

Piqua's Mark Dowty takes on powerboat racing

PIQUA — Powerboat racing — even the name of the sport sounds fast.

But there is something about speed that draws men and machines together. It's the thrill of danger and the feeling of power when the race has been completed, without speed taking its share of the payoff.

Powerboat driver Bill Muncey and his colleague Dean Chenoweth took speed to its limits once too often, Muncey paying for his life last year and Chenoweth with his just last week.

A thin veil of gloom is likely to hang over the festivities at the Dayton Hydroglobe at Eastwood Lake this weekend because of Chenoweth's death on the water in Miss Budwiser. Chenoweth, who learned to race on the Miami River in Troy, was killed almost instantly when his powerboat caught a puff of wind and flipped, disintegrating on the water at Pasco, Wash.

Piqua powerboat driver Mark Dowty hopes he never experiences that feeling, but he may never have the chance. He is in it just for fun, not to set records or earn his living. Dowty admits that even in his short racing career, he thinks about the possibility of an accident. The possibility will exist when he races this weekend.

"It is always in the back of your mind, but when you are out there racing, you forget about it," Dowty said. "It is like Chenoweth said, you can't think about it because eventually, you will psyche yourself into having one."

Dowty's 2.5 liter, 225 cubic inch, 250 horsepower, Pinto engine-powered Slow Ride powerboat will never reach the speeds Chenoweth was cruising at when the wind took a change for the worse. But at best it will travel at 115 mph. The lap record at the Hydrobowl in the 2.5 liter class is 85.5 mph set last year.

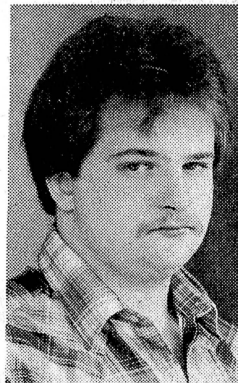
"People going 35 miles an hour on water think they are moving," said Dowty. "You can get going pretty good in a powerboat."

Dowty, 22, has been around powerboat racing for almost 10 years, ever since a friend's dad in Piqua, Ralph Bornhorst, owned his present boat.

"I just tagged along to the races to do clean

Troy Daily News Associate Sports Editor

MARK
DOWTY



up work and have a good time," said Dowty, who has known Piqua's most famous powerboat driver, Ron Snyder, since he was 12. Snyder is driving the Miss Madison on the unlimited hydroplane circuit this summer.

"It didn't take me long to start thinking about racing. Now that I have begun to race, I really enjoy it. There is really nothing like it," said Dowty.

Dowty bought the 25-year-old boat from Bornhorst in April 1981. For the first two races last year, Dowty let another driver race, but since then he has been behind the wheel. Then he became both the driver and mechanic.

"I took my drivers test in Raleigh, N.C. last year and passed," said Dowty. "About all you have to do is know the rule book and prove you can handle the boat."

As part of the test, Dowty ran in a real race,

but stayed in back of the field. For the second heat, he was allowed to race, and finished fifth in a 12-boat field.

"I don't know what I did, but I guess I did something right," he said.

The Slow Ride was running well until a timing belt broke and bent four straight valves. Efforts to repair the engine overnight failed, but Dowty had passed his test and was an official driver.

This year, engine problems have plagued the boat again. Dowty's best finish was fourth at Madison, Ind. early this year. In two other races, the boat did not place because of engine problems.

Dowty, who has been off work from Copeland Corp. for about 15 months, has been working to get the Slow Ride back into racing form.

"I wouldn't miss racing in Dayton for nothin'," said Dowty. "The Hydrobowl is a nice place to race, but it is also good to be racing close to home."

Powerboat racing, even at this level, is an expensive hobby. Dowty's sponsor, Bev's Lamp Post of Piqua, has picked up most of the tab this year.

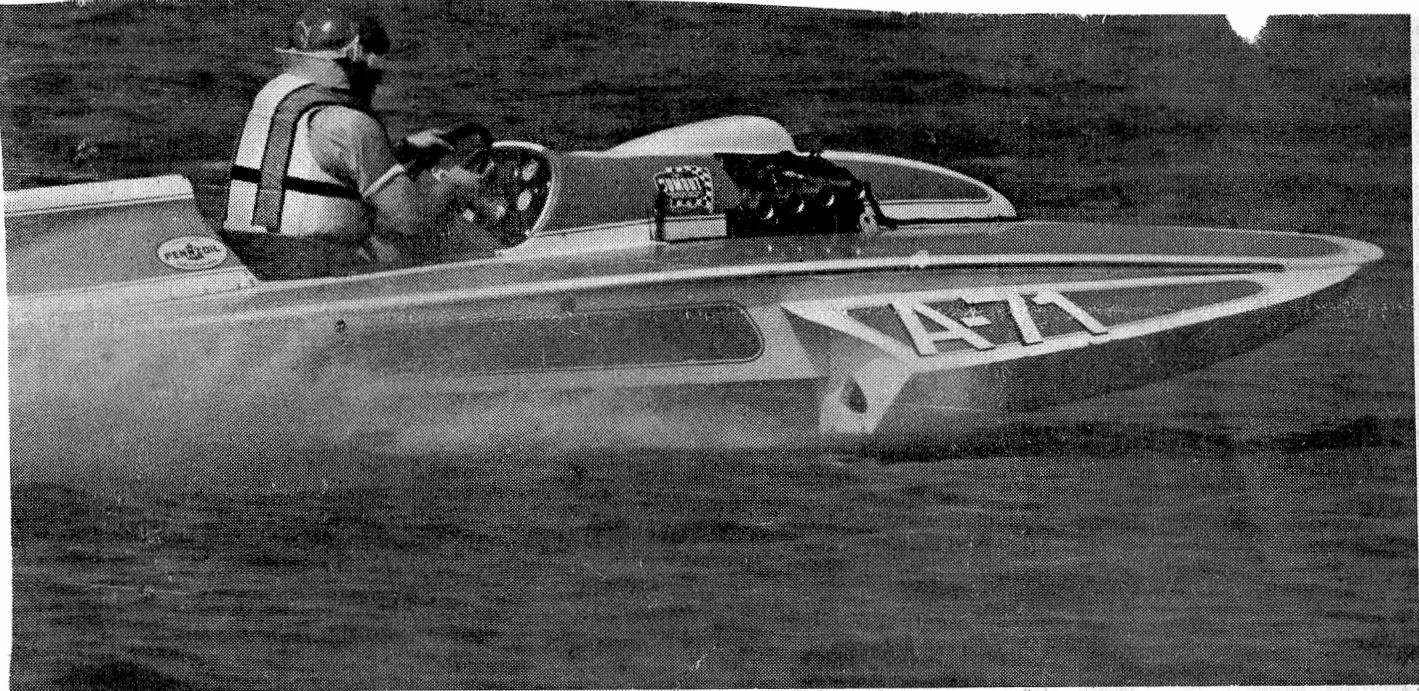
"It is nice to have a sponsor," said Dowty. "With money being the way it is right now, it is good to have the support. I've tried to keep the cost down to a minimum."

Dowty is already thinking about his next move in powerboat racing.

"I have my mind on moving up a few classes with bigger engines," but that is if I start work again," he said.

Racing begins today with practice runs and continues tomorrow and Sunday at the Hydrobowl at Eastwood Lake, located just off State Route 4 and Harshman Road in Dayton. Four entries from China have been confirmed and many other countries will be represented. The world championships for the OB Hydroplanes is expected to draw a large field as are the indoor and outdoor Grand Prix races.

The gate price for two days is \$12, \$6 a day, and there is a \$2 parking charge.



Dowty and his 25-year-old boat can cruise up to 115 mph