

Squadron Scheming



By James Fleet.

Now that there are more vacancies in Team New Zealand than in our national tidily winks team, Sailing New Zealand thought that it might be a good idea to go and check out our local up and coming match racers at the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron's youth scheme.

The scheme has been around for fourteen years now, producing some of New Zealand's finest talent including new Team New Zealand backup skipper, Cameron Appleton and our Olympic Star Class hopefuls, Gavin Brady and Jamie Gale.

Under the experienced guidance of the RNZYS training officer, John Weston, this year's intake are in good hands and good boats for that matter, because this is the first full season for the squadron's fleet of brand new Elliott designed 6m purpose match racing trainers.

The ten new boats replace the fleet of the popular (not just as a training boat) Elliot 5.9s that had very much served their purpose by the end of 1999 and were starting to develop symptoms of overuse.

A long term supporter of the scheme and director of Auckland's famous ship chandlery A Foster and Co, John Street, was again instrumental in sourcing the not insignificant amount of money required to purchase the boats.

Greg Elliot, who donated his time in the designing of the yachts and organising the building side of things at Auckland's Unitec Boat Building Department, was also a major contributor.



The boats were put to their first real test when they were used in the recently held Coca Cola Cup, an unofficial youth match racing world championship. They passed the test with flying colours.

Most competitors praised the customised boats in terms of performance and layout, especially our Australian counterparts, who are looking into getting their own fleet of Elliot 6s.

The Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron's intake of thirty-five; (twenty-nine males and six females) for the 2000/2001 season is made up of some really top quality youth sailors between the ages of sixteen and twenty. Some of you may remember former Tauranga and Tanner Cup winner and now youth scheme sailor, Carl Peters.

The scheme provides an opportunity for someone like Mark, who has obviously got the ability to progress to the highest level of sailing, to continue to sail - ,it ,i competitive level with I competitive boat while attending university. Most sailors have to make a choice between the two as funding both sailing and study, for many people, is impossible. The same goes for school leavers who are beginning their trade and maybe come from out of town.

Selection into the scheme, however, is not automatic. Strict selection criteria make sure that only the best make it through, it states that the applicant must "have a genuine desire to succeed and respond to the disciplined nature of the training program".

Once in the programme the selected sailors have committed themselves to twelve months of week, in, week out training and racing. The twelve months is divided up into seven different modules beginning with "Boat handling drill training" and finishing with a stint in the senior match racing boats, the MRXs.

Within the duration of the programme there are also seven national and international regattas, attended by selected representatives from the scheme, with the pinnacle event being the Coca-Cola Cup.

Other highly regarded regattas such as The Governors Cup (USA) are hotly contested by our squadron representatives on an annual basis and since this particular regatta's inception in 1990, the RNZYS team has won the event no fewer than four times.

The boats

As always when building a fleet of boats all at one time, there is a possibility that quality may be lost as a result of trying to keep building costs down. This is definitely not so with the Elliott 6s. Between Greg Elliot and the RNZYS, the youth scheme has ended up with a boat that is perfectly balanced when thinking about the job they were designed to do.

After fourteen years of use the old 5.9s provided an excellent starting point to develop a new and improved version. Obvious improvements start with the more open style deck layout which makes life a lot easier when pushing the boat and crew to their limits in the heat of match racing. Another major difference, in comparison to the old boats, is the arrival of a fixed keel on the new boats, the old 5.9s sported a trailer sailer style lift-up keel. As a result of this alteration the 6s require a more extensive hard stand trailer but this is a small sacrifice for the benefits of a fixed keel. The sail plan has been restricted to very similar dimensions to the old boats, in order to allow the existing sails to be utilised. All in all the new fleet of boats is immaculately presented and it is interesting to note that the sailors themselves maintain the boats.

Performance



A solid easterly met us for my first outing in the Elliot 6.

John Weston had teamed me up with a couple of the young sailors, Amy and Chris. Instructed to trim the main sheet I knew that there was a solid breeze, but little did I know how responsive these new boats would be to it.

Lowering the boats into the water from the special hard stands was remarkably easy and before I knew it, we were being towed by the coach boat to the other side of the Westhaven Marina entrance to be met by a breeze that had pretty much doubled in velocity since my arrival.

Detaching ourselves from the coach boat's warp we proceeded to hoist the jib only to discover that the breeze did not want our sail to go up, as it ripped all but a few hanks clean off the forestay, leaving the jib wavering across the top of the waves to leeward. After sorting out that problem, we managed to hoist the mainsail without any hiccups and began to bear away, with everyone in position.

The acceleration of the E6 was immediately evident as I eased the main to help bring the boat away. After deciding where we actually wanted to head, we rounded up into the by now 20 25 knots of breeze.

I couldn't remember how to stack so I let the youngsters show me for a little while so I could "warm up".

The boat felt well over ragged for the conditions, however, it was still relatively responsive to crew trim. It was obvious to me that only a very fit crew could sail this boat

to its full potential in a breeze, as extended periods of effective stacking were required to drive the boat upwind.

When tacking I quickly discovered the need for footwear, as deck grip was minimal. This proved to be quite annoying (my lack of footwear) as I slid around the boat through most manoeuvres.

After throwing a couple tacks I was asked rather politely if I had any desire to utilise the spinnaker. I in fact can't remember ever not putting up the chute in my skiff sailing career so the answer was quick and easy: "right away, please". With myself on the halyard and Chris taking care of the sharp end, we bored away again.

Hoisting the chute was rather a simple affair and the young crew definitely proved to me that the John Weston's training techniques were without doubt effective as they went about the manoeuvre like I go about having a beer, quickly and smoothly. Once hoisted the boat again showed its speed, but I must say that the crew made it feel a lot easier than it might have been, had I been steering. We decided to drop rather than gibe, mostly, is a result of time restraints, and as with the hoist everything went well.

The open layout of the boat is outstanding for sailing in a decent breeze, everything is easily accessible and even though my footing was ruined by lacking a decent pair of sandshoes, it is easy to pick your "run" across the boat with so much room available.

The narrowness of these new boat makes them perform well upwind and down, it would be fair to say that in a lesser breeze they would be a delight to sail. As for our day of sailing, we could have done with a little less breeze and a little more time, but all up it was most enjoyable and the young members of the scheme are a credit to the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron.

Any budding match racers between the ages of 16 to 20 who are interested in the scheme, should contact John Weston, training Officer, RNZYS Westhaven Auckland.