

Drag Boat Builder Brendel Says 200 m.p.h. Barrier to Fall in '70

BY LUPI SALDANA

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Irv Brendel, veteran North Hollywood boat builder, predicted Wednesday that drag boat racing's impossible dream—the 200 m.p.h. record—is going to become a reality this year.

"Today's drag boats have everything it takes to achieve the 200 mile per hour record—design, construction, power, competition and the driver," said

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Brendel, one of the country's leading manufacturers of drag boats.

He noted that the power boat blown fuel hydros have already punctured the 200 m.p.h. ceiling. Gary Gabelich drove Crisis to a speed of 200.44 m.p.h. last Sept. 14 at Perris, but the boat faltered on its backup run and failed to break the 190.26 record held by Mr. Ed.

"I can make boats that will go faster than 200, but I hesitate because of present safety factors. By this I don't mean that today's boats aren't safe. Actually the boats have never been safer and the drivers are well protected," said Brendel.

"A good example is the hull. Since we started making hulls of fiberglass, we solved the problems of having the bottoms torn off. And, of course, racing helmets and other safety equipment are much better."

Brendel said the boating fraternity is working on several new safety items. They include a glass capsule to protect the driver and an ejection seat.

He also expects the blown fuel flat bottoms to go faster this year. He looks for rides of up to 160 m.p.h., which would surpass the current record of 148.36 m.p.h. held by Ray Casselli's Panic Mouse.

Brendel, who has been building boats for the last 16 of his 40 years, said drag boats are gaining in popularity because they can be used for a dual purpose—to race and to water ski. He said a blown fuel drag boat can be built for \$9,800, which includes power. But if it is used for racing the upkeep isn't cheap, averaging \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year.

The giants of the drag world will have an opportunity to make Brendel's prediction about 200

m.p.h. record come true in the National Drag Boat Assn. spring championship Saturday and Sunday at Long Beach Marine Stadium.

Race director Ralph Roberts said entries in the blown fuel class include Mr. Ed, Crisis, El Tigre, Son of a Witch and Conquest. Qualifying will begin at 10 a.m. Saturday with the finals scheduled to start at noon Sunday.

Roberts said a new event, speed skiing for men and women, has been added to the 17 racing categories. Rick Cowles of Long Beach will lead the assault on the men's speed record of 121.11 m.p.h. held by Chuck Stearns of Bellflower.

A display of power and sailboats will be featured at the second annual Western National Boat & Marine Show which opens Friday at Anaheim Convention Center.