

# Top of the Gulf

## REGATTA

Held from the 4th to 8th of May 2017, the 13th Top of the Gulf Regatta attracted a range of local Thai keelboats but surprisingly few outsiders apart from the cruising boat, *Lady Bubbly*, from Australia and the IRC Div 1 yacht, *Loco*, from Singapore. Even offers of free berthing for participants at the organiser's Ocean Marina, Jomtien, on their way to join the Samui Regatta, didn't attract more.

Considered the largest multi-class regatta in the region, it was again disappointing for the organizers that there were not enough entries to open certain of the classes including IRC Racing 2 and no entries for F18 and Open Beach Multihulls, while the windsurfers were again missing.

Numbers have been down this past year in most of Asia's regattas other than in China. The Top of the Gulf, though, still provided competitive racing in all classes, especially amongst the 11 mostly chartered Platus, representing six countries, entered in the Platu Coronation Cup.

Similarly the Optimist fleet, competing in the 44th Thai Optimist National Championship, which is also open to overseas teams, saw a marked reduction from in excess of 120 boats in recent years to 79. This was partly explained by the Hua Hin Regatta being held only at the end of April, causing logistical problems in moving some of the Optimist fleet. Also this year, Thailand hosted the World Optimist Championships at the Royal Veruna Yacht Club in July followed by participation in the SEA Games in Malaysia in August. So, budget constraints were more than likely another issue.

Optimists from abroad included Costa Rica, India and the Sharks from the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club.

A total of 45 participated in the dinghy races in single- and double-handed Laser Standards, Radials, 4.7s 420s and 470s including Malaysian, Russian and French entries.

The fleet was, however, boosted by the introduction of IOM Remote Controlled Yachts (IOM RCY) with some 20 entries. That's certainly one way to boost numbers.

All told, including the keelboats and dinghies, but excluding the IOM RCY, 147 (2016 : 269).

Racing was split between three race areas with keelboats and multihulls under the supervision of race officer, Denis Thompson, from Australia.

### Day 1 FRIDAY 5th May 2017

The morning had started dark and stormy but, by the scheduled start at 1100, the skies were beginning to brighten.

First off into a 15- to 16-knot breeze on a windward / leeward were Kirati Assakul's Crowther 42, *Sonic*, and Bob Garner's Corsair 28, *Bladerunner 7*, both multihulls.

Cruising were next off with Pote Suyasinto's Jeanneau 42i taking on Dwight Willis' Beneteau Oceanis 54, *Thida Waree*, and Chris Mitchell's Adams Naut 40, *Lady Bubbly*.

In IRC Div 1, David Dimmock's NY Club Swan 42, *Loco*, took on the challenge of Scott Bradley's Sydney 40, *Imagine*, and Kevin Whitcraft's TP52, *THA72*.

— continued overleaf

*Lady Bubbly* makes 3.32 knots, crew nip below for refreshments

**Continued from previous page** — *THA72* at the pin end came in on port tack just managing to avoid the others.

IRC Div 3 immediately followed with the Jeanneau 35, *Magic* (ex-*Magic Roundabout*), taking on Gary Baguley's Holman & Pye 52, *El Coyote*, Martin Brown's Cal 33, *Nautical Wheeler*, and Tim McMahon's X-99, *Sail Quest Hi Jinks*.

Last off were the 11 Platus in Class 4, competing in the prestigious 22nd Platu Coronation Cup which commemorates the late King Rama IX. Surprisingly, Scott Duncanson with his Kingdom Property team was not back to defend his title, giving other long term challengers a fighting chance. Chris Way and his Easy Tiger III Team from Australia were back, along with Rolf Heemskerk and Team Viewpoint having recruited Steve McConaghy to join them. Colin Simmonds (UK) skippered *Wikki* with Warwick Downes back for another crack at the Cup.

The Singapore Management University (SMU) have been regular supporters of the event and this year entered three Platu teams. Collin Lim's *Stingray*, Alison Chia's (No Name) and Bernice Koo's *Nam Prix*.

Russia was represented by Valerly Dichenko and colleagues on *Naiad*

Local teams included *Pine-Pacific*, *The Royal Thai Navy* and Jeremy Smart's *Pim*.

It got particularly congested at the leeward mark with the Platus and other classes all converging on the same gate. After the first lap, the RO was obliged to move the windward mark to 160 degrees.

Normally a passage race follows the first windward / leeward but, bearing in mind the easing conditions, the RO opted instead for a second windward / leeward. The Multihulls were off again at 1340.

At the end of the day, *Sonic* had won both line and handicap honours in both races.

Likewise, *Lady Bubbly* had made it two in a row, with *Le Vent* 2nd and *Thida Waree* 3rd.

*THA72* took line honours in both races but was surprisingly beaten on handicap in the last by *Emagine*.

*El Coyote* put in a strong performance in IRC Div 3, also claiming the daily double in both races.

The Platu fleet, with a maximum of 10 races scheduled over the four days with a discard available after completing six or more races, managed to get in a third race.

In the first, Team Viewpoint came in on port tack at the windward mark but also got away with it.

*Pine-Pacific* were off to a good start and more than held their own, taking two bullets in the first two races followed by a 6th in the last of the day.

Team Easy Tiger III placed 6th in Race 2 with 2nd in Races 1 & 2. *Wikki* finished down the pack in Races 1 & 2 but claimed victory in Race 3 to keep hopes alive.

The evening's awards presentation was held on the lawn at Ocean Marina with canapés and free flow Singha beer, wine and Mount Gay, at least for a couple of hours.

## Day 2 SATURDAY 6th May 2017

FH had the pleasure of joining Chris Mitchell and crew on *Lady Bubbly*. Having competed in the Raja Muda and Phuket events over the past few years, Mitchell was keen to stretch his wings and try the Gulf of Thailand events.

It was bright and sunny with a 4- to 5-knot breeze which, initially, caused the RO to raise the postponement (AP) flag. The Multihulls finally got away 40 minutes later sent on a windward / leeward, with the mark at 1.4nm at 290 degrees.

The Cruising fleet was next off on an island race heading offshore to a distant mark, before returning around Koh Rang Kwian and back to the finish. *Le Vent* got a head start and led the fleet around the outer mark. The wind pressure looked promising, lifting *Lady Bubbly* forwards, but that all changed approaching the mark, knocking it off course, and forcing it to go further than intended.

For some unknown reason, *Lady Bubbly* seemed to be lacking speed and experiments with sailing higher with the asymmetrical failed to generate any gains. So the skipper reverted to jib, which eked out about a one half knot gain.

Meanwhile, *Thida Waree*, which had trailed by seven minutes at the mark, was making rapid gains and overhauled *Lady Bubbly* at Koh Rang Kwian (Battleship Island). Rounding the island to starboard, it was up with the spinnaker and a run back to the finish. Meanwhile, *Thida Waree* got left behind having to cover wider angles with its asymmetric.

With *Le Vent* finishing at 3:17:48 and giving *Lady Bubbly* time, Mitchell estimated he needed to finish within about 14 minutes to take handicap honours. Fortunately the breeze picked up marginally, with boat speed creeping up to 5 knots until *Lady Bubbly* finished at 3:33:19. It came as a considerable surprise for all onboard when it



was learnt that this had just been in time to take handicap honours by five seconds. Reason to celebrate indeed!

Meanwhile, IRC Div 1 & 3 had been given a windward / leeward and followed by a 14nm race around

Koh Rang Kwian and back to the committee vessel. *Emagine* again took the honours in Race 1 with *THA72* redeeming itself in the second with both line and handicap honours.

In IRC Div 3, *El Coyote* added two further bullets with *Magic* trading 2nd and 3rd with *Nautical Wheeler*.

*Bladerunner 7* upped its game in its two races winning both to finish tied with *Sonic* on six points each in the series after four races.

The evening awards function at Ocean Marina was, as always, a social affair with much interaction between crews analyzing the day's performances and reminiscing over deeds and misdeeds. In *Lady Bubbly's* case, its celebrations continued with an excellent seafood meal at a neighbouring rustic restaurant on the beach.

## Day 3 SUNDAY 7th May 2017

This time FH had the pleasure of rejoining Gary Baguley's *El Coyote* in IRC Div 3.

Again, the breeze started light but, after a one-hour delay, things perked up and down came the AP flag at 1159.

Multihulls were again given a windward / leeward followed by the Cruising fleet on Course 19 taking a windward mark at 0.5nm to starboard.

IRC Div 1 & 3 likewise followed on a two lap windward / leeward but slightly shorter for Div 3.

Meanwhile, dark grey clouds were forming ashore with heavy rain showers drifting along the coast.

In IRC Div 3, *El Coyote* was closing on the finish line with *Magic* ahead as the rain squall hit. This certainly helped the tail-enders who made up considerable ground. However, *Magic* almost broached at the finish missing the line and was obliged to go around and try again. This proved costly as it might otherwise have given it line honours and beaten *El Coyote* into 2nd place on handicap behind the fast-finishing *Nautical Wheeler* which claimed corrected honours.

A second race got underway for IRC Div 1 with the fleet sent on a passage race to Pattaya.

However once away the RO had a change of heart for some of the other fleets and sensibly, as it turned out, gave them another windward / leeward, shortened after one lap

In the Multihulls, *Bladerunner 7* retired after limping home in the first race with a torn main and headed back to the marina. Meanwhile *Sonic* was late to start the 2nd race and, with no competition, likewise headed back to the marina.

In Cruising, *Le Vent* had led the fleet before hitting a hole, which both *Lady Bubbly* and *Thida Waree* managed to skirt. Having raised its kite for the downwind leg, it lasted barely 400 metres before reverting to a beat back to the finish with *Lady Bubbly* adding its 4th bullet for the regatta.

*El Coyote* restored some pride with a win in the 2nd race of the day in IRC Div 3.

At the end of the day, in the dying breeze in IRC Div 1, *Emagine* had taken the honours in Race 1, while it was *Loco's* turn to take the 2nd passage race.

Three races for the Platus saw the three series leading boats trading positions. The Russians on *Naiad* won the first race and finished 2nd in the second. Team Easy Tiger III finished 2nd and 3rd while Team Viewpoint scored a 3rd and won the last race. After eight races, Team Easy Tiger III led the fleet on 16 points, Team Viewpoint was 2nd on 20 and *Naiad* 3rd with 23. It was still anyone's Cup.

The evenings awards included the prizegiving for the dinghy and Optimist fleets. Panwa Boonnak was crowned the new Thai Optimist National Optimist Champion.

## Day 4 MONDAY 8th May 2017

Conditions were brighter for the final day with racing only slightly delayed. Another windward / leeward with marks set at 1.7 and 1.3nm at 230 degrees.

A significant windshift again saw the windward mark relayed for the second rounding. In Cruising this resulted in a protest by *Lady Bubbly* after observing from behind *Le Vent* and *Thida Waree* both rounding the wrong mark. Its protest was subsequently upheld and both offending boats were disqualified.

*Lady Bubbly* won the series, *Le Vent* 2nd and *Thida Waree* 3rd.

In IRC Div 3, honours for the day were shared between *Nautical Wheeler* and *El Coyote* with *Magic* 3rd in both races. *El Coyote* took the series with *Nautical Wheeler* 2nd, *Magic* 3rd and *Hi Jinks* bringing up the rear.

In Multihulls' one race, *Bladerunner 7* took line honours but *Sonic* again claimed handicap honours as well as the series win.

In IRC Div 1, *Loco* continued its winning streak taking the first race ahead of *Emagine* while *THA72* redeemed itself in the last

to finish ahead of both *Loco* and *Emagine*. Still *Emagine* had done enough to secure the series relegating *THA72* to 2nd with *Loco* 3rd.

In the Platus, *The Ferret*, no longer in contention for a podium finish, led at the windward mark and went on to beat Team Viewpoint to the finish. Going into the final race Easy Tiger III's lead over Team Viewpoint was now cut to just three points with everything still to play for.

In the final race, *Naiad* took the lead heading downwind for the finishing line. Four boats Team Viewpoint, Team Easy Tiger III, *Pine-Pacific* and *Wikki* were neck and neck perfectly aligned, kites full, running to the finish. All four finished within 7 seconds of each other: Team Viewpoint 2nd at 1435; *Pine-Pacific* 3rd one second back; 4th was *Wikki* at 1441, and Team Easy Tiger III 5th at 1442. This tied them with Team Viewpoint on 24 points. On count back, Team Viewpoint lifted the title and the Coronation Cup.

Having previously been in contention to win, Team Viewpoint's Rolf Heemskerk was obviously delighted but unfortunately he had already made early departure plans so left it to Steve McConaghy to receive the glory at the official presentation.

The evening's closing function was in a more confined area of the grounds of Ocean Marina, which made it seem perhaps more intimate and brought the curtain down on another successful Top of the Gulf regatta.

Organisers Scott Finsten and Bill Gasson, in conjunction with the Ocean Marina team, did a fine job, but let's hope with a possible expansion of the charter fleet it will be better supported next year.

