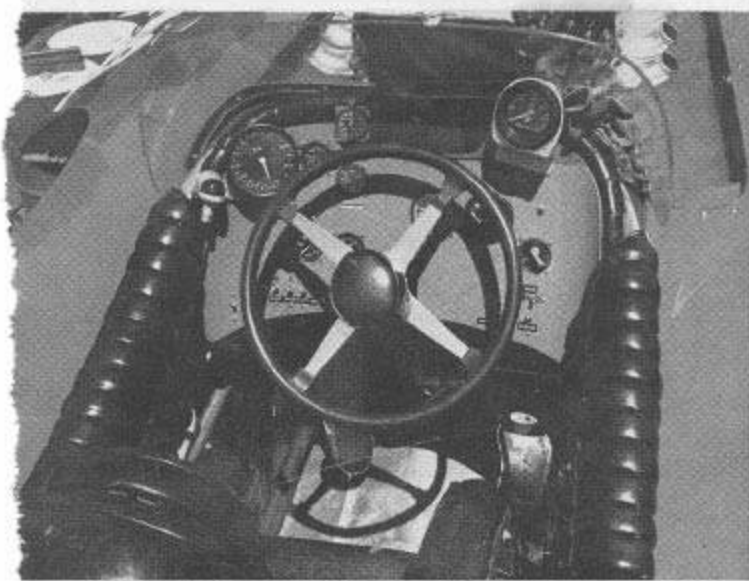

*If you were the little guy
with the heavy foot, this
would have been your front
row seat, in U-40, at the*

GOLD CUP RACE

BY RALPH IANUZZI





Winner of the Gold Cup was in doubt until the very end. Here (foreground to shoreline) Madison, U.S.V, Bardahl, and Tahoe begin their first heat and their seesaw duel for the hardware.

When the unlimited hydroplanes met back in July on the Detroit River to decide the 1964 American Power Boat Association Challenge (Gold) Cup, the prophets were out in force. A prediction of the outcome, amply supported by many plausible reasons, could be had from any stranger, and from the regular racing buffs without even asking.

Everybody was wrong. Oh, there were those who did pick *Miss Bardahl* to win, but they had changed their opinions before the final heat. *Notre Dame*, the sentimental favorite, lost her chance by dislodging a buoy in her second heat, and the glorious picture of a clean sweep by *Tahoe Miss* was cruelly destroyed minutes before the gun went off for the final match.

It was an incredible race from any point of view: the Gold Cup was in doubt one second before the last boat finished the last heat. In her first heat, *Miss Budweiser* hooked her sponson on the tight east turn, pitching driver Bob Schroeder out of the cockpit without doing him or herself any great harm. In the same race, *Blue Chip*, with Fred Alter driving, lost the sheathing from his starboard sponson, but finished the heat without further incident. Don Wilson, in *Miss U.S. V.*, reported the bow of his boat went over the stern of *Gale V.*, driven by Rex Manchester, in

FLASH

Ron Musson and *Miss Bardahl* have added the Seafair Trophy to their impressive list of 1964 victories.

On August 9, with a record-breaking crowd looking on, Musson and the "Green Dragon" roared around Lake Washington at Seattle, Wash., and edged out *Miss Exide*, to win the race by two-tenths of a second. Early finishers were:

1. *Miss Bardahl*, Seattle, Wash.—driver Ron Musson
2. *Miss Exide*, Seattle, Wash.—driver Bill Brow
3. *Miss Madison*, Madison, Ind.—driver George Byers
4. *Tahoe Miss*, Lake Tahoe, Nev.—driver Chuck Thompson
5. *Notre Dame*, Seattle, Wash.—driver Bill Muncey
6. *Eagle Electric*, Seattle, Wash.—driver Norm Evans

A highlight of the exciting race occurred in the second heat. *Gale V.*, a Detroit-based boat, caught fire and driver Jerry Schoenith was thrown into the water, luckily escaping major injuries but eliminating him and the boat from the race.

heat 2A, when both craft swerved to starboard to avoid collision with a third—but the only result was scratched paint. *Gale V.* came perilously close to the north shore when Norm Evans in *Miss Eagle Electric* forced *Gale* way outside, an action considered rough driving (earning Evans a disqualification in heat 3B) and again stretching luck to an unbelievable point. Heat 3A was stopped and restarted when a 26' pleasure cruiser parted her anchor line and drifted onto the course in the paths of Musson and Muncey.

With death on a holiday, the crowd estimated at 250,000 could focus attention on the intricate possibilities presented before the final and decisive heat.

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Gold Cup Race

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Thus far, the big winner of the day was *Tahoe Miss*, driven by Chuck Thompson, who won all three of his heats. Ron Musson, in *Bardahl*, had taken two heats and a second place behind *Tahoe Miss* in another (there are only three heats before the final, but each is run in two sections because of the large number of boats).

Under the A.P.B.A. Point System for Scoring Unlimiteds—400 for first, 300 for second, 225 for third, 169 for fourth, 127 for fifth and 95 for sixth—*Tahoe Miss* had 1200, *Bardahl* had 1100, and third was *Miss Exide*, driven by Bill Brow, with 900. Rounding out the top six, all of whom had the right to go into the final, were *Miss Madison*, Buddy Byer, 825; Bill Cantrell in *Miss Smirnoff*, 675 and Don Wilson in *Miss U.S. V.*, 563.

Tahoe Miss had to be considered the favorite at this point. Thompson, one of the best and most experienced drivers on the circuit, handled her superbly all day, and the boat responded like a bullet. Most of the time she clung beautifully to the water, looking and running as new as she was. It was clearly up to Musson to stand on *Bardahl* for all she was worth. He had to win the final in order to tie *Tahoe* in points. The crowd assumed and expected a duel between Thompson and Musson, and there is no doubt both men were not prepared to yield.

Under the point system, a tie is broken by the highest average speed. Thompson had about a 15-second edge over Musson, so the *Bardahl* driver, if he did succeed in taking the final, had to do it at least 15 seconds ahead of Thompson, assuming *Tahoe* would wind up second.

It was now time for the five-minute gun. The roostertails revved up but Chuck Thompson was having trouble with *Tahoe Miss*. He went back to the pits for a hasty check which revealed nothing. Under unlimited rules, he had to be running when the one-minute gun sounded.

For 60 seconds before the start the sleek *Tahoe* strained to get up steam. You could almost touch the energy of the silent crowd's encouragement as the people stood, and waited, and started to hope.

When the big gun fired for the start, its effect was stunning. Chuck Thompson was a mile and a half from the starting line, limping along, but slowly picking up speed. The Detroit waterfront was Mudville and the mighty Casey had struck out.

Then came the weird part. When Musson hit the line, he realized *Tahoe* was in trouble. He started adding numbers and figured if he took third place for 225 points, giving him a total of 1325, he'd have the cup. It was a foolish decision because it was predicated on *Tahoe* finishing last, earning only 95 points for a total of 1295. *Miss Exide*, already in the lead and destined to win the heat, could not total more than 1300.

What Musson didn't figure was the long-shot possibility of another chance for *Tahoe Miss*, one that materialized along toward the fourth lap. Musson had settled comfortably into third place behind *Exide* and *Miss Madison*, with about half a mile between *Bardahl* and *Exide*.

Suddenly, the crowd came alive with the possibility that Chuck Thompson might just catch Don Wilson, in *Miss U.S. V.*, who was holding fifth. Wilson's boat was not up to par when she came out for the Gold Cup. It was a fourth-place boat at best, running averages between 87 and 90 mph. With each lap, *Tahoe* had gained. From 58.451 mph for the first three-mile lap, Thompson had brought his average speed up to 87.213 mph at the end of the fourth lap.

Miss Exide, *Miss Madison*, *Miss Bardahl* and *Miss Smirnoff* crossed the finish line in that order, but *Bardahl* still did not have the cup. For the next 30 seconds, it was Don Wilson who controlled the Gold Cup. Chuck Thompson was barreling toward the line probably doing more than 100 mph, fast catching *U.S. V.*

The mob roared as both crossed almost at the same time, but Don Wilson held fifth place with a fraction of a second and 30 feet to spare, in effect, winning the Gold Cup for *Bardahl*.

It was so close that Chuck Thompson, seeking a Gold Cup for 20 years, thought he had caught Wilson, many spectators thought he had too, until the loudspeakers quickly blared *Bardahl* the winner.

Later, Chuck Thompson could not believe he had lost the cup. He said he looked at Wilson's bow as he passed him and was sure he nosed Wilson out. The judges disagree.

There is a great deal of room for error with boats moving in excess of 150 feet per second on a straightaway. The possibility for error is compounded when one boat is moving much faster than the other—not to mention the confusion of the white water thrown up by roostertails. There was little wonder the events of the afternoon and the decision left the *Tahoe* camp bewildered.

Had *Tahoe Miss* won the cup, there is little doubt that Harrah's Club, the boat's owner, would have earnestly sought to stage the next Gold Cup Race on Lake Tahoe, Stateline, Nev. Ever since Bill Harrah joined unlimited racing in 1961, he has kept his operation on the highest level. While Stateline, Nev., could easily have outbid any city on the current schedule for the Gold Cup race, Harrah has exhibited his own brand of sportsmanship in this regard.

Certainly Seattle will push hard to get the race. That city, home port of *Bardahl* and other Gold Cup winners, has not had a Gold Cup race since 1959. Yet it can run a Gold Cup race better than any town, turning out up to 500,000 spectators.

The Spirit of Detroit Association probably will not give up the race without a fight. The organization seems to have a lot of savvy in fund raising, permitting it to offer unusually high purses. The unlimited commission has been giving prime consideration to highest bid, but big purses do not always make a good race. It is more important to run a race with people who know what they are doing; can do it efficiently and reliably. Detroit still must learn how to guard the pits properly, and facilitate the flow of information to the press area. **⚓**