

International Dragons in Hobart in the 1960s

Hobart was the epicentre of the International Dragon racing scene in the early 1960s, Leigh Edwards chronicles four summers in nine years on the Derwent River.

The 1930s saw a new metre-boat design called the Dragon. Unfortunately, World War II intervened with competitive sailing significantly restricted around the world. The Island Sailing Club gave the Queen and Prince Philip a Dragon as a Wedding gift in late 1947. The 1948 'Peace' Olympics in London saw the Dragon introduced as the mixed three-person keelboat. Royal patronage and the Olympic Dragon spurred many gifted Australian sailors to build, buy and sail the Class in Australia. The first Australasian Championship was held in 1954; Prince Philip was encouraged to provide trophies for competition in three Commonwealth countries; Great Britain, Canada and Australia.

The first Prince Philip Cup on the Derwent was in **1958**; the fifth ever contested. The winds were light and mostly fickle, there was not one true sea breeze nor a good nor' wester. Visiting yachtsmen had greater experience and in the fleet of 15 boats were ultimately successful.

Jock Sturrock, an Olympic representative in 1948, '52 and '56 (when he won the bronze medal in the 5.5 metre Class) won his third Prince Philip Cup with masterly helmsmanship. His first was with *Kamulla* in 1954, *Paula* in '55, and *Nan* in '58. Alexander Stuart Jock Sturrock MBE later skippered *Gretel* and *Dame Pattie*, and won over four hundred international, national, state and club championship yachting races and was awarded the 1962 Australian of the Year Award.

Mick Brooke of Victoria took second place with *Sabre* in an amazingly consistent series of races. The titleholder, Bill Fesq of NSW, disappointed in the early heats but, with a fine showing of form, won the last two heats. However, he started his run too late, and only finished third.

The Cup regatta helped the six local boats develop, and increased enthusiasm among the local skippers.

Three seasons later there were 22 starters for the second Prince Philip Cup in Hobart in **1961**; 10 from Tasmania, five each from New South Wales and Victoria, and one each from South Australia and West Australia. The six Victorian Dragons were loaded on to three-ton trucks in special cradles and driven aboard the *Princess of Tasmania*. On arrival at Devonport the Dragons were driven overland by the crews.

Races were sailed over the new Olympic type course (triangle, sausage, beat) in the middle of the estuary and conditions varied from steady sea breezes to fluky zephyrs but, judging by the number of local boats that stranded themselves looking for 'lifts', local knowledge did not play an important part in the regatta.

Racing was generally very close, the leading boats from Victoria and Tasmania dominated the contest, with the experienced NSW team proving a disappointment.

Australia's Dragon Class representative at the previous year's Rome Olympics, Mick Brooke, sailed his *Ghost III* to a well-merited and popular win. It was his eighth National title; six in 14-footers between 1920 and '32, and the 12 sq. metre title in 1937.

Brooke had been close to winning the coveted PPC trophy previously however it had eluded him until this year. Runner-up was Jack Linacre in his Danish-built *Lill*, with David Boyes, of Tasmania, sailing his *Merinda* to the State's best-ever placing of third. Then came *Ann* (Ediss Boyes), title-holder Allan Jarman of NSW in *Sea Joy IV*, and *Lesley Ann* (Geoff Cuthbertson).

In the first three heats, *Ghost III* scored two wins and a second. Then *Sea Joy IV*, *Ann* and *Gustel XI* (David Linacre) won. This pattern, of the Cup being decided in the first three heats, had become fairly prevalent, and it prompted much talk of extending the Cup to seven heats as in the Olympic Games.

Many costly imported boats were seen in action, but locally built craft performed equally as well as their more expensive foreign sisters. The spectacle of 22 different coloured spinnakers proved a colourful and unforgettable sight on the river. Best represented boat builder was Geoff Cuthbertson, of Hobart, who had five of his Dragons racing.

The Australian International Dragon Class Association was formed during the regatta to foster racing; to be affiliated with the International Yacht Racing Union; to take the place of the individual State Associations; to maintain the registration and records of Australian-owned Dragons; and promote annual meetings between State measurers. Tasmania was represented by Don McIndoe and Geoff Cuthbertson.

1963 saw the third-ever English Speaking Union Cup, sailed on the Derwent; the inaugural event had been sailed at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1961.

The English-Speaking Union is an international educational charity founded in 1918. With 35 branches in the United Kingdom and over 50 international ESUs in countries around the world, the ESU promotes the use of

English as a shared language and means of international communication of knowledge and understanding in a non-political and non-sectarian manner. The new international event quickly achieved a highly respected standing; Jack Linacre and *Lill* won the second event on Poole Bay, England in 1962.

That year Germany had 250 registered Dragons, the United Kingdom and Sweden 215, the United States 178, France 155, Australia 96, Denmark 50, Holland 40, Norway 38; Ireland 36, Finland 33, Belgium 28, Italy 23, Portugal 18, Spain 16 and Greece 15. There were more than 40 Dragons in NSW of about 2,000 Dragons worldwide.

Hobart was a focal point for 10 days in 1963 when nineteen entries competed in the first international sporting event in Tasmania.

Crews were well represented by the cream of the Dragon World including Ole Berntsen from Denmark and Martin Parry from England, considered by many at the time as the reigning king of the Dragons, and main contender for the Dragon crown.

The Olympic course circle of 2 miles diameter could be viewed from Bellerive Bluff in the east and Alexandra Battery on the western side of the Derwent. HMAS Huon acted as committee boat and steam ferries were available for spectators.

Lalaguli was skippered by Eric Strain, who had represented the UK at the Olympic Games in 1948 and 1956 and won the Gold Cup on the Clyde in 1947.

White Lady, owned by Ole Berntsen from Denmark, won the series. He was a 33-year-old Danish sailor when he first competed at the 1948 Olympic Games; then again 1952, 1956 and 1964 and placed third, fifth, second and first, respectively. His closing remarks were: "My crew has enjoyed every minute of their stay in Tasmania. It was just like home - or better."

Southern Star, built in Scandinavia and owned by Norman Booth of Sydney, was christened at the RYCT before the first race. *Christine* was built especially for the series by Geoff Cuthbertson. Other Cuthbertson built boats were *Alinta*, *Moana*, *Lesley Ann*, *Merinda* and *George Bass*.

The early races were held in boisterous conditions, with many sheared halyards and broken fittings leading to dismastings and retirements. *Ann* won the first Heat narrowly from Norm Booth and Don Calvert. *White Lady* showed great skill to win Heat 2 comfortably from *Ghost III* and *Ann*. The Dane repeated the performance in Heat 3, in fickle light airs, leading from start to finish from *Vara* (Martin Parry), *Southern Star* and *Ann*. More exciting, daring and skilled helming proved too strong for the competition and *White Lady* again comfortably won Heat 4, from *Vara* and *Southern Star*, with *Ann* back in sixth place. *White Lady* led from start to finish again in the fifth and final Heat, even with a broken tack fitting on her jib, from *Ghost III*, *Christine*, *Southern Star*, *Volare*, *Laliguli*, *Sandra II*, *Vara*, *Lesley Ann* and *Ann* in 10th place.

White Lady scored 6201 Olympic points, defeating *Southern Star* (Norm Booth) on a countback (a higher finish place in the last Heat) from Ediss Boyes in *Ann*; with 4043. The English boat *Vara* (EM Parry) was fourth from the Bermudan boat *Ghost III* (Brownlow Eve), then *Sandra II* (Don Calvert), Jack Linacre and Geoff Cuthbertson in eighth – a truly remarkable finishing improvement in international company for the Tasmanian sailors.

Sailing at the 1960 Rome Olympic Games was Crown Prince Konstantinos of Greece who won the gold medal by over 1,000 points. Konstantinos would go on to sponsor and create the official World Championship for the Dragon Class, initially held in Sweden and won by Ole Bernsten, in 1965.

Tom Pilkington launched the newest Dragon in Australia in **1966**, a boat he built in Batten Point called *Thomas Piety*, in the leadup to the thirteenth Prince Philip Cup and the third to be held on the Derwent in nine seasons. There were 300 yachts on the river for the Royal Hobart Regatta, which the Cup competing Dragons contested, with good showings from Ediss Boyes (*Ann*) and Don Calvert (*Sandra II*).

Ediss Boyes won the CE Davies Invitation race in hard conditions; the First Heat was abandoned at official sunset, 7:26 pm!

Norm Booth sailed *Adios II* to a narrow win in the second Heat, from *Ann*, in a stiff sou-easterly that saw *Leander* (Tony Manford, WA) lose her mast when a spreader failed. *Ann* had failed to cover *Adios* and *Siena*, and when they crossed again, the interstate boats were ahead.

A first beat wind shift in the resail of Heat 1, from a moderate southerly that eased and went easterly, favoured the boats that went east. *Myamba* from NSW won from *Bluebird* by 2 feet, with *Cambria* third a boat length behind.

After repairing her mast, PPC Champion *Leander* sailed well to win Heat 3 in a much lighter easterly. She won Heat 4 methodically in a light southerly, by a minute from *Cambria*.

Paul Mellody won a most interesting fifth Heat. The race started after three postponements in a light and fluky sou'westerly with *Ann* sailing the middle of the river and taking an early lead. As the breeze eased further the leaders ran out of breeze first, and the others sailed up to them. *Marjorie Anne* ran past *Ann* and *Sea Joy*, who

were engaged in their own private duel. Boats approached the finish line either hard on the wind, or free sheeted, two boats even with kites.

Pandemonium ruled at the start of the sixth Heat in a stiff and consistent sou'easter sea breeze. There were several protests, *Joanne* holed *Ann* in a collision; *Merinda* was disqualified. It was a procession for most of the race with *Siena* first to the top mark from the western shore. *Leander* sailed fast and with just one tack to rise 8 places to second, while many others covered, tacked and match raced; losing overall places. *Adios* followed *Leander* into third.

Bluebird was disqualified from Heat 7, in the best breeze of the regatta - a hard and steady southerly. There were eventually seven retirements. The eastern side held the advantage and halfway up the final leg *Leander* was leading *Adios* and *Bluebird*, but her mast failed, again, robbing her of Cup success when she ran into a steep sea and the replacement mast, sails and Bob Day went into the river. *Bluebird* was provisional winner by 2 points, 7,063 vs *Adios* 7,061. But. Another Victorian, Noel Brooke, flew a protest flag after an incident at the start with *Bluebird*. The protest started at 6 pm and the decision was made at 8 pm, after the start of the Presentation Dinner at the Bellerive Yacht Club.

Norm Booth sailed *Adios II* beautifully to win his second Cup; with Tasmanian Ediss Boyes third.

And so, Hobart and the River Derwent had played an integral part in the development of world-class yacht racing, those impressive four summers exceptionally memorable for those competing and watching the very colourful Dragon.

George Friedrichs won the second ever World Dragon Championship in Toronto in '67, Robert Mosbacher won the third in Spain and the fourth ever Dragon Class World Championship was won by the Swedish Sundelin brothers in 1971, in Hobart. That regatta was five years away. Hobart was the epicenter again. Ediss Boyes' son Stephen eventually won the Dragon World Championship in Toronto (1991) and Nick Rogers won in Perth in 1995. A small River at the bottom of the world produced two home-grown World Champions; from such humble beginnings.

Leigh Edwards

The Cup ... Their hour of victory

The Prince Phillip Cup last night was presented by the Governor (Sir Charles Gairdner) to Norman Booth, skipper of the winning Dragon, *Adios*. Our TOP picture shows the winning crew (l. to r.) Peter Cresse, Booth, and Peter O'Donnell.





