

Diamond Classic Derby - A True Gem

WESTERN OUTDOOR NEWS

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MARTINEZ — As the benefits of catching and releasing trophy fish, in particular striped bass and white sturgeon, have been gaining momentum in northern California, the Diamond Classic out of Martinez Marina has become the standard bearer and model for catch and release tournaments in the bay/Delta system. The 6th annual Diamond Classic was held on Saturday, Jan. 28, and as it is the brainchild of Steve Talmadge of Flash Sport Fishing, he was at the forefront organizing this year's event with plenty of help from a variety of volunteers, including party boat captains Mike Andrews of Predator Sport Fishing, Bob Monckton of Reellentless Sport Fishing, Jay Lopes of Right Hook Sport Fishing, Barry Canevaro of Fish Hooker's Sport Fishing, Don Franklin of Soleman Sport Fishing, Frank Miller of Fury Sport Fishing, Sean Treacy of SF Bay Sport Fishing, Chris Kane of Outcast Sport Fishing, Jason Russey of Longfin Sport Fishing, Mark Delnero of Fin Addict Sport Fishing, David Hammond of Delta Pro Fishing, Paul Velez of Boss Hogg Sport Fishing, and Bill Clapp of Bill's Sport Fishing.

With such a quality lineup of captains, the lure of cash prizes for the top seven, and prizes for all children entered in the tournament, this year's attendance set an all-time high with 411 adults up from 348 in 2011 and 19 more children with 76 participants this year. All children are entered for free. Lynda Abbott, aka 'Diehard', served as the press coordinator for this year's event, and she exclaimed, "The entire event went off like clockwork from Friday night's seminar at La Tapatia restaurant to the award ceremony on Saturday afternoon," adding, "The weather couldn't have been better, and we were blessed with quality participants and happy people."

Although Abbott thought the bite was slow, a total of 42 legal sturgeon made it into the pool this year for a catch rate of nearly 10 percent, and for the first time, three children caught and released legal fish. In addition to the legal sturgeon, three oversized were also released. The children were Tanner Austin, Brooke Sutton, and Corina Medinas with all three receiving a custom rod specially designed for them by Vic's Custom Rods in Martinez. Austin and Sutton also received reels in excess of \$500 in value. All children went home with a prize donated by derby sponsors.

In the adult division, Shawn St. Gormain of Martinez took home the top cash prize of \$3,596 for his 49-inch sturgeon and the Super Stealth Sturgeon designed by Sean Traacy of Custom Cut Critters, Chris Kane of Martinez left with \$2,569 for his second-place 51-inch fish, and Victor Grajeda of Vallejo became \$2,055 wealthier due to a 59-inch diamondback. The remaining 4 places paid \$514. With all anglers landing a legal sturgeon being placed into a blind draw, anyone landing a keeper can take home the top prize, regardless of the size of the sturgeon. The 2nd and 3rd place winners also took home a Custom Cut White Sturgeon trophy.

As our fishing resources become more and more stretched, catch and release derbies will hopefully continue to grow. In addition to the Diamond Classic, Lauritzen's Yacht Harbor in Antioch sponsored the inaugural RatLTrap Catch and Release Striper Derby last November. More information on the derby rules, past derbies, photos, and sponsors are available at www.diamondclassic.org/.



DOZENS OF YOUNG anglers joined in the Diamond Class Jan. 28, and all had a great time and won lots of prizes for their efforts.



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