

UK Sailmakers Short Handed Series wrap-up

With the enthusiasm of the yachts Kwilena, Selkie and Solstsice, and the strong support of GBYC and Rear Commodore Sailing Anton Mann, owners and crew met pre-season to develop a shorthanded series. Rules stipulated that a boat of 20-30 feet could have 2 crew in total, a boat of 30-40 feet could have 3, and a 40-50 footer could have 4.

We were very fortunate that Geoff Bishop of UK Sailmakers in Fremantle, was very strongly supportive of a shorthanded racing series. Geoff very generously provided 8 Sail bags as prizes for each of the series events. Shorthanded and double handed yacht racing is booming throughout Europe and the USA. A great deal of yacht and sail development has come from shorthanded racing and Geoff is very keen to have it develop here, particularly as finding crew becomes more difficult. Double handed offshore racing is a new event in the next Olympic games, as well as being included in the Sydney Hobart fleet and other noted offshore races such as the Fastnet Race.

With great input from the initial meeting and many emails and much research later, the series of eight events was put in the GBYC racing calendar. It included a race from Port Geographe to Koombana Bay, an overnight stay, and return race the following day. The other races were Passage races, with a modified finish, as well as the Dunsborough and Meelup races. The finish was transplanted to the end of the Busselton jetty, in order to avoid finishing in shallow water while surrounded by dinghies and other keelboats - it can be difficult to respond to close quarters scenarios with only one helm and one crew! Finish times were recorded by the yachts themselves, and radioed to the tower, where they were tabulated by Terry Compton.

The series has created a strong and friendly race rivalry between the participating yachts with a very competitive spirit on race days. Every boat had its time at the front of the fleet - and it's time at the back.

The learning curve has been significant, but fun, from learning to 'rabbit start', to spinnaker handling, and juggling a main sheet and a VHF radio. The series has inspired yachts with small crews into competition on equal terms, strengthening participation in GBYC events, where they may otherwise have felt at a disadvantage or chosen not to race due to being a few crew short.

We now have the formats and Sailing Instructions developed for the series, properly conducted under the Rules of Racing and covered by insurance. With this base we hope to further improve on the series for next season. We would like to incorporate an extended Geographe Bay race from GBYC to a mark near Bunbury, on to Cape Naturaliste, and finishing at GBYC, with both shorthanded and fully crewed yachts participating.

Our great thanks and appreciation to UK Sailmakers, GBYC Committee and staff for their support and work in getting the series up and running. It was a great series. We look forward to bigger and better things to come. Amazingly enough, it seems that no sails were damaged in the course of the racing!