

The Second Step...

MARK RASMUSSEN TELLS HOW A TASMANIAN CLUB FOUND A LINK BETWEEN "INTRODUCTION" AND "RACING" STAGES.

PARENT and child learn-to-sail classes have been a regular event on the Lindsfarne Sailing Club's calendar for many years. They have always generated a considerable level of interest and brought high numbers of keen family groups to the club, all wanting to take the first step and share a special experience with their kids. Whilst some have successfully made the transition to racing, there seemed to be a sizeable group who simply walked away after the initial basics had been taught.

Some used the classes to learn enough about sailing to participate in the sport as a recreational activity. Others took the next step into club races, only to find that Hobart's often boisterous weather made it hard for them to take the step from sailing in sheltered water to larger fleets in more open waters.

The realisation dawned on several experienced sailors within the club, who were attempting to introduce their own quite young children into the sport, that there perhaps needed to be a less threatening second or intermediate step available for novice families and also for people who were not ready to expose their very young kids to the "real thing". As a result, the "Start to Race" program was born.

Before long, the start-to-race group became the largest fleet regularly operating at the club, with upwards of 15 boats participating. The majority were either in the club's fleet of Pacers or in the Heron class, which found its numbers rose dramatically as a result of participants deciding that sailing really was for them.

So, what can other clubs learn from the LSC experience? Some initial decisions were made which seemed to have some positive influence on the success of the program.

1. The races were deliberately run close to shore so that those who were inexperienced never felt far from the safety of the club or threatened by high winds.

2. The races were initially simple windward - leeward courses over one lap, with each leg of the course not much more



than 200-300 metres. This had many advantages – lots of starts in a relatively short period of time was very worthwhile, complete beginners weren't being left floundering around long courses largely alone, and kids were kept interested by lots of action. Depending on wind strength, up to six races were run on some mornings.

3. The weekly sessions were limited to not much more than an hour in duration, running from 10.30 to 11.30am on the regular Sunday race day. The club recognised the need for brevity to satisfy the needs of several participating groups. The average age of these children was very young, with two of the kids being only six. Secondly, it was important that the club's rescue boat crews were given time to have lunch and a break before supervising the afternoon's racing.

4. On-water coaching was an essential ingredient in the success of the program. This was provided in two distinct forms. Rescue boats were crewed by club members happy to help out with advice for the beginners. Also several of the participants in the group were competent skippers who were using the availability of the program as a means of introducing their very young children to the world of racing.

These individuals fulfilled the dual roles of teaching their own kids and also of providing an example of "how it is done" to the less experienced. The combination of these two coaching methods proved to be highly effective in getting as many participants as possible up to speed.

5. The program was graded in the level of complexity offered to the participants. Early weeks consisted of simple courses and abbreviated two minute start sequences. As participants became more competent, Olympic courses were introduced and start sequences became more formal.

6. Participants were given a goal to aspire to. In this case it was participation in the end-of-season Tasmanian Heron class championship. As the weeks passed, more emphasis was placed on preparation for this "real event", concentrating on all of the aspects needed to compete in a serious event, thus giving a focus to the activities that might not otherwise have existed.

Participants were glowing in their assessment of the success of the program. George Rance, who grew up sailing skiffs on Sydney Harbour in the 1970s, stepped back into a dinghy in the first time in decades to teach his grandchildren Ethan (6) and Ayla (8). His comments say much





29er Australian Championship

THE 2009/10 29er Australian Championships were sailed from the Cruising Yacht Club of South Australia, with the race management team headed by International Race Officer Garry Hosie from Melbourne. The CYCSA were outstanding hosts and a great venue to sail such an event, with the race management team conducting a faultless regatta.

The event attracted entries from all states of Australia except Tasmania, and entries from New Zealand and Hong Kong giving it an international flavour.

The regatta was sailed in a complete range of conditions, with winds from as little as three knots and as much as 30 knots. All of which tested the skills of not only the sailors but also the race management team.

As was expected, racing at the top of the fleet was tight with reigning National Champs James Sly and Andrew Gilles intent on making it back-to-back national championships. NSW sailors Byron White and Tom Koerner along with Declan Rielly and Ash Rooklyn provided strong competition for Sly and Gillies, with many other competitors ensuring that these three teams did not get it all their own way.

Going into the final day's racing, the teams of Sly/Gillies and White/Koerner left the beach on equal points, skipping ahead of the rest of the fleet.

The first race of the day was sailed in light conditions with Sly/Gillies hitting the lead for the first time in the race with only 150m to go to the finish. This win gave Sly/Gillies a one-point buffer over White/Koerner. With a shark sighting on the course area, the final race of the day was abandoned giving James Sly and Andrew Gillies sailing *Frances Shingleton Real Estate*, back-to-back Australian Titles.

– Martin Sly



ABOVE: The 29er fleet sets off in a heat of the Nationals in South Australia.

ABOVE RIGHT: James Sly and Andrew Gillies won the 29er title by a solitary point.

FAR LEFT: Evidence of success... LSC's busy rigging area as participants get ready for a morning's racing.

ABOVE LEFT: The author and six year old son Tom enjoy a quick ride as the breeze builds. Fun for dad, and the ideal way to introduce a youngster to the sport.

LEFT: "Today, we'll try a pursuit race..." Organiser Mark Rasmussen talks to participants prior to the morning's activities

about the approach taken by LSC.

"I had begun racing at the beginning of the season after many years away from dinghies. My grandchildren weren't really old enough to go out and race in the serious stuff – it was too long and rather intimidating being so far from shore in breezy conditions. I was also battling to get up to the speed I thought I should be able to achieve in the fleet racing. By dropping back to the start-to-race group, I found that the grandchildren had a much more positive experience and will be far better prepared to participate in the real thing in future. Also, the on-water coaching from class veterans meant that I learned quickly the essential things that will help me understand the idiosyncrasies of our Heron."

LSC Commodore Michelle Garland observed: "The program has provided the club with fresh goals with a new fleet emerging. This has energised longer standing members of the club and encouraged greater enthusiasm and more volunteers. In an effort to ease the load on regular rescue boat crews we started using members who had recently gained their motor boat licences through another program initiated by the club. The flow-on effect has been more support for the rescue

boat crews and more integration between new sailors and old.

"We also found that some of the tasks traditionally undertaken by one or two members are being done by other members - new skills are being learned, generating more interest in the program and greater versatility within the club. LSC is seeking to expand its fleet with Optimists to continue to catch the interest and learning curve generated by the start-to-race phenomenon."

The other unwitting winner has been the local Heron class. New owners have trickled into the class at a steady rate, allowing the previously dwindling fleet to revitalise as learners became more competent and chose the class as the first boat their family would own. Skippers also came to the party by accepting that this was an opportunity to reinvigorate their class. As a result they chose to accommodate their new classmates by modifying the format of their state titles to make the races shorter and fewer in number, thus encouraging the new participants to take the third step and compete for real.

Perhaps the experience of LSC can provide a template for other clubs interested in boosting numbers and introducing dinghy sailing to a wider audience.

Results

1. Frances Shingleton Real Estate (Sly/Gillies Vic) 25,
2. Jimmy West (White/Koerner NSW) 26,
3. Catalina (Rielly/Rooklyn NSW) 48,
4. Dardy Patrol (Roberts/Glaskin WA) 65,
5. Cold Fire (Carr/Smith WA) 68.5,
6. Viper Fish (Rankin/Hudson QLD) 73,
7. Frequent Flyer (Lahey/Rushton QLD) 74,
8. Fledging (Lloyd/Lainson Vic) 75,
9. Valhalla (Lloyd/Rae Vic) 93,
10. Tiger Fish (Rankin/Brake QLD) 99.