



JET-SKIERS are part of the scene anywhere along the Intracoastal Waterway these days. These two were photographed just east of the Holden Beach Bridge.

STAFF PHOTOS BY EDDIE SWEATT

It's A Boat! It's A Ski! It's A Lot Of Fun!

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

Fifteen-year-old Brett Barbee does it. So does 30-year-old Ben Edkins. Wanda Hewett, a motherly type who is somewhat older wants to try it, too. It's a very speedy kind of locomotion and all the rage on the water, the newest form of water travel known as jet-skiing.

Well, that's how it's known, but jet-ski is a trade name, like Kleenex; the proper term of reference is personal water craft.

This new toy has been around for about 18 years. Kawasaki invented it, but in the last five years other manufacturers, especially Yamaha, have gotten into the act and this personal-maneuvering-in-water-at-high-speeds has become a craze.

It bears little resemblance to either water or snow skis, nor is it powered by a jet engine, so the original trade name is a puzzler. But it does "jet" along at a maximum 38 miles per hour with a 50 horsepower engine powering a vehicle up to ten feet in length.

With handlebars resembling those of a motorcycle and a stable base for sitting, kneeling, lying or standing, it is considered safer than many water sports.

"If it turns over, it comes right back up again," explained Brett Barbee, a teenager who spends a lot of time on his family's craft, which was being repaired and not available for demonstration. The Barbee's is one of the larger version, comparable to a small boat, that will accommodate two on a broad seat, encased in a fiberglass hull with a gel coat cover. The largest craft will seat three persons.

"I sure want to try it," exclaimed Wanda Hewett, who works in the convenience store on Ocean Isle Beach owned by Brett's father, Terry Barbee. "I'd like to sit behind Brett and hold on tight." She demonstrated by hugging him tightly from behind. Both laughed at her teasing, but both agreed that people of all ages are enjoying the speed and flexibility of this vehicle. "It's safer than water-skiing...I would never do that!" she added.

Brett noted, "You have to wear a life jacket with it," but he said no tests were required to qualify one to use the vehicle. A license must be purchased for it, however, as for boats.

"What I like to do best is jump waves," Brett said, adding that there were no locations along Ocean Isle



PEOPLE OF ALL AGES are enjoying the speed and flexibility of these personal water craft, popularly known as jet-skis. This couple have the larger, two-seater model.

Beach that are off-limits to this activity.

Ben Edkins, visiting the beach community from Chapel Hill, owns a smaller model, about three feet in length, that has no seat and requires the skier to stand, kneel or lie prone, holding the movable handlebars. "It's officially a boat," Edkins said, "so you have to obey all the rules required of boats."

The cost ranges from \$3,995 to \$5,800, depending on size. According to a Wilmington boat dealer, it also depends on amenities.

"In the larger crafts there can be gas and oil gauges and a reverse diverter," he said. "That backs up the waterflow, giving a reverse effect, so you can actually ski backwards."

So popular has this vehicle become, the dealer said he sold out last year by June 15. "It's great! It's my second love, next to motorcycle riding," he said.

However, the speed and maneuverability of the personal water craft has sometimes been used irresponsibly and given it a bad name. "Some idiots out there get drunk

and act crazy around big boats," he said. "When the rules are obeyed and people operating them behave sensibly, this kind of skiing is very safe. And by the way, anyone caught operating this craft under the influence can get a DWI citation."

Monitoring of all water traffic is done by the U.S. Coast Guard and particularly by N. C. Wildlife officials.

Brett looks forward to the return of the family craft. "It's a lot of fun," he repeated, "but I really like surfing better. It's cheaper."

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