



an update from Big Bird

by STEPHEN BARTON

ALTHOUGH OBVIOUSLY enjoying the inshore sanctity of flat water within Pittwater and Broken Bay whilst racing and going for picnic sails, we have found offshore sailing not only brings other joys and challenges but also helps to reaffirm how beautiful our home waters are.

So beautiful in fact, that sometimes after finishing a race, instead of dropping sails, we turn around and go out for another sail ... just because we can. When the golden light of the setting sun lights up the sandstone headlands and surrounding bushland and we have this amazing waterway totally to ourselves, well, it's quite breath taking even after the millionth time.

But to racing, the reason why most boats are out on the water:

The RMYC's 2007/2008 summer twilight series, allowing only working sails, usually had at least 100 boats on the water with 19 multihull entries and the all-seasons Saturday multihull series allowing as many sails as you can hoist, unfurl, drop, furl, change, and rehoist, (on *Big Bird* we carry at least 10 sails!) had 17 entrants and we generally see 10-15 cats and tris on the start line, with a combined two series total of at least 21 different boats each week. Fairly healthy and, by the way, we have plenty of boats looking for crew so if you want to go for a one off sail or want to be an irregular or regular crew you should get in contact with us. Check out the RMYC Broken Bay website.

The number of multihulls around must be getting close to the 'critical mass' stage yet people still buy monos! I'm not sure

Big Bird being chased out of Sydney Harbour by SSAA fleet. (above)

why. And it's so surprising that with the sponsored Oatley Wines on Saturdays and Pelandri Wines on Monday twilights given for prizes being so enjoyable how many only-moderate or even non-drinkers there are in the multihull fleet! Sensible mutihullers – strange!

There has been a flurry of buying, selling and refurbishing boats.

Yet we still need many more boats to reach our aim of at least 20 multis starting each race but with additional boats soon to hit the water we should see that number soon enough. It's very good, too, to see a full spectrum of

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multihull designs racing ranging from Darren's (recently sold) diminutive and sporty little Grainger 071 tri *Silent Running* to the luxurious Spirited 380 bridge deck cat, Seawind 1000s, a plethora of Farrier/Corsair trailerable tris, Bill Salisbury's 40' twin masted cat *Shotover II*, Peter Barron's self designed and built cat *Bluey Zarzoff (III)* based on two Burgess trimaran floats and many others. Recent additions or swap overs include, Alan Brand's Corsair Sprint *Zorro II*, Darren Drew's recently purchased Grainger all carbon super-Raider *Indian Chief* (ex *Max*), David Bishop's recently purchased and refurbished Grainger 30 sports cat *Rapid Ride*, Brian Marshall's soon to be launched giant new Chincogan 52, Rowan Walter's Seawind 1000XL *Endless Summer*, Doug Cumming's Egan 9.5 tri *Voodoo Spirit* and more.

Ocean races

Beyond the protected shores of Broken Bay the RMYC Sailing Division's Ocean

Racing Series, which openly invites and includes multihulls into the mono fleet and the pointscore, has seen Jason Geddes' Crowther 41 *Quickstep* trounce all comers including all the monos and the multihulls *Big Bird* and Jim Geddes' Spindrift 44 *Te Arawa* in anything more than a few knots of breeze. These 20-50 mile races are a fabulous way to enjoy the coastline, see whales (sometimes at very close range) and give us a chance to let our multihulls spread their wings whilst having some full-on racing. With most of the races returning to Pittwater you can put the boat safely back on the mooring at the end of the day. As far as the

Blithe Spirit starting SSAA ocean race from Balmoral.





On a 30ft trimaran even moderate seas and wind can be lots of fun – downwind.

management committee of the Sailing Division is concerned the inclusion of the multis is, in their words, considered “a no brainer, as they’re all boats and the more the merrier”.

The Short Handed Sailing Association of Australia (SSAA)

Talking about ocean sailing, the SSAA conducts a series of offshore races in which multihulls are not only warmly

welcomed, start with and sail the same courses as the other boats but also, as of this season, included in the main fleet’s pointscore. This association is run out of the gorgeous Olde World and historical SASC (Sydney Amateur Sailing Club) in Cremorne. This winter based series of races for solo or two or three handed boats has most of its starts from Balmoral and includes races (approximately one per month) to Port Stephens, Newcastle, Botany Bay return, Pittwater return, a polar challenge (out to a longitude and back) and a coastal 200 miler which has replaced the 430 mile Lord Howe Island race.

I’d like to report about last year’s 200 miler because I want to share the fun we had (since none of you were there!) but firstly, I have just looked at the ‘Sea breeze’ site (Google ‘Seabreeze’ for an amazing weather site) to check out what the wind recording instruments positioned on North Head said that we had had in the Polar Challenge. A pretty good fleet of 10 monos had lined



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Contemplating another glorious sunset or maybe wondering where the headlamp torch got to? (above)

Typical view of *Quickstep* as it pulls away going out to sea. (below)

up for the 10am start with a Farr 40 AFR *Midnight Rambler* and a Sydney 38 seen as *Big Bird's* biggest competition. With a 15kt westerly gusting to 22 until 11.15am we were confident (prematurely as it turned out) of not only winning but also getting back to Newport quickly. How wrong was !!

With the wind due westerly for the start and taking us with a couple of gybes straight out of The Heads, I chose (possibly to co-crew Darryl's dismay) the starboard tack option south-east out to the 12 mile away longitude. After one hour of anxiously sitting on 12-15s with too much (masthead) kite hoisted on the 15-20kt downwind leg and struggling a bit trying to keep the rudder working and with reasonable progress also made back upwind, *Big Bird* arrived near Fairy Bower and three miles offshore crossing tacks with the Farr 40. The weather forecast had predicted and the wind records showed that the boats that went down wind on a port tack to the north were favoured when they u-turned at the imaginary longitudinal line with the wind shifting to the north-west. Silly me. But what about this! 11.15am-2.30pm; NW dropping from 15 to 4 knots. 2.30pm; SE 5 knots. 2.45pm; SW 2 knots., 3-4 pm; NE 4 -7knots. How can you read that? The Farr 40 on our port side and the Sydney 38 on our starboard both got a whiff of wind as we languished in the middle of the entrance to the Heads with a huge freighter doing a 90° turn right at us and, yes, both those yachts beat us! A bit frustrating! But motoring back to Pittwater with a beautiful amber and deep red sunset on a flat sea and a rising full moon whilst packing up saw us happily back at the RMYC in good time to have a beer and rum. Despite that ridiculous wind it was a really pleasant day out.



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Max sailing nicely in 2007 Brisbane to Gladstone.

Multihull's history of short handed racing

The coveted SSAA Multihull Champion trophy is, curiously, a mounted bent nine inch long by half inch thick brass nail from the rudder of *HMS Porpoise* that sunk in Queensland in 1803. The last boat to win it was Paul Nudd's Crowther Shockwave 38' Cat XL2 in 1994 sailing with Brendan Egan. The only two other winners dating back to 1989 are Cathy Hawkins and Ian Johnstone on their (also famous) Crowther 40' tri named *MMI Express* but more commonly known as *Bullfrog/ Verbatim/Baleena* etc and Bob Dunne with Gavin LeSeuer on *Escapade* in 1990.

This last season saw some close battles between Neville Stanford's recently circumnavigating Super Shockwave 42.5

Blithe Spirit and my Grainger MTB 920 *Big Bird*. Unfortunately, Neville couldn't contest the series concluding 200 miler and with the points gained entering that race *Big Bird* has now become the most recent recipient of the Bent Nail trophy.

But it was a somewhat anticlimactic way to win the series and having Neville there to contest the series in that final race would have been exciting. Never the less, it was still a fun and challenging race as some of the monos are definitely a challenge for *Big Bird's* modest speed.

The 200 mile Two Islands Race

It was a relief and much appreciated to have two very pleasant blokes on board, despite my Frenchman Martin unfortunately, and uncharacteristically, feeling crook and *Big Bird* first timer Paul

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("Gee, I've never been on a boat with a spinnaker before!") who claimed he is usually an insomniac, both sleeping for large portions of the race. I find the anticipation and experience of sleep deprivation quite unpleasant and potentially dangerous so I was very happy to accept the double penalty of 7.5% added to my time and no auto helm (which I don't have anyway) for having three onboard.

Besides, there's no way an autohelm would know how to deal with the various steering characteristics of *Big Bird* which, depending on the wind strength, boat speed, the sail combination aloft and the size and characteristics of wave action, and can result in weather helm, cavitation, sudden severe lee helm and more. For example, when fully powered upwind the weather helm will disappear if you pull away a few degrees and the speed rises suddenly from a pedestrian 10kts to well over 14kts. At these speeds, despite the boat's ample weight, especially when fully configured for offshore Cat. 3 plus life raft, the middle hull lifts a bit and with it sitting on its belly there is buggie-all rudder in the water. The boat then wants to run away and get powered up very quickly (read: wants to go arse over tit) necessitating a big push on the tiller. Nevertheless, by steering

from the 'bus seat' out near the windward float you can, with concentration and effort, get the boat in the groove and sail quite high at those sorts of faster speeds. But a balanced sail configuration is critical. All par for the course on these types of trimarans. Maybe a longer rudder or rudders in the floats would help?

As usual for most multis in strong breeze, having smaller sails up is faster, safer and more relaxing than being over-powered.

The first leg to Bird Island, 45 miles north of Sydney just shy of Newcastle, was a light eight to 10kt tight reach and the masthead kite on the rather bendy 46ft rotating wing mast had me very stressed out and anxious about the top 2.5m of mast. With the running back stay wound on tight pretty much keeping the stick in column and with runs of up to 15kts down the long low swell we established a small but handy lead by the time we rounded Bird Island and headed off 95 miles south to the toothbrush shaped Flinder's Islet off Port Kembla.

The wind turned very light from the north and so at about midnight and feeling comfortable with the fractional kite up I had to have a lie down but, as my head was next to the centreboard case, I was soon woken by the rising crescendo of the hissing noise coming



Grand Master of Pittwater Kurt Ottowa from F-28R *Scud* receives the inaugural presentation of 'John and Margaret Partridge Perpetual Trophy' from Margaret Partridge. (above)

After her Brisbane to Gladstone dunking *Max* sustained some minor damage but new owner, Darren Drew, has fixed her up beautifully and relaunched her as *Indian Chief*. (below)



Twiggy's float was nearly broken in two pieces. Note the bow shaped hole on main hull. Repaired by Peter Barron it is now looking better than ever in new grey livery. (below)

Indian Chief (formerly Max) and Voodoo Spirit both now call Pittwater home. (bottom)

through the hull. I opened one eye and could see the focussed and smiling face (or was that grimacing?) of the now miraculously recovered Martin. I stuck my sleepy head out the companionway and could see in the moonlight that the wind had increased, as there were 'plenty of sheep in the paddock'. Not surprisingly, the required course had gone out the window and heating up the apparent wind angle to find the highest top speed had become the crew's primary aim. Larrikins!

We gybed back towards Australia and although it was fun flying through the

night at 15-18kts I was now worried that we were going to reach the little rocky speck in the pitch darkness between the time the moon set at 3am and when the sun was to rise a few hours later. I need not have worried as the wind completely dropped away and we drifted around the tiny island in blazing sunlight. As we tiptoed north for the beginning of the final 65-mile leg the chasing boats brought the predicted nor'easter down with them.

By midday we were leaping and bashing our way over and through 2.5m cresting waves and a solid 25kt nor'easter with two reefs and a no 3. The coast is angled north-east to Sydney so it was dead upwind to dig ourselves out of Wollongong. Despite the conditions the boat felt pretty good and solid, and we only fell awkwardly into a couple of steep troughs. But we got a jolt when looking back down wind we could see a set of sails emerge through the salt mist. We were wet, tired, and getting thrown around a bit but with only 12 miles to go determined not to be overtaken so we were back into race mode. "Damn the breaking waves – stop pinching and bring on full power", but alas, we soon worked out the sails were obviously of a yacht leaving Botany Bay and going southward down wind.

The sun was setting when we got to South Head and as we pulled away the breeze funnelling through the heads was



a crazy 30kts and with the water fairly flat we flew towards the finish just inside the harbour at over 20kts on the edge of control and, as it turned out, four hours in front of the next boat after 40 hours of racing. Race over. So we dropped Martin off at Clontarf, near the Spit Bridge, because he was quite over feeling crook and Paul and I headed back out to sea for the 20 mile bash back up to Pittwater straight into the teeth of the black nor'easter.

With having virtually no sleep I was exhausted and fell asleep at the tiller off Avalon but fortunately Paul had awoken from his slumber below decks just as we were veering towards the cliffs only a couple of hundred metres away. One of the few times I've appreciated being woken up. The other times I've enjoyed being woken ... never mind! Anyway, Murphy's last-ditch effort was foiled by a little luck.

Other news

There was a pleasingly big turnout of multihullers for the recently held combined (monos and multis) Annual

Presentation Dinner at the RMYC and there were some interesting developments announced.

The multihull and sailing divisions have now put in place a reciprocal block entry arrangement where for a small amount extra (\$45) on top of the annual race fees. Multihulls can now go into all sailing races held by the club. That's potentially over 100 races including Saturday races, Monday twilights, the Friday arvo 'Chicken Run', Sunday Whitworths Series, and the Ocean series. The monos, in turn are able to enter our races too.

Also, Margaret Partridge was on hand for the inaugural presentation of 'The Margaret and John Partridge Perpetual Trophy'. This trophy was commissioned to be a perpetual reminder of the wonderful contribution they made to the formation and running of the multihull division over many years. It was an excellent coincidence that the first presentation of this trophy was made to Kurt Ottawa (*Scud*) who was a close friend of the late John Partridge. He was awarded this trophy for winning the most

line honours in the previous year. Out of 36 races he had crossed the line in first place 18 times and all in a fairly stock standard F-28R whilst five other boats had won the remaining 18. Kurt has been the most prolific line honours winner for many years and he also won the overall prize for PHS honours for this year.

Also announced was the introduction of an ocean race for Cat. 4 multihulls on the Friday of the upcoming 12th Annual Lock Crowther Memorial Regatta (principally sponsored by APC Logistics) and held, as usual, on the October Long Weekend. This will be in addition and separate to the usual inshore four race regatta.

So, if you're up for it, there's a whole lot of multihull racing going on but, as many of you know, despite racing being so much fun and encouraging us to regularly go sailing, when it's all said and done there's nothing more relaxing than going for a nice cruise sail and having a picnic and a swim with family and friends or just sitting on the deck and simply watching the sunset after a nice day on the water.

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