

August
89

Shell to back Southern 80

The famous Southern 80, the grueling 80 kilometre water ski race along the Murray River, kicks off later this month with a new sponsor, and will now be known as the Shell Marine Southern 80.

Race organisers, the Moama Water Sports Club announced the sponsorship arrangement with the Shell Oil Company of Australia early in the New Year.

This year's classic, over a course on "Old Man Murray" between Torrumbarry Weir and the famous paddle-wheeler town, Echuca, is set for February 11/12.

Up to 300 crews are expected to enter for the 24th running of the event, with nearly \$15,000 in prizemoney up for grabs throughout the 22 classes.

Organisers believe it rates as the second largest water ski race in the world, shaded only by the Hawkesbury River Classic, the Bridge to Bridge, which has drawn in excess of 400 crews.

With 125 bends in the river over the 80 kilometres, Moama Water Sports

Club president Ken Oliver, says boat speed alone will not win the event.

"Although the Super Class boats can top 160kph on certain sections of the course, it's usually skier fitness and boat crew concentration which will decide the winner," he said.

A highlight of the classic will be the assault on the present race record of 36 minutes, 12.34 seconds, established last year by the 1988 Bridge to Bridge winners, also in race record time, Danny Cropper and Craig Brown.

Cropper and Brown will again take "leave of absence" to ski behind the Victorian boat which took them to last year's victory dias, Murray Price's Rolco.

Cropper, manufacturer of the highly sought-after Dee Cee race skis, is reasonably confident that he and Brown can continue their record-breaking form.

"Naturally weather, and the conditions on the river at the time, will play a part, but I feel we can knock up to a minute off last year's time", Cropper told Powercraft.

He described the course as "particularly tight".

"Behind Supafortruss in the Bridge to Bridge, Craig and I ran 270-foot ropes, but for the Southern 80 we'll

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probably use 210-footers", he explained.

Rolco, an Everingham inboard running a big block Chev., averaged better than 133kph over the winding course in winning last year's race, a tribute not only to the rig, but to the wheelmanship of Murray Price.

Shell's sponsorship of the race continues the company's welcome support of various facets of boating following the introduction of the Shell Marine range of specialised nautical lubricants.

The company is also sponsoring Pat Burke's Plus One, Steve Ackerie's offshore racer Stefan Shampoo, and the Formula I race team, True Blue, headed by Neil Hancock and Don McClymont.

Mr. Bronte Birch, advertising and promotions manager for Shell Oil, said he was confident the race sponsorship would help promote the Shell Marine range.

He said sponsorship of the Southern 80 was "an obvious choice".

"Shell Marine is designed for use in all types of boats, from fishing craft through to the world's fastest Formula I catamarans", he explained.

"This race appealed simply because it not only attracts some of the world's best ski racers and crews, but many local weekend skiers respond to this annual challenge".

Riverina Petroleum, which was a major sponsor last year, will continue with its involvement as the area's Shell distributor.

"I'm sure the support of Shell Oil and Riverina Petroleum will make the 1989 Shell Marine Southern 80 the greatest race in the event's 24-year history", Ken Oliver said.

"The involvement of a company of Shell Oil's magnitude can only add to the stature of the race, and what's more, the entire sport will benefit".

For further information on the race, contact Ken Oliver, of the Moama Water Sports Club, telephone (054) 82 4836.