

SONOMA COUNTY BELLY BOAT BASS CLUB



Bass tournaments are usually associated with big boats, powerful motors and high-end electronics. There's a club in Northern California, though, that powers its vessels strictly with fins and oars. Although a good number of its anglers are beginners, the big fish and winning weights in its events often rival those brought to the scales



in major tournaments. And it's not a "newbie", either: in existence for over 20, it's called the Sonoma County Belly Boat Bass Club.

The roots of the club go back to 1983, when a teenage Rich Caro invited anglers to a float tube tournament at a small local lake. The club evolved and grew, and since 1999 has enjoyed a period of unprecedented expansion. Membership as of August 2003 stands at 41, a new record for the organization.

Its members use a wide variety of float tube models. Today, many fish out of pontoon-style kickboats, most of which accommodate the use of oars. Other anglers opt for the simplicity of a

bassers on the "big waters" of Northern California (i.e., the Cal Delta and Clear Lake). The weights of its top finishers in two-day events often exceed 30 pounds, rivaling those brought to the scales in tournaments of both local clubs and major pro-ams. One of its past presidents, Jimmy Reese, has gone on to compete successfully on the B.A.S.S. circuit.

Since its tournaments are strictly catch-and-release affairs, an oft-asked question is, "How does the club keep its catch alive?" Many of its anglers use some variation of a large fish basket (most of which have been designed or modified to float). Others use a large plastic tote, mounted on the rear rack of their kickboats, and keep fresh water circulating by use of a bilge pump powered by a small battery.

With growth and maturation, the club has begun to take a more outward-looking approach. In early 2002, it conducted a trash pickup at a small lake heavily frequented by shore anglers. Later that same year, it held a charity fundraiser for the Make-A-Wish foundation, raising over \$3,000. The club is planning another fundraiser for a home for neglected young

Stupid Bob

Hi, my name is Stupid Bob.

Last year I received \$10,000 in tournament sponsorships. If you are half as stupid as I am you could receive \$5,000 in Sponsorships.

Write to:
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basic design, be it a U-boat, a hybrid (using a pontoon-style design but without a metal frame), or, like club founder Rich Caro, a traditional "round boat."

Modified with rod racks, depthfinders, gear bags and livewells, these outfits elicit curious stares and chuckles from onlookers. But the club's anglers have earned a certain degree of respect, even from seasoned tournament



people along with a cleanup at a local park.

Although a small fortune can be spent on it, at its core, fishing is still a simple pursuit. The Sonoma County Belly Boat Bass Club has maintained that simplicity through a straight-

forward approach that is inexpensive while offering a high level of competition and excitement. And, as it has matured, it has also become a contributing member of the local community.

For more information about the club, check out its website: <http://scbbbc.homestead.com>.