

**1982-1983 Australian National Cherub Championships and
1983 Cherub World Championships**

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Goodnight Waterloo Bay

We were on our way to Brisbane for the Cherub World Championships when the crew said, "I hope we haven't forgotten anything". Unfortunately we had left something behind - boatspeed. And it proved to be a serious omission. Things began promisingly enough when we arrived at Royal Queensland Yacht Squadron. I recall the invitation race of the nationals as the highlight of the two series (that gives you some idea of how the rest of it went).

On December 26 it's blowing 18-20 kts from the southeast. The fleet's all rigged and there's obviously a touch of pre-series tension amongst my fellow sailors. Everyone's rigged, nobody's hitting the water. Time for action. "Let's go", I say to the crew. At this point we are about a minute away from becoming the first boat in the series to hit the drink. We lift the boat into the water near RQYS ramp. Launching involves the relatively simple exercise of bearing away and running out of the marina. With everybody watching we bear away and roll into windward. Ha! Ha! Sorry to the crew. A look of daggers in return.

As it happens that's where the disasters end for this day, and we handle the boat well to finish fourth. Ahead are Queensland's Craig Taylor in *Windcheater*, WA's Jeremy Hubble in *Boadicea*, and NSW's defending titleholder Ben Lehmann in his new machine *Colourfast*.

It's an unusually good day for our boat, *Goodnight Saigon*. We even get a mention in the paper, the first time and also the last. We are starting at the very top of a two-week slide into obscurity. Flash forward; heat five of the Nationals. The scene is as follows: By the conventional wisdom, *Colourfast* is unbeatable. The series is over, barring the squabble for minor placings. Ben Lehmann and Andrew Wigan have won four heats convincingly. Bryan Smith and Neil Monk sailing *High Fidelity* (NSW) and Craig Taylor with Brett Haywood in *Windcheater* are battling out second and third. *Goodnight Saigon* is boarding an express train, which will take us out the back door of both the nationals and the Worlds.

The start of heat five is delayed an hour and a half. Steady drizzle obscures the course as the wind drops from 20 knots ("tremendous") to 12 knots ("not again") to less than five knots ("I'm suing the weather bureau"). Finally we get a start in about 14 knots. Nobody can see the lead boat, let alone the first mark. After about a mile, the group of boats we're with is going nowhere. Where's the bloody buoy? I look around and through the mist see a line of boats way down to leeward. We charge off and eventually round the first mark and treat the gybe mark as the windward mark (interesting theory, eh?). This group includes *Colourfast* and *High Fidelity*. The group which correctly rounded the windward mark includes *Windcheater*.

You guessed it folks. It's time for everybody's favourite nationals game "Protest the Race Committee". Something's wrong somewhere, that's for sure. It transpires the wind swung dramatically after the start, but nobody could tell because of the rain. That's official; so don't ask me about it. I went the right way. Protestors *Colourfast* and *High Fidelity* have DNFs on their scorecard. *Windcheater* has a heat win, and the series is till open. On TV, Richie Benaud says cricket is a funny game. That applies to sailing, too.

High Fidelity wins heat six but *Colourfast* resumes normal transmission for the last heat, winning it and taking out Ben Lehmann's second national title in a row. *Colourfast* goes into the Worlds having never been beaten in any series they have sailed. But the competition in the Worlds will be better; two good Victorians are joining the fleet, plus four New Zealand boats and two United Kingdom boats. *Goodnight Saigon* finishes 14th in the nationals, if anybody's interested. We're faced with the difficult task of improving our performance by about 25 minutes per race.

The good guys check their overall placings. The not-so-good guys see how they're doing against their own State boats. The guys who are in real trouble try to beat boats from their home club. On *Goodnight Saigon* we're comparing our results against our Brisbane flatmates. ("If we get better than 20th we'll beat 'em.").

On lay-days in Brisbane you go either north (Sunshine Coast) or south (Gold Coast). On different days we go different ways, but either way we do the same thing - hit the surf. We take some New Zealand boys with us one day, and hopefully show them a good time. Later we take some English boys to the coast, but it rains. Somehow, that set the mood for their whole series.

Goodnight Saigon misses the invitation race along with many others. ("I've had eight invitation races, why do I need nine?") New Zealanders Bill Wallace and Phil McNeill in *Foreign Affair* win it, and *Colourfast* is third. All the New Zealanders are fast, *New Testament* (David Owst and Brett Douglas) is well up in some races, and so is *Last Resort* with Rob Naismith and Mathew Mason. The competition from the Australians is pretty hot, too.

Queensland's *Ecstasy* (David Mists and Evan Milne) start to get their act together and so does NSW boat *Show Off* (Pat and Shane Beyer). *Colourfast* puts in a shocker (for it) in the first heat, to finish ninth. But in the second heat *Foreign Affair* hits an unidentified object in the water (sleeping dugongs, or sabotage?). It breaks its rudder box and has to carry a DNF for the second heat.

For a while *High Fidelity* is looking good until Bryan Smith obligingly blows up his own rudder box in the fourth heat. By heat four things are getting interesting at the front of the fleet and desperate back where *Goodnight Saigon* is. We have scored 16-19-13-19, but worse is to come. I am developing an uncanny ability to go exactly where the wind isn't on the beats. When there is a shift, nine times out of ten I'm on the wrong side of it. It's a chicken and egg situation. Am I sailing badly because we haven't got boatspeed, or haven't we got boatspeed because I'm sailing badly? I don't know, which doesn't help much. *Colourfast* wins the fourth heat to keep the series alive. He holds off *Foreign Affair* and *New Testament*, and sails well. *Goodnight Saigon* sails a bad first beat, finishing 27th. Our flatmates beat us and the battle for 20th place is alive again.

Heat six is sailed in a good 18-20 kts which dies gradually through the race. We start well at the correct end of the line and sail a pretty good first beat. We manage to round about 10th at the first mark. For one triangle we hold our place, then the rot sets in. We gradually lose places and finish 16th. Demoralisation has well and truly begun. Nothing we can do is right. Therefore we can try anything, correct? Wrong. Just watch what happens in the next race.

Let me set the scene for the final race. This race just happens to be set up by the leading contenders as one of the classic final heats of a series. (I'm tempted not to sail, so I can watch from the spectator boat.) *Foreign Affair* has 1-DNF-1-2-1-2. *Colourfast* has 9-1-2-1-3-1. By my calculations *Colourfast* has to win and *Foreign Affair* be third or worse for *Colourfast* to be World Champion. *Foreign Affair* has to cover *Colourfast* to be safe. Aboard *Colourfast*, where they have never lost a Cherub series, the pressure is really on. However, aboard *Foreign Affair* Phil McNeill must be feeling it, too. He has been to four Cherub World Championships. He was in exactly the same position in the last Worlds, and he ended up second. This will be a one-on-one match race with 30 other Cherubs becoming an obstacle course (some will be more of an obstacle than others.) By the way, at this stage it's statistically impossible for *Goodnight Saigon* to win the series. ("We almost won the Worlds, but we had to drop seven bad placings".)

The final race comes up with a few surprise twists, but for *Goodnight Saigon* it really is a summing up of the whole series. On the morning of the final heat there is virtually no wind. Score one point for *Foreign Affair* in the psychology stakes. Once again by conventional wisdom, *Foreign Affair* is faster under 15 kts. Somehow, nature provides the perfect pre-race build-up for this contest. No wind delays the start for half an hour. Then there is a light breeze, but we have to wait for Flying 11s to exit the scene. Waterloo Bay can get pretty crowded. After over an hour's delay a start is organised. The boys on *Foreign Affair* and *Colourfast* look calm, but I don't think an hour's delay would have helped them relax. Aboard *Goodnight Saigon*, the pre-race strategy has been decided. Since we've got nothing to lose we'll (as they say in the classics) "go for it" (what does that mean?) It's a port-end bias on the line as we jog down towards the buoy with the gun not far away.

Bang! Okay, let's tack! We go, cross one or two starboard tackers, and amazingly seem to have clear air. *Stanley Crocodile*, the ACT light weather flyer, is eating up gradually to weather, but by a miracle we hold onto clear air. We go for 200 metres, *Stanley Crocodile* tacks, and we go for another 100, Then we go. I am shocked by the view of most of the fleet behind us.

Only 20 metres ahead Lehmann is covering *Foreign Affair*. They're interested only in each other, but *Colourfast* has to stay in touch with the lead. The first beat is a dream for *Goodnight Saigon*. We play the shifts well, and approaching the mark we're right up there. Then I notice the first twist for the race. *Ecstasy*, the Queensland, has taken a flyer on the first beat and he rounds the first mark with a 60-metre break. (*Ecstasy* goes on to win, *High Fidelity* and *New Testament* bomb, and it's equal third overall for David Miers and Bryan Smith.) *Colourfast* rounds ahead of *Foreign Affair* with a boat between them. Can Lehmann hold on? At this point I'm not too concerned about it. We're eighth with a pack of boats right on our tail. We lose two boats on the two reaches, then the dream becomes a nightmare. In two tacks on the second beat we lose 100 metres. In two more tacks we lose two more boats. Don't panic! Let's go over there (the opposite side to everybody else). We lose 200 metres. I don't believe it. We're becoming an express train to the back of the fleet. We go up the middle. The fleet divides in two and goes to either lay-line. We get passed on both sides. We hold our own on the reaches, but it doesn't help. Next beat we're on the lay-line opposite to the swing. We lose hundreds of metres. On the final beat (this is the last bloody one isn't it?) we are about sixth last. Okay, we'll go for the flyer. Which side? A debate follows between skipper and crew. The crew says one side, the skipper opts for the other. We lose big. Approaching the finish line, reality takes hold. Am I about to finish last in a nationals heat? I apply

a tight cover to the second-last boat (he's going faster than us?). As we approach the line we tack inside him and just squeeze between him and the mark. Temporary elation is quickly replaced by depression. I have just sailed my worst race ever in Cherubs. I feel approximately the same as an inmate on death row who has been told he will be hung tomorrow.

We raise the kite and sail in, more or less in a daze. There are more boats ahead, and through them we notice one boat with four people on board, rocking crazily from one side to the other. It's *Colourfast*. Lehmann has two mates aboard. There's a lot of shouting and laughing on board. Have they won the series? I guess not. In every other series he's won, they've never acted that way. I wonder if they feel as bad as I do.

We hit the shore and it's confirmed. *Foreign Affair* broke through *Colourfast* and finished fourth. *Colourfast* fell back and finished sixth. New World Champions Bill Wallace and Phil McNeill are modest victors. They've scored a deserved win. But Lehmann and Andrew Wigan are gracious in defeat. They sailed well enough to make the series a great spectacle. Equal third are *Ecstasy* (David Miers, Evan Milne) and *High Fidelity* who finished 16th in the last race (will Bryan Smith ever finish better than third?)

New Testament has a 100 mm square hole in the bottom. A certain skipper has apparently had trouble controlling his foot muscles. Nice to see I'm not the only one with that problem. The Poms have had a bad ten days. Ian Brown on *Tigress* withdrew early due to boat problems. He's kept the bar in business. Guy Lewington and Nick Eady manage to finish two heats. (they beat us in the last one.) They will hopefully try again in three years time.

As for *Goodbye Saigon* (sorry, *Goodnight Saigon*) we peaked too early (ie. the invitation race of the nationals). What did we learn? To paraphrase a famous Australian fly-spray ad, "Aveagoodseries - Remember the boatspeed

Foreign Affair is a modified *Wop* hull, her mast was stiffened by lower shrouds and her NZ Hood sails carried their drive well aft. The boat handled the chop better in light airs, developing more power and getting the crew out on trapeze earlier- Jib sheeting was 100 mm further inboard than on *Colourfast*. *Colourfast*, a recent Iain Murray design, has a foam sandwich hull and ply decks. she seemed to perform better in breezes above 10 knots. The Peelgrane mast had conventional spreaders and was not as stiff as the NZ mast. Her One Design sails had the drive further forward.

Windcheater is a Dennis Lehaney hull with Tru Flow sails on Speedspars. *High Fidelity* is a Kulmar hull with One Design sails, Peelgrane spars.

Results

Australian Nationals

- 1, *Colourfast* (Ben Lehmann, NSW) 1 1-1-1-dnf-2-1, 3 pts
- 2, *Windcheater* (Craig Taylor, Qld) 5-2-3-4-1-3 2, 25.4;
- 3, *High Fidelity* (Bryan Smith, NSW) 6-4-2-2-dnf-1-8, 39.7
- 4, *Ecstasy* (David Miers, Old) 7-3 5-3-dnf-5-4, 52.4;
- 5, *Boadicea* (Jeremy Hubble, WA) 52.8 pts,
- 6, *Double U A* (Simon Prosser, WA) 71.7
- 7, *Crushed Nuts* (Bruce Johnson, Vic) 72.7
- 8, *Showoff* (Brett Beyer, NSW) 78.8,
- 9, *Up Tight* (Stephen Fries, Vic) 80.7,
- 10, *Poseidon* (Paul Green, WA) 103.

Worlds

- 1, *Foreign Affair* (Bill Wallace, NZ) 1-dnf-1-2-1-2-4, 14.0
- 2, *Colourfast* (Ben Lehmann, NSW) 9-1-2-1-3-1-6, 20.4
- equal 3, *High Fidelity* (Bryan Smith, NSW) 3-2-3-dnf-4-5-16. 54.4
- equal 3, *Ecstasy* (David Miers, Old) 6-13-9-4-6-4-1, 54.4,
- 5, *Showoff* (Brett Beyer, NSW) 2-4-12-9-77 -2, 55.0
- 6, *New Testament* (David Owst, NZ) 5-8-4-3-2-19-?, 56.7
- 7, *Last Resort* (Robert Naismith, NZ) 14-9-5-5-12-3-23, 78.7
- 8, *Windcheater* (Craig Taylor, Old) 11-11-10-6-5-6-21, 83.4,
- 9, *Big Yellow Taxi* (Mark Ellsworth, Vic) 4-6-7-10-13-15-10, 83.7,
- 10, *Up Tight* (Stephen Fries, Vic) 8-7-14-12-11-12-5. 90.

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