

Diamond Classic focused on catch and release and kids

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MARTINEZ — With sturgeon cards and tags now a part of California's sturgeon fishing facts of life, many anglers are opting for catch and release for these long-lived gamefish. That, and the concept that a competitive event shouldn't, by design, deplete a resource, gave birth to the annual Diamond Classic catch and release sturgeon derby.

Promoter Steve Talmadge of Flash Fishing continued the tradition of worthy causes this year by adding an emphasis to getting kids involved in fishing.

This year's event drew 283 anglers, and 26 kids who all left with a tackle pack and some great additional prizes. A total of 20 sturgeon were caught and released, and three oversized sturgeon were released. Out of the entire kids field, 12 of them landed fish, some more than one.

While weather most of the week leading to the derby was some of the most heinous of the season, Saturday's weather was surprisingly calm. A few rain squalls swept through the post frontal lull between storms, but the wind, a sturgeon angler's bane, was calm. While a few wives and kids opted out of the on-the-water part of the event, many did fish.

"This event is about having fun with the family," said Talmadge. At the "weigh-in," anglers who caught a legal sturgeon are entered into a drawing. This year's winner of the big first place fistful of \$2,476.25 cash was Ross Buller, who fished with Donovan Olech. The pair caught a 54 incher. Second was Dexter Bell, who's 46.5 incher scored \$1,768.75. In third came Jeremy Prince, who cashed in for \$1,415. Places fourth through seventh paid \$353.75 each to Eugene Lamont, Pete Katzman, Ryan Caraway and David Shimamoto.

Top prize in the youth division was a Vic's Custom rod and Avet Reel valued at over \$250. Each of the remaining 12 successful youth anglers took home tackle boxes, rod and reel combos and other tackle prizes, many of them provided by *Western Outdoor News*.

While the event revolves around the fishing derby, a big favorite part of the Diamond Classic is the pre-derby seminar. The past two years, Talmadge has put together a panel of sturgeon experts to field questions from the anglers.

"We moved to a bigger venue this year," said Talmadge. "We booked the new Martinez Event Center." While bigger, there was still a line of anglers wrapping around the building to get in. On the expert panel were Captain Jeremy Kangas of Stickem Sportfishing (who also served as a chase boat during the derby), Captain Barry Canevaro of Fish Hookers Sportfishing, Captain Don Franklin of Soleman Sportfishing, Captain Mike Andrews of Predator Sportfishing, and Captain Frank Miller of Fury Sportfishing, as well as Talmadge.

While casual observers might wonder that this event has actually grown annually in attendance during a tough economy and more restrictive sturgeon regulations, Talmadge takes care of some fundamentals that keep anglers coming back. He encourages polite radio conduct, discouraging trash talking. The catch-and-release concept is supported by "chase" boats that officially measure the fish, so there is no question of cheating. Finally, he insists on a 100 percent payback of entry fees back into the winners pool.

For more information on getting involved in the Diamond Classic next year, contact Martinez Bait and Tackle at (925) 229-9421, or call Talmadge of Flash Fishing at (510) 881-0858.





AVET REELS and Vic's Custom Rods provided a rod and reel combo for the top prize for the youth division, a rod combo any dad would be proud to own and use. WON PHOTO BY BUD NEVILLE



BOATS STREAMED back in for the awards at the Diamond Classic. One onlooker said he'd never seen so many boats and trailers at the Martinez Marina. **WON PHOTO BY BUD NEVILLE**



KIDS WERE an additional focus at the Diamond Classic, where catch and release sturgeon fishing is championed by promoters. Every kid got a prize package and those who caught fish were entered into an additional drawing for more prizes, many provided by *Western Outdoor News*. **WON PHOTO BY BUD NEVILLE**



WINNERS OF the Diamond Classic Catch and Release Sturgeon Derby split a 100-percent payback pot of over \$7,000. First place went to Ross Buller who fished with partner Donovan Olech. WON PHOTO BY BUD NEVILLE