

# Vintage Views

## The Helter Skelter Saga

### Part 3 The Restoration by John Jenkins and Tim Settle

“The phone call from Phil came out of the blue, sort of, in late 2010. ‘John, I want you to restore my old race boat **Helter Skelter**’ Well, now. I first met Phil in 1979 at a meet, and got to know him really as a photographer of limited inboard raceboats and the people in the sport. His racing career as an owner/driver ended back in 1972, and I was just beginning my racing activities in ‘79. After a few more discussions, I agreed to undertake the boat’s restoration (or more accurately, its rebuilding) as you will see, for one significant reason.

“I came to realize what this boat meant personally to Phil and its discovery by Rich Willim after being lost for so many years. I had begun my work and my company, *Hydroplane Ltd.* in 2006 here in Kingston, Ohio and had some experience restoring, repairing and building race boats. This project struck me as a little special though. I believe it’s a rarity to give up a major focus of your life for four years, never expecting to experience it again, and then having it reappear as a neglected hulk. Phil and Tim Settle had retrieved the boat from Rich Willim’s shop up in Michigan and started to take a closer look at its condition. As Jack Hines removed part of the deck and much of the hardware, they realized the extent of the deterioration of much of the wood. Then I was brought into the picture. They brought what was left of **Helter Skelter** to my shop and my work began in December, 2010.

“The first thing I did, as I do with all my projects, was to determine how much of the wood in the boat was re-usable. Well, not too much. It appeared that the boat was stored on an angle, bow up, so a good deal of the deterioration was in the bottom and back of the boat and in the backs of the sponsons. The front part of the boat was not as bad. So, the project became a rebuilding effort – new frames, new keel, new battens, new skin on the deck and new rear frames on the sponsons, using the old parts as patterns. The sides of the boat were fairly solid, but scarred and rough, so I covered them with an overlay of 1/8 inch plywood. The new decks are 1/4 inch Okume, covered with a layer of glass. The pictures show this process in some detail.



New frames, new transom, and covered sides of **Helter Skelter**.



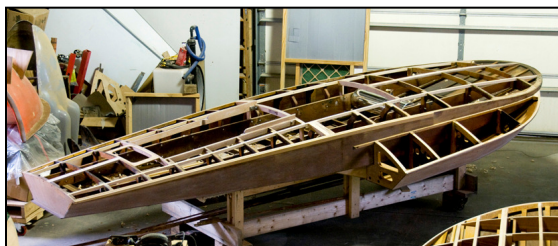
New keel, new bottom battens installed.



New battens installed in sponson bottoms.



Completed bottom, ready to turn over.



Right side up, ready for deck skin installation.



Ski installed with many c-clamps.

“The only interruptions to the work schedule through the winter were the frequent visits by Phil, along with either Ron Snyder, or Jack Hines, or Tim Settle, or John Kovach, to check on the progress and, of course, to take pictures. Didn’t seem to mind these visits, which usually included an extended lunch and much story-telling. All in all, things went somewhat according to plan.



Jack Hines and me glassing the deck.



Glass sanded and ready for paint.

“I then went through all the boat’s hardware, cleaning and polishing it as necessary. I painted **Helter Skelter** according to its original color scheme with the stars on the cowl, and awaited the arrival of the engine – from Rich Willim. While Phil originally ran it with a 265 Chevy, we decided to install the 273 Chrysler which Rich got along with the boat, along with assorted 273 parts and a spare parts engine. John Kovach and Phil brought the engine complete with Rich's newly fabricated and fitted oil pan down from Michigan to my shop, and I proceeded to install it in the completed hull. We had to relocate the engine rails, modify the linkage and plumbing set-up, and fabricate some new parts – which went smoothly, thanks to the machining expertise of Jack Hines. I (thankfully) completed all the restoration/rebuilding/ reinstalling/repainting work in time so it could be taken to Dayton for the *Test and Tune* event in May of 2011 for its initial trial runs. We used a trailer which was supplied by Tim Settle – but that’s another interesting story in itself.



Rich Willim loading the “new” 273.

### **Trailer Restoration** by Tim Settle.



Painting the trailer in my yard.

“So how did I get involved with the **Helter Skelter** project? Well, I became acquainted with Phil one day when we met by accident – and he began discussing the story behind a boat my father bought when I was about 5 years old. **Barracuda**. I was unaware of the historical importance of this 1947 Wickens raceboat and its racing pedigree. Following this and many more conversations with Phil, I began the restoration of ol’ **Barracuda**, and have since regularly run it at may vintage events around the Eastern part of the country – enjoying it immensely, thanks to Phil's information and advice.

“When Phil mentioned around November, 2010, that he thought he found his old *Cunningham* raceboat and needed some help in bringing it down to Dayton from Michigan, I was glad to help. We rented a flatbed trailer, and headed up to Rich Willim's shop in Carleton, Michigan. He had told us the trailer was not really roadworthy, and would need some attention before any traveling of any distance. We loaded the trailer holding the remains of **Helter Skelter** on the flatbed, and took it to Phil's house. Phil had already contacted John Jenkins about his doing the restoration work, so we hauled it down to John's shop in Kingston. I agreed to see what I could do with the trailer, perhaps put a new tongue on it and so on, and took it back to my house.

“The more I looked at the trailer, the worse it looked. It was, in a word, *nasty*. I had told Phil I would restore the trailer, but the more I looked at it, and realizing the restored **Helter Skelter** would become a 'thing of beauty', I decided to build the boat a new trailer and trash the old – but kept Phil in the dark. The pictures of **Helter Skelter** in its racing form showed it sitting on a *Lauterbach* trailer, built I believe, by Henry's son, Hank. I decided to replicate the original *Lauterbach* trailer, and surprise Phil. Keeping him away during that winter was not easy – he kept wanting to see my progress and take pictures, of course. And, I believe he thought I was procrastinating, and might not have it done by Spring. Finally he came by and was obviously pleasantly surprised at my decision. The new trailer matched the “new” boat.



Completed trailer, ready for **Helter Skelter**.

Submitted by Paul Poledink