



The late Kris Assakul, Ocean Marina founder, would be proud of his offspring who live their father's dream of developing a marina for water sports at Jomtien, along the coast from Pattaya, in the Gulf of Thailand. Ocean Marina has, for six years now, hosted the Top of the Gulf Regatta and the popularity of the event and success of the development have gone hand in hand.

The regatta is organised by Ocean Marina Yacht Club in conjunction with the Yacht Racing Association of Thailand and this year's principal sponsors were PTT Extraction & Production, Lexus and Thailand's Tourism Authority.

With 246 participating craft it is now the biggest regatta in Asia. While some might argue that 129 Optimists inflate statistics, FH would disagree. The organiser has successfully integrated the Coronation Cup for Platus and the Optimist-Thailand Nationals — no easy logistical task. The youngsters, aged eight to 14, add an amazing energy to the event, joining the après sailing and award parties and applauding loudly (especially when a Thai receives a gong). Long may they be encouraged by thoughtful organisers as they are the future of the sport in Asia. Incidentally, other Thai regattas appear to be following suit — the Sawadee.com Regatta includes young sailors and last year's King's Cup had a dinghy division.

Despite the political situation in Bangkok, sailors came from far and wide to join the

Top of the Gulf Regatta 2010, held from the 1st to the 4th of May 2010. All was not plain sailing, though. The breeze would not co-operate in the first two days and, when it did, it swung 180 degrees and turned an upwind to a downwind start!

Past sponsors Raimon Land were conspicuous by their absence, reflected perhaps in the less extravagant entertainment. Needless to say, Thai hospitality never failed, with endless barbecues, Singha beer and Mont Claire South African wine.

Saturday 1st May 2010

The skippers' briefing for keelboats at 0900 kicked off the first day of racing whereupon crews headed out from the marina to one of three designated race areas, with others for the Optimists and another for the dinghies and beachcats. Access to a marina certainly avoids the panic and drama of boarding longtails or RIBs although, admittedly, that does have a charm of its own.

It was during final preparations before the 1100 start that news arrived of the increased violence in Bangkok, but that seemed worlds away.

It quickly became apparent that there was a range of sailing competencies on the water, from seriously experienced (*Evolution Racing*, for example) to what could best be described as beginners. One participant called in to ask race officer, Jerry Rollin to describe an E flag!

The light 6-knot breeze was frustrating for many and particularly *Dynamite*, which got caught in irons at the pin end in the second start for IRC Racing 2 and Sports Boats. Meanwhile at the other end of the line *Magic Roundabout* and *Constanza* cleared the committee boat in cleaner air.

In Class 4 for Platus, *Naiad* was obviously well over as it tracked the line but took an inordinate amount of time to return.

In Class 3, the Cruising fleet was something of a hodgepodge ranging from the Beneteau 21.7, *Tai Too*, to the Oyster 48, *Celere*. Perhaps most surprising was the MacGregor 26, *UpYorsHoopa*, although it was soon to retire. With the inclusion of a gate at the leeward mark there appeared, on occasions, confusion for some whether this required going through and round, or round and through.

In the Ocean Multihull start, all got away clearly with the Concordia 70, *Arizona*,



gracing the start before retiring (just too much for a couple to handle).

Meanwhile the wind appeared to strengthen with *Katsu* running into difficulties gybing and had to drop its kite and turn full circle before making its final approach to the line.

The RO was keen to get the second race underway and, as the entire Platu fleet had finished, they were first off in Race 2 on an islands course.

During the intermission it was most enlightening listening to Henry Kaye of *Thor* outlining his race strategy having accidentally left his VHF on for the whole world to hear.

Unfortunately for both the Racing and Platu fleets, a misunderstanding in reading a handwritten position for a rounding mark by the person laying the mark, meant it was actually laid some 5nm from the intended position. The RO was called for clarification and the error corrected; he, however, submitted a claim for redress for some of the boats that might have been disadvantaged. Those that were, also sought redress, while *The Stingray* protested both *The Ferret* and *The Fox* for failing to round the designated mark. Eight cases in all for the international jury to consider, including *Evolution Racing*, *Ichu Ban* and AA.

Having won the race, but failed to appear for the meeting, *Evolution Racing* asked for a re-opening of the case after learning that the jury had ruled it was to be resailed.

Their argument was that everyone had a GPS, (at least in their fleet) and could round a virtual mark. This was over-ridden by arguments that GPS gives such widely varying positions and some had lost time looking for the mark which, had it been laid properly, would have resulted in different finishing positions. Although reluctant to abandon a race, the jury stood by its earlier decision that the fairest option was a resail.

The situation was slightly different for the Platus since the mark was subsequently relocated correctly with only the front-runners affected. The first Platu to arrive in the area was *The Fox* and, without GPS (not compulsory), had rounded the virtual mark by following in the wake of a Class 1 Racing boat. *The Ferret* had rounded the virtual mark next using GPS, claiming they sailed further to windward than *The Fox*, which had gained an advantage. A full five minutes separated 1st and 2nd, *The Fox* and *The Ferret*, at the finish. Once again, reluctant to abandon the race and taking all factors into account, the jury felt the best way was to let the results stand.

Sunday 2nd May 2010

Day 2 was to prove equally testing for the RO. With the windward mark set at 155 degrees at 1.7nm, the

AP flag came down at 1100 only to be raised again three minutes later, and the mark relaid.

The Ocean Multihulls were into their start procedures when again the AP was raised at 1136. They finally got away into a lessening breeze. *Sonic 43* did well, reaching along the line. In the Platus, both *The Stingray* and *Kujira* were over eager and both caught OCS.

With just one race scheduled for Cruising, against two for the rest of the boats, the line was altered for a downwind start.

The wind again failed to co-operate and the race was shortened for IRC Racing 1 at the windward mark. Meanwhile onshore a storm was brewing, sucking the wind out of the course. The confused conditions even saw *Ichu Ban* finish at the windward mark under kite.

Sonic 43 tried its spinnaker for a downwind run to the finish but, after a further wind shift, a reach followed back to the windward mark.

The AP flag was again raised before the second race of the day got underway but there were more ominous black clouds and claps of thunder over the land.

This time the bearing was altered to 250 degrees with, again, the mark at 1.7nm. Everyone got away except the Platu fleet which was faced with a sudden 180-degree wind shift. After considering all

— continued overleaf

TOP of the GULF

Regatta





Guay Yai with its intimidating graphics

Continued from previous page — possibilities, including relaying the windward mark, the Platus were given a downwind start. There were grumblings later but the RO really had little option.

Then the heavens opened.

Admirably equipped both with an awning and rain gear the skipper and crew on *Sonic 43* remained relatively dry, the envy of all and particularly those onboard the Corsairs.

Sonic 43, in its final approach to the finish, got caught out by the current and had to put in a final tack costing it at least a few minutes.

Despite the weather it was an enjoyable ride on *Sonic 43* with good teamwork demonstrated amongst the all-Thai crew with Khun Kirati Assakul, owner and son of the Ocean Marina Founder, at the helm.

Shortened courses were the order of the day, yet still there was no sign of the returning Cruising fleet, until a message came through that their race was being shortened at the Varuna yellow buoy.

After two days, *Evolution Racing* finished with two bullets and a 2nd place compared with one bullet and two 2nds for *Ichi Ban*.

In IRC 2, *Royal Thai Navy 1* dominated with four bullets leading *Dynamite* with *Magic Roundabout* and *El Coyote* trading places for lesser honours.

In Cruising, just eight of the 12 starters managed a finish with *Sansanook* holding two bullets and *Kirafiki one*. Scoring under a performance system, handicaps were to be adjusted daily.

In Ocean Multihull, *Thor* had two bullets from four races with David Race's *Freee Wheeler* earning one in Race 1 and the *Dash Hound* the other in Race 3. A 7th and 6th place on the day for *Sonic 43* was not ideal, with stronger winds for the rest of the regatta definitely on their wish list.

All did not go entirely smoothly in the Optimist fleet with over 30 Optimist sailors turning up for a protest meeting with the international jury against their RO, who chose not to attend the hearing. Three competitors requested redress claiming the RO had erred in starting Race 5 in very light winds and strong tidal current. Of 129 participants about 100 were in the starting area of which only 40 approximately started within the four minutes starting period and only 18 finished within the time limit after the RO shortened the final leg. Several boats were spotted sculling for which some took two turn penalties to avoid formal protests. — continued on page 86

Continued from page 22 — It was a great opportunity for the youngsters to experience first-hand the workings of an international jury, particularly under the chairmanship of America's Cup jurist, Bryan Willis. They ultimately ruled that since so few were able to start within the time limit the race should be abandoned and, if possible, resailed. Also, with regards to sculling, a voluntary two-turn penalty does not apply but a breach of Rule 2 (Fair Sailing) may give rise to a hearing under Rule 69 resulting in a substantial penalty.

Monday 3rd May 2010

Formerly based in Hong Kong, two Bavaria yachts, *Kirafiki* and *Reef Knot*, have found new homes in Thailand. *Reef Knot* was under charter with six of its crew doing an International Yacht Training Bare Boat Captain's Course under the watchful eye of Captain Tim McMahon. After three days the crew was beginning to gel — we joined them for the 23nm islands race with a lasting southwesterly.

Initially shut out at the start, *Reef Knot* went round only to be verbally protested by *Naren Thip*. However, the protest was not formally lodged and would have been dismissed according to the RO as no red flag was hoisted. McMahon remained confident that he would have won the protest anyway.

Several of the Cruising fleet stayed inshore, hoping to benefit from a land breeze. On the contrary, *Reef Knot* and *Melissa* preferred to head out to sea, a tactic that paid handsomely. Fortunately the Royal Thai Navy was not using its firing range through which the fleet sailed. The breeze held with *Celere* finishing comfortably ahead to take line honours with *Kirafiki* 2nd and *Reef Knot* 3rd.

Chartered for the fifth time by Tetsuo Ongino and his crew from Japan, it was *Melissa's* race on handicap. 3rd over the line, *Reef Knot* finished 5th on handicap. "Nice wind, close competition, it doesn't get much better," concluded McMahon.

Similarly other classes had been sent on passage races with *Evolution Racing* in IRC 1, *Royal Thai Navy* 1 in IRC 2, *Pornstar* in Sports Boats and *Thor* in Ocean Multihulls taking the honours. The Platu fleet opted for three windward/ leewards with *The Ferret* taking all bullets.

Meanwhile the F18 beachcats, comprising six Hobie Tigers and two Nacra 18s, after finishing a relatively short race, were sent on a 30nm race 'to the end of the earth'. Six hours later it was abandoned.

After seven races Navee Thamsoontorn took Open dinghy on a 420 from Kuanas Kuzeimil. Khairul Nizim (Laser) took the honours from Keerati Bualong (Laser Radial).

Nearing the end of her Optimist sailing career, 2010 World Girl Optimist Champion and 4th Overall in Brazil, Noppakao Poonpat, returned to successfully defend her title for the last time. Ahmad Syukri Abdul Azizi (MAS) took the Optimist Friend title for overseas visitors (23).

Tuesday 4th May 2010

For the final race there was an opportunity to join the short-handed David Race on the Corsair C28R, *Freee Wheeler*, which proved an eye-opening experience. Surprisingly comfortable there was, on occasion, time to relax on both up and downwind legs perhaps more so than on a keelboat. Care was needed, though, when handling the kite to avoid the fate fouling it under the hulls.

With *Thor* having already sewn up 1st place in Ocean Multihulls, it compounded its position with two further bullets in Races 6 and 7. There was still everything to shoot for between *Sonic 43*, *Blade Runner V*, *Cedar Swan* and *Freee Wheeler*.

Second over the line for *Freee Wheeler* resulting in 3rd on handicap and 6th for *Blade Runner V* meant they were both tied on 16.5 points for 2nd (after allowing for one discard). *Cedar Swan* was on 17 points with *Sonic 43* on 18 going into the final.

The stronger breeze favoured *Sonic 43* with its handicap rating. So it proved when its 7th place finish was sufficient to elevate it to 2nd. 3rd across the line for *Freee Wheeler* resulted in a tie with *Dash Hound* for 5th=. *Blade Runner V* hung on for 2nd place with *Cedar Swan* taking 3rd in overall.

With just two competing in Sports Boats it was a disappointing turnout with *Pornstar* taking overall from *Vino*.

In the Hobie 16 fleet, Damrongsak Vongtim did not have it all his own way with four bullets; Nut Butmerased and former H16 world champion, Aaron Worrall, snatched a bullet each

Morten Jakobsen aboard a Nacra F18 finished atop the podium with Sanya

Makinson and Jim Hood 2nd on a Hobie Tiger after their seven races.

In the final race for Cruising, there could be no better way for the crew and skipper of *Reef Knot* to celebrate the completion of their course than with a final victory elevating them to 2nd overall behind *Melissa* with *Kirafiki* 3rd.

Team work and consistency proved critical for *El Coyote* and four 2nd places in the last four races lifted them into 2nd place with overall victory going to *Royal Thai Navy* 1 with a clean sweep of all seven races.

Ichi Ban was not giving up in its race with *Evolution Racing* and two final bullets on handicap meant it was necessary to resail the abandoned Race 2 with *Evolution Racing* gaining the win. In the end, just one point separated them with *Evolution Racing* taking overall 1st place, *Tantrum* finished 3rd.

A disqualification for *The Fox* in Race 6 after an incident with *Jellyfishkiss*, the women's team, also involving *The Stingray*, cost them dearly dropping them from 1st to 2nd place with Scott Duncanson's *The Ferret* collecting the Coronation Cup to bring the curtain down on an enjoyable Top of the Gulf Regatta 2010.

