

'Do-It-Yourselfers' Have Hydroplane Fleet Abuilding

Many a new limited-class racing craft will emerge from home shops, garages for 1957 season

By FRANKIE GOODWIN

KEEPING up with the Joneses is no easy task these days, especially when their first names happen to be Ted and Ron (Ted's son).

Easy or not, at least 25 hydroplane-happy persons in the Pacific Northwest are busy giving the two boating "Jones boys" a run for their rooster-tails.

In garages and basements, in shops and chicken coops—wherever there's space—these persons have been building "do-it-yourself" hydroplanes. And a bright new crop of limited hydros is popping out into the open this spring.

"A real boating man will let his automobile sit out all winter while he builds a boat in the garage," commented Tommy Mansker, 2214 N. 54th St., whose new 136-class hydroplane, Kitten, soon will be ready for christening.

Another home hydroplane-builder, Glen Davis, 21, of 4754 46th Av. S. W., certainly can testify to this.

"There they sit," Davis said, pointing to the family cars parked in the street. "They've been there all winter."

In the dry garage sat an exciting new 225-class hydroplane. It was the Shady Lady, built by Davis and Robert Larsen, 3052 50th Av. S. W., a United Air Lines pilot.

BECAUSE veteran drivers like to surprise the competition, hot new boats often are kept top secret before race time in the spring. It is known, however, that at least 19 new

"do-it-yourself" hydros soon will have come out of hiding in the Pacific Northwest. These are in addition to the limited hydroplanes turned out by Ron Jones and by other commercial builders.

Many of the sleek new boats will make their public debuts at the fourth annual Green Lake Memorial Day Regatta June 2. Most of them will race under the colors of the Seattle Inboard Racing Association, a hydroplane club that has grown from 6 to 126 members since 1951.

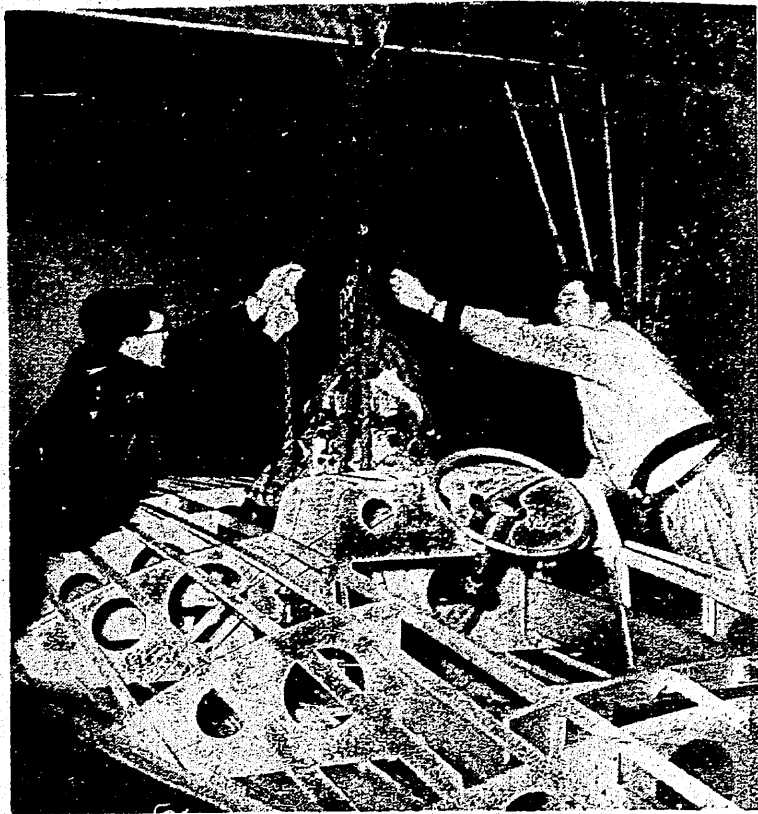
These proud new limited hydros are of seven different classes—48, 135, 136, 225, 266 and 280 cubic inches and 7 liters. These designations refer to total piston displacement of the engines, not to the sizes of the boats themselves.

Some of the engines are stock; others are "hopped up" to the skies. All are built under strict specifications of the American Power Boat Association, which determines the classes of hydroplanes across the country.

YOU don't need an engineering degree or a million dollars in your pocket to create one of these basement-built hydroplanes. You do need a love of speed and power, plus more than your share of determination.

Glen Davis, who "hopped up" the 1941 Ford V-8 block for the Shady Lady, never had seen the inside of an engine until last October. He is an education student at the University of Washington, majoring in music.

"I'd never monkeyed with engines before," Davis said. "I learned



GLEN DAVIS, left, and Robert Larsen hoisted a "hopped-up" automobile engine into the Shady Lady, their new hydroplane in the 225-cubic-inch class.

through talking with boatmen and reading source material. Then I went ahead and did it. You don't have to be an engineering graduate or have a lot of brains."

Davis' partner, Larsen, caught the hydroplane fever when he helped build the Tempest (now Miss Bardahl) for his neighbor, Norm Christianson, marine architect. Previously his experience had been with airplanes, not boats.

Tom Mansker, builder of the Kitten, on the other hand, is an expert boatman. His father long has been in the boatbuilding business, and the younger Mansker grew up near boats.

"I couldn't help but pick it up," he said. "I've also built lots of model airplanes. That experience has helped."

BUILDERS of the new hydros represent many trades. Some are electricians and mechanics, but not all.

Included are a grocery clerk, a salesman, a foreman at the Boeing Airplane Co., a draftsman, a glazier, a meatcutter, a service-station owner, a logging engineer and four high-school students.

The cost of a limited hydroplane varies from approximately \$550 to \$3,500, depending upon the class and how much the builder wants to put into it.

For economy reasons, the 136 class is most popular. Because it has a stock engine, a 136-class hydroplane can be built for as little as \$750. Ten of the 19 new "do-it-yourself" hydros belong to this group.

Mansker estimates his 136 hydro, Kitten, cost slightly less than \$600 to build. Being an experienced builder, Mansker saved money many ways, including the purchase of equipment through other S. I. R. A. members.

THE Shady Lady, a larger, 225-class boat, will total about \$1,100 in cost.

"We saved three or four hundred dollars by making our own patterns and having the fittings cast," Larsen said. These parts included the rudder,

rudder bracket, foot throttle and strut.

"We were going to name the boat Mama's Mink," Larsen added, grinning. "That's where the money for my wife's mink went. We discovered another boat back East by that name, so we chose Shady Lady."

Boats of experimental design naturally cost more. Steve Radnich, 5023 S. 144th St., designer and builder of the new 266-class Ven-Tur-Ree, estimates his costs at \$3,500.

"If it works, I'll be in; if it won't, I'll be out a lot of money," Radnich said.

Radnich's craft features an exhaust system in the tail fin. More amazing, the boat sprouts no roostertail at all, because its three-bladed propeller operates all the way in the water. The propeller is run in a "venturi," a specially designed cylinder based upon a principle of jet engines.

Many builders design their own hydroplanes, as Radnich did. Others buy a set of plans for from \$10 to \$25.

The Shady Lady, for instance, is a new Christianson design built from plans costing a mere \$15. It has a wider tunnel than most hydroplanes (4 feet 8 inches between sponsons), making it more stable in turning corners. Like the Ven-Tur-Ree, the Shady Lady has a three-blade propeller.

SEATTLE'S trim, new hydros are built on virtually every type of plan boating minds could dream up. Their names include everything from Small Fry to Big Fry—from Miss Fit to Snafu II. Also, there are Snootful III, My Lulu, and High Lead, named after a method of logging.

No matter what the name, it's the thrill of the speed that counts.

"You get the same feeling out of driving a hydroplane that you get out of doing acrobatics in the air." That's the way Larsen, a pilot for seven years, puts it.

And, as boatmen say, there are bound to be some "real-going machines" among the spring crop of hydros.

Those Jones boys had better watch out.



TOM MANSKER took a measurement for another step toward completion of the kitten, his 136-class hydroplane.