

Celebrating its eighth year, the Top of the Gulf Regatta once again delivered a smorgasbord of sailing options, but with Thai flavours, including keelboat, single- and double-handed dinghies, beachcat racing along with the Thai National Optimist Championships, the NeilPryde Racing Series for RS:One windsurfers and the Platu Coronation Cup. Held from the 4th to the 8th of May 2012, it was hosted by Ocean Marina Yacht Club, Jomtien, on the outskirts of Pattaya, Thailand.

Long overdue additional berths have recently been added to the marina and dredging undertaken, although the effectiveness of the latter would be seriously questioned by the skippers and crews of *Hi Fi*, *Siren* and *Tantrum* all of whom at some stage found themselves stuck in the mud inside the marina.

Including the 22 windsurfers, some 228 craft participated; down from 248 last year with the principal reduction being the loss of some 19 Optimist sailors.

The keelboats numbered 55 with Neil Pryde's Welbourn 52, *Hi Fi*, finding itself included with the fleet of 40-footers, along with the 2011 Phuket King's Cup IRC 1 winner, Yasuo Nanamori's Summit 40, *Karasu*.

After the disappointment of missing the Boracay Cup, due to bad weather when scheduled to leave Hong Kong, Bill Bremner's latest acquisition, the Mills King 40, *Foxy Lady VI*, (ex-*Blondie I*) made its first appearance putting owner and crew on a steep learning curve. Also competing in IRC 1 was the new Soto 30 on its worldwide launch. Apart from some excellent downwind performances, it did little otherwise to attract attention.

A revival in fortunes for the Platu fleet saw 14 of the 15 available boats on the water, after a team from the Yacht Racing Association of Thailand (YRAT) pulled out at the last minute. However, these are no ordinary sailors with a number of world champions, some from times past, putting the 25-footers through their paces and loving every minute.

A heavy downpour early in the morning of Saturday, the 5th of May 2012, left overcast skies when racing got underway on schedule at a respectable 1100.

Starting with a windward/leeward, it was another Welbourn design, the 25-foot *Brace! Brace!! Brace!!!* with its Dynamic Stability System (DSS) lateral foil that caught the attention. After acclimatising to the boat in Hong Kong waters for the past two years, Paul Murphy and crew appeared to be stretching their wings. In a building 15-knot breeze they still found the boat challenging with the first of three capsizes on the day.

The PRO, Jerry Rollin, had wisely set up the start and finish lines on opposite sides of the committee boat with a pin end bias for the finishing boats, to keep them away from the start area. Not all realised it! However, it did allow him to get Race 2 underway whilst the other boats were finishing Race 1.

The next race was a 20-nautical-miler, first around marks followed by Ko Rang Kwan (or Battleship Island) and into the finish. Disturbed seas around Ko Rang Kwan provided both entertaining and challenging conditions which proved too much for Scott



Lively conditions for the Platus (above and below)

Duncanson's Phuket 8, *Quantum* (*Somtarn Express*). Approaching from the southwest, the crew attempted a 16-knot gybe to round the island but lost it, and turned turtle. A mayday call saw the media boat racing to its aid.

Meanwhile, *Brace! Brace!! Brace!!!*, having accomplished similar antics only minutes earlier, returned to stand by until support arrived. Murphy was subsequently offered redress, despite his late application submitted the next day! Fortunately all were safe and, despite being submerged, *Quantum* was still afloat and survived a two-hour tow back to the marina.

It would prove a costly lesson for Duncanson on learning that his insurance

only covered him in Phuket waters. He had overlooked extending cover for the waters of the Gulf . . .

Entertainment, on the other hand, was provided by the likes of David Bell's *Magic* (ex-*Magic Roundabout*) which, having rounded Ko Rang Kwan proceeded to shred its kite and, in the subsequent drop, sailed over the top of it.

Modifications to *Sweet Chariot*, including a taller mast, appeared to have made a big difference after its relatively undistinguished introduction late last year. But, having taken the first race of the day, the SeaCart 26 was forced to retire when its mainsail's headboard parted.

Day 2 for the keelboats involved two windward/leewards for those who could make it out of the marina, and three for the Platus.

Despite warnings at the skippers' briefing, *Hi Fi* was amongst the first

casualties, parked in mud inside the marina, forced to sit out the first race of the day.

The wind was playing to its own tune with 30-degree swings in the southwest

quadrant. In IRC 1, *Karasu* took advantage of *Hi Fi*'s absence in the first race but showed it was no fluke by adding a second bullet in Race 4.

The Platu fleet, as always, was highly competitive with no quarters given. Confusion amongst the front-runners over the position of

their windward mark in the first race of the day (they headed for the IRC 1 mark), gave the tail-enders a chance to earn some silverware. Shaun Toh of SMU briefly tasted glory again on *Magic Dragon* taking the bullet after winning the cup last year. After two days, Chris Way's team Easy Tiger from Australia, on the chartered *The Ferret*, headed the leader board.

With Duncanson's *Quantum* out for the rest of the regatta, most of the crew found rides on other yachts but in Sport Boats it

was the three Shaw 650s — *Crime Scene*, *Porn Star* and *Hello Kitty* — that excelled in the 10-knot breeze.

Day 3 of the keelboat regatta turned out to be ideal for sight-seeing incorporating, for most fleets, a passage race along the coast towards Pattaya, past the Royal Varuna Yacht Club before heading west

around the islands of Ko Chan and/or Ko Krok and back inshore and along the beach to Ocean Marina.

It was a serious sail in IRC 2 on Gary Baguley's *El Coyote*. The H&P 52 had a great start, shutting the door at the committee boat end on both *Amanda* and *Dynamite*. After rounding a short windward mark, it was up with the kite and a race towards Pattaya, being chased down by a pack consisting of the Jeanneau 35 *Magic*, Brad Kirk's Farr 12.8m *Dynamite* and K Pote Suyasinto's Jeanneau 42i *Le Vent*. *Dynamite* initially made serious inroads until a lull off Pattaya town allowed *El Coyote* to stretch its lead.

On reaching the finish line with the last remnants of the dying breeze, there was an anxious wait for the next in class, although the crew on *El Coyote* was quietly confident they had done enough to take the daily double, and so it proved.

Meanwhile, on the slightly longer 27nm course taking the yachts around the outer Ko Lan, *Hi Fi* added a second bullet but, after a four-hour sail, just 81 seconds separated the next four 40-foot finishers on corrected. Seemingly the planing boats took advantage of the conditions with Kevin Whitcraft's GP42 *Wan Marang* beating the J/130 *Jing Jing* by just eight seconds for 2nd place.

A second bullet for the SMU sailors on the chartered *Hi Jinks* gave them and their coach much satisfaction but still left Wiwat Poonpat's *Navy 1* leading the IRC 3 fleet going into the last day.

*Sweet Chariot* took full advantage of the conditions to scream around the course and comfortably beat the rest of the multihulls over the water, and on handicap. Andrew Stansky's *Fantasia II* and David Race's Corsair 28 *Freee Wheeler* took 2nd and 3rd



respectively as well as similar positions in overall.

With holiday celebrations ending that day for the anniversary of King Bhumibol Adulyadej's coronation, the Thailand Optimist National Championships concluded after eight races over four days. There had been some initial upsets for the youngsters earlier on when, in Races 1 & 2, at least half of the fleet of 110 recorded a DNF having failed to obtain a result, due to the conditions, within the relatively short cut off time of 20 minutes after the first finisher.

International teams from Hong Kong participated with Callum Gregor finishing 4th amongst the international competitors and 15th overall. Sarawut Phetsiri took the overall honours whilst last year's winner, Chaninat Poolsirikot, had to settle for 3rd place, but still won the girls event. ABC's Charlie Stewart, aged eight, had the distinction of being the youngest competitor in the regatta.



Hong Kong entry, Sell Side Dream (top), and the Sports Boat, Hello Kitty (below)

Likewise, the dinghy and beachcat events also wrapped up on the Monday with Supakorn Pongvichien taking the single-handed honours in his LaserRadial with six out of nine bullets. Consistency again proved the winning formula for Navee Thumsontorn and Tanapong Kamolwat with two bullets

and five 2nds to win the double-handed monohull dinghy class.

A change in partner for Damrongsak Vongtim, sailing with Michapa Weiwai, made no difference to their performance with six bullets, two 2nds and a discarded 3rd place, seeing the Asian champion's domination of beachcat sailing continue.

Overcast skies and threatening storm clouds sweeping in from the sea and over Pattaya, together with erratic zephyrs, meant the PRO had little choice than to sit out the conditions until some wind consistency settled in. However, the wait proved abortive with the storm seemingly sucking out the last breath of breeze. After two hours, racing was abandoned.

This was particularly difficult for the Platus and Rolf Heemskerk on *Nataya* having been locked in the protest room with *The Ferret* the previous evening. In Race 6, two boats — *The Ferret* and Fraser Johnston's 118 — were called OCS, apparently not heard by *The Ferret*. When 118 went back in a mis-communication by the PRO, he announced "124 clear . . . wrong . . . 118 came back" whilst at the same time the individual recall X-flag was lowered. Seeing the X-flag lowered and believing they weren't over in the first place, *The Ferret* continued racing, finishing in 2nd place and resulting in the protest by *Nataya*.

The International Jury, chaired again by Bryan Willis, accepted the point that *The Ferret* was OCS in which case it would have been disqualified, but found sufficient evidence to grant redress due to the errors of the race committee. *The Ferret* was docked four places from 2nd to 6th.

Coincidentally, this left both *Nataya* and *The Ferret* tied on 15 points with matching results from the eight races. On count back the last win — *continued overleaf*

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claim overall in IRC 1. In IRC 2, with three wins, *Magic* took the overall honours from *El Coyote* whilst the Shaw 650



Kukukerachu in fine form (top right) and noisy rounding (below)



*Crime Scene*, with a perfect score of six bullets, captured overall in Sport Boats.

memorable Top of the Gulf Regatta. The access to a marina, the combining of national and international competitions for sailors of all ages, and particularly the youths and the wonderful Thai hospitality, makes this a special annual event and amongst FH's favourites. It's already in the diary for next year — 3rd to the 7th May 2013.

With four out of four victories, Peter Herning's Bavaria 42, *Kirifiki*, took the Cruising Class honours over *San Sanook* and *Reef Knot*.

Despite the abandonment, there was much celebration that evening with a sumptuous buffet on the lawn beside Ocean Marina. Once again the weather failed to co-operate and the organisers were obliged to race through the presentations before the heavens opened and the more than 500 guests moved inside seeking shelter.

*Hi Fi's* victory in the final passage race helped elevate it to the top of the pack to

Regatta chairman, Bill Gasson, was once again commended for putting on a

**Windsurfers join in** With the King's Cup having experimented with kite-boarding, it was the windsurfers turn to raise their profile and join the Top of the Gulf Regatta, introducing the first event in the 2012 calendar for the NeilPryde Racing Series using the one-design RS:One.



Twenty-two windsurfers from four countries participated in the first of this year's 10-race global series but it was the Thais that took the honours and most of the US\$3,000 cash prize.

The action was up-close and personal with sailing confined within the marina at Ocean Marina Yacht Club, making a great spectacle despite the relatively light conditions.

Racing in men's under 22, men's over 22 and women's, the top three from each division qualified for the super final. In the men's under 22, it was Natthanont Chui who took the money. In the women's, Napalai Tansai, who will represent Thailand at the London Olympics, collected the cash whilst Natthaphong Phonoppharat took the men's over 22s and the super final, beating Olympic representative Ek Boonsawad in the process.

Neil Pryde, competing in the keelboats at the Top of the Gulf Regatta, was on hand to distribute the prize money.

Coincidentally, that same weekend ISAF announced the surprising news of their recommendation that kite-boarding would replace windsurfing at the 2016 Olympics. Obviously a shock for all including Pryde although, as a manufacturer of windsurfers and kites, he has a foot in both camps. Watch this space as the windsurfers fight back.