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CONTRIBUTED

The Miss Bardahl's crew members are original pit crew (from left) David Smith, Roger Kruse, Skip Schott, Dixon Smith and current members Jon Osterberg, Ryan Smith and Mike Pronovost. In the lower part of the photo, Dixon Smith drives the Miss Bardahl at a recent exhibition.

MISS BARDAHL RIDES AGAIN

Original pit crew reunites to celebrate 50th anniversary of iconic hydroplane's last race

By David Hayes
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For those who have had their fill of Salmon Days festivities, longtime Issaquah resident Dixon Smith, 72, has an alternative recommendation for something to do the first weekend of October — come to Lake Chelan to help celebrate the 50th anniversary of the last official race of the Miss Bardahl.

Smith and three other original crewmembers will be on hand as the Miss Bardahl participates with other vintage hydroplanes at the 2015 Mahogany & Merlot Vintage Boat and Car Event Oct. 3.

Smith, the current owner and driver of the restored Miss Bardahl, said the pay he earned as a mechanic

on the boat's crew, including a portion of the winnings from races, typically helped pay the next year's cost for college at the University of Washington.

"People ask me, 'Why are you interested in that boat?'" Smith said. "Well, it paid for college. So it was a good deal, a really good deal."

Three generations of the Smiths have at one point or another worked on the Miss Bardahl, including Smith's father Burns and his son and current crew chief and backup driver Ryan.

Ron Musson piloted the Miss Bardahl Green Dragon — originally owned by Ole Bardahl, founder of the Bardahl Chemical Corp. — to 12 victories from 1962-65, including

three straight Gold Cup wins and national championships in 1963-65. The Bardahl is also renowned for running 57 consecutive heats without a mechanical failure.

Smith said the hydroplane ran its last race in 1965, before sitting around various places, deteriorating and ending up in really bad shape.

Smith and his brother David then got ahold of it in 2000.

"We spent about five years restoring the boat to running condition," he said. "That involved everything from building motors to fixing the hull, those kind of things. We got it in as good of shape as when it was a race boat."

Smith estimates they put in nearly \$200,000 restor-

IF YOU GO

2015 Mahogany & Merlot
Vintage Boat and Car Event

- ▶ Oct. 2-4, free
- ▶ Chelan Waterfront Park & Lakeside Marina
- ▶ www.mahoganyandmerlot.com

ing the Miss Bardahl back to its previous glory.

With his background as a retired American Airlines pilot, Smith said he had an advantage over others right off the street in piloting the vintage hydroplane.

"Driving one of these boats takes about the same level of attention as piloting a Boeing 777," he said. "I drive it carefully, somewhat aggressively. It took me a few runs to get used to. It is a bit of a challenge to drive."

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Bardahl

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Smith limits the speed of the boat to 150-160 mph. In races, it routinely went 180. But you won't see Smith pushing the Miss Bardahl's limits that much.

"It's not a competitive boat anymore and I don't heal up as quickly," he said. "Plus, it's expensive to repair."

The Smiths run the Miss Bardahl in about three or four exhibitions a year, and also give out the occasional ride for charity.

"So it's like a valuable,

vintage old car. You go out and drive it hard, but not so hard that if you do anything stupid, you'd break it," Smith said.

Because of the boat's popularity — Seattle-area residents in their 60s and 70s still recall the glory days of the Miss Bardahl — festivals like Seafair and Tri City Follies toss some money his way for her appearances.

"People remind me all the time, when they were little kids, their fathers used to bring them out and watch the crew work on the boat," Smith said. "Those are old people telling me now. We get really good responses. People really like boats."

He added most current race boats have gas turbine jet engines don't make that much noise.

"Crowds really like the noise, and the old boats make a lot of noise," he said. "No mufflers on these things. And people really like that."

Crowds at Lake Chelan will get to see a race course set up similar to Seattle's Seafair race.

"When we put on an exhibition, we will orchestrate it ahead of time," Smith said of the driver. "We'll run boats close together. No one gets too much ahead or behind. So it looks very much like a race."

Accompanying Smith

to the exhibition in Lake Chelan will be the other remaining crew members from 1965 — his brother David; Skip Schott, of Maltby; and Roger Kruse, of Portland, Oregon.

Also tagging along will be Smith's other unofficial crewmember, his wife of 43 years, Judy. He said she has been very supportive of his little hobby, being very, very tolerant of the things he does.

"Her only complaint is she doesn't get enough rides in the boat," Smith said. "In fact, the last time I put her in the boat with me, I put her in the driver's side and said, 'You drive.' She is kind of the official third person who has driven the boat."