

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NORTH AMERICAN INVITATIONAL

As recalled by Tom Collins

The year was 1973. Log racing was very much alive and well with good participation in various groups throughout North America. Organizationally we were linked through the Cruiser Division of the American Power Boat Association (APBA). This predecessor association to the current North American Cruiser Association (NACA) was not an entirely satisfactory solution to our needs for a means to bring us together and some of the groups choose not to belong to the APBA.

Seeking a way to overcome this problem and to better unite log racers from across the country, an idea was germinated to hold a championship contest that would bring together a representative contestant-team from each of the groups. The key figures in the early planning were Dave Shreve and Kell Hennessy of St. Petersburg Y.C., Ken Cowan from New England Cruiser Assn., and Bruce Crabtree from San Diego Cruiser Assn. They worked out a few details and decided the contest should nominally be held in early August and rotate among the various groups on a yearly basis. They named it the North American Invitational (NAI). It was not necessarily to be an APBA event.

The first NAI was held in San Diego and was a fine success. Those groups that had withdrawn from membership in the APBA were nevertheless enthusiastic about the NAI and readily participated. The ball was rolling and subsequent contests were held at San Francisco, St. Petersburg, Boston, Seattle, Newport R.I., Detroit, and Southern Calif. It is interesting to note that it wasn't until the fifth NAI in Seattle that the winner was from the same coast. And we were up to the ninth contest in San Francisco before local racer Haluk Akol won in his home waters.

At the 1978 NAI in Newport the contest consisted of two separate races. One ran on Friday and another on Saturday. The scores were added to determine the overall winner. That was the last year we did that, as it was too demanding on everyone involved.

At the 1979 NAI in Detroit, we held a meeting where we voted to disassociate ourselves from APBA and create the NACA. The NAI had truly helped to bring our groups together.

Only once has the NAI been cancelled. The NAI's in St. Petersburg are held in October, which is hopefully after the hurricanes have settled down. Well in 1999 Hurricane Irene took exception to that premise and was declared the winner of the NAI for that year. The contest was cancelled at the last minute, but the (hurricane) parties went on.

Now with more than thirty-five NAI's in the history book, that original concept of bringing our loggers from throughout North America together in a single contest has proven to be a winner. **Long live the NAI!**