

Clermont triathlete hits Missouri River



TOM BENITEZ/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Dave Harper of Clermont trains daily on local waters for a Missouri endurance race. Competitors will paddle the Missouri River, starting in Kansas City and finishing in St. Charles — a distance of 340 miles. Harper will compete in a kayak-canoe he made.

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CLERMONT — Competing at the highest level of endurance in running, biking and swimming is nothing new for Dave Harper of Clermont, who has five Ironman triathlons, hundreds of regular triathlons and more than 80 ultramarathons under his belt.

He's about to tackle a new type of competitive journey: paddling in his homemade kayak-canoe for 340 miles nonstop down the scenic Missouri River across Missouri from Kansas City to St. Charles. The event starts Tuesday and runs through Friday.

The famed river was the embarking point for Lewis and Clark's historic 3,700-mile expedition in the early 1800s, and it will host the ninth annual race of 400 solo, tandem and multiteam-member boats in what is touted by "Missouri American Water MR340" organizers as "the world's longest nonstop river race." The event has a maximum time limit of 88 hours and nine checkpoints along the way. Only two-thirds

of the teams were able to complete the race last year, and missing checkpoint deadlines is grounds for disqualification.

"I have raced all my life and have set what seem like impossible goals and then do my best to reach them," said Harper, 50, a computer-project leader for Tupperware Brands. "That is what a lot of life is about: pushing those limits."

There are no rapids along the river, but the current is strong, and Harper said whirlpools can form that may spin competitors or knock over their vessels. He has been training hard for the journey for six months with seven-hour paddles each weekend day and a couple of hours weekdays after work, in addition to his regular cycling and biking. However, he said he'll have to watch for hazards that might include rock levees, debris, sand dredgers, dikes, buoys, bridge pilings, fishermen and the occasional towboat pushing a barge in stretches that are not isolated.

"It is certainly going to be much different from the paddling I am used to," said Harper. "Some of the barges can present 4-foot

wakes that can last for miles, and I have never stayed in a boat this long, but I hope to finish in 50 hours or better."

Harper's wife, Tamara, and their three children, ages 14, 16 and 20, will serve as his support crew to replenish fluids; supply him with high-energy foods such as dried fruit, nuts and energy bars; and provide first-aid needs such as sunscreen, bug spray and Band-Aids to cover blisters.

"I will need to get in about 200-300 calories per hour, and after the first day, you want more fatty and salty foods like potato chips and hamburgers," Harper said.

Participants are briefed with a racing guide that includes checkpoint locations, emergency phone numbers, what constitutes public property on the river and more.

Though Harper has yet to complete the river run, he is looking forward to the next challenge: an ultra-endurance run in the fall.

"I do have a difficult and technical 50K trail race up in Tennessee in September this year, so I'm working my way back up to that."