



2002: European Water Ski Racing Championships
Left to right: Dave Llewellyn, Martin Davies, Nigel Knott

Water ski racing is a demanding sport and most British ski racers do their couple of years on a ski and then either retire from racing or take on a more leisurely role as an observer, driver or judge, etc. One man who has remained faithfully strapped to his ski and gone on to start and finish more British water ski races than any other person in history is 64 year old Martin Davies from Penhow near Chepstow. What's more, 2008 marks his 40th year as a skier in British water ski racing.

The persistent perfectionist mounts his bicycle at 7.30 most mornings to conquer the hill at Wentwood Forest in Wales and yet the only devoted member of his family to join him is his Terrier named Harry. His two daughters, devoted wife, grandchildren and neighbours simply stand back and wonder why the well spoken successful gent has not decided to take it easy yet. But this is just part of his training regime in his quest for success in racing.

It all started at the age of 17 when he built his own sail boat. Then in 1967 he decided that he needed some engine power, and went out to buy a little wooden boat called an Albatross. The beautiful lake at Llangorse near the Brecon Beacons in Wales set the scene for Martin's early skiing attempts and it was there that he met John Robinson who soon suggested that they join Barry Ski Club and 'have a go at water ski racing'.



1975: Left to right: Billy Taylor, Tony Waite, Martin Davies

Martin Davies - 40 Years of Chequered Flags

Martin has been married for 43 years and his wife Pauline has countless tales to tell. She said; "in the early days I woke one morning to find Martin meddling in the kitchen. He had a plank of wood with one end suspended above a steaming pot of boiling water and the other end poking out of the kitchen window – but I don't think he ever raced on the homemade concoction. I also remember the time when he took a fall in a race and found his ski floating down the Bristol Channel - one month later".

Martin joined and raced for Penarth (Wales) Water Ski Club, which was then one of five clubs that made up the newly formed Bristol Channel and Severn Ski Association (B.C.S.S.A). In those days, Penarth was one of Britain's strongest Racing clubs. By that time, Martin was the proud owner of a Fletcher 139 entering A Class (50hp) and a regular racer in the 50 lap races all over the country that were often over 2 hours long skiing hands in front! Pauline said; "those were the days when crews had to count their laps and it was common practice to have 50 pebbles in the boat

and throw one out as each lap went by". When moving up a gear to B Class there was severe competition and in 1973 Martin realised that he needed a boat upgrade. After spending the winter months working on a new boat with the late Ray Stapley, a new love affair blossomed when a beautiful wooden 'Stapley Hawk' emerged from the Stapley boat factory and entered his life. The name was 'Tarantula' and his wife Pauline was to share her husband with his second love for the next 11 years.

In 40 years of racing, Martin has seen many observers and drivers come and go and he will never forget his great friend Billy Taylor who drove him to countless medals. Billy left ski racing in the late 70's to take up powerboat racing but tragically lost his life in the 80's when his boat flipped at Nottingham.

Another driver who has remained consistent with Martin over the last 13 years is Dave Llewellyn. Martin had introduced Dave and his family to ski racing back in 1976 at Llangorse Lake. Dave said; "Martin is a terrific ambassador

for the sport and always makes time to tell people about water ski racing. He is still completely committed and in love with the sport. We've raced together since 1996 and finished on the British national podium every year except 2007 – he's incredible. The sport is so important in Martin's life that his staff can always tell whether he has had a good weekend of racing by his mood when he walks into the office on a Monday morning".

After hundreds of trophies over 40 years, the highlight of Martin's skiing career came at the age of 58 with Dave Llewellyn and observer (from 1997 to 2007) Nigel Knott when they celebrated winning the silver medal at the 2002 European Water Ski Racing Championships at Plymouth. But one of the proudest moments for this charismatic skier was when he stood at the edge of Lake Mead in Nevada USA and watched his eldest daughter (and mother of two) Paula, represent Great Britain at the 2001 World Championships.

Former World Champion Liz Hobbs (MBE) said; "Martin is one of the iconic characters on the British ski racing circuit for as long as I can remember. I have never met anyone who has had a bad word to say about him. When you compete week in week out around the UK and Europe over a number of years, there are teams that come and go and those you just can't get rid of, thank goodness. Martin and his team get a first for week-in, week-out for consistency! Irrespective of where he finishes, he always has a smile and a good word to say and is devoted in preparation for the next week. He has and continues to be a great ambassador for our sport, and long may that continue. From dauphins to the ol' codgers - you go Martin".

Robbie Llewellyn said; "it's funny how Martin introduced my family to ski racing over 30 years ago. My brother Paul and I started and retired long ago and yet Martin still keeps going. It's also funny to remember the time that I unhitched the boat from his car just as he was about to drive home from a race at Minsterworth. He sprinted after me and as I cleared the next fence and what lay beyond it, Martin didn't jump so far and landed in a huge pile of manure that accompanied him on his journey home that day in the late 1970's. Seriously though, it's incredible how Martin continues to be so committed and competitive. Hats off to the old bugger".

So the 64 year old grandfather who has helped his children, grandchildren and countless others share the sport he loves so much, prepares for yet another season of racing, 2008 will see Martin and former F1 driver Dave Llewellyn team up once again. Their observer will be Colin Harris who has himself enjoyed a huge amount of national and international success from A Class to F1. Believe it or not, 'Team Davies, Llewellyn & Harris' enter this year's races with a combined age of over 180, but they will certainly give Britain's younger teams a serious run for their money.

By: Joanna Davies & Robbie Llewellyn



photo: Martin and his crew in action

Keith Slater