

Canada's Hunt for the Harmsworth:
A Study in Technology and Nationalism
(1934 -1961)

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Beginning in the 1940's, two Canadian families tried to challenge for the Harmsworth Trophy, symbol of international power-boating supremacy. *Canada's Hunt for the Harmsworth* follows first the Wilsons of Ingersoll Ontario, then the Thompsons of London Ontario, as they tried to build and race the fastest speedboat of their day. The paper illustrates the impact of technology on Canada in post Second World War Canada, and it demonstrates how the story of these challengers caught the imagination of the press and of the nation. *Canada's Hunt for the Harmsworth* chronicles a story that could never again unfold as it did, and concludes that in attempting to master the technology of the time, simple sportsmen were seen as celebrities, even heroes.

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my wife Michele.

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Chapter 1 Setting the Stage

I met Miss Supertest at the Western Fair. For a young lad growing up in Southwestern Ontario, London's annual fall fair was a major event. It meant that summer was over. It was time to put the bikes away, forget about collecting pop bottles and playing in the creek - time to pay attention at school. The Western Fair had a midway with rides and games, and it had buildings full of displays of animals, handicrafts and the latest gadgets for home and farm. But for me, the first display one encountered upon entering the fairgrounds was the best. Lined up with military precision, ranked from the smallest to the largest, gleaming in the bright lights were row upon row of farm implements. Tractors, mowers, combines – they dazzled me; and were it not for the impatience of my parents and siblings, I would have spent my entire time at the fair clambering over them, sitting behind the wheel of each machine, imagining myself controlling the power in my hands.

But in 1959 there was a new display, and even my older brother and my parents were willing to stand in line for a chance to look at it. When our turn came, we climbed the stairs to the viewing platform, then gazed down at the gleaming hull of a huge speedboat and a massive engine that shone in the spotlights. I am sure I was told that *Miss Supertest III* had just won the Harmsworth Trophy – I do not recall any of the facts – I just remember the look of the boat and the feeling that this was something special. I never saw Miss Supertest in the water, and I have only seen film footage of the races. I never met the boat's driver; but I remember when he died, and that everyone in my school – everyone in my hometown it seemed – was saddened by the young man's death.

As this paper will show, there was plenty of interest in Canada's quest for the Harmsworth Trophy. In the middle of the twentieth century, technology offered a means by which Canadians could potentially find a place at the centre of the world stage. I will present a case study of two groups, who endeavoured to develop the ultimate in speedboat design, demonstrating that under the right conditions, ordinary people and events can assume

extraordinary significance. I will also illustrate that when media attention turns a solitary enterprise into a national quest, the participants can become celebrities – even heroes – but, it seems, only when they succeed.

“Canada’s Hunt for the Harmsworth” examines the efforts of two groups who strove for excellence and achieved prominence on a world stage. Though only some sixty years have passed, the achievements of the Wilsons, the Thompson and their colleagues have largely been forgotten. This paper chronicles their efforts, but also frames them in the context of some of Canada’s other attempts to find international recognition in the 1950s. Technology brought a great deal of prosperity to Canada in the years following the Second World War, but it also created anxiety and fear – wonder drugs and television were off-set by the threat of intercontinental ballistic missiles and the reality of The Bomb. I will argue that at a time when much of the news about technology was either disappointing or frightening, an international speed boat competition presented Canadians with a story they could cheer for and that such stories reflect the aspirations of a nation.

The time period 1934 – 1961 was chosen as it marks the beginning of the Wilson family’s career in international speedboat racing, and the end of the Thompson family’s involvement. This period, in turn, dictated the choice of newspapers as the primary source. In 1934, at the beginning of Canada’s Harmsworth quest, the country had very little in the form of national media, and newspapers were the dominant source of popular information. Television did not exist; the CBC was still two years away; and even when private radio stations finally started broadcasting news in the 1940s, they subscribed to the services provided by newspapers.¹ Newspaper coverage at this time was local or regional at best, but most publishers subscribed to services such as Canadian Press (CP). The papers were healthy, their reach extensive, and their circulation large. In fact, as Paul Rutherford notes, “Between 1947 and 1957, the combined circulation of all dailies was actually greater than the number of households in Canada.”²

Relying primarily on newspapers of the era presented a challenge of selection. A Canadian challenge for an international trophy was a national story, and evidence that the story was carried in papers across the country will be presented. However, to keep examples to a manageable level, most of the references are to the two major Toronto dailies: *The Toronto Daily Star* and *The Globe and Mail* (actually *The Globe* from 1934 to 1936 and, after merging with the *Mail and Empire*, publishing as *The Globe and Mail*, beginning Monday 23 November 1936)³. The next most frequently used sources are the daily papers closest to the key players: The *Woodstock-Ingersoll Sentinel Review* and the *Stratford Beacon Herald*. A check of the CBC archives resulted in no responses; and a search of the AMICUS database for Miss Canada came up with a story about a beauty pageant, and for Miss Supertest, a reel written in tribute by Don Messer.

What bearing does newspaper coverage have on technology and Canadian nationalism? Cultural historian Benedict Anderson argues that in the first half of the twentieth century, the newspaper was one of the most significant tools for, “creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.” In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Anderson describes the ritual of reading the newspaper as a mass ceremony in which, “each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?”⁴ To Anderson, this ritual of reading the newspaper helped create a sense of community. Rutherford describes the unifying effect the daily newspaper had on Canada: “the press acted as an agent of consensus: the habitual consumption of its messages united people otherwise divided by distance, religion, language or class.”⁵ Since publishers and editors had a vested interest in satisfying their readers (to keep up circulation and sell advertising), it follows that the stories covered in the papers were selected because they were, or were at least deemed to be, of interest to the readership.

The use of newspapers also mitigated the challenge which arose from using the memoirs of Harold Wilson and his account of the Wilson family's part in this story. *Boats Unlimited*, published in 1990 by Boston Mills, is a lively and highly readable saga; but the passage of some 40 years from the end of the author's racing career to the time of writing apparently caused some confusion as to which years specific events took place. In the matter of dates and events it was important to cross reference the author's recollections with accounts published in the newspapers of the time. It is unfortunate the publisher failed to make the effort at the time the manuscript was prepared; it would have made a good summer contract for a student of history.

Another primary source for this project was Mr. Jim Thompson himself. I had the privilege of spending an afternoon with him at his home in London. He is a quiet, humble gentleman who was very generous with his time and memories.

One thing made clear in speaking with Mr. Thompson was that in simply issuing a challenge for the Harmsworth Trophy, the Canadians were putting national pride at stake. In, *National Dreams – Myth, Memory and Canadian History*, Daniel Francis writes that a nation is, “a group of people who share the same illusions about themselves.” And in this case the illusion shared by the challengers and their supporters in the media was that Canadians could create a technology that would be better than anything else, in a competition created by the British and dominated by the Americans. As Francis notes, the challenges of creating these stories are particularly daunting in this country. What he calls ‘images of communion,’ “are expressed in the stories we tell about ourselves. Because we lack a common religion, language or ethnicity, because we are spread out so sparsely across such a huge piece of real estate, Canadians depend on this habit of ‘consensual hallucination’ more than any other people.”⁶ Perhaps it is this lack of ‘national glue’ that explains a form of Canadian nationalism bound up in technology.

Canada has a history of technical achievement. Many have pointed to the building of the railroads, the CN Tower and the development of Alberta tar sands as projects that have captured the imagination – or raised the ire – of Canadians. Donald Creighton examined the trading system made possible by the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence system and argued it was central to Canada’s economic and national development. And in *Colony to Nation* Arthur Lower claimed Canada’s “two coasts were bridged by a transcontinental railway almost in defiance of common sense.”⁷

But the machines alone do not inspire us, people do. It is not the locomotives, the telephone lines or the transmission towers that bind the country together; it is the communication that results from the enabling technology. Without visiting with or talking to each other in ways that comfort, reassure, or inspire there can be no nation building. It was not the creation of a broadcasting system that brought Canadians together, it was voices like that of Foster Hewitt reaching out to his audience into the cold winter night with, “Hello Canada! And hockey fans in the United States and Newfoundland!”⁸

In the quest for the Harmsworth Trophy, Canadians were able to follow the exploits of individuals who were attempting extraordinary things. Somehow, perhaps because of the nature of the challenge, it became understood that these undertakings were on behalf of the country. Some might call the efforts heroic. Joseph Campbell spent much of his life writing about mythology and heroes. When asked why there are so many stories about heroes, Campbell replied, “Because that’s what’s worth writing about. Even in popular novels, the main character is a hero or heroine who has found or done something beyond the normal range of achievement and experience.”⁹ According to Charlotte Gray, the lack of a Canadian pantheon of notable characters can be explained by the fact that, “Canada doesn’t do heroes well.”¹⁰ In her estimation, most heroes, “are usually fiercely individualistic – but individualism has never been celebrated in Canada. It is not a useful quality for a loose federation perched on a magnificent and inhospitable landscape – a nation that sees survival as a collective enterprise.”¹¹ In this case, the Harmsworth challengers would at least qualify

for the position. Each challenge came to be identified with its driver, but the events were still seen as Canadian teams struggling against bigger and more powerful adversaries.

The ‘David and Goliath’ nature of the struggle was not lost on the media, which played a major role in developing the story. According to Francis, for much of its history Canada has had little in the way of a ‘myth-making’ industry, pointing out Canada’s, “book-publishing industry was weak and foreign-owned; our film industry was non-existent. The media which create and sustain mythic heroes was not available to us.”¹² But in the case of the Harmsworth events, the media coverage was extensive and enthusiastic. It was just the sort of coverage that could create Canadian sports celebrities. Sidney Hook (1902-1989), a philosopher at New York University for over 40 years, wrote *The Hero in History – A Study in Limitation and Possibility*. He recognized the importance of the media in myth-making. He wrote: “more than ever before, *belief* in ‘the hero’ is a synthetic product. Whoever controls the microphones and printing presses can make or unmake belief overnight.”¹³ Publishing in 1943, Hook was referring to events in Europe and ‘heroic’ figures who sought power and the centre stage. As many, Ian Kershaw for instance, have demonstrated since, as much as mass media might promote someone as a savior or hero, such campaigns can only succeed if the population is eager to accept the message.¹⁴ In this technologically charged era, Canadians were keen to embrace their Harmsworth heroes.

The nature of the reportage and writing at this time also played a significant role. Before the days of television, and before Canadian programming could be found on radios, it was the newspaper’s sports reporter who gave the “blow-by-blow” account of an event. Often writing as the game/match/contest took place, the sports reporter owed the reader much more than a simple listing of results. As the chase for the Harmsworth unfolded, the interest and support of sports writers grew; and the characters involved served to excite the Canadian population. Certainly to the extent they were of interest to Canadians, these sportsmen were a vicarious source of national pride. In comparing different reports, this study will note that accuracy was not necessarily the number one issue for the story teller.

At the very heart of the quest for the Harmsworth trophy was the Victorian notion of “progress” embodied in technological development. Since the turn of the 20th century transportation technology had been going through a revolution – the transition of motive power from steam to the internal combustion engine. To encourage the development of aircraft, automobiles and speedboats, a number of competitions, trophies, and cash prizes were offered to anyone who could make their machines go farther, faster and endure more. It was the perfect challenge for sporting gentlemen and their Victorian notion of competition. From the beginning, the competition for the Harmsworth Trophy was based on technology and nationalism. Sir Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe 1865-1922), owner of the *London Daily Mail*, offered cash prizes and trophies for such accomplishments as the first airplane flight over the English Channel (won by Louis Bleriot, 1909) and the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic (Alcock and Brown, 1919). In the world of powerboats, the publisher established the Alfred Harmsworth International Cup, later known as the Harmsworth Trophy.

First offered for competition in 1903, the *Deed of Gift* stated in part that the race, “should serve a most effective means of bringing marine motors and the design of launch hulls to a state of perfection.” In keeping with the growing notions of nationalism, the rules also stated that this competition was to be a country-to-country challenge and, “each competing vessel shall be constructed wholly and in every particular in the country which it represents.” Finally it was stipulated that each boat would carry two occupants and, “both hands shall be natives of the country they represent.”¹⁵ All of these stipulations would have a bearing on the nature of Canada’s challenge for the cup.

The Harmsworth Races were not annual competitions, but rather contests held whenever a challenge was issued and accepted. The first Harmsworth race (1903) was won by the British, the second (1904) by the French, and the next two (1905-06) went to British boats. In 1907 an American boat took the trophy; but in 1912 Tommy Sopwith won it back for

Britain, and he successfully defended the cup in 1913. World War I put a stop to competition, so the next race was not held until 1920. Gar Wood won that year for the United States, and the U.S. held on to the Harmsworth Trophy for almost forty years. So, in a story line that parallels much of the history of the twentieth century, European nations shared supremacy in Harmsworth competitions for powerboats in the early decades, until after the First World War, when American technology proved superior, and the centre of power shifted to the New World. The only wrinkle to the story was the unlikely success of a challenge from Canada.

Chapter 2

The Harmsworth Trophy 1903 - 1933

1903 – the year the first airplane flew – was also the year power boating’s oldest racing trophy was awarded. The first event was held in Ireland on Saturday July 11, 1903 and was to feature three British entries and one from Paris. At the last minute the French competitor was unable to launch, so the United Kingdom was assured a win. The course ran from Queenstown (now Dun Leary) Harbour, up the river Lee to Cork – a distance of eight and a half miles. The winning entry, *Napier*, turned in a time of 26 minutes and 6 seconds for an estimated speed of 19.53 mph.¹⁶ Over the next few years the competition included entries from France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It also attracted celebrity drivers such as Lionel Rothschild, British banker and politician; Lord Montague, sportsman and auto enthusiast; and Tommy Sopwith, designer of the Sopwith Camel – the legendary World War I fighter aircraft. In 1914 competition was halted for the war, and when it resumed in 1920, American engineer/inventor Garfield Arthur Wood (1880-1971) entered his first Harmsworth competition and started a whole new era.

The American challenger was the epitome of the creative genius envisioned by Sir Alfred Harmsworth. In 1911, at age 31, Gar Wood invented a hydraulic lift for coal and gravel trucks – the first “dump trucks.” By 1916 the Detroit entrepreneur was a wealthy man and decided to invest some of his money in a boat-building yard so that he could indulge himself in his favourite sport – boat racing.¹⁷ In 1917 Wood experimented with putting an aircraft engine in a racing hull. He rationalized that, “airplane motors had to be more dependable than boat motors, since there was little margin for engine failure in the air.”¹⁸ Although there were many skeptics, Wood won the 1917 Gold Cup race on the Detroit River and the next four years in succession.

In 1920 Gar Wood changed the course of Harmsworth history. He put two Smith-Liberty aircraft engines into a hull named *Miss America* and shipped it to England. He challenged

the British defenders on a course laid out on the Solent, that body of ocean between the Isle of Wight and Southampton. Posting a Harmsworth-record average speed of 62 mph¹⁹ Wood defeated three British boats (*Sunbeam-Despujols*, *Maple Leaf V* and *Maple Leaf VI*) and took the Harmsworth Trophy back to the United States. Despite repeated attempts, the British were never able to win the coveted bronze sculpture back.

Although it was not part of the *Deed of Gift*, a tradition evolved that the defending country would host and determine the whereabouts of title defences. Accordingly, for the next four decades Harmsworth challenge races were held on the Detroit River. From 1920 to 1933, Gar Wood responded to a number of challenges by building and racing a series of *Miss America* boats, with his final competitor designated *Miss America X*. In all, he mounted eight successful defences to foreign challengers.

In the early part of the twentieth century, identification with and support for the British Empire were still very strong in Ontario. So given Detroit's proximity to the imperial heart of Canada, it should be no surprise that these competitions aroused intense media interest north of the border. It may be hard to think of Canada as a sailing nation today, but in the first half of the twentieth century Canadian companies operated steamship lines; there were numerous fishing vessels on both coasts and on the great lakes; and the Bluenose had already become a national icon. As W. J. Milne wrote, shipbuilding and ship repair are, "among Canada's oldest industries. The long inland waterways and coastlines, rich timber supplies, fisheries... have generated a demand for ships."²⁰ By 1915 speed boating was a fashionable sport among the moneyed set; so when the Harmsworth races came to North America, there was plenty of interest in the British challengers. And the one who came the closest to recapturing the bronze prize for the Empire, was a determined British driver named Hubert Scott-Paine (1891-1954).

Like Gar Wood, this self-taught engineer and aviator was just the kind of person Sir Alfred Harmsworth had in mind when he instigated the competition. At the age of 23 Scott-Paine

founded Supermarine Aviation, and during World War I he designed motors and built aircraft for the British Air Ministry. After the war he pioneered the use of flying boats in civil aviation and established Imperial Airways, a service designed to link remote parts of the Empire. Scott-Paine was the first to fly an amphibian aircraft across the English Channel and in 1922 he won the famous Schneider Cup Races in Italy.²¹

Fully aware that a Harmsworth event represented a country-to-country challenge in technology, Scott-Paine was frustrated in not having access to the best the British could offer. England's premier engine builder, Rolls Royce, had been involved in the 1931 and 1932 Harmsworth challenges mounted by Kaye Don – an Irish-born motorcycle and racecar driver. The 1931 attempt had been a disaster, resulting in a rollover by the British boat which ended up at the bottom of the Detroit River. The 1932 outing was not much better as the engine broke a piston rod and the British contingent had to withdraw.²² Just as winning the Harmsworth could add prestige to all involved, losing in such ignominious ways could be supremely embarrassing (not to mention expensive); so Rolls Royce determined that it would have no more to do with powerboat racing - not even when approached by a sportsman of Hubert Scott-Paine's stature. Scott-Paine even enlisted the help of Lady Fanny Lucy Houston. Reputed to be the wealthiest woman in Britain, in 1931 the widow of a shipping magnate had offered the British Air Ministry £100,000 to finance participation in the Schneider Trophy Races.²³ Lady Houston approached the Air Ministry, who agreed to supply the engines, provided Rolls Royce would agree. The manufacturer refused: Scott-Paine would not even be allowed to buy Rolls Royce engines.

As a second choice, Scott-Paine went to the Napier Lion Company where he was able to acquire two ex-Schneider Cup engines. He then built *Miss Britain III*, at 25 ft and 3,360 pounds, a lightweight compared to the ten tons of displacement registered by *Miss America X*. The idea behind the design, of course, was to make up for the difference in power: Scott-Paine would be driving 1400 horse power, while Gar Wood's boat had 4 aircraft engines with a total of 7,600 hp. One reporter wrote of Scott Paine's design that the, "flanged sides and

the submarine-like construction of the little boat's upper works are a new departure in speedboat lines. But Scott-Paine, a millionaire boat-builder in Great Britain, says it will work."²⁴ Another report described *Miss Britain III* as, "the freakiest sort of a freak. She has everything but wings – and wings are not permitted. Hull design and perfect balance is what Hubert Scott-Paine depends upon to win this race."²⁵

The pundits who made predictions about the outcome were confident the Americans would defend the title and reaffirm their claim to technological superiority. *The Toronto Daily Star* reported the, "trophy is safe in the possession of the United States for at least another year, in the opinion of speedboat racing experts today."²⁶ Scott-Paine also considered himself to be greatly disadvantaged. As he wrote to Detroit newspaperman J. Lee Barrett, "I'm sorry I can't put up a more formidable challenge to America. I don't hope to beat Gar Wood. My boat is not powerful enough. I'm just trying to keep alive England's interest, that's all. Maybe if I put up a good race I'll be able to get the engines I want next year."²⁷ In another report the British aviator claimed, "I'll be back year after year either until I am successful or wear out in the attempt."²⁸

Despite, or perhaps because of, the seemingly overwhelming odds, the Canadian media stood behind the challenge that represented the British Empire. Under a photo montage featuring two shots of the boat speeding across the water and a third, head-shot of the builder/driver, *The Toronto Daily Star* implored its readers to, "Take a peek at Miss Britain III, the challenger for the famous Harmsworth cup, the trophy that has cost Englishmen plenty of money and more worry and which has defied their efforts to take it back across the Atlantic." The piece concluded the, "little ship weighs only 3,360 pounds. Gar Wood's Miss America X weighs 10 tons. Good luck, Scott-Paine, says all Canada! Good luck little ship!"²⁹

As it turned out Hubert Scott-Paine did not manage to beat Gar Wood. In front of a crowd estimated at 325,000³⁰ Wood won the best-of-three race in straight heats; but *Miss America X* was only ninety seconds ahead in the first event, and a mere twenty-two seconds in the

second. Still, the margin of victory might have been artificially close. According to *The Toronto Daily Star* sports writer Lou Marsh, Gar Wood could have won handily but, “did not rub it into a gallant rival. He showed admirable sportsmanship all the way through the piece. He had Scott-Paine beaten before they started and he knew it. Still he was magnanimous.”³¹

After the race Hubert Scott-Paine was determined to issue another challenge, and so was a newcomer to the field. A story by Lou Marsh claimed, “Bert Hawker, the Canadian speed boat designer, says that a Canadian challenge is almost a certainty.” Marsh described Hawker as having wealthy backers from the Lake Muskoka area north of Toronto; but he immediately identified a major obstacle for the Canadian challenge: “Hawker is a smart designer... knows what it is all about in the draughting room... and he is a nifty driver and experienced driver of high speed boats... And Canadian workmen can build the hull... and build it right – But even if he gets the money and designs and builds the hull where is he going to get his motors?” Marsh correctly pointed out that the Harmsworth challenge was a country-to-country affair and the entire package had to be built by the challenging country; “Where is a Canadian challenger going to get – in Canada – racing engines which can hope to show the class of Wood’s Packards, Lord Wakefield’s Rolls-Royces or Scott-Paine’s Napier-Schneiders?”³² In a nutshell, Marsh had identified the key obstacle to a Canadian challenge for the Harmsworth Trophy.

Despite the firm commitments, there was to be no ‘next year’ for any contender. The depression and then the Second World War put Harmsworth challenges on hold. But, as anticipated by Sir Alfred Harmsworth, the technological developments inspired by the attempts to win his trophy were put to use in new designs. Both Hubert Scott-Paine and Gar Wood spent the Second World War in North America putting their knowledge of speed boat technology to work building motor torpedo boats for the war effort. The next challenge would not be issued until 1949, and then it would be Canada’s turn.

Chapter 3

The Wilson Challenge 1934-1951

The Wilson family did not set out to race for the Harmsworth Trophy and they certainly did not begin boat racing with any notions of national fame. Ernest Albert Wilson was a self-taught mechanical engineer and entrepreneur who was born in England and eventually set up shop in the southwestern Ontario town of Ingersoll. In the summer of 1925 Wilson's four-year old son, Ernie Jr., was riding his tricycle on the driveway of their home when he shot unseen under the wheels of the family car. He was killed. Hoping to lighten the sense of loss that had descended upon the family, Mr. Wilson arranged an extended vacation for his family in the resort area of the Muskoka Lakes, north of Toronto.

The Wilsons fell in love with the area and purchased an island in Lake Muskoka, and along with an island, of course, came a boat. The Wilson's first boat was an 18-foot affair with a 15-horsepower engine, and it became an instant hit with E.A.'s 14 year-old son, Harold. The next year the Wilsons bought a 25-hp craft and, the year after that, they purchased a 28-foot Ditchburn Viking with a 200-hp engine. In a patriotic gesture the Wilsons named this classic craft *Miss Canada*. The family tragedy had set them on the course to international speedboat racing.

The Wilsons took their first serious step towards a racing career during the winter of 1928-29. E. A. Wilson acquired an interest in a new venture based in Gravenhurst, Ontario on the shores of Lake Muskoka. Tom Greavette, long-time sales manager for Herb Ditchburn, Canada's premiere builder of fine boats, decided to strike out on his own. With financial assistance from Wilson Sr., the boat-building company of Greavette Boats Limited was born. Incorporated to build, "a line of well-tested, successful, runabout hulls of good appearance available for presentation to the boating public,"³³ the enterprise would allow E. A. Wilson to

indulge himself and his son in their developing passion. And so the Wilson racing team began – E. A. Wilson supplying the financing and son Harold doing the driving.

The technical expertise was a shared responsibility undertaken by a number of players over time. One of the key members of this initiative was an American naval designer named John Hacker. Hacker had been commissioned to design a new line of runabouts for Greavette and was more than happy to sketch out racing hulls for the Wilsons. Over the next few years Harold Wilson, driving Greavette-made boats, progressed through increasingly more powerful classes of competition.

After a few years of local competition in cottage country, E. A. Wilson determined the team was ready to race in the all-new 225 cubic-inch class at the 1934 Canadian National Exhibition on Lake Ontario. Harold's new boat was *Little Miss Canada III*, his first experience with an in-board motor – in this case a Ford V-8. As Harold recalls, the team spent a lot of time choosing this standard engine over other, more exotic choices; but they felt that, “absolute dependability was more important than rather wild claims for higher power.”³⁴ By this time Harold was enrolled in the engineering program at the University of Toronto and he had developed a relationship with a young lady named Lorna Reid. Driving *Little Miss Canada III* and with Lorna as his ride-along mechanic, Harold entered the first world championship race for the 225 class at the CNE.³⁵

Harold Wilson's first race against international competition was also his first exposure to the national press; it was merely a taste of things to come. After the first bout of the three-heat competition, a page in the sports section of *The Toronto Daily Star* featured a photograph of the boats racing, with numbered insert headshots of Harold Wilson and Lorna Reid. The rather extensive caption had a title “CANUCK DRIVER AND GIRL MECHANIC DEFEAT U.S. CHAMPIONS” and the caption read: “*One of the big surprises of the C.N.E. sport program was the sensational victory of Harold Wilson of Ingersoll, 22-year-old Varsity undergraduate (No. 1) in the first heat of the 225 cubic inch motor class of hydroplanes for*

the world championship last night outside the C.N.E. seawall. No. 3 is Miss Lorna Reid, 19-year-old daughter of T.E. Reid of Toronto, who rode with Wilson as his 'mechanic.' No. 2 shows the start of the race with Riptide, the U.S. national champion of the class, apparently leading Wilson's boat, Little Miss Canada III across the line. The third boat shown is another Canadian boat, Miss Muskoka, driven by Bob Moodie of Hamilton, and the fourth is Chotsie VI of Wilmington Del., driven by Mrs. Florence Burnham, holder of the US eastern title for the class. Riptide finished third, Miss Muskoka conked out and Chotsie VI finished fifth."³⁶

The column that described the race had equally effusive headlines, "TORONTO PAIR WINNERS IN SPEED BOAT CLASSIC" and a sub-head of, "Harold Wilson and Lorna Reid Race Into Submission America's Best." *The Toronto Daily Star* sports editor Lou Marsh went on to express his reaction: "A Canadian lad who had never driven a hydroplane race before took a boat which was built completely from keels on to last dash of varnish in eight days up at Greavettes in Gravenhurst, and beat two United States champions – that I know of – two worlds record holders – that I am certain of, because I saw the official documents – and three or four more who came here with three-ply reps for being the aces of the game somewhere or other across the line." The veteran columnist continued, "Surprise? ... I'll say it was! Wilson never saw a 225 before... never was in one of them until he stepped into the Greavette Fury, Little Miss Canada III up at Gravenhurst three weeks ago... yet he whipped across the line in front of a fleet of nine of the best boats in the class in America." Marsh did not forget to mention Wilson's teammate, though he did it in 1930s sports-journalist fashion writing that Wilson, "took his best girl along with him ... little 118 pound Miss Lorna Reid, 19-year-old daughter of T.E. 'Timmy' Reid, coach of Parkdale Collegiate Institute rugby teams for the past twenty years."³⁷

Despite the lavish praise he heaped on the Wilsons, Lou Marsh (1879-1936), sports editor of *The Toronto Daily Star*, was not easily impressed. In 1892 Marsh was fourteen years old when he joined the paper as an office boy. He worked his way to copy boy to junior

reporter, to sports reporter to assistant sports editor in 1900. According to sports historian Don Morrow, “Lou Marsh was devoted to sailing on water and ice, and to motor boat racing” and his journalism, “fulfilled a purpose that good sports television commentary has taken over in the past twenty-five years. Even in Winnipeg and Vancouver Marsh was acknowledged as the ‘dean of Canadian sports writers.’”³⁸ By the time he was writing about the Wilsons, Marsh had been on the sports scene some 34 years and his unqualified support of the young couple would have carried weight with his readers.

If Toronto’s major paper considered Harold Wilson a celebrity, in his hometown there was no evidence of his exploits. The day following his victory, the *Woodstock-Ingersoll Sentinel Review* carried a headline about London brewer John Labatt, who had received death threats. The multi-millionaire beer baron had been kidnapped then released after promising to pay a ransom. Someone calling himself ‘Three-fingered Abe’ had written to Labatt demanding \$25,000 if he wanted to avoid getting a “gut full of lead.”³⁹ The paper also had a story about a surprise visit from local-girl-made-famous Aimee Semple McPherson. The evangelist had made a visit to her father’s grave in Ingersoll and to the family homestead south of the town. But of the hometown boat racer, there was not a word.

In Toronto, the press reaction to Wilson’s first-heat win was somewhat indicative of the awakening sense of nationalism that could be felt across Canada. In the mid-1960’s Carl Berger described this new sentiment that had appeared in the 1920s. “The focus of nationalist thought shifted,” he wrote, “and one of its dominant preoccupations came to be the definition of Canadian character in terms of North American experience, to emphasize the similarities between Canada and the United States.”⁴⁰ The similarities and the differences - the very premise of the C.N.E speedboat competition was its international flavor. It was dreamed up by Toronto sports writer Harry ‘Red’ Foster who, “sold the idea to Elwood A. Hughes of the C.N.E. – and worked night and day to put it over – sold the idea of building boats in Canada to meet the U.S. invaders and give the thing an international flavor.”⁴¹ And

the newspapers knew how to play up the potential for country-to-country conflict for their readers.

After the second heat on September 7, editor Marsh seemed almost apologetic about the previous day's display of nationalism. It is a rare occasion when a veteran newspaper writer begins by describing what his story is **not** about. "Red Foster's hydroplane derby up on the C.N.E. marine program did not make the eight-column front page top line streamers in this morning's papers," Marsh began. "The reason is not far to seek ... even though the only woman driver in the race did win it. A Canadian boat... a dark horse with a green driver and a girl crew... did not dash to the front on the break and whip U.S. champions and world's record holders in the most sensational race held in the class this year!"⁴² After setting up his reader's expectations, Marsh was not so much reporting the result of the race, but positioning his analysis within the international context.

By the Saturday September 8 edition, *The Toronto Daily Star* was firmly back on the nationalist bandwagon. Over the caption, "A CANADIAN IS THE NEW WORLD'S CHAMPION OF THE 225 CLASS," a three-picture collage featured a photo of the third heat in progress, an insert of the heat winner S. Mortimer Auerbach and a photo of, "Harold Wilson, the winner, and his crew, Miss Lorna Reid, of Toronto, in Little Miss Canada III, the winning boat."⁴³ Lou Marsh was unapologetic this time, "KING OF THE BOUNDING WAVES IS CANADIAN SPEED PILOT – Harold Wilson, the Youthful Collegian, Is the New Powerboat Champion." In the colourful form of hyperbole that marked sports writing of the day, Marsh declared: "A combination of hot g- ... beg pardon, I mean viscera... and cool brains won Canada her first world's championship in the hydroplane racing field... and the chap who brought the crown to Canada is a 22-year-old undergraduate of University of Toronto... Harold Wilson of Ingersoll. He is champion of the world in a new class of hydroplane racing craft known as the 225 cubic-inch motor class and his boat is Little Miss Canada III."⁴⁴

The Globe was more reserved in its tone, but just as quick to claim the title for the country. The headline of the sports section proclaimed, “Little Miss Canada III Wins Trophy,” with the sub-head, “Canadian Speedboat Claims World Title After Thrilling Race.” The article pointed out an aspect of the race that was to become a common theme throughout Harold Wilson’s racing career. In assessing the likelihood of *Little Miss Canada III’s* win, the writer revealed the role technology had played in the race: the championship story was one of breaks. *Emancipator III*, it was conceded, was ‘the fastest thing’ in the water and led the Canadian craft from start to finish. If it hadn’t been for a broken coil that tied her up in the second heat, it was probable she would have won the championship last night.”⁴⁵ It would not be the last time reliability and endurance would triumph over speed.

The Saturday edition of the *Woodstock-Ingersoll Sentinel Review* was the first time the local paper acknowledged the Wilson team’s success. The modest headline on the sports page proclaimed, “Youthful Ingersoll Pilot takes Hydroplane Honors.” The Canadian Press wire copy (which was the same story that ran in *The Globe*) began, “Roaring down Lake Ontario’s mist-hung water course in the foaming wake of Chicago’s *Emancipator III*, *Little Miss Canada III* brought home the first world’s championship for 225 cubic inch hydroplanes to Canada tonight.” The story referred to the new champion as “portly Harold Wilson of Ingersoll Ontario.”⁴⁶

In 1935, Harold and Lorna Wilson took another successful step in their international racing careers and helped advance the technology of powerboat racing. They returned to the CNE with a new boat, *Little Miss Canada IV*. Whereas *Little Miss Canada III* was a fairly conventional design with the pilot and mechanic sitting beside each other in the cockpit, *Little Miss Canada IV* had been built with racing in mind. The new boat had a kayak-style seating arrangement with the mechanic sitting behind the pilot for better weight distribution. And Ford, pleased with the publicity from the previous year’s performance, gave the Wilsons two new V-8 engines - not the stock engines any weekend boater might use, but specially modified power plants created by Harry Miller, a specialist whose race cars had been

featured at the Indy 500 for years. The new machines had, “special high-lift cam shafts, Scintilla magneto ignition instead of the standard coil type, and a special two-carburetor, four barrel intake system that was designed to make the engine produce more power.”⁴⁷ And as a further sign of support, the Ford Motor Company assigned one of its mechanics to service the boat for the entire racing season. The international race would determine the success of the new technology.

As it turned out the pair successfully defended their title in 1935. Lou Marsh was as enthusiastic as he had been the previous year, but in reporting the results of the first race, his accolades were more personal, and not quite so nationalistic this year. The main title was: “KING OF THE WILDER WAVES IS WILSON OF INGERSOLL,” and the subtitle was a Marsh-style tip of the hat to Harold Wilson’s ride-along mechanic, Lorna Reid, “With Toronto Mamzelle as Mechanic Daring Driver Turns Back U.S. Defi.” Photos of the race underway and of the winning boat and crew at rest, bore a caption with a trace of nationalism and a fair amount of questionable taste, “SHOWING UNCLE SAMMIE’S CHILLUN THE SHORT WAY HOME.” In the copy, Marsh did acknowledge the international aspect of the competition, “It was a night of triumph for the daring, nervy, comparatively inexperienced Canadian drivers... three in the first four.”⁴⁸

The Globe’s front page inexplicably adopted the Wilson’s boat for the local citizens. It claimed, “Miss Canada IV Wins First Heat at C.N.E – Toronto Craft Home First in International Competition.”⁴⁹ Inside however its sub-head read, “Ingersoll Youth Scores Victory With Miss Canada IV”⁵⁰ and this time the reporter referred to the driver as “Rotund Harold Wilson.”

The September 6 edition of *The Toronto Daily Star* compared the Canadian speedboat with the racecar *Bluebird* driven by England’s Sir Malcolm Campbell. Three days before, on September 3, Sir Malcolm had set a world land-speed record of 301.1292 miles per hour.⁵¹ The paper declared, “LITTLE MISS CANADA IV IS BLUEBIRD OF WATER LANES,”

but the sub-head continued to strike a personal note: “Harold Wilson of Ingersoll Sitting Pretty in His Drive for a Second Title.”⁵²

The next day *The Toronto Daily Star* ran a photo of *Little Miss Canada IV* and crew in the news section of the paper with the caption, “CANADIANS RETAIN WORLD SPEED BOAT TITLE.”⁵³ Later, in the sports section, Lou Marsh headed his column with, “WILSON TAKES BUGGY RIDE WITH LITTLE MISS CANADA” and the sub-head continued in a personal tone, “Ingersoll Lad Finishes Second But Wins Championship on Points.”⁵⁴ *The Globe* stayed with the local angle proclaiming, “Ingersoll Daredevil Retains World Title.”⁵⁵ No matter how it was reported, the new hull and its custom engines had proven themselves in competition.

The Wilsons had originally chosen Ford power plants for their reliability; and, despite the success they had, for the 1936 season the team made a change. They switched to the famous Lycoming engine that powered the Auburn and Cord luxury automobiles. Unfortunately, while it put out more horsepower, the new engine was not very reliable; and at the 1936 CNE the Wilson world champion winning streak came to an end. Oddly enough, although the competition involved entries from both sides of the border, and the title was once again won by a Canadian boat and driver, there was no nationalist tone to the headlines, “STUDENT PILOT ZOOMS INTO WORLD’S SPEED BOAT TITLE,” *The Toronto Daily Star* proclaimed, with the sub-head “Smiling Jack McInnis Succeeds Harold Wilson as Monarch of Waters.”⁵⁶ The change of tone may have been due to the fact that Lou Marsh had passed away that spring and Gordon Sinclair had succeeded him as sports editor; or, the difference may have been the name of the new champion: *Miss Quebec*.

The 1936 CNE races would be the last time the Wilson racing team would compete in the 225 class of racing. The issue of *The Toronto Daily Star* that described their final entry into that class had another item about power boating. Under the head, “Scent Bid for Harmsworth As Bluebird Learns to Swim,” an article with a dateline in London England

claimed the, “mighty air ministry ‘hush-hush’ motor which drove Sir Malcolm Campbell’s Bluebird to a world land speed record of better than 300 miles an hour on the salt flats of Utah last year, is being fitted into a motor boat.” The article went on to report speculation in England that Sir Malcolm, “his goal on land achieved, will once again don racing gear and try to wrest the Harmsworth trophy from Gar Wood.”⁵⁷ As it turned out, the next Harmsworth contest would involve neither of those sportsmen.

The Wilsons’ experience with the 225-class of powerboats had taken them from racing in a ‘gentleman’s runabout’ (*Little Miss Canada III*) to a race-ready specialist (*Little Miss Canada IV*). The next phase of their experience would place them out on the experimental edge of powerboat design. After retiring from his business interests in 1935, E. A. Wilson spent the winter in California. Among other things he attended several regattas featuring the “Gold Cup” class of race boats. This was the largest class of boat sanctioned by the American Power Boat Association (APBA). Although a number of Gold Cup races were held across America, the most prestigious competition was the President’s Cup held on the Potomac River in Washington D.C.

When E.A. got back to Canada, Harold learned, “Not only had I already been entered as a new Gold Cup driver, John Hacker had my new boat, Miss Canada II⁵⁸, on his drafting board, and our new engine was already under construction.” The boat was a 24-foot hydro built by Greavette with a 1,000 hp-engine built by Harry Miller, “the motor genius whose race cars had become synonymous with racing generally and the Indy 500 in particular.” But despite years of experience with racecars, Miller’s nautical design was still unproven. In fact, the Wilsons learned that Miller, “had actually built one of these monsters before, for the United States government, and it had been utterly destroyed while undergoing maximum power tests.”⁵⁹

Once again the Wilsons would accept a new development in naval technology. Until this time, virtually all their competitors had been racing boats with ‘displacement hulls.’ These

are craft that plow through the water, pushing it out of the way with brute force. With relative ease, a displacement boat can achieve a speed equal to, “the square root of its waterline length,” but beyond that, adding power simply increases wave-making and depresses the stern. In order to achieve higher speeds the boat must be made to rise up out of the water and skim or ‘hydroplane’ over the surface. This is accomplished by attaching a notch or ‘step’ to the hull at approximately amidships. “A single-step hydroplane is designed to ride on two points of the hull – amidships, just ahead of the step, and on the hull bottom right aft. Its advantage over a non-stepped hull is that it just rises bodily out of the water, fore and aft the same amount, and just skims along the top.”⁶⁰ S. E. Saunders of Cowes, England had been one of the pioneers of the technology and had employed it on *Miss Maple Leaf IV*, the first boat in the world to surpass fifty knots and the winner of the 1912 and 1913 Harmsworth races against America. It was this step-hull design that the Wilsons used on their new boat *Miss Canada II*.

Moving into the new class of boat and experimenting with new hull designs resulted in a few years of poor results and the Wilson team slipped quietly out of the media spotlight. *Miss Canada II* never lived up to expectations and a successor, *Miss Canada III*, entered the water in 1938.⁶¹ Another change to the racing team that year occurred when Lorna Reid (now Mrs. Lorna Wilson) announced the impending arrival of the couple’s first child. This development demanded the team enlist a new ride-along mechanic; so Charlie Volker, a German-born, Detroit-based specialist stepped into the role. The first race with Harold and Charlie as a team was the Gold Cup competition held on the Detroit River on Labour Day weekend, 1938. The new boat led the race for several laps in heat one, but was forced to drop out due to a faulty oil pump. The competition was eventually won by Count Theo Rossi de Montelera, head of the Italian vermouth giant Martini and Rossi. The following year Count Rossi’s boat was sitting dockside ready to compete, but its owner/driver was unable to defend his title. Even before the boats hit the water of the Detroit River, banner headlines of *The Toronto Daily Star* proclaimed, “ ‘TIME FOR ACTION’ – CHAMBERLAIN Poland Is Invaded and Warsaw Bombed *Victory Or Death, Hitler’s Own Pledge.*”⁶² The long

expected storm had begun; war was breaking out in Europe. The race was run and *Miss Canada III* finished second behind *My Sin* of Ventnor, New Jersey.⁶³

After two years of lean times, fortunes were about to change for the Wilson racing team. On the weekend of September 23 1939, the Wilsons arrived in Washington D.C. for a run at the President's Cup. When they arrived at the U.S. naval yards they learned that the U.S. navy had refused to allow their fuel truck onto the base. Instead the driver had gone on to Baltimore. There was not enough time to recall the truck, and so they accepted a generous offer from Gulf Oil: the American company would supply the fuel and, if the Wilsons won the race, their sponsor BA (British American) would be allowed to take the credit. As it turned out, that is just what happened. After two days of grueling races *Miss Canada III* had won two heats and finished second in the other, for an overall win on points.

Accounts of this victory reflect the realities of the war in Europe. The front pages of the newspapers carried stories of disaster in Poland and optimistic reports of preparations by the British and French. Even the sports pages noted changes in schedules and events to accommodate wartime conditions. *The Globe and Mail* had a brief announcement of the Wilson's success which was completely lacking in nationalist overtones. Perhaps Harold Wilson's description of the trophy presentation best sets the tone of the times. The day after the race, the Wilson racing team was invited to the White House to meet President Roosevelt and receive their hard-won trophy. After Harold accepted the Gold Cup, a reporter remarked that although a foreign country could win the trophy, the deed of gift stated the Cup could not be taken out of the United States. According to Mr. Wilson, the president looked the reporter up and down for a couple of moments, "then said, 'My dear young man, you had better realize that Canada is not a foreign country, it is a brother country. Take it home Mr. Wilson.' And so we did."⁶⁴

Back in Canada the Wilsons put their racing toys away and re-tooled their Ingersoll Machine Company from making auto parts to crafting material for the war effort. For the duration,

they would make shells for the Bofors anti-aircraft gun. It was during this period that E.A. Wilson met someone who would have a major influence on the team's racing future – the minister of munitions and supply, C.D. Howe.

During the war, and immediately after it, Canada underwent a number of changes. Historian Donald Creighton observed these changes in the mid 1970s. He wrote, “It seems to me that in the eighteen years from 1939 to 1957, Canada made a number of crucial decisions about its direction. It chose one fork of the road to the future; and the Canada we inhabit today is, for both good and ill, very largely the result of that decisive choice.”⁶⁵ To Creighton the new direction for Canada was demonstrated at the 1947 Geneva Conference where Canada played a prominent role negotiating the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. “It was natural that the United States should take the lead at Geneva in the attack on the preferential system. Canada, with its very different political and commercial history, might have been expected to follow more cautiously and with some reservations; but in fact, the Canadian delegation supported the American proposals with vigour and conviction. The new commercial orthodoxy had taken over the collective mind of the Canadian government, at both the political and the official level.”⁶⁶

Creighton marks this period as the time of the shift of Canada's traditional trading patterns - from the preferential system of Great Britain and the Commonwealth to the United States. He also determines that, despite the reality of a new dependency on the United States, Mackenzie King was trying to find a new position for Canada on the world stage. The Canadian government, Creighton writes, “believed that the war had made Canada a sovereign nation and that this achievement must be made manifest to the whole world by the removal of the remaining emblems of colonialism and the substitution of the symbols of independent nationhood. A “distinctive” Canadian flag must be adopted, and an official Canadian citizenship proclaimed. Appeals from the Supreme Court of Canada to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London would have to be stopped, and a method devised

of completing the amendment of the British North America Act in Canada without recourse to the Parliament of the United Kingdom.”⁶⁷

In 1946 Canada passed the Canadian Citizenship Bill. Up until then all members of the Commonwealth were considered British subjects and, “Canadian citizenship, in so far as it could be said to have existed at all, was simply a minor local variation.”⁶⁸ The new act made Canadian citizenship primary and stated that Canadian citizens also happened to be British subjects. Shortly after this, the Liberal government of Louis St. Laurent began to replace the historic Canadian title, “Dominion of Canada” with “Canada” or “Government of Canada.” For Creighton this marked a loss of identity for the country. It had, “dropped its familiar emblems and titles, under the belief they were ‘badges of colonialism,’ and had found no distinguishing tokens to put in their place. It had lost – or was losing – its old credentials and had gained few new ones. An unidentified, nondescript, almost anonymous country, it had ostentatiously started off on a new career, with no very definite purpose in mind and not much idea where it was going.”⁶⁹ The rest of the country might have been feeling a new sense of independence, but in the industrial heartland of southwestern Ontario, the attachment to the Commonwealth was still strong. It was under this banner of the Commonwealth that the Wilson family took up its crusade for the Harmsworth Trophy.

To undertake this next level of competition, the Wilsons determined they would need a new boat; but there were other hurdles as well. First of all was the requirement that the hull and engine had to be made in the country issuing the challenge. The Miss Canada boats had all been made by Greavette in Bracebridge, Ontario, so the hull was not an issue. But as Lou Marsh had pointed out in 1934 all the engines used by Canadian craft, including the Wilsons, had been made in the U.S.A. After long talks with the board representing the Harmsworth rules, it was determined that the challenge could be made in the name of the British Commonwealth of Nations. This decision would mean the new Miss Canada could be outfitted with a British-made engine. The obvious choice was Rolls Royce, but unfortunately the company still remembered its dismal experience with Kaye Don before the war. E. A.

Wilson sent a 'carefully framed letter' to Lord Hives, managing director of Rolls Royce and former head of its aero engine division. Harold Wilson described the reply as, "an equally well-framed letter, which said, quite plainly, 'No!'" Clearly the company was sticking by its policy of keeping out of competitions. One day in conversation with Jim Hall, the chief service engineer for Rolls Royce in Canada, E. A. Wilson happened to mention he had served on the Allied Munitions and Supply Board with C.D. Howe. Hall pointed out that Howe, "had signed a contract with Rolls Royce for the purchase of over 900 Rolls Royce Nene Jet engines to be used to power the T33 A/C planes then being built by Canadair in Montreal."⁷⁰ Wilson senior recognized this as an opportunity to strike a nationalistic chord.

E.A. Wilson travelled to Ottawa and outlined his plan for the Liberal cabinet minister. A few days later Lord Hives received a cable from Ottawa: "Would appreciate any assistance Rolls Royce could give to Ernest A. Wilson of Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada on his Canadian attempt to build a worthy Unlimited Class challenger for the eventual return of the Harmsworth Trophy from the United States. This is a serious effort on behalf of the British Commonwealth of Nations and has my full support and backing. Personal regards, C.D. Howe Ottawa."⁷¹ To follow up the request, Harold Wilson flew to England to press his case with Lord Hives. After listening to the young Canadian, the head of 'the works' said that a board meeting would be held to discuss the proposition. In the meantime, Harold was invited to meet with some of the Rolls Royce engineers to discuss technical matters. The next day Harold was invited to another meeting with Lord Hives and company. After once again explaining his plan, he was informed that Rolls Royce would join the team and Harold could have any engine he wanted.

The young driver chose the largest reciprocating engine Rolls Royce produced: the V-12 Griffon engine capable of 2,800 hp. This engine had been designed in the 1930s, then mothballed when the war broke out while engineers concentrated on the Griffon's cousin - the famous Merlin engine used to power the Supermarine Spitfire and Avro Lancasters. By the mid-1940s the engineers turned their attention back to the larger Griffon design and, at

the end of the war, Spitfires and the new Avro Shackleton reconnaissance aircraft were powered by Griffon engines.

By the time the young Canadian was contemplating a Griffon-powered speedboat in 1948, the Spitfires had given way to jet aircraft; but the Shackletons were still in service as anti-submarine patrol aircraft, and that gave rise to a snag. The Griffon was still on the 'secrets list' and only produced for the British government. As Harold recalls, it was Lord Hives who suggested a solution, "Why not have two engines disappear somewhere in the works? The engine numbers can show that they are still here being tested, repaired, retested and groomed for final acceptance by the customer, the government, and they will remain disappeared until you return them to us. Meanwhile they will have been in Canada doing their bit to help Miss Canada IV bring the Harmsworth Trophy back home."⁷² Apparently Lord Hives considered the enterprise to be a Commonwealth challenge.

That issue solved, another obstacle in the road appeared. When asked if he needed anything else, Harold stated that, in order to convert this aircraft engine into a marine power plant, he and his team would need a full set of blueprints. Once again Lord Hives pointed out that the secrets list made the request impossible. This time Harold was shown all the prints he felt were necessary; and then, in his words: "all these prints were packed into a plain, unmarked cardboard box and put aside on a table until our discussions were ended. I then said goodbye to Lord Hives, Jim Pearson and all the others who had made my stay at Rolls Royce so pleasant, and the meeting broke up. All the staff members filed out to another meeting and I left for the airport, just managing to slip that cardboard box under my arm as I left."⁷³ The next challenge was to adapt the giant aircraft engine to a waterborne platform.

Back in Canada, the Wilson racing team set about re-configuring the Griffon engine and building a new hull to accommodate the big power plant. Once again designed and built at the Greavette boat works in Gravenhurst, the Wilson's new racer was made of oak, African mahogany and a particularly strong and durable variety of cedar known as Port Orford cedar.

Miss Canada IV was 33 feet long and 11 feet abeam. When it was launched into Lake Muskoka in June, 1949, a surprise visitor arrived to watch the test runs - none other than Lord Hives of Rolls Royce. Recalls Wilson, "Lord Hives was keenly interested in every detail of the construction of our boat and expressed confidence that the combination of our boat and the Griffon engine would win the Harmsworth."⁷⁴

After almost 15 years away from the front pages of the newspapers, the Wilsons announced their return to international competition. By mid-July *Miss Canada IV* was deemed ready for race conditions, but the trial run would prove a disaster. In preparation for the upcoming challenge in Detroit, the Wilsons laid out a practice course on Lake Muskoka. On Saturday July 16, 1949 Harold Wilson and his mechanic, Charlie Volker, set out for a bone-jarring test of the 30-mile endurance heat. The test run was a well-publicized event, and many cottagers had gathered at various vantage points to take in the show. *The Toronto Daily Star* even sent a staff photographer, Gerald Richardson, to record the event. He brought his wife, son, daughter, mother and aunt to enjoy the spectacle. To get close to the action the Richardsons accepted an invitation to board the Wilsons' pleasure yacht, the *Sarah Maude*, along with nine friends of the Wilson family and Harold's wife, Lorna. As *Miss Canada IV* began her way around the test course, Lorna Wilson realized that the *Sarah Maud's* anchor had not caught, and the cruiser was drifting too close to the course. While the new race boat hurtled around the course at an estimated 150 mph, Lorna pressed the starter and the *Sarah Maude* exploded in a ball of flame. Harold immediately changed course for the scene of the accident, arriving in seconds to find the surface of the water ablaze from spilt gasoline. He and his mechanic immediately dove to the rescue, "Charlie and I swam around splashing water over flaming heads of hair as fast as we could."⁷⁵ The next day, photographer Richardson described the scene as he experienced it, "Hell couldn't have been more terrifying than those indescribable minutes we floundered dazed, burned and bleeding in a sea of blazing debris."⁷⁶ Another observer, W. J. Ward wrote, "If it hadn't been for Charlie Volker, the engineer on *Miss Canada*, a woman about 65 would have drowned for sure. Charlie and Harold Wilson dived off the racer one after another. They were marvelous."⁷⁷

As it turned out, ten of the sixteen passengers ended up in hospital with injuries ranging from shock to broken bones to burns. Three days later, Mrs. Meatha Richardson, mother of *The Toronto Daily Star's* photographer, succumbed to her injuries. With the Harmsworth races scheduled for July 29, the Wilsons sought to postpone or even cancel the event, but the organizers felt that too much had been done to change the date at that point.

By 1949 Canadians had come to realize the potential for disaster that scientists had developed during the war. On Wednesday July 27 the front page of the *Woodstock-Ingersoll Sentinel Review* carried a story headed "ATOM ATTACK Little Can Be Done By Civil Defence, Report." The story went on to describe a study by British scientists that determined the results of a nuclear attack on the UK would leave very few survivors.⁷⁸ But inside on page four was the news story the locals really cared about. There were two photos of *Miss Canada IV* with an extended caption which began, "Everyone in town must have had a look at Miss Canada IV on Tuesday as she rested at the market square." The accompanying article expressed the sentiment of the townsfolk, who seemed oblivious to the fact that the boat was built in Gravenhurst as the headline claimed, "Miss Canada Comes Home on Way to Harmsworth," and the local journalist enthused, "With the austere, yet flowing beauty of a queen visiting her capital city, Miss Canada IV came to Ingersoll yesterday." The newsman noted that this was the first time the locals had actually seen anything more than a picture of the boat, and he was inspired to write: "The smooth, streamlined grace of the \$100,000 boat was striking to an extreme and left the viewer with an impression that was only comparable with the flowing beauty of an early-Grecian sculpture."⁷⁹ Thursday morning, *Miss Canada IV* left for Detroit in a convoy complete with an escort of Ontario Provincial Police.

By this time the national press was well aboard the bandwagon. On Thursday July 28, the front page of *The Toronto Daily Star* featured a headline trumpeting: "MISS CANADA TRIAL IS A RECORD." Staff correspondent Dick Ryder reported, "the Canadian speedboat reached nearly 150 miles an hour in Lake Muskoka trials."⁸⁰ Under a photo captioned 'Canada's Hope', *The Globe and Mail* for July 29 reported that Harold Wilson,

“wheeled Miss Canada over the course today while several hundred onlookers crowded docks and shore. There were ‘oohs’ and ‘ahs’ from the spectators at the sheer beauty of the craft.”⁸¹ In the Wilsons’ hometown of Ingersoll, Ontario, *The Ingersoll Tribune* sported a front-page banner, “BEST OF LUCK HAROLD Says Premier St. Laurent.” The story went on to describe the message the Prime Minister had sent to the newspaper from his holiday home near Bathurst, New Brunswick: “*All Canadians are interested in international sporting events and will be hoping for the success of Harold Wilson and his Miss Canada IV in the forthcoming speedboat races at Detroit this weekend. On their behalf, as well as my own, I wish him the best of luck. Louis S. St. Laurent.*”⁸²

On Friday July 29, the front page of *The Toronto Daily Star* declared: “Miss Canada Favorite to Take First Heat in Harmsworth Races.” According to Dick Ryder, “For Ingersoll’s Harold Wilson, this is the day that climaxes 18 years of motorboat racing. For Canada, it is the day that could see a Canadian take a grip on the prized Harmsworth trophy for the first time.” The writer went on to describe the confidence building in the Wilson camp as, “the contagious type that urges you to slap down next week’s salary on the sleek-hulled beauty out of Gravenhurst.”⁸³ The story even captured national interest. Under the headline, “Canada Seeks Harmsworth Cup,” *The Calgary Herald* ran an Associate Press (AP) story that concluded, “It is no secret that for the first time since Gar Wood brought the famed trophy to the United States in 1920, the challenging craft has an excellent chance to win.”⁸⁴ For those who wanted to experience the excitement live, the *Woodstock-Ingersoll Sentinel Review* ran an advertisement for the county’s radio station urging fans to, “Listen to the Harmsworth Trophy Results 6:30 – 6:45 Friday and Saturday CKOX 1430 on Your Dial.”⁸⁵ In Toronto the race was scheduled for broadcast on CBC Radio from 6:30 to 6:50 pm on Friday and from 6:30 to 7pm on Saturday.⁸⁶

Unfortunately for the Canadian supporters who tuned in, the news they heard was not good. As those who read about the story in the newspaper found out, “a thin but vital wire on Miss Canada’s supercharger snapped.”⁸⁷ The malfunction limited the boat’s speed to 60 or 70

mph and she finished last in the field of three. The front page of the *Woodstock-Ingersoll Sentinel Review* on Saturday, July 30 carried a photo of boat and crew and bore the caption, “A Broken Supercharger Slowed Miss Canada IV.”⁸⁸ Inside, AP writer Stan Bradshaw delivered the full details but the gist of the story was simple: *Miss Canada IV* was never in the race. The only hope was to repair the damage and have Canada’s challenger ready for the second of the three heats.

In Saturday’s edition of *The Toronto Daily Star*, Dick Ryder described the all-night effort of the Wilsons’ mechanical crew. In addition to the broken wire in the supercharger, the boat and engine had taken such a pounding over the course of the 42-nautical miles that many minor adjustments had to be made. With the optimism of both a nationalist and a sports fan, the reporter concluded, “If Miss Canada can leave misfortune ashore, the experts agree, she will rush back into the Harmsworth picture and, in less than half an hour, the odds against Harold Wilson and his Canadian challenger will be even again.”⁸⁹

The attention paid to *Miss Canada III* was beginning to change the nature of the Wilson’s quest. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson concentrates on language and printed materials to explain the notion of nationalism and how it is disseminated. On the other hand, British historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger have expanded the notion of national media to include symbols such as kilts, school ties and flags. They also explain, “most of the occasions when people become conscious of citizenship as such remain associated with symbols and semi-ritual practices (for instance, elections), most of which are historically novel and largely invented: flags, images, ceremonies and music.”⁹⁰ The July weekend in Detroit became such an occasion for national awareness, at least in the minds of the editors of the *Woodstock-Ingersoll Sentinel Review* who claimed, “All Canada will be focused on Detroit this weekend.”⁹¹

And for the people of southwestern Ontario, this was no ordinary sporting event. On Saturday, July 30, nine busloads of flag-waving fans from southern Ontario made their way

to Detroit. The convoy carried supporters from Ingersoll, Woodstock, Brantford, and Hamilton. This was long before the building of the expressway, Highway 401. The buses had to wind their way through towns and villages along Highway 2. They were escorted by police cars with sirens blaring as they passed through the city of London. At the race site, the Canadians were shown to special bleachers that had been erected specifically for them as guests. They waited impatiently as the race was delayed for an hour to accommodate extra repairs to one of the American boats. Then, just ten minutes before the contenders took to the Detroit River for the second heat of the race, the Canadian fans were stunned by an official voice over the public address system: “Harold Wilson has just announced that he will be running the race purely as a courtesy gesture and not as a competitor.”⁹² Apparently that long night of work had failed to solve the mechanical woes of *Miss Canada IV*.

Needless to say, the race was an anticlimax. The American boat *Skip-A-Long* won the heat with an average speed of 94.285 mph, while *Miss Canada IV* could do no better than 77.922.⁹³ The Canadians were aware that their boat was not performing up to its ability, but according to *The Toronto Daily Star* reporter Ryder, “the Wilsons raced Miss Canada Saturday because they felt Canadian representation should be carried on ... Better to lose with heads up than to default.” However, as the newspaper indicated, the Rolls Royce representatives might have felt their concerns about bad press had been justified. “Nettled by the scoffing tone of Detroit newspapers, whose boat writers suggested Miss Canada had never gone fast and never would, the Canadian manager of Rolls Royce warned the U.S. to ‘keep an eye on Miss Canada.’”⁹⁴ *The Globe and Mail* posted an optimistic note with a front page story headed “World Speed Mark Next Aim For Miss Canada IV.” The reporter described the sad story of Saturday’s race but reminded readers that the boat had been clocked at over 150 mph in trials. He wrote, “‘We may try for the world record,’ said Wilson, thus indirectly giving an idea of the boat’s speed when mechanically perfect.”⁹⁵ The *Calgary Herald* ran a brief AP story about the loss⁹⁶ and also using AP copy, the *Vancouver Sun* reported, “Speedboat Cup Goes to California.”⁹⁷

Aiming to save face and prove their faith in their boat, in late August, 1949, the Wilson's took *Miss Canada IV* to Picton, Ontario for an attempt at beating the world record for speedboats. The mark of 141.7 m.p.h. had stood for 10 years after being set in 1939 by Sir Malcolm Campbell. Stewards from the Prince Edward Yacht Club in Picton laid out a measured course on the sheltered waters of the Bay of Quinte's Long Reach and *Miss Canada IV* was given several runs before Harold Wilson decided to try another day. He returned in October and on its first official run *Miss Canada IV* snapped a shaft and threw its propeller. Finally, on October 3 1949, the Wilson team was able to claim moderate success. In an official run *Miss Canada IV* flashed down the course at 138.6 mph. – it was 3.1 mph shy of the world record, but it did establish *Miss Canada IV* as the fastest boat in North America.

With the season at an end, the Wilsons discovered the reason for their poor performance in the Harmsworth race: *Miss Canada IV*'s propeller was bent out of shape. Apparently the high engine speed and rough water had combined to deform the prop. The team had already decided that Harold would go to England to report on the race results to Rolls Royce; and when he described the problem with the propeller, Lord Hives decided Rolls would undertake to provide a replacement. The new propeller was carved from a solid block of forged stainless steel and took 1,600 work-hours to produce. With their boat and confidence rejuvenated, the Wilsons issued their second challenge for the Harmsworth Trophy. The race was set for September 1950.

By 1950 the Cold War was at its darkest, and the UN had committed troops to 'police action' in Korea. The August 5 edition of the *Woodstock-Ingersoll Sentinel Review* carried a full-page recruiting ad for the 'Canadian Army Special Force' indicating, "preference given to veterans of the Second World War." The patriotic slogan across the bottom of the page was, "Armed Aggression Must Be Met With Trained United Strength."⁹⁸ Despite the tension between east and west, *Miss Canada IV* remained in the news. On page 4 the paper reported progress in the Wilson team's preparation for the September challenge for the Harmsworth.

The optimistic headline, “Wilson Nudging Record Between 159-160 mph,” was tempered with the copy that followed: “Miss Canada IV, whose past has labeled her as one of the biggest busts in power-boat history, is beginning to make noises like a champion.”⁹⁹ By Monday August 28 the paper reported, “Harmsworth Entry Now Hitting 160 With Ease.”¹⁰⁰ And on the following Wednesday readers learned that *Miss Canada IV* was on the way to Detroit, although this time there was no ‘state visit’ to Ingersoll or police escort along the route to the race course.

Miss Canada IV’s quest was more than just local news; the story remained in the spotlight of the major papers as well. In August 1950, the war in Korea was still on the front page as *The Globe and Mail* reported, “Reds Set For Big Push.”¹⁰¹ Another story described the deliberations in cabinet over the type of commitment Canada should make to the UN force in Korea. And a third quoted Premier Leslie Frost of Ontario as saying there was no time for petty bickering between levels of Canadian government, citing that, “these were perhaps the most serious times in the history of the world.”¹⁰² At the bottom of the front page a photograph depicted *Miss Canada IV*, “zipping over the bay west of Gravenhurst.”¹⁰³ On the sports page Al Nickelson reported, “the capricious challenger for powerboat speed supremacy, approximated the world record of 160.3 miles an hour in a test run over Gravenhurst Bay.”¹⁰⁴ The reporter stated that *Miss Canada IV* would forgo an attempt at the world record and continue to prepare for a Harmsworth challenge in September.

Before the September contest took place, the Harmsworth committee agreed to a number of rule changes to reflect the current state of the sport in the United States. The course was shortened to five nautical miles; the race was to be run counter-clockwise; and the stipulation that the boat must have a ride-along mechanic was dropped.

As the fall came, concerns over the Korean situation deepened and the Canadian government debated its role in the conflict. On September 1, *The Globe and Mail* carried a story about a speech by External Affairs Minister Lester B. Pearson. In a special session of the House of

Commons, Pearson briefed the members on the Korean situation and made a, “call to put the resources of the Canadian people at the services of the United Nations to defeat aggression in Korea or anywhere else it might occur.”¹⁰⁵ But another article on the same page gave an indication of the cost of such action. Defence Minister Claxton announced defence spending projections for 1950 would reach, “an approximate total of \$570,000,000. For 1951-52 defence expenditure will be ‘very considerably’ more than \$650,000,000 and the same in the following year.”¹⁰⁶ The blossoming defence budget would plague the Canadian government for years and lead to the biggest technological debacle in the country’s history.

On the sports page of the same September 1 issue, reporter Al Nickleson wrote that after 22 years of racing speed boats, Harold Wilson was quitting the sport. Citing family and business considerations Wilson could no longer justify the time and effort he was devoting to his quest. In a separate editorial Nickleson assessed Harold Wilson and his chance for success on the weekend. The writer noted the young man, “never sought the sports publicity attended on his sometimes hussy companion, Miss Canada. He was forced into the public prints because he had built the latest line of Wilson powerboats with the intention of cracking the world speed record.” As for his chances against the Americans, the reporter pointed out Wilson, “will be trading spray with an American three-boat unit which has shown the fastest trial times in the storied, heart-breaking history of the Harmsworth.”¹⁰⁷ Wilson was soon to find out that he would end his Harmsworth career on a disappointing note. Early in the third lap of the eight-lap heat, the bracket supporting the steering column snapped. For the rest of the heat, Wilson gamely wrestled with the steering wheel as it flopped back and forth, and when he finally got his checkered flag, he was four miles behind the winner. Fixing the bracket in time for the second heat would have been an easy task, but Wilson’s crew noticed vertical cracks in the *Miss Canada IV*’s side planks. Apparently the pounding the boat took riding the wash of her competitors had been too much to bear.

Once again the defeat was made personal. *The Toronto Daily Star* ran its headline on the sports page: “Harmsworth Jinx Shatters Wilson’s Dream... Miss Canada is Out.” The

reporter quoted Harold Wilson as saying: “With the steering control lost, I couldn’t keep her out of the wash... The jinx was still with us.”¹⁰⁸ The cracks were so bad *Miss Canada IV* could not even answer the gun for the second heat. As *The New York Times* reporter wrote, “Instead of dashing out from the pits this afternoon she was on her way back to Canada with virtually a broken back. Planking as well as the stiffening ribs had cracked about amidships. It was an ignominious ending to the long efforts of the Wilson father and son to get back the trophy for Canada that Sir Alfred Harmsworth, before he was Lord Northcliff, first put into competition back in 1903.”¹⁰⁹

The *Picton Gazette* recognized the sense of frustration felt by its readers. The paper which served the area of the Long Reach where the Wilsons had made their speed record attempt, tried to explain the mechanical jinxes that seemed to plague the boat. “To the uninitiated, all this is most puzzling. They ask why an engine which took thousands of men and bombs to Berlin should be unable to take a small boat over a 40-mile course, and why engineering skill which could construct a Lancaster or a Norseman can’t devise a contraption which can circumnavigate a racing course without developing the blind staggers.” The paper gave its readers a simple answer that summed up the essence of Sir Alfred’s challenge: “Speed boat men reply that in fact, man and machine take a worse beating on the Harmsworth’s 40 miles than on Berlin’s 400 – ack-ack and all.”¹¹⁰

Wilson’s hometown press was more concerned about the effect on the citizenry than on the competitor. “Ingersoll Stunned At News of Miss Canada’s Ill Luck,” the *Woodstock-Ingersoll Sentinel Review* proclaimed. “There will be 300 empty seats in the special bleachers on the Harmsworth course this afternoon” ran the Canadian Press copy. “Confident their favourite Miss Canada IV had outlived her bad luck, Ingersoll folk bought tickets for the special section reserved for them opposite the finish line. The race will be run, but they aren’t interested. Word of Miss Canada’s broken steering column, her stove-in sides and Harold Wilson’s forced decision to withdraw from the race hit Ingersoll between the eyes.” The story went on to tell of the driver’s disappointment and his hope for the future.

“Before the race he informed reporters that this would be his last Harmsworth race. ‘I’ve been racing 22 years’ he said, ‘I have done my best for Canada and only hope that another Canadian will carry on.’”¹¹¹ Apparently by now in Wilson’s eyes, the ‘Commonwealth challenge’ had become a Canadian endeavour.

In the fall the Wilson team returned to Picton and the Long Reach. After another failed attempt to break the world speed record for powerboats, the Wilsons retired from competition. Disappointed by the outcome, but proud of his record, Harold Wilson was adamant he would retain the name of his boat for the family cruiser: “The name Miss Canada belongs to the Wilsons. If the hull is used again it will not have the name Miss Canada.”¹¹² The Wilsons final act as a racing team was to sell *Miss Canada III*, *Miss Canada IV* and all the team’s racing equipment to the Thompson family of London, Ontario. It would be for the Thompsons to take up the Harmsworth challenge.

Chapter 4

The Thompson Challenge 1952 - 1961

Unlike the Wilsons, the Thompson family of London, Ontario had its sights set on the Harmsworth Trophy from the beginning. Like many others in southwestern Ontario J. Gordon Thompson and his son Jim had followed the Wilsons and their efforts. They had attended races in Detroit. So when Harold Wilson announced his retirement, the Thompsons were ready and in a well-heeled position to step into the Wilson boats. Still, it would take the Thompsons almost ten years to develop the combination of power, design, and driving skill needed to succeed on the world stage for speedboat racing.

John Gordon Thompson was born in Aylmer Ontario in 1894. He was educated in Corunna and London, Ontario. During the First World War, Thompson served with the Canadian Expeditionary Force and achieved the rank of Sergeant. Upon returning from Europe, he served two years as an industrial survey officer for the Department of Soldiers' Re-establishment, then worked as a driving instructor. After a successful business career, he was made Honourary Colonel of the Royal Canadian Regiment, and for much of his later life he was known as Colonel Thompson.

From the beginning of his business career, Colonel Thompson showed a flair for marketing. In 1920 Thompson and Charles E. Norris formed the Canada Vulcanizer and Equipment Co. Ltd. to manufacture tire-repair equipment, and a few years later, "visible gasoline" pumps. In 1923 Thompson partnered with James D. Good to buy the assets of the Energy Oil Company which included a rundown filling station on Dundas St. East in London. It was there that J. Gordon Thompson put the word "service" in service station. In the early days of the automobile, people bought gasoline at hardware stores or the general store. In addition to

pumping their own gas, drivers checked their own tire pressure, oil levels, and radiators – all of which needed frequent attention. On the holiday weekend of May 23, 1923 motorists in London, Ontario were astounded by uniformed attendants who did everything for the traveler and refused to accept tips. Word spread and the Automotive Service Limited flourished.¹¹³

Thompson's flair for marketing was demonstrated in a number of ways. According to company legend, one night at the movies the Colonel was thinking about a competitor's new marketing campaign for its 'high test' gasoline. He was watching the 'super feature' and combined the two concepts to create 'Supertest Gasoline.' The company created the logo of an orange maple leaf on a white background with its name emblazoned across the top and the words "All Canadian" on the bottom. One early advertising campaign proclaimed: "You're never far from where you are to the sign of the Maple Leaf." Other early slogans claimed that, "Supertest Gasoline with Power-thrust" provided "Not Just Performance, But Power Performance" and that Supertest, "Costs no more than the ordinary kind."¹¹⁴ This marketing strategy was rather ingenious, given that Thompson's company did not make gasoline; it did not even own a refinery and merely retailed gasoline it bought from competitors.

But the Supertest penchant for promotion paid off. The company provided uniforms and courtesy school for attendants. It was the first to offer washrooms to the public and provide free air for tires. This was an era when most people who travelled any distance took the train. There were no 'super highways,' even very few paved roads. Supertest offered an invaluable service in that within twenty-four hours of receiving a request, it would create personalized road maps with trip information clearly marked. By 1956 the Supertest Petroleum Company owned 2,000 retail outlets.

It was this year that the Supertest brand became known for speedboat racing, thanks in part to Colonel Thompson's son Jim.¹¹⁵ James Thompson was born 18 December, 1926. He was raised in London before attending Ridley College, Royal Roads Military College, the University of Toronto and the University of Western Ontario where he earned an MBA. In

1951 Jim and his father purchased the *Miss Canada* boats and motors from the Wilson family. The Wilsons, however, declined to sell the name with their boats – the family yacht in Muskoka was still named *Miss Canada* – so the marketing-savvy sailors gave *Miss Canada IV* the name *Miss Supertest*. The Thompson team raced under the *Miss Supertest* name in 1952 and 1953, but with little success, so they retired the former *Miss Canada IV* after the 1953 season.

By 1953 the fighting in Korea had ended; but the Cold War was at its height. In *The Booming Fifties* edition of the *Canada's Illustrated History* series, Alexander Ross writes, “More than anything our public life was shaped and occasionally distorted by fears of Soviet aggression.” And as a result Canadians, “learned to live with the awesome prospect of instant extermination.”¹¹⁶

But by the mid 1950s Canada was also enjoying a period of incredible economic prosperity: “Canada’s gross national product rose from \$18.4 billion in 1950 to \$36.8 billion by decade’s end. The average weekly industrial wage, which was \$45.08 when the decade began, rose to an unimaginable \$73.47 by the end of the decade, and not much of the increase was caused by inflation.”¹¹⁷ J. L. Granatstein explains the boom quite simply: “After ten years of depression and six years of war, Canadians wanted the good things in life. The war had put money into the pockets of farmers who had sold everything they could produce for high prices, of workers who had had as much overtime as they could handle, and of service men and women whose pockets bulged with their service gratuities and re-establishment grants.”¹¹⁸ And spend they did. According to Ross, during the 1950s Canadians bought, “3,541,381 passenger cars, built 1,115,485 new housing units (most of them suburban bungalows with big front lawns and picture windows) and produced more babies (exactly 4,322,904 of them, according to the Dominion Bureau of Statistics) than any previous decade.”¹¹⁹

Some people, however, were concerned about the source of the money. The capital investment for this production came primarily from the United States. In 1950, “American companies invested \$167 million in 30 new Canadian subsidiaries, (bringing the total of American-controlled Canadian subsidiaries to 2,200) and another \$363 million in Canadian-controlled enterprises. That same year, American investment in Canada totaled nearly \$7 billion.”¹²⁰ Donald Creighton describes the process as less about receiving investment and more as a conspiracy to capitulate. “With the active encouragement of C.D. Howe, who himself was an American import, direct American investment in Canada had more than tripled during the twelve years from 1945 to 1957; and the takeover of Canada industries and natural resources had proceeded apace.”¹²¹ Regardless of the intent, the result in some ways was a contribution to rising feelings of Canadian nationalism. Canadians, “accepted American capital, American technology and American management techniques and we realized that these things were helping to create our new prosperity. At the same time, we tended to blame the Americans for everything that was new and unwelcome.”¹²²

This tug-of-war between appreciation of American technology and a sense of Canadian nationalism entered into the Thompson team’s attempt to wrest the Harmsworth Trophy from U.S. hands. In planning a new boat, the Supertest team was careful to keep in mind the rules of the Harmsworth competitions. The challengers were still using the Rolls Royce Griffon engine approved as part of a Commonwealth challenge, although by then the technology had been de-classified. In fact, as Jim Thompson recalls, the team got, “our first ones from Crown Assets. The navy had them for the Seafire aircraft that they ran from the aircraft carrier. Later on Rolls Royce was able to help us get some later model Griffon engines in England and that was a big improvement.”¹²³

Building the boat itself called for some creative thinking. For the new hull, Jim Thompson decided to depart from the stepped-hydroplane they and the Wilsons had used. Instead they would use a three-point hull designed by American Les Staudacher, of Kawkawlin, Michigan. The three-point terminology referred to the fact the boat rode on its half-

submerged propeller and two pontoon-like running surfaces called sponsons. In order to comply with the rules, the American crew that built the boat drove across the border to Sarnia every day to work in a facility owned by Canadian boat manufacturer MacCraft Industries. The finished racer sported mahogany, orange and white, and was 31 feet long, 12 feet wide and weighed seven thousand pounds. And for the first time the Canadian design would incorporate the 1950 rule change that had eliminated the need for a 'ride-along engineer.'

The Thompsons built *Miss Supertest II* for the 1954 season, but it was 1955 before the boat made a splash. While the team had little success on the racing circuit that year, its attempt at a world speed record on the Long Reach of the Bay of Quinte near Picton did result in a Canadian record of 154.854 mph. In June 1956, driver Bill Braden outduelled a field of American challengers to win the Prince Edward Trophy on the Bay of Quinte. Encouraged by this result, the team then headed for the Detroit River to challenge for the Harmsworth Trophy.

As if chastened by the coverage of the Wilson attempts, the major newspapers had little in the way of preliminary coverage of the 1956 Harmsworth challenge. On the Wednesday before the big event, *The Toronto Daily Star* sports page had a single item of three column inches and the storyline featured the American defender. According to the Associated Press story, "Barring unexpected developments Shanty I, a powerful boat capable of dazzling speeds, will oppose Canada's Miss Supertest II in the Harmsworth trophy challenge race this weekend on the Detroit River."¹²⁴ *The Globe and Mail* was equally silent. Not until the Saturday before the race did the paper make mention of the event, and then only to note that the Supertest team needed to repair a damaged supercharger.

Elsewhere on the sports page there was a plea for support in a national cause. Sports Editor Jim Vipond pointed out that the national Olympic team needed an additional \$20,000 to assure its round-trip passage to Melbourne Australia for the 1956 games. Voicing

disappointment in the Canadian government, Vipond called upon his readers to step up: “If the government of the country isn’t interested in what happens to Canada in Australia next month or appears not to care if the team even goes, the people will have to speak.” On behalf of the paper the writer offered to accept donations and forward them on to the Chairman of the Canadian Olympic Fund. Vipond ended with an emotional plea to national sentiment: “At last we have a chance, after many long years, to do something in international competition. Don’t force these kids to stay home. Help them out.”¹²⁵ Apparently there was a sentiment of support for international competition; it was simply not with the power boat challenge.

As *The Toronto Daily Star* had predicted, the American defender for the 1956 Harmsworth was indeed *Shanty I* owned by Texas oil millionaire, Bill Waggoner. Taking advantage of the highest order in available American technology, the boat was driven by Lt. Col. Russ Schlee, a member of Strategic Air Command and a test pilot for the U.S. Air Force. The race was a three-heat affair, each leg consisting of seven laps around a five-mile course. In the first heat the defender took command and finished three miles ahead of the Canadian challenger. And so it was with no surprise that in reporting the results *The Toronto Daily Star* headed its piece, “Canadian Boat Outclassed in 1st Heat.” The story went on to announce that the American’s “powerful, low-riding speedboat, probably the fastest ever to compete on U.S waters was favoured today to take a second and deciding heat in defence of the historic Harmsworth trophy.”¹²⁶ *The Globe and Mail* scribe was slightly more optimistic. Quoting sources identified as ‘veteran speedboat enthusiasts’ the reporter claimed that, “while the challenger seemed outclassed Saturday, they felt the Canadian craft had bettered her performance near the end of the race and distinctly had a chance in the second 35-mile heat.”¹²⁷

In conceding the trophy to the American side, *The Toronto Daily Star*’s writer lost sight of the essence of the trophy competition. As Jim Thompson remembers, “You’ve gotta finish – the harder you drive a boat the more likely a breakdown will occur.”¹²⁸ In the second heat

Col. Schlee decided to try for a Harmsworth record and turned in a lap speed of 110.357 mph. But the strain was too much for the boat and its engine failed, stopping the American dead in the water. While the Coast Guard towed *Shanty I* back to its berth, *Miss Supertest II* took its time finishing. It was not pretty, but the Harmsworth competition was as much about stamina as it was about speed, and *Miss Supertest II* had finally proven a Canadian entry could beat an American defender. After two days of racing the contest was tied.

Still, the press corps was not impressed. *The Toronto Daily Star* headed its item with: “Shanty’s Balky Engine Shunts Canada into Harmsworth Tie.”¹²⁹ And *The Globe and Mail* proclaimed, “Miss Supertest Takes Second Harmsworth Heat As Shanty Engine Fails.” The latter story, found on the fourth of four sports pages, followed baseball, football and horseracing – it shared the page with local cricket. The UP stringer made it clear the race had been America’s to lose. The article stated that Shanty’s, “engine conked out while the American defender appeared headed for a repeat victory.” The reporter noted that *Miss Supertest II* had taken an early lead, but the American driver, “a record-breaking jet pilot on loan from the Strategic Air Command,” had regained the lead by the first turn. Through the rest of that lap the writer reported that *Shanty I*, “leaving little doubt it was the faster boat, set a Harmsworth lap record of 110.357 miles an hour in its first swing around the twisting five-mile course.”¹³⁰ But that was it for the American defender. As it started into the next turn, the engine died and it was just a matter of driver Bill Braden making sure *Miss Supertest II* completed the required number of circuits. Noting the lack of competition in this heat, *The Toronto Daily Star* went on to describe how “mechanics worked confidently on the record-shattering powerboat” and reminded readers that in the previous encounter the American boat had “whipped the Canadian challenger by nearly three miles.”¹³¹

No doubt feeling vindicated, *The Toronto Daily Star*’s reporter filed his article describing the final heat of the contest. The piece began: “A jet pilot whose hobby is breaking records on water as well as in the air said today he’s willing and able to defend the international Harmsworth trophy any time and any place the next challenger may choose.”¹³² In the

deciding heat, *Shanty I* was again in control and easily beat the challenger. *Miss Supertest II* did not perform well; and one reporter wrote that Canadian driver Bill Braden had, “such a rough ride that he was hospitalized afterwards, suffering from extreme fatigue.”¹³³ It would be Bill Braden’s final ride for the Supertest team – to win the Harmsworth they would need new technology and a new driver.

In the spring of 1957, Canadians found themselves in an election that would bring about discussions of nationalism and technology. During the course of the campaign, the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, John Diefenbaker, changed the tone of Canadian politics. J. L. Granatstein has described the new Tory leader and his effect on the audiences that turned out to his rallies in the following way: “With his fierce eyes and marcelled grey-white hair, the Chief would have been a striking individual in appearance alone, but when he began to speak the effect was electric. The words flowed forth, mixing Biblical rhetoric and parables with down-home humour; the arms waved, the fingers pointed, the gaze mesmerized.” But it was more than just a show. “Dief the Chief” had a message for the nation: “My theme is One Country – One Policy: our policy embraces the whole of Canada.”¹³⁴

As political strategists and advertising executives were learning in the fifties, the key to reaching a mass audience was not so much to try to convey the vision the leader wanted to impart, as it was to be the messenger with the message the audiences wanted to hear. As Daniel Francis puts it, “It turns out that many of our cherished myths were invented by government agencies or private corporations for quite specific, usually self-serving, purposes. Canadians as a whole then embraced them because they seemed to express something that we wanted to believe about ourselves.”¹³⁵ In the fifties, Canadians wanted to believe they were in charge of their own future.

According to historian Donald Smith, Diefenbaker’s philosophy had been influenced by a young economist named Merrill W. Menzies. Menzies had studied Sir John A. Macdonald

and was convinced that Canada's first prime minister had been right when he concentrated the country's policies and money on developing east-west lines of communication and trade. In his view, if the market was allowed to determine development, the east-west ties that bound Canada would be broken and economic integration with the U.S. would follow. Menzies proposed a program of development inspired by Sir John A. Macdonald's transcontinental policy. As Smith writes, the vision, "aimed particularly at growth in the Atlantic provinces, the west, and the north, and infused with passionate conviction was brilliantly attuned to John Diefenbaker's mood and intuition in 1957." In Smith's view, Diefenbaker, "had no talent for coherent economic and social analysis. His political discontents had previously been expressed in sharp but disconnected criticisms of his opponents. Now Menzies – another westerner who viewed the country from outside the Ontario-Quebec heartland – transformed those criticisms, like magic, into a positive vision."¹³⁶ Fortunately for the political aspirations of Mr. Diefenbaker, it was a view of the future that would resonate with many Canadians.

Menzies' vision was first imparted to Diefenbaker in the spring of 1957. Smith quotes from a document entitled, *'Memo for Mr. Diefenbaker: National Policy, April 6 1957:* "From Confederation until the early 1930's there was a powerful unifying force in the nation – what Bruce Hutchison is fond of calling the national myth. This unifying force was the challenge and the development of the West. It engendered a powerful but not xenophobic nationalism and was made possible and given shape and direction by Macdonald's National Policy. Since then we have had no national policy – and we have had no transcending sense of national purpose, no national myth, no unifying force." Menzies concluded by proposing "a new national policy – the NEW FRONTIER POLICY; a new national strategy – that of 'Defence in Depth'; a new national myth – the 'North' in place of 'West' which 'died' a quarter century ago."¹³⁷ His memo did not include any reference to the degree to which this strategy would depend on developing technology.

The document had a profound effect on Diefenbaker and his aspirations of becoming Prime Minister. In his memoir *One Canada*, he recollects, “As I reread Menzies’ proposals, they inspired in me the dream of opening Canada to its polar reaches. I could see a Canada that answered not only the description on the main doorway of the House of Commons, ‘Canada from Sea to Sea,’ but ‘Canada from Sea to Seas.’ Today, these ideas are regarded as the fundamental policy for the development of the north. The name I ascribed to them at the time of the 1957 election was “the New Frontier Policy.”¹³⁸ Whatever the source of its theme, the campaign struck a chord with the voting public. On June 10, 1957 the Canadian voters elected Diefenbaker as the leader of a minority government. J. L. Granatstein summed up the change in government with one word, “Astonishment. That was the only word that could describe the nation’s feeling when Canadians awoke on the morning of June 11, 1957.”¹³⁹ The results - Conservatives 112 seats, Liberals 105, CCF 25, Social Credit 19, and Independent 4, meant Diefenbaker would lead a minority government; he would have to wait a while to really make his mark.

1957 would be a year of waiting for the Thompson team as well. That year *Miss Supertest II* was back on the water, and for that season the Thompsons hired Art Asbury as driver. Asbury was born at Dwight, Ontario on Lake of Bays near Algonquin Park. In 1942 he joined the RCAF and flew 37 operational missions as the skipper of Liberator B-24 bombers.¹⁴⁰ After the war he took up powerboat racing and was a natural choice for the cockpit of *Miss Supertest II*. After winning one race and dropping out of two others, the boat finished the summer with a less-than-stellar performance.

As if to make up for the lacklustre season, the Thompson team decided to make one more attempt at the world water-speed record. And so it was back to the sheltered Long Reach of the Bay of Quinte near Picton for the fourth Canadian attempt at a world record. On November 1, 1957 Art Asbury drove *Miss Supertest II* across the waters of Long Reach at a world record rate of 184.49 mph.¹⁴¹ *The Toronto Daily Star* was quick to make the story a national achievement, with a photo and caption that read: “Could Have Hit 190,’ Says Pilot

After Setting World Record for Canada With Miss Supertest II.”¹⁴² *The Globe and Mail* showed more restraint: its story on the inside sports page acknowledged: “Miss Supertest II Tops Record, Hits 184.499 at Picton.” Using a horse-breeding analogy *The Globe and Mail* staff writer Al Nickleson described *Miss Supertest II* as a “Three year-old Canadian thoroughbred, by Determination out of Adversity.” With no specific reference to the trials and tribulations of the Wilson team, the copy pointed out that the achievement marked a milestone, “as Canada gained a world record by an unlimited class powerboat for the first time.”¹⁴³

By February 1958 Canada was in the midst of another election; this time John Diefenbaker refined the message he had used in 1957. The theme of the north for his 1958 election campaign, he presented, suitably enough, at Winnipeg. The prime minister declared he saw a new Canada, “not oriented east and west, but looking northward, responding to the challenges of that hinterland, its energies focused on the exploration and exploitation of the Arctic.”¹⁴⁴ It was a campaign that continued to play a nationalist theme. In his memoirs, Diefenbaker describes his attitude going into the 1958 campaign: “I saw the opportunity of giving leadership in the building of a great nation in which the population of Canada would more than double by the century’s end. The basis of our future greatness lay in our ability to exploit *in the interests of all Canadians* [Diefenbaker’s emphasis] and not of foreign entrepreneurs, that vast treasure-house that the Almighty had provided us in the Canadian north.”¹⁴⁵ This time Canadians bought the nationalist vision wholeheartedly and the Diefenbaker government was returned with 208 seats – the largest number ever elected by one party up to that time.

In celebrating nationalist sentiment it was often difficult not to appear anti-American. In *One Canada*, Diefenbaker gave his explanation of the issue: “I, for one, considered the Liberal policy of selling our birthright (the ownership and control over our resources) too high a price to pay to maintain our standard of living and our post-Second World War rate of economic growth. It was simple logic that Canada could not maintain its independence if we

continued existing Liberal policies. Recognition of this implied no hostility to the United States. It was a case, as it was for so many of my government's policies, of being pro-Canadian, not anti-American. If we failed to diversify our trade, Canada would cease to belong to Canadians: we would have no destiny to fulfil.”¹⁴⁶

The 1958 powerboat racing season saw a third driver behind the wheel for the Thompson team. His addition would mark the next step in the evolution of Canada's Harmsworth challenge. Robert Douglas Hayward was born October 27, 1927. He grew up near Embro, Ontario just south of Stratford, and no account of his life or career ever fails to mention that he was a chicken farmer. It was not entirely accurate, but the newspapers seemed to think it made good copy. For the record, in Bob's own words: “The press often refers to me as a chicken farmer, and in fact my brother and I still have four acres of farmland at Embro, Ont., a tiny place near London, and we did raise chickens, but mainly we're in the trucking business now.”¹⁴⁷

More to the point, as a young man, Bob Hayward was intrigued by engines and raced dragsters and stockcars on local tracks. In May, 1957 he joined the Thompson team as a mechanic, then took his turn at the helm towards the end of the season. By 1958 Bob Hayward was the fulltime driver of *Miss Supertest II*,¹⁴⁸ and his name would be linked with the team forever. That year the boat entered five races, finishing third and first, before recording DNF in the next three events. By the end of the season Jim Thompson decided that *Miss Supertest II* had reached the limit of its capabilities and that it was time to design and build a new boat.

That same fall, John Diefenbaker looked around at the world and his vision for Canada's place in it. The prime minister embarked on a six-week world tour visiting New York, London, Paris, Brussels, Bonn, Rome, Karachi, New Delhi, Colombo, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Djakarta, Canberra and Wellington. He wrote that the trip was, “an opportunity

to see for myself something of what was happening in a world made ever smaller by technological advances.”¹⁴⁹ A huge supporter of the Commonwealth, Diefenbaker recalls his opportunity to speak in London during this trip: “An evening that will live forever in my memory was that of Tuesday, 4 November 1958 when I spoke in London’s famous Albert Hall. Over five thousand people turned out that evening to the Anglo-Canadian rally sponsored by the Commonwealth and Empire Industries Association.” He spoke, “on the need of the Commonwealth to be more than simply a remnant of Empire but rather a new and vital force in world affairs. I talked about my dreams for the future and my vision of the Commonwealth’s ‘new appointment with opportunity and destiny.’”¹⁵⁰ The very scope of the Prime Minister’s trip and the theme of his speeches convey a sense of Canada’s self-image in those post-war years.

Diefenbaker’s trip coincided with technological and political developments that had an unsettling effect for the whole world. It was an era of international tension; and looking back on it years later, the former prime minister commented on the advances in technology: “It would be well to remember that 1958 was not a year noted for détente. The Cold War was still a harsh reality; nuclear weapons and sophisticated delivery systems had created a psychology of nuclear terror among the peoples of the world, Canadians included.”¹⁵¹ It was technology born of this ‘nuclear terror’ that would occupy Canadian headlines for much of the next few years.

In fact, Diefenbaker’s government had barely had time to settle into the benches when it was forced to deal with one of the most unpopular decisions in the history of Canadian technology. Development of the CF-105 Avro Arrow had begun during the Korean War, years when Ottawa was facing the possibility of Soviet-made, long-range bombers flying over the North Pole with nuclear weapons destined for North America. The government devised a plan according to which the Canadian Air Force would acquire some six hundred of the aircraft that would be built by A. V. Roe of Malton Ontario. Only the airframe was to

be developed in Canada and the engine, weapons and control systems would be purchased elsewhere – primarily in the U.S.

From the beginning the project had problems. Shortly into the development stage, it was discovered that there were no suitable engines available; so the government agreed to fund the engineering of the Iroquois engine by Avro's subsidiary, Orenda Engines Limited, at a cost of \$70 million. Next, the U.S. Navy cancelled work on the Sparrow air-to-air missile which had been intended for the Arrow. By that time, costs had soared to the point that the question of a weapons system was shelved until after the RCAF could take delivery of the prototypes. The latter had been reduced in number from eleven to eight, and the total project would still cost \$216 million. All these developments took place between 1953 and 1957 under the Liberal government of Louis St. Laurent.

When the Diefenbaker government took office, it was faced with the difficult question of whether to continue development of this defence system or cancel it. The spiraling costs of the Arrow program were bad enough, but two new variables had been added to the equation. The Americans had been developing the Bomarc missile system. So, the experts asked, why create expensive manned interceptors when you could use unmanned missiles designed to shoot down long-range bombers? But even more to the point, in 1957 the USSR had launched Sputnik, proving their ability to someday produce intercontinental ballistic missiles. Was the interceptor now redundant? Diefenbaker's vision of the north included a defence of the territory against any invader; he needed a strategy he could afford. By mid-1958 a Department of Defence Production study estimated, "that \$300 million had been spent and that \$871 million more was necessary to complete the project. The total unit cost per aircraft for an order of one hundred or so was therefore about \$12 million, including development costs."¹⁵² The best way to help pay for the aircraft was to sell some of them to other countries, but who would buy? Obviously only NATO members could be considered. France had its own program; Britain did too, but it was bankrupt; and the U.S. was not

interested in defensive weapons; its strategy relied on deterrence through offensive weapons like its own long-range bombers at Strategic Air Command (SAC).

Donald C. Story and Russell Isinger argue that Canada's program to build an interceptor was doomed from the outset. Never mind the quality of the technology or the importance to the development of Canada's aircraft industry; the Arrow was a defensive weapon and Canada's major military ally was an offensively-minded power. They argue that Canadian military thinkers ignored the fact that, "senior U.S. military officials were agreed the continent's security would be best guaranteed by the threat posed to the Soviet Union of the unleashing of the war-making powers of the nuclear-armed bombers of SAC." In other words, they conclude, "costly fighters capable of shooting down incoming Soviet bombers were not a leading priority."¹⁵³ Canada's best example of leading-edge technology had no role to play.

With cost over-runs and no market to help defray costs, there seemed little choice. On August 8, 1958 the Chiefs of Staff Committee told the Cabinet Defence Committee that the Arrow should be scrapped. And the bad news did not end there. On August 21 the committee learned that cancelling the project would probably cost \$170 million in cancellation charges and affect 25,000 jobs. Diefenbaker announced the cancellation of the Arrow on February 20, 1959. His government was denounced, "for selling Canada and Canadian technology short and for causing the ruination of the aircraft industry. It was assailed in Toronto for creating massive unemployment and for putting all of Canada's defence eggs in the US basket."¹⁵⁴ The cancellation was a blow to national pride.

Crawford Gordon, President of A.V. Roe, was a notorious self-promoter who, according to historian Denis Smith, "predicted a loss of national independence. 'Complete reliance on other countries even the crucial weapons with which to defend ourselves would be a long step backward from the position of independence which this country has been labouriously

building over the years. Our right to an independent and authoritative voice in world affairs would, in my opinion, be greatly diminished.”¹⁵⁵

While Gordon was not without bias, Oakley Dalgliesh of *The Globe and Mail*, and a friend of the prime minister was also critical of the decision. His editorial appeared on the front page the following day and concluded, “Here is the irony of it. Most Canadians will recall that in the early days of the postwar years we were not permitted to share defence production with the United States; the reason the United States gave being that we lacked the necessary ‘know-how.’ So, at great trouble and cost, we acquired the ‘know-how.’ Still, there was no sharing. And now, what? Now, the brilliant array of engineering and technical talent which built up this great Canadian industry will be dissipated. Now, these highly-trained men and women – the one national asset – will probably go. Where? To the United States.”¹⁵⁶ As Denis Smith writes, “The outcome was discouraging. Avro Canada never recovered, and thousands of scientific and technical staff moved south to the United States. Canadian pride in the country’s achievements and potential was undermined.” Moreover the ruling party had lost faith in its leader. Smith reports Leslie Frost’s conclusion that this action, “was the beginning of the decline of the Diefenbaker government. The method adopted completely lost the confidence of business and industry. In a space of some ten months, the overwhelming vote of confidence of March 1958 was completely lost.”¹⁵⁷ By the spring of 1959 Canada’s technological self-esteem was at a low point.

As the workers at A.V. Roe were putting down their tools, the Thompson racing team was getting ready to test a new race boat based on a Canadian-made design. For 1959 the Thompsons truly did adhere to the Harmsworth rules in constructing their new hull. *Miss Supertest III* was designed by Jim Thompson, and it was built in an old chicken shed on the Thompson farm north of London – a site that is now part of Sunningdale Golf Club. At 30 feet, 8 inches long and 6,500 pounds, *Miss Supertest III* was 1000 pounds lighter than its predecessor.¹⁵⁸ As with the previous Supertest boats, power was supplied by the 2000 hp

Rolls Royce Griffon engine. The propellers were primarily home-made as well. As Jim Thompson recalls, the team, “had them roughly cut, and they were all finished by hand, we would finish them... and the one who did most of it was Bob Hayward himself, he was very good at it. You start with a solid block of steel, with a machine you roughly carve out the shape of the propeller, and then finish it down to the fine part.”¹⁵⁹

Like the boat before it, *Miss Supertest III* was a 3-point hydroplane. As driver Bob Hayward described it, the boat rode, “on the water like an inverted saucer with the ends chipped out.” One of the basic concepts behind the three-point design was the strategy of making the hull rise up out of the water onto the sponsons, so that the boat actually rode on a cushion of air. As Hayward wrote, “At 160, the only parts of Miss Supertest that touch the surface are half the propeller, fourteen inches of rudder and two areas of the forward sponsons (remaining lips of the saucer) about the size of my hands.”¹⁶⁰ The three-point design had been around since the 1930s, but as Sir Alfred Harmsworth had predicted, all the technology involved in speedboat racing required fine tuning.

While Jim Thompson had confidence in his new creation, the only true test of its abilities would be in competition on the water. As a tune-up race for their Harmsworth challenge, the Thompsons entered their new boat in the 1959 Detroit Memorial on July 4. The race consisted of 3 heats of 5 laps around a 3-mile course on the Detroit River. Ten boats started the event, but only 6 made it to the final. Hayward and *Miss Supertest III* won their first heat, came second in the second, and won the third heat to gain an overall win on points. Hayward’s overall average speed was calculated at 78.488 mph.¹⁶¹ Although the maiden race was a success, it was not without its dramatic moments. At one point the boat “hit a swell and jumped six feet in the air. It bounced twice before settling in. ‘It shook me up all right,’ Hayward recalls. ‘But it didn’t scare me enough not to race.’”¹⁶² In fact, the results would encourage the team to enter into the next phase of their challenge.

The success at the Detroit Memorial lifted team spirits and sparked interest from the media and general public. The industry magazine *Yachting* observed, “the US defense of the Harmsworth Trophy starting Aug. 25 on the Detroit River, was given added zest when the Canadian challenger, J. Gordon Thompson’s Miss Supertest won the Detroit Memorial Race, July 4.”¹⁶³ In setting the tone for his readers, *The Toronto Daily Star* sports columnist Jim Hunt reminded them: “The story of this most famous of all trophies for speedboats is one of failure and heartbreak. Since Gar Wood won it for the U.S. in 1920, 11 challengers have tried and failed – their hearts and hulls broken by harsh waters and cruel fate.”¹⁶⁴ It would be up to the Thompson team to prove it could become master of its own fate.

The headline in newspapers that weekend was a reminder of the chaos caused by the cancellation of the Avro Arrow. Under the banner, “US JET ‘PILOT KILLER’ HELLYER TELLS HOUSE,” a story out of Ottawa reported Liberal defence critic Paul Hellyer’s opinion of the aircraft chosen for the RCAF. After the article reminded its readers that Hellyer was, “an aeronautical engineer before he went into business in Toronto,” it claimed, “The airframe was unstable and the J-79 General Electric engine unreliable.”¹⁶⁵ A follow-up article went on to disclose that the aircraft chosen had not even been taken for a test flight. *The Toronto Daily Star*’s staff writer Mark Harrison reported, “Canada is to spend more than \$250,000,000 on a new U.S. plane that has never been flown... The Lockheed F-104G – to be used by eight RCAF squadrons in Europe – is still in the development stage and hasn’t been tested in the air.” The article recounted that Defence Minister General George R. Pearkes stated, “a thorough examination had been made of some 30 planes for possible use in the air division... contending the F-104G was the best available aircraft in the world for the role it was to fill in RCAF service.” Harrison also went on to point out the General, “declined to say, despite pressure from Mr. Hellyer, whether the plane had been recommended by the RCAF.”¹⁶⁶ The reporter did not need to remind Canadians that whatever the choice, the new fighter would be of foreign design.

The constant talk about ICBM's, long-range bombers and interceptors had its effect on the civilian population. The editorial in *The Toronto Daily Star* on Wednesday, July 8 1959 illustrates the mindset of the time: "Amid defence debates over Bomarc's and Lockheed-104G's, one oversight is galling: Few defence experts pay much attention to what would happen to the 18 million Canadians on the ground if hydrogen bombs start falling." The solution, the editorial writer concluded, was fallout shelters. The item went on to cite a study by the Rand Corporation, which it described as, "a science-intelligence agency of the U.S. government," and asserted the report, "reversed some atomic age ideas by claiming that national survival is possible in a thermonuclear war." The writer described Canada's civil defence strategy as a plan based on the evacuation of cities. He pointed out the flaw in this idea because the "real horror of evacuation is that, without any fallout shelters to go to, it would mean leading millions of civilians to their deaths in the countryside from exposure to the radioactive clouds which would engulf North America." The piece concluded with a call to action from Ottawa, declaring the federal government, "should be surveying the need for fallout shelters in every area of Canada; they should be in private homes, public buildings, sewers, subways, and mines. Income tax concessions could be granted homeowners or landlords who build approved models." By 1959, it would appear, the mindset in the media at least was that if nuclear war could not be stopped, it could at least be endured.

The same editorial had room for a brief word about the other technological preoccupation of the age – the space race and who was winning it. The writer noted that Russia had recently launched a space vehicle and that by carrying, "two dogs and a rabbit into space in a 4,400-pound capsule and then bringing them back alive has underlined her determination to maintain her lead in the space race." The item declared this modest achievement was just another step putting Russian scientists, "further along the road toward their declared aim – to put man himself into space."¹⁶⁷ If Sir Alfred had still been alive, no doubt he would have offered a trophy.

Against this backdrop, the Thompson racing team was attempting to make its own headlines in technology. The 1959 defender of the Harmsworth for the United States was once again a boat bankrolled by Texas oil millionaire W. T. Waggoner. *Maverick II* was also a new boat. It was 30 feet 4 inches long, 12 and 1/2 feet wide, weighed 5, 870 pounds and was powered by an Allison aircraft engine.¹⁶⁸ The Allison was the only American-built, liquid-cooled engine to see active service in World War II. Designed by General Motors Corporation and originally created to power dirigibles, it was modified in 1935 for use in aircraft. The Allison had a reputation as a sturdy and reliable engine, but its poor performance at high altitude limited its combat usefulness. The famous American-built fighter, the P-51 Mustang, began the war with Allison engines, but soon switched to the Rolls-Royce Merlins, which were produced under license by the Packard Motor Car Company of Detroit. *Miss Supertest III* and *Maverick II* had met the month before in the Detroit Memorial, also held on the Detroit River, but a significant difference in the two races was the length of the contest. The Memorial was three heats of 15 miles each, with points awarded for placement - total points determined the winner. The Harmsworth, conceived from the beginning as a test for engineering and design, was decided by the best two out of three heats, with each heat a distance of 45 miles. To win took both speed and endurance.

The first heat for the challenge was held Tuesday, August 25, 1959 and it went practically unannounced. The front page of *The Toronto Daily Star* described the Communist threat to Laos as did *The Globe and Mail* which detailed the threat to the capital of Laos and the increasing sense of destabilization due to Communist threat. The lead story in *The Globe and Mail's* sports pages announced that top lawn bowlers from six provinces were competing for the Canadian championship at the Boulevard Club.¹⁶⁹ Page three of *The Globe and Mail's* four-page sports section featured 'Graded Handicaps' picked by the paper's expert at the Fort Erie racetrack. Beneath these predictions was a small article announcing the, "Harmsworth Bid By Miss Supertest." The writer reminded those interested that the last challenge, "was in 1956 when Bill Waggoner Jr.'s Shanty defeated Miss Supertest II, also owned by Thompson." The article pointed out the U.S. boat *Maverick*, "has had better times

in races and trials this season.”¹⁷⁰ The media made no commitment to a prediction on the boat race.

Given Canada’s record in these events and the cycle of hope, hype and frustration carried previously in the pages of the press, it is small wonder that *The Toronto Daily Star* the following day carried the story inside the fourth section. Even though the Thompson team won, the headline laid cautious claim to the team’s success: “*Walkaway for Miss Supertest - Canuck Strategy Spells Victory.*” Staff writer Jim Hunt, went on to timidly wave a patriotic flag: “Canada won the battle of strategy here yesterday and with it the first heat of the historic Harmsworth trophy race.” The story then related how *Miss Supertest III*, perhaps not as fast as the American defender, played a waiting game of keeping close to her opponent counting on a breakdown to provide an advantage. “It came in the form of a blown supercharger as the boats neared the end of the 11th lap.” As Hunt’s account described it, *Maverick II* took the lead from the start; but brilliant driving by Bob Hayward brought the challenger close enough that by the 30-mile mark he had closed the gap by half. “This forced Bill Stead, the millionaire driver of *Maverick*, to turn on the heat and the blown supercharger resulted. This was precisely according to Canadian plan which counted on their boat being more durable.”¹⁷¹

The version in Bob Hayward’s hometown paper was even more subdued. The *Stratford Beacon Herald* did not even associate the race with their local lad. On the inside sports page, the paper carried a story filed by the Associated Press under the title “*London Speedboat’s Stamina Factor In Winning First Of Harmsworth Races.*” The coverage gave as much ink to a famous fan as it did to the race noting, “Guy Lombardo, orchestra leader and former unlimited powerboat driver from London Ontario carried a broad smile Tuesday as he watched *Miss Supertest* roar to victory in the first heat of the Harmsworth trophy race on the Detroit River. Guy, who retired from active racing a few years ago but is still interested in

the sport, congratulated Bob Hayward Miss Supertest's driver and said he was glad to see Supertest win because he was a Canadian too."¹⁷²

More nationalistic accolades were to be found in other newspapers. On the front page of *The Globe and Mail*, alongside continuing worries about Laos and an impending food shortage in China, the paper proclaimed, "Canadian Boat Captures Heat in Harmsworth." The article that followed tempered the tone of the celebration by declaring the Canadian craft, "covered herself more with spray than glory today in winning the opening heat of power boat racing's classic," and once again reminded readers, "Canada has never won the Harmsworth Trophy."¹⁷³ In the *Vancouver Sun* a story below the fold on the sports page was even more optimistic. Under the heading "Canada Close to Winning Prized Cup," the story began: "Canada was as close today to snatching the Harmsworth Trophy from the United States as any nation has been since Gar Wood brought it to these shores 39 years ago."¹⁷⁴ Once again, the Harmsworth competition was national news.

The fickle nature of the press was made apparent on Thursday, August 27. In the write-up of the second heat, *The Toronto Daily Star* began to establish some distance between itself and the Thompsons: "*Gamble That Failed May Cost Canada Cup – Hayward Beaten in Bid to Steal Race.*" While the previous day's story claimed, "Canada won the battle of strategy," the account of defeat in the second heat stated, "A gamble that backfired may have cost Canada the best chance she will ever get to win the Harmsworth trophy," and there was no doubt who was responsible for the loss: "It was in the first lap yesterday that cocky Bob Hayward made his move to steal the race away from Maverick, the faster US defender. Roaring for the starting line only half a boat length back of Maverick, Hayward had opened up a 200-yard lead as the speeding hydroplanes went into the first turn. But he skidded in rough water and for a few terrorizing moments lost control of his careening boat."¹⁷⁵

According to Jim Hunt, Hayward lost nine seconds and the lead, which in turn spelled defeat for the challengers. In a follow-up article Hunt claimed, "Bob Hayward had the scare of his

life when Miss Supertest skidded going into the first turn” quoting the driver ‘I wasn’t driving the boat, it was driving me.’” The article went on to state that designer Jim Thompson had been playing down the loss, claiming the margin of defeat was nothing to worry about and pointing out, “Nineteen seconds isn’t much in 45 miles.”¹⁷⁶ In *The Globe and Mail* the story slipped from the front page back to page 29. The blow-by-blow description of the race took a tone similar to Jim Thompson’s in that it stressed, “Maverick gunned into an average speed of 102.088 miles per hour. The Canadian challenger averaged 101.746. It was that close.” Like the other major paper, *The Globe and Mail* writer pointed out that if *Miss Supertest III* was unable to win the final heat then, “Canada will have failed again in four attempts to wrest the international trophy from across the border.”¹⁷⁷

Bob Hayward’s hometown paper fell in line with the major dailies. The *Stratford Beacon Herald* took note of the loss and showed no surprise with a headline that read, “Maverick Squares Harmsworth Race Series With London Speedboat.” The AP reporter began the piece by conceding defeat, “The experts favoured Maverick to turn back Canada’s challenge today in the third and final race for the Harmsworth trophy.”¹⁷⁸ Not for the first time, the experts would prove wrong.

Reports of the final outcome proved nothing succeeds like success. *The Toronto Daily Star’s* front page headline for Friday, August 28, 1959 was unequivocal: “*World Boating Crown Comes to Canada.*”¹⁷⁹ The stories on page 24 were headed: “Driver Bob Hayward Tells How He Won Harmsworth for Canada”¹⁸⁰ and “Daring Gamble Won It.”¹⁸¹ In the former article, the Canadian driver described how he approached the third heat: “Before I got in the boat yesterday I decided I had to get a perfect start if we were to win the Harmsworth. I knew Bill Stead the driver of Maverick, preferred the inside lane. So I decided to go for the outside, and disregard Stead entirely.”¹⁸² In the latter article, Jim Hunt described the victory as, “a race Canada won with a daring gamble,” then went on to give Bob Hayward credit for the strategy: “Hayward realized after the second heat, which he lost to Maverick, that his

boat needed more speed. Last night he decided on the way to get it and talked owner Thompson into letting him try.”¹⁸³ Hayward’s strategy was to remove the carburetor shield to let more air into the Rolls Royce power plant. The ‘gamble’ was that if *Maverick* got the lead, the spray from her rooster tail could knock *Miss Supertest III* out of the race. The obvious ploy then was to get the lead off the top and keep away from *Maverick*; as it turned out, that was the winning approach.

The Globe and Mail also ran the story on the front page: “Canadian Boat Roars to World Speed Crown,” was the headline. Featuring a refrain common to coverage of the story, the item began, “Born in a poultry coop and driven by a chicken farmer, Canada’s gallant Miss Supertest roared and whistled to the world’s premier powerboat racing award today.” After describing the events of the race, the article outlined the effect of the win on the three principals involved. The writer noted the win, “was a magnificent triumph for a self-effacing country boy who had been driving unlimited class power boats for only two full years,” and that the triumph was, “a glittering victory for Jim Thompson who designed the water baby and helped to build her in a large chicken house.” And without specifically mentioning the Wilsons, the writer pointed out that after all the years of trying, owner J. Gordon Thompson achieved what others had failed to do. He claimed Thompson was motivated to capture the Harmsworth Trophy for Canada because as the Colonel said, ‘it is a British donated trophy and should be in the British Empire.’”¹⁸⁴

The *Vancouver Sun* had a prominent photo this time above the fold on the sports page with the caption “Canadian Craft Captures Challenge Cup,” and the follow up AP story was headed “A Queen: Supertest Top Boat in World.”¹⁸⁵ Under their own headlines, both the *Calgary Herald* and the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* ran the same copy.

A final article by Jim Hunt summed up the media’s view of the event: “After Wednesday’s second heat, there began to be doubts about Canada’s chances of winning the Harmsworth Trophy.” The wags at the waterside determined that driver Bob Hayward, “a neophyte as

hydroplane pilots go, was out-smarted by his more experienced rival. The Canadian driver hit a corner too fast at the first turn and, while his boat spun widely, [American driver Bill] Stead cut past on the inside to take a lead he never lost.” By the end of Thursday’s heat these so-called experts were singing a new tune. “Gar Wood, the old master who made this classic famous, termed it one of the great drives in the history of the race.” And Hunt acknowledged Hayward’s feat, writing the driver, “turned the first lap at an average speed of 107.495. Then he really opened up with a breathtaking 109.334 in the second – the fastest in Harmsworth history.”¹⁸⁶ Still, even as they celebrated this achievement the members of the press felt compelled to refer to Hayward’s pedigree: Jim Hunt and *The Toronto Daily Star* sports columnist Milt Dunnell III referred to Jim as, “a chicken farmer who came of age as a driver”¹⁸⁷ and the “fastest chicken farmer in Oxford county.”¹⁸⁸

On Friday, August 28 the *Stratford Beacon Herald* recognized its local hero: “EMBRO MAN WINS HARMSWORTH TROPHY” read the headline, with the sub-head, “Chicken Farmer Sets Record in Famed Speedboat Race In Gar Wood Tradition.” The story gave the Canadian driver full credit by comparing him to the greatest name in Harmsworth history, “A Canadian who ‘gambled all the way’ in the tradition of Gar Wood has wrestled the Harmsworth Trophy away from the United States.”¹⁸⁹

With news of the success, all Canada found ways to identify with the champions. The *Woodstock-Ingersoll Sentinel Review* ran a letter of congratulations Bob received from the prime minister:

*“Dear Mr. Hayward, You have performed a remarkable feat in winning the Harmsworth Trophy for Canada and I wish to join my fellow Canadians in extending my warm congratulations. Both you and Mr. Thompson have brought renown to your country in the field of speedboat racing. And all sports loving people will wish you continued success. With all good wishes I am yours sincerely, John Diefenbaker.”*¹⁹⁰ The Thompsons and their triumphant technology were national news.

With the Harmsworth Trophy in tow, it was time for the Thompson team to meet its fans. After the week in Detroit, *Miss Supertest III* travelled to London for a civic reception, and parade. Then, it was off to Toronto for display in front of the Sports Hall of Fame at the Canadian National Exhibition. In the third week of September Bob and *Miss Supertest III* were special guests at the Embro fall fair and a civic holiday was declared in their honour.¹⁹¹

More substantial tributes were afforded the team later in the year. Bob Hayward finished second to Ottawa quarterback Russ Jackson in voting for Canadian Athlete of the Year, and Jim Thompson, Bob Hayward and *Miss Supertest III* were all inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame.¹⁹² One report of the induction gives an indication of the values of the time, "The Selection Committee of the Sports Hall of Fame, made up of one representative from each province in the Dominion, did not hesitate in reaching a decision that Miss Supertest III was truly a world champion and thus qualified for admission to the Hall. They also decided that her driver, Bob Hayward of Embro, Ontario was deserving of being included in the award, as was her owner and designer Jim Thompson of London."¹⁹³ Apparently there was no question that the technical apparatus was to be honoured by the committee; but that the men who designed, built and made it work were recognized as an after-thought. As Charlotte Gray observes, "Heroes touch people's hearts not by appearance or achievement alone, but by less tangible qualities – their strength of personality, perhaps, or the way they capture in themselves the qualities that a nation believes it represents."¹⁹⁴ It would seem the selection committee at least identified with technological achievement.

Their technological pride stung by an upstart challenger, the Americans were quick to issue a challenge. As defending champions, it was up to the Thompson team and the Canadian Boating Association to select a location and layout for the race course. For a venue the defenders chose the sheltered waters of the Long Reach of the Bay of Quinte. The Reach had been the scene of the world-speed record attempts by the Wilsons and their *Miss Canada* boats, and it was there that Art Asbury driving *Miss Supertest II* had set a world-speed record in 1957. The locale was also home to the Prince Edward Yacht Club, which played host to

the Harmsworth event, and the course was laid out by its members. Unlike the triangular course on the Detroit River, the Canadian race would be run in an oval of, “five statute miles, with 2 ¼ -mile straightaways and 1400-foot turns.”¹⁹⁵ Nine laps would constitute a heat of 45 statute miles – a true test of technology.

In the 1960s nowhere was the drive for technological advancement more evident than in the Cold War. In January 1960, *The Toronto Daily Star* reported that Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev claimed Russia, “had built up the greatest nuclear-rocket striking force in the world and that a ‘fantastic’ and more formidable weapon was in the works.” The Soviet Premier went on to assert that, “Russia was ‘several years’ ahead of the U.S. in rocketry and would strive to maintain the lead.”¹⁹⁶ Despite the unease caused by Khrushchev’s announcements, a few days later the paper ran a headline, “Clock of Doom Set Back.” The story revealed that *The Bulletin* - a publication of atomic scientists - had been publishing a “clock of doom” on the cover of every issue since June, 1947. When first published, the clock was set at eight minutes to midnight, “to remind mankind of the dangers present since the first atomic bombs were dropped on Japan.” The article described how the clock had been advanced twice, “once when the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb in 1949 and again when the Russians tested their first H-bomb in 1953.”¹⁹⁷ For several years the world had lived two minutes from doom when, in January 1960, based on some positive signs in international relations, the editors of *The Bulletin* felt they could move the hands of doom back to seven minutes to midnight.

In Canada, despite cancelling the Arrow, the federal government made technology a priority – its approach was increased investment in education. Former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker wrote: “The federal government, for the first time, shared in the costs of providing technical or vocational training in science or technology. Not only did we share the cost of teachers, instructors, supervisors or administrators to carry out the training program but, most important, to meet the for additional training facilities across Canada we agreed to provide contributions of up to seventy-five per cent of the cost of new facilities and

equipment. These included technical and vocational schools, technical institutes and trade schools. In consequence, some four hundred schools were either, built, enlarged, restored or rehabilitated and hundreds of thousands of Canadians, youths and adults, received technical training that would otherwise not have been available.”¹⁹⁸ The efforts of the federal government helped ensure that the notion of better living through science and technology remained prominent in the public consciousness. And the newspapers ran frequent stories about new advances in science and technology.

As the Thompson’s began preparation for Canada’s first defence of the Harmsworth Trophy, the members of the media now seemed comfortable at the side of the winning group. A week before the 1960 race *The Star’s* Jim Hunt described the Thompson team’s approach to the challenge. He wrote, “The crowd was still cheering and the champagne had barely begun to flow on that hot afternoon last summer Canada won the Harmsworth trophy when the mechanics of Miss Supertest III began to tear down the powerful but temperamental engines that power their craft at speeds up to 190 miles per hour.” The reporter stressed the thousands of hours of testing and maintenance that the team had put into improving the dependability and stamina of the boat. He predicted that the team would have to change its tactics from the previous year as, “A year ago Maverick [the American defender] was the fastest craft on the water but had never travelled the 45-mile route of the Harmsworth. The Canadian camp, and they were proven right, gambled they could push Maverick and force her out of the race.” Hunt opined that, with three boats, the Americans would try to reverse the strategy: one boat would sacrifice itself at top speed hoping that Hayward would try to keep up. This approach would be sure to cause the two front runners to experience mechanical problems and, “would leave the way clear for the other two Yanks to win in a parade.” But with a confident note the writer asserted the Canadian boat, “proved last year she has all the speed necessary to beat any boat the U.S. can put on the water.”¹⁹⁹

When the Americans arrived in Picton, they did so with a display of their technological prowess. For the three-day event scheduled August 19, 20 and 22, 1960, the three U.S.

contenders were *Nitrogen* and *Nitrogen Too*, both owned by Samuel W. Dupont of Wilmington Delaware, and *Gale V*, owned by Joseph A. Schoenith of Detroit. All three boats had been designed and built by Les Staudacher (designer/builder of *Miss Supertest II*) and were powered by 1710 cubic-inch Allison aircraft engines.²⁰⁰ A reporter for the local newspaper compared the teams and their technical support in terms of the most advanced technology of the day: “Nitrogen drivers look like candidates for a space ship. They dress in robin’s egg blue coveralls which are fireproof and wear orange helmets. By comparison, Hayward wears a white shirt and fatigue type trousers for his test run. The Dupont entry comes complete with a travelling workshop on wheels. It’s a tremendous sized trailer, pulled by a truck, and containing spare parts such as engine etc.”²⁰¹ As always, despite the importance of technical support, the race would be won on the water.

There was nothing shy about the Canadian press position leading up to the 1960 Harmsworth defence. On Thursday, August 18, 1960 the front page of *The Toronto Daily Star*’s feature section pictured a smiling Bob Hayward waving from the cockpit of *Miss Supertest III* and a long shot of the speedboat racing over the Long Reach. Under the second photo a caption in bold capitals bragged: “TRAILING A TOWERING ROOSTER TAIL, CANADA’S HARMSWORTH HOPE, MISS SUPERTEST, FLASHES PAST AT 125 MPH.” Another photo of *Miss Supertest III* laid the national claim to the trophy: “BOB HAYWARD WON THE HARMSWORTH TROPHY FOR CANADA LAST YEAR IN THIS CRAFT.” The article went on to explain, “according to Harmsworth rules it is country versus country. That is, if different U.S. boats win the heats Friday and Saturday, then the trophy will return to the Yachting association of America. *Miss Supertest* on the other hand must win two heats to retain the trophy she won for Canada for the first time last year.”²⁰² The writers seemed to relish the notion of underdog, confident the Canadian craft would prevail.

The other major story on the front pages in August 1960 was a tale of Cold War technology and political embarrassment. Francis Gary Powers was on trial for espionage. The 31 year-old pilot had been shot down over Russia in his U-2 spy plane on May 1, just days before a

planned superpower summit in Paris. The American U2's had been flying spy missions over Russia since 1956, but the Soviets, much to their chagrin, had been unable to do anything about it. Nikita Khrushchev's son, Sergei, remembers the time as, "years of deep freeze in the Cold War, politicians and ordinary people on both sides were gripped by the same fear: that the opposing side, whether Moscow or Washington, would seize the opportunity to deal the first, and possibly last, nuclear strike." The Soviet leader was embarrassed that he could do nothing to protest because he refused to give the Americans, "the satisfaction of hearing him beg them not to peer into his bedroom." Needless to say, shooting the spy plane out of the sky gave the Soviets cause for celebration; but coming as it did before the Paris meeting it, "caused much harm and spoiled a great deal. Most important, it cast doubt on any hope for early and effective negotiations over disarmament and gravely undermined Russia's incipient trust in America as a partner." Khrushchev, "forgave neither Eisenhower the President nor Eisenhower the man for the U2 incident. He had learned the words 'my friend' at Camp David, and that was how he had addressed Eisenhower. Now father bitterly told an aide, 'I don't need such a friend.'"²⁰³ As it turned out Francis Gary Powers was the last to fly a U2 over the Soviet Union. The aircraft technology lost out to the space race, and by August 1960 the CIA had satellites to do its spying. The U2 pilot was tried in Moscow and sentenced to three years in prison with another seven years in a corrective labour colony.²⁰⁴ Very few Americans were even aware of the U2's existence before the story broke. The fact that the 'enemy' could shoot down this top-secret weapon shook America's confidence in its technology and its leadership.

At the same time, Canadians were celebrating their technological champion. It is not every day that a national legend comes to visit and the town of Picton (pop. 5000) rose to the challenge of hosting an international sporting event. Local businesses decorated their windows, and the Shriners sponsored gala dances at the Armouries on Friday and Saturday. The mid-way at the fairgrounds was opened with free admission, and the Peterborough Salvation Army Band presented concerts in the park.²⁰⁵ Spectators came from miles around, including special trains that left from Toronto's Union Station.²⁰⁶ In fact, the event was such

a draw (attendance was later estimated at 40,000²⁰⁷) that local residents rented out spare bedrooms to strangers. *The Toronto Daily Star* reported a former hospital, “has been converted to a 500-bed hostel by a group of enthusiastic Shriners.”²⁰⁸ There was no doubt that the people of Prince Edward County recognized the importance of the occasion.

National events and their attendant press coverage are natural habitat for politicians, but Bob Hayward seemed unaffected by the attention. After the opening ceremonies at 3:15pm on Saturday, flamboyant Mayor Harvey McFarland hosted (and paid for) an extravagant reception for 1000 guests, “which was held under a giant marquee at his mansion ‘Loch Sley’ overlooking Picton Harbour.”²⁰⁹ In addition to the race participants, the guest list included Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, Premier Leslie Frost, Toronto Mayor Nathan Phillips, the Mayor of Ottawa, and 30 other mayors from local communities in Ontario and New York State. Speedboat builder/racer and Harmsworth legend, Gar Wood, was a special guest of honour.²¹⁰ Scott Young, the columnist for *The Globe and Mail*, commented on Bob Hayward’s reaction to the crowd and its attention to him: “A hand came out of the crowd and touched his elbow and he turned. ‘Why, hello Willard,’ he said, folksily, like a man at a barn dance.”²¹¹ Not everyone feels the need to preen in the limelight.

In the Harmsworth race technology was the underlying base for success, but the skill of the driver did play a role. The competition began with a “moving start” in which the boats were already in motion, if not up to speed. The drivers had to time their approach to the start line so as not to get left behind (if a little late) or penalized for “jumping the gun” and starting early. The 1960 souvenir programme explained the procedure: a preparatory gun was fired five minutes before the official start, and a red flag was raised. One minute before the start the “alert gun” was fired – the red flag was lowered and a white flag was raised. Next the starting clock was set in motion, the white flag was dropped and the starting gun was fired.²¹² In the first heat, *Nitrogen* crossed the start line first, but there was little daylight between the four racers. After that, the course design favoured *Miss Supertest III*. As one observer wrote of the race: “Nitrogen crossed the line first, but not much distance separated any of

them. The 7000-foot run to the first turn and the 2 1/4 – mile ride up the backstretch gave Supertest what she needed to get her roostertail high. She turned the first lap at 124.82 mph and the second at 122.03 mph, the fastest lap speeds ever made in motorboat racing. By that time her lead was so well established that on the eighth lap Hayward throttled down to as low as 108.82 mph, but took Supertest back up to 114.36 mph on the ninth and final lap, a gesture of confidence in his craft.”²¹³

Based on three different accounts of the race it seems the writers who attended the event and filed their stories at the time had discrepancies in their notes. The previous article describes *Nitrogen* in the lead at the start, but *Yachting* magazine writer Mel Crook saw it differently: “Aug. 19: Cloudy, glassy calm – The fleet bunched and took a full mile run to the starting line at more than 100 m.p.h. As the mechanical starting clock faltered near the end of its 60-sec. circuit, the quartet of big hydros slowed, then flashed over the line with only 75 yds. separating from first to last boat. Gale V led the pack, less than one second after ‘clock zero,’ followed by Nitrogen Too, Miss Supertest III and Nitrogen.”²¹⁴ On the other hand, according to the narrator of a promotional film made at the time by the Supertest Oil Company, the race started this way: “They’re off! In the straightaway Miss Supertest and Gale are running neck and neck’. Nitrogen Too in third.”²¹⁵ In the end it was only the competitor who finished first that mattered, and all accounts agreed it was *Miss Supertest III*.

By that summer of 1960 the technology gap between east and west was getting wider. The headline of *The Toronto Daily Star* for Saturday, August 20 proclaimed, “SOVIET SPACEMAN ALOFT ‘IN WEEKS,’ EXPERTS HINT.” The story filed from a conference of scientists in Stockholm stated that, on the day previous, the Soviets had launched the second in a series of unmanned space capsules containing a man-sized dummy and all the equipment required to sustain life in space. The article quoted one of the Russian scientists as claiming the launch was, “just another routine experiment.”²¹⁶

Above that headline of Soviet space prowess were two pictures of *Miss Supertest III*. The first showed the beginning of the first heat at Long Reach with the Canadian boat behind two opponents, the second showed *Miss Supertest III* finishing ‘all alone.’ Squeezing the ‘Spaceman’ headline to the right two-thirds of the page was a photo of Bob Hayward, hands raised in triumph, with the caption “Victorious Miss Supertest III Driver Bob Hayward” and the quote ‘Nitrogen Didn’t Really Come Close and It Didn’t Scare Me’”²¹⁷ Inside that Saturday edition of *The Toronto Daily Star* was a photo captioned, “ONLY TIME MISS SUPERTEST III WAS BEHIND IN FIRST HEAT OF HARMSWORTH RACE, Gale V, Piloted by Bill Cantrell, Leaps to Lead as Race Gets Under Way. Nitrogen is Second, Miss Supertest Third.” The page bore the legend, “Watching Canada Go One Up for Harmsworth Trophy.”²¹⁸ The statistics for Heat 1 credited *Miss Supertest III* with an average speed of 116.454 mph and *Gale V* with a mark of 115.516 – both of which surpassed the previous Harmsworth record.²¹⁹

In the *Stratford Beacon Herald*, the victory was trumpeted with the folksy headline, “*Miss Supertest Wins By Country Mile*,” and the story identified the national pride in the event: “Canada today is only half an hour away from retaining the Harmsworth Trophy and the world championship in the dangerous and expensive sport of racing the largest power boats on earth.” The article went on to declare, “An Embro chicken farmer Friday hurled Canada’s entry - Miss Supertest – around the 45 mile Harmsworth course and through just about every existing speedboat record.”²²⁰

But for years the story of the Harmsworth had proved speed records could be ignored because durability would win the trophy. Heat two was set for Saturday, August 20. After twenty hours of rain, the start was delayed one hour to allow the contestants time for test runs. By the time the starting gun fired, only two of the American contenders were up and running. *Gale V*, the most competitive of the challengers in the first heat, simply would not start and was out of the running.

As anticipated, the other two American boats, *Nitrogen* and *Nitrogen Too*, tried a little ploy to take *Miss Supertest III* off her game. Wrote one reporter, “Nitrogen and Nitrogen Too squeeze Supertest at the start line – Hayward has to drop back and go wide to avoid being drowned by the contenders’ combined rooster tails.”²²¹ *Miss Supertest* crossed the start line a hundred yards behind the Americans and followed them into the first turn. Hayward was able to pass *Nitrogen* on the first backstretch, but lost his position going into the second turn. Coming up the homestretch *Miss Supertest III* once again passed *Nitrogen*, this time for good; Hayward and his boat then trailed *Nitrogen Too* by 200 yards. As writer Mel Crook saw it, “Hayward tried to pass Nitrogen Too on the outside going down the second backstretch and finally slipped into the number one spot as they entered the second turn of that lap.”²²² *Miss Supertest*’s speed for that second circuit was a new record -126.22 mph. On the fifth lap, still running a distant second, *Nitrogen Too*’s supercharger failed putting the boat out of contention. *Miss Supertest III* ended its defense of the Harmsworth some 2 ½ miles ahead of the remaining challenger; the winner’s average speed over the 45 mile course was 115.48 mph.

On Monday, August 22, 1960 the front page of *The Globe and Mail* featured a smiling Bob Hayward and directed readers to page thirteen. That page, it turned out, was the front page of the second section and under the heading, “Hayward Retains Trophy for Canada in Record Race,” was devoted almost entirely to photos and coverage of the race. The reporter gave a brief account of the race stressing *Miss Supertest III*, “retained the International Harmsworth Trophy for unlimited-class hydroplanes with the greatest of ease.”²²³ The article also noted that, for the second year in a row, *Miss Supertest III* had set race, heat and lap records for Harmsworth competition.

The Toronto Daily Star staff writer Gerry Barker called the win an ‘easy victory’ for *Miss Supertest III*. In a brief description of the race, he claimed Hayward, “won the race in the next [second] lap. *Nitrogen Too* conked out in the fourth lap, well behind and her partner, the only other boat to finish was three miles behind.”²²⁴

Displaying pride in its local hero, the front page of the *Stratford Beacon Herald* featured a two-photo spread and a banner headline that read, “CANADA RETAINS SPEEDBOAT HONOURS.”²²⁵ Later in the week the paper featured a photo of Bob Hayward and *Miss Supertest III*, with the notice, “Embryo Boat King Feted at CNE.”²²⁶ In his column “*Speaking of Sport*,” *The Toronto Daily Star* columnist Milt Dunnell gave his opinion about the purpose of the Thompsons’ boat: “Jim Thompson, an unsmiling young man who designed and constructed the rambling raft known as Miss Supertest III, describes her as ‘a boat built for this job.’ The job to which he refers of course is defence of our shores against invaders seeking the hefty hunk of bronze which the sporting world knows as the Harmsworth trophy.”²²⁷ Dunnell, like so many others in the media, framed the competition in terms of defending national honour.

The opportunity to capitalize on the national sentiments evoked by the Harmsworth success was not lost on the people marketing Supertest products. After years of focusing on its reputation for service, early in 1961 the Supertest Oil Company ran a newspaper campaign capitalizing on the feelings of nationalism evoked by its speedy watercraft. Each ad featured an image of *Miss Supertest III* speeding across the water. Beneath the photo ran one paragraph of copy extolling the virtues of the speed boat and one promoting the company’s products. One ad began: “Canada’s Finest... This is Miss Supertest III, twice Canadian winner of the Harmsworth Trophy. Again this August in Picton she will face international challengers.”²²⁸ Another identified the boat in the photo as: “Symbol of Canadian Achievement... Last August, Miss Supertest III defeated challengers to win the Harmsworth Trophy for Canada. For the second time she proved herself a world champion and a symbol of Canadian achievement.”²²⁹ A third claimed: “Proud to be Canadian... Miss Supertest III, the all-Canadian world champion, showed her rooster-tail to all challengers when she won the Harmsworth Trophy last year. Supertest, an all-Canadian company, is gratified that Miss Supertest III has twice won the world’s championship for Canada.”²³⁰ All three ads bore the Supertest corporate logo – a maple leaf with ‘Supertest’ emblazoned on it and the words

‘All-Canadian’ printed beneath; and beside the logo was the message: “Buy Canadian – Keep Canada Strong.” As good advertisers know, the most effective campaigns speak to receptive audiences.

In the spring of 1961, the Soviet Union reasserted its place at the leading edge of technology when, as predicted, the Soviet space program put a man in orbit. On April 12, 28 year-old Yuri Gagarin became the first human to circle the earth in a spaceship. His flight in *Vostok I* caught the attention of the whole world, and later in the year the pioneer astronaut visited Canada and the United States. In fact, Gagarin was in Nova Scotia when the Soviets launched their second piloted spacecraft. 26 year-old Major Gherman Titov flew 17 orbits around the earth beginning on Sunday, August 8, 1961. The next day, the Soviet cosmonaut would share front-page space with Bob Hayward.

As if a portent of the future that lay in store for Sir Alfred’s trophy, only one challenger stepped forward for the Harmsworth competition of 1961. Chuck Thompson arrived in Picton with a boat he named *Miss Detroit*. The boat had been built in 1955 for band leader Guy Lombardo who raced it as *Tempo VII*. An Allison-powered, 29-foot creation of Les Staudacher (designer of *Miss Supertest II*) the boat had been a dominant contender on U.S. circuits, winning six major races. According to Fred Farley, historian for the American Power Boating Association, Lombardo’s boat turned in a, “record-breaking three heat triumph at the International Cup in Elizabeth City, North Carolina on the Pasquotank River with a 3-mile lap of 105.987, a 15-mile heat of 104.775, and a 45-mile race of 102.469.”²³¹ Impressive credentials, but the 1961 match would determine if the boat was Harmsworth material.

In the lead-up to the competition there was no lack of hype. *The Toronto Daily Star* banner headline expressed concern over Western-Soviet tensions in East Germany: “NEW SUMMIT OR BERLIN WAR?” and the copy that followed described a meeting of the Western Big

Three foreign ministers that, “could lead to a new summit meeting with Russia – or a nuclear war;” but the picture below the headline was one of *Miss Supertest III* skimming over the waters of Long Reach with the caption, “LOTS OF ZIP FOR THE BIG RACE.”²³² *The Star*’s Milt Dunnell went on to declare *Miss Supertest III* ready for the race and pointed out, “No person knows for sure just how fast this floating power plant can travel. Last year, in her easy defence of the Harmsworth, one of three unsuccessful US challengers estimated the Canadian boat could hit 200 miles per hour on the straightaway if necessary.” In an article focussing on the American side of the race, Dunnell reported the challenger claimed his boat had achieved speeds of 165 mph on Long Reach, and had exceeded 180 mph in other waters.²³³

The course had been shortened from five miles to three, but the overall distance of the race remained 45 statute miles. Theoretically this change would reduce the Canadian advantage since the race would involve more turns and the shorter straightaways would prevent Bob Hayward from reaching top speed with the more powerful Rolls Royce Griffon engine. Some 25,000 spectators showed up to see if this might be the case. In the first heat, Hayward and *Miss Supertest III* leapt out to a lead at the start of the race and they never gave it up. By the end of the forty-five mile contest the Canadian boat was almost three miles ahead and, in fact, shortly after it crossed the finish line the American boat’s engine failed preventing it from completing the course.²³⁴ Al Nickleson of *The Globe and Mail*, was not impressed by the spectacle and took pains to rub *Miss Detroit*’s bow in its history. He wrote, “Setting her tempo to a waltz, Miss Supertest III danced daintily around to a most unexciting victory.”²³⁵

In the second heat, *Miss Detroit* once again suffered from engine trouble and sputtered its way through much of the race. On the other hand, the smooth-running *Miss Supertest III* cruised though the course and was nearly two laps ahead at the end of the race. The lack of competition resulted in a slower pace than the previous year, so *Miss Supertest III* averaged a speed of 98.173 mph.²³⁶ The win seemed anticlimactic to Bob’s hometown paper. Instead of the national pride exhibited one year earlier, the *Stratford Beacon Herald* simply stated,

“London Boat Retains Harmsworth Trophy On Third Consecutive Win.”²³⁷ Nickelson in *The Globe and Mail* was barely short of derisive when he wrote that *Miss Supertest III* had, “a ridiculously easy win over the US challenger Miss Detroit.”²³⁸

To some at least, it appeared the Supertest team had achieved Sir Alfred Harmsworth’s goal. In his race-day article, Milt Dunnelll noted that Harmsworth had donated his trophy and inspired the competition, “to encourage the development of hulls and engines in water craft.”²³⁹ After the race the columnist speculated that lack of competition might mean an end to the challenge matches. He claimed, “Miss Supertest is too good. She’s in the same position as Joe Louis was at the peak of his fistic career. No worthy challenger in sight.” According to Dunnelll, the American side could not come up with an engine to make a racer competitive, “Neither of last year’s challengers showed any interest in a rematch this season – and Chuck Thompson, friendly Detroit sportsman who represented the US in the 1961 bid for this symbol of world supremacy in powerboat racing, sees little purpose in continuing the hopeless quest with the type of power plants the Yanks have been using against Miss Supertest in the last three years.” Dunnelll quoted the Detroit boat owner’s response to the possibility of a future challenge, ‘I would want to see some boat with more power than we have now. I know Miss Supertest has more potential than she showed today.’ Dunnelll’s conclusion was, “Unless some enthusiast comes up with more power and greater speed, Miss Supertest may not even be challenged next year. The combination of the London Thompsons, Hayward and Miss Supertest have created a situation similar to that which existed in Gar Wood’s heyday. They’re too good.”²⁴⁰

As it turned out, there would not be a nation to nation challenge in the next year – or any other year ever - but not for the reason put forth by Milt Dunnelll. As noted above *Miss Supertest III* had been designed and built for the express purpose of winning the Harmsworth, and Jim Thompson stuck to his game plan. Nevertheless there was constant pressure from race organizers who wanted the Supertest team at their events. Add this encouragement to the competitive nature of the team members, and there is adequate

explanation as to why Jim Thompson and Bob Hayward continued to race the older *Miss Supertest II* at events such as the 1961 Silver Cup race, held on the Detroit River, September 10, 1961.

In his first heat of the day, Hayward shaved a corner too close and clipped a buoy. As a true gentleman and honest sportsman, he reported the infraction and so was disqualified from earning any points. He was apparently trying to make up for the miscue in his second heat. According to one account at the running start of the second heat, Hayward was driving, “*Miss Supertest* at full throttle running almost abreast of Bill Muncey in *Miss Century 21*. As they roared through the first turn at the Belle Isle bridge end of the course, Hayward hardly slackened speed.”²⁴¹ Another account reported, “He must have been in the turn before he realized he was there.” The story in the *Detroit News* described how Hayward, “tried to gun *Miss Supertest II* between two other boats, attempting in the process to take a turn faster than any driver in the history of speedboating.” The reporter described the accident as it appeared to him and thousands of spectators. He saw, “*Miss Supertest II* dip a sponson and corkscrew into a flip as she slammed upside-down with Hayward underneath. But her terrific speed at this point, estimated at more than 140 miles an hour as she came into the turn, gave her enough momentum to carry her all the way around. *Miss Supertest* landed right side up with the crushed body of Hayward plastered to her stern deck.”²⁴² Hayward was killed instantly.

Hayward’s death was national news with stories in the *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Calgary Herald* and the *Vancouver Sun*. The headline across the front page of *The Toronto Daily Star* on September 11 read, “MISS SUPERTEST KILLS HAYWARD AT 175 MPH.” A sequence of photos across the top of the page depicted the accident. The caption read, “SKIMMING OVER DETROIT RIVER AT 175 MPH, MISS SUPERTEST FLIPS DURING SILVER CUP REGATTA, ACCIDENT KILLED BOB HAYWARD, POWER BOAT DRIVER.”²⁴³

The front page of *The Globe and Mail* assumed everyone knew whom it was writing about when it announced, “Hayward Killed in Detroit Race.” After a brief description of the accident, the article concluded by noting, “His driving brought Canada its Harmsworth Trophy in 1959 on the Detroit River. He successfully defended the trophy in 1960 and last month at Picton, Ont.”²⁴⁴ On page 25 the paper had a more personal account about the young racer written by Al Nickleson who the paper noted, “covered the Harmsworth races for *The Globe and Mail* and was well acquainted with Mr. Hayward.” The reporter declared that in a crowd Bob Hayward, “would be the least likely to be selected as driver of the world’s outstanding propeller driven speedboat Miss Supertest III which had won the International Harmsworth Trophy for Canada the last three years.” And as always there was a reference to the notion that Bob, “was a simple chicken farmer from Embro, who graduated from stock cars and drag racers to the cockpit of the sleekest, fastest craft on the water.”²⁴⁵ The *Stratford Beacon Herald* featured a photo of the racer and his boat with a headline, “Powerboat Champion Bob Hayward Killed.”²⁴⁶ It saved its major write-up for the funeral a few days later.

The funeral was held at Knox Presbyterian Church in Bob’s hometown of Embro, Ontario. In addition to family and friends, those who turned out to show their respect included many of Bob’s fellow racers, the Mayor of London, Gordon Stronach, the Chief of Police, Earl Knight, and the entire city of London Board of Control (city council). Jim Thompson and J. Gordon Thompson were pall bearers.²⁴⁷ The crowd was too large for the little red brick church, so loud speakers were placed outside to allow mourners to follow the service. Mayor Harvey McFarland led a delegation from Picton. The following Monday at the Picton town council meeting, McFarland eulogized, “We have lost one of our own Picton boys, one who has done so much for Canada; the finest sportsman I’ve met in all my travels and a gentleman at all times.”²⁴⁸

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Technology has been a major story in Canada since the arrival of Europeans. Building the railroads, stringing telegraph and telephone wires, creating a broadcast system – all of these have been cited as keys to the development of this country. At a time when Canada was just beginning to find itself as a nation – when its government was taking the first steps to transform itself from a Dominion of the British Empire to a full member of the British Commonwealth of Nations – the speedboat competitions with the technologically superior nation to the south caught the attention of the media and the imagination of thousands of fans.

From the very beginning the media portrayed the racers' success in international competition as a national triumph. When Harold Wilson and Lorna Reid beat American competitors at the CNE they were presented as national representatives. After the war the Wilsons were unable to duplicate their success, but the media attention did not diminish. In fact, it seemed that the size of the headlines and the need to succeed grew with the prestige of the competition. The Wilsons did not set out to challenge for the Harmsworth Trophy; but it eventually became a goal for the father, son and daughter-in law. They suffered through hardship and tragedy without achieving their goal; but they retired from their quest knowing they had done their best and the thousands of fans who had cheered them on were disappointed, but proud.

During the fifties and sixties Canada built the Trans-Canada and 400 series highways and the St. Lawrence Seaway; but the really high-tech accomplishment was to have been the Avro Arrow. Where the Americans had the bomb and the Soviets had Sputnik, Canadians were to have a supersonic interceptor. John Diefenbaker promised great things including extensive development in the north and an independence for Canadians like they had never known. The Canadian voters gave him the largest majority the country had ever seen; and so when

his government cancelled the Arrow, Canada's place on the world stage seemed less assured. Canadians were ready for a success story.

For the Thompsons, winning the big bronze sculpture was the primary objective for the family and the boats they built. The members of the Supertest Team set a world speed record and realized their dream of capturing the international racing title for unlimited class speedboats. They not only brought the trophy to Canada, they also repulsed American attempts to take it back - twice. But the opportunity to enjoy their triumph was cut short by a spectacular crash.

Neither the Wilsons nor the Thompsons set out to become famous, but the nature of their endeavours made them celebrities. Media coverage of a person or an event can never guarantee the interest of the general public, but reporters and news editors know a good story when they see one. In the 'David versus Goliath' confrontation of the Harmsworth challenge, the news outlets had a ready-made scenario to present. That the *Deed of Gift* for the trophy insisted on a country-to-country challenge simply fed the nationalist appetites of the time, while the disappointments and human suffering involved served as a reminder of the real danger involved in pushing the envelope of technology.

The Harmsworth Trophy was created to encourage the development of speedboat technology. In designing and refining *Miss Supertest III* and matching that hull with the Rolls Royce Griffon engine, the Thompson team achieved what Sir Alfred Harmsworth had in mind. *Miss Supertest III* outperformed any boat powered by a piston engine the Americans (or any others) could develop – or desired to. But by 1961 the future for the aircraft industry was jet power. Aircraft manufacturers had no incentive to develop more advanced piston technology; and marine builders were interested in the power of diesel, not the speed of high-octane gasoline. Serious American sportsmen interested in speed continued to use the Rolls Royce Merlin and Griffon engines and simply focussed their attention and dollars on competition amongst themselves. The international flavour and media interest of the

Harmsworth Trophy faded away. Bob Hayward's death marked the end of an era. No international challenge for the Harmsworth Trophy was ever issued again.

A story such as this raises key questions. Was it really Canada's quest for the Harmsworth? The speedboats were bankrolled privately, and the men and women who took part in the campaigns did it for the challenge of the competition. Yet from the very beginning reporters wrote about "Canada's victory." What right did the media and the fans have to call it theirs?

Were the players in this saga, heroes? The Wilsons were never able to win the really big race, but surely their efforts were more than ordinary. After all they did win the President's Cup in 1939 and in 1949 they set a speed record for North America. And the Thompson team showed determination and ingenuity that was ultimately rewarded with public acclaim and the satisfaction of achievement. Perhaps they were heroes because the conditions of the time needed them to be heroes. Gray declares Canadians have an, "appetite for people who symbolize our nation, and for occasions to celebrate our pride in Canada."²⁴⁹ Yet Francis claims there are powers that would curb this celebration, pointing out that the, "overwhelming influence of American culture on our lives has inhibited the emergence of homegrown greatness."²⁵⁰ He further states that, "heroes draw attention to themselves simply because their selfless deeds of valour seem to incarnate the values which we all share as members of a community. This is the role of the hero, after all: to represent ourselves at our collective best, to knit the community together in a shared self-regard."²⁵¹

I have argued that, at a time when technology was seen as playing a critical role in the prosperity and security of Canadians, failures like the Avro Arrow and threats like the atomic bomb undermined the confidence of the nation. In the Harmsworth trophy races Canadians saw powerful symbols of their nation that allowed them to rejoice in triumph over their powerful neighbours to the south; and for some, of equal importance at the time, the victories represented a strengthening of bonds within the British Commonwealth. At a time of

confused identity and low esteem, Canadians saw fellow citizens who could accomplish great things.

As sports historian Don Morrow, writes, “the type of satisfaction sought in a hero is derived from the value of one’s culture and that anyone set up on the heroic pedestal is emblematic of that culture and cultural values that placed the hero there.”²⁵² In Canada during the 1950s mastery over technology was a value to be cherished, and Bob Hayward was seen as the master of the unlimited-class power boat. If it is simply a matter of deeds, then the actions speak for themselves. If heroes are created by storytellers then perhaps this is an example of a saga forgotten. According to Charlotte Gray, “History has always been written by the winners’ spin doctors. If there has been a shortage of heroes in Canada, it is because we have lacked enough spin doctors. We certainly have enough victories in our past.”²⁵³ They were just speedboats built and driven by ordinary people, but for a while they bonded Canadians together and made Canada proud.

Epilogue

After retiring from competitive racing in 1950, Harold Wilson concentrated on a successful career managing the family-owned businesses: The Ingersoll Machine and Tool Company, and Morrow's Screw and Nut. He kept his cottage on Wawanessa Island in Lake Muskoka and also purchased a property in the Caribbean. In 1990 he published *Boats Unlimited*, an account of his exploits in power and sail. At the time he stressed that he had shared virtually all of his adventures with Lorna, his former mechanic and wife of 57 years.

Bob Hayward was buried in the small cemetery north of Embro. There are a few permanent tributes to his exploits. Near the farm where Bob grew up there is a cairn and plaque commemorating his achievements, and a branch of the YMCA in London is named for him. The body of water he and *Miss Supertest III* made famous was re-named in Bob's honour – the Long Reach became Hayward's Long Reach. However, you have to be a local of a certain age to know that, because you cannot find it on a modern day map, and neither Google Maps nor Yahoo Maps can locate it.

After Bob Hayward's death, Jim Thompson stopped racing. He put his time and effort into the prosperity of the Supertest Oil Company. In 1971 he sold the company to British Petroleum and joined the board of directors of BP Canada. For the first time the slogan, "All Canadian" disappeared from the company signs. In 1983, BP was forcibly taken over by Petro Canada, and Jim Thompson was no longer involved in the company. As for the racing game, Jim Thompson said, "We'd done what we'd set out to do which was to win the Harmsworth and we'd defended it twice, we had the world's record. Where do you go from there?"²⁵⁴ Certainly the death of Thompson's friend and driver, Bob Hayward, had an influence in the decision.

Miss Canada III spent some time in the Antique Boat Museum in Clayton, New York, but is now in private hands on Lake Rosseau in Muskoka. When the Thompsons bought *Miss*

Canada IV they re-christened the boat as *Miss Supertest I*, but it was later restored to its original identity. It is now in a civic museum in Harold Wilson's hometown, Ingersoll, Ontario.

What was left of *Miss Supertest II* after the accident was stored in a barn on the Thompson farm near London. It and all the racing equipment purchased from the Wilsons were destroyed in a fire that consumed the barn. Jim Thompson donated *Miss Supertest III* to the Ontario Science Centre where it was showcased in the 'Hall of Technology.' However, by 2004, *Miss Supertest III*, with a wooden hull and piston engine, no longer represented the leading edge of marine design. So when the Science Centre decided to de-commission the exhibit, according to his terms of donation, Mr. Thompson took the boat back into his possession. He then donated his creation to the Canadian Motorsport Hall of Fame in Halton Hills. The Hall has yet to mount a display with it.

The Thompsons returned the Harmsworth Trophy to its home in England. No country-to-country challenge was ever issued again.

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