

Good Fortune for Women Sailing Dragons

By Susie Parker and Rob Hubbard

In Japan, the dragon represents a symbol of good fortune, and they bring us happiness! How true this symbolism proved to be for the teams in the WAIDA and RFBYC International Dragon Class Women's Helm Regatta sailed on Sunday 15 October.

Perfect racing conditions greeted the 30 sailors who gathered on the dock to rig nine Dragons kindly made available by their generous owners. The short-course regatta provides an opportunity for experienced women sailors to try sailing a Dragon, and for owners to get their boats (and crew) ready and on the water prior to the summer sailing season commencing.

Its also a great refresher for owners who generally take-up a position of crew, even going as far forward as the foredeck, to allow the guest skipper to take over the steering compartment!

Although 10 helmswomen had been paired with ten boats and their owner/crew, nine headed out to the racecourse. It's a statement of the strength of the Dragon Class at RFBYC that even in a practice match, a fleet of nine can be competing.

Race Officer Rob Hubbard provided the onshore briefing and then like magic, conjured up a terrific 10 knot easterly breeze from a direction of around 070 degrees. With foresight akin to having a crystal ball, Rob brought the first warning signal forward by 30 minutes to ensure sufficient races could be held before the wind eased at 1pm.

It was just as well that some preseason sailing was part of the *Relentless* team of Susie Parker, Davo and Jack Lynn's sailing program. Having gone all out to get *Relentless* pumped up (literally, the jinker tyres were flat all winter) and entirely re-rigged, the newly swaged ferule securing the mainsail halyard loop gave way on the way to the start line. The halyard retreated inside the mast while the mainsail collapsed into the cockpit. However, good fortune was in store for Robyn Johnston and her *Seajoy* team. They returned to the dock with a spinnaker problem and did a quick swap for the *Relentless* spinnaker so they could complete three of the four races. That's the spirit of the Dragon fleet.

Rob Hubbard set the course up with the start/finish boat east of the club marina, and with input from WA's top mark-layer in John Anderson, the top marks were laid on an axis of 070 and distance of 0.43nm. The wind direction was fluctuating from 050 to 090 and the pressure ranged from 4 to 12 knots. This really put pressure on the experienced race management team, which included three former Commodores, as well as being demanding on the sailors. However, these conditions resulted in tremendous and close racing.

The aim was to run up to 4 races each with a target duration of around 30 minutes. The weather gods were on side, allowing the Race Officer to run the 4 races (two 3 lappers and two 2 lappers) only having to rejig the course once. Although as is the case with a fluctuating breeze, the start-line angle was continually changed through the use of the start boat anchor. As predicted by the RO, the fourth and last race finished in the dying wind.

The racing was close. Leaders fluctuated and opportunities to find 'their own wind' were seized. Three helmswomen shared line honours. After Race 3 only three points separated the top three, so the trophy was up for grabs with Race 4 and the opportunity to drop the worst score.

Another name has now joined the list of winners of the Saracen Plate with Jen Richardson sailing *Scoundrel* with Willy and Jock Packer being awarded first place in the Regatta. Jen was a clear winner from Philippa Packer in Ray Chatfield's *Wizzardry* and Mia Lovelady sailing *French Connection*

The gathering of skippers, owners, crew and volunteers in the Dinghy Training Centre after the racing demonstrated the symbolism of the Dragon as being of good fortune and happiness. The joy of sailing, displaying skills and competitiveness in a fair and friendly manner, was keenly evident.

The helmswomen thank:

Race Officer – Rob Hubbard and his team of on-water volunteers

Mark Layer and Chief Organiser – John Anderson

WAIDA Committee Members and RFBYC Sailing Operations Team

Susie Parker for the Donation of the Saracen Plate

And the very special owners and their yachts;

Gerry McGann's *Seajoy* with Robyn Johnston on helm with Shane Atwell and Gerry.

Ray Chatfield's *Wizzardry* sailed by Philippa Packer with Greg Bell and Ray.

Rob Campbell's *French Connection* sailed by Mia Lovelady with John Longley and Max Maxted.

Willy Packer's *Scoundrel* sailed by Jen Richardson with Jock Packer and Willy.

Kevin Palassis' *Indulgence* sailed by Laura Wheeler with Freek Bijlma, Tracy Bettina and Kevin.

Sandy Anderson's *Blue Marlin* sailed by Caroline Gibson with Deb Henderson, Brad Stout and Sandy.

Ian Malley's *Saphira* sailed by Margot Mathews with Leonie Rochford, Mark Cubitt and Ian.

Trish Ford sailing her *Canewdon Witch* with Graeme Fardon and David Hay.

David Lynn (*Relentless*) and John Anderson (*Gazelle XIV*) for making their boats available.

IMAGE 1 – Caption: Rob Parker and Andrew Locke presenting the Saracen Plat to winner Jen Richardson

IMAGE 2 – Caption: Helmswomen (L-R) Trish Ford, Margot Mathews, Caroline Gibson, Laura Wheeler, Jen Richardson, Philippa Packer, Mia Lovelady, Robyn Johnston with Sandy Anderson.