PENNZOIL'S CONTACT WITH
Ortemond was prompted by connections with Mar-Con, an oil and gas service company in Erath. The company was founded by Ortemond's wife, Diana, 12 years ago, and she remains president today. Her husband is general manager. The multi-million dollar business provides fabrication and hook-up crews, dismantles blowout-damaged structures and makes heavy equipment lifts offshore.

Mar-Con is the Seawing contractor, but Ortemond is the guiding force. He works on this project along with his regular duties at Mar-Con. "This could be a hobby turned into an obsession," he says. "It really was a hobby initially." A two-man crew now works on it daily.

The setting for this entrepreneurial enterprise is unpretentious. The sleek craft is housed at the Ortemond residence in the country setting of Leblanc, between Youngs and Erath. It perches on the boat trailer near the house, like an oversized toy, but the graceful lines suggest a proud bearing.

Ortemond's pride is evident too as he speaks of the tribulations of building something that's never been done before. "It's been a lot of trial and error. It has not been easy," he says. "We're not a technical group here. We're just a group of country boys that had a dream."

Ortemond himself has no engineering training or formal background in boat building. "Just very curious," he says with a grin. He spent 10 years as an offshore roughneck. "It gives me a real good feeling of what these guys want. They want to get to the platform and they want to get there quickly."

In 1976, Ortemond founded Petro-Drive, which he sold to Charles Milam in 1981. When he went to work at Mar-Con. Through all this time, he maintained his appetite for fast boats. He got his first speed-
An artist’s rendering of the Seawing, which Ortemond prefers to describe as “a high-speed personnel carrier” rather than a crewboat.

boat in 1976 and continued to indulge his passion through the years. Three years ago, he won the prestigious Mississippi River race from New Orleans to St. Louis, breaking the previous record in the process.

Now, rather than racing, he spends most of his recreational time at Cypremort Point in his pleasure speedboat Black Thunder.

“It’s such a very expensive hobby. I can’t afford to race on the circuit like I’d like to,” he says. “I just enjoy going fast in water. I enjoy now the technology of going fast more than going fast.”

Ortemond says people from around the world have contacted him because of his expertise. He has no idea how they track him down in LeBlanc, but he’s amazed by the networking that has developed.

There are still kinks to be worked out in the Seawing. The transmission has to be fine-tuned and extensive tests run. “It’ll go fast,” he says, “but will it go fast everyday?”

Other problems that need to be overcome include a lift to transport people safely to the platform. Ortemond is currently collaborating on this with a company that helped design park rides at Disney World. Other items that have had to be designed from scratch include comfortable seating and an intercom system.

“I really believe it’s going to work,” he says. “I’m an entrepreneur, I’m a free spirit. It’s going to take a while, but look at what I’ve done here already.”

He feels he’s on the cutting edge of a trend that is just beginning to develop. “I can assure you in the next five years, it may not be me, but there will be fast boats in the Gulf of Mexico.”

Through all of Ortemond’s endeavors with the Seawing, he has maintained his sense of humor. He insists that he has a time limit on the Seawing project, though he is not specific about how much of that time remains.

“The worst case scenario, I’ll end up with a nice pleasure boat,” he says. “But I know I’m on the right track.”