

Webb's Slough

St. John, wa

**Sprint boat
races to make
a splash in
St. John
on Saturday,
June 15**



A supplement to the Whitman County Gazette,
Cheney Free Press and Ritzville Journal



THURSDAY, JUNE 13, 2024	START	FINISH
Webb's Slough Opens for Camping	10:00 AM	
Ticket Office & Sloughvenir Store	12:00 PM	8:00 PM
Registration: NASBA Race Office (Old Ticket Booth)	2:00 PM	7:00 PM
Technical Inspection: Next to Launch	3:00 PM	6:00 PM
FRIDAY, JUNE 14, 2024	START	FINISH
St. John Golf Course Scramble Fundraiser, register 9 AM	10:00 AM	
Registration: NASBA Race Office (Old Ticket Booth)	10:00 AM	3:00 PM
Technical Inspection: Next to Launch	12:00 PM	4:00 PM
Ramp Open for Warm-up	12:00 PM	4:00 PM
Ticket Office & Sloughvvenir Store	12:00 PM	8:00 PM
Show & Shine: Downtown St. John	4:00 PM	6:30 PM
Whitman County Shrine Club Cornhole Fundraiser Tournament	5:00 PM	
St. John Fire Dept. BBQ Fundraiser: Main Spectator Gate	5:30 PM	UNTIL SOLD OUT
Registration: NASBA Race Office (Old Ticket Booth)	6:30 PM	8:00 PM
Technical Inspection: Next to Launch	6:30 PM	8:00 PM
SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 2024 (PRE-RACE)	START	FINISH
Late Race Registration *All APBA Memberships by 7:30 AM	6:30 AM	7:30 AM
Late Technical Inspection	7:00 AM	8:00 AM
Ramp Open for Warm-up	7:30 AM	8:30 AM
PIT ROAD GATE CLOSED To All Drive Through Traffic	8:00 AM	11:00 AM
Will-Call at Ticket Office	8:00 AM	
RACE OFFICIALS Meeting at Launch	8:15 AM	8:30 AM
Driver's Meeting & Course Walk	8:30 AM	8:45 AM
Safety Slough Crew Meeting at Launch	8:45 AM	9:00 AM
Staging for New Driver Safety Runs	9:00 AM	9:15 AM
Spectator Gates Open	9:00 AM	
New Driver Safety Runs	9:15 AM	9:45 AM
Boat & Track Staging *No Engines During National Anthems	9:45 AM	10:00 AM
Presentation of Colors:	9:45 AM	
O' Canada		
Star Spangled Banner		
SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 2024 RACE SCHEDULE	START	FINISH
Qualifying One	10:00 AM	11:15 AM
Qualifying Two	11:15 AM	12:30 PM
Qualifying Three	12:30 PM	2:00 PM
Qualifying Four	2:00 PM	3:15 PM
Break - Timing & Scoring, Establish Race Order	3:15 PM	3:45 PM
Elimination 8-Cut	3:45 PM	4:45 PM
Elimination 4-Cut	4:45 PM	5:30 PM
Finals	5:30 PM	6:00 PM
SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 2024 POST-RACE SCHEDULE	START	FINISH
Track Closed	6:00 PM	
Awards Ceremony (30 Minutes After Finals, Terrace Below Beer Garden)		
Fireworks Display Over Webb's Slough	DARK	
SUNDAY, JUNE 16, 2024	START	FINISH
St. John Youth Sports Breakfast Fundraiser: Patio At Ticket Office	8:00 AM	UNTIL SOLD OUT

Making a splash: Webb's Slough 2024

June sprint boat races return to St. John

BY MATTHEW STRISSEL
GAZETTE REPORTER

From New Zealand and Australia to Canada and the United States, people from all walks of life will descend upon St. John, Wash., to participate in the Webb's Slough sprint boat races.

Saturday, June 15, will mark the 17th year Webb's Slough has put on the races. The second race of the season will be Saturday, Aug. 24.

"It's a great show," said Amanda Webb, the "Webb Master" and an organizer of the event. "I'm super happy for the fans and the drivers. Some have been with us 15-plus years, some drivers are brand new, some only have a year under their belt."

The event began in 2007 when Amanda and her husband Matt purchased the property and set up the track. They ran one race in the first year in July, then held races in both June and August every year since, making for the June 15 race to be the 31st in its history.

At the start, the Webbs knew Woodinville, Wash., was in its last

year as a track and they thought building one in St. John was a great opportunity.

"My husband and I looked at it and we've always wanted to bring something to St. John that wasn't reliant on wheat prices," Amanda Webb said. "We wanted to be able to bring income to the community where non-profits could utilize it, downtown businesses could utilize it, and it wasn't held to the ups and downs of the wheat market, so we saw it as an opportunity."

The sport is popular in New Zealand and Australia, where it got its start, but has not taken off in the U.S. as much. While not 100% sure, Amanda believes Webb's Slough is the longest running sprint boat race track in America.

"We've seen a lot come and go over the years and there were several before us, but some of them are gone now," Webb said. "Racers come from all over the Pacific Northwest, with teams sprinkled over Washington, Oregon, Idaho, British Columbia (Canada) — they travel from everywhere."

The ins and outs

Each boat in the contest has a driver and a navigator. The driver steers around islands through a channel and

the navigator uses hand signals to direct the driver where to go.

Every year the rotation of the course changes and the teams only have a few days to memorize the pattern. Once the flag drops to start the race, one boat travels the course and the team has to get the path correct ... and fast.

"Because the rotation is different and the field of drivers changes, you never know who is going to have engine trouble the day of (the race), who you're competing with to push you for those tenths of a second (to make it to the finals)," Webb said. "That could be someone who worked on their engine all year that will beat you on the podium this year. We've seen some of our best drivers hit an island in the finals, and the podium flipped upside down."

There are four qualifying rounds with the top eight boats making it to the finals in each class. There are three classes of boat: Modified, 400 and Unlimited.

Modified is mainly comprised of stock parts for the boat. There are very few modifications a team can do. The 400 category is limited to 400 cubic inches for the engine. Unlimited, also called Super, has much more freedom to modify

the engine. All teams go through a technical and safety inspection the day before the race.

"It's exciting from the moment the race starts to the very end," Webb said. "Qualifying is just as exciting as the finals. You want to be there when the races start. They're pushing all day long to be in the finals, and all of it is worth watching. You never know when an island is going to get in the way."

It takes a village

While the race itself is the main event, there are also food, retail and merchandise vendors available at the venue. Camping is also a big part of the weekend.

Webb said she can usually see anywhere

from 600 to 700 RVs at the site.


Several safety measures are in place in the not-so-off-chance a boat might run into an island or crash. Webb Slough is known for being one of the most technical tracks with tighter corners in the nation.

"I'm biased, of course, but we have the best safety crew," Webb said. "The EMTs, paramedics, off-duty police officers, they stand just inside the fence and are ready to spring into action if a boat needs their help. They are usually there within a second to help them."

Webb said the best part of the weekend is seeing the amount of love and care from the volunteers that goes into put-

ting on the event. She said there are about 120 volunteers for each of the two races every year and she looks forward to seeing the sport grow in St. John.


"The coolest part of Webb Slough is the number of volunteers that come out and help put on the race," Webb said. "We have a lot of volunteers who have become part of our 'Slough Crew' who have been with us for 30 races. That speaks volumes to the passion everyone has to bring to our community, and that's why Webb Slough is so successful and the longest running track in America is because of our volunteers. It is really special for Matt and I to have that and be part of the community."



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PURCELL RACING HAS A TITLE TO DEFEND

August 2023
Modified Class
Victor

BY MATTHEW
STRISSEL
GAZETTE REPORTER

Hailing from the Puget Sound area, Purcell Racing will return to St. John for the Webb's Slough sprint boat races, starting at 10 a.m. on Saturday, June 15.

The crew is made of two teams, with boat #154A driven by Jeff Purcell of Grapeview, Wash., and James Goldberg of Edmonds, Wash., as his navigator. Boat #154B is driven by Goldberg and navigated by Margaret Purcell, also of Edmonds.

The team has been participating in St. John since 2019 and Margaret Purcell said the family loves to race there.

"The first time at Webb's Slough, my jaw dropped," Purcell said. "I couldn't believe how many people came out and watched (the races). There are hundreds and hundreds of people camping, it's quite a sight. It's fun that there's so many folks out there."

Last year at the June race, the #154B boat took second place in the Modified class, with Goldberg navigating and Jeff driving at the time. In the August race, #154B finished at the top of the podium in the Modified class with Goldberg driving and Margaret as navigator. The team also took second and third

place at the Port Angeles, Wash., track.

Purcell Racing has only been in the game for about five years, but once it got started, the team has been dedicated to the sport.

"My brother (Jeff) has always been a race guy," Margaret Purcell said. "He's a former motorcycle racer, BMX, water ski racer, so he's always been in tune with that. A friend of his talked about (sprint boat racing) and he went out and watched an event and got hooked."

The driver and navigator have to work as a team to get through the course in sprint boat racing. The race is a series of shallow channels connected around islands of dirt or grass. The team looks at the track the day before the race and memorizes the steps and turns in the rotation from start to finish.

The navigator sits to the right of the driver and uses hand signals to tell the driver whether to turn left, turn right, or go straight. If a boat misses a turn, it is disqualified.

While the racing season is in the summer, the work never really stops for Purcell Racing.

"There is a period of time at the end of the summer where it's quiet, but come summer we gear up again and there's a lot of maintenance to be done," Margaret Purcell said. "We've been on a maintenance kick. We redid the blades for our pump and replaced the steering wheel. Last year



SUBMITTED PHOTO |
PURCELL RACING

The Purcell Racing Crew navigates twists and turns during a race.

we had a rollover accident, so we had a whole lot done this winter tuning the engine. We had to nearly take it all apart and put it back together again."

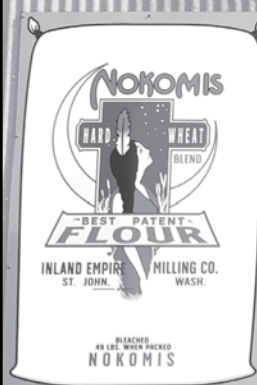
The Purcell Racing crew is also made up of several family members and close friends who help out. Purcell said it is really nice to have that core of people be part of the group.

"We have a lot of family and friends who help with the mechanics," Purcell said. It's a pleasant way to spend the winter — in the garage and grease."

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Lillie looks to top the podium...again

Reigning 400 Class victor for Webb's Slough's 2023 races

BY MATTHEW STRISSEL
GAZETTE REPORTER

Driving the "Preventing Insanity" boat, Leighton Lillie has been sprint boat driving for just a year and a half. Still, he is the reigning 400 Class champion in both the June and August 2023 races at Webb's Slough.

Lillie and his navigator Cody Holzer, both from Lewiston, Idaho, have been a team for six years when they raced river boats. Lillie said he enjoys the competition sprint boat racing has to offer.

"It's great being able to get out and experience a little adrenaline still and have fun with my friends," Lillie said. "I've always been competitive and a racer since I was four years old, so being able to scratch that itch is nice."

He was a river boat racer for five years, and before then, Lillie was a professional motorcycle racer. Fifteen years ago, he became paralyzed from the legs down. He controls the speed of the boat using his hands.

"The steering is the same, it's just the throttle is on the steering wheel," Lillie said. "There's some extra leg bracing and strapping, but other than that it's all the same."

Lillie has been sprint boat racing across the Pacific Northwest. He competed in Port Angeles, Wash., and raced in

Ontario, Ore. He said the sport seems to be growing and hopefully there will be more boats competing in the future.

Since the spring season has warmed up, Lillie has been diligently working on his skills. He said sprint boat racing is still more of a year-round project.

"The preparation doesn't really stop," Lillie said. "We're working and changing and doing engine stuff all year. We've been driving and testing the boat for a couple of months since the weather has been good."

Lillie plans on racing in New Zealand, a place of origin for the sport. While he's been to other tracks, he said Webb's Slough has a certain atmosphere to it that makes it special.

"For me, it's the event scenery, the green grass, and all the campers," Lillie said. "It's kind



OLIVIA HARNACK | THE GAZETTE

Leighton Lillie maneuvers the Webb's Slough course during the June 2023 races.

of got a vibe to it that gets me excited to go out and race."

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River Rogers hopes to build a dynasty

Claimed victory in the August 2023 Slough races.

BY MATTHEW STRISSEL
GAZETTE REPORTER

Last year was the first season of sprint boat racing for River Rogers, but he and his family have already seen massive success.

His father, Ryan Rogers, used to race in the '90s and won the world championship. He got out of the game, but River looks to carry on the legacy.

Hailing from Lewiston, Idaho, River Rogers had the opportunity to race in New Zealand. He ran in a new class, called LSA with an LS motor, overseas and came back with an NZ1 championship. He and his team went 5-for-5, with five wins in five races.

"It was a crazy cool experience, I loved it over there," Ryan Rogers said. "I'll be back next year to defend the title, and the goal is to get the world title, but the tracks over here (in the U.S.) are awesome and I'm excited to be back."

Rogers said the tracks are a bit different in New Zealand compared to the United States, being more forgiving.

"They run a little differently over there," Rogers said. "Tracks are wider in New Zealand and are not as technical as in the U.S. In the

race. We've been preparing all year. It takes a lot of time, effort, preparation and a lot of knowledge I've been learning from my father and our mechanic."

What Rogers enjoys most about the sport is the competitiveness. He said one boat can run

"In the States, there are narrower channels and tighter corners, but the speed is the same. Races are a little more demanding in the U.S."

— River Rogers,
Driver, Pure Insanity

States, there are narrower channels and tighter corners, but the speed is the same. Races are a little more demanding in the U.S."

In order to be successful on the sprint boat racks, Rogers said it's important to prepare. Not just during the summer season, but all year.

"You're always preparing, year-round," Rogers said. "You have to do your homework all year and have to be on your A-game for the first

an incredible race, but the next can be just a bit faster.

"I like how all the races are tight and one person can lay a heater down, and the next is one-hundredth of a second faster," Rogers said. "It gets your adrenaline going."

Race watchers can catch Rogers in the boat named "Pure Insanity" at the Webb's Slough races on Saturday, June 15, starting at 10 a.m.



RIVER ROGERS | INSTAGRAM

Rogers races in the third round of the New Zealand Jetsprint Championship.

Webb's Slough

St. John, wa

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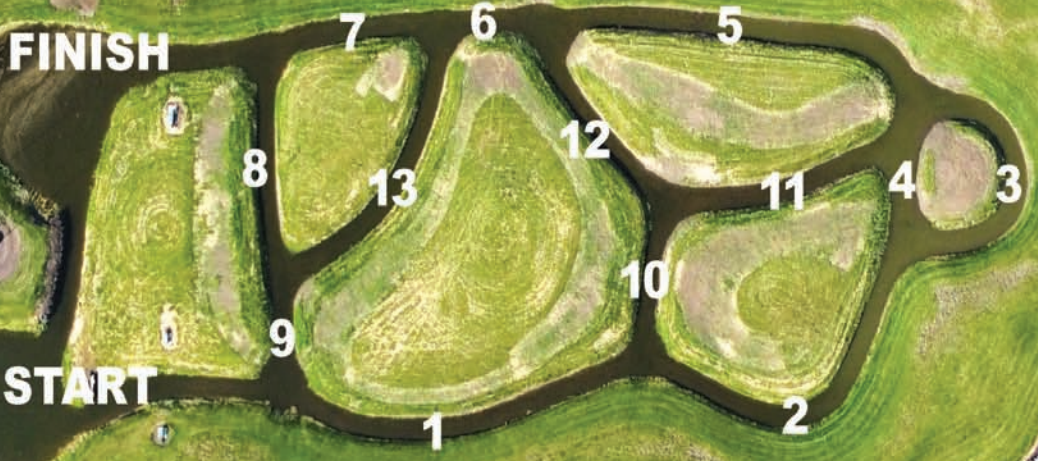
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