

By Bob Brown

Un burlesque jargon the term 'top banana' refers to the baggy-pants comic that delivers all the punch lines to an endless stream of old jokes. But at the conclusion of the 9th Annual Bushmills Grand Prix in Newport Beach, California, an all-star field of offshore racers didn't think there was anything the least bit funny about Charlie McCarthy's opening night act.

McCarthy, who doesn't need an Edgar Bergen to do either his talking or his racing, went wire to wire in an unprecedented ocean racing debut victory to take round one in the 1979 U.S. offshore circuit. Before the curtain went up, the bulk of the pre-race publicity ballyhooed a so-called rematch between APBA '78 high points champ Betty Cook and two-time runner-up Joey Ippolito. However what the prognosticators failed to realize was that Charlie McCarthy was heading to town armed with the most lethal 'Banana' ever created.

Although barely into his thirties, McCarthy has already fashioned himself a personal success story nearly more remarkable than his unexpected Bushmills win. In the mid 1960s, McCarthy met Don Aronow and immediately became enthralled with the mystic of ocean racing combat. However, being a realist, McCarthy understood the overwhelming economics involved. Unless you have a real heavyweight's checkbook, it doesn't make sense to get into the expensive wave crashing game. Since McCarthy's bank balance was a little on the anemic side at the time, he decided to embark on an ambitious journey to acquire the necessary wealth.

Starting with just one truck in his home of Providence, Rhode Island, McCarthy now operates a fleet of commercial haulers numbering in excess of 300 vehicles. With business booming McCarthy believed the best way to get into the high performance marine arena was to open his own boat building enterprise. With tongue in cheek, the Banana Boat Company was born and the far Northeast had its first true offshore racing speed headquarters. Although the acknowledged kings of deep-vee competition in Miami were hardly quaking in their life jackets, the Banana crew was quietly plotting an insurrection with its new secret weapon.

Actually McCarthy's planned assault to the offshore throne was one year later than he anticipated since the construction progress of the 38 foot Banana went painfully slow. Its hull design is the work of flamboyant Frenchman Jean Claude Simon who is credited with creating Joel Halpern's 38 foot Cobra plus numerous other high speed ocean going craft. The gregarious Simon, who unfortunately does not build boats as fast as he talks, apparently has a solid handle



For Charlie McCarthy, the Bushmills victory was a culmination to a life long dream.



Jerry Jacoby's new 37½ foot Cigarette, *Ajac Hawk*, pressed *Top Banana* every inch of the way to the finish line for second.

on what it takes to harness 1200 plus horsepower in a vee bottom boat and send it hurtling across the ocean with control and speed. McCarthy's new 38 Banana proved that without a question.

From a design standpoint, *Top Banana* is a slightly different breed when compared to the rest of the ocean racing missiles presently competing. For the past two seasons Dupont's space age aramid fiber, Kevlar 49, has dominated the race boat construction scene. Simon,

not a believer in the material, fashioned the 38 Banana out of traditional fiberglass. In addition, the neophyte 38 footer has one extra set of bottom strakes when compared to the Cigarettes, Scarabs and Bertrams now racing plus a noticeably sharper entry at the bow.

However all was not sweetness and roses when McCarthy eventually trailed down to Mercury's Lake X test facility in Florida to find out just how good the Banana really was. Although he had