

## INDUCTEE PROFILE

# 'Cyclone' Malone

## Hollidaysburg native becomes world champion watercraft athlete

By Josh Langenbacher

Seeing their children's interest in watersports along with a desire to break away from work during summer weekends, Gene and Bonnie Malone bought a houseboat that the Malones parked at Lake Raystown.

What transpired trans-fixed the attention of a future world champion who revolutionized the sport of jet ski competitions.

From the days of tearing up Lake Raystown to his first competition at Lakemont Park to becoming a multi-time world and national champion, Eric Malone's impact on the sport of jet skiing will be honored with his induction into the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame.

Pro Rider Watercraft Magazine Publisher Michael Ratti shared, "When I was starting in the sport, Eric was prime time, on TV, in movies winning championships in surf and flat water, pushing the sport, especially freestyle, constantly creating new tricks, releasing videos and performing shows with World Freestyle Watercraft Alliance (WFWA). Freestylers idolized him, studied his equipment and maneuvers. His mentorship helped me develop skills that enabled me to travel



Eric's 43 titles are the most in International Jet Sports Boating Association history and include eight world championships.

the world much like he did through the sport of jet skiing."

"You talk around the jet ski world, and everyone knows Eric Malone," said boyhood friend Jason Ritchey, who trained and competed with Malone on tour the year Malone won his first U.S. national championships in amateur freestyle. "He's the man in the sport and for what he's done. He's definitely the icon in the sport."

"We'd go on tour, and Gene and Eric would work together, and they'd come up with crazy awesome ideas to figure out how to make things work or make things work better," Ritchey added. "It was tribal knowledge."

Indeed, Malone carved out a niche in the jet ski world. His fearless ways, unrivaled ingenuity and never-ending search to innovate resulted in transforming the sport not only as a competitor, but as a manufacturer of his freestyle machines under Eric Malone Enterprises.

"Eric Malone is the winningest pro freestyle athlete in the sport," said Scott Frazier, president of the IJSBA (The International Jet Sports Boating

(Continued on page 16)



**Eric's exploits on the jet ski circuit brought exposure in numerous national publications, including Sports Illustrated.**

*(Continued from page 15)*

Association), the worldwide sanctioning body for personal watercraft competitive racing.

Malone has won eight world championships (seven as a professional, one as an amateur) and 11 pro U.S. national championships.

Malone was credited with developing the famous jet ski trick, the no-handed barrel roll. That same year, he won the IJSBA Pro World Championship using another trademark trick, the double-barrel roll.

Other notable jet ski tricks he developed include the double 720° aerial barrel roll in surf, and flatwater backflip. He also created the industry's first "vert ramp" for WFWA stunt shows across the U.S.

Malone earned a movie SAG card when he stunt doubled for main actors in the movies "I Am Number 4" and "Into the Blue."

"There is no question that Eric Malone is the father of modern free-style watercraft competitions," Frazier said. "His athleticism and gymnastic prowess was a natural fit for the emerging personal watercraft sensation that swept through the millennium. He developed an artistic flair that, when

combined with his control of a watercraft, raised the bar to a new level that few of the world's competitors could reach."

Malone culled fragments of various avenues to fuse them together to be at the forefront of the industry. Inside of his trophy case at his home are the first trophies he won.

As a youth, Malone won a trophy playing basketball in the Hollidaysburg youth league, which Malone says showed him that inputting time into refining a craft could lead to an output of results.

Malone worked with Gemini Gymnastics trainers during the offseason and believes his years competing as a wrestler for Hollidaysburg taught him about leverage and other tactics that helped him during his career.

Malone's pursuit of his passion on

jet skis was not limited to the physical benefits he derived from other sports, though.

One of the best decisions he ever made, he said, was working with sports trainer and psychologist Dr. Bill Thierfelder, who additionally instructed Malone on the mental aspect of competing on an international stage.

"Eric was one of the most gifted athletes I ever worked with," said Thierfelder, who worked with professional athletes in every sport before becoming president of Belmont Abbey College near Charlotte, North Carolina. "He was a motor control genius. He was remarkable. When he came to me



## Malone bio

**Sport:** Jet skiing

**High school:** Hollidaysburg

**College:** Penn State Altoona

**Hall of Fame achievement:** Winningest professional in International Jet Sports Boating Association competition with 43 titles, including eight world IJSBA championships (seven pro, one amateur) between 1995 and 2010.

**Current residence:** Hollidaysburg



originally, my first impression was he was a young guy that wanted to do everything he possibly could to tap out every bit of ability he was blessed with. He didn't want to leave one stone unturned."

Malone credits his hometown for helping him tap out every ounce of ability, noting that training in the relative anonymity of Pennsylvania helped him develop his equipment and new tricks on the skis because he could practice incognito as opposed to training in a hotbed like California, Florida, or Arizona, where watchful eyes could have derailed the tricks he debuted at international competitions for the first time.

"I could train without my competitors watching," Malone said. "The name of the game is to develop new tricks, and that requires me and the machine to be stronger each and every day, keeping the two in sync."

When Malone began competing, his Pennsylvania roots meant sponsorship opportunities were rare. During his amateur years, his parents sponsored Malone in his competitions and later purchased a powersports dealership. Malone established himself in the sport



**Eric's home in Hollidaysburg has a special room to display his memorabilia.**

winning the amateur freestyle U.S. national and world championship and later through the connections people like Shawn Alladio provided.

Alladio trained Malone in swift water rescue. Malone then applied those skills later in life and earned national recognition for his heroic efforts during the floods of 1996 when he rescued people in Linds Crossing and Claysburg.



**Eric's prowess earned him roles as a stunt man doubling for main actors in the movies "I Am Number 4" and "Into the Blue."**

Alladio's connections also helped Malone land a one-on-one meeting resulting in a sponsorship from industry heavyweights during a rather risky meeting with Steve Lawler, the racing manager of Yamaha's personal watercraft division. During a trip to California, Alladio and Malone met Lawler on an unplanned visit to Yamaha's headquarters.

"I just barged right in, and Steve was in a meeting with someone else," Alladio recalled. "I said 'No, Steve, you're in a meeting with me right now.' We sat down and he asked 'What's going on with you, Shawn?' And I said, 'It's not what's going on with me, Steve. It's what's going on with you. This is your newest pro rider, and you're going to sponsor him, because if you don't, you're going to regret it when Eric becomes a world champion. You're going to look like a fool, and I don't think you're a fool.'"

Malone left with a contract agreement, and Malone began flying to competitions while his parents followed in a motorhome.

Malone's father, Gene, estimated he purchased about three or four motorhomes that each racked up more than 100,000 miles on cross-country trips while the Malones supported their son.

Bonnie Malone died of cancer in July 2005, while Eric was still competing.

Today, Malone continues to support the industry while pursuing a career in real estate. An exemplary model of how success follows hard work, dedication and perseverance, Malone is a role model and proud citizen of Blair County.

"It's always been my home base and I have always lived here, it's where my closest friends and family are," he said. "It's home to me."

He appreciates his hometown's support and recognition.

"The more I think about it, when I was inducted into the jet ski industry Hall of Fame, that was expected," he said. "This is 10 times the honor with it being a rural area in Pennsylvania and individuals not really into jet skiing. For that to be recognized is a complete honor."