

# Hérons

**JACK HOLT CLASSIC CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY  
BY MARK RASMUSSEN.**

**A** LOOK at any Australian yachting publication more than 25 years old is a fascinating indicator of the number of dinghy classes that have shone briefly only to be replaced by more modern alternatives. One remarkable example of longevity is the Heron. Still racing actively in every state and undergoing a strong resurgence all over the country, the Heron holds a unique place in Australia's sailing fabric.

Like any class, the records remind any who care to look of the quality of past champions who have dominated the class over the years. However the real story is the number of families who have either been introduced to a lifelong love of sailing or have returned to the sport as adults so that their children can share the experience.

The Heron is one of the dwindling number of dinghy classes that still offers the home builder the opportunity to produce their own boat, thus keeping alive that somewhat romantic notion of family members working away in the evenings in the garage to prepare a new boat for the upcoming season.

Designed by revered Englishman Jack Holt, (also responsible for the Mirror, Pacer, International Cadet, Enterprise, Lazy E and Diamond) the Heron was the winner of a design competition run by *Yachting World* magazine. The basic aim of the design was to provide a safe, stable, family sailing dinghy that could be built by the home handyman in ply and which could be raced or used for recreational purposes such as day sailing, rowing or under outboard power. The two piece gunter rig allowed for the easy storage of the entire rig inside the boat and enabled owners to transport the boat without an overhanging mast.

Strict adherence to "one design" principles has allowed older boats to remain competitive. A shining example of this was at the 50th National Championship held in Brisbane last summer. Victory went to Queenslander John Nobbs in 1971 National Champion boat *Sobraon*. The fact that a boat of this vintage can still compete at the highest level is a great advertisement for the longevity of the class.

The Heron is easy to sail and ideal for beginners, being difficult to capsize and relatively under canvassed. However it is a challenge to sail the Heron well, offering the expert the opportunity to tune the boat for extra speed. Don Jamieson (10 times National Champion.) and Craig McPhee (nine Championships.) head the list of top

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quality skippers and these two in particular raised the tuning and sailing of Herons to the level of an art form.

In the 1980s, the class allowed the use of side buoyancy tanks, making the Heron both drier and more seaworthy in the event of a capsize. The class has continued to move with the times with regard to construction methods. Home builders can choose between traditional ply-over-frame construction or the popular stitch-and-glue method. Professional builders can produce boats using either of the above methods as well as having the option of foam and fibreglass construction. Results at National Championship level indicate that no particular method is at an advantage and that crew ability is the overwhelming factor deciding finishing position.

The class is also currently examining ways to improve the user-friendliness of the boat. An aluminium bermudan rig option has been sanctioned alongside the current alloy or timber mast and boom with timber gaff. This change will have significant safety implications, making the main much more easily lowered and stowed in strong winds.

Another exciting recent development has been the production of new moulds for fibreglass construction. South Australian Andrew Baker has been licensed to produce these boats.

Other options being canvassed include a larger jib to allow heavier crews to remain competitive and the use of more easily available materials to construct traditionally timber rudder boxes and jib sticks.

In Australia, fleet numbers peaked between 1965 and 1990 when it was not unusual for 100 or more Herons to contest National Championships. Current numbers are again on the rise. Heron sailors cover the entire spectrum of ability levels, from parents and children learning to sail together, pairs of teenagers, and adult experts with young crew.

Class officials are keen to expand local fleets around the country and the National Heron Association is attempting to put potential owners in touch with sellers. National Heron Association President, South Australian Richard Gibson, has issued a



plea to Heron owners who no longer have a use for their boats to put them up for sale. To this end, State Heron Associations are compiling lists of available boats. Prices of boats currently for sale start from \$500.

A perfect example of the ability of the Heron to bring families to sailing is Hobart's Crook family. Fifteen-year-old Tyler Crook began sailing lessons at Lindsfarne Sailing Club several seasons ago. His first experience of racing a Heron was in a borrowed boat at the 2007 National Championship with his younger sister, 10-year-old Demi as crew. The young pairing have improved at a rapid rate, taking out the 2008 - 9 Tasmanian championship last March.

Tyler's parents, Clinton and Janine Crook are effusive about the positive nature of



ABOVE: Tasmanian Heron Champions Tyler and Demi Crook find a way to kill time while waiting for the wind.

LEFT: John Nobbs – current National Champion aboard 39 year old *Sobraon*. The boat was Australian Champion in 1971.

PICS BY MARK CASWELL

the Heron experience. “It’s been great to see my kids participating together,” Janine Crook commented. “Being able to learn together is a wonderful opportunity to do something that will stay in their memories forever. The local Heroners have been incredibly welcoming, offering advice and encouragement regularly.”

Despite there being more than 5000 boats in existence around the country, the family association with the class has actually led to an undersupply of second-hand boats as families hold on to them for the next generation.

Those wanting more information or wishing to register their boat for sale with the Heron Association can contact Richard Gibson via the class website at: <http://www.heronssailing.com.au/>



PHOTO BY GREG OWAY

ABOVE: The junior division will be hard fought.

LEFT: Last year’s runners up, Matt Jerwood and Patrick Voss (WA), will start favourites for this year’s 420 Championships.



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# 420 Nationals hoping for international entries

**T**HE 2009/10 420 Nationals will be sailed at Largs Bay Sailing Club in South Australia from 28th December to 3rd January.

Organisers are hoping for between 40-50 boats from around Australia, with possible entries from Singapore and New Zealand as well.

With last season’s Open/Male division winners not defending their titles, the strong contenders appear to be last year’s runners up, Matt Jerwood and Patrick Voss (WA) with strong opposition from Angus Gallaway and Alex Gough from Queensland. Victoria have strong contenders in Llewellyn/Duncan and Davies/Hannah, whilst NSW have the teams of Lindsay/Jones and Kennedy/Bromfield. Local South Australians Stephens/Flaherty and the Flint and Arnold brothers should like their local conditions.

In the Female division, many new teams will be contesting this season and the competition seems very wide open. The Ryan sisters from Queensland have been

performing well, with strong opposition coming from fellow Queenslanders Warlow/Toner, while from the other states, the top contenders appear to be Thomas/Lindsay (NSW), Groome/Soulsby (SA) and Smith/Middleton (WA). Tasmanians Shephard/Catt will also be very strong contenders, having been together as a team for longer than the other crews.

With the 420 being the ISAF World Youth Double Handed Dinghy boat, competition will be fierce in the juniors, as the selection is taken over both the 420 Nationals and the following Australian Youth Championships, both of which will be held at Largs Bay Sailing Club. With competition expected from Singapore and New Zealand, this takes on an international flavour, and adds more depth to the competition and racing.

Practice races will be sailed on Monday 28th December, followed by racing proper until the scheduled rest day on Friday 1st January. Racing resumes on the Saturday and Sunday.