

ON THE WEB

The making of a cherished resource

Perry Performance Group owner has been behind the transformation of Sea-doo.net from a high school project to an industry leader.

BY JEFF HEMMEL
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Internet is without doubt a powerful tool, but not all dealers, aftermarket manufacturers, or even OEMs, for that matter, have figured out how to use it to their best advantage.

A few sites have found sustained popularity; others have languished in near obscurity. One site, however, stands out from the rest — sea-doo.net.

A one-time basic bulletin board that has grown into one of the most influential and highly trafficked destinations on the PWC enthusiast's hit list, sea-doo.net has found that elusive mix of content and community that managers of similar sites can only dream of.

"Sea-Doo.net is a tremendous resource for people in the industry," said WaterTop Unlimited's Tim McKercher, himself a former Sea-Doo employee. "You can hear what people really think about all kinds of things, from new model colors, reliability issues, promotional interest, to public access issues. It is a great place to see what the consumer world is thinking and what they want."

Powersports Business recently sat down with the man behind the pages, Perry Performance Group owner Glen Perry, and picked his brains about the site's popularity, influence and future.



GLEN PERRY



The sheer volume of visitors enables the site to often be the first place that recognizes a problem, and often also the first to offer a solution.

JUST THE FACTS

In stark contrast to its dominant Internet presence today, sea-doo.net had a fairly quiet debut. It started as a teenager's computer project for school, a basic bulletin board where Sea-Doo fans could get together and discuss the brand.

A chance meeting with the site's webmaster, a Florida man who had come to Perry's shop for some performance work, was Perry's first real introduction to the power of the Internet. A little wheeling and dealing with the customer, who didn't have a lot of money for the work he wanted performed, and Perry was the proud owner of a Web site.

Perry began to develop sea-doo.net almost immediately. Soon, a tremendous resource of technical articles began to be assembled, along with anything else Perry and the site's increasingly loyal following could think of — from member

message boards to photo pages to classifieds, even links to race results and event calendars.

The information is vast. One example is the 190-page reference guide that will tell you just about anything you could possibly want to know about every Sea-Doo model manufactured from 1988 to the present.

"There's just an incredible amount of stuff on there," says Perry, who said the information goes almost as deep as the Sea-Doo enthusiast would ever need to look. "Not only will it give you every paint code, but every prop pitch, interchangeability of driveshafts. Even what composition that year's pump was made out of."

The site also includes a tremendous amount of technical info, tips, how-tos, and troubleshooting info, from copies of just about every Sea-Doo service bulletin available to articles penned by Perry himself.

Others with a good deal of technical expertise also often share their thoughts and tips on the site, making sea-doo.net a virtual clearinghouse of ideas. The sheer volume of visitors enables the site to often be the first place that recognizes a problem, and often also the first to offer a solution.

At its peak, the site has received 2.6 million hits a week, Perry said. Although the growth of similar sites in recent years has cooled that traffic just a little, sea-doo.net still continues to be arguably the most sought-after resource for all things Sea-Doo — and beyond.

"I kind of tripped over it," says Perry, "and wow, what a tool."

LEAVING A MARK

Beyond the sheer information available, sea-doo.net also has managed to evolve into a true online community, the MySpace of the PWC world. Recent message board topics have included everything from proper winter storage procedures and hot performance parts, to Internet dating, football, even members offering each other computer help.

According to Perry, sea-doo.net has signed up more members for the American Watercraft Association than any other organization or group.

"We just won't leave it alone," says Perry of the site's prominent AWA link. "We just keep pounding because we need people to sign up. We need to protect our waters."

The site also tries to make it easy for enthusiasts to take action, often providing a simple link to sign a petition on legislative issues or voice a concern to a legislator.

"We'll make it where it's just a simple click," he said. "When somebody's taking on our waterways, we make it easy for them to get involved."

The site has left a mark upon people in the industry.

"Sea-Doo.net is truly a unique phenomenon," explains WaterTop Unlimited's McKercher. "The number of visitors and the time they stay on the site exceeds any other site in the industry. SeaDoo.net offers Sea-Doo, and PWC enthusiasts in general, a place to learn

See Sea-doo, Page 56

SEA-DOO

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 54

almost anything there is to know about the sport ... and a lot of other things going on in the world."

And like many anonymous Internet relationships, some of the members have chosen to go beyond the screen, and get together in person. Numerous members have gotten together to ride in shared waters, while others have gathered to troubleshoot or install their own latest performance mods.

BUSINESS CENTS

Does maintaining the site pay off for Perry's "real" job, Perry Performance Group?

Certainly the investment is high. Perry has six moderators involved with the site, as well

as a substantial monthly server bill. Fortunately most of the moderators are PWC junkies, and accept payment in trade. "I just take care of them however I can," says Perry. "They all have a Sea-Doo habit, so whatever they need at any time they know all they need to do is let me know."

Perry readily admits some refuse to take anything in payment, just giving to the community for its own sake.

Of his own time, Perry estimates that he's given sea-doo.net about 350 days a year of attention for about the last six years running.

Enough so that he freely admits that attention to the site has delayed the launch of his own online store.

Of course, all good communities support their own. Once members see how involved Perry is with the group, or read the success stories shared by other members, they're very apt to

choose Perry's shop when it comes to their performance needs. As an example, he cites a recent online poster who benefited from a few of Perry's personal tricks to solve a reliability issue.

"When you can tell someone how to stop their boat from spitting that wrist pin clip, or I can find your problem without you going ahead and buying a pricey module or something, some of this stuff is immeasurable help," Perry said. "All I've done is give freely, and hope that customers will see that and buy from me."

As to the future, Perry's goal is to simply make the content even richer, with an emphasis on more how-to articles, instructional that will soon include video as well. He also insists on keeping the technical information accurate, checking much of it himself and even occasionally offering a gentle rebuke should the information not jibe with what Perry and his fellow tech gurus feels is accurate.

MANUFACTURER INVOLVEMENT

Perry has had limited help from Sea-Doo in the past, but he currently receives no compensation. Still, the company — and its network of dealers — has benefited from the site's presence, reportedly monitoring the pages for technical and real-world consumer info.

"Why the manufacturers have not grabbed it, embraced it and ran with it more, I have not one clue," says Perry. "Other than lack of knowing what a powerful tool it is."

In fact, that's probably one of the reasons for the site's success — it's free, and almost any information is just a mouse click away. The site even had the newest Sea-Doo models up with specs before BRP's own company site.

"It really grew into a much bigger phenomenon than I ever imagined, Perry said. "It's done well. It's definitely copied, so I guess that's a pretty high form of flattery." PSB