

Cherubs Re-born

Cheaper boats from production moulds and a lot of hard promotional work by the class association have revived a popular dinghy class.

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Australian champions David Leigh and Craig Newton in Gumboots.

The seeds of a Cherub class revival were planted long before its decline ever began. It was like a form of insurance, so that when the class was really in trouble it still had a chance to rebuild. John Spencer developed a good design. The insurance was the restricted class status, which he set as the basis for the double-handed single trapeze dinghy when he conceived it in New Zealand during the 1950s. The Cherub could adapt, and in 1986 that policy had to pay out when only eight boats contested the NSW titles and the Association almost hit rock bottom.

A sure sign of trouble was the number of sailors who would ask, "Is that class still going?" They don't ask any more. The answer is obvious and becoming more so every week. The dramatic revival of the Cherub class has been brought about by the hard work of several people who have been associated with it in the last decade, and it will culminate with a World title sailed on Sydney's Botany Bay in January.

The recovery has not always been smooth or easy, and there are still some contentious issues to be dealt with, but it remains as one of the most dramatic redevelopments of a class in recent seasons, as well as pointing up the wisdom of Spencer's original decision to design a boat which would allow sensible progressive developments to be incorporated into the rules. Over recent years the Cherub hull and rig

have undergone definite (and positive) changes.

The parameters of the Cherub are neither strictly one design or totally open, and although at one stage of its regrowth the suggestion was raised that it should become a one design class, that does not appear a choice of the majority of sailors at the moment. That the suggestion was raised highlights one major reason for the Cherub's revival; the introduction of a high quality complete production hull from an Association mould. It is a one design construction method which, ironically, has been used to great effect by this development class. The results will be seen with the high number of new boats built from the mould which will be racing in the World titles this summer.



Foreign Affair (2712) Trent Harrington and Dave Ewings is still going strong.

But the mould would never have been produced if a successful hull had not been developed that would present itself as a potentially top selling boat, and thereby attract a boatbuilder. The mould was taken off the 1983 and 1985 World champion Foreign Affair, and the threads of the development of that hull can be traced back over a 15 year period. Like a carefully selected insurance policy, the ideas and philosophy on which the class grew strong paid off again when times were hard.

In the early Seventies when the Cherub was probably the major intermediate double handed class in Australia, sailors such as Iain Murray, Andrew Buckland, Grant Simmer, the Wilmots and the Bethwaites (amongst others) formed the top levels of competition in the class. In design terms Murray and Frank Bethwaite also had a major impact. Bethwaite's hulls evolved into a squat boxy shape, with a flat run aft and almost vertical sides, which proved to be very fast when sailed flat. The Bethwaite hull almost monopolised hull design for several seasons, and it was the precursor of what became known as the Wop design, which appeared on the scene in the late Seventies.

By this stage the tremendous dominance of the Cherub class was waning

as other classes (and sailboards) appeared on the scene, but it was still a class that encouraged new thinking. NSW skipper Phil Smith and his brother developed a hull based on the Bethwaite design, but with much higher topsides which had concave curves at the transom. It looked very boxy, but it proved fast and Smith won the 1980/81 Nationals in Perth with it. He also finished fourth in the 1980 Cherub Worlds sailed in England, and showed tremendous boatspeed.

The New Zealanders who finished first and second in that regatta were impressed enough to develop *Foreign Affair*, based on the *Wop* design. They won the 1983 Brisbane World titles in their boats, which was probably the last major Cherub regatta which had a very good depth of competition. As well as a top hull, the New Zealanders had developed an unusual rig with higher hounds and spreaders, and checkstays, resulting in a very stiff mast. They used a mainsail which twisted off a great deal, and sailed low with speed. The boat provided the starting point for a worldwide class debate on where the Cherub should go. By 1985 when Sydney sailors Greg Hartnett and James Syngé had won a



A fleet of 38 started in the first interclub regatta of the season on Botany Bay

National title and another World title in that boat, a debate was well underway on what (if any) changes should take place in the class. When Hartnett moved on, along with several other top sailors in the class, there was an acknowledged decline in the depth of competition. The best sailors were still good, but they had less people to test them. That situation reached its nadir at the 1986 NSW titles, with only eight entries. As NSW had always been numerically the strongest state, the class was obviously in trouble. But even at that time moves were already in train to start a revival.

Kerry Gibson, current National class President, says that at the 1985/86 Nationals John Hartnett and Ian Hay (both fathers of National champions in the class) distributed a questionnaire asking sailors what should happen with the class. This was done against a backdrop of fermenting ideas. For some time UK Cherub sailors had been agitating for several dramatic changes to be made to class rules. Eventually, says Gibson, they broke away after introducing their own changes to the class without New Zealand or Australian support. But the turmoil created was useful in that it set the Australians thinking. One UK proposal that was introduced in Australia was a keel-stepped mast. Results from the questionnaire handed out at the Bunbury WA Nationals convinced Hartnett and Hay there was interest in a production hull and a revised sail plan (although not as radical as the English proposal). Gibson, the owner of Sailflite Sails, developed an experimental sail plan, with a higher aspect jib and a re-profiled mainsail, based on IYRU rules rather than those governing the Cherub. He says it was viewed by all the sailors at the 86/87 Nationals in Wynyard, Tasmania, and used by various sailors in every state for around two seasons, before being passed as acceptable. It became official as of September 1 last year along with some other rules changes including gate controls on keel stepped masts.

However that was not the only area of development which took place after the Bunbury Nationals. Hartnett and Hay pursued production hulls as well. A mould was built of the successful *Foreign Affair* hull and Pamcraft of Sydney began building foam shells with bulkheads. Boats became cheaper and much more available to average sailors. About eight hulls were built and finished by home builders, and in the Tasmanian National titles they finished 1,2,4,5 and 6. It sparked more interest, and another 12 Pamcraft shells were made. As well, the South Australian Association "flooded" a mould off a *Foreign Affair* hull and began building their own boats, and there was strong interest from WA. The last National titles were held in Adelaide, and there the developments in the class began to generate even more interest. However Hartnett and Hay were keen to get a complete production boat. Just prior to the last National titles the mould was transferred to Julian O'Mahoney of Sydney's High Technology Boat Construction.

O'Mahoney was a former competitor in Cherubs with several high placings in major regattas, and they convinced him it would be viable to build a deck mould as well. O'Mahoney says: "There was a fair bit of time and money involved, but I wanted to see the class kick on, and I was pretty sure we'd sell the boats." While the Association owns the hull mould, O'Mahoney owns the deck mould, and mouldings for a mast gate, spinnaker chute, and centreboard case. He built four shells between January and April, and has currently built 17 boats altogether, most of which are complete hulls. New owners no longer have to worry about getting an uncompetitive hull, and demand has been strong.

Throughout this period Hartnett, Hay and Gibson also worked tirelessly in promoting the class, through organising sailors to participate in demonstration days and test sails. Acutely aware that in NSW the Cherubs had gradually been reduced to only one club, Georges River on Botany Bay, they lobbied yacht clubs throughout Sydney and NSW to officially sponsor Cherubs as an intermediate class. Some clubs had seen their Cherub fleets die and were very interested; others had to be convinced.

Gibson says that in NSW the class now sails from Georges River, St George, Greenwich, Yarra Bay, Middle Harbour YC, and the Lake Macquarie clubs of Toronto and Belmont.

The World regatta has been scheduled for Jan 6 to 15, and it will be preceded by the Nationals from Dec 26 to Jan 5. The regattas will be shared between the two strongest NSW Cherub clubs, the Botany Bay neighbours Georges River



One Step Beyond (Brad Gibson and Samantha Johnson) is one step wide at a mark-rounding.

(for the Worlds) and St George (for the Nationals). Mcichelboeck says there is a great rivalry between the clubs, but they will share facilities and co-operate with each other for the running of events. He expects 45 starters for the National titles, and 60 to 70 for the Worlds. "Four crews from the UK are very interested, and there are possibly two others, which we plan to supply charter boats to." The New Zealanders are very keen to attend as well, and Mcichelboeck expects at least seven, and possibly five extra NZ boats to attend. Along with around 60 Australian entries, the fleet should be big.

Current Australian champion David Leigh and his crew Craig Newton are expected to sail, says Mcichelboeck. And he does not expect to see a big "drop off" after the Worlds. "Particularly in NSW there has been a large growth in the fleet. A lot are in the class for the Worlds, there's no denying that, but we have good young sailors in fleets at places like Belmont and Toronto, and the majority are new members just starting in Cherubs from Flying Ants, Flying 11s, and other junior classes. I can't see them getting out. They have new boats that will last a long time. We've worked pretty closely with the Flying Ants and that's paid dividends now," he says.

Kerry Gibson echoes those comments. "John Hartnett and Ian Hay looked at the reasons why people weren't building new boats. They found that a lot were worried about building boats that didn't perform, and that was when NSW offered to build a *Foreign Affair* mould." He says the initial success of those first boats in the Tasmanian Nationals, combined with interest in the new sail plan, led to a resurgence in interest. "Orders started to come for boats from the mould and it seemed a good time to instigate changes," he says.

At the Adelaide Nationals Gibson says 75 per cent of boats had the new sail plan, however many people were using their older (slightly smaller) sail plan in heavy airs. To stem that trend a cut off point was introduced. No new sails (to

an old plan) have been allowed to be produced since September 1987. The sails have to carry an official measurement stamp (and date) to say when they were made. However, Gibson says because the Worlds will be a transition period, sailors of old boats can make a choice of carrying either old or new rigs. New boats must carry the new rig. "We're emphasizing the newer rig rather than the old," says Gibson. He believes Australian Cherub sailors, because of their reluctance to develop the new rig for windier weather, may find themselves "behind the eight ball" against the New Zealanders in the Worlds.

He says the class still encourages development. As well as the official Association hulls produced by O'Mahoney, Sydney boatbuilder Larry Selby is building boats, and there is more interest once again in home building. Gibson says the South Australian Association has access to naval architecture design facilities, and they are preparing home building plans of the Foreign Affair design. "We've had numerous enquiries from all over the country from home builders, but we've never had anything to supply them with. Now we will have plans available by Christmas," he says. He concludes, "In 1986 we had eight boats in our titles. Last year we had 33 and this year we'll have over 50."



Crew work is extremely important.

Julian O'Mahoney, who builds the Foreign Affair hulls, has put in a tremendous amount of effort to produce a top class boat. He built a full foam sandwich construction boat as a mould for his deck plug, but before even commencing this task he spent a considerable period of time researching layouts to determine the most efficient and simple placement of fittings. "I used ideas and measurements from when I was sailing, and I checked a lot of good boats layouts with Andrew Hay, a former National champion," says O'Mahoney. "I came up with some basic dimensions like mast position, and stem to chainplate lengths, then drew up a deck plan. I tried to clean it up and make it simple, because simple is fast." He designed the layout but then allowed some scope when placing solids in the foam for movement of fittings and equipment. "The Cherub shouldn't be a One Design class," he says. "It should encourage them to think about what makes a boat tick. But the idea of a production boat is to keep costs down. All the old school had disappeared, and the class was at a stage where lots of people didn't know what they wanted. I decided it was much better to work out from my experience what was needed. Then, after a couple of years they can try it themselves." He offers high praise for John Hartnett.



The production hull has mouldings for mast gate, spinnaker chute and centreboard case.



Julian O'Mahoney has added a production deck to the association's production hull package.

"If it hadn't been for him the class would've died. He was a real motivator for everyone, including me," says O'Mahoney.

O'Mahoney has attempted to produce a production boat to the standards of a "one off" high quality boat. The hulls are vacuum bagged in a female mould using fibreglass cloth, Termanto foam, and a minimum of chop strand glass. "I use a wet lay up, which is more difficult but produces a better boat," he says. Cloth laid in the mould is wet out and in the same operation foam is vacuumed down to it, making a lighter and stronger hull.

"What I've been trying to do is use the good processes of 'high tech' one off construction in order not to waste weight, and without going into exotic materials," he says. "Most production boat builders wouldn't do it." He uses Iso polyester resins, which

are of a higher standard. After a few hours drying, the bag is removed and the inner layer of glass is hand laid. Hull and deck moulds are made at the same time, using the same technique, although foam thicknesses and glass weights vary. O'Mahoney makes the hulls with 10oz glass and 12mm Termanto foam, while the decks are made of 6oz glass and 5mm foam. A chute is moulded and fitted into the deck before it is joined to the hull. A centreboard case moulding and mast gate moulding are added after that. Any colours are available, as well as two-tone decks, and the hulls come with "U" bolt chainplates fitted into the solid gunwales. O'Mahoney supplies a shell for \$1,350 including sales tax, and a complete boat for \$3,830 (including chute, gate, chainplates, inspection ports, two tone decks and a coloured hull, plus an Association mould hire fee).

I sailed one of the new boats with the revamped rig and a keel stepped mast, belonging to class veteran David Gibson (one of Kerry Gibson's two sons who sail the class), In the light to moderate breeze we began with, it felt lively and seemed to keep me on trapeze, and the hull planing upwind for much longer than I remember my old boats ever doing. It was very open for a small two handed dinghy, facilitated largely by end boom sheeting and a central post in the cockpit on which the mainsheet ratchet block was mounted. Vang and Cunningham controls fed down the centre of the cockpit and out to each side deck between skipper and crew. Mast gate control was provided with a multi purchase box positioned in a foredeck channel which O'Mahoney has built to give it extra stiffness. The boat was also fast downwind.

The kite halyard was fed back to the mainsheet post, although O'Mahoney has placed a pod at the rear edge of the centreplate case for a halyard cleat, where the topping lift is also positioned. The chute is set on the port side and appeared to function well. It might have been more difficult to set it from the windward side in a full gale. The jib leads are set well in on the foredeck. Both the new plan sails looked good in the moderate and gradually fading breeze. Gibson, 20, who has been in Cherubs six years, and who finished third in the last Nationals, is enthusiastic about the boat. He was planning to get out of the class last year, but was encouraged to stay in by the new boats, and the World titles. "I've seen the ups and downs of the class," he says. "A few years ago everyone was tight lipped about what they were doing. Now its more open, and people pass on information to the new guys. It can only improve the class even more." He says: "It looks really promising for Cherubs. If they're promoted well they should be able to get bigger and bigger."

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