

SPORTS

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SECTION
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Hopping across the finish line



BY GREG FARRAR

Greg Hopp in UL 15 Mike's Hard Lemonade/Happy Go Lucky (right) pulls ahead of Dave Bender in UL 38 Golden Nugget Casino to capture Sunday's Tastin' N Racin' KZOK Cup.

UL 15 picks up Tasty victory

BY BOB TAYLOR

Last year Greg and Jerry Hopp, along with everyone else, were chasing Phil Bononcini of Sammamish for the Unlimited Light Hydroplane Racing Association (ULHRA) national points lead. This year Bononcini and the rest of the ULHRA fleet could be chasing the Hopp's Racing Team.

Greg and his father Jerry, who hail from Snohomish, got the early jump in national-points standings Sunday. Greg drove the UL 15 Mike's Hard Lemonade/Happy Go Lucky to first place in the KZOK Cup of the seventh annual Tastin' N Racin' at Lake Sammamish State Park.

"This is a great start for us," Greg said. "The boat ran like a charm."

The UL 15 had a near flawless weekend in the opener of the ULHRA season. While other boats broke down, the UL 15 was still in top running condition for the final. Saturday it had the fastest qualifying speed of 127.841 mph. In Heat 2B, the UL 15 went 113.888 mph.

In the KZOK Cup, Greg Hopp and the UL 15 cranked up for the finish as it overcame Dave Bender in the UL 38 Golden Nugget Casino and George Woods in the UL 51 Security Race Products. Paul Beckert, a pilot for Northwest Airlines, drove UL 14 Aurora Rents to fourth place, edging Kelly

Stocklin of Issaquah in the Thunder Valley Racing Team's UL 40 Front Page 2003.

Bender finished second in the light driver-points race last year.

The annual showcase event for Tastin' N Racin' featured some comebacks. Woods returned to action after a 10-year layoff. The driver was a favorite of Northwest fans when he recorded three victories in the Unlimited Hydroplane circuit before sustaining injuries in a racing accident in 1993.

Stocklin and his crew made quite a comeback to get ready for the final. They weren't even expecting to be in the event after the UL 40 finished fifth in the B Main. The top four boats in the B Main qualified for the final. The fourth boat would be the trailer boat. However, the UL 58 and UL 5 developed some engine problems and couldn't race in the final. That moved the UL 40 into the finals as a trailer boat, meaning it had to be one full roostertail behind the last boat before it could start the race. Stocklin, the 2002 ULHRA Rookie of the Year, and his crew worked feverishly to get the ready for the final.

Issaquah's John O'Brien, co-owner of the UL 40, knew the odds were against his boat even if it got in the water in time for the race.

"Only once in 20 years has a trailer boat won," O'Brien said.

The UL 40 moved up a spot just as the race started when the UL 19, driven by Steve Hook, was dis-

qualified prior to the race because of a violation.

A large crowd that lined the shoreline had anticipated a battle between either Greg or Jerry Hopp, or Bononcini, the two-time Tastin' N Racin' champion, and Bender.

Bononcini entered the weekend as the three-time ULHRA national champion. The UL 72 Budweiser-Pocket Mechanic, owned by Bononcini and Joe Frauenheim of Issaquah, was first in owner points last year with 7,729. Jerry Hopp was second with 7,426 and Bender third with 5,345. Bender was also second in driver points behind Bononcini and Jerry Hopp third.

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BY GREG FARRAR

Greg Hopp of Snohomish is congratulated after winning the first race of the Unlimited Lights Hydroplane Racing Association season.



BY GREG FARRAR

Kelly Stocklin of Issaquah in the UL 40 Front Page 2003 finished fifth in Sunday's race.

