

3 months FREE!

Switch to AT&T Yahoo!
High Speed Internet

\$14⁹⁹
/mo

SWITCH NOW >

For residential customers. 12 mo. term. See details.
Comparison of major broadband providers.

The new  at&t

bellevuereporter.com

Thursday, July 5, 2007

[return home](#)

sports

Saving Miss Bardahl

Local residents restore historic hydroplane to former glory

By JOEL WILLITS

Staff Writer

From 1962-65, there were few, if any, hydroplanes that could match the accomplishments of the Miss Bardahl unlimited race boat. Owned by Ole Bardahl of Bardahl Chemical Corp. and driven by Ron Musson, the boat and its crew won three APBA Gold Cups, three national championships and one world championship, setting numerous records along the way.

The crew, headed up by 37-year-old Leo Vanden Berg, was mostly comprised of college-aged young men who pioneered many innovations that helped to add to the boats success.

Dixon Smith, of Issaquah, brother David Smith of Bellevue, Skip Schott of Maltby were all members of the crew during those three magical years. Both Smiths owed their college education to the Bardahl: the pay they received from their work went straight to the University of Washington.

"It was the first job working on a boat that I actually got paid for," recalls Dixon. "For a college kid, it was just a great deal."

"We were just a bunch of smart mouthed kids," adds Schott, who was 22 during the 1965 season. "Leo [Vanden Burg], he tried to whip us into shape. But we were all enthusiastic and everybody had a good combination of skills."

Youth didn't stop the crew from achieving tremendous success: The boat went 55 consecutive heats without an engine failure, a remarkable feat for any hydroplane.



TRANSFORM YOUR RIDE SALE
0% APR
FOR QUALIFIED BUYERS
PLUS \$1000
ON MOST '07s
HURRY - SALE ENDS JULY 9
GET DETAILS
TRANSFORMERS IN THEATERS NOW

shop

Classified Marketplace

Search Classifieds

[Browse Classifieds](#)

Ads by Google

[Hydroplane](#)

Browse a huge selection now. Find exactly what you want today.

www.eBay.com

[Unlimited Hydro Programs](#)

Hydroplane programs & posters From 1946 to 2006, common & rare.

www.hydroprograms.com

[Racing Pit Crew Apparel](#)

Caps, Shirts, Jackets, No Minimums Buy Online - Orders Ship Same Day

www.StellarApparel.com

[Official Subaru Site](#)

Get Pricing Info, Locate Dealers & More - Official Subaru Vehicle Site

www.Subaru.com

Miss Bardahl ended the 1965 season by winning the San Diego Cup in a dominating performance. Following the race, Schott, both the Smith's and fellow crewman Jerry Zurvich lifted that boat out of the water for the final time. The boat was used for promotional events until 1967, when it was shipped to a Bardahl plant in Boston via railroad.

Following the 1965 season, tragedy struck the crew. In a Washington, D.C., race, the new boat crashed and was destroyed. Musson died in the wreck.

"It was just devastating because I knew Ron very personally," Dixon said. "All of a sudden the boat crashed and the driver was killed; it was very sad."

Over the years, the crew dispersed and went their separate ways. Unbeknownst to the crew, one fan's search and a twist of fate would reunite them with the old Miss Bardahl boat over 40 years later.

Search and Rescue

Jon Osterberg of Seattle was a Miss Bardahl fan from the beginning.

"I guess you could say I became a fan because my father lived right by the Bardahl plant," Osterberg recalls. "I just grew up a huge fan of Miss Bardahl."

In 1979, Osterberg began a three-year mission with one objective: To find the Miss Bardahl. Three years and sky-high phone bills later, Osterberg had finally found the boat.

And as Osterberg soon discovered, the Bardahl itself had gone through quite the trip.

"When the Bardahl plant in Boston was shut down, they brought in a comptroller who was responsible for liquidating the plant," Osterberg said. "Turns out, he accidentally sold Miss Bardahl for only \$1,500."

The boat had passed to two more owners, and was simply wasting away in a New Hampshire field. Through long negotiations, Osterberg arranged for the boat to be donated to the Seattle Hydroplane Museum.

The Bardahl saga was about to come full circle.

The Bardahl Restored

Dixon Smith had no knowledge of Osterberg's search, but was aware when the Bardahl returned to Seattle. Dixon, his brother David and Schott had recently worked together once

again on the Miss Thriftway boat. After enjoying themselves, the suggestion was made that brought everything together: to buy and restore the Bardahl.

So on June 24, 2000, Dixon bought the boat from museum associate Curt Erickson, who purchased the Bardahl from the museum. The original crew reunited to not only restore the Bardahl to what it looked like in 1965, but also to restore it to full running condition.

The crew began work, this time adding another Smith, Dixon's son Ryan, a Purdue University engineering graduate.

"The original crew was all about at retirement age," Dixon said. "Early on we decided to work on it at a reasonable rate; we'd do whatever it took but not kill ourselves doing it."

The restoration process began: Dixon hired hydroplane circuit veteran Mike Hansen to do the woodworking, the crew had installed new frames, a new deck went on, the hull was painted and in May 2005, the work began on the World War-II era Rolls-Merlin aircraft engine that would power the Bardahl.

Miss Bardahl Roars to Life

On July 30, 2005, the Bardahl was lowered by a crane into Lake Washington in hopes of a successful run. Schott remembers exactly what he was feeling, seeing the boat he grew up with more than four decades earlier restored to its former glory.

"Forty-one years, 246 days," Schott said, pointing out the exact time lapse between the running of the Bardahl. "I knew, unless we were dead, the three guys who had taken the boat out of the water in 1965 were going to put it back together."

The Smith brothers were the first riders in the boat, as Schott, Zurvich (who was not part of the restoration) and many curious onlookers watched the boat fire up and hit Lake Washington running.

"I told Dixon I wanted to go fast; I didn't want to go 100 miles per hour, I wanted to go 150 miles per hour," David said. "It was one of those feelings that just brings you back to when you were a kid — it brings back all the things that make you feel good."

"It was a very emotional moment," Schott agreed. "Just that engine starting up for the first time and hearing the living, breathing 3,000 horsepower animal — it was very satisfying."

Now that the Bardahl is back on the water, the Smiths and the rest of the crew plan to run the boat a few times a year, as well as display the boat for hydroplane enthusiasts. As an added twist to the story, Dixon made Osterberg, the man who found the Bardahl, an official crew member, as well as the boat's historian.

It had taken 41 years, 246 days, countless work hours, patient wives and lots of dedication, but the Miss Bardahl has given the men something special: the memory of a lifetime.

Joel Willits can be reached at joel.willits@reporternewspapers.com or 425-453-4270.

