

Tastin' n Racin' celebrates 10th anniversary this weekend

BY BOB TAYLOR

It was just more than a decade ago that John O'Brien and Jon Courtright decided that one way to live things up one weekend a year at Lake Sammamish State Park was to throw a big party.

The party became Tastin' n Racin', an event that has earned recognition for hydroplane races, food, classic car shows, live bands, arts and crafts, rides for kids and just fun.

Tastin' n Racin', which gets big-

ger each year, celebrates its 10th anniversary this weekend.

The event begins with Hydro Happy Hour Friday. From 4-8 p.m. patrons can listen to live music and look at some of the hydroplanes that will be racing Saturday and Sunday. There is no admission charge Friday.

Tastin' n Racin' goes from 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Admission is \$5 per person, free for children 6 and under.

When O'Brien and Courtright first envisioned Tastin' n Racin', they had no idea it would become

an annual party.

The only thing they knew for sure was that their party would definitely have noisemakers. As co-owners of the Thunder Valley Racing Team, O'Brien and Courtright knew the Unlimited Hydroplane Racing Association series would welcome the opportunity to kick off its season at Lake Sammamish.

Hydroplane racing on the lake wasn't a novelty. There had been hydroplane races during Salmon Days.

However, O'Brien understood

that if the party consisted of just hydroplane racing, the only people showing up would be the racers and their fans. So he thought the event should have vendors, music and assorted entertainment.

But the first Tastin' n Racin' almost didn't get off the drawing board. Another group that was trying to help launch the event ran into financial problems.

"My group had all our permits in place and we were ready to go," O'Brien said.

If an inaugural Tastin' n Racin' was going to happen, someone had

to put up \$7,000. O'Brien contributed the money.

Now the festival budget is \$90,000.

"And that's just to break even," O'Brien said. "Insurance, everything has gone up since that first year."

O'Brien is pleasantly surprised as the success of the event.

"I didn't know it would keep going like it has," O'Brien said.

"They say if a festival goes past its fifth year, it's usually going to become an annual event. People have kept coming mainly because

of the car show, food and the racing."

The first event drew 27,000 people. Attendance has usually been in the 30,000s since then. O'Brien believes Tastin' n Racin' could have a larger crowd this year because of some new attractions and because parking is free.

Among the new attractions for children in the Family Fun Area are batting cages and climbing walls.

"The bands are of higher quality

See **TASTIN' N RACIN'**, page D3

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7, 2006 • D3

Tastin' n Racin'

FROM PAGE D1

this year, too," O'Brien said. "This should be our best Tastin' n Racin' ever."

More racing

Tastin' n Racin' has its most diversified racing action ever, beginning with the PWC Regional Qualifying jet ski races at 10 a.m. Saturday. Following the jet skiers are the unlimited lights. The weekend schedule also includes the nostalgic circle boats and the lighter-than-light limited hydros.

"There will be a race scheduled every 15 minutes," O'Brien said.

Spotlight on unlimited lights

The major attractions for most people are the unlimited lights, which officially begin the Unlimited Light Hydroplane Racing Association (ULHRA) season at Tastin' n Racin'.

Returning to defend his title for the I-90 Marine Center Cup is driver Greg Hopp, who was ULHRA points champion last year. Hopp also had the high boat points champion last season. Although the UL-1 Mike's Hard Lemonade/Happy Go Lucky was fast enough to win the last three national titles, Hopp and his father, Jerry, decided to retire the boat. They

have purchased a new boat, the UL-9 American Eagle. The boat had the fastest qualifying time in the ULHRA fleet when it went 116 mph at an open testing session on the Columbia River last month.

Thunder Valley's UL-40 Miss Red Dot Corporation had the second fastest time of 114.9. The UL-40 has a new driver this season in Brian Perkins, who was points champion in the Lighter-than-Lights division last summer. Perkins replaces Harold Mills, who retired.

"This is the 15th year for Thunder Valley. We have a pretty seasoned crew," O'Brien said. "We've put in a lot of improvements into the boat the past couple of years. The technology started working last year. Of all the years we've been racing, this year has the most potential. I feel we have a chance to be one of the front-runners."

The UL-40 finished fifth in the national standings last year.

Another contender should be the UL-72 Miss Boat Electric, owned by Issaquah's Joe Frauenheim. The UL-72, driven by Mike Flaherty, finished second in last year's national point standings. The UL-72 was just 83 points behind the UL-1.

Longtime hydro fans will recognize a familiar name among the newcomers in the ULHRA fleet this season. Driving the UL-136 LaCucuracha is Will Muncey, son of limited hydroplane racing great Bill Muncey.

Bob Taylor can be reached at 392-6434, ext. 236, or bobtaylor@isspress.com.