

Lake Cahuilla II



1996 BP Racing AquaMoto Gran Prix Series

Race #7 - October 19, 1996

Lake Cahuilla (ka-hee-ah) - Indio, California

Long Course Gran Prix Format

Highlights:

Nice weather, maybe 88-90 degrees, not ghastly hot like it could be at this time of year. It was pretty windy though. The course was almost identical to the last race here, the only exception was near the end of the lap there was an additional hard right followed by a hard left into the long front straight to the start/finish.

One odd thing was since the Master and Vet classes had so many entries, the Womens class was combined into the Sport/Ski class heat. So you had runabouts, sport boats, and stand-ups all on the course at once. Made it just a little more challenging.

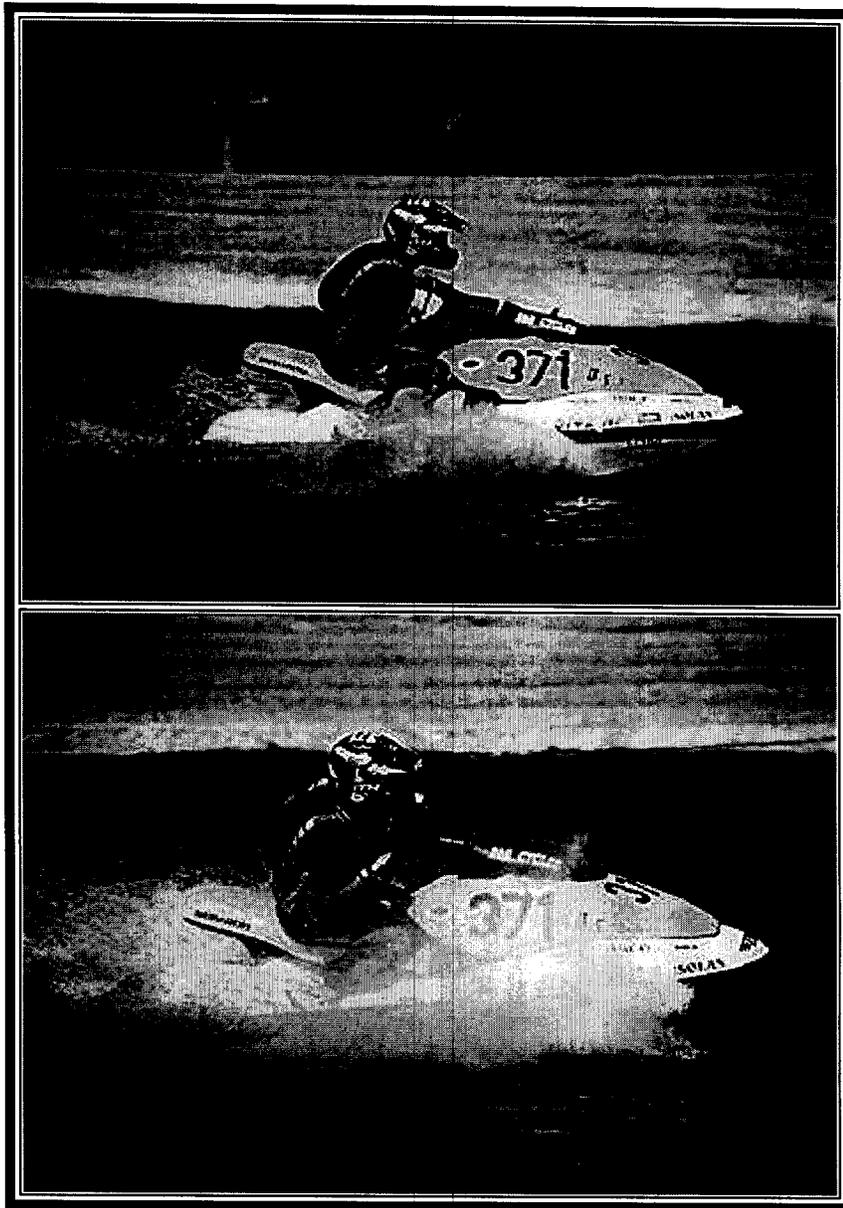
First up was the Master, and Vet Class heat at 9am. Then the Open Class at 11am, followed by the Sport/Ski/Women Class heat at 1pm, and finally the Runabout 785 Class heat at 3pm for a full day of racing. Each heat was 90 minutes long. The first heat met with problems on the first lap. One, the field was missing the right/left bouy combo at the end of the course and two, a more severe problem, there was an accident/injury on the first lap which required that the race be stopped and restarted. The injured rider was hospitalized and fortunately came out okay. The race was restarted about an hour late, which had a ripple effect on start times throughout the day.

The Sport/Ski/Women heat started at 2:15 pm. There were about 25 boats, about 10 sport boats, 11 Women on runabouts, and 3-4 stand-ups. I got a crappy start, my boat stalled and I was 6th to last getting off the line. The start was a dead engine start with the rider standing next to the ski for todays races rather than the "Le Mans" style starts used here previously. Anyway, I finally got going and by the time I reached the first bouy I had caught up to the pack, and by the time I reached the 3rd bouy I had picked my way to the point where I was in 3rd Place in the Sport Division, behind Mauren O'Donnell (Novice Sport) and Patti Morabito (Expert Sport). It took five full laps to pass up Patti, I managed get around her by taking an outside line around a bouy and trapping her on the inside behind a stand-up. It's difficult in these long course formats to pass people. You often

have to use strategy like that to do it. A couple bouys later I looked back and was pleased to see that I had left Patti a good 50 yards behind. So, my sights were now set on Maureen. It took another full lap before I was able to catch up to her and pass her on the final right/left combo of the sixth lap. We hit the right hand bouy at the same time, I took a fast outside line she took the inside, I hit the throttle and cut inside after making the turn forcing her to back off the throttle thus closing off her entry to the next bouy. More strategy. I hit the next left and went into the long front straight and poured on throttle. When I looked back at the start finish I was a good 50 yards in front. YESSSSS! The race was now mine to lose.

I managed to relax a little for the next couple of laps, but not for long. I looked back after one lap and out of nowhere Scott Justet (Expert Sport) was breathing down my neck about 20-30 feet behind me! This lasted a good four laps. I was able to hold him off through sheer luck. As I said, it's tough to catch up and pass people when you have evenly matched boats and abilities. Then I had a stroke of exceptionally good luck. On one bouy I looked back and Scott was right on my tail, a couple bouys later I looked back and he was gone! YES! I thought he had spun out, but I found out later he ran out of gas! A couple laps later at about the 47 minute point in the race I made my one and only pit stop. Got a decent pit time, Patti was there too and I got out a few seconds before her and managed to pull away. But my work was not yet done. With the race only a little only half way over, anything could happen. I had to keep telling myself to take it easy and not psyhe myself out. In the last half of the race you're getting tired, and you start to get sloppy on the bouys. I couldn't afford to make any mistakes. This race had to be flawless.

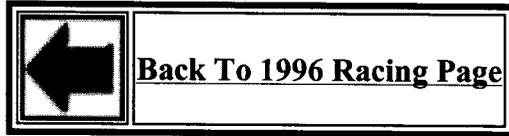
With about 20 minutes left in the race, again seemingly out of nowhere appeared Fred Tuttle (Expert Sport)! ACK! Fred is my main challenger right now, only eight points behind me in series points. He challenged me for the remainder of the race, sometimes coming within 20-30 feet. On every bouy I would look back and it seemed he was getting closer and closer! The wind was really whipping up some chop on the lake and the front straight and the bouys were getting tricky. I bobbled a couple times, doing that high speed on the edge of control side to side "chine walk" that I'm sure you HX riders know what I'm talking about. A couple times I got caught off balance with all my weight on one side of the boat and leaned over. You HX riders know that when the HX is leaned over and weighted, it wants to turn. But I was doing 57 mph on a choppy straight and turning was the last thing I wanted to do. Boy I almost ate it a couple times. Other times I would get caught behind a stand-up or a runabout which would force me to slow down and get caught in their prop wash, losing speed and control through the turns. Fortunately I had enough speed in the straights to hold him off because I was getting sloppy on the bouys where he would gain ground. I managed to hold him off for about the last six laps of the race. I have never been so happy to see a checkered flag, this was a very satisfying win. My first win in this series, an Overall Sport win to boot, and in a very close come from behind race. It was incredibly exciting, a total adrenalin rush from start to finish.



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