

Record field to contest Southern 80 ski race

Big prize money and ideal river conditions are likely to result in a record field in the 1986 Southern 80 water-ski race, to be decided on the Murray River, near Echuca, on Sunday, February 9.

Entries are expected to reach the 250 mark, well above last year's record entry of 206, which made the race the second biggest of its type in the world, yielding pride of place only to the Bridge-to-Bridge.

As we went to press, entries were well above the number received at the same time last year.

This year, the Southern 80 carries prizes in trophies and cash to the value of more than \$12,000.

Conditions should be perfect for the race. The consistent rains in recent months have put plenty of water in the river, which is right up to normal summer level.

The field will include the best boats and skiers racing in Victoria, South Australia and the Riverina, including the Bridge-to-Bridge winner, Moonshot-TAA.

Lester Fremantle will be attempting to record his second successive Southern 80 victory in this boat.

He won last year's race in 39 minutes 11 seconds, just 46 seconds outside the record set by Ted Hurley in Rolco VI the previous year.

His skiers were South Australian David Tarry and the brilliant youngster from Bendigo, Linc Kelly. But for one mishap on the way, they would have broken the race record comfortably.

The boat is even better this season, and has been reserved for the big races in New South Wales, with Geoff and John Hardaker doing the skiing.

This team has put together a string of successes culminating in the Bridge-to-Bridge, and Moonshot-TAA will start a hot favorite.

Murray Price, Rolco's new owner, had his heart set on breaking Ted Hurley's record last year, but it was not to be.

He put up two of the best skiers in New South Wales, Mark Ward and Rory Brown, but one of them fell, and, to make matters worse, the boat had only seven cylinders doing any serious work over the last few miles.

He had to be content with third place, and a respectable time of 41:46. He will be out to make amends this year.

Ted Hurley's retirement has been short-lived. He began getting the itch again early in the 1984/5 season, and put in an order for a new 20 ft Everingham.

This boat has now been delivered, and, as we went to press, Ted was burning the midnight oil in the workshop to have it ready in time for the race.

The tip is that Wayne Ritchie will be one of his skiers. He obviously intends to do his level best to hold that record.

In the absence of Moonshot-TAA on the NSW circuit, South Australian Trevor Gallard's Aquaholic has been dominating ski racing in Victoria.

Trevor has also been using NSW skiers — Darren Mortimer and Craig Brown — and they have been carrying all before them.

It will be interesting to see how they shape up against the other top-liners in what promises to be a four-way contest for outright honors.

Last year's Unlimited Outboard winner, Gordon Johnson, will be attempting to repeat the success in his new 20 footer, in which he has been mixing offshore with ski racing.

However, with the 235 Evinrude which he used last year, the bigger boat could be at a disadvantage on the Southern 80 course, which has no fewer than 125 bends, many of them hairpins.

The battle for outboard honours could therefore be wide open, with the most fancied candidates possibly Geoff Stephenson's Kidder Skis or Swanny's Bullet.

But anything can happen in a Southern 80. That is the fascination of the race.

The course gives it a unique character which causes competitors to come back, year after year, even though, on form or paper, they might have little or no chance of winning a trophy.

The 50 miles of river between Torrumbarry Weir and Echuca provides easily the world's most difficult and challenging ski course, with the result that an increasing number of water-skiers, who do not normally compete in races, take part every year just to prove to themselves that they can master it.

Finishing a Southern 80 has become a major status symbol in the sport.

And there's always the unexpected; if you're in it, you never know, you might win it.

New sponsorship arrangements have increased the value of the race,

in terms of cash prizes and trophies, to over \$12,000.

The outright winner will receive \$750 in cash, and the Leigh Johnson Memorial Trophy.

In addition, Bob Jane T-Mart, of Shepparton, are offering \$1000 cash to the fastest boat to break the 38 minute barrier.

The next two boats to break 40 minutes will receive \$250 each, and there will be a \$100 cash prize to the winner of all the event's 16 classes.

The fastest local boat — that is, one garaged within a 25 kilometre radius of Echuca — will win the Leon Sharp Plumbing Trophy.

The Torrumbarry Weir Caravan Park Trophy will go to the fastest novice boat, and the fastest novice crew, all of one family, will win a midweek houseboat holiday, valued at \$500, from Rich River Houseboats.

The 16 classes of the event are evenly divided, providing for both expert and novice skiers. They are:-

EXPERT

- Class 1: Unlimited inboard.
- Class 2: Unlimited outboard.
- Class 3: Under 6 litre inboard; up to 201 hp outboard.
- Class 4: Six cylinder and under 5.2 litre inboard; up to 17 hp outboard.
- Class 5: Boys and girls, 16-19 years.
- Class 6: Juniors, under 16 years.
- Class 7: Women, open.
- Class 8: SMOC and up to 235 hp outboard.

NOVICE:

- Class 9: Unlimited inboard and outboard
- Class 10: Under 6 litre inboard; up to 201 hp outboard.
- Class 11: Under 5.2 litre V-drive and 6 litre mid-mount inboard; up to 176 hp outboard.
- Class 12: Under 5.2 litre mid mount inboard; up to 176hp outboard.
- Class 13: Six cylinder mid-mount inboard; up to 116hp outboard.
- Class 14: Novice women, open.
- Class 15: Novice juniors, under 16 years.
- Class 16: Novice sub-juniors, under 13 years.

First, second and third trophies will be awarded to all crew members in every class.