

Once again the ingredients were all there for the Top of the Gulf Regatta 2009, hosted for the fifth consecutive year by Ocean Marina Yacht Club, Jomtien, near Pattaya in Thailand. Whilst economic circumstances may have had an effect, in terms of the entertainment provided at the Raimon Land party, it did nothing to dampen the spirits of the participants from enjoying the hot and spicy Thai hospitality.

The regatta has developed its own unique features making it one that stands out amongst the assortment of regattas making up the circuit in Asia today. First and foremost it encompasses a number of other events, including the annual Platu Coronation Cup and, perhaps more importantly, the Thailand Optimist National Championships. This involvement of the youth sailors, who attend the communal prizegiving and parties, is truly inspirational with the youngsters often receiving the heartiest of applause. Hopefully they will likewise be inspired, as they are the future of sailing.

This year the Platus and Optimists were joined by IRC Racing 1, IRC Racing 2, IRC Cruising, Ocean Multihulls, Hobie 16s, Hobie Tigers and Monohull Dinghies. All told some 197 craft on the water, split into three separate race areas, under three race officers — one overseeing the 92 Optimists, another the 36 dinghies and 20 beachcats and one overseeing the 49 keelboats and ocean multihulls.

The promised dredging of the marina and approach channels fell behind schedule, with delays in approvals and the unavailability of dredging equipment. So, unfortunately, Frank Pong's

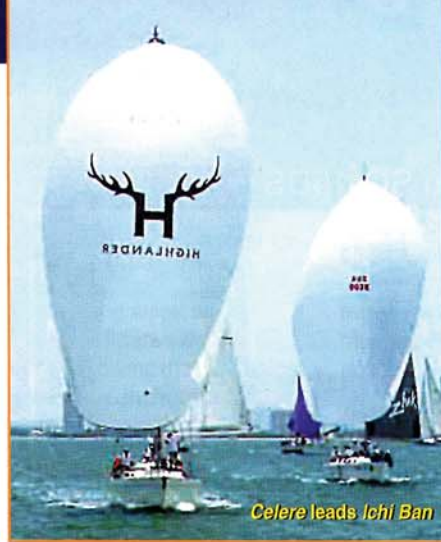
Jelik withdrew whilst both Ray Robert's *Quantum Racing* and Neil Pryde's *Hi Fi* had engine or delivery problems and missed the event. Commendably, Roberts chartered instead a Platu, *Wikki Quantum Racing*, and turned in an equally impressive performance.

There was a bit of juggling of boats within classes with Kipson Bett's Shaw 6.5, *Pornstar*, and the Phuket 8, *Vino*, included with IRC Racing 1, pitching them against the commodore of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, Matt Allen's Beneteau First 44.7, *Ichi Ban*, as well as Ian Nicolson's Dubois 80, *Intrigue*.

Somewhat unusually for this time of year, a northwesterly wind prevailed for much of the regatta. Most courses had been drawn up for the expected southwesterlies. However, the introduction of a judicious windward mark was a big help.

DAY 1 Friday, 1st May 2009

After the 0900 skippers' briefing, the fleet headed out from the marina to the start area. Initially organizing committee chairman Bill Gasson must have been wondering whether his prayers and offering at the local shrine had been adequate given the drizzle and light conditions,



Celere leads Ichi Ban

which saw the official 1100 start time pass. Still, by 1115 the wind had begun to freshen and the windward marks at 1.5nm and 2nm were laid before the AP (postponement flag) was lowered at 1139.

IRC Cruising were the first away with *Big Blue* the keenest to make an impression, heading

for the windward mark and then off on an islands course.

The first race for the remaining classes was a warm-up windward/leeward followed likewise by a longer islands race.

The 14-strong Platu fleet included Scott Duncanson teaming up with *The Ferret* in defence of the Coronation Cup after last year's victory. *Naiad*, the 2007 champions were also back, along with two teams from the Singapore Management University (SMU). The unknown factor, however, was Ray Roberts with his tactician Steve McGonaghy and their team of young Australians on *Wikki*. The Platus, *Stingray* and *Puma*, were both over enthusiastic at the start and ruled OCS (on course side) but both made amends.

In IRC Racing 2, the nine boats included two RS Elites*, *Carrena* and *Prosecco*, making their debut at an Asian regatta, and an impressive one too, finishing in 1st and 2nd places respectively in Race 1.

At the start of IRC Racing 1, keeping close to the committee boat, *Lawana* had a brief encounter with *Breakaway* but fortunately there were neither breakages nor injuries.

It was an inauspicious start for Yasunori Osada's *Millibella* in IRC Cruising, which surprisingly was first back to the finish having followed the IRC Racing fleets instead of the Cruising. However, with only three of the seven eventually finishing, it made little difference in the end.

The fleet of 10 Ocean Multihulls included three Corsair C28Rs and two Corsair C7505s, demonstrating the increasing popularity in Thailand of these Vietnam-made craft. Only one Firefly 850, Peter Dyer's *SEA Property* competed but still gave the trimarans a run for their money. Likewise Radab Kanjanavanit's F9A trimaran, *Cedar Swan*, which took handicap honours in Race 1.

In IRC Racing 1, *Ichi Ban* took the opening bullet but the light wind favoured the two sports boats with *Pornstar* 2nd and *Vino* 3rd. Meanwhile, as IRC Racing 1 were still finishing their first race, the Platus and Ocean Multihulls were sent on their second race of the day, followed shortly thereafter by IRC Racing 1 and 2.

Once all were away, and the RO had time to reflect on the easing conditions, it became apparent, in view of the 1600 cut-off for the first boat to finish, that courses would need to be shortened. Jumping into a RIB he sped off to initiate the shortened courses, which were successfully accomplished for all but IRC Racing 2.

Unfortunately, the first of the IRC Racing 2 fleet appeared to have already rounded the mark intended as the cut-off, so it was necessary to reposition off Koh Rang Kwian (Battleship Island). The front-runners naturally wished to continue and the RO was reluctant to call it a day in order to give them

a result. So, despite the dying breeze and the 1600 time limit, the race was allowed to continue while others who had "run out of beer" had long decided to call it a day. Consequently, upon returning to shore, the International Jury chaired by Brian Willis had little option but to abandon the race.

Stingray took the honours in Platus and *The Sting* in Ocean Multihulls. Renfred Tay and crew from SMU took the honours on *Amanda* in IRC Cruising, while *Ichi Ban* added a second bullet in IRC Racing 1.

DAY 2 Saturday, 2nd May 2009.

Still blowing from the northwest, the breeze had picked up a notch by 1100 when the IRC Cruising Class again headed off on an islands course.

As always, it was a competitive start for the Platus, with *The Ferret* and *Stingray* leading the charge. David Race's *Free Wheeler* was living dangerously close to the start line as the Ocean Multihulls hit the last minute of their countdown. It was equally competitive in IRC Racing 2, with the *Thai Navy 1* and *Carrena* holding the front row.

No quarters were given in IRC Racing 1 with the more versatile *Vino* leading the pack ahead of *Lawana*, with *Pornstar* sandwiched between it and *Ichi Ban*. With the wind temporarily taken out of its sails, *Pornstar* righted and its mast became ensnared in a slack runner hanging from *Lawana*. Towed along by *Lawana*, *Pornstar* almost broached until *Lawana* bore away and finally freed the runner.

Although the skies remained overcast, it was a colourful spectacle from the committee boat as the fleet bore down on the leeward gate consisting of two marks either of which the competitors could round. This was a sensible option given the 42



Ian Nicolson's Intrigue (above) and Le Vent crew (left)

boats that would otherwise have been descending on one downwind mark.

Meanwhile the conditions took their toll with *The Sting* the first to be demasted.

With the breeze at 15 knots, and gusting 17, *Vino* and *Pornstar* both had spectacular broaches at the leeward mark (in the case of the latter with *El Coyote* fast bearing down on them!). Unfortunately *Pornstar* damaged its spreader and retired for the day.

Ichi Ban, *Carrena*, *Wikki* and *SEA Property* took their respective class honours.

Meanwhile, a heavy storm cloud worked its way along the shore blocking the view of the coast and eliminating all sign of the Optimist fleet. Fortunately it did not encroach into the keelboats race area as the countdown started for the next race.

— continued overleaf



An anxious Free Wind crew watches Celere duck in front of them

Continued from previous page — Morten Jacobsen's *Emma Mathilde XX* got the best of the Platu start while *Vino* and *Breakaway* had the excellent starts in IRC Racing 1. *Thai Raver* and *Magic Roundabout* lead the IRC Racing 2 Class across the line.

Out on the course it was exhilarating sailing as the breeze held.

Breakaway's main couldn't take the punishment with a large hole appearing in the upper sections. Still, they managed to keep sailing holding on to 2nd place behind *Ichu Ban* and pipping *Intrigue*, which relished the conditions, by just 39 seconds.

Magic Roundabout took the honours from *Navy 1* in Race 4 for IRC Racing 2. The class was given a third and final race for the day to make up for the abandoned Race 2 and this time, *Navy 1* took its revenge finishing just 1 second behind *Magic Roundabout* on elapsed, enough to take handicap honours, with *Carrena* and *Prosecco* 2nd and 3rd respectively.

Wikki added a second bullet for the day with *Magic Dragon*, also a new team to the regatta, adding its second 2nd place.

SEA Property's colourful pink spinnaker led the Ocean Multihulls around the course and repeated its comfortable second victory of the day.

With two retirees it was 1720 when the last of the seven Cruisers finished after more than six hours, with honours for their one race won by Tetsuro Ogino's *Missy*.

DAY 3 Sunday, 3rd May 2009

It was a bright sunny morning that greeted the fleet as it converged on the start area to do battle on the penultimate day. The wind, meanwhile, had swung northeasterly — still unusual for the season.

A windward mark was, therefore, again set before the fleets headed off to the islands. That is all apart from the Cruisers and Platus (who opted for two windward/leewards).

Onboard *Celere*, the crew from *Happy Endings* were enjoying a more leisurely experience and, weighing in at some 20 tonnes, they tried to minimize the frequency of tacking. However, in true *Happy Endings* style, at least one port tack into the rest of the fleet left one wondering if they would come out alive on the other side! Still, at the end of the day, they managed a 2nd place finish behind *Carrena*.

Pornstar was back on the water, its spreader repaired overnight.

Intrigue averaged eight to nine knots on the way back from the islands until the breeze died towards the end.

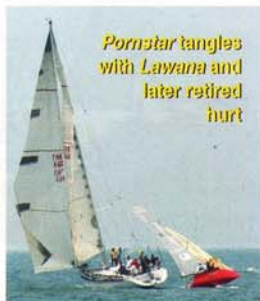
It also had a close encounter but with a Hobie 16 whose crew, probably watching in awe as the 80-footer approached, found themselves in irons necessitating a deft swerve by *Intrigue* to avoid a wipe out.

Ichu Ban added a fifth bullet to its tally while *Carrena* again topped the leader board in IRC Racing 2. *Amanda* won its back-to-back races in IRC Cruising.

In the Platus, honours went to *Wikki* in Race 5 with *The Ferret* 2nd. Positions were reversed in Race 6. There was a major windshift on both the port and starboard sides of the course in this race catching out some of the early leaders who chose the middle of the road.

Taking advantage of its lower handicap compared even with the other two Corsair C28Rs, Henry Kaye's *Zenith* reached its zenith with a 1st place, while Ocean Marina's Kirati Assakul's larger *Sonic 43* finished 2nd. *SEA Property* became another casualty when a forestay deck fitting gave way, resulting in another demasting.

The evening's Ocean Marina Gala Dinner was a grand affair and included the prizegiving for the Optimists, Hobie Tigers and dinghies.



DAY 4 Monday, 4th May 2009

Going in to the final day *Ichu Ban* had sewn up IRC Racing 1 with five bullets, with *Breakaway* (with four 2nd places and one 4th) securing 2nd spot. *El Coyote*, lying 3rd, had the edge over *Vino* and *Pornstar* both still in with a fighting chance for 3rd place.

In IRC Racing 2, *Carrena* was on top with *Navy 1*, *Magic Roundabout* and *Prosecco* all vying for 2nd and 3rd. It was something of a surprise, therefore, leaving the marina, to see both *Carrena* and *Prosecco* remain covered, their crew missing out due to work commitments.

The Ferret still had some work to do against the experienced team on *Wikki* who, after dropping one race, were on 10 and seven points respectively.

At 0700 there was hardly a ripple on the water in front of Ocean Marina and its new condominium development, Ocean Portofino. However, with an earlier than usual 1000 start, the breeze still cooperated clicking in while the RO gave the stragglers some leeway before starting procedures.

The start of the final race for the Platus saw *Wombat* leading the pack.

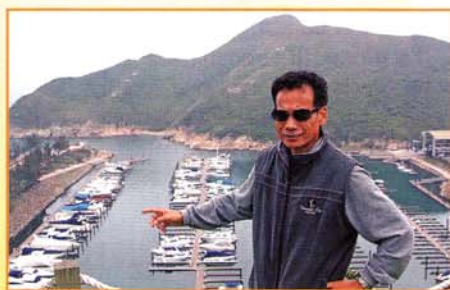
The second IRC Racing 1 start was particularly thrilling watching it from the rail of Pote Suyasinto's *Le Vent*. *Breakaway*, *Vino*, *Pornstar* and *Ichu Ban* led while a second tier of *Patience 5* and *Lawana* was followed by *Intrigue*, which powered through.

As the breeze continued to build to 15 knots gusting 17, *Intrigue* came into its own giving Nicolson and crew the somewhat infrequent pleasure of line honours, but still well beaten on handicap.

After five consecutive bullets, it must have come as something of a surprise for *Ichu Ban* to be relegated to 2nd place behind Pascal Leray's** *Breakaway*. Unfortunately, Leray had been unable to join the regatta but generously allowed his friends to sail the boat.

Ichu Ban was back on the top of the podium for the final race — *continued on page 25*

Following his completion of the Advanced Marina Management course, **Martin Leung**, (right) manager of Clearwater Bay Marina, has attained the title of Certified Marina Manager from the Board of Marina Industries Association Australia and the Association Marina Industries in the USA.



Leung has extensive experience in the marine world, having started his professional life working in shipyards in Macau and Hong Kong, and then as a sea captain with a marine company in Kenya. He then returned to Hong Kong and worked at the Aberdeen Marina Club seeing to the marina and boat maintenance facilities. He joined Clearwater Bay Golf and Country Club in June 1999 and has managed operations of the club's spectacular marina at the tip of the Clearwater Bay peninsula. The 300-berth marina also features 120 drystacks, maintenance facilities, fuel stations and a mini-chandlery.

Continued from page 22 — and also to collect the IRC Racing 1 overall award, followed by Breakaway with *El Coyote* hanging on to 3rd.

The no-show of *Carrena* and *Prosecco* gave the rest of the fleet in IRC Racing 2 an opportunity they could not resist. Navy 1 took advantage to earn two bullets over *Magic Roundabout* with *Thai Raver* taking two 3rds. This was enough to give Navy 1 the overall title, followed by *Magic Roundabout* with *Carrena* in 3rd.

The SMU team on *Amanda* added a fourth bullet while *Missy* and *Constanza* finished 2nd and 3rd, finishing in the same order in IRC Cruising overall.

A costly 6th place for *The Ferret* in the penultimate race after an OCS, saw Ray Roberts and crew on

Wikki crowned 2009 Platu Coronation Cup Champions. They opted out of the final race

Sonic 43 took the first Ocean Multihulls race of the day with *SEA Property* returning to winning ways after a disappointing 8th in Race 6, allowing the consistent *Cedar Swan* to sneak through and take overall.

Onboard *Le Vent* there was a private wager going on with *Lawana* over who would beat who. *Le Vent* generously handed over two packs of beer to *Lawana* after the final race when *Le Vent* acknowledged defeat on elapsed. However, it was then realized that the donation, which was gratefully accepted by *Lawana*, might have been premature given that *Le Vent* actually beat *Lawana* on handicap!

Throughout the first three days, the Monohull Dinghies, comprising Lasers, Laser Radials, Laser 4.7s, 420s and Byte CIs competed as one designs as well as in an overall. Comprising seven races, overall



Aroon Ruangjarongpong and Narongrit Beakeaw taking overall.

In the Optimists there was no stopping the reigning champion, Noppakao Poonpat, from retaining her title but it was a better performance from the boys compared with last year with the Under 12, Thacharin Narbonne, finishing 2nd. Hong Kong's Hebe Haven Yacht Club was represented by nine Optimist sailors — Nagisa Sakai finishing highest at 16th. Sadly, neither Malaysia nor Singapore attended,

giving the HK team the international medals.

The Raimon Land Prizegiving & BBQ party brought the

regatta to a close.

The convenience of the marina, good breezes, splendid hospitality, competent race management and organization all contribute to the growing reputation of the Top of the Gulf Regatta. With assurances that the dredging will be finished by next year, the notice of race has already been issued for a repeat performance from the 30th of April to the 4th of May 2010.

The H16 fleet is expected to double by that time while

was won by Navee Thamsomtoorn in a 420.

Damrongsak Vongtim and his brother Kidsada continued their winning ways to retain the H16 crown over nine races, beat-ing off competition from no other than the reigning H16 world champion Mick Butler.

The Hobie Tiger fleet, comprising seven boats, enjoyed seven races with

several, including Ray Roberts, Matt Allen and John Hodda of *The Fox* have vowed to return, so why not mark your diary!

** RS Elite Designed in Britain by Phil Morrison, the RS Elite was the first new keelboat class in its sector for years, first competing in Cowes Week in 2004. Morrison had previously worked with the 2000-1 GBR America's Cup Challenge design team so, not surprisingly, the boat looks like a miniature version. The RS Elite is renowned for its finger-light steering, perfect tracking and stability. Designed for a crew of three, although manageable by two, the boat is designed with both family sailing and racing in mind. Its long (7.4m) hull and narrow (1.72m) beam maximizes water length and minimizes*



resistance. The ultra lightweight carbon fibre mast with pivoting heel plug is easy to raise by hand.

Built in Thailand they are available in Hong Kong through Bluefin Seaspots

*** Pascal Leray 1956-2009. A memorial regatta for Pascal Leray, owner of Breakaway, was held over the weekend of the 20th and 21st of June 2009 at Ocean Marina Yacht Club, Thailand. RIP.*