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VOLUME 5 ISSUE 3

## HISTORIC: BUSHMILLS

OLD-SCHOOL CALIFORNIA RACING FROM 1979

## HIDEAWAY MARINA

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*Rookies in the Open Class No More  
The winning team (l-r): Ron Morrison (Navigator), Charlie McCarthy (Owner / Driver) and Paul Lesnewski (Throttleman) celebrate their upset victory in California.*



# HISTORIC OFFSHORE RACING

HISTORIC PHOTOS COURTESY HORBA ARCHIVES



See Actual Video from 1979!

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We've got the highlights of the original Bushmills race on the website now - check it out!



**"When Irish eyes are smiling"**

*Did the Leprechauns really help the Top Banana team win the Bushmills Irish Whiskey race?*



# Bushmills

1979 - Newport Beach, California

**STORY BY CHARLIE MCCARTHY**

1979 would be a very special year for me. Until then, I had been running Production Class boats. For two years prior to that, I had been developing a brand-new Open Class boat in which I would compete against the very best offshore racers in the United States and around the world. Open Class was the premier class, where the big boys ran, and I wanted a piece of that action badly. As the date of the new season arrived, my team and I hooked up my brand-new, 38-foot Open Class boat and headed West to California in search of fame and glory.



To find out more about the  
Historic Offshore Race Boat Association  
visit [www.historicraceboats.com](http://www.historicraceboats.com)

offshore  
legends



**Open Water**  
The Banana Boat Co's Bell Jet Ranger, carrying Charlie wife Mary Pat, son Charley and friend Stan Pike, follows the winners around the tricky Pacific Ocean course.



Bushmills

**OPEN CLASS!** | Twenty-nine years ago only two classes of boats ran the National Circuit of the APBA — Open and Production Class; the smaller classes raced only in their region. More boats raced back then. It was a different era, before catamarans came along and ruined the simplicity of the sport. The Open Class teams got the media spotlight, the fans, and the women. The Production racers were second-class citizens, barely tolerated on the racecourse by the Open Class teams. At that time, every Production racer aspired to move up and challenge the Open Class stars.

My transportation companies were doing well and I finally had the money, so I was ready to make my move up. My crew included navigator Ron Morrison, an old childhood friend who had raced with me in everything from flat-bottom skiffs to marathon SK boats. Then there was my riding mechanic, Paul Lesniewski, my throttleman, who had

served his racing apprenticeship on Stan Pike's Sports Class boat, Inferno. So we were seasoned ocean racers, but only in Production Class boats.

My Banana boat company had produced boats from old Cigarette molds, but when I decided to go Open Class, I started with a fresh design.

Joel Halpern's boat, Beep Beep, which had won the American title for the two previous years, impressed me. I wanted to build a take-off of the original MSV Bobby Saccenti and Sonny Miller had designed. This 44-foot hull, racing as La Tortuga (The Turtle), had won the first Benihana race. After that race, Jean Claude Simon rented the 44-foot mold, blocked it at 38 feet, and produced the Beep Beep boat.

The boat had a very narrow bow, which gave it greater speeds in head seas without lifting or flying as the broader bows did. So, I hired Jean Claude Simon to do my new

# offshore legends

design. I wanted to improve on the Beep Beep design by widening the strakes and laying the boat up lighter. I decided against using Kevlar, and went instead with a regular glass lay up. We squeezed out every extra ounce of resin to keep the weight down. My original design was owned and built under the Banana Boat brand. You can still see my design on the water in Coyote and Sonic 386 hulls.

Jean Claude suggested we use a curvy deck design like the one he had used on Beep Beep and on his Production boats. Don Aronow felt the curved deck would act as a spoiler and put pressure on the bow, making it slower. We cut it off and made it a flat deck. Don also gave me a set of Cigarette engine hatches to use, because he felt Jean Claude's original design with vents in the side of the deck would not bring in enough air to feed the engines.

In spite of our high hopes for this boat, it only reached 70 mph on our first trial run. We needed to be closer to 90 mph to have any chance of holding the checkered flag. With the help of Don Schwebbe and Lynn Lupo up at Mercury's Lake X, we dialed in the setup and got the speed up to a respectable 89 mph in fresh water. Our spirits were high as we headed west toward California.

I was not using Mercury engines because, as a new kid on the block in Open class, I would not be on the A list and get the best engines. So I chose an unknown engine builder from Long Island, New York: McBetts Racing Engines. He had a lot of experience in auto racing and had built a set of boat engines for Stan Pike, the previous year's champion in the Sports Division of the Production Class.

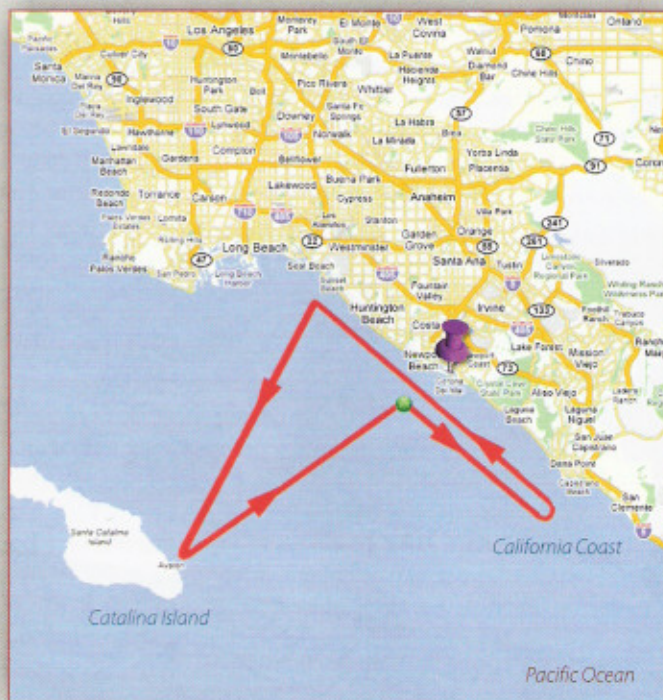
**CALIFORNIA BOUND** | The site for the Bushmills race was the prestigious Balboa Bay Club in Newport Beach, California. All the big names were there and the fleet was the largest ever to assemble for this race. Forty-three boats sat in the pits. I was very aware of the race's history and the many big names who had won here. They included Doctor Bob Magoon, Snapper Norris, Rocky Aoki, Larry Smith, Betty Cook, Joey Ippolito, and Hal Sahlman. Now I was ready to add my name to that illustrious list.

I woke up early on race morning and took a quiet walk along the docks to survey the competition. Rocky had brought his cat with its Keith Black monster engines. Betty had her 38-foot Scarab V hull, as did Joey Ippolito, with Jack Stuteville on the throttles. Howard Arneson had his new Scarab 38. Bill Elswick, against whom I had competed for years in the Production Class, was there too with his new, 39-foot Cigarette, Long Shot.

Joel Halpern had Beep Beep and Australian Arnold Glass had the 38 Bertram, Copper Kettle. Chicago's Howard Quam had a new, 38-foot Bertram, Flap Jack, with Keith Hazel on the throttles. Powerboat magazine publisher Bob Nordskog was also there with a 38 Scarab, LA Skyhawks, named after a professional soccer team he had purchased. Jerry Jacoby's new boat, Ajac Hawk, was in the line-up too.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 80

## Bushmills 1979 Race Course



**Pacific Course** The 205 mile open ocean course (over 3 laps) contained every type of treacherous water; from flat spots, to sneaky Pacific rollers, to cross-chop. Not to mention the annual migration of whales for the drivers to avoid. And with an immense spectator fleet scattered all over the course, it got very dicey out there...



*Ajac Hawk  
The granddaddy  
of all future  
Top Guns from  
Cigarette. It  
would be over a  
year more, before  
it achieved its  
first victory, but  
it was a tough  
competitor  
right from the  
beginning.*

Although Cigarette called it just 37.6, it would become the forerunner of the famous Top Gun from Cigarette. Jerry had won Rookie of the Year the previous season and now had the experienced throttleman, Bobby Saccenti, with him in the cockpit.

Rocking quietly at the dock was Billy Martin's famous Bounty Hunter, a 39-foot lightweight racer. Cigarette was busy building his new 40-foot bubble boat which would show up at the next race in Miami. Completing the field was an assortment of third- and fourth-hand 36-foot Cigarettes and Bertrams and local west coast racers. I was in for some very serious competition.

John Crouse asked me at breakfast that morning who I thought would win. "I will," I replied. "Today is St Patrick's Day, and this race is sponsored by an Irish whiskey, and since I'm Irish, who else is going to qualify for the special help of the Leprechauns and a big dose of Irish luck?" I smiled. In spite of my confidence, I knew the Pacific Ocean would probably have a few surprises of her own.

**RACE DAY** | I always enjoyed the pre-race bedlam in the docks. Watching everyone get ready, and hearing the boats fire up is always an adrenalin rush, especially in Newport Beach. Hundreds of boats escorted the fleet of race boats out of the harbor into the ocean. Actor John Wayne provided a special touch by coming down on his dock and waving to us as we passed his home.

The previous year the big trawlers and yachts nearly ran over my Production Class boat trying to get a better look at the race. In our race boats we were like thoroughbred minnows traveling with barracudas. A big mass of boats was moving out the inlet with us.

Once clear of the harbor, we turned north while the fleet went straight out to form a line that defined the outside leg. Leaving the spectator boats behind, we throttled up and headed toward the starting line. I saw Joel Halpern in the water, doing a last-minute prop change and knew our choice that day was just right for the conditions.

I looked up and saw my wife and son cheering me on in the Banana Boat Company helicopter. I gave them the thumbs up sign in return. After such a long wait for this moment everything seemed perfect. The boat was running great and I was ready to race, physically and mentally.

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*The Pacific provided everything  
from flat spots and cross chop, to  
sneaky giant rollers that would  
throw us skyward..*

- charlie

The pace boat started its run down the beach toward the start line and I drew alongside on the right. This was my preferred starting place. Betty drew up along my right side. Jerry and Bobby Saccenti were on her right, and Bill Elswick was to their right in Long Shot. Joel, Joey Ippolito, Nordskog, and Howard Quam were left of the pace boat. As the pace boat hit full speed, the green flag flew and our 205-mile sprint to the checkered flag was underway.

I was pumped. We jumped into the lead from the start, and I was setting a very aggressive pace. I had built this boat for one-person operation. I was driving, trimming, and throttling the boat. With the smaller production boats,



1979

# offshore legends

it wasn't that hard to do. But doing it now, racing this 38 footer, was proving more than I had bargained for.

I did my best for the first leg down to Dana Point. At one point Bill Elswick rolled up on me and took the lead. After that, I signaled to Paul to take over the throttles. I focused on the driving and trimming and we regained the lead, pulling out from the rest of the field for good.

It was a great race and the McBetts engines delivered exactly what they had promised. Whenever someone got too close to challenge us, we just pushed the throttles and moved out to maintain our lead.

The Pacific provided everything from flat spots and cross chop, to sneaky giant rollers that would throw us skyward. It was a true ocean race over those long Pacific swells, but behind us a drama was unfolding.

Bob Nordskog had set up his offshore boats with a foot throttle, so he could throttle as well as steer and trim the boat. Joel Halpern in Beep Beep was right behind him. Then things went wrong. This is how Joel explained it: "I was running right behind Nordskog's boat. First it went up, then over on its side, then upside down. Then it jumped back up on its tail and walked another 100 yards. Then

it rolled over upside down again and finally righted itself before stopping.

I got there first. Then Joey Ippolito stopped too. Nordskog was on his back in the water. His goggles were on his mouth. He didn't know where he was. His throttleman, Norm Teague, was unconscious and floating face down. We rolled Norm over and got him breathing again. We couldn't see where the other crewman was. We thought we had run over him in the water. It turned out when the boat rolled over, he slid down in the hold and must have banged his head on the footlocker.

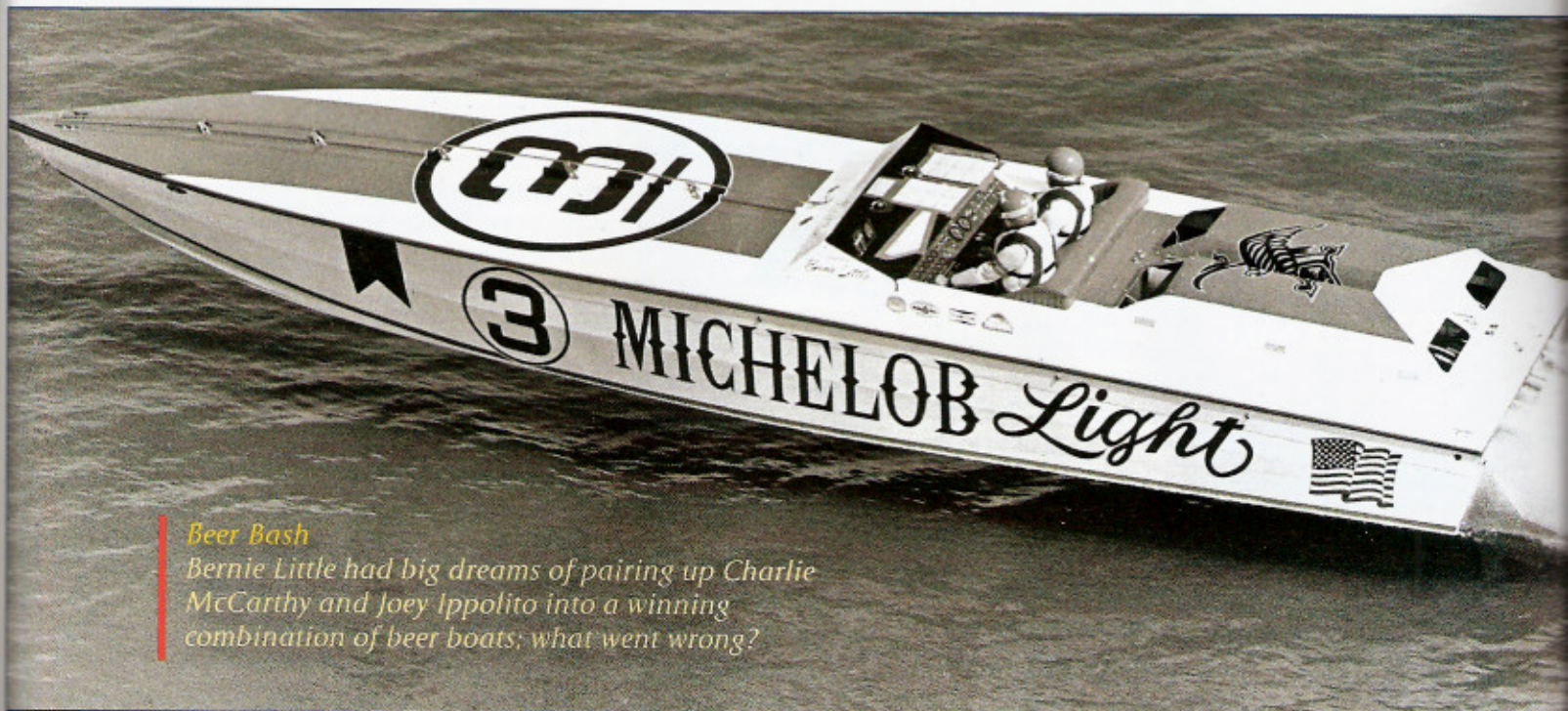
Finally, we found him in the boat. He threw us a line and we tied the other end to Bob and Norm's life vests while they floated nearby. Then we left. I told my throttleman, 'That's enough time – let's get out of here. They're alive; they're breathing; and they're floating.' Norm Teague stayed in hospital overnight and was released the next day.

Betty Cook stayed with the lead pack for the first few legs. Then she caught a bad re-entry and spun out. Rocky's Cougar cat struggled to keep pace and languished in mid pack until one of the motors died and ended their day. Joel



*Charlie McCarthy founder of the Banana Boat Company. He's a longtime boater/racer and Managing Director of HORBA.*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 81



### Beer Bash

*Bernie Little had big dreams of pairing up Charlie McCarthy and Joey Ippolito into a winning combination of beer boats; what went wrong?*



**Tough Fight**  
For 205 miles, Joel Halpern and Joey Ippolito fought side by side, even stopping to rescue publisher Bob Nordskog during the race and then resuming their hard fought battle to the end.

Halpern in Beep Beep and Joey Ippolito in Michelob Light were locked in a duel over the entire 205 miles.

After almost three hours of running on the ragged edge of control, we took the checkered flag. Ajac Hawk, one mile behind, took second place. Betty Cook, in her 38-foot Scarab, and KAAMA came third, a full minute behind Ajac Hawk.

As spectator craft escorted us to the Balboa Bay Club, seven Irish bagpipers welcomed us. The pipes stirred my Irish blood as we took to the podium and collected our giant shamrock and a big bottle of Bushmills. We were then unceremoniously dunked in the cold marina waters and hustled off drenched to the press room to meet about 100 reporters. The press had a field day because an Irishman had won the Irish whiskey race on St Patrick's Day. Bobby Saccenti and Jerry Jacoby also attended the press conference. I remember Bobby's comments to the press...

"When I saw the Top Banana pull into the dry pits, I knew it was going to be a very competitive boat. Charlie

was always a perfectionist in building these boats, and this one was no exception. The paint was perfect. Even the screws holding the rubrail on were all lined up perfectly. He just pulled us with speed. It was a new boat design and it worked beautifully. The water was rough enough to keep you on your toes, but calm enough for the fastest boats to run in front from the start of the race. We beat Betty and Elswick, but there was no catching that Top Banana."

Jerry Jacoby told the assembled media: "Charlie absolutely kicked my ass! Every time I told Bobby to push the throttles up, he told me they were already pinned, but he just kept moving away from us like we had an anchor out."

"We had just come back from Argentina and a very rough race, and I was really looking forward to starting the season in a winning way. At the start of the race, we were in a pack with Charlie, Betty, and Bill Elswick. Then the Top Banana just started moving away. There was nothing we could do. I watched the Banana boat walk away from us

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See Actual Video from 1979!  
**On-Line Video Footage**  
[www.extremeboatsmag.com](http://www.extremeboatsmag.com)  
 We've got the highlights of the original Bushmills race on the website now - check it out!



*Charlie McCarthy with his 38 foot "Top Banana" winning the Newport Beach, California race.*



*The Dream Lives On: Charlie's passion continues to this day. To find out more about Charlie and his Banana Boat Company, visit [www.bananaboatco.com](http://www.bananaboatco.com).*

knowing he had gone to an outside engine shop. As the race was going on I was already building my own HAWK motors in my mind."

After the press debriefing, Bernie Little asked me if I would like to become the new Natural Light-sponsored boat, racing out of his stable. Preston Henn had retired and Bernie was looking for a good replacement. I should have said yes, but I was young and dumb. After working so hard to finally get to the Open Class and then win, I didn't want to turn it all over to someone else. So, I thanked him for the offer but declined.

Bill Elswick and I met later that evening and spoke about the many times we had raced side by side in our Production boats. He asked what I thought about the Open Class. I said we actually raced much harder in the smaller

boats. We never gave an inch in those boats and ran wide open for as long as we could, because the guy next to us would be doing the same.

He laughed and said those were exactly his feelings when he had moved up to Open Class the previous year. In Open Class, we didn't run over our heads; we ran the boats in control, whereas the Production guys usually ran almost out of control. Bill went on to become national champion the following year with Long Shot carrying the US J on its bow.

The Bushmills race was held on a Saturday and we partied all night before catching a flight back on Sunday. Don Aronow phoned me first thing Monday morning and asked me, "How come it took you so long to win your first Open Class race?" We both laughed. It was a great time to be an offshore racer. -Charlie



To find out more about the Historic Offshore Race Boat Association visit [www.historicraceboats.com](http://www.historicraceboats.com)

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**Bushmills**

*Keep it Simple...*

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**BUSHMILLS™ & ginger**

*BUSHMILLS™ Original Irish whiskey  
75ml ginger ale*

*Pour BUSHMILLS™ Original Irish whiskey  
over ice cubes in a glass, top with ginger ale.*

---

**BUSHMILLS™ & cola**

*BUSHMILLS™ Original Irish whiskey  
75ml cola*

*Pour BUSHMILLS™ Original Irish whiskey  
over ice cubes in a tall glass, top with cola.*

---

**BUSHMILLS™ & soda**

*BUSHMILLS™ Original Irish whiskey  
75ml soda water*

*Pour BUSHMILLS™ Original Irish whiskey  
over ice cubes in a tall glass, top with soda.*

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*Smooth is a state of mind....*

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# Drinks

## Bushmills

**Irish Whisky**



In honor of Charlie McCarthy's achievements  
in Offshore racing history - a toast to Charlie!

**To 1979!**



**DRINK RESPONSIBLY; AFTER THE BOATS ARE PUT AWAY FOR THE NIGHT.**

Got a Favorite Drink Recipe? We want to Try it! Send it to [drinks@extremeboatsmag.com](mailto:drinks@extremeboatsmag.com)