Lake races could leave cash in their wake

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ANDERSON — More than 150 athletes will compete Friday through Sunday in the Lake Hartwell Triple Crown Water Cross, part of a national tour that has been described as "NASCAR on the water" and that local retailers hope will make cash registers ring.

The competition is part of the Toyota Upstate Watercraft Promotions-International Jet Sport Boating Association national tour.

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. Races will begin at 11 a.m. Saturday and Sunday.

About 7,500 spectators are expected at the event, which should benefit the economy on both sides of the state line, said Kathy Benson, executive director of the Anderson Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"This event should produce an economic impact of about a half-million dollars for the area," Benson said.

Competitors from around the world will race personal watercraft through a closed course at speeds up to 80 miles per hour, according to A.J. Handler, director of Upstate Watercraft Promotions in Penfield, N.Y., who uses the phrase "NASCAR on the water" to describe the speed competition.

In a freestyle segment, at noon Saturday and Sunday, athletes will take to the air, performing choreographed, acrobatic routines for a panel of judges. The freestyle competition will be held at noon Saturday and Sunday.

Local amateur riders will get their chance to compete on the course in a corporate challenge on Friday at 11:30 a.m.