

Photo: Colin Taylor Productions

Beware; once hooked on powerboat racing you will never escape. If you wish to become a lifetime addict, read on.

Joining

Firstly, one must join a club affiliated to the RYA such as the Royal Motor, Royal Southern, Allhallows, Varne or of course UKOBA. It is particularly useful to join UKOBA because, not only have they set themselves up to become 'the National Club' as opposed to a local club, but, more importantly, membership of UKOBA helps where it matters most, *in the pocket*. UKOBA organises six races each year and members obtain a discount on each entry fee, this discount more than outweighs the membership fee.

Seek advice

It pays to get good advice early and your club should help to guide you in the right direction. UKOBA have a printed card which explains all the classes, both racing and cruiser. Your choice of category will have to suit your pocket and your ambition but, when you work out your budget watch out, you will probably underestimate by some £2,000 to £4,000. It will probably pay you to buy a well set-up second hand boat for your first season, the kinks should have been ironed out. But, if you insist on having a boat fitted out from new, extract every ounce of information from the manufacturer of the hull. He should know the best engine size, height, propeller size and weight distribution. Then, most important of all, get a good engineer to fit the boat out. "Bodge-ups" by inexperienced engineers cost races and cost Dollars.

Keeping within the rules

Once committed to a boat, it is prudent to get hold of the current rule book issued by the RYA. You should ask the RYA

(Powerboat Section — telephone Woking 5022) for a *Licence Application Form* and at the same time ask to be allocated a boat Race Number. Quickly book a medical with your doctor, take the form with you to the doctor who will sign it stating your medical fitness. Fill in the remaining questions and send the form to your Club Secretary together with a cheque made out to the RYA for either £30 Basic Licence — for Offshore Circuit Racing (OCR) or £50 National Licence — for Class 1, 2 & 3 and Cruiser, plus a stamped envelope addressed to the RYA. The Club Secretary will counter-sign your application giving the Club seal of approval that you are a fit person to be allowed to race. The form and cheque will then be sent to the RYA, who, in turn, will issue a Racing Licence and will send you a Rule Book free of charge. (NB If you apply for a UIM Rule Book before applying for a Licence you will have to pay £3 for the book). A large proportion of your licence fee pays for Third Party Insurance.

Your licencing status

To race Nationally in Offshore Circuit Racing only the driver needs a *Basic* Licence, whereas in Class 1, 2 & 3 two crew members must have *National* Licences, whilst in cruisers only the Driver need have a *National* Licence, but all other crew members should hold a *Passenger* Licence to cover Third Party Insurance.

Moving Up

An INTERNATIONAL LICENCE is necessary if you wish to compete in European or World Championship Races. Generally, to obtain an International Licence one must compete satisfactorily in three races and obtain the signature of the Race Organiser at each of these events, then your licence can be uprated by the RYA for the extra fee of £27.

Do not let this rule put you off though, for example, the World 3B

Championships in Guernsey will be the *third* race of the season so there will only be two races beforehand. In these circumstances special dispensation will be granted by the Offshore Racing Committee (ORC) so your experience will be taken into account and you will most surely be granted an International Licence. The ORC prefers to encourage growth of the sport rather than deter it.

Painting the boat

Strict rules apply to painting numbers on boats, for OCR (or Class 4), the exact dimensions will be found in the RYA booklet called PBI issued by the RYA upon application. Cruiser rules are also to be found in PBI, both OCR and Cruisers are British Classes only, no other country yet races these boats. The remaining Classes 1, 2 & 3 are recognised internationally and are governed by the UIM Offshore Rules booklet. Rule 707 explains the Race Number particulars for Classes 1 and 2 whilst Rule 745 applies to Class 3.

Sign writing must be kept away from Race Numbers. In PBI, these minimum dimensions are explained in Rule 10 under the heading 'ADVERTISING' in the General Rules Section. For Classes 1, 2 & 3 Rule 203.051 applies. Take care, read carefully, it costs money to repaint boats. NB The race number on the bow should be read from the helmsman's position.

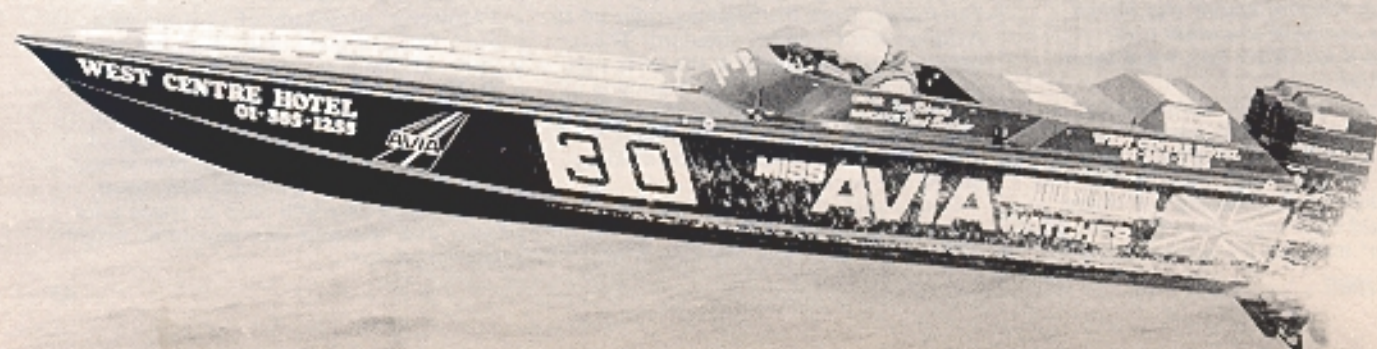
National Flag

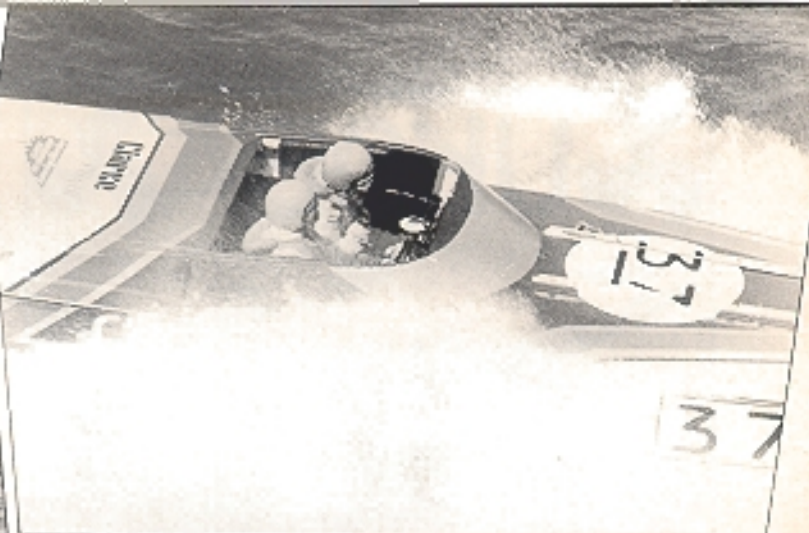
The National Flag, either an ensign or a Union Jack may either be flown on a short flag pole on the boat or may be painted on either side of the hull. There are specific dimensions for each class to be found in the appropriate rule books.

Boat measurement

Once the race numbers and flags are in place and the steering, seats, tow eye, navigation lights, engine and fuel tanks are installed then you must call in a measurer who will measure your boat to

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see that it complies with the minimum length for the class, that the engine is correct and homologated, that the sign writing is within the rules and he will advise on the quality of the installation with safety paramount in his mind. A list of measurers can be found in PBI and they are entitled to charge a fee, particularly in respect of travel.

Mandatory equipment

A full list of compulsory equipment can be found in both PBI and UIM booklets, they differ slightly among the classes but they have to be complied with for safety and insurance purposes. Helmets and lifejackets have to be strong and effective, boats must carry a compass, anchor, fire extinguisher, flares, first aid kit, radar reflector, torch, long rope, sea anchor, 2 paddles, fog horn, bilge pump and navigation lights.

Get the best swinger in town

If you hope to lead or even win a race, getting a compass swung by a professional is essential, it is no good losing your way, in any case, at each race you have to show a current deviation card (dated within the last year and signed by an expert). Before you 'swing the compass' fix everything in the boat, be 'race ready'. Even your spare tool kit and propellers must be installed because magnetic metal placed in the boat after the 'swing' can undo all the good work of the compass man. I have known a spanner placed in the same spot but with the head facing the other way, change the compass by 10°. A neat suggestion is to mark the spanners with coloured tape and place them in the boat the same way every time. If you have to move anything after the 'swing', test it by passing it over the compass to see its effect. A compass swing could cost you £20 — £40 depending upon distance travelled. NB Whilst racing do not carry metal in your clothing, it can lead you astray if the compass is affected.

Entering races

A list of all the races can be obtained from the RYA or UKOBA, simply write or telephone the organising club for each race and ask them to send you the Race Entry form and Advance Programme. There is a closing date, approximately, 7 — 10 days before each race, and entries after that closing date will carry a surcharge. It pays to enter early, you will then receive instructions early and may well appear in pre-race publicity which should please your sponsor.

Preparing for a race

Races are won by the amount of good sensible effort that is put into your race preparation — BEFORE YOU CROSS THE START LINE. There is no substitute for hard work, preparation, practice, dedication, attention to detail and determination. There is no magic formula.

No need to cheat!

Do not listen to the wisecracks who whisper in your ear that 'Joe Bloggs has bent his engine' or that there is a secret way to 'hot-up' an engine and without which you stand no chance. Rumours that you need to cheat are UNTRUE! The speed of a boat can be dramatically improved by balancing it properly, getting the engine fitted at the best height on the transom, finding the most effective propeller shape and pitch and at the same time learning how to drive it and to trim the engine to obtain maximum speed. It takes lots of money to 'bend engines' but it takes only hours of time to set-up a boat to go faster, I know which I prefer.

Don't leave anything behind

It helps to make a check list of everything which you have to take to a race, this includes such things as compulsory equipment, licences, measurement certificate, compass deviation card and important items such as funnel, oil, props, nuts, washers, tools, chart of the

course and even money.

What to expect

Do your navigation homework (as set out in race instructions) *before* you go to the race. At the race you will find that the hours rush by and suddenly the race is upon you. Race instructions will tell you when race control opens, when scrutineering begins and ends, when briefing starts and when the race starts, and describes fully the course, marks, distance and laps. Aim to arrive when race control *opens*. Trailers have a habit of letting you down on the road and scrutineers have a habit of finding things wrong with your boat, so you need a margin of error to make sure you can make up for lost time or correct any errors or oversights in your preparation.

The scrutineers will go over your boat and safety equipment with a 'fine toothcomb', they are sticklers for the rules for your own protection and that of your rivals. Briefing is simply a get-together of all the competitors, drivers, navigators and throttle men who answer the roll call and receive final instructions from the Officer of the Day. Make sure you understand clearly every important detail such as which side of the start boat you are to be positioned. Write down the name of the start boat, have all the instruction flags to hand in case the course is shortened or the race is stopped etc. Your brain becomes scrambled as soon as the flag drops and as fifty boats leap forward at the start 'all hell lets loose'. Your meticulous preparation now begins to pay off as your memory leaks like a sieve.

