



BY JIM WRIGHT

PHOTOS BY ROGER SQUIRE AND JIM WRIGHT



ON LAND and sea a 488-cu. in. Dodge wedge will appear in blown fueler classes. This flat-bottomed ski boat, built by Buck Smith, owned by Todd Rawleigh and driven by Larry Schwabenland has been timed at 128.92 mph on Dodge power.

FIGURES DON'T lie, but there are a lot of liars figuring, so the saying goes, but in this case believe U.S. Coast Guard figures that show boating is one of the fastest growing sports (or hobbies) in the country. And, one of the fastest growing sports-within-a-sport is boat drag racing. Those who haven't picked up on this scene yet are really "missing the boat" so to speak.

Of course, to those who don't live on the West Coast attendance might prove a little difficult, because, as automobile drag racing was 10-11 years ago, big time boat drag racing still is largely confined to that area.

To those who haven't had a chance to view this kind of action, it might come as a shock to learn that some drag boats are recording speeds and elapsed times almost as quick and fast as those turned by 4-wheel dragsters. How does 170 mph and under 8 sec. for the quarter-mile sound?

The similarity between hot boats and hot cars doesn't end with the near speeds and e.t.s. Scratch a hot boater and the chances are that eight times out of ten lingering traces of hot rodder will show through. In some cases the party will be active in both circles. Old familiar names such as Edelbrock, Cragar, Mickey Thompson, Milodon,

Chrysler, Ford, Chevrolet, Keith Black and Dave Zeuschel also can be heard.

Just as there are associations and classes for drag cars, there also are associations and classes for drag boats. The two major associations are: American Power Boat Association (APBA) and the National Drag Boat Association (NDBA). The APBA pioneered the sport back in the late 1920s, but lately has tapered off activity in this field. This is due mainly to the fact that APBA is the main sanctioning body for power boat activity of all kinds in the U.S., and, as such, is pretty busy. On the other hand, NDBA was formed with one purpose in mind, to sanction drag racing events. And this it does very well. Every now and then APBA will put on a bash at Long Beach Marine Stadium, but these are being conducted with less regularity and, because of the spatial limitations at Marine Stadium, boats use only gasoline for fuel. The NDBA regularly schedules at least two meets a month, one at Oakland in northern California, the other at Perris in southern California. Either fuel or gasoline is allowed. The Perris course (strip?) is at a man-made lake called Ski-Land and is also the "home" of NDBA. In addition to the regular monthly meets, Ski-Land also is the site of the Spring Championships in

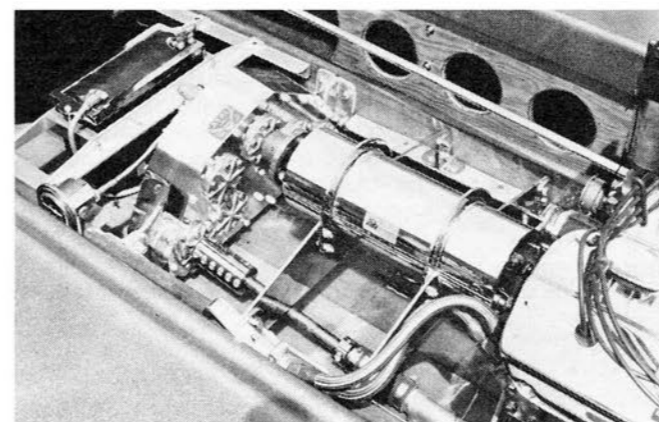
May and the Nationals in September, both larger-than-usual events that draw boats from throughout the country.

Classes are almost as numerous, and almost as confusing, as those found in automobile drag racing. These are broken down by type of hull, engine and fuel, and according to how fast the boats turn on qualifying runs. Hulls fall into two categories, flatbottom and hydroplane. Engine classifications are a bit more complex. First, they are either inboard or outboard. The inboards are additionally broken down according to whether they are supercharged or un-supercharged and whether they burn an alcohol or alcohol-based mixture or just plain old pump gasoline. In addition, there is a "super stock" class established for the big 426/427 performance engines, including Ford, Chrysler, Chevrolet, Pontiac (421), Oldsmobile and Buick.

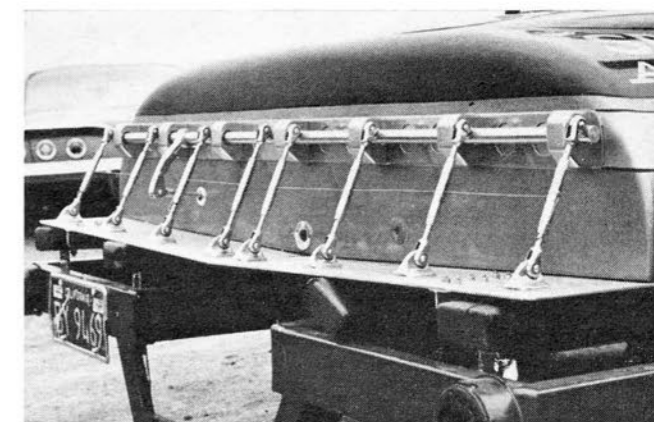
THESE ENGINES may undergo "blue-printing," but can't be bored or stroked, and are limited to stock carburetion (single and dual 4-barrels, 3-2s). There also is an "SK" class designation for engines under 400 cu. in. The only limitation in SK is that the carburetion system can't cost over \$400. Both SS and SK are flatbottom classes. Both are limited to pump gaso-



DRIVER-OWNER Tom Weeda put his El Tigre 2 hydroplane through the traps at 168.84 mph, a quarter-mile time to be envied by landmen, but, surprise, El Tigre's speed wasn't fast enough to set a National Drag Boat Association 1966 meet record.



TWIN-SCREW drive for El Tigre 2 is accomplished with a Casale gearbox, complete with quick-change gearsets.



FOOT-CONTROLLED cavitation plate trims drag boat for maximum velocity and stability during speed runs.

line. The big, supercharged gas and fuel hydros correspond roughly to rail dragsters in hot rodding.

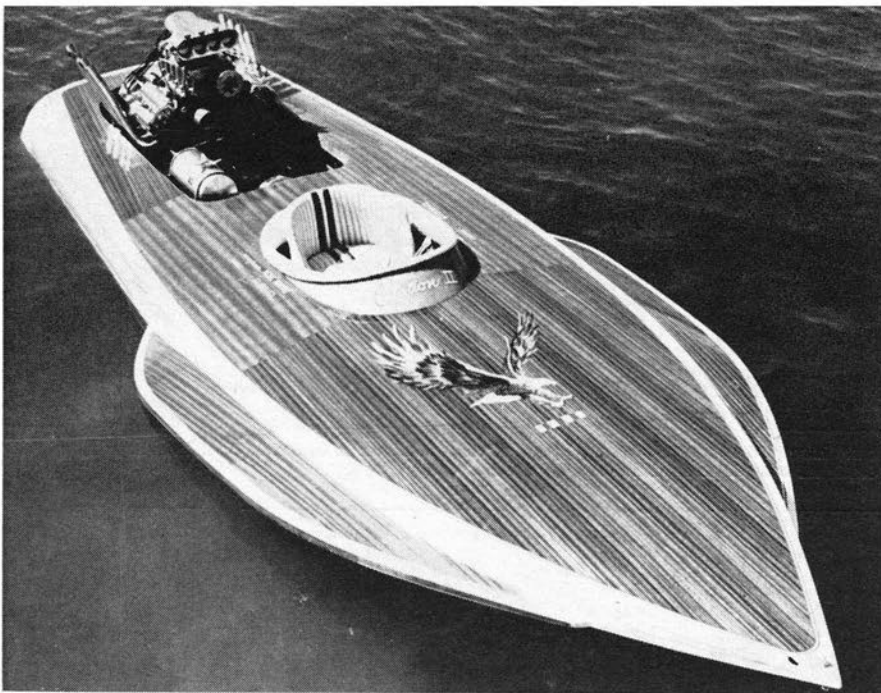
Next are the speed classes. These are split at 5-mph increments from 50 to 100 mph, and at 10-mph increments from 100 mph upward. All competing boats make qualifying runs to determine in which mph classes they will run eliminations. In some cases, where accidents or other delays have put the activities behind schedule, a competitor may declare into a mph bracket, but if he exceeds the specified speed in competition he's disqualified. On the other hand, a boat that has qualified for its bracket can exceed the speed limit for that bracket and, if it is in the first round of eliminations, will be moved up into the next bracket. If a boat goes over the bracket after the first round it's disqualified. In this case the losing boat automatically wins and goes to the next round and a would-be sand-bagger is eliminated.

STARTS, ON BOTH single and elimination runs, are controlled by a starter who must determine several things before he can push the green "go" light. The first is speed. Boats can't idle dead in the water; they must be moving slightly to maintain headway. It's up to the starter to make sure the boats

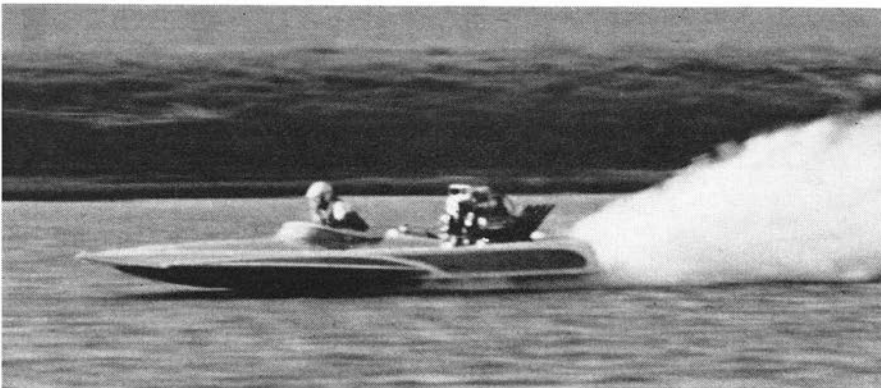
aren't going faster than necessary, which would result in both invalid speed and elapsed time marks. Secondly, the starter makes sure that in eliminations both boats are lined up with each other as they approach the line. If everything is okay, he punches the green light, if not, the red light. The timing clocks are exactly like those used to time the hot rods at a dragstrip. They are actuated by photo-electric cells. The first beam is at the starting line and actuates the elapsed time clock. The second beam is located 66 ft. before the finish line and actuates the top speed clock. The third is at the finish line and stops the e.t. clock. The fourth and last light is 66 ft. beyond the finish line and stops the top speed clock. The top speeds are as accurate as are found at any automotive dragstrip, and therefore can be compared against car speeds. Elapsed times are a different matter because of the running starts, which can vary from one start to another due to the fact that, after all, the starter is only human. So, while it's not uncommon to see one of the top hydros turn an e.t. of 7.5 sec. or so, it's not quite the same as a rail turning 7.5. Even so, it can be assumed that boats are capable of turning well into the 8-sec. bracket.

It was stated previously that many hot boaters are ex-hot rodders. There's a fairly simple explanation for this: Boating in itself is a sport in which the whole family—man, wife, kids, dog and all—can share. Probably 85% of all boats that run at the drags also are used for skiing most of the time. By switching from cars to boats, the man of the house still can get his kicks out of building and maintaining a high performance (and usually showy) piece of equipment, the thrill of competition, all the while spending as much if not more money, but with a difference. The other half can't say much when she looks at the check stubs because she also uses and enjoys the boat. Of course, if one happens to involve himself in fuel-burning, supercharged hydros he'll get static.

LIKE CAR DRAGS, boat drags were born in California and are as much the result of the introduction of fast, sleek, auto-engined ski boats as any other factor. The California ski boat was welcomed with open arms by the ex-hot rodder types. Here was something they could readily understand. The hull could be bought in one place, either finished or unfinished. The engine of choice, perhaps even the one out of the old hot rod, could



**CITATION II**, with engine by drag race specialist Dave Zeuschel, set a record at 169.80 mph in fuel competition class the first time out.



**RENE ANDRE** sprints to fuel record in Citation II. Andre believes that 180 mph is possible with his one-of-a-kind Hallett-hulled dragster.

## Wild Wet

be fitted. The boat was ready. Custom engine, custom hull, custom paint and custom upholstery; it's just like building a hot rod.

The majority of the dual purpose ski/drag boats seem to be Chevy powered, which rather ties in with auto drag racing statistics. But a great many Ford, Oldsmobile, Buick, Pontiac and Cadillac engines are seen in these hulls. In the Super/Stock class, the 427 wedge-head Ford high-performance engine seems to have the edge at present. The famed stock car team of Holman & Moody has been turning out marine conversions for several years and has even opened a West Coast branch to accommodate demand. In the past year, Chrysler has become more and more involved in boating through the purchase of

West Bend (outboard engines) and the Lone Star Boat Co. For a number of years the Chrysler Marine and Industrial Division has been supplying the early Hemi engine as a marine conversion, but not as a high-performance item. Recently Chrysler has taken steps to enter the late 426 Hemi high-performance engine in the boating field. Also rapidly gaining favor is the new Chevrolet 427 "porcupine."

In the blown and unblown, fuel and gas, flatbottom and hydro classes, the early Chrysler Hemi still is *the* engine. These engines are virtually identical to those used in the hot rod field in the big blown fuel and gas dragsters. In fact, there have been many instances where a successful dragster engine has been dropped into a drag boat with notable results.

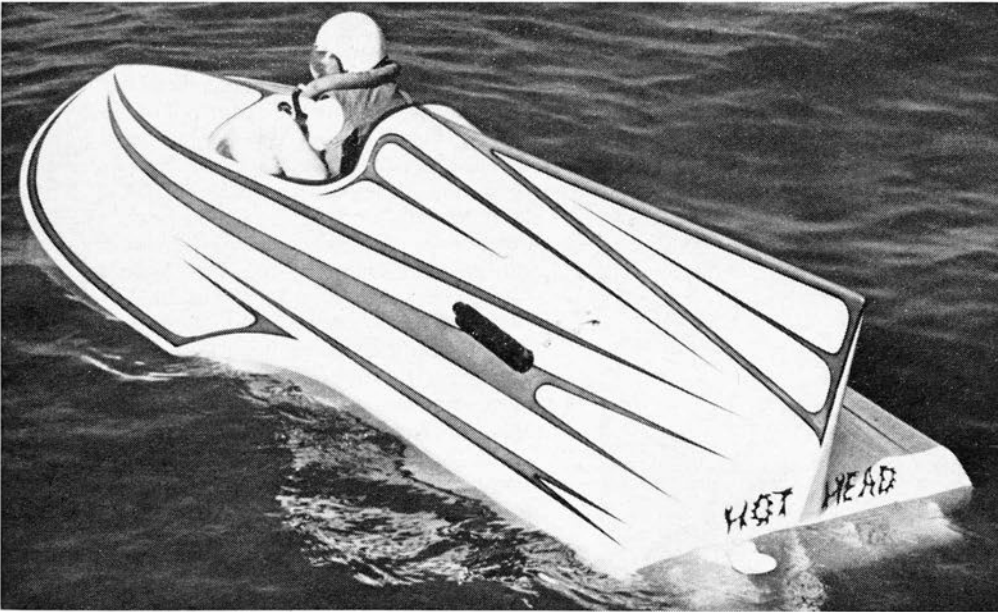
While drag boaters need not worry about tire sizes, traction, or rear axle ratios, they do have to worry about engine to propeller gearing, and prop pitch and diameter, all of which

amount to about the same thing. In addition, they must worry about hull efficiency, which is dependent on elusive and not readily changed factors such as weight, balance, length, beam, shape and propeller thrust angle, and has a direct effect on efficiency of the engine, gearing, prop combination.

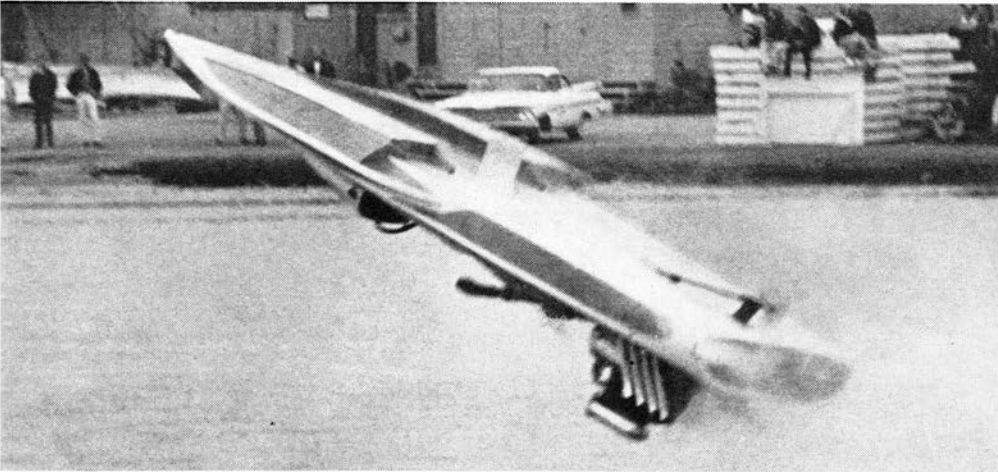
Almost all flatbottom (actually semi-flatbottom) hulls used today are made of molded fiberglass.

**H**YDROPLANES ARE something else again. The majority of successful drag hydros have been all-wood construction with either glass or resin overlays. Rich Hallett has been the most successful in this field. Several years ago the Sanger Boat Company introduced an all-glass drag hydro that has been quite successful. In fact the top, blown fuel, hydro record (NDBA), until several weeks ago, had been held by a Sanger hull. This was the "Assassin," driven by Jean Jenne-wein. Assassin's record had stood for a year and a half at 165.44 mph. The record had been exceeded slightly several times, once by Barry McCown in "Banzai" (Hallett hull) at 166.34 and then by Tom Weeda in his Sanger-hulled "El Tigre 2" at 168.84 mph. Barry's run didn't exceed the old record by the required 2% and while Weeda's run did, he didn't try to back it up, possibly because he wanted to come back another day and break it by at least 5 mph which is worth \$200. El Tigre 2 made its fast run at the March NDBA meet at Perris and at the April meet everyone was watching it, sure they'd see a new record. But it wasn't El Tigre 2 that did the job. While everyone was looking the other way, Rene Andre unloaded his beautiful, one-of-a-kind (it's 22 ft. long, compared with the usual 18-20 ft.) Hallett-hulled "Citation II," fired it up on fuel for the first time and powered through the eyes at a fantastic 170.76 mph. He backed up the record at 169.80 mph.

Andre, under the guiding hand of engine builder Dave Zeuschel, had been bringing both himself and the new boat along slowly by running gasoline. On gas, Citation II had run over 133 mph, exceeding the blown gas record (at that time) by 3 mph, but Andre didn't back it up. Then recently Zeuschel took on engine chores for Don Edwards, who also runs a Hallett hydro (20 ft. long). Not wanting both his boats in the same class, Dave decided Citation II was ready for fuel. Dave is the first to admit that the record run was unscheduled. According to the fuel load, gearing and prop, the boat should have run about 160 mph to warm up. But the unknown factor

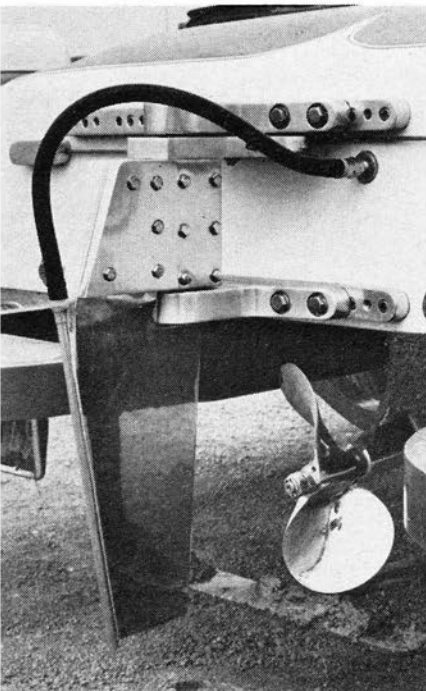


**HOT HEAD**, a fiberglass hydro, depends on streamlining for speed because her 396-cu. in. engine is relatively stock, carries a single 4-barrel.



**DRAGSTRIP CHAMPION** Don Prudhomme has had one, and only one, drag boat ride. The asphalt ace managed inverted flight in Andre's Citation I.

**SHEER** strength marks drag boat rudder fittings.



**THIS OUTBOARD**, magneto sparked and motorcycle carburetored, is a Chevrolet Corvair Six.



here turned out to be Hallett's experimental hull which was much more efficient than anyone had imagined. Right now Zeuschel and Andre think 180 will come up pretty easily.

Barry McCown and Banzai have been one of the most successful combinations in this class in the past, but now Barry is retiring the venerable Banzai and has ordered a new Hallett similar to Citation II.

Drag racing fans (car type) probably won't recognize the names Andre, McCown, Weeda and Jennewein. They are strictly products of drag boating. Contrary to what one would expect the top names from the dragster field haven't done well in the hot boats. In fact, not many have wanted to have a go at it. Of those who have, Don Prudhomme probably is the best known. He took one boat ride he's not likely to forget. Dave Zeuschel talked him into driving Andre's first boat, Citation I (a 20-ft. Hallett). Don wasn't exactly anxious to go, but Dave was a friend, and it might even be fun. He hadn't driven a boat of any kind ever before, but quite naturally (for a driver), he didn't want to look bad before several thousand people, not after the pre-race buildup anyway. So he got in, fired up the engine, pointed the boat toward the finish line and put the pedal to the wood. He made the lights in pretty good shape, turning 136-plus mph (over the then APBA record), but then all of a sudden the boat got up on one side, dug in a sponson, and the next thing Don knew he was floating around in the water and Citation I had disappeared, except for a few small, floating pieces. Don admits that he knew the boat was doing "something," but, because he lacked experience, he didn't know exactly what.

The photographers who follow drag boating say that this is about par for the course and every time they hear about a dragster driver who is taking his first hot boat ride they make sure the motor-drive Nikon cameras are loaded with film and pointed at the finish line.

**UNTIL** NOW the writer always has been pretty much of a dragstrip fan. Nothing like standing there inhaling the alky fumes, having the old ear drums blasted by the big fuelers and getting covered with the rubber dust and dirt that is usually flying around at the starting line. At the boat drags, it's usually pretty clean and the air is fresh, and the boats are far enough away so that one very seldom gets a whiff of fuel, and the engines don't sound very loud, and in the summertime all the girls on the shore are wearing bikinis. . . . ■