

ISSUE 68

THE DEVICE

JUNE 2025

DISPRO OWNERS

ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

*For latest news and updates
please regularly visit
our website at*

www.disproboats.ca



Photo: Paul Jenner

Jack Law and Lorraine Human enjoying last July's cruise on beautiful Raven Lake. One of the highlights of the cruise was the spectacular rocky cliffs. It was a great day out on the water.



President's Letter • June 2025

Welcome to a new Dispro season. A snow laden winter has finally melted away and your executive has been working on events to make summer in your Dippy memorable. Over the past several years the regatta search committee has found it more difficult to secure resorts that can accommodate us at a reasonable price.

This year's regatta September 5, 6, 7, 2025 will have a different format. The DOA has booked 20 rooms at the Jolly Roger Inn on Hwy. 400 south of Parry Sound at the Osler Park Drive, Exit 217. Each participant is responsible for their own accommodations and meals, including the Saturday boat lunch.

On Saturday we will trailer our boats to a launch ramp in Parry Sound and tour the south channel with a lunch at the half way point. We will return to Parry Sound and put our boats on trailers and return to the inn for wine and cheese and plaque presentation, followed by dinner. On Sunday there is a tour planned that will head off to the north side of Parry Sound, returning in the early afternoon for good byes to another Dispro regatta.

This is also a workshop year, Bob Burk and I will co host this event with some interesting topics plus a new twist. One portion of the workshop will encourage everyone to take two minutes to explain their favourite piece of dippy quick fix. It may be a tip for varnishing or a quirky engine repair or a simple navigation technique. As you prepare your boat for this summer, please jot down your favourite trick. I am looking forward to hearing everyone's ideas.

Bill Otton

★★ Special Announcements ★★

★ Call for Volunteers ★

The **ACBS Vintage Boat Show** will be on **Saturday July 12 at Gravenhurst Wharf**. The show runs from **9:00 am to 4:00 pm**. As usual, the DOA will have our stand there. We have a tent, a Dispro on display and chairs to relax in.

However, we do require some willing volunteers to man the display tent. Shifts would be 2 hours and all you have to do is extol the pleasures of dippies to interested show goers. Explain the workings of the boat and the great benefits of becoming a member of the DOA. So, if you are coming to the show anyway, just stop by our display and take a break for a couple of hours.

To volunteer, please call Bob or Sheila Burk at 705-835-6489 Summer: 705-732-6304 or email Bob: erburk10@gmail.com or Sheila: burkbshe@csolve.net

★ Save the Date ★

This year's **Annual Regatta** will be **September 5-7 at the Jolly Roger Inn & Resort** in Parry Sound. Space is limited so if you are planning on attending, please book now to avoid disappointment.

Device Submissions: Please send all written and photographic submissions for The Device directly to the editor at: paul.jenner@sympatico.ca

Ebb & Flow

Social Events, Milestones and News About DOA Members

It is with much sadness that we learn of the passing of **John Thomson**. Many members fondly remembered and valued his friendship over many years. John was so willing to share his knowledge and expertise about our little boats and their engines. He provided invaluable assistance and guidance to keep our boats on the water. We extend our condolences to Happy and family.

We regret to share the news of the passing of **Dick Bell** on May 8th. His wife Jean informed us that Dick had not been very well during the past two and half years with a number of different ailments and had contracted double pneumonia. Dick was a past President of the Dispro Association (1997-98). Our sincere condolences to Jean and family.

With sadness we report the passing of member **Reay Stephen**. Our sincere condolences to Gloria and family.

We sadly announce the passing of **Keith Watson** after a long battle with Parkinson's Disease. Our sincere condolences to Kerry and family.



2025 Annual General Meeting

April 27 at 1:00pm, Boston Pizza, Gravenhurst

Jim Butler: Chair
Bill Otton: Vice-President
Bob Burk: Director
Sheila Burk: Treasurer

Barb Dickson: Membership Secretary
Gary Campaigne: Website Coordinator
Paul Jenner: Device and Trader Editor

Item 1: Call to Order and Welcome Welcome by Jim Butler

Item 2: Approval of Agenda

Motion 25-10: That the 2025 AGM Agenda as presented be approved.
Moved: Sandra Turnbull Seconded: John Cooper Motion: carried

Item 3: Approval of the DOA April 28, 2024 AGM Minutes

Motion 25-11: That the minutes from the April 28th, 2024 AGM be approved.
Moved: Sandra Turnbull Seconded: Karen Boyer Motion: carried

Item 4: 2024 Year in Review

Jim Butler provided an overview of the activities that occurred in 2024.

Item 5: Financial Report

Financial Report presented by Sheila Burk, Treasurer

Motion 25-12: That the Financial Report as presented be approved.
Moved: Karen Boyer Seconded: John Cooper Motion: carried

continued . . .



Item 6: Membership Report

Membership report presented by Barb Dickson

- Introduction of new members
- 190 members (waiting on renewal membership payments from a few people still)

Item 7: Device and Trader Report

Report presented by Paul Jenner

- March 2025 issue has been delivered. Next issue will be published in June with the details for the remaining events in 2025

Item 8: Website Report

Report presented by Gary Campaigne

- Website has been successful in bringing new members into the club this past year
- Note: March issue had incorrect date for the July ACBS show. This year's show is one week later than normal on July 12

Item 9: 2025 Regatta Report

Report presented by Sheila Burk and Bill Otton

- Regatta will be in the Parry Sound area. This year we are not staying on the water. accommodation will be at the Jolly Roger resort.
- Full day of boating on Saturday returning to the Jolly Roger on Saturday night.
- Boating options will be available on Sunday.
- Breakfast included in room rate. Plaques to be handed out Saturday at the Jolly Roger.

Item 10: 2025 Events

UUMMTs

- June 14th – Honey Harbour area. Lunch at the Otton cottage.
- July 26th – Kabshe Lake, Gravenhurst.
- August 18th – Bala Bay area.
- Workshop – 2025 is a workshop year. The workshop will be in October.

Item 11: Future Regattas

Regatta Research Committee presented by Sheila Burk

- Discussed planning criteria and shrinking number of locations that meet all the requirements.
- More details were given about this year's regatta at the Jolly Roger Inn in Parry Sound.

Item 12: 2025 Workshop

Report presented by Bill Otton

- Workshop will be on October 25th at the Coldwater Legion
- Bill Otton provided an overview of the planned agenda

Item 13: Nomination of 2025/26 Executive

Presented by Karen Boyer

Slate of Officers

- President: Bill Otton
- Vice President: Bob Burk
- Director: John Storey
- Past President: Jim Butler
- Recording Secretary: Jim Butler
- Treasurer: Sheila Burk
- Membership Secretary: Barb Dickson
- Newsletter Editor: Paul Jenner
- Website Coordinator: Gary Campaigne

Motion 25-13: That the 2025/26

Executive be accepted as presented.

Moved: Karen Boyer Seconded: Sandra Turnbull Motion: carried

Item 14: Presentation to incoming President

- Jim Butler made a presentation to Bill Otton of the "Corroded Connection" and President's gavel

Item 15: Presentation to outgoing President

- Bill Otton made a presentation to Jim Butler to recognize his contribution to the club as president

Item 16: Adjournment

Motion 25-14: That the 2025 DOA AGM be adjourned.

Moved: Karen Boyer Motion carried



Photos: Paul Jenner

Sheila Burk gave the financial report as well as details for the September regatta.



Outgoing president Jim Butler hands over the two badges of office to incoming president Bill Otton.

Looking At the Details in an Old Postcard



Here's an old postcard titled "Waiting for Mail", Go Home Bay, Georgian Bay. Not sure what the date is, but it could be the 1920s or 1930s. Obviously getting the mail was a big deal back then as quite a crowd has gathered, waiting perhaps for the mail boat.

There is quite an assortment of boats to be seen here, everything from canoes to rowing skiffs, a skiff powered by what appears to be an early Evinrude outboard and a small sailboat at the far end of the dock. In the middle are a couple of large inboard powered launches. One has an almost full length canvas canopy covering all the seating area, while the one in front is completely open and is sporting individual wicker chairs.

I can just make out the name "Temeraire" on the bow. "Temeraire" (French for reckless) was the name of a French warship captured by the Royal Navy in 1759 and the name was consequently used on other ships of the Royal Navy.

Tied up in front of those two launches is a humble Waterford model Dispro. Yes, even in the wide open waters of Georgian Bay, the Dippy was a popular and seaworthy craft. Today, some members of the DOA still confidently use their boats on Georgian Bay.

Image provided by: **Gary Campaigne**

Observations: **Paul Jenner**

The Life and History of Gertrude

A 1923 Port Carling Uncle Sam

Our initial involvement with the world of Disappearing Propeller Boats began when we attended our first ACBS Boat Show in Gravenhurst. Ian saw a couple of Dispros on Dock B and was impressed with these little wooden boats with their beautifully shiny copper jacket engines. He was not yet aware of their real magic, the disappearing Device. During the show we happened to run into a friend we had first met on a holiday in Grenada and had maintained social contact with Dr. Henry Wilson from Orillia was familiar with the antique boating world and had a couple of magnificent wooden boats himself. He suggested to Ian that if he wanted more information about Dispros, he should contact a gentleman named Paul Dodington, who lived in Port Carling.

In another twist of fate, while having lunch with a fellow at a company in Toronto, Ian mentioned being at the boat show and being intrigued by Dispros. Unbelievably, his lunch mate was familiar with Dispros and had a Dispro for sale. Ian expressed an interest in seeing it. Ian decided he should take Henry's advice and contact Paul Dodington. One evening he found his number and made a cold call to Paul to see if he could hire him to accompany us to give us his opinion of the boat. I could hear Ian in his office talking to Paul, and after an hour and a half he was still chatting. Knowing Paul's passion for Dispros as I do now, this does not surprise me. At the time, I was amazed that a cold call with a total stranger could last that long.

Paul was keen to join us on a road trip, so one Saturday shortly after, we picked Paul up at his home at Wharerah in Port Carling and set off to see the boat. The owner picked us up on the mainland to take us to his island. In the boathouse was a heavily modified Dispro that absolutely refused to start. We decided, with Paul's guidance, that perhaps this was not the boat for us. When we returned to our car, Paul asked if we had time to look at another boat. The day was young, so of course we did! Paul said he was brokering a boat and wouldn't tell us much about it. He said he wanted us to see what we thought. From Minett, we headed south to Moose Deer Point Marina on Twelve Mile Bay. There she was, *Gertrude*, glistening in the sun and looking like she had just come from the factory. Needless to say, we were impressed! Paul explained how the boat worked and suggested that we take it out for a run, so we borrowed life jackets from people on the next boat. I thought a washroom break before we left might be a good idea. I headed off to the marina and as I was leaving, decided a large bag of Cheetos might make a yummy makeshift lunch as it was now well past one o'clock and our new adventure was about to begin.

With Ian and Paul at the dashboard and me in the rear seat we set off under warm, sunny skies on what was to be our own Gilligan's Island Three Hour Tour. Paul kindly showed Ian how to operate the boat and I enjoyed the scenery. With our stomachs grumbling, I felt it was time to crack open the Cheetos as we putted along. I will always remember Paul's enormous grin and his comment, "Life doesn't get much better than this!" Ian and I agreed and I think that was the moment we were smitten with Dispros. Paul suggested we go out to the large tree that was on an island we could see in the far distance. We agreed, but distance to the tree was much farther than it initially appeared, unlike the warning on a car side mirror. As we approached the island with the tree,

Paul then suggested that we could go around the island. At this point the waves were getting larger, my inability to swim and my fear of water was kicking in, and my bladder was beginning to come to life. Catching Ian's eye, I gave him the cut across the neck signal and Ian suggested to Paul that we should head back. When we arrived back at the marina the boat we borrowed the life jackets from was gone. It had started to take on water and we found it sitting in dry dock. We returned our new friend Paul home and shortly after, the deal was completed. *Gertrude* then came to Muldrew Lake.

Our Twelve Mile Bay cruise held many fond memories for us. Some time later, while sitting with friends at the cottage, Ian suggested the idea we that as a club, we should be using our boats on a more regular basis and the concept of UUMMTs was born. Of course the first one was held on Twelve Mile Bay.

Gertrude was built in the Port Carling Dispro factory in 1923. She spent most of her life with the Freeborn family from Brantford, who cottaged at Point Gertrude, near the swing bridge in Bala Bay. In an ironic twist to my story, Joseph Freeborn worked as a manager for the Ham and Nott Manufacturing Company in Brantford. It was an early refrigeration company and also made hosiery style kitchen cupboards. It is our understanding that Mr. Freeborn developed a serious illness, probably TB. On the invitation of Mr. Nott, who had been coming to Muskoka, Mr. Freeborn went to Muskoka to recover. He fell in love with the area and purchased property there. In the early eighties a friend gave me a Ham and Nott kitchen cupboard which I restored and we still have it at our cottage.

Our boat *Gertrude* had been named after Mrs. Freeborn and her daughter, also Gertrude, and we felt we should keep her name in honour of her history. At Paul's suggestion, we took *Gertrude* to our first regatta at Stanton House in 2002. Although we were not yet club members, Paul encouraged us to attend. Happy Thomson was membership



Gertrude in her early days.

secretary and before we had finished our last bite of breakfast on Saturday morning, we were members in good standing of the DOA. Since that time, *Gertrude* has traveled many kilometres on the lakes and rivers of Muskoka. We in turn, through our wonderful DOA, have made many life long friends and acquaintances, explored areas of the province we could never have seen or enjoyed in any other form of transport and shared many wonderful experiences with others who have one common connection, our little boats.

As a postscript, knowing Paul's love of "Cheesies", two large bags were delivered to his door in Toronto on his 80th birthday. He amazingly knew their source and we received a lovely note in return. Thanks for your guidance and friendship Paul. It's been a great adventure!

Barb Dickson

Upcoming Events in 2025

We remind members that UUMMTs (Unofficial Unorganized Mini Misery Tours) are unorganized and unauthorized and as such the DOA leadership is not in any way responsible for any misadventure that might accidentally occur during any such event. These “mini tours” are fun and we look forward to them each year, but please exercise caution and be safe.

For first timers, come prepared for all possible weather and lake conditions. Bring your own lunch, water and supplies to be self sufficient. Your fellow Dispro boaters will be happy to guide and assist you.

Saturday July 12 – ACBS Boat Show – Gravenhurst

The DOA will again be in attendance with our usual tent display. Anyone who is able to spend a couple of hours at the display answering questions and generally promoting the joys of Dispros, please contact Bob or Sheila Burk. Contact information is at the bottom of page 2 in this issue.

Saturday July 26 – UUMMT 56 – Kahshe Lake

Launch Site: Town of Gravenhurst Government Dock, 1119 South Kahshe Lake Road. Details: Launch between 9:00 and 9:30 Saturday morning. Aiming to start boating at 9:30. Morning will cruise down the lake through Housey’s Rapids into Bass Lake. Picnic lunch at Bass Lake Park. No docks at the park but very nice sandy beach. Afternoon returning to the launch site. Washroom available at the launch site. Portable toilet available at Bass Lake Park.

Any questions, please contact Jim Butler at 289-684-3417.

Monday August 18 – UUMMT 57 – Bala Bay

Checked out all the launch sites in the area and found that the Torrance launch site would be the best. Take Highway 169 W. of Gravenhurst to Torrance Road and then onto Queen’s Walk Road. The launch site is right there and there is plenty of parking within a short walk from the landing.

Hopefully we’ll all be launched by 10 am and will head around Bala Bay, Bala Park Island and Acton Island area. We will have lunch at Windsor Park in Bala. We will probably be about two hours in the morning and an hour in the afternoon and then back to the landing. Please make sure everyone brings a picnic lunch as we have no host and we’ll be at a public park.

Any questions, please contact Brad and Karen Jackson at 705-764-1901.

September 5-7– Annual Regatta – Jolly Roger Inn & Resort, Parry Sound

A little bit different format than previous regattas but with many more options. If you want to attend, make sure you book soon as space is limited. The regatta is always the highlight of the boating season so you don’t want to miss it.

Saturday October 25 – Fall Workshop – Coldwater Legion

Remember to make a note (or notes) of your Dippy quick fixes or general tips and tricks that you employ to keep your boat running smoothly. The workshops are always well attended and we can all learn something new about our wonderful boats.

Crossing the Bar

It somehow doesn’t seem quite right when talking about boats to use the landlubber’s term “milestones” in reference to indicators of change, so I suppose the nautical equivalent might be the phrase that the poet Tennyson immortalized as “crossing the bar” – the passage over the harbour bar en route to the great unknown.

Well, whether we realize it or not, the Dispro made such a passage in April 1990, when the last of the original Dippy engine builders went out of business.

The Coventry Victor Motor Company (reorganized in the late 1960s as A. N. Weaver (Coventry Victor Ltd.) was begun in 1911 by Alfred Weaver’s father after he had built and flown one of the first successful aircraft in the British Empire. Initially, the company was a machine shop, but by the end of World War I it had branched into the manufacture of small engines for motorcycles and cyclecars. In the 1930s, an outboard motor, the Neptune, was introduced, and later came the inboard engines that developed directly into the PMW1 and M02 engines used in Greavette Dispros from 1951 on.

When I heard last spring that the company was ceasing operations I made arrangements to go to England and try to salvage what was left that was applicable to D.P.’s. I stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Weaver and their two children at their home in Coventry. They were most hospitable and although the visit was only of 24 hours duration, I learned a great deal about the history of the company.

I was taken to three different factory locations that the company occupied over the years. The first one was just a block from Coventry Cathedral, and was of course, utterly destroyed by Nazi bombing along with the cathedral. The second and third premises were farther on the outskirts of Coventry and are still standing. The engines which powered the Greavette Dippies were built in a new factory just to the north of Coventry. This was a rather large but nondescript collection of buildings, rather like something you’d see in “Scarberia”. My camera, unfortunately packed up during the first few minutes I had there, so I was unable to get a photograph for posterity!

In the late 1960s, the original company got into financial difficulties and reorganized as “A.N. Weaver (Coventry Victor) Ltd. At this time, large scale production ceased, and the company moved in the early 1970s to much smaller premises at Smith’s Industrial Estate in Coventry. From this time on, the total staff numbered about a half dozen souls, and from what I can gather, the business was mainly one of supply of an existing stock of engines and spare part in the marine and industrial field.

For the past several years, the fate of the business had depended largely on the annual renewal of government contracts for marine and industrial equipment and spares, and when one of these contracts was not forthcoming, the bankers foreclosed, and the company ceased operations. Who would have foretold that Margaret Thatcher would be the one to deliver the fatal blow to this last major manufacturer of Dippy equipment?

Now that the Greavette Dippys have “crossed the bar” what lies ahead? Certainly, it will be essential for every Coventry Victor owner to be fastidious about engine maintenance. Those who forget to drain their cooling systems before freeze-up, who run their engines low on oil or allow their engines to become submerged, may find themselves in serious difficulties indeed.

But on the positive side, if all owners do their best to ensure nothing beyond normal wear and tear happens to their engines, I see no reason for undue concerns. Sufficient spare parts were salvaged from England to keep most, if not all, of these Dippy engines “putting” sweetly along, well into the 21st century. And don’t forget: if you have spare

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Coventry Victor parts lying around – even if they are worn out, incomplete or damaged – don't throw them out! As time goes on, we will learn new methods for renovating and salvaging such items so that the next generation of Dippy enthusiasts may enjoy the boats just as we do today.

Paul Dodington, 1991

A Dispro called Waterbug

Cameron Peck was a wealthy Chicago businessman who had a fascination for collections. As a Muskoka cottager on Lake of Bays, he had an extensive collection of boats; everything from steamboats such as Naiad, Wanda III and Phoebe to raceboats such as Whippet, Dix, B IV and Altair, many of which are still on the lakes today.

His collection also included a Disappearing Propellor Boat. We know very little about this boat, but it was labelled as a 1920's and called *Waterbug*.

In the early 1950s, Mr. Peck's collection of at least 50 boats was sold at auction at Baysville, Ontario. The description in the auction flyer reads: "Dis-Pro-19 ½ ft. with one-cylinder St. Lawrence engine, pull start. These boats are too well known to need further description. It is in good condition."

It would be interesting to know if this boat still exists today.

Mary Storey

Cameron Peck Photo Archive



However, this photo allegedly of *Waterbug* from the Cameron Peck Photo Archive, clearly shows a copper jacket dispro engine and not the St. Lawrence engine as advertised in the sale.

Paul Jenner



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