



Two cups of coffee were just about all that were keeping Phil Mercer's eyes open, and he was on his way to the kitchen for a third when Sonny rang the doorbell.

Sonny was in a hurry. He didn't want to be late for today's County Lake boat races where he'd be racing his SST 60 boat. This would be the fifth OPC race Phil attended with him in the last two months.

Sonny had been around racing all his life. His dad built and raced outboards, putting Sonny in his first race at age 15. Last week,

he finished second in a race, his best showing in the six races he'd competed in this year.

Phil and Sonny had known each other all of their lives. Ten years ago, Sonny began developing a chain of successful submarine sandwich restaurants. A gregarious person, he conducted conversation like he did business, all over the place.

Phil was a bank president who aspired to couch potatodom until Sonny convinced him to go to a race five weekends ago. Being part of these APBA races intrigued Phil.

Two of the weekends, Phil's wife and children came along for the two day event. Sonny's family usually went to his races. "They love it," he told Phil that first weekend. "I'd never be able to race if my family didn't like it too."

Phil enjoyed visiting with the people at the races, especially those who raced. He liked the camaraderie that existed among competitors. And thrived on the sense of achievement that he got from helping Phil prepare the boat, then test it and finally watch him race.

In fact, he had begun to mull over the possibility of trying it himself. But how? As far as he knew, the book "How to Start Boat Racing from Scratch" didn't exist. So, he began asking questions.

"Sonny, do you think I could race a boat?"

"Sure."

"Well, how would I start? I mean, I've never done anything like that."

"Guy, you're already half way there. See, the first thing you needed to do was decide if boat racing held anything for you, and the

only way to do that is to go to a few races and hang out. You've done that."

Phil nodded, but he wasn't completely satisfied with that answer. As Sonny pulled his box van and boat into the pit area, Phil tried a different tack.

"Yeah, but watching a race doesn't get me a boat, and it doesn't teach me how to handle it in racing traffic."

"Look around, and tell me what you see."

Scanning the pit area, Phil studied the boat and trailer rigs and uniformed crews. He saw

people readying their boats for the race. The drivers ranged in age from 20 to about 40. These drivers, owners, crews and family members represented all kinds of businesses. Some were even business owners. In the last two months, he had gotten to know most of them.

"They're like us," Phil mumbled as he watched Sonny climb into his boat and head out onto the race course for a test lap. Then he turned to Sonny's sponsor, "Eh, Irv, tell me something. Why do you sponsor Sonny's boat?"

"Well, for not much money, I can get the hardware store's name in front of my market. I've had incredible results."

"Also, the boat is a great advertising medium. In terms of advertising impact, it's not a cluttered sport like stock car racing, for instance. My company logo is always visible. It doesn't have to compete with an abundance of others."

Best of all, when Sonny goes on the road, his boat becomes a moving billboard because he tows it on a trailer, not in a trailer. The

boat's attractive. People notice it, and it gives my name a great deal of prestige. Boat racing has a mystique. It's exotic. It's high tech."

Sonny's heat was beginning and everyone scattered to grab a seat with a good view of the course.

About 15 minutes later, Sonny returned sporting a huge grin. "Hey, Irv? Second place, man! Where's Phil?"

"He said something about making the winner an offer he couldn't refuse."
(See other side for details.)