

Winter 1995

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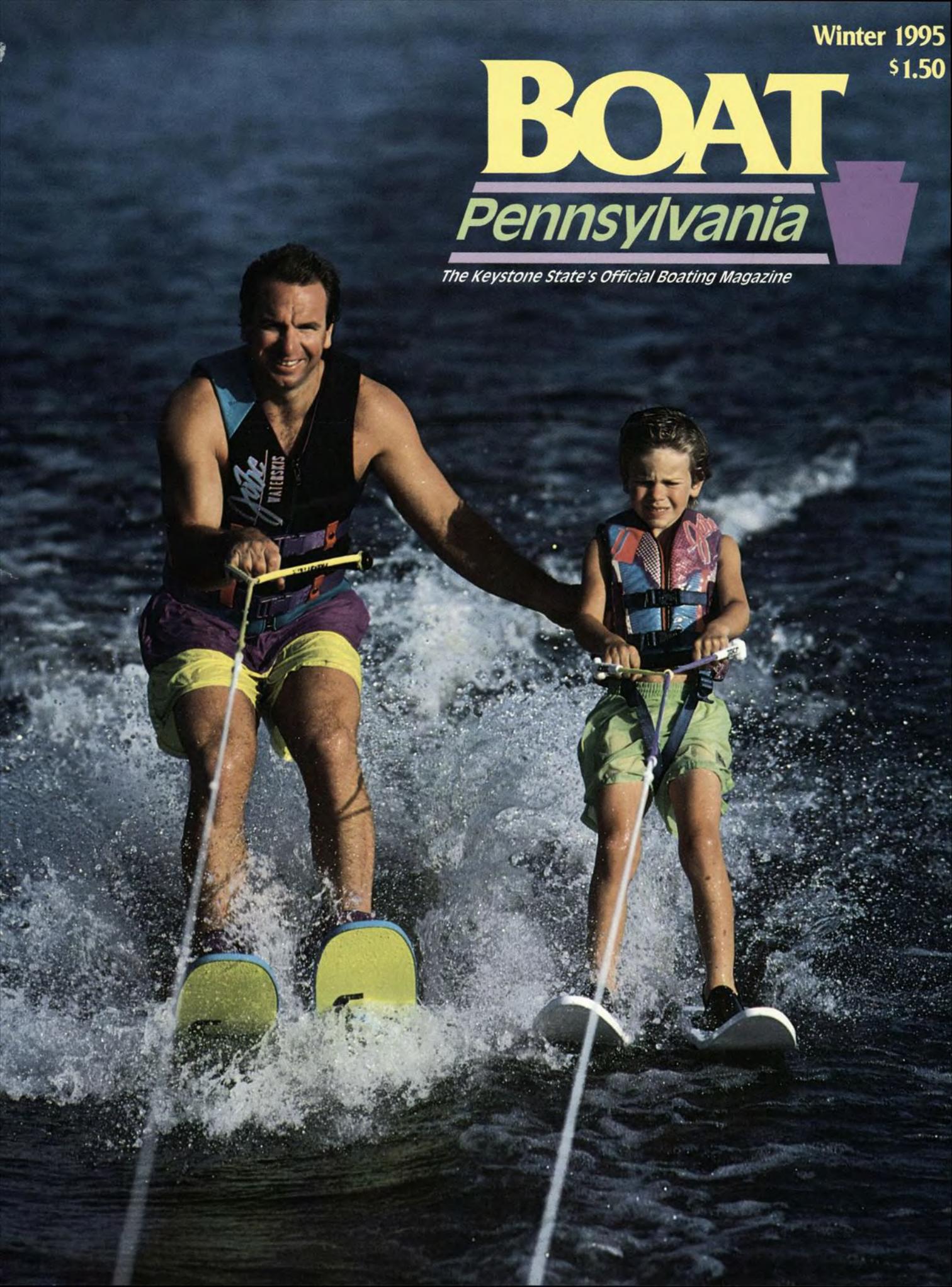
# BOAT

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## Pennsylvania

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*The Keystone State's Official Boating Magazine*



# Viewpoint

## Surging Numbers



**John Simmons**  
*Director  
Bureau of Boating  
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission*

The year 1994 was good for boating. The summer was warm but not too oppressive. Generally, the weekend weather cooperated throughout the year, providing many enjoyable days for hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians to ski, fish or just cruise and relax.

The number of registered boats reached a record high. After a one-year hiatus during which there was no increase in registration numbers, the number of new boat registrations soared. Increasing by almost 10,000 registrations, over 321,000 boats were registered during 1994. Some of these new boat registrations came from unpowered boats registered to use Commission facilities. Many of the remainder of the new boat registrations came from a continuing interest in personal watercraft. At this writing, we don't have a complete analysis of the year, but over 3,000 more of these craft were registered last year, bringing the total number to over 12,000. These watercraft are fast becoming the boat of choice for the next generation of Pennsylvania boaters.

The number of boaters who have taken advantage of the various education class offerings also increased during the year. About 8,000 students received certification. Even though this number is increasing, it is not nearly enough. With over 321,000 registered boats, we have a long way to go toward our goal of an educated boating public.

Four boating program specialists were hired to increase the number of boaters attending boating safety classes. The Legislature considered several bills that would establish mandatory education requirements for Pennsylvania boaters. None of the bills was reported out of committee, but interest is growing. Voluntary education remains the choice of most legislators and the Commission, but the lack of interest by boaters makes the continuation of this policy uncertain. If boating is to continue to grow as it has, boaters must begin to accept that they cannot do without formal education. We hope that more boaters take advantage of opportunities to learn more about how to enjoy their sport safely.

Fifteen boaters lost their lives in accidents this season—up from nine in 1993. No single group of boaters is responsible for these tragedies. The age of the victims ranged from 15 to 80. The boats ranged from 8-foot vinyl rafts to a 26-foot auxiliary sailboat. Five victims were in unpowered boats, three of which were inflatable. Fatal accidents happened both during daylight hours and in the middle of the night. Some were on busy waters; others occurred when no other boats were around. In five of the accidents alcohol use was indicated. Twelve victims fell overboard or their boats capsized. Cold water was a factor in most of the accidents.

Two common factors can be identified in all these accidents. The first is that the victims ended up in the water unexpectedly and without their life jackets. In the last issue I reported some recent changes in the PFD rules. In almost all of the boating accidents, the victims probably would have survived had they worn their PFDs. Most were operating in conditions where there was no excuse why one was not worn. Boating accidents can be prevented if boaters would use a little common sense and wear their PFDs when appropriate.

The second factor is that these victims did not receive any boating safety training. Winter boating safety classes are under way in many areas. More will be available between now and the next boating season. Think about your safety and that of your family. Take a boating safety class.

Information on a program near you may be received by contacting the Commission Area Boating Program Specialists: Northwest Area, Keith Edwards, 814-336-2426; Southwest Area, Mike Petrosini, 412-781-6116; Central Area, Heidi Milbrand, 717-834-9073; and Eastern Area, Mike Roush, 215-862-0280.

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**Are You Using the Right Gas and Oil?** *by Bob Stearns*  
Problems lurking in your fuel and oil can cause huge repair bills. Avoid these difficulties with this information.....4

**Central Pennsylvania's Personal Watercraft Spots**  
*by Heidi Milbrand*  
Check out these specially selected central Pennsylvania waterways for personal watercraft use from the New York border to the Maryland border.....7

**How to Get More from Your Battery** *by Bob Stearns*  
Your battery needs TLC just as other parts of your boat need special attention.....10

**Hassle-Free Water Skiing for Parents** *by Sue Carloni*  
Taking the kids along doesn't have to be an unsolvable problem....12

**Shakedown Cruise** *by Art Michaels*  
Put your best foot forward when you own a new boat and you best ensure years of trouble-free, confident boating.....14

**Donning a PFD in Deep Water** *by Virgil Chambers*  
The safest course is to wear your PFD. The next-best option is knowing how to put it on quickly in the water.....16

**Keep It Clean and Rust-Free** *by Ben Taylor*  
Simple, inexpensive procedures keep your boat running fine and looking sharp.....18

**Conquering the Rapids?** *by Gary Rosensteel*  
After a trip like this one, who in his right mind would go again? A lot of people, actually.....20

**Cartopping in a Nutshell** *by Jonathan Angharad*  
Some boaters and paddlers get into the sport by cartopping their boats. Learning these basics can help you cartop your boat safer and more efficiently.....22

**Pick a Sailboat** *by Kevin D. Kirkpatrick*  
Follow the author's advice on how to pick what you really want at the right price.....24

**15 Canoeing Mistakes You Don't Want to Make** *by Cliff Jacobson*  
Don't make these common errors.....28

**The covers**  
This issue's front and back covers were photographed by Tom King. This winter, think carefully about the kind of oil and gas you use in your boat. Better read the vital information beginning on page 4 to make sure you don't risk unnecessary breakdowns and repair bills. Similarly, check out the article on page 10 for hot tips on how to care for your boat battery, and read the information on page 14 and 18 to care for your boat properly. No matter what kind of boat you own, wearing a PFD is the safest course, but if you don't wear a PFD, knowing exactly how to put one on in the water is the next best thing. Beginning on page 16 you'll find step-by-step instructions on how to do that. Finally, do you own a personal watercraft (PWC)? Pennsylvanians are registering more and more of these kinds of boats. Check out page 7 for the details on where in central Pennsylvania to use your PWC.

