

# Race circuit offers unique spotlight to dealers, OEMs

*Pro Watercross kicks off 25th season with four events*

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Adrenaline pumping, hairpin turns, eyes set on finishing first — there's something about the racing side of any sport that shines a special spotlight on whatever the activity may be. Pro Watercross — a non-profit organization — in the personal watercraft world is certainly no exception.

Despite getting underway almost two months behind schedule — with cancellations, postponements and completely redesigning events due to the sweeping COVID-19 pandemic — Pro Watercross kicked off its 25th season of racing in late June.

"We definitely had to take a new approach and start thinking outside of the box to show that we're serious about our racing, but also very serious about things going on with the pandemic," Pro Watercross founder and CEO AJ Handler told *Powersports Business*.

Between providing masks for competitors, sanitizing stations around event locations, volunteers to break up large congregating groups and so much more, Handler said it's been a team effort to ensure safety for everyone, while still celebrating the sport.

"We took the extra measures that many promoters might not," Handler added. "We approached each municipality that we had events scheduled in with specialized and very detailed plans for each event. It's on us to do our part to help, both for each host city and the sport as a whole."

With the pandemic bringing the 2020 racing down to four events, Pro Watercross still continues to go big for its 25th season. "Though COVID road blocked many of the celebrations and parties we had planned, we're still doing a lot to make the best of the 2020 season with new partnerships, new racers and much more," Handler said. "And on top of what we're able to do this season, we're still planning on holding celebrations for our many seasons of racing during year 26."

Running roughly 15 classes of racing, with various age groups, Pro Watercross

Despite delaying its schedule by two months due to COVID-19, the Pro Watercross kicked off its 25th season of racing in late June. Photos courtesy of Pro Watercross



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brings a spotlight to watercraft use that no other means really can, but it also brings the industry itself together.

"To put it very basically, races draw attention, attention draws more interest, more interest draws more sales," Handler said. "However, there's so much more to it than just that."

Pro Watercross and racing provides a stage to OEM watercraft builders, product manufacturers, suppliers and everything in between. Racing introduces not only riders and dealers alike to new products in the marketplace, but introduces industry members to potential business partnerships.

For example, the current season and next season will feature LIQUI MOLY as a title sponsor, as the oil and fuel additive manufacturer aims to stake its claim with its wide array of marine-focused products.

"We definitely provide an economic

impact to dealers and manufacturers all around," Handler said. "And on the flip side their sponsorships continue to enhance our programs, so that we can continue showcasing the sport. It is most definitely win-win."

On the dealership-specific side, Handler said that racing and sponsoring racers particularly offers great visibility and opportunity to local dealers during race events in their area.

"The exposure a dealership can get by sponsoring a racer is something not found in any other form of marketing," Handler added. "People watching that racer succeed and who find interest in the sport will go associate the sport with that sponsoring dealership, meaning that dealership will be that person's first stop to pursue the sport."

In its 25th season, Pro Watercross has even expanded the spotlight it offers to the sport and its sponsors. All four of the 2020 season's races are being televised through a contract with CBS Sports starting Aug. 1.

"Attention to the sport keeps growing and we have no intentions of letting that slow down," Handler said.

Handler and the Pro Watercross team have set their sights on getting the sport on live TV, which would make it the first

watercraft event to be aired live. "It's definitely within our reach, especially with our world championship," Handler added.

At the end of the day, Pro Watercross is all about the sport; enjoying the sport, the people, the environment, everything that goes along with it.

"As we enter our 25th year, Pro Watercross has taken on a mission that more outwardly reflects the ideals and core values we have always held dear. Since our humble beginnings, we have always worked to ensure our events have been conducted safely and with respect for the marine environment," the organization's website reads on the homepage.

The educational non-profit operates on three main pillars: safety, camaraderie and the environment.

"I fully believe that if we continue to operate on these pillars and continue receiving the support from the industry, we will certainly continue to bring new people into enjoying watercraft and the outdoors, helping to lead success for all those involved in the industry," Handler said. **PSB**

Adam Quandt is Personal Watercraft Editor of Powersports Business.



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