



# Howie Bennis, Racing Legend

BY APBA VINTAGE HISTORIAN BILL DEGLOPPER AND LINDA EMANUELE,  
WITH DINOMYTES TEAM MEMBER CHARLIE MILLER

Buffalo, New York native Howie Bennis enjoyed a terrific racing career that spanned almost 40 years. During that time he earned multiple national championships, class and world records. His achievements reflected exceptional driving skills in diverse classes in the APBA.

Howie earned those numerous speed records and titles in competition held throughout the United States, Canada and even New Zealand. The versatile Howie drove a number of significant hydroplanes and flatbottoms in



to compete on the Erie Barge Canal. Here he established a new World flying quarter mile class record of 176.6 mph.

In 1974, iconic Unlimited hydroplane owner Bernie Little needed a new driver for his *Miss Budweiser*. Bernie consulted with APBA Commodore Bob Wanamaker, who told Bernie without a doubt Bennis was the best.

Together, the team enjoyed immediate success, as Howie won 3 races in his first season in the Budweiser. He was awarded Rookie of the Year.



A victorious Bennis in LEBOEUF  
at Valleyfield, 1988.  
Photographer unknown

His contract restricted him from competing in any Limited classes. Nevertheless, fans everywhere remember the raceboats he drove over his career: *Miss Gangway*, *Sudden Seven*, *Wa Ha Ki*, *Miss Shane*, *Chevy Too Much*, *Fantasy*, *Miss Budweiser*, and the beloved *Miss Dinomytes*.

In 1988, driving the Canadian-owned GP 1001 *Leboeuf*, Howie won the Triple Crown Championship, which included American, Canadian and World designations. In 1989 the team made its first of three visits to New Zealand. There, he drove Peter Knight's CPR *Latimer Lodge* and the AWA *Clarion*. He won the EC Griffith Cup in *Latimer Lodge*.

1991 was highlighted by a victorious return to Valleyfield and another North American Championship.

his long, illustrious career. His great skill behind the wheel, fueled by nerves of steel and dogged determination, inspired him to attain speeds and prestigious honors still unmatched today.

He began his racing career in the 1950s in western New York. Competing in a variety of classes throughout the East Coast, he was soon recognized as having special talent.

In 1968, Howie stepped into George Lang's flatbottom, SK-401 *Chevy Too Much* for the first time during the APBA National Championships held on the Niagara River. He roared to the national title for the class.

In 1973, he drove the Lauterbach H-10 *Sudden Seven* to a National victory. The H-10 was powered by a blown 426 cubic inch Chrysler engine. Earlier in its career this hull was campaigned by Buddy Byers as the *Little Miss Budweiser*. On August 24, 1973, at Picton, Ontario Howie drove the *Sudden Seven* to the Canadian Gold Cup title. Then in the same season, Howie traveled to Marcy, NY

1992 was especially significant, as it featured a GP qualifying heat that turned into a great match race at Valleyfield between JP Lesard in *Dynasty* and Howie. JP's engine developed over 500 cubic inches of horsepower, somewhat more than Howie's blown Chevrolet 486 cubic inch qualifier motor. The ensuing race was spectacular, as both pilots cast caution to the wind. The video of that race is still widely watched on YouTube. The capacity crowd roared its appreciation and gave both men an extended ovation.

On August 9, 1992 Bennis drove the GP 1001 *Dinomytes* one last time in the GP World Championships held at Summerville, PEI.

In retirement, Howie joined the Niagara Frontier chapter of the Antique & Classic Boat Society. He restored a 1957 Chris-Craft Capri woody, which he displayed at Vintage events in New York and Florida. The hull was named *Semper Fi*, a nod to his service in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1956-1958.

He spent summers in western New York and winters in Florida, attending



local races. His attraction to water continued as he worked for longtime friend and *Dinomytes* owner and engine builder Lyle Dinsmore. The DEC contracted with Lyle's LDC marine construction firm to restore Strawberry Island. Later, LDC restored Motorboat Island and created several new island habitats in the Niagara River under contract with the NYS Power Authority. Howie adeptly piloted barges, delivering supplies to the midriver construction sites.



Howie passed away March 12, 2018. At his memorial service on Grand Island, NY, attendees celebrated his life by wearing jeans and racing team shirts and jackets. Toasts and stories flowed into the night as fans, friends and family relived their memories of a great racing career.

At left, Howie Benis in retirement. Bill DeGlopper photo  
Below, Howie with Bernie Little. Photographer unknown

