



SASC NEWS

The Newsletter of the Sydney Amateur Sailing Club



December 2006

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Cover:

John Crawford's
Vanity running
before the
Southerly Buster
of 8 October
(John Jeremy photo)

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The SASC News is published six times per year.

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Print Post Approved PP 255003/01708

Printed by B. E. E. Printmail (02) 9437 6917

COMING EVENTS

DECEMBER 06

SATURDAY 16 DECEMBER 2006

Spring Trophy day. Twelfth point score race for Super 30 Division. Thirteenth point score race for Division 2 and Classic Divisions. Sixth point score race Cavalier 28 Division and seventh point score race for Division 1 and Super 30 and Division 2 short series.

FRIDAY 19 JANUARY 2007

First Friday Twilight series race for 2007.

SATURDAY 20 JANUARY 2007

Thirteenth point score race for Super 30 Division. Fourteenth point score race for Division 2 and Classic Divisions. Seventh point score race Cavalier 28 Division and eighth point score race for Division 1 and Super 30 and Division 2 short series.

SUNDAY 21 JANUARY 2007

Fifth point score race for Gaffers Division and Division 6.

FRIDAY 26 JANUARY 2007

Australia Day Regatta

SATURDAY 3 FEBRUARY 2007

Fourteenth point score race for Super 30 Division. Fifteenth point score race for Division 2 and Classic Divisions. Eighth point score race Cavalier 28 Division and ninth point score race for Division 1 and Super 30 and Division 2 short series.

TUESDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2007

First Race in the Paul Slocum Trophy Tuesday twilight series.

SATURDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2007

Fifteenth point score race for Super 30 Division. Sixteenth point score race for Division 2 and Classic Divisions.

SUNDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2007

Sixth point score race for Gaffers Division and Division 6.

SATURDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2007

Sixteenth point score race for Super 30 Division. Seventeenth point score race for Division 2 and Classic Divisions. Ninth point score race Cavalier 28 Division and tenth point score race for Division 1 and Super 30 and Division 2 short series.

SUNDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2007

Young 88 Regatta

**NEED
THE TEN-
DER?**

**Call Mike or
Allan on
0418 678 690**

Sat: 0900-1800
Sun: 0900-1700



SIGNALS FROM THE COMMODORE

It's Christmas again and we are half way through the season. It is also the season of daylight saving and long balmy nights on the water. Sometimes, however, the conditions aren't so balmy and I ask you all to remember the rules and use a bit of common sense when it comes to racing on Friday nights. Last Friday night there were (at various times) six crew off competing boats in the water, fortunately none of whom got more than a dunking, but it could easily have been a lot worse. So please remember not all of the crews are as good as yours and not all the skippers are keeping as good a lookout, so that we all can continue to enjoy our Friday Twilights.

Elsewhere in the *News* the Vice Commodore has detailed the disaster that has befallen our use of the slipway and, unfortunately, the restrictions now placed on us will impact on our ability to generate revenue. As John notes the progress of the slipway development is fundamental to our continued ability to work on our own boats and we will be presenting the business plan for the development to the members at the earliest opportunity.

Christmas is also the time for holidays and for us, the members, to thank the staff at Sydney Amateurs as they begin their well-deserved break. Patrick and Megan in the office, Maggie and Denise on sailing, Rod and his team in the boatshed, Frank who has kept the Club in such great order and Warwick and Michael and now Allen who have ferried us round the bay. They and the others who have helped them have made it a very successful and enjoyable year.

On behalf of the Flag Officers and Board I wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy New Year for 2007.

Rob Evans

Photo John Jeremy

Yachts alongside
at the SASCAfter
the regatta for
S80s and Super
30s on 29
October



“Biggles” Purkiss Wins 33rd Gosford to Lord Howe Island Race

Fellow *Azzurro* crewmembers helped position his groin protector as 2005 Bali bombing survivor, Tony “Biggles” Purkiss prepared to take his stand at the crease on the Annual Yachties v. Islanders Cricket Match on the impossibly-welcoming Lord Howe Island.

No-one mentioned to the Islanders that this big bastard with a swagger and a white stick was legally blind. More to the point, no-one mentioned how he came to be that way.

We all heard the round of guffaws as he strode to the wicket, guided by constant friend and companion Glen “Cyril” Picasso. Bat in one hand, gyrating white stick in the other and stupid grin completed this absurd piece of theatre. “They’re bulls—ing,” muttered one slightly hesitant Islander at silly point. “He ain’t blind.” Then a hush descended among players and spectators alike when it became apparent that Purkiss was without sight. The white stick was no affectation.

As a matter of consolation to any aspiring batsmen challenged by such competition, Purkiss is a bunny with the bat — Two Not Out — and a style reminiscent of a whirling dervish. But at this annual picnic event at the end of the 2006 Gosford to Lord Howe Island Yacht Race, we all came away assured that the human spirit is something extraordinary, especially when it’s packaged within a bloke like Purkiss.

Photo Sean Kelly



by
Robin Harris

‘Biggles’ Purkiss at the helm of *Azzurro*, guiding her into the Lord Howe lagoon. ‘Look Mum, no hands!’

Biggles was among the ten crew aboard *Azzurro* — one of two SASC yachts represented in this year's Lord Howe Island Race. He missed out on last year's race. At the time, he was just emerging from a coma, body still punctured and torn with nails and ball bearings after he and his wife Maryanne took the blast force that ripped through the beachfront restaurant at Jimbaran Bay in Bali. For Purkiss, reclaiming an ability to go ocean racing seemed the most natural thing in the world and for our part we were honoured to have him do it as an *Azzurron*.

That's not to diminish the blitzing performance of Bruce Dover's elegant Warwick 44 *EZ Street*, whose skipper and crew wonderfully interpreted wind and current to score second placing on PHS Handicap to *Azzurro*'s fifth place.

As Skipper Dover noted during his speech while accepting his prize, the Gosford to Lord Howe Island Race is one of the world's last great amateur yacht races where all-comers can have a go — and long may it remain so. It still resists the baubles thrown at it by big boats, big dollars and big egos. It remains a true Category -1 rhumb-line passage that is undertaken without the histrionics of other races of its ilk.

It doesn't matter how often you've done it, the first sunrise glimpse of Ball's Pyramid and Lord Howe to the north is always a special moment — and for those who witness this for the first time it's a sense of achievement that stays with you.

Arrogant in
Victory, Sullen in
Defeat —
Azzurro's crew
prepare for an *EZ
Street* welcome to
Lord Howe Island

Photo Sean Kelly





Tranquility beneath Mounts Lidgbird and Gower — *Azzurro* (above) and *EZ Street* (below)

Photos Sean Kelly





The fun of cruising in company — *Azzurro* about to be overtaken, yet again, by *EZ Street*
Joys of ownership — Bruce Dover enjoys the dramatic approach to Ball's Pyramid from the companionway of his Warwick 44

Photos David Salter



Plaudits must go to the race committee at Gosford Sailing Club, ably headed by David Slingsby, and of course to the welcoming folk on Lord Howe Island who, apart from feeding, watering and housing the crews, manage to keep smiling throughout.

The race itself was characterised by a boisterous sou-easter for the dash from the Pittwater start to The Skillion rounding mark at Terrigal. It persisted for much of the way to Lord Howe. I doubt that any spinnakers were deployed for the entire race. The fleet variously threaded north and south of the Barcoo Sea Mount trying to exploit the currents to carry it to Lord Howe. Currents can make or break you on this race and they provide a fascinating element to your navigating challenge.

No rock-star sailors on either *Azzurro* or *EZ Street* this year. Instead, we were an eclectic mix of coal-miner, accountant, chairman, lobbyists, marine and civil engineers, publisher, public servant, film-maker, shop-keeper and architect. Makes for interesting banter on a long watch, especially at night. Did you know, for example, that the collective noun for lobbyists is a lack of principles? Or that finding love in an aft pipe bunk does not necessarily mean that you are hard-on? I still maintain that *Azzurro* offers more laughs per nautical mile than any other yacht around — closely followed by *EZ Street*.

However, it's going to be a long, long year. After *Azzurro*'s two successive PHS wins in the race to Lord Howe, Dover and his *EZ Street* crew can't wait to reaffirm their supremacy at the next race. In the meantime, they are dispensing a lot of advice. There's not much we can do but grin and bear it.

As always, the island offers a chance to chill-out or recharge, whichever you prefer. There are the inevitable tales of derring-do and gravel rash among yacht crew who persist in showing off on push-bikes as if they've never really evolved beyond adolescence. This offers particular challenges when it's on a black night after a tippie or two, the balancing mechanism is slightly left-leaning, there's no moon, no stars and the one bloke you feel comfortable following is Purkiss who reassures you that he knows the way.

[Tony Purkiss has lauded the assistance of Vision Australia in advising him of facilities and services that help the blind and vision- impaired get on with life. If you want to make a tax-deductible donation to this worthy organisation, you can do so by visiting its website at <http://www.visionaustralia.org.au/info.aspx?page=520>]

A REMINDER

The Club is again being plagued by feral batteries and containers of waste oil. It costs extra money for the Club to have these items removed and members should dispose of waste of this type away from the Club.

FIDELIS IN ACTION



Nigel Stokes' beautiful *Fidelis* made a fine sight as she approached the finish line for the Division 6 race on Sunday 5 November

Photos John Jeremy



Big brother is watching!

On 30 October the Sydney Amateur Sailing Club was fined \$1,500 by North Sydney Council for polluting the waters of Mosman's Bay. This is the first time the Club has been fined (*Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997*) and it should be regarded as a lesson to the Club and to its members.

by
John Crawford

The incident involved a member water blasting his boat which was on the small cradle. The tide at the time was just covering the lowest catch drain and some of the waste water escaped into the bay. The boom was in place, however as we all know it cannot make an effective seal between the slipway ramp and the bay. In addition over-spray from the water blasting was drifting into the Cremorne Point Reserve.

These operations were observed by a North Sydney Council officer, who promptly imposed a fine on the Club. Since then we have spoken with the officer concerned, apologised for the lapse in our slipway operational procedures, sent a letter of apology to North Sydney Council and paid the fine.

Apart from the fact that this type of incident should never have occurred, it highlights the fact that we as a Club have a very privileged position on the shores of Mosman's Bay and if we wish to keep these privileges we need to appreciate how vulnerable we are and just how quickly they might be removed by a careless individual action.

After the incident, there was some discussion amongst the Club's directors as to whether water blasting operations on the slipway should only be carried out by boatshed staff. Consensus was that this would be removing one of the advantages that our slipway offers i.e., that members can work on their own boats. Another suggestion was that if an individual working on the slip was responsible for incurring a fine then he or she would also be responsible for paying the fine. While 'user pays' might be more equitable to the wider club membership, the reality is that it is a whole of club responsibility which reflects on all of us, not just the individuals concerned.

In the end we decided that members should be able to work on their own boats, but every member who does so, needs to be acutely aware that their actions on the slipway are under scrutiny, not only from Council officers, but neighbours and passers-by. Woe betide the member who fails to sign-off on and observe the Club's environmental compliance procedures.

Everyone who exercises their rights to work on their boats on the slips

COME and ENJOY
SASC FRIDAY TWILIGHT RACING
2006/2007

**A FUN WAY TO WIND DOWN ON FRIDAY
NIGHTS AND A CHANCE TO BECOME ELIGIBLE
TO**



David Salter photo

**Win a trip for 2
to
LORD HOWE
ISLAND**

(Valued at over \$2,000)

HOW? Simply sail in the SASC Friday Twilight Series and when you make a season entry and complete 5 races your boat becomes eligible to enter the draw for a trip for 2 to Lord Howe Island. The more races you compete in increases your chances of winning. Potentially you can be entered in the draw 12 times. The trip for two will be drawn at the completion of the last race in the series. Contact the club and enter now!

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must appreciate that along with those rights is a responsibility to do the right thing, so I urge you all to be keen observers of slipway work practices, your own and that of others.

On a more positive note, discussions with the Council confirmed that they are keen to see our hardstand proposal approved so that the Club is better able to ensure compliance with the increasingly onerous obligations we all have to protect our environment, especially our immediate sailing environment, the waters of Mosman's Bay. It also highlights that we are on 'borrowed time' with our conventional slipway and the DA approval we are seeking for an EPA compliant facility is important if we are to be able to offer slipping operations to our members.

Have a great Christmas and see you all on the water for the remainder of the Spring Series. Roll on summer.

AUSTRALIA DAY REGATTA 2007

The 171st Australia Day Regatta will be held on Sydney Harbour and other NSW waterways on Friday 26 January 2007. This popular event is a great way to celebrate Australia Day, and SASC members are invited to join the Sydney Harbour fleet. A Notice of Race and entry form is available at www.sasc.com.au and copies of the Australia Day Regatta programme will be available at the clubhouse.

The Australia Day Regatta Race Management Committee is chaired by SASC Past Commodore John Jeremy and Immediate Past Commodore Charles Maclurcan will be starting the main harbour races again this year. The start and finish will be close to Clarke Island, near the regatta flagship HMAS *Newcastle*.

Other attractions on the water on the day will include a parade of tall ships and other craft in which all are invited to participate before the Regatta, an aerial display by the RAAF and a parachute drop into Sydney Cove by Army Red Berets.

Activities on the harbour are a major part of the Australia Day celebrations and the Regatta is always well supported by SASC members — so fill out the entry form and come sailing.



Photo John Jeremy

A start in the 2006 Australia Day Regatta

SEASONS GREETINGS

THE COMMODORE, FLAG OFFICERS
AND DIRECTORS EXTEND THEIR BEST
WISHES TO ALL MEMBERS FOR A
HAPPY CHRISTMAS SEASON, AND
GOOD SAILING FOR 2007

*BEST WISHES TO ALL OUR STAFF ON
BEHALF OF ALL MEMBERS WITH
THANKS FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND
EFFORTS OVER THE LAST YEAR*

SEASONS GREETINGS FROM MEGAN,
PATRICK, MAGGIE AND DENISE
(ADMIN AND RACING),
ROD, JEFF AND
STUART (BOATSHED),
FRANK (CLUBHOUSE),
MIKE AND ALLAN
(TENDER DRIVERS)
AND THE STARTING
TEAMS



by
John Westacott

Now there comes a time when a mind turns to cruising. It is all well and good to race around the buoys, charge around the ocean and sail on with vainglory.

I've loved and cherished, restored and raced wooden boats since 1964, when I managed to swap with a bloke a tape recorder for a my first VJ. *Skid* was her name and we sailed from the Spit VJ Club, next to the big concrete sewerage pump. Both the pump and club are still there, the VJs long gone.

Skid was up-graded for a Moth, the Moth for a VS — you know how it goes.

I've had the fortune to look after two Rangers (custodianship John Crawford calls) *Valiant* and *Cherub* and campaign the beautiful McGrurer eight-metre, *Celeste 3*.

But the lustre of the varnish brush wanes, leaking decks and weeping seams lose that rustic charm. In years past I'd dismiss these moments of depression as boating blimps, mere hiccups in the rich tapestry of a wooden boat owner's lot. That great smell, the motion, the familiar creaks would always win back any tremulous heart.

Like a drop out from Alcoholics Anonymous — "I'm John Westacott and I'm a wooden boat owner" — there would always be someone around to snap me back with words like red lead, garboard seam or stopwater. Once a sucker...

But cruising, as I say, was in mind; to find the *perfect* boat for the task. No grand voyages mind, just while away days along the East Coast; Tassie maybe...certainly a winter dodging along the Reef. Love her like my own child, but *Cherub* was for younger limbs and less indulged habits.

When Lynn and I were courting we cruised the coast for many weeks in *Valiant*, with just a metho stove and a couple of buckets for all other luxuries. How soft we become!

My search for the vessel of these dreams-a-cruisin' has exhausted more than two years — with visits hopeful from Hobart, to the Gold Coast and Auckland.

The brief was simple, creature comforts for a couple of months at a time. Sea kindly, yet quick enough to hunt around the buoys on a Sunday.

Cold-moulded or strip-planked — classic lines. Shoal drafted, maybe a swing keel to duck into interesting spots.

Somewhere between the dream and reality docks *Degrees of Freedom*, now sailing with the Club as A42.

Described by her Perth designer Malcolm Runnalls as a fast cruising boat, she's 38 ft foam sandwich, with a hydraulic lift keel, fixed dodger and tiller.

She was built for Mike Reynolds by Peter Milner in Perth in 2001. Mike and his wife completed a circumnavigation of our fair land, including a Hobart race a couple of years ago. Circumstances forced the sale of their much loved and much lavished creation.

As have I, our esteemed editor and John Crawford have ventured a thought or two on the chosen name, *Degrees of Freedom*.

"More a statement than a name", is Crawford's pity observation.

Perhaps a metaphor for a sailing life, I agree, but tradition and superstition preclude any chance of a nom de plume. Maybe we could get away with the Blue Boat or simply A42.

We had our first outing in the Division 6 series last week in a gusty southerly which caused more concern to crew than yacht. And we'll dine out on leading *Fidelis* around the first mark, at least until the next race!

So, my apologies to the wooden boat fraternity — I still have a wooden dinghy. But if you catch us on a mooring there's always a cold beer and a warm shower.

[*Cherub*, by the way, remains with the Club in the safe hands of Peter and Mark — men of stout heart and deep pockets!]

Photo John Jeremy

Degrees of Freedom



Richard Falk continues the story of his adventures in the now-completed Clipper Round-the-World Race with the Singapore to Qingdao leg.

To say this leg was unique would be an understatement! It started off with all the hoop la of any other international yacht race — the Senior Minister of Singapore was aboard our boat in the morning to wish us farewell along with his three bodyguards and numerous other ministers. Around the boat were three RIBs with armed security personnel and in the water, checking for bombs and various other terrorist threats, were Singapore Navy clearance divers (Navy seal type chaps). So after a large ceremony with no less than 100 performers and 200 invited guests we threw our lines off and motored out for a ceremonial motor past with spectator boats and helicopters along with the usual tugs with water cannons.

If I am starting to sound a bit blasé about it all it's because I am. It is interesting how at first all the pomp and ceremony is quite exciting and we are all keen to be part of it. However, as the race has worn on all skippers and crews have come to dread the arrival and departure ceremonies and we yearn to just either get ashore for a break or get to sea

Singapore's
Senior Minister
wishes us good
luck

All photos courtesy Richard Falk



and get on with the racing. After something like a total of 24 media interviews, live TV appearances and “biogs” with journalists in 10 days I was personally ready to be on my way.

We got our wish and motored for several hours towards the entrance of the Singapore Straits and our official start line. Due to the busy nature of the local shipping lanes the local authorities would not allow us to start anywhere within 20 miles of Singapore Harbour.

Unusually for this area we were faced with fresh winds of 25 knots plus from the N-NW and we settled down to a solid beat for the next few days. My first order of business was to get some sleep after a very busy stopover. For the first day or two we stayed at the front of the fleet with *Western Australia* and *Victoria* for company. As we beat into the South China Seas the seas became steeper and more uncomfortable. After about three days we began to lose our speed for some reason. Boats began slowly to edge away from us and before we knew it we were back in the middle of the fleet.

Like all good skippers I immediately put it down to poor crew work and started “lecturing” about the need for better helming and trim with a few good lashings of “concentrate harder”. In complete frustration and after 24 hours of slowly dropping further back in the fleet I took the helm for an hour or two. Within minutes I felt a strange shudder and then felt the boat power forward and into a more normal motion. Clearly we had been towing something that was presenting us with drag. Whilst our speed had been down a little it had not been enough to definitely guarantee that we had something fouling either keel or rudder. In any case we were in 35 knots and 3 to 4 metre steep seas in the waters of the South China Sea which are known for sharks. As the designated “diver” on our boat I had not been keen to jump into the water for a look anyway.

Free of our unwanted hitchhiker (which I suspect was either a discarded net or rope with floats attached) we started to reel the leaders back in. Whilst we elected to go up the western edge of “Dangerous Reefs” two of the boats elected to tack up the middle of this uncharted and decidedly dodgy stretch of water. It was a decision they would later regret as the waters there are treacherous and filled with uncharted coral outcrops and atolls rising up from thousands of metres. Let’s just say that not a lot of sleep was had on those boats.

Back on the Western side of the fleet *Glasgow* got a little too close to one of the many small islands that is considered “disputed territory” between various nations such as Vietnam, the Philippines, China and Taiwan. They were approached by what could either have been an official naval gunboat but could just as easily have been a pirate vessel. After much waving of hands and harsh words in what seemed like every language other than English the boat finally moved off and remained a discreet distance away. Mind you given the thick accents of the skipper and most crew on *Glasgow* even had the vessel been a Royal Navy cutter she would have struggled to understand them.

Now the race got interesting.

For some days *Glasgow* had been taking water in ever increasing quantities, the source of which could not be located. Finally after stripping the bulk of the interior the skipper (Rory Gillard) discovered some movement around the keel bolts. Over the ensuing hours this movement increased to the point where the keel was noticeably moving relative to the hull. Each movement brought a new influx of water from the ocean and clearly with every hour

the situation was worsening. With 1,400 miles still remaining to Qingdao there was no question — *Glasgow* was not only out of this race but would need to find safe haven immediately. She diverted to Subic Bay in the Philippines some 180 miles away.

Obviously upon hearing news of this keel problem the first reaction in a one-design fleet is to check the same area of one's own boat. The ensuing four hours or so was an interesting time. Within a couple of hours six more boats had located either movement around their keel bolts or else early signs of cracking in the interior gel coat within the keel floors. *Qingdao* had also begun to take water and was experiencing an unhealthy amount of movement of her keel. We now had seven boats in total that had elected to stop racing and were headed for Qingdao. At this stage *Western Australia*, *Singapore* and *Jersey* had exhibited no signs of any movement or damage and thus elected to keep racing.

However, within an hour the call was received to advise us that the race had been abandoned and we were instructed to make for Subic Bay with the rest of the fleet. We (*Singapore Clipper*) were requested to rendezvous with *Glasgow* and *Qingdao* and to escort them into port in case their problems suddenly deteriorated. Two days later we met up with the rest of the fleet at the Subic Bay Yacht Club in what was to be one of the most interesting experiences of my sailing career so far.

We were now faced with a serious keel issue in the middle of a third-world country and approximately 170 skippers and crew in the middle of a round-the-world yacht race and, at that stage, no real idea of the extent of the problem.

Within a day or so the assistant Race Director was on site from the UK and started the ball rolling. It was about six days later when a suitably qualified engineer and surveyor had been located and was also on site. In the meantime we had stripped the boats from top to bottom, storing all equipment in shipping containers and the sails in a nearby warehouse. We did this using our crew as labour before they were all released. Clipper then paid for them all to fly home or gave them a cash payment of £600 Sterling which was a fairly substantial amount to survive on in the Philippines. Clipper staff continued to arrive and slowly but surely a temporary infrastructure was established.

Meanwhile the 10 skippers worked on having temporary cradles built and then getting the rigs out of the boats. At our peak we managed to remove seven rigs in five hours between seven skippers. Not bad for a morning's work. The locals didn't know what had hit them when they kept seeing rig after rig removed in quick succession. I don't think they were quite used to the pace we worked at. However, when it came to having the boats lifted we were reliant on local hoist drivers and labour for the welding up of the cradles around the boats. Having now lifted these boats somewhere in the vicinity of 30 times over the last 18 months (ten boats three times each) we can generally get them from the water to the cradle in about 30 minutes. Not bad for 30 tonnes. However, in Subic each boat took eight hours. Very frustrating.

Over the days and weeks that followed the problem was identified as a combination of a design flaw and build issues. No doubt the exact accountability will be decided in court over the coming few years. Laminators were flown in from the UK and with a combined local and imported workforce of over 90 people every day for almost six weeks the affected

areas of all boats were cut away, rebuilt to a new specification, new strengthened keel bolts to replace the old and the whole thing put back together, times ten! Despite only seven of the ten boats showing exterior visible signs of delamination in the keel area it was sensibly decided to carry out rectification work to the entire fleet. Upon cutting away laminate on the three unaffected boats it was found that there was some minor sign of delamination occurring there too.

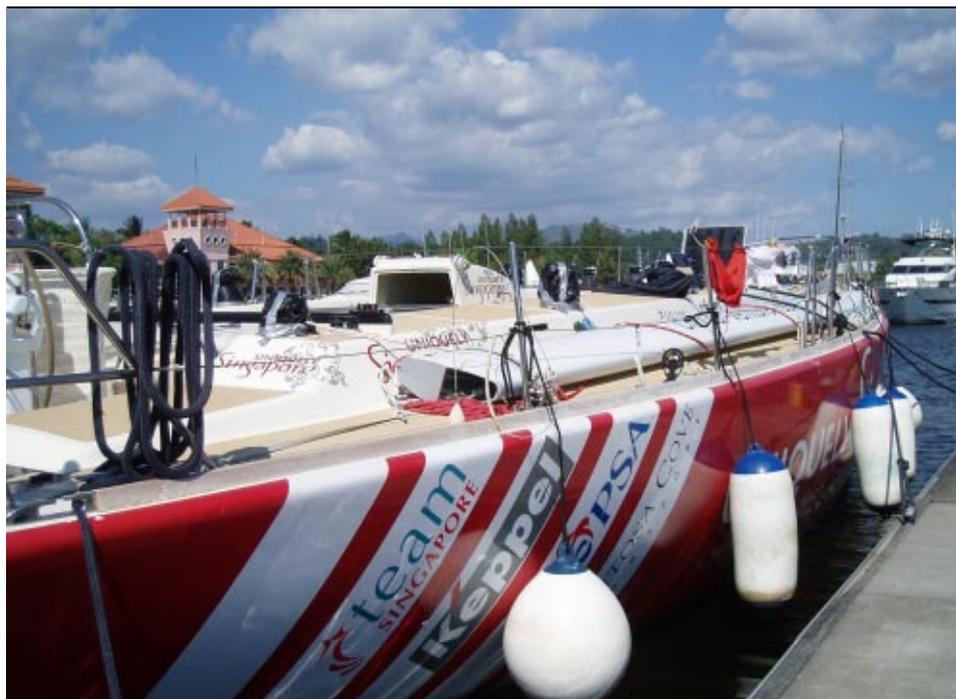
Skippers managed to get a couple of weeks off during the eight week delay. Some headed home whilst others went off on holidays. I went the UK to sort out some business matters and see friends and then on to the USA in -15 degrees C to see my kids which was an unplanned bonus.

After seven weeks we had all the boats back in the water and with crew back on site were now able to start to reassemble the boats with all deck gear having to refitted, engines reinstalled, rigs put back in and water tanks reinstalled. A massive job. We then had to retest every system on the boat prior to having her re-inspected for coding (survey). We finally got everything finished on *Singapore* 24 hours before the race restart date and managed to get out for a test sail — in 4 knots of wind. However, the majority of boats were not actually finished until the morning of the race start and had to combine the shake-down sail with their pre-start manoeuvres.

Seven masts out
in four hours

We all had a love/hate relationship with Subic Bay and the Philippines in general. It was great to see the place and to meet some of the locals. It was outrageously cheap and the climate, whilst hot, was not too bad. The poverty was phenomenal and the crime rate huge. Guns were evident everywhere and discretion had to be used about where to go and when. Shootings and hold-ups were regular events on the main road between Subic Bay and Manila, a four-hour drive along what was, in many places, a dirt road. During our stay there was a spate of six violent rapes and murders within two km of where we were based. I witnessed (or rather heard) a 25-minute gun battle in Olongapo City involving over 400 shots being fired. I gave up counting. Locals just went about their business as if nothing was happening.





Uniquely Singapore stripped and ready for keel work

Subic Bay itself was a major US naval base from the early 1900s up until the early 1990s. When the US left much of the infrastructure remained with many hotels and businesses operating out of what were very clearly either officer's quarters or warehouse facilities. The people were warm and friendly but willing to take money (or anything else) from you at any opportunity. There was no remorse whatsoever when caught stealing — just a shrug of the shoulders or someone you had been speaking with ten minutes earlier who suddenly now could not speak English.

Subic Bay is encompassed in what is known as “The Free Port”. It is a tax haven designed to attract business and industry to the Philippines. As such it enjoys a slightly higher level of safety than does most of the area but it also has a certain surreal feel to it — a sort of manicured third-world look.

However, if you are going to be stuck somewhere there were worse places to be. Those crew and skippers who got to any of the outlying islands all agreed that they were beautiful. While I won't be rushing back anytime soon I am glad to have had the opportunity to see at least some small part of the place.

Fortunately for us the breeze filled enough at the start to allow the entire fleet to clear Subic Bay before nightfall. We were finally off and racing again towards Qingdao, China!

The race up the west coast of Luzon was a typical coastal one with a sea breeze during the day up to 20 knots and a land breeze of perhaps 8 knots at night within two miles of shore. The scenery as we worked our way up the coast was lovely and we would often encounter lone fishermen in these very small, narrow canoes with outriggers that would zip along at 25 knots. They would steer directly towards us to try and trade their fish for cigarettes or booze. They didn't quite understand that we were (a) racing and (b) unable to stop quickly even if we wanted to. On more than one occasion we were surrounded by 15 or more of these single-man canoes with men balanced precariously on them while zipping over the waves at 25 knots. It looked like fun!

We managed to claw our way up the pack to be about mid fleet by the time we got to the infamous Luzon Strait between the Philippines and Taiwan. Having been faced with generally light winds up the coast of the Philippines in what were relatively protected waters we were well and truly walloped by 35 to 45 knot headwinds the whole way across the Strait. With water coming in from the north Pacific and rising from depths of 3,000 and 4,000 metres it then piles into the Luzon Straits at depths of sometimes less than 100 metres. The resulting sea is a bloody mess. It is much like a warmer version of Bass Strait but with lots more shipping thrown in.

It is here in 8 to 10 metre seas where we had our first serious run in with commercial shipping. At about 0200 on a black pig of a night in 40 knots we spotted a ship about nine miles from us and clearing us by about four miles. We were tracking him on radar and to my horror when he was approximately six miles away he altered course and was now going to intercept us. All the toys were readied in the cockpit — white flares, searchlights etc. etc. Torches were shone on sails. I contacted our new friend on the VHF and asked him his intentions. He had indeed seen us and informed me his intention was to pass across our stern. We bade farewell, maintained our course and watched. He then altered course again, slowed and was again on a collision course with us. He was now less than 1.5 miles from us. I radioed again and this time spoke to a very sleepy and rather abrupt ship's captain. It would appear we had been dealing with a rather inexperienced officer of the watch. The captain apologised and restated their intentions which were now the opposite of their original ones. They took three hours to get away from us having lost so much way in such a big sea. At their closest point they were two cables from us. That may sound like a lot but it is actually only about 400 metres and on a black night in 10 metre seas it is closer than one might choose be. To be safe we tacked away and spent several hours looking over our shoulders to be sure we were not still being stalked by what turned out to be a ship of more than 300 metres in length.

We were now working our way up the east coast of Taiwan in lightening winds. There was a clear choice to be made. Go east for what was possibly a new system developing. It meant more distance to sail but did look tempting. Instead we opted for the other choice — to stay closer to the shore line and work the north bound current along with what I hoped would be a land sea breeze effect. The gamble paid off and we rapidly moved from sixth to third. We lengthened our lead on the pack and continued to gain on the leaders at times riding with three knots of current. We rounded the northern tip of Taiwan and made our way towards the southern edge of the Yellow Sea.

This entire area was jam packed with military vessels, fishing boats and unmarked fishing nets and buoys of every shape, size and description. At one point as we approached the coast of China near Shanghai at night we passed between two very large Chinese warships going in opposite directions. We were constantly being approached by curious fishing boats both day and night. I guess the sight of a 68-foot ocean-racing yacht with spinnaker up doing 14 knots is not something they were familiar with.

On numerous occasions we came close to hitting these unlit and unmarked fish traps that lurk below or on the surface. They are usually marked by an odd array of floating debris but are virtually impossible to spot during the night and not much easier during daylight. This problem was exacerbated by the fog which swallowed us when we sailed into the Yellow Sea and which carried with us all the way to Qingdao. Eventually we gave up looking for them and just crossed our fingers — the strategy seemed to work.

Right about now we had two setbacks in quick succession. Firstly we blew the head out of our 1.5 oz kite. A five-metre rip from luff to leech and all the way down one tape. It was a major job and not one we could hope to rectify between where we were and the finish. Admittedly we were running hard down wind in 32 knots of breeze with a kite rated to 27 knots.

Then disaster. With one reef in our main and on a beam reach we saw a split develop along a seam in our main between the first and second reefing points. Fortunately were able to get it down before it ran more than about three metres. Still it was a big job and meant we could not carry anything more than a double-reefed main for the foreseeable future. As luck would have it the wind built to 35 knots and we were happy with that. However, 24 hours later we had the main on the deck with half the crew stitching feverishly to try and get the thing repaired. We got it back together and re-hoisted. Two hours later the repair failed and we were back to square one. We repaired it again and as we were so close to the finish where lighter winds were expected we kept it reefed until it was absolutely needed. Fortunately this time it held!

We continued on in third place in strong downwind conditions all the way to our final rounding mark about 28 miles from the finish line. At this stage we were about 12 miles behind the boats in first and second place and the boat behind us (*Durban*) was 26 miles away. With that the wind died. We then coasted to within about eight miles of the finish. From here it would take another eight hours to finish. An hour or two before dawn we picked up the radar signature of another boat and then got a visual on what turned out to be another Clipper boat — *Liverpool*! The boat in second place was now just 300 metres away in the fog. Then lo and behold a miracle — *Victoria* appeared about the same distance away on the opposite side of us. At this point we were in perhaps two knots of wind and 1.5 knots of favourable tide generally sweeping us toward the finish line. We had not slept for 20 hours now.

Fish traps were all around us and I mean ALL AROUND US. We gave up counting at 250 in the last two hours alone. We had minimal steerage as we fought to maintain any momentum we could in the ferry glide to the finish. At this stage I was running on pure caffeine. Very nail biting! About two miles from the finish we were swept onto a fish trap and stayed

put for about 10 minutes. When we finally freed ourselves we took another 15 minutes to regain steerage and momentum. There was no way to find one's bearings as visibility was still less than 400 metres and the shore was some miles from us.

Then we sighted the finish vessel — a Chinese coast guard cutter on station as the fog thinned out in the early morning sun. With that both *Liverpool* and *Victoria* were across the line in quick succession to the sound of the ship's horn. Then disaster (again)! *Durban*, who had been 26 miles astern of us at the previous sched., was at the other end of the line emerging from the fog. They had ridden a fresh breeze in all the way to the finish and drifted over the line 10 minutes or 200 metres ahead of us.

We were all pretty devastated. Having been in a strong third position for more than half of the 12-day race we had been pipped at the post. The bottom line was that we had sailed a good race, had some bad luck and *Durban* had followed the racing sailor's motto — it's not over until the fat lady sings. To the credit of my crew they all took it very well. They put on very brave faces and held their heads high. There was no bitterness, just a very strong resolve to not let that happen again.

We hit the land to a massive traditional Chinese welcome. With plenty of Tsing Tao beer (brewed in Qingdao and an official sponsor) some horrible champagne and even more pomp and ceremony than we had received in Singapore we were welcomed into Qingdao by the mayor, the Chinese Olympic organising committee and every other man and his dog.

Our stop in Qingdao was a short one due to a revised race schedule and the need to make up some of the 8 weeks we had lost in Subic Bay. Whilst most of the time was spent on maintenance we did have some opportunity to have a look around and also to experience some of the local culinary delights. Qingdao is a very modern and westernised city that is busily preparing to host the sailing events for the 2008 Olympics. It is very much like any western city one would visit with a slightly lower sanity level demonstrated by the drivers. The people were incredibly friendly but the evidence of life under communist rule was very evident everywhere. Bureaucracy was rife as was the presence of various police and military officials wherever we went. To really glimpse the inner workings of the place you needed to walk a few kilometres out of the heart of the downtown area and start walking up and down back streets around the workers' residence area. That was far more interesting and strengthened my resolve to go back at some point and see more of rural China as well as some of the cities not yet westernised.

So we managed to get to Qingdao finally with a two-months pit stop along the way. We had a strong if somewhat disappointing race result. However, the most important thing to come out of this race was that we in *Singapore* now knew that we were able to keep up with what had been previously a fairly elite pack of lead boats. That was a real confidence boost and one that made us very keen to get into the next leg as quickly as possible.

Stay tuned for the next instalment — Qingdao to Victoria across the North Pacific. I promise it will be shorter than this one (in pages though not distance)!

Richard Falk

Skipper — *Uniquely Singapore*

SASC Life Member W. G. (Bill) Brown passed away in October.

Bill became a member of the SASC in 1972, an experienced sailor having sailed with Lorraine in Heron-class dinghies as a member of the Middle Harbour Heron Sailing Club.

Bill's sailing experience was quite extensive and included building a Heron, *Joker*, (sail number 3351) followed by a Northbridge Junior for his son Geoff and a Moth for his son Steve.

With the SASC, Bill sailed in three Sydney to Hobart races and three Lord Howe Island races as navigator on board *Rebecca*. Member Tony Barry remembers discussing navigation with Bill who told him 'it was time to tack when you could hear the sound of track bikes in the fog'.

Bill was a quiet, solid man who served in the armed forces in Morotai and Balikpapan during World War II. An engineer, he worked A. E. Goodwin and Howard Auto Cultivators until he joined the NSW Forestry Commission where he remained until he retired in 1980.

We extend our sincere sympathy to his wife Lorraine, his sons Stephen and Geoffrey and their families.

Vic Dibben

REFIT FOR *VAMPIRE*

The National Maritime Museum's biggest exhibit, the ex-RAN destroyer *Vampire*, crossed the harbour to Garden Island on 18 October for a major refit. The old warrior, built at Cockatoo Island in Sydney in 1959 and decommissioned in 1986, was towed to the Captain Cook Dry Dock, Garden Island, where she has undergone the largest works program since she came to the museum in 1991.

More than 1 million people have climbed aboard and explored *Vampire* at the museum, exploring her gun bays, works spaces and crew quarters.

The refit included structural repairs and maintenance as well as high pressure cleaning of the ship's bottom plating and bilges.

Vampire also received a fresh coat of paint from truck to keel with members of the *Vampire* Association (former crew members) assisting with the work. The ship was expected to return to the museum on 28 November 2006.

Vampire passing under the Sydney harbour Bridge on her way to the Captain Cook Dock



Photo John Jeremy



Photo John Jeremy

The first race in the Sunday series for Division 6 and the Gaffers was abandoned on Sunday 8 October when a powerful Southerly Buster swept into Sydney. Competitors headed for home of convenient shelter, including John Crawford's *Vanity*. John is claiming a Ranger-class World Speed record for his beautiful black yacht as she reached a speed of 9.1 knots (by GPS) before the 40 to 45 knot wind



Rob Roy, Yeromais, Vanity, Sylvia and Ranger shortly after the start to the 2006 Captain Slocum Trophy race on 5 November (above)

The trophy was won by Ian Macdiamid in *Sylvia* (below)

Photos John Jeremy





The SASC conducted a regatta for S80s and Super 30s on the weekend of 28 and 29 October. The first race on 29 October was sailed in a flukey and shifting southerly with some interesting mark roundings(above)

Froth & Bubble and *Arrow* about to round the leeward mark during an afternoon race (below)

Photos John Jeremy





Pinchgut's spinnaker about to get very wet at the leeward mark (above). *Pinchgut* went on to win the Super 30 event

The starts for the S80s (with fewer competitors than the Super 30s) were quite spacious (below)

Photos John Jeremy



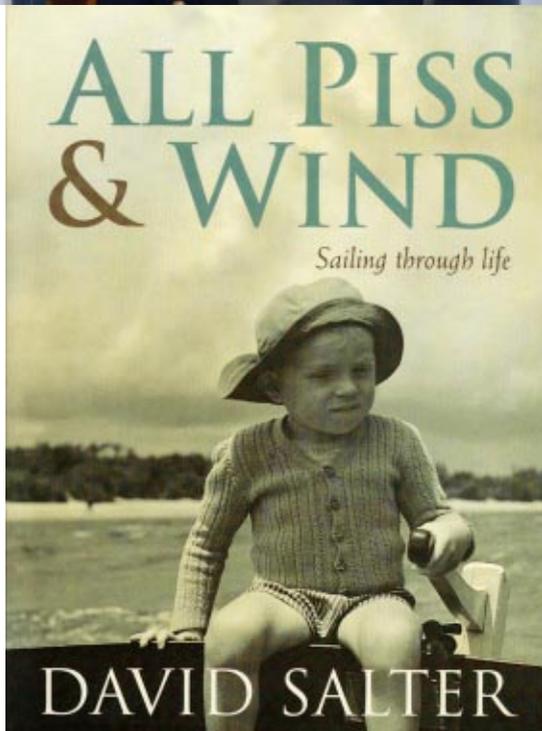


Photo John Jeremy

With a title like *All Piss & Wind* there is a reasonable chance that the book is about sailing — and it is!

On the evening of 5 December, Sir James Hardy (above, with the proud author) presided over a perfect launching at the Sydney Amateur Sailing Club of member David Salter's latest book.

Published by Random House Australia, *All Piss & Wind* is a series of entertaining anecdotes of a life of sailing and quite a number of SASC members will recognise incidents and themselves in the stories David tells in his usual very readable style. From all good bookshops, of course!



Bill Gale received an unexpected gift from his close competitors in *Vanity* before the races one recent Saturday morning. It certainly seemed to hit the spot but it is not clear whether the gift constituted outside assistance or an additional handicap!



Photo John Jeremy

FRIDAY TWILIGHTS

The Friday Twilight races are proving as popular as ever. If you plan to come sailing on Friday nights and to stay for dinner afterwards, please ring Megan, Patrick or Maggie as soon as possible and definitely no later than Thursday when Patrick polishes the Club's crystal ball and orders the food.

No table bookings can be accepted after 1200 on Thursday

A booking sheet is also available on the notice board, and members are encouraged to use this facility when they are passing.

Volunteers are also needed to help clean up and ensure a great evening for all. Add your crew to the list on the notice board now!

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members:

John Fox
Scott Mitchell
Gervase Pearce
Antony Tisch (rejoining)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear John,

I haven't really been able to contribute to the newsletter recently due to other commitments — including preparing for my first Hobart Race since 1999 and the first one since becoming a Tasmanian.

I have joined the Derwent Sailing Squadron and keep my boat *Thalia* there. She is a 27-foot timber raised decker. Not quite a Ranger but a similar concept except for the fractional sloop rig. She will be entered in the Wooden Boat Festival in February and proudly displays the SASC name and sail number on the transom. There will be a few from the Amateurs at the festival, all being well.

The Derwent Sailing Squadron also has a very interesting regular newsletter. They have some good history on many past events, quite a lot of which have some connection with Sydney and yachts racing at the Amateurs. The club has a very similar feel to the Amateurs. Their website is www.dssinc.org.au where you can see past news letters under the news tab. The October edition has a picture of the boat *Fruit* which is the boat in which I will sail the Hobart. There are also a number of yachts that might be familiar. They all seem to end up down here. It is like sailing in Sydney 10 years ago!

I hope things in Sydney are going well. I am still studying and working hard with a little bit of sailing so there is not much time for much else, except that I will be cruising the Greek Islands again in July next year. I hope to give you a run-down of the cruise as an article in due course.

Peter Pangas

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

The next SASC News will be the February 2007 edition. Contributions from members, which are always welcome, should reach the editor by Thursday 25 January 2007. Contributions can be in hard copy or sent by email. Photographs are also very welcome.





Photo John Jeremy

Unfortunately the original transparency has not aged gracefully but this photo of the start of the 1962 Sydney to Hobart yacht race is a reminder of less frantic times. Today most of the competitors, including *Anitra V* (centre), would be regarded as classic yachts



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