

Ted Jones Remembered

By Fred Farley - ABRA Unlimited Historian

If one famous name is to be singled out above all others as having exerted the greatest influence on post-World War II Unlimited hydroplane racing, that name is unquestionably Tudor Owen ("Ted") Jones from Seattle, Washington.

Mr. Jones passed away on January 9, 2000, at the age of 90. A boat racer since 1927, Ted designed and drove SLO-MO-SHUN IV, the first propriding Thunderboat to run successfully. He piloted the IV to victory in all three heats of the 1950 APBA Gold Cup on the Detroit River.

This was in the days when the Gold Cup race location was determined by the yacht club of the winning boat. Jones and the SLO-MO-SHUN IV represented the Seattle Yacht Club and thus were allowed to defend the cup on home waters in 1951. This was the start of a hydroplane tradition on Seattle's Lake Washington that continues to this day.

Between 1950 and 1966, Jones-designed Unlimiteds won 75 major races, including fourteen Gold Cups, and claimed an unprecedented ten consecutive National High Point Championships.

In addition to SLO-MO, Ted designed SHANTY I (his personal favorite), MAVERICK, MISS THRIFTWAY, MISS BARDAHL, MISS WAHOO, HAWAII KAI III, and others.

The world didn't know much about Tudor Owen Jones prior to June 26, 1950. But Ted took care of that in his own inimitable way. That was when SLO-MO IV set a mile straightaway record of 160.323 miles per hour on Lake Washington near Sand Point, which raised the former standard by nearly 20 mph.

With owner Stan Sayres driving and Jones along side as riding mechanic, the IV had toppled Sir Malcolm Campbell's world mark of 141.740, established in England in 1939 with BLUEBIRD K4. The era of the three-point suspension design of hydroplane had most assuredly arrived.

Measuring 28-1/2 feet in length with an Allison V-12 aircraft engine, SLO-MO-SHUN IV was not the first Unlimited hydroplane to "propride" on a semi-submerged propeller. But she was the first to reap championship results in the application of the concept.

The days when a Thunderboat could win by plowing through the water with a fully submerged propeller were numbered. For the next twenty years, boats had to pretty much use a SLO-MO-type of design to be competitive.

Jones and Sayres had met in the early 1940s through their mutual interest in Limited hydroplane racing. In 1942, Sayres bought a Ventnor-designed 225 Cubic Inch Class hydroplane-the TOPS III-from Jack "Pop" Cooper of St. Louis, Missouri. As the story goes, TOPS III (which became SLO-MO-SHUN II) had damaged a sponson in transit and Sayres asked Jones to help true up the new sponson. It was at this time that Jones informed Sayres that he had the working design for an extremely fast boat and was seeking a backer.

After World War II, Sayres commissioned Jones to build the 225 Class SLO-MO-SHUN III. Ted, who was an employee of the Boeing Company at the time, did so in 1947. The III was similar to other boats that Jones had constructed in recent years but was built heavier to withstand rough usage.

Sayres and Jones found that SLO-MO-SHUN III was capable of speeds almost 10 miles per hour faster than others in her class at the time. She was not campaigned all that extensively due to a lack of local competition, and because her makers were already planning a larger and more powerful boat.

Sayres, Jones, and builder Anchor Jensen attended the 1948 Gold Cup in Detroit. After sizing up the situation there, Jensen recommended to Sayres that they build a boat along the lines of MY SWEETIE, which was a non-propriding two-step hydroplane, designed by John Hacker. But Sayres accepted Jones's suggestion that SLO-MO-SHUN IV should be a three-point proprider (i.e., two sponsons and a propeller).

Construction of SLO-MO commenced at the Jensen Motor Boat Company in Seattle during the fall of 1948, following the basic design that Jones had envisioned ten years earlier.

L.N. "Mike" Welsch, who worked with Jones at Boeing, became the IV's crew chief and served as riding mechanic with Ted at the Gold Cup.

Upon arrival in the Motor City, then the hub of organized boat racing in North America, the oddsmakers conceded that the newly crowned record holder was indeed an awesome sight to behold on the straightaways with that impressive roostertail of spray a football field in length. They doubted, though, SLO-MO's ability to effectively corner under competitive conditions and labeled her "A worm in the turn." This notion vanished quickly when pilot Jones made several high-speed test laps around the Detroit River race course and demonstrated that cornering was not a problem.

After winning the Gold Cup, SLO-MO-SHUN IV went on to Claim the Harmsworth International Trophy, also at Detroit, with Lou Fageol driving. The IV thus became the first boat to win both the Harmsworth and the Gold Cup races, in addition to setting a world straightaway record, during the same calender year since MISS AMERICA (in 1920).

The second Ted Jones-designed Unlimited was the SLO-MO-SHUN V of 1951. The V had the same length and power source as her predecessor, but had a wider beam and a slightly different sponson design that included larger non-trip areas. Unlike her sister, SLO-MO-SHUN V was built for competition rather than for straightaway performance.

For Seattle's Unlimited debut, two races-for the Gold Cup and the Seafair Trophy-were scheduled for consecutive weekends during the month of August, 1951. SLO-MO-SHUN V won both of them with Fageol driving in the Gold Cup and Jones in the Seafair Trophy. On the first lap of the initial race, the V demonstrated acceleration never before witnessed in competition and was credited with a 3-mile mark of 108.633, which raised the former standard by better than 22 miles per hour.

Following the 1951 season, Jones left the SLO-MO-SHUN team and went to work for the Kiekhauser Corporation. He designed one Unlimited (the BREATHLESS for J. Philip Murphy) but pretty much distanced himself from Thunderboat racing for the next three years.

After the split between Jones and Sayres, SLO-MO-SHUN V was rebuilt. The boat was still fast but experienced handling difficulties and was never quite the same.

The 1955 season was Ted's comeback year. He showed up at the 1955 Gold Cup in Seattle with two new boats in tow-the REBEL SUH (which he co-owned with Kern Armistead) and the MISS THRIFTWAY (owned by Associated Grocers of Washington State).

That same year, Jones also tried his hand at designing a twin-Allison-powered boat, the GALE VI, for owner Joe Schoenith.

The 1955 Gold Cup was a race that Jones would not soon forget. REBEL SUH sank in the First Heat. This proved to be Ted's first and last experience as an Unlimited hydroplane owner. MISS THRIFTWAY won two out of three heats and was prematurely announced as the winner. But the victory went instead to GALE V, a Detroit boat, which ran the overall race 4.536 seconds faster than MISS THRIFTWAY and

thus was entitled to 400 bonus points. This gave GALE V-which hadn't even won a heat-1225 points for the day to MISS THRIFTWAY's 1025.

As bitter as his 1955 Gold Cup defeat was, the race proved that Ted could still field a competitive entry-even after four years on the sidelines.

Also at the 1955 Gold Cup, Jones introduced to the racing world two of its most celebrated personalities: REBEL SUH driver Russ Schlee and MISS THRIFTWAY pilot Bill Muncey.

Schlee, a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Air Force, would achieve immortality the following year with another team that Ted put together for owner W.T. "Bill" Waggoner-the SHANTY I. "The Flying Colonel" went on to win the 1956 Lake Tahoe Mapes Trophy, the Seafair Trophy, the Harmsworth Trophy, and the National High Point Championship. This was the first of ten consecutive High Point titles to be won by a Ted Jones-designed boat.

Muncey would go on to become one of the most recognized racers of the 20th century. Jones had chanced to observe Bill, an obscure Mid-West Limited pilot, perform incredibly well in the Harmsworth trials of 1950 with the obsolete MISS GREAT LAKES. Muncey was only 21 at the time, but there could be no doubt in Ted's mind that a major new talent had arrived on the Unlimited scene.

Five years later, when Jones was organizing the MISS THRIFTWAY team for representative owner Willard Rhodes-and after deciding that his own driving days were over-Ted offered Muncey the seat in MISS THRIFTWAY. And a racing legend was born.

The 1955-56 off-season was a busy one indeed for Jones. In addition to being team manager for MISS THRIFTWAY, he had many other items on his agenda.

Ted designed a trio of identical hulls-each 28-1/2 feet long and constructed simultaneously at Les Staudacher's plant in Bay City, Michigan. These were the SHANTY I for Bill Waggoner, the MISS WAHOO for Bill Boeing, Jr., and an unnamed hull owned jointly by Waggoner and Boeing to be kept in reserve as a back-up boat. (This latter hull was later sold and raced as MISS SPOKANE in 1958.)

Jones sold REBEL SUH to Waggoner who renamed it MAVERICK and hired Nevada cattle rancher Bill Stead as driver.

Another hull, the HAWAIIAN VILLAGE, owned by industrialist Edgar Kaiser, was another Jones design, built by Staudacher, which Ted patterned after REBEL SUH. Before entering competition, HAWAIIAN VILLAGE was renamed HAWAII KAI III. Nicknamed the "Pink Lady," the tropical rose and coral mist-colored KAI was a trendsetter with its unique aluminum-clad construction, giving it exceptional strength.

After a slow start, HAWAII KAI III would by 1958 establish herself as arguably the finest race boat of the 1950s with Jack Regas as driver.

Also in the works in 1956 was an experimental THRIFTWAY TOO, 34 feet in length and designed to carry two V-12 engines in tandem, with the driver seated ahead of-not behind-the engine well in a so-called "cabover" configuration. But this craft was not put into the water until 1957 and then with only a single Rolls-Royce Merlin.

Four Jones hulls won a total of eight races out of thirteen in 1956: SHANTY I, three; MISS THRIFTWAY, two; HAWAII KAI III, two; and GALE VI, one. This was obviously Ted's most successful season to date. Of special significance was MISS THRIFTWAY's hard-fought victory over MISS PEPSI in the Gold Cup at Detroit. Due to a bizarre series of official protests (including whether or not MISS THRIFTWAY destroyed

a course marker), the "Nifty Thrifty's" win wasn't certified until 85 days after the fact. But the end result signaled the return of the Gold Cup to Lake Washington for 1957.

The Ted Jones "fleet" accounted for eight victories in eleven races in 1957, eight out of thirteen in 1958, and eight out of twelve in 1959.

MISS THRIFTWAY won a second straight Gold Cup at Seattle and established a world 15-mile heat record of 112.312 on a 3-mile course at Madison, Indiana, in 1957. Then, one day after setting the record, Muncey and MISS THRIFTWAY disintegrated in a shower of splinters during a heat of the Governor's Cup on the Ohio River. The boat was destroyed and Muncey was seriously injured.

Jones crafted a replacement MISS THRIFTWAY that debuted in 1958 and promised to be as competitive as her predecessor. She won the Detroit Memorial Regatta and looked impressive in winning Heat 1-C of the Gold Cup. Then, disaster struck the Associated Grocers team for the second time in less than a year. Heading into the first turn of Gold Cup Heat 2-A, MISS THRIFTWAY lost her rudder and crashed into a U.S. Coast Guard utility boat at tremendous speed.

Bill Muncey jumped clear at the last moment. Both the THRIFTWAY and the Coast Guard boat sank almost immediately. Several Coast Guardsmen were injured but none seriously. Muncey was pronounced "dead" when a rescue worker could find no pulse. Fortunately, Bill revived to race again.

Curiously, MISS THRIFTWAY's teammate, THRIFTWAY TOO, had likewise experienced rudder failure earlier in the week during qualification. (Driver Brien Wygle was uninjured when the TOO hooked to the right and violently spun 720 degrees.)

Undaunted, Ted designed and built a third MISS THRIFTWAY-the last of the line-in 1959. Despite handling problems experienced during the initial season, MISS THRIFTWAY the third proved to be the winningest Jones hull of them all with fourteen victories between 1960 and 1963. Also known as MISS CENTURY 21 (to promote the 1962 Seattle World's Fair), she was National Champion in 1960, 1961, and 1962, finished a record 55 heats in a row between 1960 and 1962, and set a mile straightaway record of 192.001 in 1960 that stood for two years.

Jones unfortunately did not reach the level of success with THRIFTWAY TOO that he had achieved with the MISS THRIFTWAY boats. Circumstances dictated that only a single-engine set-up could be used in the larger-than-usual hull. So, the TOO was very much underpowered. Ted's prediction of 130 mile an hour lap speeds never materialized. THRIFTWAY TOO also had to settle for a volunteer crew, while MISS THRIFTWAY had a professional crew.

THRIFTWAY TOO's highest finish in competition was a second-place to HAWAII KAI III in the 1957 Sahara Cup on Lake Mead.

MISS WAHOO, the sister hull of SHANTY I, was one of Jones's most popular success stories. The WAHOO's rookie driver, Mira Slovak, who was coached by Ted, emerged as one of the sport's top drivers of the 1950s and 1960s.

Slovak, the famed Czechoslovakian freedom flyer, won the 1957 Lake Tahoe Mapes Trophy with MISS WAHOO, which was capable of very high speeds. The WAHOO ran even faster when she switched from Allison to Rolls-Royce Merlin power in 1959 and won the President's Cup in Washington, D.C., and also the Lake Mead Cup.

Renamed the MISS EXIDE in 1963 by Milo and Glen Stoen, the former WAHOO continued her winning ways with Bill Brow as pilot. She became the first boat to qualify for the Gold Cup at better than 120 miles per hour with a 3-lap/9-mile average of 120.312 on Lake Washington in 1965.

HAWAII KAI III emerged as the finest competitive machine in the history of Unlimited hydroplane racing at that point in time. The KAI was the epitome of the all-conquering Ted Jones design of the 1950s.

Maintained by the same mechanical crew that had serviced SLO-MO-SHUN IV and SLO-MO-SHUN V, the "Pink Lady" set a world competition lap record of 116.004 on a 3-mile course at Chelan, Washington, in 1957. The previous best had been TEMPO VII's 106.007 at Madison, Indiana, in 1955. The KAI's mark would stand until 1963.

A case could be made for HAWAII KAI III being the most significant record-breaking boat of the post-World War II era. This is because she raised the competition lap record by more miles per hour and held it longer than any other craft.

The KAI won the last five races of 1957 in a row and finished first in National High Points, after having taken second-place the year before. Also in 1957, HAWAII KAI III raised the mile straightaway record to 187.627, eclipsing the previous high of 178.497 established in 1952 by SLO-MO-SHUN IV.

Following a brief retirement, the KAI came out of mothballs to win the 1958 Gold Cup on Lake Washington. She thus became the first Unlimited hydroplane to win six consecutive races. This also was the first time that a Thunderboat had completed 300 miles at a winning pace. The previous mark was the SKIP-A-LONG's 299.3 miles at a winning pace in 1949. The record would stand until 1962.

In 1958, Ted Jones designed the MISS BARDAHL for owner Ole Bardahl of Seattle. But instead of going to Anchor Jensen or Les Staudacher, Ted this time selected his 26-year-old son, Ron Jones, as the builder.

The younger Jones had previously collaborated with his father on a successful 7-Litre Class hydroplane, the WHIZSKI. The 1958 MISS BARDAHL was the first of many Unlimiteds to be produced by Ron over the next four decades.

Christened on Lake Chelan, the "Green Dragon" MISS BARDAHL won the 1958 Apple Cup at Chelan a few days later with Norm Evans as driver. Later in the season, with Mira Slovak in the cockpit, MISS BARDAHL won two more races and edged out MISS U.S. I for the National High Point Championship.

In 1959, Ted Jones designed and built two boats-the third MISS THRIFTWAY and the second MAVERICK. While the THRIFTWAY didn't come into her own until 1960, the MAVERICK was an enormously competitive machine almost from Day-One.

Despite an annoying tendency to "hook" in the turns, MAVERICK won five races and the National Championship in 1959. A representative of the Lake Mead Yacht Club, she whisked the Gold Cup away from Seattle and took the APBA's Crown Jewel to Las Vegas for 1960 at a record-breaking 104.003 for the 90-mile distance.

At a time when most major teams were changing over to the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, MAVERICK used a highly developed-and incredibly powerful-aux-stage Allison that, according to Ron Jones, was the equal of any Merlin ever built.

As the 1960s dawned, Ted Jones began gravitating to the lucrative field of pleasure boating. By 1965, he was completely out of the boat racing business.

Ted's last few race boat assignments included the 1963 TAHOE MISS, the 1963 MISS EXIDE, and the 1964 MARINER TOO, which he designed but did not build.

Jones disowned the MISS EXIDE project when he learned that the Stoen brothers had hired Ed Karelson to put the boat together with a staple gun. Ted's fears proved to be well founded when MISS EXIDE quite literally fell apart during only its second race.

Karelson later vindicated himself with the 1967 MISS BARDAHL, the 1968 MISS BUDWEISER, and the 1969 NOTRE DAME, which were highly successful and which imitated the 1963 MISS EXIDE's flatter than usual hull profile.

The last two Unlimiteds to be designed and built by Jones were the 1960 MISS BURIEN and the 1962 MISS BARDAHL. The BURIEN was a beautiful riding boat that was still in competition twenty years later as SAVAIR'S PROBE. MISS BURIEN unfortunately never had much more than a stock Allison in a sport dominated by the much more powerful Rolls-Royce Merlin. The BURIEN (also known as TEMPEST) never did win a race but accumulated a lot of seconds and thirds during her long career.

The final Unlimited hydroplane to benefit from the hands-on attention of Ted Jones was arguably his best. The 1962 MISS BARDAHL was to the 1960s what HAWAII KAI III had been to the 1950s-the ultimate competitive machine. Driver Ron Musson predicted that this latest "Green Dragon" would be "one hell of a boat." And he was certainly correct.

The fledgling MISS BARDAHL did experience some new-boatitis. She spent her first season in the shadow of MISS CENTURY 21, which won five races and fifteen heats in a row during 1962.

Musson and MISS BARDAHL took second-place in National Points and won the Harrah's Tahoe Trophy, which was the only race that year that MISS CENTURY 21 failed to finish.

During the 1962-63 off-season, Ron Jones was called in to do some fine-tuning on the sponsons. This resulted in some additional miles per hour for the boat.

At the outset of 1963, MISS BARDAHL shaped up as a formidable threat for national honors. Musson drove her to victory in the first race of the season at Guntersville, Alabama. The win would have been more significant if MISS CENTURY 21 (now renamed MISS THRIFTWAY again) had been present. But the Associated Grocers team had not tested during the off-season and would not debut until the second race, which was for the Gold Cup, in Detroit.

The inevitable showdown between the defending champion Muncey and the challenger Musson in those two classic Jones hulls was as dramatic as it was shocking. MISS BARDAHL ruled the waves and would not be denied. Ron reeled off three first-place finishes in the preliminary heats and took a safe second to Bill Cantrell and GALE V in the Final.

As for MISS THRIFTWAY, she finished a dismal sixth in the 1963 Gold Cup. Bill Muncey drove what was arguably the sloppiest race of his career.

Bill won the first heat without too much difficulty. Then he was watered down at the start of Heat 2-A, which was won by MISS BARDAHL. And it was all down hill for Muncey from there. MISS THRIFTWAY ran fifth, fourth, and fifth and finished behind boats that she had dominated the year before. The persimmon-and-white U-60 was unrecognizable as the shining superstar that had won a record seven races in a row during 1961 and 1962.

MISS BARDAHL posted the fastest heat of the day at 109.489. This compared to 105.561 for GALE V, 104.814 for Chuck Thompson and TAHOE MISS, and 102.428 for MISS THRIFTWAY. After a depressingly one-sided 1962 season, competition had returned to the Unlimited Class.

The "Green Dragon" also established a Gold Cup lap record of 114.649 on the 3-mile course at Detroit. MISS BARDAHL was now the fastest boat in the fleet. She went on to claim the 1963 National High Point Championship over second-place GALE V and third-place TAHOE MISS. It was Ole Bardahl's first championship since 1958.

Even a mid-season change of drivers did not derail the team's competitive momentum. Musson fractured some ribs in a test run at Madison, Indiana, and had to relinquish the wheel for the last three races of the season to Don Wilson, who ordinarily drove the MISS U.S. boats.

But no matter who was driving her, MISS BARDAHL kept right on winning and annexed a second straight Harrah's Tahoe Trophy on the last day of the season at Stateline, Nevada.

The 1964 campaign produced some outstanding competition for the fans. A couple of boats were faster than MISS BARDAHL, but the "Green Dragon" won another High Point Championship on the basis of being more consistent. Musson won four out of nine races, which included another Gold Cup at Detroit.

For 1965, Ole Bardahl ordered a radically designed cabover hull from the drawing board of Ron Jones. Ted had retired from Unlimited racing by this time. And the younger Jones had a concept for a forward-cockpit boat that had worked very well in the smaller classes. Ron was anxious to try the new design in the Unlimited ranks. And Bardahl was willing to give it a try.

But when the gearbox didn't arrive in time to start the 1965 season, Bardahl brought out the 1962 Ted Jones hull for a final curtain call.

"My tired, weary old boat," as Musson described her, didn't run at Gunter'sville. And she was ill-prepared for Coeur d'Alene, where the "Green Dragon" finished third behind Bill Brow in MISS EXIDE and Rex Manchester in NOTRE DAME.

But at Seattle, MISS BARDAHL was her old competitive self again and won a third consecutive Gold Cup. This hadn't happened since George Reis made it three-in-a-row in 1933-34-35 with EL LAGARTO.

Following her Gold Cup triumph, MISS BARDAHL won three races and TAHOE MISS won two. Musson had apparently won at Madison but was penalized an extra lap after a disputed call.

In the final race of the year in San Diego, the MISS BARDAHL crew headed by Leo Vandenberg pulled out all of the stops. Ron held nothing back and set long-standing world records for the 3-mile, 15-mile, and 45-mile distances with speeds at 117.130, 116.079, and 115.056 respectively on the salt waters of Mission Bay. It was quite simply the finest hour for a Ted Jones-designed hydroplane.

In the words of Associate Unlimited Historian David Greene, "It became clear that no boat in history could run at the same competitive speed as the MISS BARDAHL. She raised the heat record almost four miles per hour faster than any other boat had ever recorded."

Following the greatest race of her career, the 1962 MISS BARDAHL was retired and vanished forever from the Unlimited scene. She never ran in competition again.

It is appropriate that Ted Jones and his finest creation-the "Green Dragon"-entered retirement at just about the same time. They both went out a winner.