

Southland Regatta

Stock Broker Racer Espouses Speculation



Racing

by Charles Walston

'There are probably more expensive things you could do, but I don't know what that would be. Probably ramming Rolls Royces into brick walls.'

John Woods

John Woods is laughing over the phone from his St. Louis office. He spends 12 hours a day there, working as a vice-president for E. F. Hut-ton.

Listen:

"It certainly is a lot more down to earth speed than getting out in your Cadillac and going 130. The liftoff speed of some large air-planes is 130, but you don't really have the sensa-tion of speed that much.

"It's definitely a radical sensation . . . my adjectives falter and fail me in this case."

Woods is talking about powerboat racing; specifically hydroplanes. When the Southland Regatta's 40th edition begins at Lake Maggiore Saturday, Woods will be there in his 225cc speedster, *Speculation IV*.

It'll be his first time in the boat, his first time on the water in more than two years.

"I never really got out," he says of racing. "I was sort of high and dry for a couple of years there."

Without a ride, he was, because he sold *Speculation III*, and the bloodline's latest was years in the shop. The builder started in southern California, moved to Tucson, then to Seattle, then made a cross-town move within Seattle.

The boat is unique. One of its singular fea-tures is a corrugated aluminum hull, something that has been incorporated only in a few larger boats.

It is quite a step up from his first hydro-plane. That was an eight-footer he built in shop class "23 or 24 years ago." His father bought him

a motor for Christmas, a 10 horsepower Mercury. "I'll never forget, that thing went 48 miles an hour. I thought I was really flying. Then it was one step after another. Forty-eight wasn't fast enough."

Woods' return to racing was jokingly bemoaned recently by another Southland driver in the 225 class. He was a man to reckon with before his layoff. Victories included races at the Nationals in Miami and the World Championships in Dayton, Ohio.

"I just won a few," says Woods when apprised of the anticipation among those he'll race. "No big deal."

But big enough that Woods hired film crews to document his exploits. "I figured when I'm old and grey and arthritis sets in I could watch these things on snowy days. It's cheap home entertainment."

"There are probably more expensive things you could do, but I don't know what that would be," he admits. "Probably ramming Rolls Royces into brick walls."



It may make just about as much sense to some people, driving \$60,000 cars into a wall. Be-

cause Woods spend \$15,000 on the hull of his new boat. Then he shipped it from Seattle to California to have it painted. He has a man in Detroit building four engines, two of which are on the way to St. Petersburg for the Southland. Propellers, trailers and so forth are little extras.

It may not make much sense to some people, but a child can understand it. Monday, a group from the Northeast Exchange Club met at All-Children's Hospital to discuss the races. A driver who attended parked his boat in the front driveway. From the third floor, children gazed at the shiny machine. The promise of speed and excitement had them glued to the windows; you couldn't have pulled them away if your life depended on it.

In a sense, their own lives are linked to the Southland Regatta, because the Exchange Club, which puts on the race, donates all proceeds to the hospital. But the kids probably don't know that. And though the tug of a worthy cause helps pull men such as John Woods to town for the races, it is the dark and unspeakable, the elemental craving for speed and more speed, that caused him to choose his unusual hobby.