

The Extraordinary Racing Life of John Schubert

John Schubert's 25-year professional motorboat racing career began in Class A Stock Outboard Hydro, when in 1953 at the age of 14, against more experienced drivers, he drove his 3-point Jacoby hydroplane into third place in regional championships and qualified for the national championships in Liverpool, New York. The next year, he drove B Stock Hydro, and having taken several regional and divisional trophies, he placed 4th overall at the De Pere, Wisconsin national championships. On the way to the nationals, a win at the August 15th Liverpool divisional championships was doubly significant because during that run, he set a 5 mile in-competition record of 48.996 MPH.

After such a strong start, years of continued success followed finding John in the winner's circle with remarkable consistency and focus. For the sake of brevity we will touch only on highlights of national races and other noteworthy accomplishments..

John's Sid-Craft B hydroplane was the first one built, and it bore the number 1-J, the latter having been awarded to him in 1956. In 1957 John drove a newer design Sid-Craft hydroplane Mercury Mark 20H combination that pushed him into 5th place at the National Championships against stiff competition from the up-and-coming Champion Hot Rods. Even though he didn't complete the 1957 season, he earned 2nd in B Stock Hydro High Points.

In the years 1957 through 1961, John attended the United States Merchant Marine Academy in King's Point, New York, which occupied eleven months per year. Nevertheless, he found time to compete in C Stock Hydro, and in 1960, he took 2nd place at the Beloit, Wisconsin national championships. Also in 1960, he was awarded the National High Point Championship as well as the privilege to carry boat number 2-US for 1961. In recognition of his many nautical efforts and successes, both on and off the race course, the Academy announced recently that it is awarding John Schubert its Life Time achievement award.

He "moved up" yet again in 1962 to D Stock Hydro, and was Regional High Point Champion four years in a row, an unprecedented feat which retired one trophy and got his name engraved on another. At this time he felt a need to give something back to the sport and was elected President of the Greenwood Lake Racing Club, where he chaired an awards banquet held at the Spring Rock Country Club. Featuring Lou Eppel as the Master of Ceremonies and attended by Don Guerin, then president of the APBA, Colin Chapman of Motor Boating, and Mel Crook of Yachting. This event was heralded as the largest of its kind in boat racing. For several seasons in the mid 1960s, John served as Director of Region 3 and actively promoted race sites to potential sponsors using a "sponsor's information kit" of his own creation.

John's most successful year of racing was 1968, as he won 18 of the 21 races he entered and took the National Championship at De Pue, Illinois. By this time he was driving a Quincy Looper on a Sid-Son hydroplane in B Pro Hydro, or "alky" as it was called. His achievements that year got him elected into the Gulf Oil Marine Hall of Fame, and the boat was also elected to Yachting Magazine's All American Racing Team.

The next year was not without its share of successes. Driving for Dick O’Dea in Pro Hydro on February 21, 1969 at Lakeland Florida, John set two 5-mile in-competition records of 82.418 and 84.906 MPH in C and D class, respectively. The latter was the fastest worldwide outboard in-competition record of its day, and eclipsed many inboard classes as well. Later at the National Championships, he took 1st in class C, 2nd in A, and 4th in D. He was awarded the George H. Townsend medal for total points that season, and his driving of Dick O’Dea’s C hydro resulted in the boat and its owner receiving Yachting Magazine’s All American Racing Team award.

John remained active in the APBA off of the race course. In the late 1960s, he became Region 3 Chairman for the Pro classes and was appointed Deputy Pro Commissioner. He succeeded in getting Pro classes added to most stock outboard races in Region 3, and in promoting several all-Pro races. He also coordinated inter-regional Pro activities with the Region 2 leadership. Working with Bob Henry, he formed a committee of Pro drivers from Regions 1, 2, 3, and 4. Working in conjunction with the New York Boat Show, John was instrumental in setting up two meetings at the Essex House, the first of which was attended by the Pro V.P. of the APBA.

In 1970, John began racing in the OPC category in S class, sponsored by Jim Briggs’ world-famous team, T.A.R.T. On the way to 1st place at the 3-hour Marathon National Championship, John set a new record of 72.197 MPH. Co-driving with Ron Hill in the Six Hours of Paris, he finished 4th overall. In 1971, John again took 1st place in OPC S class at the Marathon National Championship in Miami, Florida.

Competing in OPC “225” marathons in 1972, John consistently placed in the top five overall and in the first three positions in S class. At the Six Hours of Paris, persevering through serious hull damage (from a mishap while his co-driver was at the helm) and a steering wheel that had become loose on its shaft, John finished 4th overall. Steering (and trim) problems again were a factor at the 1973 Parker 9-hour Enduro, but John still managed to turn the fastest lap and came in 3rd overall.

With his “day job” demanding more of him, John's racing efforts wound down over the remainder of the 1970s; however he was still very much active in racing behind the scenes. In his workshop in 1978, he built the first 45SS motor. When the APBA stock outboard racing commission passed on the concept, citing concerns that it was too fast for their boats at that time, he submitted a formal proposal, including costs to support the project, to Edgar Rose. Several years later, the SST45/45SS motor was approved by both the SORC and the OPC racing commission, and it is raced in both categories to this day. In point of fact, it is the largest class at the OPC Nationals.

John's second racing career as engine builder continued through the 1980s well into the 1990s, during which time he built approximately thirty SST45 engines for other owners. These engines won four national championships and one world championship. He has also hand-built SST60 engines for about 12 different drivers, including Randy Minch, who won a national championship, and Roddy Foreman, who won both national and world championships.

In 2009, John was elected First Vice President of the Antique Outboard Motor Club, Inc. Drawing on his history John leveraged interests common to the AOMCI and the APBA. He promoted the APBA Vintage group at AOMCI functions around the country, which inspired several AOMCI members to join the APBA. At the January, 2012 APBA meeting in Chicago, John successfully petitioned the Vintage category committee to add a specific “Outboards” group to their sanctions, which has attracted more members and significantly increased outboard turnout at numerous events since then. In recognition of his efforts for AOMCI since 1973, John has been awarded a Lifetime Honorary Membership putting him on a list of past honorees that include Charles Strang among others.

John performed Chairman duties for the First and Second Boat Racers Reunion held in conjunction with the 2007 and 2012 Pro National Championships at DePue, IL. Through his hard work, organizational skills, contacts, and lifelong friendships, the Boat Racers Reunions drew over 200 attendees. The list included many successful and iconic drivers such as Ron and Russ Hill, Bill Seebold, Dick Pond, Dick Austin, Rich Fuchslin, Kay Harrison, Dick O'Dea, Ron Anderson, Lee Sutter, Phil Wagner, and Jerry Simison, amongst others. In addition John arranged for a series of display boats and motors to compliment this event which means so much to so many true boat racers who represent the very foundation of APBA. It is a testament to the respect and affection his peers have for John that these events were so successful and well attended.

John's keen interest in promoting APBA racing at the grass roots level continues to this day. In 2012 he sponsored the “J” hydro class for the Pleasant Prairie memorial day weekend & the Pell Lake, WI 2 day race by purchasing a set of 1st, 2nd & 3rd place trophies for the “J” Junior Hydro class to be awarded on the basis of high points for the weekend. John's reward for this was simple yet exemplified what is truly important about APBA's youth programs. The winner of both weekends gave him a big hug. With all his trophies and championships that's the kind of award that John cherishes most. He vows to never forget that 14 year old kid from New Jersey who chased a dream and threw a roostertail.