

Home Grown Racing

EORC Keeps The Racing Candle Alive On The East End

by Capt. Gary P. Joyce

As the boats come roaring out of the first turn headed for the green flag, they are lined up like a John Ford cavalry-charging-the-Indians scene, thundering directly at you. But it's not the Old West, nor is it *Miss Budweiser, Oh Boy, Oberto* and their ilk.

No, these boats belong to a variety of APBA (American Power Boat Association) outboard classes competing this June morning on a somewhat sheltered section of a fairly tranquil Flanders Bay, right off the Flanders Men's Club, just outside of Riverhead. Many of the boats are miniature versions of the aforementioned Gold Cup Unlimiteds, but there are just as many small runabouts wailing around the oval course. The one thing they have in common is that they are all members of the Eastern Outboard Racing Club (EORC), a grassroots organization that has been keeping the sport of outboard racing alive on eastern Long Island since 1948.

The EORC races take place from June to September on waters around the area - Cold Spring Pond, North Sea Harbor and Flanders Bay - and the boats compete in several of what seem like hundreds of possible APBA classes. The men, women and youngsters racing in the EORC mainly run B or C class stock outboards (J Class for juniors), and recently a well-competed-in Open class (OSY, the smallest engine class in the Open group) has developed. Regardless of the class, all of them continue a proud East End tradition of offering real racing competition at relatively affordable prices aimed at providing a rarity in today's culture - a *real* family activity that is educational, exciting and all about the boats.



Racers battle it out at the turn.

The EORC is believed to be the second oldest powerboat racing club in the United States. The club had been somewhat dormant in the 90s, but has been running at full throttle since with, in some cases, the third generation of racers providing the impetus.

"It's a party when you get to the races," said Pam Young, who handles the club's membership duties. Pam's husband, Dave, is high points champ for 2006 in the 24SSH class, and his son, Dave, also races. "It's like a big family reunion," she said, "a fraternity of racers and their families who are all involved in the sport as racers, scorers, timers, safety personnel and more."

A look at the 2006 series High Point results shows the democracy of the classes with Howie Pickerell winning B-1 Hydro class, Dave Young (Sr.) 25SSH class (Dave also won the national High Points award in this class), Mike Young winning B

Runabout and Diane Murray winning the OSY 400 class. More classes develop and get raced as racers from other area clubs enter the summer series EORC holds.

Stock Outboards

The stock outboard racing concept has been around since the 1920s and 30s and was most popular in the 50s and 60s but has become literally worldwide in scope. It's affordable and as competitive as you'd like it to be and is an excellent way to get on the water and racing. Children can start racing at nine in the J class, which runs a restrictor plate that restricts the amount of air the engine gets, slowing it down some. This class also uses low-efficiency props.

There are about a dozen classes raced in the Junior and Stock Outboard divisions in the EORC race. The classes are based on different criteria. Hull shape, racer's age, engine size and overall boat weight all come into play when determining the proper class, but the most discernible difference to the spectator is hull shape.

The nine to 13-foot boats are either the familiar hydroplane shape or the monohull, the latter referred to as runabouts. Most of the boats racing in the EORC events are 25 horsepower engines using standard gasoline that can achieve speeds in excess of 60 mph on straightaways. All the boats are either homemade or purchased from small builders.

"Most of the boats we race in the EORC are C and A class," said Dave Young. "The C-class is 30 ci boats ... usually Yamato engines. There are some Mercury 25XS and 25SS engines around, but Mercury doesn't make them anymore. That's one of the beauties of this sport, though. Those engines are still around and being used."

Young and partner Doug Pearsall manufacture some parts and adapters for Mercury 25 XS engines so they can race and also convert regular engines to racing models. Young said it can take three to four days to build a racing engine, and most racers run at least two engines, with many swapping different size engines to race in several classes at one meet. "This ain't a business," said Young. "It's a labor of love just to support the racing."

Racing every weekend if you wish isn't a problem since races are held in virtually every state from the east to the west coast where there is a body of water large enough to accommodate the boats. National Championships, drawing 500 to 600 entrants, are held every year. Surprisingly, the EORC races are quite possibly the only ones run in saltwater, with well-sheltered freshwater lakes providing the most common racecourses.

Other races in the Northeast are held in upstate New York, Connecticut, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The APBA breaks the country into districts with New York considered Region 2; New England is Region 1 and New Jersey/Penn-



Enthusiasts prepare to move out fast!

sylvania, Region 3.

Young, like many competitors, builds his own boats, both hydros and runabouts. He said there are "about a dozen guys" around the country who build and sell boats commercially - again, not as a living, but as a passion. The Pickerell family is a long-established name in the boatbuilding business on Long Island and in the Northeast, and both Pickerells race and build their boats, as do many of the other racers.

What Else?

"We follow the APBA rules and regs, and in some cases we're a bit stricter on the safety end because the amateur involvement is a bit bigger at the EORC races," said Pam Young.

Helmets, Kevlar "cut-suits" and a racing PFD are all required for the drivers. The Kevlar suits are designed to prevent propeller blades from slicing through to skin. Kill switches are required on all boats as well. Like auto racing, as the competitive level rises, the chance of crashes and being tossed from these 13-foot rockets increases, so the adherence to strict safety requirements is paramount.

Racing

Drivers are given three minutes to get their boats on the course and in position for the start. After the three minutes have expired, the timer does a one-minute countdown under a white flag before the race starts. The object is the same as in sailboat racing: hit the line the moment the clock goes zero. Too early, and you're DQ - disqualified. Too late and you might lose the race. Like NASCAR, there are no lane assignments (you have to establish your lane 500 feet before hitting the start/finish line) and all the turns are left-handers ... and everyone wants the inside of the turn.

The first turn looks like an exercise in how to crash boats, but the boats rarely do. Rarely, is the operative word, however. Everyone is full-throttle trying to get to the first marker buoy the tightest, and it's not unlike the first turn dramatics in any type of racing. The courses are approximately a half to three-quarters of a mile around. The runabouts tend to bounce along the water somewhat like a stone skips across it, while the hydros do their air-assisted hull-to-hull tiptoeing walk across the water. Turning requires some slowing and a *lot* of body English. Wet elbows are not an uncommon phenomenon.

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