

Flying Boats?

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Monitor flying across Lake Mendota in 1955

This year's America's Cup was the first time most armchair sailors had seen a sailboat go faster than the wind. But for a handful Madison iceboaters including Bill Mattison and Jack Ripp it was *deja-vu*. They'd seen it all before--one day in August, 1955 when the Monitor flew across Lake Mendota.

In the mid-1930s, Gordon Baker raced E Scows with the Mendota Yacht Club in Madison. Gordon was a great sailor because he *really knew* something about wind power. That's because the family business, Baker Manufacturing in Evansville, WI, was one of the country's foremost manufacturers of windmills. Gordon began experimenting with hydrofoils in the 1940s and launched his first prototype hydrofoil, a sailboat, in 1950 at the University Boathouse on Lake Mendota. Based on its success, Baker Manufacturing soon introduced a hydrofoil kit for powerboats in 1953. Once installed, a 14-foot boat with a 10-horespower motor could reach speeds of 35 miles per hour.



One of these boats sold at an auction in May of 2012 in Wilmar, MN.

With some funding from the U.S. Navy's Office of Naval Research, Baker continued to perfect the designs on his hydrofoil next sailboat, the *Monitor*. On August 25, 1955, Baker and his colleague Robert Johnston climbed aboard *Monitor* and headed for the open water of Lake Mendota off Picnic Point. As the boat's speed increased, *Monitor*'s hull lifted onto a set of three ladder-shaped hydrofoils. With her high-aspect sails, *Monitor* literally *flew* across Lake Mendota at 25 knots (28.7 mph), setting a new speed record for a sailboat of any kind. Footage of the event was shown on ABC-TV's *John Daly and the News* and photos of the boat were featured in *Sports Illustrated* and *Life* magazines later that year. A year later, *Monitor* set another record on Mendota, reaching 30.4 knots (35 mph), or twice the speed of the wind.

You can see drawings of *Monitor* as well as photos and short film clips of *Monitor* sailing on Lake Mendota here: http://www.wind-water.nl/test/contents/monitor_1.php