

# If It Floats, Enter In the River Raft Race

By CLAUDIA VAN NES

The Connecticut River Raft Race began modestly five years ago when several friends threw

some wood together to make a couple of rafts and raced each other down the river.

The event has grown

yearly into its present status as a major summer attraction in the shoreline area and organizers promise a "bigger and better than ever" race this August.

Last year thousands of spectators lined the river's shore to watch the exuberant event which starts off at the Deep River Landing. Every imaginable homemade floating craft is vying its way for first place as raft crews paddle, sail, wheel and deal their way down river.

The race ends at Knott Island across the harbor from Essex and revelers continue the good times on the island where beer, food and entertainment are provided under tents.

Last year, 95 entries battled the tides, winds and the general vicissitude involved in keeping a rickety raft afloat and an irrepressible crew aboard.

The race is scheduled for Aug. 4 this year and will begin sometime in the morning, depending on the tides.

The number of rafts will be kept to 200 and many entries have already been received. Last year's winner, "Riverwurst," will be back and the names of a few other competitors fit to print in a family newspaper include:

"Sleazy Riders," the all-female "River Queen" and "Nitro Banana."

There was some displeasure voiced last year by Essex shopkeepers because the raft committee provided a launch to transport spectators to Knott Island. The spectators' cars took up available parking spaces and store owners said this

kept potential shoppers out of town.

The committee has decided to not offer any launch service this year so those wishing to participate in the after-race festivities will have to come by private boats or content themselves with watching the race from shore.

The entry fee is \$20 per raft and the fee for each

crew member is \$5. Rafts must be homemade, able to accommodate three or more people and not be powered by engine or propeller.

Entrants may write for applications to the Connecticut River Raft Race, Box 110, Old Saybrook.

Proceeds, which came to \$5,100 last year, go to a variety of charitable organizations.