

SPORTS

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SECTION
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Hopping across the finish line



BY GREG FARRAR

Greg Hopp in UL 15 Mike's Hard Lemonade/Happy Go Lucky (right) pulls ahead of Dave Bender in UL 38 Golden Nugget Casino to capture Sunday's Tastin' N Racin' KZOK Cup.

UL 15 picks up Tasty victory

BY BOB TAYLOR

Last year Greg and Jerry Hopp, along with everyone else, were chasing Phil Bononcini of Sammamish for the Unlimited Light Hydroplane Racing Association (ULHRA) national points lead. This year Bononcini and the rest of the ULHRA fleet could be chasing the Hopp's Racing Team.

Greg and his father Jerry, who hail from Snohomish, got the early jump in national-points standings Sunday. Greg drove the UL 15 Mike's Hard Lemonade/Happy Go Lucky to first place in the KZOK Cup of the seventh annual Tastin' N Racin' at Lake Sammamish State Park.

"This is a great start for us," Greg said. "The boat ran like a charm."

The UL 15 had a near flawless weekend in the opener of the ULHRA season. While other boats broke down, the UL 15 was still in top running condition for the final. Saturday it had the fastest qualifying speed of 127.841 mph. In Heat 2B, the UL 15 went 113.888 mph.

In the KZOK Cup, Greg Hopp and the UL 15 cranked up for the finish as it overcame Dave Bender in the UL 38 Golden Nugget Casino and George Woods in the UL 51 Security Race Products. Paul Beckert, a pilot for Northwest Airlines, drove UL 14 Aurora Rents to fourth place, edging Kelly

Stocklin of Issaquah in the Thunder Valley Racing Team's UL 40 Front Page 2003.

Bender finished second in the light driver-points race last year.

The annual showcase event for Tastin' N Racin' featured some comebacks. Woods returned to action after a 10-year layoff. The driver was a favorite of Northwest fans when he recorded three victories in the Unlimited Hydroplane circuit before sustaining injuries in a racing accident in 1993.

Stocklin and his crew made quite a comeback to get ready for the final. They weren't even expecting to be in the event after the UL 40 finished fifth in the B Main. The top four boats in the B Main qualified for the final. The fourth boat would be the trailer boat. However, the UL 58 and UL 5 developed some engine problems and couldn't race in the final. That moved the UL 40 into the finals as a trailer boat, meaning it had to be one full roostertail behind the last boat before it could start the race. Stocklin, the 2002 ULHRA Rookie of the Year, and his crew worked feverishly to get the ready for the final.

Issaquah's John O'Brien, co-owner of the UL 40, knew the odds were against his boat even if it got in the water in time for the race.

"Only once in 20 years has a trailer boat won," O'Brien said.

The UL 40 moved up a spot just as the race started when the UL 19, driven by Steve Hook, was dis-

qualified prior to the race because of a violation.

A large crowd that lined the shoreline had anticipated a battle between either Greg or Jerry Hopp, or Bononcini, the two-time Tastin' N Racin' champion, and Bender.

Bononcini entered the weekend as the three-time ULHRA national champion. The UL 72 Budweiser-Pocket Mechanic, owned by Bononcini and Joe Frauenheim of Issaquah, was first in owner points last year with 7,729. Jerry Hopp was second with 7,426 and Bender third with 5,345. Bender was also second in driver points behind Bononcini and Jerry Hopp third.

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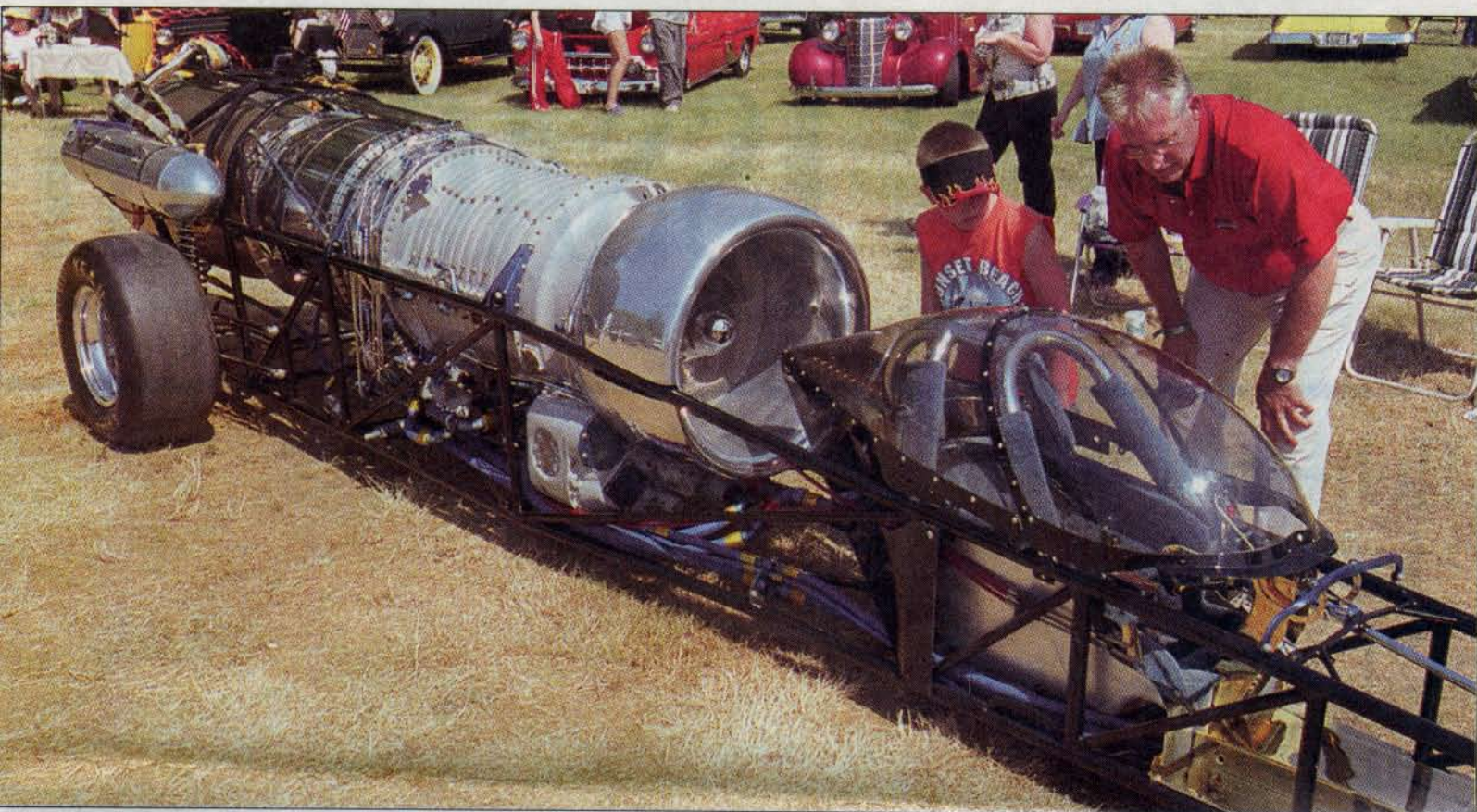
BY GREG FARRAR

Greg Hopp of Snohomish is congratulated after winning the first race of the Unlimited Lights Hydroplane Racing Association season.



BY GREG FARRAR

Kelly Stocklin of Issaquah in the UL 40 Front Page 2003 finished fifth in Sunday's race.



BY GREG FARRAR

Tim Baumann and son Trevor, 9, of Sammamish get a close-up look at the 2000 Drag Star, owned by Bill Holevas of Burien. The jet car was on display at the car show at Tastin' N Racin'.

Tastin' N Racin' draws record crowds

BY DAVID HAYES

At a two-day event that features hydroplane boats that sound, as one fan put it, like giant, loud hair dryers, it takes a lot to stand out.

Take for instance the trio of buddies from Seattle — Paul Floyd, Paul Waters and Karl Urwiler. Or better known by their nicknames of Ghostbusters characters — Wenkman, Ray and Egon. Camped out near the water to watch the hydro races for the seventh-annual Tastin' N Racin', the trio staked out their picnic table with a distinctive Jolly Rogers flag, complete with skull and crossbones.

"It's just a flag we use for RC racing (remote-control cars)," Floyd said.

The trio has journeyed to the shores of Lake Sammamish all seven years of the event. Floyd said they caught the first year almost by mistake.

"We were driving through the South Park area when we heard on the radio this was going on," Floyd said.

"a small cooler and a prayer," they ended up having a "helluva time" and have returned each year with bigger and better supplies. This year they put their tabletop barbecue to the test, attempting to grill what appeared to be an entire side of beef.

With no favorite driver, they aim just to have fun.

"This is one of the last bastions of half-assed freedom this side of the thunder boats you can get," Floyd said.

The trio were part of an estimated crowd of 40,000 — the biggest ever according to organizers — taking in unlimited light hydro racing, international-themed grilled food from vendors, a huge car show, a carnival for the kids and lots of sunshine.

In fact it may have been too hot for some. One vendor said on Saturday, which soared to a searing 93 degrees, lemonade was going faster than the food. But fans returned in droves on Sunday when the temperature mellowed. Unfortunately, many drivers suffered through interminably long waits just to get into the park, as the line of cars stretched for about a mile

much to do and see for all ages. Michael Courtade brought his children Kari, 10, and John, 8, to experience the hydros, something he's done at Seafair since he was his son's age. Fresh from the autograph line, Kari and John had armloads of signed posters and cards.

Both said Issaquah's Kelly Stocklin is their favorite driver. Taking it all in at her third Tastin' N Racin', Kari said she wanted to get all the drivers' autographs "just in case I didn't make it back next year. And also so I know who they are and can root for them."

John said he loves to come to the festival just for the racing, simply because he loves the loud noises the hydros make.

Set up in the greener grassy area of the park was the car show. In a display featuring souped-up classic cars, Bill Holevas' jet car attracted much attention. His 2000 Drag Star lists its special features as the ability to "go fast."

Holevas built his exhibition car from military afterburner jet engines used on Navy F-8 Cruisers in the 1960s.

"That makes this car unique."

supposed to own these engines."

But because he was able to "intercept" the engine in pieces, saving them from the scrap heap, and because sufficient time has elapsed since the engine was in service, he figures no one from the government will show up and haul him off in handcuffs.

Since Holevas can't enter his exhibition-only vehicle in pursued races, the only money he makes from the car is through appearance fees. Holevas said he takes it to about 60 shows a year across the United States and overseas in Germany, Japan and Australia. He is currently making plans to make a world record attempt to top 350 mph. But it takes the right raceway to drive it on. Just starting it up proves too much for his Burien neighborhood.

With so much to see and do at Tastin' N Racin', co-chair John O'Brien said the combination has helped make this the biggest and best yet.

"They say the guideline for festivals is if they make it past their fifth year, then people are coming back because they enjoy the event, not because they're just curious."