



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The Sea Rocket will carry 12 passengers from wharf to wharf in eight minutes, at \$10 for a round trip.

Water taxi links Santa Cruz, Capitola

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MONTEREY BAY — Imagine getting from Santa Cruz to Capitola in under 10 minutes. With no traffic. No parking ticket. No asphalt. No glares from uptight drivers.

Imagine only bay waters shimmering below, a cool breeze running through your hair, salt spray misting your face, and stares may be from a low-flying pelican.

It will all be possible when a waterfront

shuttle service makes its debut next weekend, bringing back a wharf-to-wharf taxi service that locals and tourists have not been able to enjoy since the early 1950s.

Called the Sea Rocket, the 34-foot Nordic speed boat is like, well, a sea rocket. With a twin drive train and a catamaran hull, the four-ton vessel jets smoothly across the bay, at times hovering *above* the water.

"It's a marine limousine — that's what I

■ *Monterey Bay could be Yosemite on water, and grand visions for the National Marine Sanctuary are moving out of a pure dream stage. For the story, see Page A12.*

like to call it. And it's fun," said Krista Lighthall, the skipper.

When she took the boat on trial runs during the past month, Lighthall said, she always made a point to turn her head from the helm to scan the passengers' faces as the boat left the harbor and headed out to sea. "I love looking back and seeing all the smiles," she said.

It took owner Jim Beauregard of Santa Cruz, who is also co-owner of the Chardonnay II, nearly two years to reach this point. The \$120,000 boat is built to Navy SEAL standards and has twin Mercruiser 7.4 Bravo II engines. It runs on 14 gallons per hour at 45 mph.

The shuttle venture has only met with enthusiasm and support, Beauregard said. "No opposition at all," he said.

He has already won unanimous approvals from the cities of Capitola and Santa Cruz and the Santa Cruz Port District and is awaiting final approval from the state Coastal Commission, which he expects to get within a week. The U.S. Coast Guard has also tested the boat, and will be doing a final test before the shuttle service begins.

The boat carries up to 12 passengers and will make stops at the Small Craft Harbor (on the Crow's Nest side), the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf and the Capitola Wharf.

Tickets are \$10 round-trip — usable all day — or \$5 for a one-way trip. It's cheaper than the \$14 cab ride from Capitola to Santa Cruz, Beauregard said.

For now, Beauregard plans to start with only weekend service

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from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. During the peak summer season, beginning in mid-June, the service will run daily from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Departures will be every two hours. But if the demand calls for it, Beauregard said, the rides could run every hour or every half-hour.

"We'll see," he said. "Since it's a new business, you have to see how it goes."

The bright yellow, pink and white speed boat is a novelty in local waters right now. As it approached the Capitola Wharf during a preview ride Thursday, it immediately raised the curiosity of two local residents soaking up the bay view.

"A water taxi?" said Pleasure Point resident Mike Barker. "I think it's really cool. They should have had something like this a long time ago."

In fact, they did. That is, the Stagnaro family did.

For several years after 1946, the Stagnaro family ran a water taxi,

called Big Boy II, from Santa Cruz to Capitola. It was an hour-long, round-trip ride. The "weather element" finally spelled its demise, said Robert "Big Boy" Stagnaro.

But at around the same time, the family's Sea Stag II speed boat was a big hit. For 20 years, the Sea Stag II flourished as a \$1 tourist attraction (50 cents for kids), offering 11-minute tours of the bay off the former Pleasure Pier near the Boardwalk. The 38-foot vessel zoomed around the water at 45 mph and carried up to 45 passengers.

Talking about the new Sea Rocket gets Stagnaro in a nostalgic mood.

"It's exciting," he said. "It's great to see someone trying to bring that type of operation back. It could bring back the popularity of the speed boat of years ago."