

Big, Strong Fleet Ready For Northwest Swing

TRI-CITIES, Wash. --- If the American Boat Racing Association unlimited hydroplane circuit wondered what type of fleet would be racing when it took over the sport two years ago, no one could have imagined the numbers and competitive level of the race boats would have even been this strong.

This week, 14 boats will arrive on the shores of the Columbia River for the 42nd consecutive running of the Lamb Weston Columbia Cup, July 27-29.

Defending Columbia Cup champion Dave Villwock (Auburn, Wash.) will take a three-race win streak into this weekend's event.

Villwock, driving the Miss Ellstrom Elam Plus, won the season opener in Evansville on July 1, took the Madison Regatta one week later and just over one week ago on July 15, he won the prestigious Gold Cup in Detroit.

This is the first time since 2000 that a driver has won three consecutive races. And in 2000 that driver was Villwock himself. He won the first four races in the Miss Budweiser and six of seven races during the season.

Unlike 2000, Villwock is having more fun with this winning streak.

"There are six to seven teams that have a legitimate chance to win a race," said Villwock. "It is really a lot more fun racing with this competition than it is to go out there and win easily."

FormulaBoats.com crew chief Mike Weber (Atlanta, Ga.) also believes Villwock's run is impressive.

"He should be given a lot of credit for what he has been able to accomplish this year," said Weber. "I don't think he can win them all but he always seems to have a little jump and a great start when he gets to the final."

Maybe Villwock should be given more credit for his win of one year ago.

Villwock and the MISS E-LAM PLUS team won the 2006 Atomic Cup under extraordinary circumstances. Their boat "blew over" during the running of preliminary Heat 2-A. They rebounded in time to win the next two heats and the overall championship.

FORMULA FOR SUCCESS: The FormulaBoats.com team has had a 'brutal' season according to Weber. The team had both boats flip in Evansville and then Mike Allen (New Orleans, La.) had a blow-over accident in the final heat at the Gold Cup while running third.

"We have been looking at everything to find out what has been going on," said Weber. "We have looked at all the different set ups, the water conditions and much more."

The team will bring a rookie driver to Tri-Cities. Jimmy Shane (Havre de Grace, Md.) will get his first official ride in an unlimited hydroplane on the Columbia River. Shane, a seven time APBA record holder in the inboard classes, drove the U-1 last year in an exhibition in Celina, Ohio and will take Allen's sport until the New Orleans native heals properly. Shane will be driving the FormulaBoats.com back-up boat, the same boat Weber drove for the team two years ago.

MIKE IS 'OK': Allen is in good shape but the thumb injury he suffered needs time to heal properly. He also had some worries about infection in the wound after the Gold Cup flip and possible contamination from the water of the Detroit River.

KIM AND DEBBIE GREGORY RETURN: Rookie driver Dave Bryant (Mesa, Ariz.) also will return the Miss Ahern Equipment Rentals boat back to the circuit after missing the Gold Cup in Detroit. The 10 boat broke a prop causing major damage to the shaft, deck and the gearbox of the turbine. You can see pictures of the repairs by [clicking here](#).

FOUR BOATS JOIN THE CIRCUIT: Four new boats will be in the pits for the first time this year. Nate Brown (Preston, Wash.) returns to racing, driving the U-17 Miss Red Dot; Chris Bertram (Eatonville, Wash.) will be in the cockpit of the U-9 Miss Conover Insurance; Dave Williams (Seattle, Wash) will be in the U-48 Miss Lakeridge Paving while Brian Perkins (Black Diamond, Wash.) will also get a chance for the first time to officially drive an unlimited as he takes over the reigns of the U-21 Meyer's Auto Tech boat.

RETURN TO CIRCUIT AFTER FIRE, WAIT: Last year, the 21 was burnt to the hull line in a terrible fire in Seattle on Lake Washington. The team had hoped to race the entire 2007 circuit but discretion was the better part of valor. Owners

Jeffrey Johnson and Kevin Aylesworth from San Diego, Calif. decided to get the boat prepared properly before getting on the road.

VILLWOCK THIRD IN CAREER LISTS: Villwock has won 54 career unlimited races and six Gold Cup Trophy races. Bill Muncy has 62 career wins while Chip Hanauer has 61. Hanauer has won 11 Gold Cups while Muncy won eight.

THE COLUMBIA CUP: The Columbia River towns of Kennewick, Pasco, and Richland first climbed on the Unlimited bandwagon in 1966 with the first annual Tri-Cities Atomic Cup. There had been talk of inviting the Unlimiteds there as early as 1958 but 1966 was when it finally happened. Bill Brow was the winner that first year, driving Bernie Little's Miss Budweiser. The Tri-City Water Follies group will be conducting its 42nd consecutive Unlimited race in 2007. The board worked with Lamb Weston, a division of ConAgra Foods, to put together this year's corporate sponsorship, something that the entire sport hopes will last a long time. Lamb Weston is a producer of frozen potato and specialty products, tailored for the food service and retail markets. The headquarters is located in Richland, Washington. 2007 Lamb Weston Columbia Cup Hydroplane Line-Up U-1 Formulaboats.com Owner Ted Porter Driver Jimmy Shane U-3 Hoss Mortgage Investors II Presents Ronald McDonald House Owner Ed Cooper Jr. Driver Jimmy King U-5 Formulaboats.com Owner Ted Porter Driver Jeff Bernard U-6 Oh Boy! Oberto/Miss Madison Owner City of Madison Driver Steve David U-9 Miss Conover Insurance Owner Mike & Lori Jones Driver Chris Bertram U-10 Hoss Mortgage Investors Owner Kim & Debbie Gregory Driver David Bryant U-13 Spirit of Detroit Owner Dave Bartush Driver J. Michael Kelly U-16 Ellstrom Elam Plus Owner Sven Ellstrom Driver Dave Villwock U-17 Miss Red Dot Owner Our Gang Racing LLC Driver Nate Brown U-21 Meyers' Auto Tech Owner Jeffrey Johnson/Kevin Aylesworth Driver Brian Perkins U-25 Superior Racing Owner Dr. Ken Muscatel Driver Dr. Ken Muscatel U-37 Beacon Plumbing Owner Billy & Jane Schumacher Driver Jean Theoret U-48 Miss Lakeridge Paving Owner Greg O' Farrell/John Cheetham Driver Dave Williams U-100 Mirage Boats.com Owner Fred Leland Driver Greg Hopp