

"Rubber Lips"

1979

Outsmarts 'Em

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That, obviously, isn't entirely true as some rather lengthy and ingenious planning went into many of the rafts featured in Saturday's race.

A crew of lumberjacks from Lyme, for instance, spent about \$300 and two months building "Rubber Lips," the contraption made of two pontoons connected by a flat deck which won the six-mile race in 47 minutes—only one minute ahead of the second place raft "Riverwurst."

"Rubber Lips" Captain Abbie White conceded that much of that time and money was spent buying and drinking beer while her eight-man crew built the raft, but for the past two weeks prior to the race, the group got down to some serious strategic planning.

Said Abbie, "Most of us work at Congdon's Saw Mill in Lyme and my boss, Bobby Congdon, was a crew member and he really wanted to win. We got out of work early every afternoon because of the hot weather and practiced. And then we had the Friday before the race off too."

Their plans were to have six people rowing at one time, with Abbie, the only female crew-member, serving as captain. The eighth member acted as an alternate to relieve the tired oarsmen.

But for all the practicing, Rubber Lips actually won because her crew outsmarted the other rafters. "We were the last raft to start. We had been way in the back at the starting line," said Abbie. "We passed quite a few rafts at the bottle neck between Deep River landing and the island there. Then after the first mile there were only four rafts ahead of us. After two miles we were neck and neck with the Riverwurst."

Rubber Lips and Riverwurst remained neck and neck for the rest of the race until Riverwurst's plan to take first place backfired. The Riverwurst crew landed at the end of Nott Island, figuring that its captain could run to the sign-in desk in a shorter time than it would take to row there.

But "Rubber Lips" stayed with the water and landed on the beach right in front of the desk—and Abbie beat Riverwurst's captain to the sign-in sheet. The prize was a keg of beer, a silver mug and a souvenir flag, and Abbie figures that's not a bad take for a group of lumberjacks who never took part in a raft race before.

She generously attributes the win to "my hardworking crew" which included Bob Congdon, Paul Koch, Charles King, John King, David Burnkem and Michael McLaughlin—all residents of Lyme or Old Lyme.

In addition to "Rubber Lips" and "Riverwurst," there were other serious rafters who made good time in the race. Not far behind were the third place winners, "Intrepid II." ~~Fourth~~ and ~~fifth~~ place went to "Morning Star" and "Lickety Split" respectively.

Others found reason to celebrate even if they came in tenth, twentieth, fiftieth—or ninety-first place. For them, the race was simply a way to have a good time.

Tom Carey, the bearded skipper of the "Lite One," wasn't intimidated by the money and effort which had been sunk into other rafts, telling **The Gazette**: "Whatever they put together can easily be taken apart with a chain saw."

Carey would have had a fight on his hands had he aimed a chain saw at the crew of the "Ship of Fools." Its 12 member crew, all employees of Yale-New Haven Hospital, had labored hard and long to insure that the oil drums they had "Borrowed" early the week before were firmly attached to the craft's wooden floorboards.

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