

Trabing

# Mostly about People

By Wally Trabing



## Hot Boat Driver

Speed over water is capturing the imagination of a passel of daredevils and I talked to one the other evening and discovered a number of facts I never would have known if I hadn'tov.

Jack Heitz, who drives a truck and lives at 336 Frederick street, has "eeeeooooommmmed" 150 miles per hour over water.

He was a little concerned about my making it sound too risky because he says boat racing is on of the safest sports there is.

I didn't think to ask him: "Relative to what—cliff climbing?"

I have raced row boats attaining a speed sufficient to make the trailing of my fingers in the water a relaxing pastime.

Heitz talks of speeds in the 50s and 70s.

When a 14-foot racing boat passes 50 mph, it has a tendency to become airborne, which negates the purpose of boat racing.

"Past 50, a boat actually floats along on a cushion of air between bounces. At times only the propeller is in the water," he said.

"I started seven years ago as a deck rider. He's the fellow that rides with the pilot and keeps the boat balanced by crawling about. When the front flares up (like a jet taking off), you flop on the bow.

"More times than not, now, I'll look around and my deck rider is gone—they fall off—and you have to get to him fast and protect him with the boat so the others won't hit him.

"I got 11 stitches in my head from being whacked by a following boat."

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So what, pray tell, is the sensation, hitting the water at 70? "Hitting the water at 70 knocks you half goofy," said Heitz.

"Sometimes you roll along the top, like a skipping rock."

This is a pretty satisfying description. He made it more satisfying.

"Let me tell you how hard the water is at high speeds.

"I've hit the top of a beer bottle floating in the water while doing about 70. The part sticking above that water has two ways to go—down in the water, or up through the bottom of the boat — in other words, it will take the path of least resistance.

"Well, that bottle exploded through my boat and drove glass into my legs!"

But, like he said, it's a relatively safe sport.

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Heitz is 42, an age which does not take kindly to hours of body pounding on a 400-mile race. He holds trophies for a seven-state race at Pineflat dam and for a marathon race from Stockton to Colusa and back—369 miles. Other hot-boat racers in this area are Joel Walters, Tom Walters, Jack Gillman and Gary Young.

Heitz reached his 150 mph in a 17-foot inboard Rayson Craft in the Salton sea.

"At this speed there is little sensation of motion. More like flying," he said.

After his fast runs Heitz will notice that the edges of his propeller are blue.

"This is because they have been burning from the friction of the water."

When the big boats speed, they leave "rooster tails" or spumes of water out behind. At 75 mph these "rooster tails" have been measured to arc up to 100 feet high and 500 long. Someone figured out that with six of these boats racing, they keep 12,000 gallons of water in the air.

Heitz has noticed another thing. The speed friction between boat and water becomes so pronounced that it often boils the water in the boat's bilge.

"Some guys driving barefoot have actually scalded their toes," he said.

Outside of these little things, boat racing is the safest sport in the world.