

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ronald J. (Ron) Musson
Driver Miss Bardahl - (U-40)
1963-64 National Champion

By piloting the Miss Bardahl to another National High Point Championship during the 1964 season, Ron Musson brings to eleven the number of high point titles he has won in his boat racing career of 20 years. And as each racing season passes, the 35-year-old family man from Seattle (wife, Betty, son, Bobby, 17 and daughters, Josette 13 and Michelle 1) gains tremendously in hydroplane racing stature even though not in size, 5'7" and 155 pounds.

Musson has been driving unlimited hydros for only 6 years but during that time has won two high point championships, both for Bardahl, 1963-64. His other nine high point titles were in "limited" class hydro racing as follows:

266 cu. in. class - 1954, 55, 56, 57, 58
225 cu. in. class - 1957
135 cu. in. class - 1954, 55, 56

In addition to "high point" titles which are a result of compiled points won at several races during a season, Ron won seven limited class national championship races (single events in which the nation's top boats compete each year):

7 liter class - 1956
266 cu. in. class - 1954, 55, 58
225 cu. in. class - 1952, 53
135 cu. in. class - 1955

Ron's racing career actually started in Akron, Ohio, his home town, when he was 15. Says Ron, "Out at the lake in my home town, they had pleasure boat races every summer. My Dad promoted them, so it was natural for me to get interested. I started running outboards. Didn't do anything great, but I found it to be a lot of fun, and it sort of crept into my blood."

In 1952 Ron went to a regatta in New Martinsville, West Virginia. Meriin Culver, a past president of the American Power Boat Association, won the race in his 225 Cubic Inch, Yankee Doodle.

"It wasn't a 'claiming race', "Ron quips, "but I claimed Yankee Doodle. I knew she had won the national championship in the 225 Division the year before, and I had just watched her beat "Pop" Cooper's boat. I just had to have her."

So Ron bought Yankee Doodle and raced her all over the mid-West. In 1953 he took the boat to Cincinnati for the national championships. Pulling into the pits after a run on the river, he tore the rudder off. Ron was sitting on the end of the dock several hours later, dejected at the thought of missing the big race, when a fellow named Ray Smith from St. Louis asked Ron if he'd like to take a run in a new boat he had just purchased from Dick Hallett (a well-known race boat builder). Smith's driver hadn't shown. Ron took a run and was selected to drive in the race.

"In the first heat I came in second to Dick Hallett (Hallett was driving another of his boats in the race). Just before he went out for the second heat, Orville Smith, our crew chief, told me if I don't win this one, I should just keep right on going down the

Ohio River. I went out there and really poured the coals to her. I kept looking out of the corner of my eye and seeing a spray of water. I knew Hallett must be right on my tail. I kept my foot down heavy on the throttle and fought like crazy to win. Finally I got the checkered flag and returned to the pits." Smith was right there when Ron got out of the boat. "You did fine," he said. "But who do you think you were trying to beat?" "Hallett," Ron answered. "He was right behind me." Smith told Ron to turn around. He did, just in time to see Hallett cross the finish line. Ron had been way out in front all the way. The spray he saw was his own roostertail.

A RABBIT'S FOOT IN THE COCKPIT

Ron Musson is probably one of the luckiest unlimited drivers in the business. He's had plenty of close shaves, but none so close as his flip during a practice session before the 1963 Indiana Governor's Cup. The Miss Bardahl caught a cruiser's wake, spun around and flipped over on her back, throwing Ron into the Ohio River and breaking five of his ribs. The boat survived amazingly well to race next day with substitute driver, Don Wilson.

In 1959, while driving Hawaii Kai at Coeur d'Alene in the Diamond Cup, Ron's propeller blade blew off at 160 miles per hour as he was passing Miss Burien to take the lead during the last heat. "The shaft broke loose from the strut," Ron recalls. "It came up like a pretzel, flew by the cockpit -- just missing me -- and landed on the deck. My steering was gone. Suddenly the boat lifted in the air and turned around, facing the direction I'd been coming from. Inside the cockpit, the gear box went, the foot throttle fell on the floor. I just sat there waiting, praying that none of the other boats would run into me. I was just lucky to walk away from that one."

RACING HISTORY

Besides his many national racing championships and titles, some of his many racing honors include: Driver of the Year - 1954; Gulf Gold Cup - 1954; Gulf Marine Hall of Fame in 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956 and 1964; Member of the Gulf 100-MPH Club; Union Internationale (UIM Award) as "Outstanding Driver of the World" from Brussels, Belgium in 1955. Musson retains the World's record of 82.191 miles per hour for five mile competition in the 225 class, and 113.660 mph for 15 mile competition in U-hydro class.

1959

Musson's first venture into the big unlimiteds for 1959 was a successful one. As driver for Joe Mascari, he won the Governor's Trophy at Madison, Indiana. In eight racing starts in the unlimited class that year, Musson won 5 firsts, 1 second and 1 third, and did not finish in one.

1960

In 1960 Musson was driver for "Nitrogen II", owned by Sam DuPont of Wilmington, Delaware, when it was selected to represent the United States in competition for the International Harmsworth Trophy in Picton, Ontario. The U.S., hoping to regain the trophy which England had won the year before, failed although Musson and "Nitrogen II" set a new U.S. record of 124 miles per hour in competition.

Ron won the 1960 Detroit Silver Cup, and then Joe Mascari arranged with Musson to pilot "Hawaii Kai" in the annual Reno Regatta, and in the Gold Cup scheduled for Lake Mead near Las Vegas. Musson won the Reno Regatta, and had led for nine laps of 10 in the first heat of the Gold Cup, and ran out of gas on the 10th lap. Then bad weather set in, causing the first Gold Cup cancellation in years.

1961

In 1961, Musson became driver for the famed "Miss Bardahl" hydroplane out of Seattle, and won the rich "World's Championship" on Seattle's Lake Washington. In the 1961 Gold Cup, as in 1960, Musson led for nine out of ten laps in the first heat, developed mechanical trouble in the tenth, but finished third in the heat and third place overall. He returned to Detroit, where for the second year in a row, he won the Silver Cup title.

During the President's Cup race in Washington D.C., despite a first heat breakdown, Musson won his last two heats, and finished third overall. Madison, Indiana was the last stop in 1961, where Musson again won his first heat, before developing trouble. Musson's overall record in 1961 in "Miss Bardahl" was 7 firsts, 1 third, 2 fourths in 12 starts.

1962

It was a new Miss Bardahl in 1962, and the Green Dragon was completed only ten days before the season's first race - the Diamond Cup Regatta at Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. With only nine minutes of water testing for the boat and Ron Musson, Miss Bardahl had to settle for a tenth place finish. A frantic crew, working 'round the clock for two weeks got the big boat ready for the Gold Cup on Lake Washington. Bardahl grabbed second place in a race run on rough water and interrupted several times due to poor weather conditions.

At Detroit's Silver Cup three weeks later, Miss Bardahl withdrew in protest when a dispute arose over the start of the first heat and persistent poor weather made water conditions hazardous. The Governor's Cup followed on the Ohio River in Madison, Indiana. Little Ron Musson pushed the Bardahl to a second place finish. She took a sixth place in the run for the President's Cup in Washington D.C., and finished the season September 29 and 30 with a victory in Harrah's Championship Regatta on Nevada's Lake Tahoe.

1963

Ron won the first two races of the 1963 season - The Alabama Governor's Cup at Lake Guntersville, and the coveted Gold Cup at Detroit, setting new lap, heat and race speed records in both. He set a new course record of 118.421 mph at Coeur d'Alene in a time-trial run before the Diamond Cup race, and turned 120 mph in a qualifying run on Lake Washington before the Seattle Seafair for the two fastest laps of the entire season.

The 1963 Hydro wars ended with Ron winning the most heats (8), the Miss Bardahl winning the National High Point Championship, and Ron, crew and boat being named 1963 APBA All American Race Team.

1964

Musson brought Bardahl its second straight National High Point Title by winning the Gold Cup (again), the first annual Dakota Cup, the Seattle Seafair Trophy and the Harrah's Cup. He set a new all-time heat record of 113.660 mph during the San Diego Cup, the season's last race, and emerged as top driver for the year, receiving a new perpetual trophy presented by the San Diego Union newspaper.