

SCHOOL'S IN

Concerned about safety on the water and the lack of insurance coverage for high-speed boats, offshore champion Tres Martin turns teacher.

By Richard Crowder

"Right now there is absolutely no insurance available for cats that run over 120 miles per hour! And the same will surely happen for V-bottoms. You can count on it."

These are the words of four-time national and world champion, three-time Throttleman of the Year and APBA Hall of Champions inductee Tres Martin of Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

You'd think he might know. Tres Martin runs Martin Offshore Inc., a custom rigging shop specializing in the theory that it is not necessarily the fastest boat that always wins, but the best handling and best balanced boat.

He has dedicated some 27 of his 41 years to this theory and his results on the race circuit would certainly seem to be proof. But Martin has also seen first-hand the ever-increasing speed capabilities of so-called

"production" cats and vees that are available "off the shelf" to anyone with the money and the desire. As far as he is concerned, it's akin to putting a novice into an F-15 with no flight training.

Which is why, after years of listening to many people involved in competitive and/or recreational performance boating talk about the need for some kind of training, Martin has taken the initiative by starting a school for performance boaters.

"With the insurance situation affecting 120+ mph cats and the rates for V-bottoms skyrocketing, everyone in the industry is being affected, from the manufacturers to the rigging shops to the dealerships to the individual salesman," says Martin.

"I want to stop accidents from happening before something catastrophic shuts down the performance boat market."

To this end, Martin has met with

insurance carriers, outlining his objective to re-set the parameters of insurance availability – provided that boat owners successfully complete a recognized training program at a school that has received insurance company-approved certification.

To help "make it so" Martin has developed a 1-1/2-day course in Fort Lauderdale where he works with no more than three to four students at a time. Limiting the size of each class, Martin says, enables him to provide more of a one-on-one type approach.

Martin believes that safety and handling theory needs the most time, so the first full day is spent in the classroom. The morning session begins by covering the basics of boating safety and related equipment, from PFDs and fire extinguishers to kill lanyards. Following topics include rules of the waterway, simple boat mainte-



nance and occupant safety.

Next on the course outline is an explanation of the dynamics of hull design and how the laws of physics - including hydrodynamics - affect a hull at different attitudes, speed, and water conditions.

To further stress the importance of these theories, films of boating accidents are shown and then analyzed in detail.

The afternoon is spent on the specifics of trimming, tabbing, acceleration, deceleration, turning, wave and wake crossing, and how to take corrective action in case of a problem.

After covering techniques for maneuvering in tight situations, such as docking, as well as maintenance requirements that can prevent accidents, Martin ends the in-class part of the program with a written exam.

The morning after puts the previous day's lessons to practical use, beginning with the boat on the trailer. Using the school's 36' Cigarette Gladiator with twin 500 EFI engines, Martin shows students how to perform an essential equipment pre-launch check. If desired, a student can also bring his or her own boat, says Martin.

At this point, the focus on safety is intense: what to look for, what to check, common maintenance tips and potential problem areas. Martin demonstrates how to properly inspect key components such as the hull, drives, engine and support systems such as water intakes, exhaust, electrical and steering, in addition to the trailer, which is often overlooked.

Once this is done, Martin devotes the remaining two hours for on-the-water sea trials, in a concerted effort to make certain his class members are capable of

putting their newly acquired knowledge into actual practice.

By noon, it's all over. Exam grades and test scores are distributed. The cost? \$2,500 per person.

Does it work?

Twenty-one-year-old Richard Neff, an engineering junior at Northeastern University in Boston, owned a 28' Pantera capable of running about 65 mph. Feeling a need for more speed, Neff visited the Fort Lauderdale boat show, where he discovered his newfound passion for catamarans.

A year later, he purchased a 36' Nor-Tech cat with twin 525s. Given the boat's 100+ mph top end rating, Neff was unable to get insurance coverage. He also realized that when it came to his ability to properly handle and drive a cat - especially at those speeds - he was completely out of his depth.

He had spent the past year searching for a solution to his on-water problems. He learned about Martin's school through the web.

Understanding the urgency of Neff's situation, Martin agreed to accommodate him on a one-on-one basis. "I knew absolutely nothing about cats and had only three hours experience in them prior to school," says Neff. "Yes, I had been boating for twelve years and I went into the school with a totally open mind. I learned how the tunnel works, about pressure gradients on the hull - it took my boating experience to a whole new level.

"In a way, I was forced to take the course in order to get insurance, but there is no question I would highly recommend it to anyone - novice or veteran. There is just so much I learned. Tres was great at explaining even highly technical details in an

understanding someone only picked up one tidbit, the cost is worth it.

"When it was over, Tres called the insurance company and told them I had passed the course and arranged the insurance for me. It was great. I now have so much more confidence in how to handle my cat and I can spot potential trouble coming."

"Modern technology is creating rapid progression in hull speed," states Martin. "I believe that high performance boating is still one of the great recreational privileges we still have and many take for granted. I know I can bring a safe educational manner to owners and operators which would benefit all."

Richard Neff would agree.

Let's all hope that Tres Martin is on the right track and more high performance boaters take advantage of such a program. In fact, Martin says that he is so convinced of the increasing need and potential demand for this specific training, he intends to turn this school into a full-time occupation.

Within six months or so, he intends to move the training facilities to mid-Florida, perhaps in the Orlando area, away from the distractions of the Fort Lauderdale area waterways. With fewer boats around, says Martin, he can have the undivided attention of his students.

As the saying goes, you're never too old to learn. Maybe now is the time.

