Jet Sport Boating tour event to motor onto Lake Hartwell

BY ISABELLE KHURSHUDYAN
FOR THE JOURNAL

HARTWELL, Ga. — If A.J. Handler had to pick one word to describe Jet Sport Boating, it would be excitement.

"It's a very exciting sport," said Handler, director of Upstate Watercraft Promotions in Penfield, N.Y. "It's a national sport that features some of the fastest athletes in the country competing to win a national title."

This Friday through Sunday, Lake Hartwell will host the Lake Hartwell Triple Crown Water Cross, part of the Toyota Upstate Watercraft Promotions-International Jet Sport Boating Association national tour, in which spectators will have the opportunity to witness the top competitors in the sport vie for the championship title.

The event will feature a closed course race that's best described as motocross on the water. Closed course racing is handle bar-to-handle bar competition that matches rider and machine in an intense watercraft expedition.

Reaching top speeds of more than 75 mph, the race features a buoy-marked, half- to three-quarter-mile track that is designed to keep the competition tight and fans close to the action. Each race begins with one of the most nail-biting experiences in motor sports — the side-by-side gated start, which brings to mind images of horseracing.

While the first-turn requires considerable thought and skill, speed, technique and racing ability will all come into play over the next 20 minutes, as the riders begin to negotiate a series of turns, as well as man-made log jumps.

Similar to NASCAR's Sprint Cup Championship, the overall winner in each class of racing is determined by the highest point total over the course of a series of races. This weekend's race is the second to last stop before the final race in Charleston and has the potential to determine the winner prematurely.

Several racers to look out for amongst the field of 150 include Rob Flores, who is the points leader in the Ski GP class, as well as Erminio Iantosca, who is the points leader in Runabout Open class. The Pro Runabout Open will begin at 11 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday, with the finals on Sunday at 1 p.m., while the Pro Ski GP begins at 11:30 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday, with the finals at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday.

HARTWELL: National tour event coming

FROM PAGE B1

E B2

Another highlight of the weekend will be the freestyle competition, which tends to be a crowd favorite. Freestyle features some of the most gifted athletes on the beach, performing two-minute routines in an Olympic-style format for a panel of seven judges, taking place at noon on Saturday and Sunday. Competitors' routines are made up from a series of choreographed tricks that are performed to music.

"They do all sorts of tricks," Handler said. "They're able to flip their ski and do a 180, which is basically like a somersault on a jet ski."

The events will take place at the Big Oaks Recreation Area in Hartwell, Ga., and the action is free for spectators, who can view the races from land or water. For more information, visit http://www.mylakehartwell.org or http://www.uwpinc.com.

International Jet Sporting races have taken in a variety of locations, including New York, Wisconsin and Florida, and Handler has no doubt that spectators surrounding the Lake Hartwell area are going to enjoy the weekend's exhilarating race, just as followers of the sport have in other venues across the country.

When asked why Lake Hartwell was chosen as the racing site for this all-important stop on the tour, Handler simply responded, "Why not Lake Hartwell? It's beautiful here."



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The Lake Hartwell Triple Crown Water Cross will get under way Friday at the Big Oaks Recreation Area in Hartwell, Ga.