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Vintage Hydroplanes on Display

By Katherine Hessel. Published Friday, July 25th, 2014



Miss Bardahl

It's a battle between old and new, vintage and modern.

For some, shiny is better, but for a select few, age is perfection.

Dixon Smith is the proud owner of this machine, Miss Bardahl -- Smith was one of the crew members who witnessed the boat win multiple gold cups and national championships back in the 1960's.

"What I learned during the summer working on the boat paid for school next year," said Smith, "This boat put me through the University of Washington."

10 years ago, Smith and his brother found Miss Bardahl on sale on the east coast, and decided to purchase it for their own.

They spent the next few years restoring her to her former glory.

"It was about a 4-year restoration project, the boat was in terrible shape," said Smith.

Three boats are on display at Columbia Park today, all three are members of the Hydroplane and Raceboat Museum in Seattle.

People get the chance to peek into what hydroplane racing looked like decades ago -- with old fashioned knobs, switches and engines taken from World War II fighter planes as opposed to the turbine helicopter engines in today's hydros.

But organizers say what really catches a hydroplane connoisseur's attention is what these machines are made of.

"They're made out of wood, and it's plywood," said museum director David Williams, "It looks like something you can go buy at Home Depot, though you actually couldn't because this is marine plywood. But they're very surprised to see a machine that is capable of 180, 190, 200 miles per hour, just built out of plywood."

For vintage owners like Smith, his appreciation stems from firsthand experience as a young man.

"We learned a tremendous amount about how to get things done in a short period of time, which is a skill that not a lot of people have."