

Top of the Gulf REGATTA



By Asian standards a turnout of 49 keelboats is a good

number but adding in the 19 beach catamarans, the 37 Lasers, seven 420 and 470 dinghies and 129 Optimists, made The Top of the Gulf 2011 with 241 in total (2010: 246) the biggest in the region. Despite the size, it remains an intimate event with the widest diversity of participants of any regatta we cover.

The regatta, now in its seventh year, was held between the 29th of April and 3rd of May 2011 consolidating a number of events under one umbrella. These included the Thailand Optimist Nationals and the Coronation Cup* for Platus** held to celebrate the anniversary of the 'Sailor King' King Bhumibol Adulyadej's coronation.

Indeed, the regatta has much going for it and continues to attract newcomers including, this year, Neil Pryde's *Hi Fi* and Johannes Waimer's *Team Premier*, which made it a more challenging regatta for regular supporter Ray Roberts' *Evolution Racing*.

After the carnage on Kata Beach during last year's Phuket King's Cup, a major plus for The Top of the Gulf Regatta is the marina facility provided by Ocean Marina Yacht Club, Jomtien, Pattaya, which hosts the event. However, berthing attributes are not the only ones since on-hand are all the necessary marine support facilities, including chandlers and charter boat operators. A number of individuals also play key roles including Chairman of the organising committee Bill Gasson and Kevin Scott (aka Ferret) who prepared



eight of the Platus for participants, including overseas teams, competing in the Coronation Cup.

A past winner of the event, Scott was delighted to see more youngsters competing in the Platus... even if it meant *The Ferret* conceding its crown.

Accommodation is also available at Ocean Marina with several hotel

options in close proximity. The hospitality at the parties and prize-givings was, as always, excellent with free flow Mont Clair wines from South Africa, Singha beer and rum. Needless to say there were few complaints on that score! On the other hand the international jury was kept especially busy!

Racing commenced on Friday, the 29th of April, involving the beach cats, dinghies and Optimists before keel boat racing started the following day.

Saturday
30th April 2011

The regatta traditionally kicks off with a short windward /leeward for all bar IRC Cruising before stretching their wings on a longer passage race, in this case 21 nm (Cruising went straight into the passage race). *Team Premier*, which finished 7th in IRC Racing at last year's Phuket King's Cup, has obviously learnt a thing or two in the meantime and came out with all guns blazing to take line honours in both races in IRC 1, along with handicap honours in Race 1 and 2nd place behind *Evolution Racing* in Race 2.

Former commodore of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, Matt Allen, has been a serious competitor here for a number of years and again demonstrated he meant business in IRC 2 with twin handicap honours.

The Royal Thai Navy's *Navy 1* took line and handicap honours in both IRC 3 races whilst *Amanda* took the honours, ahead of *Free Wind*, in the one race for IRC Cruising.

The Ferret found itself in the unusual position at the bottom of the results list in Platus after a disqualification in the first race, but made partial amends with 2nd place behind *Naiad* in Race 2.

Alan Cawardine's *Bladerunner* took line honours in both Ocean Multihull races and handicap honours in Race 1, with *Cedar Swan* 1st in the second.



Platus start (main), Wan Ma Rang (left inset) and Optimists (above)

Sunday
1st May 2011

Overcast skies and threatening thunderstorms were a contrast from conditions the day before with 40-degree wind shifts, swinging between 90 and 130 degrees. Mechanical problems with one of the support vessels meant the RO, Simon James, was unable to lay a windward mark in time for the start of the cruisers on their preferred passage race, so he included them in a windward /leeward with the rest of the keelboats.

Having delayed the start for over an hour, and with rain clouds threatening, the RO chose to get racing underway, with IRC 1 away first, for fear that after the storm passed the wind might die altogether. A request from the fair weather sailors from Dubai, on *Team Premier*, not to place the windward mark under the rain cloud was predictably ignored by the RO. Sent off on a three-lap windward /leeward, IRC 1 was shortly followed by IRC 2 on the same course with the mark set at 1.5nm. A closer mark at 1nm was set for the Platus and Multihulls with again three laps, while IRC 3 and IRC Cruising settled for two.

It was noted on approaching the leeward mark for the first time that the IRC 1 boats — *Team Premier*, *Hi Fi* and *Evolution Racing* — were all flying red protest flags, apparently after a port starboard incident at the windward mark. *Evolution Racing's* initial protest against *Hi Fi* was dismissed but subsequently reopened when Ray Roberts provided further evidence to the international jury, again chaired by Bryan Willis. By a majority decision they subsequently upheld the protest resulting in *Hi Fi's* disqualification. Despite having performed a 720-degree penalty turn after it collided with *Team Premier*, *Hi Fi* failed to keep clear of *Evolution Racing* approaching on starboard tack.

It was evident, as always, that some participants hadn't read the sailing instructions with the former Hong Kong boat, *Reef Knot*, approaching the leeward gate inquiring of the RO, "Which buoy do we go around?" They were left to find out on their own...

With the wind continuing to drop as predicted, the RO chose to shorten certain of the classes. In IRC 2 the Beijing Sailing Center's *Jing Jing* with three-time world 11m champion, Steve McConaghy, onboard led *Katsu* and *Ichi Ban* across the line but missed out on handicap honours to *Ichi Ban* by 20 seconds.

In IRC Cruising, with a scheduled two-hour time limit for the windward/leeward race, both *Danaya* and — *continued overleaf*

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While hoping to get a second race in, the wind gods failed to cooperate, and at 1430 the RO called it a day.

Monday 2nd of May 2011

After the grey and sultry conditions of the day before, Monday morning was a complete contrast with blue skies and shimmering seas. The breeze was still relatively light resulting in a short delay before the AP flag came down at 1114. Initially scheduled for a passage race, the cruisers were again assigned initially a windward/leeward course but with them starting last and the wind strengthening the RO switched their course back to a passage one.

Meanwhile, IRC 1 and 2 were completing three and two laps respectively of a windward/leeward course with the mark set at 1.45nm at 240 degrees whilst the Platus, IRC 3 and Ocean Multihulls were completing two laps with the mark and offset at 1nm.

In IRC 1, *Hi Fi* comfortably led *Team Premier* followed by *Evolution Racing* around the track. Kevin Whitcraft's GP42, *Wan Ma Rang*, and Jonathan Mahoney's Humphreys 42, *Zanzibar*, brought up the rear.

Meanwhile onboard the committee boat, MV *Oceanic*, a sailing cruiser recently arrived from Western Australia to join the charter fleet, which provided an abundance of upper deck space for the race officials, RO James prepared the Platus for a second windward/leeward course followed by IRC 1.

The other classes were dispatched on passage races ranging from 10 to 20nm. The latter was a particularly major ordeal for the two sports boats, Kipsen Beck's Shaw 650, *Pornstar*, and Mikael Pophillat's Thompson 650, *CU Later*, which due to their lack of numbers had been consolidated with IRC 2. Here they were racing against the First 44.7, *Ichi Ban*, Rick Pointon's J/130, *Jing Jing*, and Ben Copley's Swan 42, *Katsu*, boats more than twice their size! In a dying breeze it was perhaps unsurprising that they brought up the rear on this 20nm marathon with *CU Later* crossing the line in a setting sun.

With legal issues now resolved in his favour over the design and build of the Shaw 650, Beck is confident that the sports boats will be back in their own class at next year's Top of the Gulf Regatta.

The Platus were scheduled for up to 10 races so the RO was keen to get a third race in while conditions were favourable in the 15 to 16-knot breeze. Somewhat surprisingly, Scott Duncanson and crew on *The Ferret*, despite taking a bullet in Race 5, were sailing less consistently and needed to make amends for their DSQ in Race 1. However, a 7th place in their final race of the day meant there was much, perhaps too much, to do on the last day to retain their Coronation Cup winner's title with Maximilian Soh's *Magic Dragon*, Kenta Inaba's *Lucky Lady*, K Wiwat Toontat's *Naiad* and Rolf Heemskerck's *The Fox* with Peter Ahern*** onboard making a welcome reappearance at an Asian regatta, all vying for podium finishes.

Meanwhile, over at the beach cat courses, 11 Formula 18s (F18), mostly Hobie Tigers, were competing with Jason Waterhouse with eight bullets out of nine races, taking the title from last year's winner Morten Jakobsen. In the Hobie 16 and open multihull class, two Nacras raced against six H16s with Kitsada Vongtim continuing the family tradition, established by his brother and himself, in winning the series on a Hobie 16.



Souyi 1 (above), mixed fleet (below) and Bill Gassan races an Optimist sailor (bottom)

In the combined 420 and 470 fleets it was Nawe and Tanapong's 420 that took the honours with five bullets from nine races. Kirati Bualong,

with seven bullets from nine races, clinched overall in the combined Laser Class after finishing 2nd last year.

As always, the 129 (2010: 129) Optimist sailors were a sight to behold . . . despite being split into two groups A and B (novices) with 64 and 65 in each respectively. How anyone actually keeps track of them all remains something of a mystery.

With the 2010 World Girl Optimist Champion, Noppakao Poonpat, now exceeding the age limit, the Optimist Thailand National title was open for grabs. It was another girl, Chaninat Poolsirikot, who took the title and that evening was presented with the overall cup in Group A, whilst Nattapon Yoak-khaw took the Group B title. Incidentally, Hebe Haven Yacht Club again supported the regatta with Nathan Bradley (HKG) finishing 10th overall.



Back on the committee boat the RO was becoming concerned about the 1600 time limit imposed by the SI for the first boat to finish in IRC 2 and it was not until 1608 that *Jing Jing* made it across the line. As a precaution, times had

been taken at the last mark but the RO had still felt it reasonable to let the race run its course.

It, therefore, came as quite a surprise to *Ichi Ban* to discover from the results that its run of five bullets had come to end with *Jing Jing* having the better result at the cut-off. A subsequent protest eventually saw the results for the complete race being reinstated, giving *Ichi Ban* another bullet by the closest of margins of 17 seconds.

Tuesday 3rd of May 2011

Fortunately the sun was still shining the next morning with the higher level of clouds indicating more settled conditions. Although the wind remained relatively light at first, there were significant wind-shifts from the west-southwest which kept the RO on his toes.

Hi Fi, after its disqualification in Race 1, was particularly fired up to make amends but was caught OCS and obliged to restart. While red and yellow shirts have become symbolic of political affiliations in Thailand, the sight of an *Evolution Racing* red shirt worn by 'The Ox' on *Hi Fi* stood out against the pale blue shirts of *Team Pryde* and must have inspired those onboard. Apparently it did the trick and, having overtaken *Evolution Racing*, it still



trailed *Team Premier* over the line but had done enough to take handicap honours.

In the final race of the day, *Hi Fi* took line and handicap honours and had it not been for its DSQ would likely have won the series, tying with *Team Premier* but winning on count back. Instead it was *Team Premier* that took the series with *Evolution Racing* 3rd.

Technical problems with a horn at the start of the Platus race saw the AP flag raised briefly before normal procedures were resumed. "The Platus are remarkably well behaved this year," remarked a relieved RO, Simon James. In the end they managed to complete three races on the day making nine for the series. *Lucky Lady*'s luck ran out in the penultimate race, having completed only a 360- instead of a 720-degree penalty resulting in its disqualification. This probably cost it 1st place . . . and the Coronation Cup. Instead, it was *Magic Dragon* that collected the cup with *Lucky Lady*, *Naiad* and *The Ferret* finishing 2nd, 3rd and 4th respectively.

Finally, in the penultimate race in IRC 2, *Jing Jing* took revenge over *Ichi Ban* with both line and handicap honours adding a further bullet in the final race, which *Ichi Ban* decided not to contest, having won the series.

In IRC 3, *Navy 1* made it six bullets out of seven to take overall with the Singapore Management University (SMU) team on *Hi Jinks* putting in a credible performance to take 2nd with David Bell's *Magic* (ex-*Magic Roundabout*) 3rd.

IRC Cruising saw Lennart Fahlgren's *Amanda* take the series by two points ahead of *San Sanook*.

It seemed somewhat surprising that there were fewer Ocean Multihulls this year — seven compared with 11 last year. However, Khun Kirati Assakul's

Crowther 42, *Sonic*, still remained competitive against the fleet of mostly Corsairs to finish 4th overall. After some especially close finishes James Haste's *The Sting* took the series ahead of *Bladerunner* with Khun Radab's *Cedar Swan* 3rd.

"A good regatta. The marina makes a big difference," concluded Waimor of *Team Premier* with which many agreed. In addition, efficient race management and traditional Thai hospitality makes this a regatta not to miss.

**Coronation Cup: established in 1996, the one-design Platu championships held that year with 24 entries coincided with the anniversary of the King of Thailand's coronation on the 5th of May 1950*

***Platus: a group of businessmen in Thailand commissioned Bruce Farr to design an economically-priced, high performance boat suitable for Thai waters. Built by McDell Marine of New Zealand, 28 of the Platu 25s were delivered in 1995 to the former Phatra Marina in the Gulf of Thailand. Impressed with the design, Beneteau bought the moulds and began building the Beneteau 25 in Europe. Approximately 600 were built*

****Peter Ahern former owner of Yo!, now based in Western Australia and commodore of the Royal Freshwater Bay Yacht Club, Perth, expects a busy time ahead. Freemantle will be hosting the ISAF World Championships (3-18.Dec.11) where they expect to be entertaining some 1,400 sailors, 5,000 officials and hundreds of thousands of spectators. He then anticipates rejoining more Asian regattas*