

Drag boats hit Oklahoma River this weekend

BY CORBIN HOSLER

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Mike McAuliffe doesn't know much about the difference between a hydroplane and jet boat, but he does know how to secure sponsors and a venue. Both will be on display this weekend when McAuliffe's company hosts the Little Ceasars/Ozarka Oklahoma City Nationals drag boat races.

"The city manager's office came to me and asked me to bring the event back after it left," the CEO of OKC Motorsports said. "We brought it back last year and learned a lot about how to best host it."

The event was moved after 2007 due to debris floating in the river that forced the cancellation of several races. One of the reasons it was brought back is because the Oklahoma River offers an ideal venue to watch and host races, McAuliffe said.

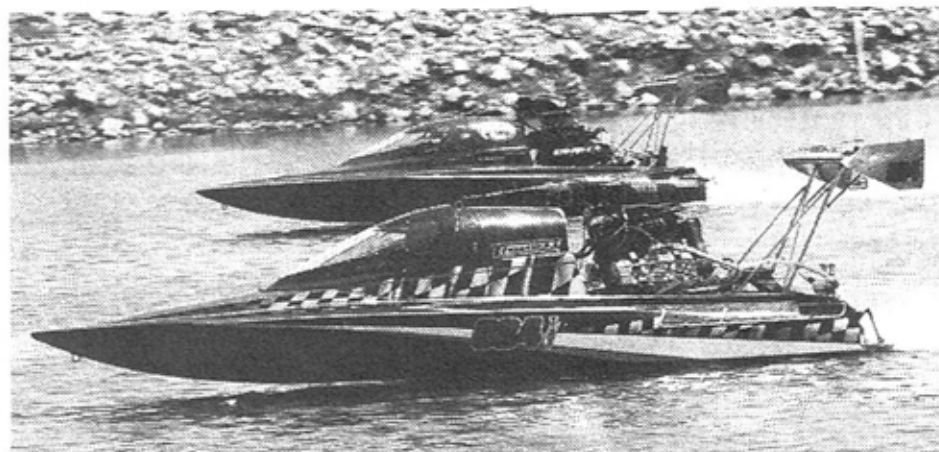
"Almost by accident, we have one of the best drag

boat courses in the country," he said. "The fact that the river is recessed helps to block the wind, and the elevated shore makes it great for spectating."

The event begins today and runs through Sunday along the Oklahoma River near the Dell plant located at I-44 and SW 15th St. The drag boat event features 140 teams of racers competing in boats that can reach top speeds of 260 mph.

The event is expected to have an economic impact in excess of \$4 million due to an influx of spectators and competitors, McAuliffe said. The races will be televised on the Versus and Speed cable networks.

Gates open at 8 a.m. today, and the first race starts at 8:30. Three-day passes cost \$40, and children 12 and under get in free on Friday and for \$5 on Saturday and Sunday. Members of the military can enter free on Friday with a military ID as part of Oklahoma City's Navy Week.



Bricktown Nationals drag boat races in the Oklahoma River in downtown OKC. PHOTO FROM THE OKLAHOMAN ARCHIVE

OKLAHOMA CITY NATIONALS DRAG BOAT RACES

› **When:** Today through Sunday

› **Where:** Oklahoma River by the Dell Facility at SW 15th Street and S Portland Avenue

› **Tickets:** Tickets are available at all metro Homeland stores, the Ford Center Box Office and www.ticketmaster.com.

Today

10 a.m.-5 p.m.: Testing and tuning runs on the river

6-8 p.m.: Meet-and-greet Show and Shine event.

Saturday

8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.: Qualifying races

Noon-12:30 p.m.: Opening ceremonies

Sunday

10 a.m.-5 p.m.: Eliminations and finals

6-7 p.m.: Awards presentation