

Fierce competition among the fleet of Platus (below & middle)



2015, the fleet of windsurfers in Class 11 were back competing in their RS:One Asian Championships — 31 sailors in the men's division and 14 in the women's. Some were honing their skills in preparation for the Rio Olympics.

The dinghy fleets were again well stocked with 13 Laser Standards and 13 Laser Radials competing in Class 9a, 20 Laser 4.7s in Class 9b and nine entries competing in 420s in Class 10.

However, what makes this regatta special in FH's opinion is the 138 Optimist sailors who took part in the 41st Thailand Optimist National Championships — the largest number ever. Fortunately, they welcome overseas contestants and Hong Kong was represented by RHKYC, HHYC and ABC sailors along with their vocal parents.

Three yachts contested IRC Racing 3 with Lennart Fahlgren's Tasker 32, *Amanda*, challenging Martin Brown's Cal 33, *Nautical Wheeler*, and Tim McMahon's recently-acquired X-99, *SailQuest Hi Jinks*.

Class 4, Cruising, comprised four boats including Cedric Remaud's K30 lovingly restored six-metre gem, *Selma*, and three local boats — *Sein Samathi I*, *Le Vent* and *Dream*.

The ever-popular Platu Class was well supported, competing for the Platu Coronation Cup, with 14 entries including Scott Duncanson and his boat, *Kingdom*

A major benefit for this regatta is the convenience of the marina. Whilst the notion of mooring off the beach, as happens at other Thai regattas like the King's Cup and Samui Regatta, may seem ideal, the practicalities of transporting provisions and crews out to the boats, let alone risks of boats being blown ashore, gives the Ocean Marina-based event a major fillip.



One ingredient, which has proven somewhat fickle over the past 11 events, exceeded all expectations, and that was the wind. The only disruption occurred on the practice day when a squall forced an early evacuation. The consistency of the breezes also made it easier for the race management teams compared with past years. Marks did not need to be relocated because of oscillating winds.

The combination of point-to-point and windward / leeward races selected by RO Denis Thompson proved popular — the return passage of the race to Ko I Ra proved exhilarating for many.

One missing ingredient was founding father and co-chairman of the regatta, Bill Gasson, absent for health reasons. FH wishes him a speedy recovery.

Despite sponsorship concerns, everything came together for the 2016 Top of the Gulf Regatta, held from the 30th of April to the 4th of May.

Now in its 12th year, the event is organized by the Ocean Marina Yacht Club in conjunction with Ocean Property, with the support of the Royal Thai Navy and the Yacht Racing Association of Thailand. It is the largest multi-class regatta in Asia, this year involving 269 craft (2015 : 182).

The event incorporates up to 12 classes although just 10 opened this year as both the F18s and open beach multihulls stayed away. Surprisingly, in what should be a popular multihull sailing area, just the two old faithfuls, Khun Radup Kanjananani's Farrier F9A, *Cedar Swan*, and Khun Kirata Assakul's Crowther 42, *Sonic*, entered in Class 6.

Despite free mooring, it was disappointing for the organizers that the Hong Kong fleet, a few of whom would normally support the regatta, never showed up.

This meant IRC Racing 1 comprised just two TP52s — Ray Roberts' *Millenium Racing* and Kevin Whitcraft's TP52, *THA72* (ex-*Provezza*). Incidentally, the boat has an identity crisis as its main sail bore the lettering PT52!

A mixed fleet of six yachts joined IRC Racing 2 with Roland Dane's Corby 36, *Jessandra II*, taking on the syndicated Beneteau 44.7, *Fujin*. Also competing were David Dimmock's Swan 42, *Loco*, Gary Baguley's Holman & Pye 52, *El Coyote*, John Morris' A35, *Iolanthe III*, and David Bell's *Magic* (ex-*Magic Roundabout*).

*Property*, trying for a record hat trick of wins to add to his tally of five victories to date. With *Hi Jinks* now under new ownership and no longer available for the Singapore Management University team, they instead entered four teams in the Platu Class.

The Coronation Cup was first held in 1996 and celebrated the coronation of the greatly-revered King Bhumibhol Adulyadej on the 5th of May 1950.

A total of 31 entries (2015 : 32) made up the keelboat and multihull classes.

Having missed



Close racing on handicap in the multihull class gave *Sonic* victory in Race 1 but *Cedar Swan* got its revenge in the longer second point-to-point race with a six-second victory.

Fourteen Platus on the start line, their skippers all keen to lift aloft the Coronation Cup, resulted in a general recall in the first start and individual recalls in the restart. Chris Way's *Easy Tiger IV* drew first blood over Rolf Heemskirk's *Viewpoint* by two seconds. Scott Duncanson made amends with *Kingdom Property* winning the next two races.



Meanwhile, the keelboats and multihulls completed registration before heading out for a practice race.

However, with the wind changing direction and a heavy squall descending on the race area, the fleets made a hasty retreat. That evening there was the opening ceremony.

Sunday, the 1st of May, saw the multihull and keelboat fleets heading off with the other classes in four separate race zones.

Two races were set for most of the keelboat and multihull classes with an additional race for the Platus.

Whitcraft's newer TP52, *THA72*, quickly demonstrated how designs have moved on in the TP52 world since *Millennium Racing* (ex-*Island Fling*) was built and stormed around the course. In the 10 to 12-knot breeze, however, Whitcraft was forced to retire from the second race with a backstay problem, leaving honours shared for the day in IRC Racing 1.

In IRC Racing 2 honours were shared between *Jessandra II* and *Fujin*. *Amanda*, with UK Sailmakers' Barry Hayes onboard, won both races in IRC Racing 3.

Pote Suyasinto's Jeanneau 42i, *Le Vent*, had initially been credited with two wins in Cruising only for its handicap to be adjusted and finish with a 1st and 3rd. The second race going to *Selma*.

Conditions again proved ideal on Monday, the 2nd of May. A building southwesterly reached 18 knots by mid-afternoon.

Cruising were sent on a passage race to Pattaya and back with honours again going to *Le Vent*, whilst George Foose's *Dream* recovered from a nightmare start to the regatta to take 2nd place.

Two long windward / leeward courses saw *THA72* comfortably lead *Millennium Racing* around the track and finish with two bullets.



*Jessandra II* proved unstoppable in IRC Racing 2, finishing ahead of *Fujin* and *Loco*. *Amanda* continued its winning ways with two further bullets in IRC Racing 3. *Nautical Wheeler* came 2nd and Captain Tim's *Hi Jinks*, with a class of trainee skippers onboard, finished 3rd.

Two short races for the multihulls gave *Sonic* a two-wins advantage on handicap.

It was mixed fortunes for the Platus in their three races. *Kingdom Property* finished with a 1st, 2nd and 6th whilst *Easy Tiger IV* scored a 5th, 3rd and 2nd. Wiwat Poonpat's *Royal Thai Navy* scored a win in Race 5 while Russian Valeriy Dichenko's *Wikki* took the final race of the day.

After three days the dinghy, RS:One and Optimist Championships were all concluded. The prizegiving for the 41st Thai National Optimist Championships was held at Ocean Marina where the young athletes mingled with various spooky characters and clowns, provided by Ripley Entertainment, whilst tucking into pizzas and other refreshments while the results were finalised. Day prizes for all and series awards for the dinghy and RS:One sailors were held in the gardens of the new Movenpick Siam Hotel.

Conditions on Tuesday, the 3rd of May, again exceeded expectations, which saw the keelboat and multihull fleets start with a two lap windward / leeward with a distance of 1.9nm to the windward mark at 220 degrees.

This was followed by a passage race of 23nm to Ko I Ra in the channel between the mainland and Ko Khram for IRC Racing 1, 2 and Multihulls and shorter races for the rest.

A single passage race for Cruising saw *Dream* take victory, based on EHC performance handicap, while *Selma* took the honours on IRC.

In the Multihulls' windward / leeward race, *Sonic* won by 4 seconds while, in the point-to-point race completed by *Sonic* in just over 4 hours, *Cedar Swan* snatched victory by 23 seconds on handicap.

In IRC Racing 3, *Amanda* made it six in row while *Hi Jinks* continued to show improvement, closing the gap on *Nautical Wheeler* and finishing just 42 seconds behind on handicap over their two-hour race.

In IRC Racing 2, *Jessandra II* continued its winning ways but only by 16 seconds in their longer three-hour plus race. In IRC Racing 1, *THA72* added two further bullets to its tally.

TOP OF THE GULF

— continued overleaf

*Continued from previous page* — The Optimist and dinghy sailors kept the international jury busy over the first three days of the regatta but then it was the turn of the keelboat skippers to lodge protests.

In Cruising, *Sein Samathi I* protested *Dream* for rounding the last mark to starboard instead of to port as stated in the sailing instructions. *Sein Samathi I*, however, had correctly passed the mark to port but, as all marks are rounding marks, had failed to round. In its wisdom, the jury concluded that the SIs were ambiguous. *Dream* rounded the mark to starboard instead of to port and *Sein Samathi I* left the mark correctly to port but had not rounded it. To have complied with the SIs, a boat would have needed to loop around the mark. Both yachts were initially disqualified but, since no one else had looped the mark, they were granted redress and reinstated both due to an error of the race committee.

It was an identical incident in Case 6 in IRC Racing 2 where *Loco* protested *Fujin*. There *Fujin* had sailed round the last mark to starboard instead of to port whilst *Loco* left the mark to port but did not loop around it. Both were disqualified and then reinstated.

Meanwhile, *Kingdom Property* stamped its authority on the Platu Class, claiming two victories, while mixed results for the rest of the fleet saw *Royal Thai Navy* and *Pine-Pacific* score 2nd places in Races 7 and 8.

To close the regatta, FH joined Gary Baguley and team on *El Coyote* for the final two windward / leewards. Unfortunately, earlier on *El Coyote* lost its capable foredeck hand who broke four ribs tumbling down an open hatch, while that morning Mick Grover had cried off just before heading out.

The first race for IRC Racing 1 and 2, was a two-lap windward / leeward with the windward mark at 2nm at 215 degrees. A slightly shorter course was set for IRC

Racing 3 and the Platus. Conditions were again ideal with blue skies, sunshine and a 15-knot breeze.

Unfortunately, fearing a protest after converging at the leeward gate with others, *El Coyote* completed a two-turn penalty to exonerate itself but lost valuable time to finish 5th.



The windward mark was stretched out to 2.5nm for the final race. *El Coyote* had a good start tucked in beside *Fujin*. *Fujin* was now down to just two of its owners onboard — Mick Tilden had abandoned ship and taken his spinnaker with him, a result of too many skippers onboard, they say! This left Ketelby and Sorensen, the latter celebrating his birthday, in charge. *Fujin* encountered problems with a torn headsail which the crew managed to replace during the race.

At the leeward gate, *El Coyote* had a close encounter with *Iolanthe III* but with no right of way and struggling to retrieve its spinnaker, *Iolanthe III* missed the gate and lost time recovering its position. The smile on Baguley's face will go down in history.

Despite some further kite issues, *El Coyote* finished the regatta with a credible 3rd in the last race. It was too little too late to make any difference on the overall results. The winner was *Jessandra II* with *Fujin* 2nd and *Loco* 3rd.

In IRC Racing 1, *THA72* added two final

bullets to take seven of the eight races. Roberts, realizing *Millennium Racing* is no longer competitive, is already planning his comeback, having acquired Ben Copley's TP52, *Kodo*, which is currently undergoing modifications in Phuket and which he hopes to campaign at the Phuket Raceweek in July.

In IRC Racing 3, *Amanda* made it a clean sweep of seven races with *Nautical Wheeler* 2nd and *Hi Jinks* 3rd.

In Cruising, *Le Vent* took the series honours on performance handicap ahead of *Sein Samathi I*, *Selma* and *Dream*.

In Multihulls, honours were shared on the final day with series honours going to *Sonic*.

The final two Platu races were both won by *Wikki* to take 3rd in overall, closing the gap to just one point behind *Easy Tiger IV* in 2nd place.

Finishing in 3rd place in Race 9, Duncanson's *Kingdom Property* had done enough to clinch the series, opt out of the last race and collect the Platu Coronation Cup for the sixth time with a hat trick of consecutive wins since 2014.

At the evening's prize presentations, Duncanson thanked his sponsors Kingdom Property and Quantum Sails as well as his crew for their remarkable achievement.

Also attending the prize-giving for the second year was the Minister of Tourism & Sport, Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul. She welcomed the sailors to Amazing Thailand, the Land of Smiles and was pleased to see the new generation of young sailors in the Optimist Championships.

Given the hospitality and the great winds, the best that FH can recall over the 12 editions, all attending the regatta were winners with only those staying away losing out. Dates for the 13th Top of the Gulf Regatta are 4th to the 7th of May 2017.