

Miss Supertest III 50th Anniversary Celebrations

By Heather A. Rennalls

Oxford County has important ties to the history celebrated at this epic event held August 6th to 8th, 2011 in Picton, Ontario. Miss Supertest III is a Canadian hydroplane boat that achieved international acclaim and honors during the 1950s and 1960s by winning the prestigious Harmsworth International Trophy three times. This weekend recognized and celebrated the history of this and other Ontario hydroplane racing successes.

The first tie between Oxford County and the international hydroplane racing history is Ernest Wilson and his family from Ingersoll. Ernest was a well-known Canadian sportsman during the 1930's. As a business man, Ernest was president of Greavette Boats Ltd. in Muskoka, the Ingersoll Machine and Tool Company and the John Morrow Screw and Nut Company, also in Ingersoll. Ernest's three race boats, Miss Canada II, Miss Canada III and Miss Canada IV, were constructed at Greavette Boats and their gear boxes were built at his Machine and Tool Company.

Ernest's son, Harold Wilson, was the driver of these Miss Canadas from 1936 until 1950. Lorna Reid, Harold's fiancé and later his wife, was his riding mechanic during races and an exceptional contributor to their successes. For fifteen years, from 1936 to 1950, this father, son and wife team built three boats, won three world championships, two North American speed records and broke the world's speed record. The Miss Canada III became the first Canadian boat to win a major American trophy and the Wilson's became the first Canadians to compete for the prestigious Harmsworth Trophy.

In 1950, the Wilson family withdrew Miss Canada IV from competition for the Harmsworth International Trophy and retired from racing. The Miss Canada IV was then sold to the Thompson family in London, Ontario. The Thompson family, the father and son team of Colonel Gordon and Jim, renamed the boat Miss Supertest I, after the family's petroleum chain in Canada. After a year of racing without winning, this boat was retired.

During retirement, the Miss Supertest I was heavily damaged by fire. She was carefully restored to her pristine condition with the guidance of her original designer, Douglas Van Patten. After her restoration, this hydroplane returned to her beginning name of Miss Canada IV. This 34 foot vessel, with its 10 feet 6 inch beam, then resided for over twenty years at the Ingersoll Cheese & Agriculture Museum in Ingersoll, until she was moved to Gravenhurst, Ontario to be featured in a documentary celebrating the racing achievements of the Wilson family.

Harry Wilson, son of Harold and grandson of Ernest reported that he is making this docudrama to "fill in the missing history of the Wilson family to hydroplane racing." This docudrama produced by Muskoka Film Works Inc. will showcase archival photographs, news articles and original film footage from 1928 to 1950 of the Wilson family. In 1975, Harold was inducted into the Canadian Sports Hall of fame and in 1990 he wrote a book titled Boats Unlimited. In 2005 Harold was posthumously inducted into the Canadian Motorsport Hall of Fame. Harold died in 1995 and Lorna in 2000. The film will also depict the

compelling story of Harold and Lorna, their love for each other and their love for their boats, especially Miss Canada IV.

The second tie to Oxford County is the driver of the Miss Supertest boats, Robert (Bob) Hayward. Bob was a single 33 year old chicken farmer from Embro, Ontario. He was hired by the Thompson family in 1957 to be the mechanic for their super boats. Jim Thompson designed the Miss Supertest II and Miss Supertest III and Bob soon became the main driver for these boats. Bob received international acclaim after winning the prestigious fifteen pound bronze Harmsworth International Trophy three times in a row, in 1959, 1960 and 1961 racing Miss Supertest III off the shores of Picton, Ontario. During his victory laps Bob has been reputed to have doused dignitaries in attendance, such as Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, Ontario Premier Leslie Frost and Toronto Mayor Nathan Phillips. Bob became a national hero, and with the Thompson family and Miss Supertest III, was honored in a ticker tape parade in Toronto in 1960.

All of this changed on September 10, 1961. On this day, Bob was racing Miss Supertest III on the Detroit River in the Silver Cup Regatta. During his second heat, at a speed of 175 km/h the boat flipped and Bob died from a broken neck. Following this unfortunate accident, the Thompson family retired their boats from racing.

In 1960, Bob had already been inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame and in the same year Miss Supertest III was the first non-human to receive the same honor. Posthumously in 2000, Bob was inducted into the Canadian Motorsport Hall of Fame. On June 29, 2011, a stretch of water on the Bay of Quinte's Long Reach in Prince Edward County was named after Bob. Linda Jeffrey, the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources, officially named it Hayward Long Reach.

On Monday August 8, 2011 Bob Hayward and Miss Supertest III were immortalized when Canada Post unveiled two commemorative stamps in their honor. The 50th Anniversary celebrations for this history in Canada's achievements in hydroplane racing were held at the Loch Sloy Business Park in Picton, Ontario and included various exhibitors, vendors and events. Miss Supertest III, on loan from the Science Center, was present as well as other vintage boats and memorabilia.

Jim Thompson, designer and owner of Miss Supertest III was the guest speaker on Sunday August 7th at the Mariners' Memorial Service held at the South Bay United Church. Thompson was introduced by Derek Wolfe, keg organization of this event, as "a man of many interests and accomplishments" - a military man, a business man, a sports man and a family man, who considers his greatest accomplishment as that of a family man; the father of five and grandfather of fifteen.

During his speech Thompson, now in his mid-eighties, gave a history of the Miss Supertest III, honoring the Wilson family who sold his father Miss Canada IV, which they named Miss Supertest I. At that time, hydroplane racing was growing and the Thompson family decided to design their own boat to race. Starting with no knowledge of what they were doing, they designed and built Miss Supertest II and then Miss Supertest III. Thirty-seven years later, the Harmsworth Trophy came to Canada in 1959 with Miss Supertest III. Jim Thompson praised Picton as being "the best water to race in" as the sloping shoreline there absorbed the waves.

For the past two years, Prince Edward County resident, John Lyons had spearheaded a campaign to have a stamp made to honor these two Canadian heroes – Miss Supertest III and Bob Hayward. On Monday August 8th two commemorative stamps of the Miss Supertest III were unveiled. During his opening remarks, Jim Plomer, the Chairman of the Miss Supertest III Stamp Release Celebration Committee, stated: “Today is a special day for the Miss Supertest III, Prince Edward County and all Canadians. Miss Supertest III and the Thompson family established world domination three times that is part of Canadian history that is so magnificent.”



The unveiling of one of two Commemorative Stamps for Miss Supertest III



The second Commemorative Stamp for Miss Supertest III

Natalie Bolton, Director of Eastern Ontario region of Canada Post, thanked Jim Thompson for allowing design artist, Ivan Novotny, to research his archives and for sharing his expertise. Bolton told the large crowd ``I believe the stamps accurately capture the speed and grace of Miss Supertest III. Our stamp program showcases Canada to the world``. Stamp collectors turned out in record numbers to meet the design artist and to get the Supertest Set that included the two new stamps, post cards and first day covers.



Stamp Designer of both stamps Ivan Novotny gets Jim Thompson to sign his stamp collection

Nineteen members of the Thompson family and six members of the Hayward family participated in the unveiling of the stamps during Monday's celebrations. They were all basking in the glow of these celebrations marking the history of their family members. Scott Hayward, the younger of Bob's two nephews present, was born the same year his famous uncle died. Scott's family resided on Bob's property until it was sold to Cold Springs Farm. A cairn in memory of Bob Hayward is erected on this former Hayward farm located at the corners of County Road 6 and Cody's Side Road in Embro.



Jim & Beverly Thompson and their family in front of Miss Supertest III



The Hayward Family: Mark, his son Cody, Doris, Bob Hayward's sister-in-law, and Scott flanked by the commemorative stamps

At 4:00 pm on August 8th, at the Regent Theatre, journalist, producer and former CBC Radio and Television broadcaster, Peter Lockyer, premiered his documentary entitled Making Waves: The Story of Canada's Miss Supertest Team. During his opening remarks, he said that "everybody who talks about Bob Hayward says he was a wonderful person who never got a swelled head from his success." Lockyer explained how Picton became the site of hydroplane racing that attracted thousands of fans to the area. "When the Miss Supertest team won in Detroit, they got to pick the next years venue and the Thompsons knew that Picton was a wonderful place to race with ideal conditions." Lockyer also credited Picton's mayor at the time, Harvey McFarlane, saying that "he willed it to happen here, politically and financially, Harvey McFarlane got things done. He also had a construction company and they worked for months to get the property ready to service the thousands of people who would show up on race weekends."

Peter Lockyer was the man behind the scenes of this weekend celebration for Miss Supertest III. He must felt proud of this success that honored a tremendous era in Canada's sport history. Peter grew up in Picton and had a personal connection to the Miss Supertest III. Lockyer has memories of seeing the wake or rooster tails of the magnificent boats and hearing them roar in the waters of the Bay of Quinte's Long Reach. Lockyer produced this documentary through his production company, History Lives Here Inc. His twenty one minute documentary briefly outlines the history of the Harmsworth races, the Wilson family, the Thompson family and the driver of Miss Supertest III, Bob Hayward.

These August weekend celebrations were capped off with a 50th Anniversary Celebration Dinner and silent auction on Monday evening at the Prince Edward Yacht Club, with proceeds going toward the Mariners Museum. Bob Hayward's nephew, Scott commented on this evening: "The VIP dinner was great food, speakers and atmosphere ... It truly was a fantastic event, but the people are what make it happen, after 50 years, unbelievable"! This weekend large crowds came to learn about and to witness history in the making when Bob Hayward and Miss Supertest III were honored, celebrated and immortalized.

During the 1970s, hydroplane races of a smaller class than the Miss Supertest III, were held at the Pittock Conservation Area in Woodstock, Ontario. These races stopped after people complained about the noise following a late start in a 1980 race. As an Oxford County resident who attended the celebration weekend event in Picton, I could not resist the hope that the shores of Pittock Lake might once again hear the roar of hydroplane engines and feel the spray of their rooster tails. After 30 years, we need to bring hydroplane racing back home.



The Hayward family with former CBC Television & Radio Broadcaster & Producer of Making Waves, Peter Lockyer