had to be brought to shore in the back of a row boat. By the midpoint of the 1989 season I still had not won an R/CU race. I was beginning to get a little frustrated with my "Blaster" (and myself) and began racing both the Atlas and the Pringle's at races. For those of you that don't know, racing two boats can be a difficult proposition. You are constantly working on, refueling, or in my case retrieving one of the boats. Eventually, I began to really enjoy and feel confident driving the Pringle's. I'd been making small changes to it all year, and now it was really running well. I did pretty well with it at the last few races in '89 and knew that if I made a few more modifications, the Pringle's could really be a top competitor. One modification I knew would be necessary was to tear off the deck and lighten up the interior of the hull. I had been a little over ambitious with glue and fiberglass when I originally built the boat and made it too heavy. I was sure I could get rid of at least two pounds, but unfortunately, it would have to be at the expense of Roland DeSteese's beautiful paint job. At the end of the 1989 season I was surprised and happy to learn that the registration for the club's 1983 Atlas Van Lines had become available. The member who had been racing the boat was leaving the sport, so the Atlas registration would be put up for draw.

This was the chance and excuse I was looking for to rebuild the boat and have an all "Atlas" race team! I stuffed the ballot box with several entries (at ten dollars an entry) and won the registration. The next day, I had the deck torn off and was working hard on the reconstruction. One lesson you learn racing scale hydros is that there is no such thing as a water tight boat. No matter how hard you try, or how thorough the construction, water always manages to find a way inside. One

mistake Dumas made with their kit is that they make the interior frames solid which did not allow any way for water to drain out. When I removed the deck, I found a lot of water soaked frames which explained the mystery of why the boat had gotten heavier as time went by. I replaced the bad frames and window framed the rest. Window framing is a technique used in airplanes, as well as race boats, in which you remove or cut a hole in the center of a part to make it lighter, yet maintain most of its original strength. In boats, it also helps water travel through the hull to drain holes in the transom and allows air to circulate inside, helping keep things dry. Once I completed all the modifications, it was time to put on a new deck. Several model boaters in the Northwest have been fortunate to have Ron Jones Marine make hi-tech parts and materials for their boats. This is the same Ron Jones who designs and builds full size Unlimiteds. I was able to get a sheet of E-Glass for my deck, which is a very strong and light fiberglass material. I wish I could have built the whole boat out of this stuff- it's amazing! Once I completed gluing on the deck, I prepared the whole boat for it's new blue and white paint job. Can you imagine Roland DeSteeese's response when I called and asked him to paint the boat....again! After a few \*#@\$!!!'s he agreed, and performed another incredible work of art transforming the Pringle's into what it was supposed to be in the first place, the 1983 Atlas Van Lines.

Spring testing for the 1990 season was very successful, as the '83 boat ran better than expected. When the racing season began, I ran both Atlas's and did pretty well, especially with the Dumas boat. I began choosing the '83 hull as my "points boat" more and more often. In R/C Unlimiteds, a member can drive two or more boats at a race, but the rules state that you must declare only one to be your "points boat". The points earned only with this boat are applied to your season driver's high point total. Typically, drivers will choose the boat that they feel most confident with and think will most likely score the most points. I made a lot of final heats during the first half of the '90 season, but couldn't quite make it to the winner's circle. Finally, at the Gar Wood Memorial in Longview, Washington, in my fifth racing season, I won my first race! And with a six year old, sawed into pieces, rebuilt, reworked and repainted Dumas Atlas Van Lines kit. This marked the first time that a Dumas kit had ever won an R/CU race. The boat went on to win its second race, the Silver Cup in Tri- Cities, the first stop on the 1991 circuit. Over the past several years, I've gone on to build two more scale hydros. The 1982 and 1984 versions of the, what else, Atlas Van Lines. The boats were scratch-built using composite materials, like carbon fiber and honeycomb. These models reflect a lot of boat-building technology and knowledge I've gained over the years, thanks to my many talented friends in R/CU. But, the most thanks go to [Dumas Boats](#) for teaching me, and many modelers like me, how to get started and enjoy this wonderful sport of model boating!