Launch mode for world-class whitewater

By Tom Stienstra, San Francisco Chronicle

You can hit launch mode on a rafting trip this summer and feel like you're being shot out of a cannon.

Light the fuse and stand back.

As the rafting season gets under way, the outlook matches or exceeds the biggest water seasons in the past 30-plus years, including 1983, '86 and '98. Coming after years of drought, conditions are beyond euphoric for those who love rafting, kayaking and river running.

Ratings for many rapids have been upgraded to the highest level and – in a new industry trend – several rafting companies have raised minimum age requirements from age 7 to 12 until flows recede to more traditional levels.

"With all the water, we're treating Class III runs like Class IV," said Nate Rangel of Adventure Connection out of Coloma.

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