

Now & Then in Ripon ... Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society

Miss Ripon speed boat made waves among Riponites

Little is known about a speed boat named the “Miss Ripon,” which was built in 1924 by a local auto mechanic/part-time carpenter Alvin Weingarten (1884-1936) and post office worker Herbert Habel (1891-1965).

Weingarten was born in Ripon and lived in the community until moving to Omro in 1928. Habel lived at 212 Blossom St.

Almost 100 years ago, on a Sunday afternoon in 1924, a large number of Ripon and Green Lake residents, along with other boat enthusiasts, gathered at Green Lake to see the speed boat take to the water.

That day, Miss Ripon’s pilot was Paul Little (1904-1954), who was making a half-mile boat run between The Hickories section of lakefront cottages and houses to the Sherwood Forest area, clocked at just 59 seconds.

Little grew up on Houston Street, attended Ripon public schools and Ripon College before becoming an athletic coach and teacher.

Built of wood to regulation width, the Miss Ripon measured 16-feet long and was outfitted with a 50-horsepower Piercebud branded hydro-type motor, considered “the best” in power speed boat circles. Initial tryouts clocked the boat at 30 miles per hour, which pleased the builders and the crowd



MISS RIPON OWNERS Alvin Weingarten and Herbert Habel test the course in the only known photo of the boat. The actual race would have been run by a single pilot or speed boat driver. submitted photo

before the motor could be fine-tuned via minor adjustments to enhance its performance. Final tryouts to test the speed boat’s peak performance were to be held two weeks later.

The Miss Ripon demonstrated nautical balance and smoothness, eventually reaching its desired speed of 35 miles per hour and was declared “without a doubt” the fastest boat on Green Lake at that time. It was hoped that the Miss Ripon might also someday be declared the fastest in Wisconsin in its speed boat classification.

A crowd pleaser competes

The Miss Ripon was entered into a regatta in Oshkosh held July 3-5, 1924 on Lake Winnebago. The Miss Ripon took third place in its class of speed boats, which was quoted in the *Ripon Commonwealth* newspaper as “highly satisfactory to the owners, Weingarten & Habel.”

This was the first competitive race that the boat had been entered into, and when Miss Ripon forged ahead of its competitors the newspaper article went on to state “a spell of pride went up through the many Riponites (spectators) who were present.”

Boat entries were from all over the United States. Approximately 300 Ripon people attended the competition.

The race was the first of its kind in central Wisconsin. It was reported that some of the fastest world-record speed boats and some larger boats were clocked as fast as 72 miles per hour. A grandstand was erected for this event that held 10,000 people and was filled to capacity. Miles of Lake Win-

nebago shoreline was filled with an estimated 30,000 additional spectators.

A special steamboat was chartered for a press party the second day of the Lake Winnebago races to allow photographers and movie film crews to document events from vantage point on the water. Following this regatta race it was hoped a similar event might take place at Green Lake, but lacking local enthusiasm and financial support, the event was never scheduled.

Seeking additional information

By fall of 1924 the *Ripon Commonwealth* printed an article stating that “Boat builders Weingarten and Habel have been busy drawing up plans for a ‘Miss Ripon II’ speedboat that will be 24- [to] 26-feet long (also made of wood), and will be driven by a 200 horsepower engine. It is expected the boat will run between 55 and 60 miles per hour. ... Work on the boat will be started early this winter.”

The Ripon Historical Society has no photographs or records of the Miss Ripon II completion or it being entered into any boat races.

If anyone has photos of the Miss Ripon, or the proposed “Miss Ripon II” speed boat email scan copies to riponhist-soc@gmail.com. Any related stories handed down by former family members also is appreciated and may be shared with the historical society by calling 920-748-5354.

Today, Green Lake still offers more than 7,000 acres of water where people enjoy kayaking, sailing, canoeing, speed boating, skiing and pontoon boating, among other water crafts and sports.

The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more information follow us at Facebook/riponhistory or www.riponhistory.org.

Summary of Results, Mississippi V		
Oshkosh, Wisconsin, July 3, 4, 5, 1924.		
MILE SPEED TRIALS—3 up, 3 back, average of 6 trials.		
215 Class—Frazzle VI, Randall McFarlan, 37.80 M. P. H.		610
215 Class—P. D. G. VI, A. C. Strong, 37.56 M. P. H.		710
340 Class—Ethel XI, C. P. Hanley, 48.92 M. P. H.		400
510 Class—Sawdust City, John D. Buckata, 44.42 M. P. H.		
510 Class—Jay Eye See, O. E. Wadewitz, 43.28 M. P. H.		
610 Class—Peggy, Fred W. Schram, 54.78 M. P. H.		150
Webb Trophy Class—Fore, W. D. Foreman, 67.815 M. P. H.		
510 Class—The Swan, Wm. Macho, 37.49 M. P. H.		
Free-for-All Runabout 2 laps—Miss Liberty, L. R. Piper, 52.02 M. P. H.		150
151 Class—Jay Eye See II—O. E. Wadewitz, 33.63 M. P. H.		
151 Class—Miss Ripon (2 laps) 28.43 M. P. H.		
1 1/2 LITRES CLASS. DISTANCE, 5 MILES. NO. OF ROUNDS 2.		

THIS MOTORBOATING MAGAZINE August 1924 issue excerpt quotes “Fox Valley Regatta another speed record breaker! The Miss Ripon, of Ripon, Wisconsin, was given third place honors in #151 Class speed boats 28-43 miles per hour.” submitted photo

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