



NATIONAL NEWSLETTER



SEPTEMBER 2007

RL24 – It's YOUR kind of boat

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Geoff. and Arch. Olney.
Rob. Legg.
Ross Corben.

Greetings to all RLeers

Back on the 9th of October 1915, one of this country's best philosophers, the late C J Dennis, published a collection of poems called "*The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*". The first work was entitled *A Spring Song* and in it The Sentimental Bloke draws a comparison between the arrival of springtime and mysterious and amorous feelings towards the opposite sex. One verse reads

"What *is* the matter wiv me?..... I dunno.
I got a sort o' yearnin' 'ere inside,
A dead crook sort o' thing that wont let go
Or be denied –
A feelin' like I want to do a break
An' stoush creation fer some woman's sake."

Now I'm not for a moment suggesting yachtsmen and women get carried away by the arrival of spring to the same extent as my beloved Sentimental Bloke but most of them would agree that the prospect of another sailing season sets their blood coursing just a little faster and brings a benign hue to their otherwise nondescript view of the world. With the advent of warmer weather, who amongst the RL24 diaspora isn't thinking about boat maintenance, new or re-cut sails, mast tuning, keel tidy-ups or replacement or just reveling in the joy of getting out on the water for some serious sailing? A few fortunates have a year-round relationship with the sport but for those of us who hibernate during winter, the anticipation of the thrill of renewing our involvement with one of the most exciting, difficult, enjoyable, frustrating and satisfying of all sporting pastimes is one of life's great delights. Here's wishing you all a thoroughly enjoyable season.

National Titles 2008

As advised in the May Newsletter, our next National Regatta will be held at Mannering Park Yacht Club (MPYC) located on the southern shores of Lake Macquarie, NSW. Planning for the event is well advanced and the Regatta Notice of Race is enclosed with this Newsletter. MPYC has conducted at least 3 National Championships on our behalf in the past and on each occasion all competitors and shore crew have had a very enjoyable time. Lake Macquarie is a superb stretch of water and the Club is friendly and family conscious. It is an easy place to combine a happy holiday with good, competitive sailing and we hope to see you there. For further details regarding local conditions and the availability of accommodation, contact Lou Gambrill, the MPYC Regatta Liaison Officer whose email address is louanita@bigpond.net.au or talk to Bernie Ryan or Paul Corben whose contact details are at the front of this Newsletter.

Trigger Happy

Had a brief note from Peter Trigger in Brisbane the other day along with a photo of *Yogi Bear*, his Mk1 RL which he has owned since he bought her new sometime in 1974 or 75. Peter, a former Victorian (aren't they all in Qld?) has the distinction of being the first

winner of the prestigious Geelong – Queenscliff Trailable Yacht Race and if memory serves me correctly, he won both handicap and line honours. This was at the beginning of the Golden Age of trailable yachting and these new-fangled things from Rob Legg's drawing board were sweeping all before them. Peter's crushing win didn't make us any more popular on the trailable racing circuit but he certainly made the belt and braces brigade in their displacement hulled, masthead rigged floating bath tubs have another think about how a trailable yacht should be designed. Peter tells me he is currently giving *Yogi* a timber refit although work has been temporarily interrupted by a caravan trip to Darwin and back. Nice to hear from you, Pete and thanks for the pics.

Member Honoured.

Barb. Castles, who has been intimately involved with the RL scene since its inception and who is the owner of *Pegasus* has also been a member of the Lake Wellington Yacht Club for "about 50 years" (more actually!). As someone noted recently, her membership goes back to the days when the club facilities consisted of a corrugated iron "shed" on the lake's foreshore. There, as a young teenager, she observed at first hand the rather innovative manner in which club members interpreted the State's liquor laws of the day. She also learned, from first hand experience, the truth of the old adage that there is no baling device known to man that is as good as a frightened crewman with a bucket. She also learned, from the various skippers from whom she cadged a ride, how to sail and how to sail really well. Having done an enormous amount of work for the Club down the years, especially in regard to the Marlay Point Overnight Race and more recently as the Club's Hon. Treasurer, a position she still holds, the Club, in its wisdom, elected her by unanimous acclamation, a Life Member. I believe I speak for the entire RL24 Association in saying that we join with LWYC in congratulating Barb. on her great honour and we, too, thank her for her wonderful contribution to the sport over such a long period.

Treasurers Report

Sometimes, someone or something crosses our paths which leaves us feeling amazed, energised, euphoric and very glad the experience came our way. This happened to me a few months ago when Trevor Jones, our Hon. Treasurer and owner of *Casper* emailed me about a sailing trip he and John Inglis (owner of *Bunyip*) recently made. Trevor's account of the trip, reproduced in its entirety here, makes gripping reading and demonstrates that he is not only a competent yachtsman, a brilliant techno-whizz and conscientious honorary treasurer but also an accomplished craftsman of the written word. Here's Trevor's story – I'm sure you will enjoy it.

Recently John Inglis and I had the opportunity to sail on a 45 foot racing yacht from Port Vila to Brisbane. The yacht had entered the *Melbourne to Port Vila* race and a crew was needed to bring the boat back to Australia. It sounded like a great way to escape the winter chills of Victoria for a while and a chance to see a part of the world where neither of us had been before. We departed for Vanuatu a week before the yacht was due to arrive there, with a plan to do as much sightseeing as we could in that time.

It was a fun trip, interesting to see how the locals live. They are a very friendly lot, even though they are mostly very poor. The contrast between the resorts where most of the tourists stay and the housing of the local people, next door and across the street, was startling. Walking was the best way to get around in Port Vila and it was amazing to see the very poor living conditions close up, yet the people would always stop for a chat or smile and say hello.

The highlights of the trip were canoeing on the lagoon, the fishing trip to Lillepa Island, the meals at the local market and the rides in the local taxis. They don't seem to have any regard for road rules in Vanuatu. Just switch on the hazard lights and you can go as fast as you like.

We decided to take a flight down to Tanna, another of the larger islands, to have a look at an active volcano. It was a little worrying walking out to the aircraft, an old twin otter, as the tyres looked pretty flat and inside the aircraft was very rough. The seats had been repaired with duct tape. The co-pilot made sure he gave the safety brief while the captain was revving the engines so no-one could hear a word he was saying. There were no dramas on the flight though, luckily the weather was fine all the way. The airline had overbooked for the trip back and they had to remove a couple of locals from the aircraft to get us on the flight. It seemed like the locals may have been non paying passengers filling up the spare seats if there were any.

Tanna was even better than Port Vila, much cleaner as there were really no shops so there weren't the plastic bags, bottles etc scattered around like there was in Port Vila. It was very clean and the people were also very friendly.

The accommodation we had picked on Tanna was about 90 minutes drive from the airport. We travelled in the back of a four wheel drive ute, about the only means of motorised transport on the island. The road was fairly rough like most of the roads in Vanuatu. Even the few sealed roads were full of potholes as they don't have the money to maintain them, on Tanna they were nearly all dirt tracks. The scenery on the way to our accommodation was beautiful and our driver stopped at the most scenic locations for us to take some photos. We had chosen the accommodation on the recommendation of the resort owner in Port Vila, an Aussie from Castlemaine. It probably was the best accommodation on the island. At least that is the opinion I formed after hearing the stories from a fellow traveller we met when we got back to Port Vila. Our home was a bamboo hut right next to the beach, even the floor was bamboo, except for in the bathroom. The floor there was crushed coral to let the water from the shower soak through. The hot water service on the shower was an instantaneous system connected to a gas bottle. A hot shower would have been good but alas there was no gas. I guess that didn't matter too much as there was no water either. That's probably why they didn't need any drains, just the crushed coral. Anyhow the beds were comfortable and fairly clean and the beach was right outside the door. We were only six kilometres from the volcano so the beach was speckled black and white sand, a mixture of volcanic dust and coral. The other two accommodation huts at this resort were occupied by a retired couple from Oklahoma and a couple of honeymooners from Queensland. We all ate together at the lounge / kitchen hut, which was more like a picnic shelter. The food was OK though, local meat, vegetables and fruit and home made bread. Toothless Mary, the manager and cook did feed us well. We found out later that the women get their front teeth knocked out when they get married. I think wedding rings are a much better idea.

Late in the afternoon it was time to head for the volcano so into the back of the ute we climbed. The newlyweds and a French couple were our travelling companions. The ride was rough and dusty as usual but we didn't have too far to go, about a half hours drive through the jungle and across a volcanic sand plain. We arrived there before dark and parked with the tourists from the other parts of the island, then we had to climb up the side of the cone to the rim of the crater. The volcano was going off about every four or five minutes, showering molten rocks and dust hundreds of metres into the air and the ground would rumble. Occasionally a more powerful eruption would occur, startling everyone with the noise and vibration. As the sun went down the eruptions became even more spectacular as the molten rocks were now visibly red hot. It was an awesome feeling standing on the rim of the crater in the dark watching the natural fireworks. You could feel the power locked up in the earth beneath us. Later that night there must have been an extra large release of pressure as the rumble woke us up back at the resort.

The next morning we had to be at the airport early for the flight back to Vila. We managed to get out of bed and get packed early enough but toothless Mary had prepared breakfast for us. She assured us that we had plenty of time as her son would be driving us. We soon found out what she meant. The ride in the back of the ute was the scariest experience of my life. I was sure we were going to be killed as her son drove so fast and dangerously my knuckles were aching from hanging onto the rickety steel frame above the tray of the ute. On many occasions I braced myself with my back pack against the cab window. I don't know how we missed all of the many chickens, pigs, horses and pedestrians that scurried for the embankments as we hurtled around the blind corners at full throttle. As we got closer to the airport, an ambulance with sirens blaring appeared behind us. The road had become smoother and wider by this point so we thought perhaps the driver would slow down to let the ambulance pass. No way. The siren just made him go faster as he was determined to out run the ambulance. Eventually the ambulance did get past as it had a bit more power than us. We also had picked up more passengers on the way so we had a full load of passengers in the tray. John and I were the only tourists in the back but even the rest of the passengers, locals getting a lift, looked panic stricken. We were so glad to get to the airport and with lots of time to spare. We didn't need to hurry at all.

On arrival back at Vila, we decided to check into a hotel close to the waterfront as we were due to leave in the next few days and the boat was close by. The leading boats in the Melbourne to Port Vila race had arrived a few days earlier but due to some tactical mistakes, our boat had been becalmed for a couple of days and did not do well in the race. Most of the race boats tied up bow on at the wall along the waterfront. They made a spectacular sight with their flags and banners displayed. Access to the boats was fairly easy, just step across to the bow from the wall. John and I loaded most of our gear onto the boat and kept the bare essentials at the hotel.

The plan was to leave on the Saturday. This turned out to be about the worst day to leave as customs were closed and the duty free shops closed early. This meant the skipper had to do a quick trip to the airport with our passports and paperwork to be processed, then rush madly to buy up the duty frees and transport them to the boat. It was early evening before we departed. Missing the channel and running aground was a shaky start, but it didn't take long to heel the boat over a little and back up to get free. As we headed out of the harbour, I downed a couple of ginger tablets just in case. I needn't have bothered; the

big swells in the open water soon had a couple of us feeling a bit green around the gills. The swells got bigger and the wind increased. It took me about two days to get my sea legs and three days before I could stand to eat anything.

The boat handled the rough conditions very well. We were doing some amazing speeds down the huge swells, over sixteen knots occasionally. Not bad with a number three headsail and a reefed mainsail. There were just five of us to crew the boat, which normally has a crew of about ten, so we were spending a lot of time on deck and not getting much sleep. Steering in the day times was not too difficult but the weather was continually overcast. This made steering at night very tiring as it was necessary to concentrate on the compass to keep the boat heading in the right direction. It is amazing how much more difficult it is to steer when you can't see anything. No stars, no moon, no horizon, just the phosphorescence in our wake as we are tossed about in the boiling seas. The winds continued to increase, peaking at about thirty five knots. We had plenty of fresh food on board but it was just too difficult to cook with the boat pitching and rolling so violently. All we lived on was bananas, apples, biscuits and the occasional can of baked beans or an omelette. We probably all lost a fair amount of weight over the week it took to get to Brisbane. I know I lost about six kilograms.

We did not see any other boats or pass any land on the way, but there always seemed to be flying fish around. A few of them landed on deck at different times and occasionally you would hear a clunk as one would fly into the side of the boat.

We were not far past the half way point when things really started to go wrong. One of the crew had injured his back somehow and was unable to do any more work on deck. He was confined to his bunk, but worse was to come. The skipper was seated in the cockpit and the order was given to alter course. As the boat jibed, no one had noticed that the attachment point for the mainsheet on the boom had broken and slipped forward along the boom. The mainsheet, which would normally have whizzed past above the skipper's head, caught him across the face. His injuries were quite serious, half his bottom lip was hanging off and there were holes through his top lip where his teeth had gone through.

We were out of radio contact so were not able to get any medical advice right away. The first aid kit on board was very comprehensive but we were not keen to stitch the skipper up unless absolutely necessary. Brisbane was still three days away. We had a satellite phone on board which was not working, but it was soon realized that it only had a flat battery. It was put on charge for a few hours, then a doctor in Melbourne was called for some expert advice. Two of the crew spent considerable time taping up the injuries in the manner prescribed over the phone. The skipper now looked like Hanibal Lecter. He would be unable to eat anything for the rest of the trip, only drinks through a straw.

The three remaining crew were now working around the clock. Forty five minutes was about as long as you could concentrate for on the helm at night, so we would do forty five minutes steering, forty five minutes resting on deck ready to wake the sleeper up and keeping watch, and forty five minutes laying in the bunk trying to sleep. During the day time there were only two taking it in turns on the helm as we could get by without a safety watch on deck. The third crew did most of the cooking for everyone else, a very difficult job even for simple things like soup or omelettes.

We were becoming very fatigued by now. There was no time for things like washing and changing clothes. We slept in our wet weather gear and by now my feet were feeling very sore and I had a cut on my nose from being thrown around below deck. It was very

slippery down there with oily bilge water everywhere. On the last morning as the Queensland coast was becoming visible on the horizon, the weather abated and the sun came out for the first time since we left. Wet weather gear was finally discarded and on removing my sailing shoes, which I had been wearing wet without socks since we left, I was horrified to find large ulcers on the soles of my feet. It would be a couple of weeks before I could walk normally again.

The last day was a leisurely motor sail past Moreton Island, into the bay and on to Manly. The Marina at Manly is the biggest Marina in Australia. All yachts arriving in Brisbane are supposed to stop here to be inspected by Customs. However Manly has a major problem. The water is way too shallow for a deep draft racing yacht. We barely made it up the channel at high tide, zig zagging to the deepest areas as noted on the charts with less than a metre under the keel. We could not quite make it to the Customs jetty and were compelled to illegally park at the end of the nearest finger jetty. It was Saturday night and Customs were called on the mobile phone. They were not happy about having to come out without the required couple of days notice. We were keen to get the Skipper off to hospital but were not permitted to leave the boat until Customs were finished. Strangely they were not interested in searching the boat, their only concern was having all the paperwork filled in correctly. Eventually they were satisfied and left, the skipper caught a taxi to the hospital and the rest of us settled back with a few drinks and a feed. We were all pretty tired and longed for a full nights sleep.

During the night as the tide went down, no-one noticed the boat starting to lean and in the morning, we were all horrified to discover that we were sitting on the keel with the hull right out of the water and almost sitting on the floating jetty. The fenders were completely squashed and fortunately the mast had just missed the mast and rigging on the boat moored to the other side of the jetty. Seven tonnes of boat sitting on its keel can't be good. We moved around very carefully. There was nothing we could do until the tide came in so off to town we went for a decent feed, the first for a week. We had been in touch with the skipper at the hospital and he had been stitched up and was to be released. We had to leave at high tide. We had worked out the very latest we could leave, with or without the skipper. He arrived with only minutes to spare, the engine was warmed up and the lines were untied ready to go. We spent the day motoring back to the Brisbane River where the only deep water anchorage is. The next few days were spent lazing around Brisbane, shopping and visiting John's relatives. The crew gradually departed for Melbourne. John and I were the last to leave and the boat was to be sailed back by the other co-owner and his crew a few weeks later.

Overall the trip was lots of fun, but I must admit I prefer the sailing the RL24 on our Lakes. Maybe if the weather had been better the sailing would have been more enjoyable but John and I are both very keen to try a shorter distance trip, perhaps Melbourne to Hobart.

And Finally.....

Corben's law states that the probability of someone seeing us is proportional to the stupidity of our actions.

DON'T FORGET MANNERING PARK – 30/12/2007 TO 04/01/2008