

RIO BALSAS MARATHON



The thousand-horse, turbocharged V-8 jetboats were looking like sleek fiberglass-encased irrigation pumps. Their owners were turning colors to match their craft: candy apple red and metallic blue. The race was over and victory belonged to an OUTBOARD!

Brownsville, Texas service station owner Tony Garcia, piloting a Viking Hydrostream with a new 235-horsepower Evinrude, outclassed the entire field in the 370-mile, five-day Rio Balsas Nautical Marathon. And that incident at Interoillo Dam on the fourth day of racing did nothing to detract from the thrill of victory. According to Mexican Olympic Committee Press Director Jaime Molina, it happened like this:

Tens of thousands of roaring horse-power strung itself out across the lake, and even then, Garcia was leading. A two-time winner in "B" Category (outboard rigid craft), Garcia had a reputation as the "man who knows the Rio Balsas." So when he charged up a wrong channel, he sucked half the pack up with him. Cool as a tall pina colada, even in the heat of battle, Garcia started looking for a hide-out once he saw he was lost. When he found it, he sat and watched as his competition screamed madly up the dead-end inlet. He headed back to the main channel, picking up half an hour on the second-place boat.

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But this was no "cheap shot" win. Even without the extra 30 minutes, Garcia would have beaten the fastest inboard by 22 minutes. How does the soft-spoken Mexican citizen explain his victory?

"Good preparation," was all he said.

Who says Boy Scouts don't win races?

Garcia's time over the 324 miles of shallow, windy river and 46 miles of rough ocean was 6 hours, 26 minutes and 16 seconds — an average speed of 57.47 miles per hour.

The fastest "C" Category (open class) boat was *Montserrat*, driven by New Zealander John Westland and owned by Mexico City businessmen, brothers Jose and Francisco Posada. Their 21-foot Can-Am Boat is powered by a 454-cubic-inch Chevy with twin turbo-chargers, built by Gale Banks Engineering of California. Their time was 7 hours, 18 minutes and 44 seconds.

There were no hard feelings on the Posada-Westland crew. After it was all over one racer asked Francisco Posada if he was happy with his boat's class only victory.

"After seven years (of entering the Rio Balsas) Of course. How many years have you run the race? One? You've got six to go," he said to the rookie.

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Just finding the Balsas race is a point of pride.

Of the 79 boats that left the start in Mezcala (100 miles inland from Acapulco) on Oct. 29, only 25 showed up in Zihuatanejo on Nov. 2. Ninety percent of the casualties take place in the first three days.

The only real rapids on the course all come on the 70-mile leg from Mezcala to Santo Tomas. The second and third stages — 58 miles the second day, 100 miles the third — are fully of rocky shallows. All along this stretch, roads are terrible and repair facilities almost non-existent.

"We had more trouble getting the support vehicle in . . . that's a marathon in itself," reported "A" Category world champion Jim Sutton of Calgary, Alberta. He and the crew of the *Little Beaver* cruised to an easy win in the inflatable craft competition — their only hitch a broken transom brace which they were able to weld up in one all-night session after the fourth stage.

That part of the race has the boats crossing Infiernillo and Morelos reservoirs, with a mid-race portage at Infiernillo Dam.

Garcia's feat of beating his counter-



part in the open class competition also took place in the second and third place standings. An All-Canadian crew headed by Isaac Raymond, whose boat was powered by a 175-horsepower Merc outboard, finished better than a minute ahead of *La Rata*, a boat owned by Jorge Merino of Mexico. He runs a carburetted Chevy.

Raymond had an overall time of 7:36:32 — good enough for a second place among the "B" boats and third place overall. Merino's time of 7:37:58 put him second among the open class boats and fourth overall.

Fifth overall was Rodolfo Castilleja's *Pinna*, powered by a 150-horsepower Mercury — time, 8:18:39. Sixth overall and third in "C" was Salim Dominguez's boat "*Quetzalcoatl*" which, like the *Posada* boat, was powered by a Gale Banks big block Chevy with dual turbochargers. American Howard Pipkom drove the boat.

Dominguez, owner of a construction company in Veracruz state, ran a conspicuous "big bucks" operation, going so far as to hire a helicopter to fly ahead of his boat and radio down information about rocks and shallows.

But at this point, big bucks and big engines don't win river races. At least not on the Rio Balsas.