

Whipp gets to stay home

By Paul Meyer

Journal Herald Sports Writer

Gene Whipp spent more weekends away from home (34) and drove more miles (60,000) last year than many traveling salesmen.

But Whipp wasn't selling anything. He was enjoying his hobby.

Whipp's hobby is driving boats — of the inboard hydroplane variety — for fun but little profit.

This weekend, however, the 1969 national point champion in the 280-cubic inch class won't have so far to go in order to enjoy his hobby. Whipp will stay here to race in the sixth annual Dayton Motorboat Racing Assn. Regatta at Eastwood Park Lake on Sunday.

WHIPP will have his fun — he's driving in three different classes which means six heat races — but he won't make much money. The class winners will get just \$40 apiece, mainly because proceeds from the event will be turned over to the Barney Childrens Medical Center.

Obviously, then, Whipp doesn't race for the money involved.

"The financial returns are very small," Whipp conceded. "But the challenges and the risks are very great. Eddie Sachs (the race car driver who was killed at the Indy 500) used to say that he was in control of his car 95 per cent of the time and out of control five per cent of the time. In boat racing, you're out of control 95 per cent of the time and in control five per cent."

But it's not just the thrills.

"The hospitality of the local groups which put the races on is what lures you to them," Whipp explained. "They plan a lot of parties and other things. You're not just there to race."

IN FACT, Whipp and his family make each trip a sort of mini-vacation.

"We all pile in the car on Fridays, drive all night if we have to, carry all our food and lots of coffee, get there for the race and then drive back Sunday to be at work on Monday," Whipp said. "Of course,

you don't have to do this all the time. Some guys just race on a few weekends, but the beauty of the sport is that you can put into it what you want to get out of it."

Whipp, a 28-year old Fairmont High School graduate, has been putting a lot into the sport for 11 years. He began racing between his junior and senior years in high school and his first ride was a test drive in Elroy Spiker's 48-cubic inch model.

"**I WENT** to Columbus for the test," Whipp remembered, "and it seemed like fun. I loved it right away."

Whipp admitted that now "it's getting to be work at times," but, he quickly added, "it's still fun."

For Gene Whipp, racing boats at speeds up to 145 miles an hour for 34 weekends a year is "how I get my kicks."

Which, come to think of it, is what hobbies are all about anyway.