

Smoke on the Water



Janine Doherty of Discovery Bay, Calif., won national titles in the 30-39 Women and Outboard divisions.

A year after the 2003 event was cancelled due to wildfires in southern California, USA Water Ski's fastest sport discipline got back on the water for the 33rd Water Ski Racing National Championships, Oct. 8-10, in Kelseyville, Calif.

Written by Scott Atkinson
Photography by Memories Ink.

It's as simple as this: Racers love to race. And one year after the 2003 Water Ski Racing National Championships was cancelled due to devastating wildfires in southern California, members of the National Water Ski Racing Association were back on the water curing their need for speed. The 33rd national championships took place Oct. 8-10 on Konocti Harbor in

Kelseyville, Calif., with 19 skiers, five drivers and one observer earning national titles.

Nearly 100 athletes — from 9-year-old Trevor Wendt of Huntington Beach, Calif., to 76-year-old Alice Craddick of Clearlake, Calif. — competed in two rounds of circle-sprint racing on a 2-mile oval course. Athletes drew for pole positions, made a deep-water start at the drop of a green flag, and raced in lanes for a designated number of laps. The total number of points earned from placements in the two races determined national titles. National titles also were awarded to the highest-scoring driver and observer. Working in unison, skier, driver and observer communicate intently as a 1,200-horsepower powerboat guides them at speeds up to 110 mph in the straightaway and up to 90 mph in the turns. And when all was said and done this year, Janine Doherty (Outboard) of Discovery Bay, Calif., and Brent Griffin (43-50 Men) of Long Beach, Calif., successfully defended national titles from 2002, while Jon Cole became the first ski racer to win three national

titles in one year.

"I was really psyched up to ski fast at San Diego last year and was quite disappointed when we didn't get to race," says Cole, who hails from Sherman Oaks, Calif. "After that, I committed myself to the 2004 season by entering and running both the marathon circuit and the sprint race circuit." Cole, with the help of driver Ron Tesarski and observer Dusty Schulz, went undefeated in the Veteran Men division in 2004, with two top-three finishes overall. "We had a great year, which got me into super shape for the Nationals," Cole says. "The Nor-Cal Ski Club did a great job of hosting the Nationals — the venue was great and the racing was fast and fun. I knew that it would be quite a challenge to grab three national titles, but I felt strong."

Cole, who turned 54 in December, won national titles in 51+ Men, Men's Flatbottom and Hands Out Front, a popular new division in 2004 that celebrates a sort of throw-back style of the sport. "There is no rest in Hands Out Front," Cole says. "The pull on the skier is tremendous and the laps are debilitating

and wearing on you. I was literally hanging on for dear life. The pressure to keep the ski out in front is far more difficult and you feel like you are being pulled over the front.” Water Ski Hall of Fame member Mike Avila and Scott Wendt drove Cole to the title in the 51+ Men’s and Hands Out Front divisions, while Wayne Bouchard served as the observer. Dave Rankin and Mike King served as Cole’s driver and observer, respectively, in the Men’s Flatbottom event. While Cole swept both races in the 51+ Men’s event, he won on time in Men’s Flatbottom and Hands Out Front.

Doherty, meanwhile, was arguably the happiest person to be competing at this year’s Nationals. The 2003 Women’s Formula 2 world champion and a house painter by trade, Doherty ruptured the lining of her lower calf in July when a ladder fell on her left leg. “It was a devastating day and it took me 10 weeks to recover enough to where I could ski,” says Doherty, who competed despite having a six-inch blood cut in the damaged tissue. “My confidence was not as high going into this year’s Nationals. I really wanted to win, but my nerves were all over the place.”

Fortunately for her, she channeled that nervous energy into her racing. Doherty swept both races in the 30-39 Women’s division, winning by at least a mile in each event. Then she defended her national Outboard title, turning back a pair of men in dominating fashion. “It was so great to be able to defend my titles from 2002,” says Doherty, who won every class that she



Deann Shannon of Orange, Calif., raced her way to the Women’s Open national title.

entered in the 2004 season. “I was definitely disappointed with the cancellation of the 2003 Nationals, especially since it was going to be held two weeks after I won my first world title. I really wanted to show off. My age class, 30-39 Women, had some very tough competition. Both heats started with side-by-side racing, but it didn’t take me long to pull out in front and take the wins. As for the Outboard class, well it’s always a great day to beat the men. You know me; I’m a big

fan of winning.”

In other highlights, Griffin not only defended his title in the 43-50 Men’s division, where he edged Harry Anderson, but he finished runner-up to Cole in the Men’s Flatbottom event; Mike Schneider of San Juan Capistrano, Calif., turned back six competitors to win the 33-42 Men’s division; Brady Hoggins of Huntington Beach, Calif., swept both races to win the 0-12 Boys title; and Peter Kompaniez and Ron Ayala earned national titles for driving and observing, respectively. ♠

NWSRA Honors Members

The National Water Ski Racing Association honored three of its members with its annual Man & Woman of the Year awards. This year’s recipients were Dave Allen and Mike King, who were named co-winners of the Man of the Year award, and Kelly Ireland, who was selected Woman of the Year.

Allen has been a long-time participant as a driver and ski racer. He has been lauded as one of the most dedicated members of the association, and he has been instrumental in helping numerous ski racers advance their careers.

King has been a participant since the 1970s. On the regional and national board levels, he has done everything from serving as Region 2 points chairman and race chairman to national body vice president/race chairman. On the water, he is a three-time national champion observer, in addition to winning multiple region and marathon hi-point awards. On the international level, he has been a gold-medal winning observer for both the U.S. Elite Water Ski Racing Team and the Women’s overall world champion.

Ireland has been an active member of the NWSRA for more than 20 years. She started out as a skier in Region 3 back in the 1980s. She has accomplished many things in her career in the sport of water ski racing, including being a region hi-point champion and national champion as an age-class skier. She has spent countless hours holding various offices on the regional, national and international levels of the NWSRA, and she has served as a judge at the world championships.

2004 National Champions

0-12 Girls

Chelbe Kinslow

0-12 Boys

Brady Hoggins

13-16 Boys

Sam Frey

17-29 Women

Amy Threlfall

17-25 Men

Justin Soller

26-32 Men

Jason Miller

30-39 Women

Janine Doherty

33-42 Men

Mike Schneider

40+ Women

Denise Magrin

43-50 Men

Brent Griffin

51+ Men

Jon Cole

Women’s Novice

Sue Harr

Men’s Novice

Glenn Evans

Social

Ryan Nelson

Men’s Flatbottom

Jon Cole

Men’s Flatbottom Driver

Dave Rankin

Women’s Flatbottom

Debbie Kaz

Jet Boat

Billy Mason

Jet Boat Driver

Bill Sidney

Outboard

Janine Doherty

Outboard Driver

Joe Platsis

Stock Boat

Cameron King

Stock Boat Driver

Gary Heinbuch

Hands Out Front

Jon Cole

Women’s Open

Deann Shannon

Men’s Open

John Kompaniez

Driver

Peter Kompaniez

Observer

Ron Ayala

For complete results, go to nwsra.net.