



"Long Gone" Reigns As King Of 7-Litre Boats

... Daytonian will drive it this weekend in Miami

Thomas Sets Sights High In Orange Bowl Regatta

By Bucky Albers
Journal Herald Sports Writer

Dave Thomas hopped aboard a Miami-bound airplane last night. He's going to the Orange Bowl.

Nope, he's not a week late.

And he isn't confusing the Orange Bowl with the Super Bowl or the Playoff Bowl.

Those annual contests are held on terra firma at the football stadium.

The competition Thomas will enter is held on water. It's the annual Orange Bowl regatta at Miami's seaquarium—a sanctuary set aside for speed.

Thomas, 29, is driving a boat called "Long Gone" which was long gone in this event last year when the late Bill Heath drove it to victory.

Heath isn't around to defend his championship. He got the boat sideways while traveling over 100 miles per hour at Guntersville, Ala., last year and was killed as the craft flipped.

Thomas knew Heath well. He saw the accident. He went to Heath's funeral at Homewood, Ill. Now he's in the boat.

Actually, it's not Heath's boat. It belongs to a fellow from near Chicago named Les Brown.

He's not the Les Brown who had a "band of reknown" but he did get his name in the papers

a couple of years ago when he flipped the boat at St. Petersburg, Fla.

Brown wears a brace on his back now. He can't drive. Still, he builds boats as well as anyone, and "Long Gone" is his pet.

"This is the best equipment I've ever had for this race," Thomas insists. "It's the national champion. It carries No. 1. If I get any breaks at all, the boat should win."

Powered by a 426 cubic-inch Chrysler, "Long Gone" will be running in the grand prix, a 12-boat, 10-mile race, tomorrow. Sunday it is entered in a race of the same size and length but strictly for seven-litre boats.

Thomas, a machine operator at Delco-Moraine, isn't concerned about the fact that the boat hasn't been raced since Heath's fatal flip. Dave doesn't scare easily.

Last year he saw a fellow competitor cut in half. He saw Heath and others die in the big boats.

"If you look at most of them," he says, justifying his desire to continue racing, "they're all freak accidents."

Thomas has always loved thrills. As a teenager he had his automobile driver's license suspended several times.

Once he was hauled into court after reportedly spinning his tires so crazily that flying gravel broke the headlights and chipped the windshield of a car behind him.

Dave has mellowed somewhat since those days.

He still likes to throw something at the boys behind him, but now it's a big roostertail of water.

If he can douse the other fellows pretty good this weekend, he thinks he'll have a chance to land a seat in one of the Gold coppers—the biggest of the racing boats.

"I'd like nothing better," he said, "than to drive for a living."



Thomas