

## Hydrofoil Crash in Tramp Harbor

As Vashon prepares for another early-morning Fourth of July hydroplane race around the island, it is worth remembering that the hydroplanes are not the only light and fast boats that have skimmed around Vashon. In the 1960s the Boeing Company used the waters off Vashon Island to test the cutting-edge hydrofoils they were developing for both military and civilian use.

Vashon's annual Fourth of July hydroplane race began in 1955, when Roger Stanley made the first hydroplane trip around the island in his Ted Jones-designed hydroplane with a 25-horsepower motor. Someone asked him how long it took, and the urge to race was born. The next year, several others made the trip in their hydros and they all compared notes on their experiences. In 1958, the first "race" took place on New Years Day when Roger Stanley and Warren Bibbins took their hydros around the island. The next year they organized an Island Outboard Race for the Fourth of July, and the annual tradition began. That year, 29 outboard boats (not all hydros) participated in the race. Every year since, except 1973 when King County canceled the race because of complaints from some island residents about the 6 a.m. noise, the race has taken place. Last year, Evan Mattingly, seen in the photograph of the 2012 race, won for the second year in a row with a time of 37 minutes, 12 seconds.



Evan Mattingly winning the 2012 Vashon Hydroplane Race

Around this time, in the early 1960s, the Boeing Company began developing

hydrofoil technology that took the company's experience with wings and airflow and applied that expertise to water flowing over a wing-like foil, a hydrofoil. Boeing tested a 20-foot version of a hydrofoil boat, the Little Squirt, in 1962. In 1963 it began testing a 100-mile-per-hour version, the Fresh-1, on the waters around Vashon. The old measured mile, a route on the east side of Vashon that had pylons located near Thriftway and one mile north near Dilworth, allowed ships to accurately measure their speed. This was the track run by Fresh-1 on July 18, 1963, when it recorded a speed of 97.6 miles per hour. On its second run, as the boat hit 80 mph, it lost stability and rolled over, with the crew escaping as water rushed into the cabin. No one was seriously hurt, but it ended the U.S. Navy's attempt to build a 100-mph hydrofoil and focused attention on the 50-mph versions.



*Fresh-1* courtesy The Boeing Company

The Fresh-1, seen in the photograph, was little more than a 59-foot aluminum catamaran with a Pratt and Whitney jet engine strapped onto the hulls and a small cockpit situated on the bow. Boeing then built the USS Plainview at the Lockheed Shipbuilding Company and launched it in 1965. Again, the waters around Vashon and in Quartermaster Harbor became the testing grounds for these new boats. The success of these tests led to the construction of the USS Tucumcari, a 71-foot, 57-ton patrol gunboat which had sustained speeds of 55 mph and was used in Vietnam during the Vietnam War.



*USS Tucumcari* courtesy US Navy

Boeing then built six 131-foot Patrol Hydrofoil Missiles for NATO in 1974. That same year, Boeing built its first passenger hydrofoil, the Jetfoil, which could carry up to 400 passengers. Boeing built 23 of these Boeing 939 boats for passenger service in Hong Kong, the English Channel, the Canary Islands, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia. Washington State Ferries considered using them for passenger-only service, but decided they were too expensive to purchase and operate. These boats were often seen around Vashon as they performed sea trials and refueled at the old Standard Oil Dock located at the current Tramp Harbor fishing pier.



Boeing 939 *Jetfoil* courtesy The Boeing Company

Islander Larry Trotter, a teenager in the summer of 1963, had a front-row seat from above KVI beach as the Fresh-1 experimental jet boat made its test runs. He remembers the day the boat crashed. While he didn't witness the accident, he saw boats gathering out in Tramp Harbor and heard what had happened.

"I ran down to the beach and launched the dingy, rowing far out into the harbor to join the scene. Here were all these big boats around an upside-down hydrofoil," he recalled. "Fortunately, the cockpit had a floor hatch for the crew to escape. Someone thought I was in the way because this big loudspeaker boomed out, 'Hey, kid in the red shirt, move back!' Embarrassed that I had gotten that attention, I turned my little dingy around and moved out."

As you prepare for the buzz of the 6 a.m. hydroplane race this Fourth of July, remember the July 41 years ago, when a different buzz was heard around the island, as Fresh-1 was speeding along at nearly 100 mph.

To see the Fresh-1 in action, go to this YouTube link and you can see it starting at minute 1:56 to about minute 3:20 with Vashon in the background -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkG4KaOXTdo>

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