

How to watch a race

The powerboats speed and slow erratically around the oval on Grand Lake St. Marys. The gun, actually a small cannon, fires as spectators crane to see whether the race has started. Disappointed, they turn to each other, “Has it started yet?”

Only the announcer’s voice clues in to when the race has finally begun.

Watching hydroplane racing is not for the inattentive. Like sailboat racing, hydroplane races begin with a flying start. The gun fires several times before the race begins and the checkered flag is flown. Colored flags are also displayed during the race.

Hydroplane racing is a test of attention, even for veteran racers. Not only must they hit the one-minute pin — a buoy marked as such during the drivers meeting in the morning — they must make it to the start at specified times. Drivers use stop watches and digital watches, watch for flags and communicate onshore with crews using two-way radios. They do this while traveling over 100 mph.

Spectators won’t have to be as diligent as the racers in order to understand the race. Continuous broadcasting will be supplied by WCSM and over PA by our announcers.

Hydroplanes are placed into the pit area, or water, by a crane. Racers can make last minute adjustments up to the first gun going off, which tells them to leave the pit area for four minutes of timing runs, during which a green flag is flown.

Boats can’t leave the pits at the same time and typically leave one or two at a time until the entire field begins circling the oval.

Racers time how long it takes them to get from buoy to buoy. This will tell them how fast they should go in order to hit the one-minute buoy and the start line at the optimum time and boat speed. Boats will often speed up and slow down in order to achieve the right timing.

After four minutes have passed, the gun sounds again and a white flag is displayed. At that point, no driver is permitted to leave the pits.

During the last minute before racing begins, drivers will jockey to establish their lane position. There will be a designated buoy either at the entrance to the second turn or at the exit of that turn after which racers must established and maintain their lanes from that point to the starting line.

Each boat has a timer which begins counting the seconds to the start. Racers can not cross the starting line until the digital clock hits zero or they receive a one-minute penalty.

Racers must complete five laps, with a checkered flag flown during the last lap. A black flag is immediately flown after the race. That signals that the course is closed and drivers must return to the pits.

Flags

Several flags will be displayed during the event.

White flag: Flown during the last minute of the 5 minute milling period before the start of each race as the boats are positioning. Also used to indicate the final lap for the lead boat during each race.

Black Flag: Means the course is closed and all race boats are to return to the pits. Boats are not to leave the pits while the black flag is displayed.

Green flag: Signifies the race course is clear and ready for racing. This flag is displayed for the first 4 minutes of the 5 minute milling period, and then is displayed while racing is underway up until the boats are on their final lap.

Red flag: Means the race has been stopped and is used when referees have determined an extremely dangerous situation exists or when an accident has occurred on the course. Boats should immediately stop when the red flag is flown and should return to the pits only when the black flag is raised.

Blue flag with yellow or white stripe: Indicates to drivers that something has changed on the course, such as a boat down or moving slowly on the course, cowling coming off a boat or debris floating on the course.

Checkered flag: As in all racing, the checkered flag indicates the end of the race.

In case drivers can't communicate with their crews via radio, they can use hand signals:

Clasped hands about head: Signals that everything is fine and driver needs only routine assistance.

Waving helmet: Indicates that driver is uninjured, but the boat needs immediate assistance.

Waving both hands continuously above head: Indicates that the driver is in danger and needs immediate assistance. Racing will be stopped to give aid.

Classes

CELINA — The Governor's Cup Regatta will showcase seven different classes of racing boat, powered by marine versions of engines one might find in most everyday automobiles. Hydroplanes sport the same variety of power plants as you would find cruising any American boulevard on weekend night in the summer.

1.5 Litre Stock

Letter designation: T

Max length: 13'6"

Minimum weight: 750 lbs.

Rising in popularity due to its economical nature, the 1.5 Litre Stock class offers four-cylinder racing on a budget, featuring 1200 cc to 1587 cc Toyotas, running virtually stock and on non-racing pump gas. Boats racing in this class top out near 95 mph. This class is designated with the letter T and boats will have a maximum length of 13 feet and 6 inches. Minimum weight is 750 lbs.

1.0 Litre Modified

Letter designation: Y
Max length: 13'6"
Minimum weight: 750 lbs.

A step up from 1.5 Litre Stock, 1.0 Litre Modified opens the door for boat builders to use their imaginations. Two or four cycle motors can be powered by pump gas or methanol and will top out at 105-mph. This class is designated with the letter Y and has the same length and weight restrictions as 1.5 Litre Stock.

2.5 Litre Stock

Letter designation: S
Max length: 13'6"
Minimum weight: 975 lbs.

The 2.5 Litre Stock class features Ford four-cylinder motors. The class is also noted for its affordability. Designated Class S, boats are restricted to 13 feet 6 inches in length and 975 lbs. in weight. Boats in this class will top out near 100-mph.

2.5 Litre Modified

Letter designation: A
Max length: 16'
Minimum weight: 1325 lbs.

The 2.5 Litre Modified class features BMW and Alfa Romeo motors running at over 125-mph. Engines are restricted to 166 cubic inches, but can be fed anything from pump gas to aviation fuel and will feature a variety of different modifications. Boats will be designated with the letter A in this class and are a maximum 16 feet in length and a minimum 1325 lbs. in weight.

5 Litre

Letter designation: E
Max length: 16;
Minimum weight: 1450 lbs.

The 5 Litre Stock class is open to Ford, Plymouth and Chevrolet motors in the 5 Litre range. Due to class restrictions, the most popular and usable motor is the Chevrolet. Boats in this class will perform near 115-mph and is considered one of the most competitive classes among inboard racers. The boats in this class will wear the letter E. The boats are a maximum 16 feet in length and 1450 lbs. in weight. Four of the last six Governor's Cup winners have been from the 5 litre stock class.

National Modified

Letter designation: NM

Max length: 19'

Minimum weight: 1600 lbs.

Boats racing in the National Modified class will range from four-cylinders to 350 cubic inch small block V-8s. Speeds will top out at nearly 140-mph. Boats in this class are designated NM. The maximum length allowed is 19 feet and the minimum weight is 1600 lbs.

Grand National Hydroplane

Letter designation: GNH

Max length: 20'

Minimum weight: 2000 lbs.

Grand National Hydroplane class boats will top near 150-mph and thrill crowds with 70-foot rooster tails. Powered by monster big block V-8 motors, these boats are a maximum 20 feet in length and 2000 lbs minimum. These boats run on pump gas.