

Jet boats offer unique tour experience

September 19, 2022



Pulling up into the Port of Gold Beach Harbor on the morning of Friday, Sept. 9, a long line of people wait outside Jerry's Rogue Jets clinging to tickets. The air is buzzing with excitement.

Guests checking in to Jerry's Rogue Jets are greeted by siblings Scott and Nic McNair and Stephanie Stout. Together, they run the family-owned business.

A member of the friendly group goes over a few details of the tour – whether the historic mail route, express whitewater, wilderness whitewater or 2-hour Bay Cruise – before handing out a color-coded ticket.

Those lucky enough to have a red ticket on this day are on one of two boats heading out on the Wilderness Whitewater tour. Over the course of the day, they will make a 104-mile round trip up to Agness, then embark on a wild and scenic whitewater tour further upriver into the Rogue River Canyon, which boasts some of the most majestic wilderness in Southern Oregon.

Darin Stichter is one of the jet boat captains. The driver says hello to guests as they find their seat. The further toward the front they sit – the more likely to get wet on this trip. On this sunny day it's a requisite.

"Today is my first day," Stichter says before pulling out the massive tour vessel from the dock.

Guests giggle nervously. He's joking, right?!

It doesn't take long to realize the driver is a skilled boat captain – as well as history buff, a wildlife expert and a thrill seeker. He is also sarcastic.

Eventually Stichter will let his guests know it's not his first day on the job. He has actually been a jet boat driver at Jerry's Rogue Jets for 32 years and is the longest consecutive jet boat driver at the company.

Over the course of the day – those taking the jet boat ride will learn about the history of Gold Beach, and the Rogue River, as well as the town of Agness. They will see a variety of wildlife, including seals, eagles, cormorants, and a slew of other birds – and maybe even a bear during the time of year when the blackberries are ripe along the shore.

They will see fish jumping, and learn that once a huge fish jumped all the way into the third row of the jet boat before guests threw it back into the water.

Stichter keeps guests entertained, slowing down and stopping for wildlife, scenic nature shots, and historical areas while cracking jokes along the way.

"I like watching people have fun and making them happy," Stichter said.

For thrill seekers, the best part of this jet boat tour is traveling at high speeds, narrowly avoiding rocks and squeezing through tight turns. In some of the more open areas, the captain says "Oops," pretending like his hand slips while the boat glides into a full 360. Jet boat riders laugh and scream as water comes up over the top, drenching the riders at the front of the boat.

After the whitewater thrills, guests stop for lunch at the Cougar Lane Lodge in Agness. The most popular lunch is a barbecue plate with ribs, pulled port, brisket, muffin, baked beans and coleslaw. By now the jet boat riders have worked up an appetite and eagerly enjoy their food.

On the way back to Gold Beach, driver Stichter cruises down the river, at times maneuvering the boat system to force water to spray up alongside the boat, and guests can reach out and touch the spray. They sit back and enjoy the sights. The wind blows over them as the sun shines down.

Back at the Port of Gold Beach, the guests thank Stichter with big smiles before going along their way.

Jerry's Jet Boats is considered to be a major attraction on the Oregon Coast.

They operate 12 tour vessels and can transport and feed as many as 450 people a day to their upriver lodge.

Bill McNair ran Jerry's Jet Boats for many years before passing the business along to his adult children in 2010.

He reports that there is no other attraction like Jerry's Rogue Jets on the Pacific Coast, except for a smaller operation on the Klamath River.

"Ours is unique due to the extreme beauty and seclusion of the Lower Rogue River Canyon," he said.

Jerry's Rogue Jets consolidated Court's White Water Tours into theirs in 1987 and the mail boat in 2010. All companies now operate as one company which minimizes the number of daily trips required to transport an annual average of 35,000 passengers from May 1 through Oct. 15.

McNair said the tours also benefit the local community because guests often stay multiple days in Gold Beach before heading to other coastal attractions.

While Jerry's Rogue Jet Boat season is currently wrapping up, it's also one of the best times of the year to go on a tour, McNair said.