

THE WINNING EDGE



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WETBIKE WIZZARD **ANDY MATLOCK**



B.T.E. — Beyond the Edge
A.M. — Anthony D. Matlock

B.T.E. — Tell Us a little bit about yourself; Age, Family, Employment, Education, etc.

A.M. — I am 31 years old. I have a fantastic wife, Sarah. We've been together for 12 year now. We have four children. Rachel 8, Anthony 7, Samantha 6 and Vance 8 months.

I work for a local lumber mill, Stimson Lumber, doing various jobs. Although I am a licensed practical nurse, I found that once in the field, it really wasn't for me. I have been employed at the mill for 12 years.

B.T.E. — You have built up quite a collection of vintage Wetbikes, what attracted you to the Wetbike? Do you recall your first ride?

A.M. — I was first attracted to the Wetbike when I saw someone riding one. I was about 9 or 10 years old, my family was out water-skiing one day when I saw a man riding something that looked like a motorcycle on water. That image stuck with me.

My first Wetbike ride, was a 1980 Arctic Enterprises Wetbike (Arctic Cat), with a 50 horsepower Suzuki motor. It was incredible! When the Wetbike first comes up out of the water, it is like riding a wheelie on a motorcycle. I was so excited about finally getting a Wetbike, I forgot to attach the kill switch lanyard to my lifejacket. As with most first time riders, I spilled the bike shortly after take-off. With the lanyard attached to the Wetbike, not to me, the Wetbike kept idling away, I couldn't catch up to it.

Luckily, my brother-in-law Alan Bradshaw was riding my stand-up Jet Ski, he rode up along side the Wetbike and pulled the kill lanyard. Well, I was so excited with the first take-off; I forgot to attach the lanyard to my lifejacket again! I didn't let it happen a third time. After a few minutes of riding, I got the feel of the Wetbike and thoroughly enjoyed

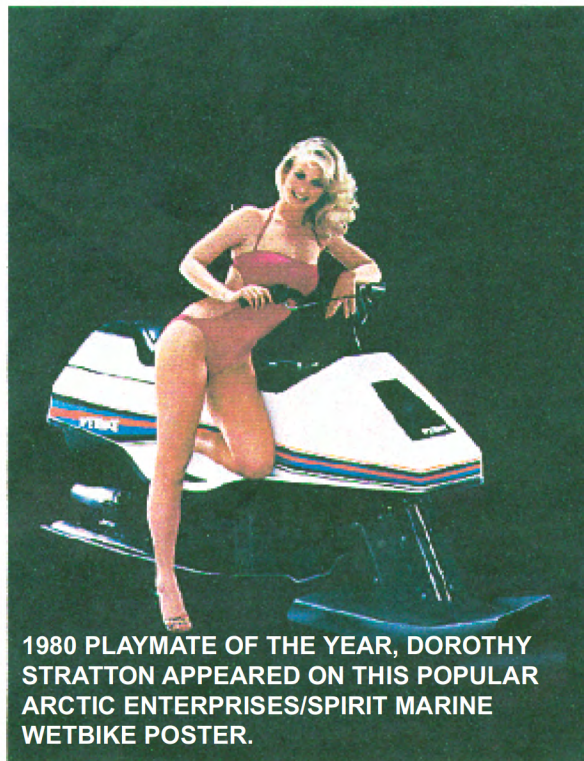
SARAH MATLOCK - ANDY'S WIFE - EXPLODES OFF THE WATER.



it.

I ride all kinds of watercraft, but nothing compares to the Wetbike. My wife Sarah rides with me as well as my children. Especially my daughter Rachel, she loves riding with Dad on the Wetbike.

B.T.E. — Those of us old enough to remember will recall the Wetbike made its debut in The 1977 James Bond 007 Movie "The Spy Who Loved Me" In 1978 a division of Arctic Enterprises - Spirit Marine produced the Wetbike through 1982. Please give us some history on the Wetbike; who it was invented by? How did it develop into what we saw in the 007 movie? What happened to the Wetbike after Arctic

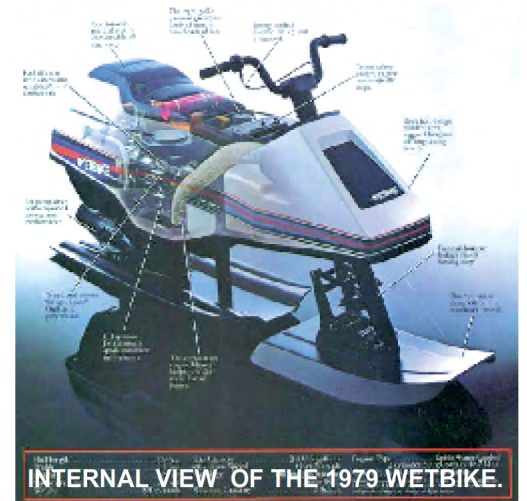


1980 PLAYMATE OF THE YEAR, DOROTHY STRATTON APPEARED ON THIS POPULAR ARCTIC ENTERPRISES/SPIRIT MARINE WETBIKE POSTER.

Cat left the industry? Who picked it up? When and why did Wetbikes cease production?

A.M. — The Wetbike was invented by a man named Nelson Tyler. I have never had the opportunity to speak with Mr. Tyler, from what I have heard, he developed this "hydrofoil water cycle" then took the prototype to the producers of the James Bond movies. The producers took one look at it and said, "Oh, yeah, Bond has got to have one of these". A lot of the history of the Wetbike is sketchy.

In 1983 a company called Sea-crest purchased the rights. I think one of the main reasons for the Wetbikes demise was the advent of the sit-down watercraft in the mid 1980's Wetbikes require quite a bit more skill and balance to ride. They are not as stable in the water at rest like the sit-down style watercraft we see so prevalent today. To the best of my knowledge, there were four manufacturers of the Wetbike over the years. Arctic Enterprises - Spirit Marine from 1978-1982, Sea-Crest (1983-1984), Wetco (1985-1986), and Ultranaotics (1987-1992).



INTERNAL VIEW OF THE 1979 WETBIKE.

B.T.E. — Having had a chance to work on the Wetbikes how would you say they evolved from that 1978 Arctic Cat/Spirit Marine version to the last versions ever produced?

A.M. — The basic body design didn't change much over the 14 years that they were produced. (1978-1992). In 1985 they were manufactured with a 60 horsepower Suzuki motor. In 1986, the material used for building the hulls was changed from fiberglass to a material that was lighter, called metton. These two changes made the Wetbike the fastest, most powerful, personal watercraft in production at the time. From 1986-1992 there were a few changes in the Wetbike as far as pump modifications. The control switches were changed to the handlebars instead of the front dash panel beginning in 1989, but the basic body design remained the same.

B.T.E. — One might expect someone who is really into a watercraft to live near the ocean or the Great Lakes. Is Idaho really into boating?

A.M. — There are many beautiful rivers, and mountain lakes to enjoy up here in the northern part of Idaho. The summers are short, but very hot. Boating and riding personal watercraft are popular summertime activities.

B.T.E. — From starting out as a collector you have accumulated quite a few Wetbikes, so many in fact you have turned it into a business. Tell us about your business. How did you get into it?

A.M. — I had enjoyed riding and collecting Wetbikes and other watercraft for a few years. I was always on discussion boards answering questions for people who were having problems with their Wetbikes.

I had a goal of one day starting my own watercraft sales and repair shop. I had collected just under a dozen Wetbikes, when an auction on ebay caught my attention, it was a marina that had rented out Wetbikes at one time. They were no longer being rented. Most of them had set for years. This marina also had an inventory of new parts that had

been collecting dust for quite some time, that were included in the auction. I thought, "This is my chance to achieve my goal"

I contacted the marina and asked several questions about the Wetbikes and parts inventory. How many bikes were there? What kind of overall shape were they in? I asked if they could send me a parts inventory and more photos of everything, they were very helpful.

All of this was contingent on winning the auction. Of course I was thinking the whole time that someone would get in there and snipe me at the last minute.

Over the next several days I crunched some numbers as far as shipping costs for all the Wetbikes and inventory and what I could actually afford to pay for them.

As the time for the auction grew short, I had everything worked out for shipping and a loan from the bank. Now, all I had to do was win the auction. The morning it ended, I sat down at the computer and waited and watched. Surprisingly, there was only one bid so far. I thought "this is going to turn into a bidding war for the last 10-15 minutes of the auction"

I finally put in my maximum bid with a minute or so left, and sort of anti-climactically, I won. No other bids came in. I decided to start my dream of owning a watercraft sales and repair shop.

B.T.E. - Tell us about your business.

A.M. — My business is called "American Wetbiker", I provide parts, service, we sell all types of used personal watercraft, I specialize in the Wetbike, and other vintage personal watercraft.

I currently have 43 Wetbikes. Most are in various states of restoration. I have been very busy this summer going through them one at a time and bringing them back to reliable running condition, as well as restoring the exterior hulls.

B.T.E. — As with the case with vintage snowmobiles one might think parts would be hard to find for Wetbikes, especially those produced by Arctic Cat. Are the parts difficult to find? Motor, Hull, Ski's, etc.

A.M. — Surprisingly, most of the parts for these unique watercraft are readily available. Suzuki still manufactures most of the engine components. There are a few places that offer the exterior trim pieces and hulls left over from the last company to produce the Wetbike. A few minor parts, however, are no longer available. The supplies have been exhausted, and there is nobody manufacturing them.

B.T.E. — If a person were to purchase a Wetbike from you what might they expect to pay? What do you do to the bikes you sell before they ever go to a buyer?

A.M. — Most of my Wetbike are in the \$700-\$1000 price range. A few of the nicer, newer Wetbikes are upwards of \$1500-\$1800.

Before I sell a Wetbike, I completely strip it down to a bare hull. Next, I inspect the hull and skis for any cracks or breaks, I then wash and wax the



ANDY MATLOCK - WETBIKER, APPEARS WITH A FEW OF THE WETBIKES HE WON OFF EBAY TO START HIS BUSINESS.

hull. I wash the skis and jet pump, change the gear oil in the jet pump. I check the output shaft and impeller shaft for rotation to make sure it is not seized, or wobbly from a worn bearing. I inspect the impellor and wear ring and replace them if worn or damaged. I grease the impellor shaft bearing. Then I move on to the engine. I start by cranking it over by hand to make sure it is not seized. I then perform a compression test. I remove the carbs and clean,

1978 WETBIKE AD.

adjust, replace any needed components, and synchronize them. Moving on I check the reed plate for bent or broken reeds. At this time, I check the crankshaft and connecting rods and bearings. I replace any needed seals and gaskets. I replace the water-cooling lines and fuel lines, as well as the fuel pickup line in the fuel tank. I clean the fuel pickup screen in the fuel tank. I clean the anti-siphon valve at the top of the fuel tank. I check the fuel pump for proper functioning. I install new spark plugs, and a new fuel filter. Then I put the bike back together, and take it down to the river and test ride it. It's a dirty job, but somebody has to do it. LOL.

B.T.E. — We've all heard that Wetbikes are difficult to ride. For a person buying their first bike how would you instruct them to go about learning to ride safely? How would you compare the experience to a modern day P.W.C.?

A.M. — I inform people that the Wetbike is nothing like riding a modern personal watercraft. It is like riding a motorcycle on water. It hydroplanes on the surface of the water via a front and rear ski. I explain and familiarize them with all the controls; start/stop switch, electric choke switch, bilge pump switch, and emergency kill lanyard switch.

I point out that the Wetbike is very responsive to any shift in the rider's body weight. Although the front ski pivots left and right. It is mainly used to steer the craft at slower speeds.

When riding at higher speeds, you steer by leaning and shifting your body weight. When the Wetbike is at rest, it is about halfway submerged in the water. It is sleek, and with an operator sitting atop, has a high center of gravity. This makes it unstable when at rest. The rider must shift back and forth, left and right somewhat to keep balanced. Once the Wetbike is in motion, it becomes more stable and balanced.

I instruct people on how to mount the Wetbike and get the feel of sitting on the Wetbike. Then I tell them what to expect once they decide to actually ride. The Wetbike rests in the water about halfway submerged. When the throttle is applied, the watercraft starts to move forward. The water resistance on the front ski, lifts the front ski out of the water. It is like riding a wheelie on a motorcycle. As the speed increases, the rear ski comes up on plane as well. Then the whole Wetbike is up on plane, only the skis are touching the water surface. The actual hull of the vehicle is anywhere from 8 inches out of the water at the rear, to 16 inches at the front of the bike. It is an awesome ride that no other watercraft can offer.

B.T.E. — What is the average speeds for Wetbikes?

A.M. — In my experience, with a strong motor and a good impeller and wear ring, the stock 50 hp Wetbike will run about 32-36 mph. The 60 hp Wetbike runs about 38-42 mph. There are a few modifications one can perform to their Wetbike to increase the horsepower and overall speed.

B.T.E. — In the old brochures you see pictures of people riding two up. How do you do that?

A.M. — Riding two up can be tricky, with patience it

can be done. The hardest part is two people mounting it and maintaining their balance until the bike is on plane. Once the Wetbike is on plane, it is a blast! My friend John Gentle have a great time riding two up. The first time we tried it, was crazy, we laughed so hard at all the spills and awkward movements when getting up on plane. Once we got it done it was a whole new world of Wetbike riding. You definitely need a strong motor and a good impellor and wear ring. It can be a little awkward riding two up. Because of the added weight of another rider, the bike takes longer to plane out, and when maneuvering, you both must lean in unison.

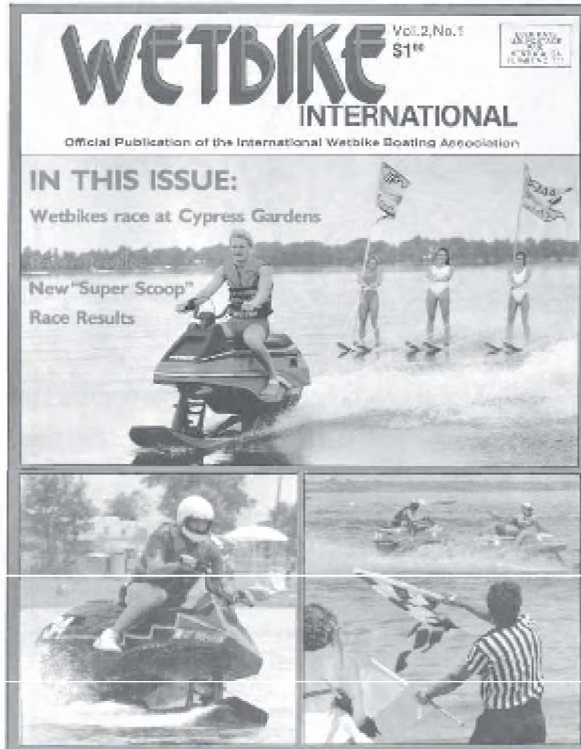
B.T.E. — In the 1979 Arctic Enterprises Brochure it shows a Wetbike towing a water skier. How is this possible considering the stability? Also in later years a Wetbike Magazine shows four skiers being towed - was there really that much power in later models? Consider today's boating laws would it be legal to tow a skier without mirrors or a passenger facing them?

A.M. — I have never towed a water-skier with my Wetbike, but have spoken with some people who have. With an experienced operator who understands the handling characteristics of the Wetbike, it can be done. The motor is powerful enough to handle it, both the 50 hp and 60 hp models, but it is difficult to pull a water-skier due to the water drag on the Wetbike on take-off, and add a skier to that... You get the picture. All the video demo tapes I have seen of a Wetbike pulling a skier show just the Wetbike operator, and a skier, no spotter. Also, the photo in the brochure where the Wetbike operator is pulling three skiers, you will notice, they all look like very lightweight women.

Most people who have towed a skier, said that they had to dry start the skier (off a dock) or, have a long ski rope and get the Wetbike on plane first, before the rope gets tight and starts to pull the skier out of the water. This latter of water-skiing behind the Wetbike might be a little hard on the water-skiers arms. Some states don't require a spotter, or rearview mirrors when towing a skier. Here in Idaho and in other states and provinces, to legally pull a water-skier you must have a spotter. This of course adds more weight to the Wetbike, in addition to a skier. That is mainly the reason I have not pulled a skier with mine. I think the weight of two riders and a skier, plus all the water drag when first trying to get on plane is a bit too much for the stock 50 or 60 hp engines.

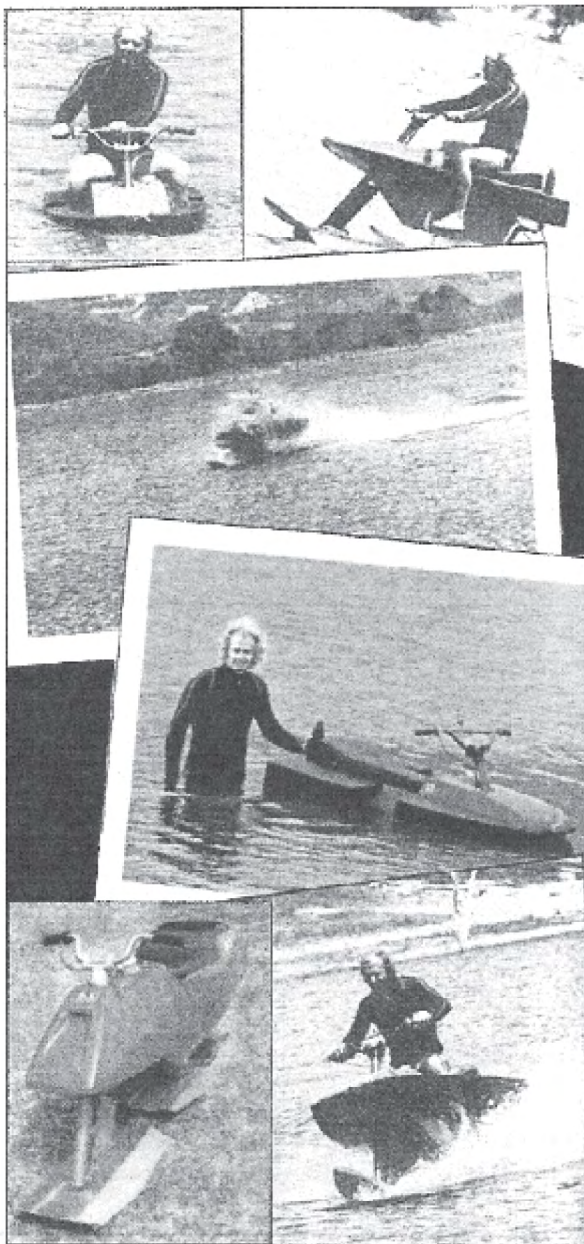
B.T.E. — You started a new web-site wetbike.net how and why did you start this site?

A.M. — Wetbike.net was actually on the Internet a few years ago. Apparently the previous owner just didn't have the time to maintain the website. So, it went offline. He eventually passed it on to a man named PJ. PJ is a Wetbike enthusiast who read my posts on another website that dealt with Wetbikes. One day, he contacted me and told me about wetbike.net, and his intentions to bring it back online. He asked if I would like to come aboard and contribute to the website as an administrator and answer questions and head up the discussion forums. I was all to eager to help. The goal of



WETBIKERS EVEN HAD THEIR OWN PUBLICATION AT ONE TIME.

NELSON TYLER DESIGNER OF THE WETBIKE IS SHOWN HEREWITH THE VARIATIONS THAT LED TO THE 1977 MODEL THAT APPEARED IN THE JAMES BOND MOVIE "THE SPY WHO LOVED ME".



wetbike.net is to provide a place for Wetbike enthusiasts to meet and discuss tips on riding, modifying, servicing, and getting parts for these vintage watercrafts.

B.T.E. — In recent years we've seen a surge in racing vintage snowmobiles. At one time Wetbikes raced on their own circuit - do you see a time in the future when Wetbikes may return to racing in their own vintage program?

A.M. — I honestly can't say. It sure would be nice. I came into the Wetbike scene long after they were out of production and were no longer racing them.

B.T.E. — There was an attempt to bring out a craft similar to the Wetbike. Do you know what ever became of that project? Do you see any on the horizon?

A.M. — I am not quite sure what became of that project, or the company.

The learning curve for the Wetbike is high. As a result, many people gave up on them. With the popularity of the easier, more stable sit-down watercraft, I doubt that anything similar to the Wetbike will ever see full production.

B.T.E. — You mentioned you had an interest in vintage snowmobiles. Do you have any or are you looking for anything in particular? Do you snowmobile much in the winter?

A.M. — Here in the mountains of Idaho, we get several feet of snow every year. The winters are long. I have to have some sort of winter recreation. I do enjoy snowmobiling.

My friend Brad, purchased a Polaris RMK 800 a few years ago. What a machine! Several times during the winter, our families get together and ride in his fields and on the trails of his property. Brad also has an early 1970's Arctic Cat Cheetah. It is in immaculate condition, and runs like a dream.

Unfortunately, I no longer own any snowmobiles. At one time, I owned six of them. An old Scorpion, a 1971 Evinrude, a 1972 Yamaha and a couple of early 1980's Ski-Doos.

As you can see, I enjoy the vintage toys. I would really like to get a hold of a Chrysler Sno-Runner. One of the supervisors at the mill has one, and brought it in one day. I was hooked. I have spent many hours online trying to locate one nearby, and affordable enough.

B.T.E. — Any final comments?

It has been a pleasure working with you. Thanks for the opportunity to share with you my business, and enthusiasm for the Wetbike personal watercraft.

For more info contact:

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