

Leading the Charge

A new-generation boat leads the Cherub's move into contention as a stepping stone to the Olympic and skiff classes.

By Bob Ross (words and pictures)

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A ready to sail production Cherub is already showing off the benefits of the concave foredeck and asymmetrical spinnaker permitted by class rule changes approved by the membership in March. Julian O'Mahony's *Pocket Full of Kryptonite* is the first boat out of a new set of deck and hull moulds conforming to the changed rules. Soon after it began sailing, O'Mahony had orders for five more, with the price of a complete boat, including sails, of \$11,890.

The new generation Cherub, exemplified by the O'Mahony production boat, emerged from turbulent circumstances through the 1995-96 season when a group of sailor/parents headed by Hugh Treharne and Peter Moor had an Iain Murray and Associates boat designed and built to the English Cherub class restrictions which allow a narrower hull shape.

Roger Perrett and Adrian Manning sailed the Mark Phillips-built *Sport Cherub* to win the world championship on Botany Bay that summer. The boat was one of the three Dinghy Sports hulls allowed to compete in the worlds because they measured to the British class rules but were not eligible for the Australian title because they did not comply with the Australian rules.

The Dinghy Sports boat and the six British boats that contested the championship, were narrower, had self-draining cockpit with no foredeck and an asymmetrical spinnaker set from a bowsprit pole. Although the Australian class did not accept the boats, it recognised the pressure for change within an over-riding consideration to keep the existing 70-boat fleet competitive. Duncan Groome, Cherub National Council of Australia technical officer, explains that while the class has changed significantly over its life, it does not regard itself as a development class. He says: "We prefer to be known as a restricted development class where change is allowed but under controlled circumstances. The rationale behind this is to keep the cost of racing Cherubs at the top level at a reasonable level. As change is gradual in the class second hand boats are very competitive, guaranteeing demand and a good price for second-hand boats.

"Hence the Cherub Council was not going to rush out and adopt the proposed changes overnight. The association decided that the introduction of an asymmetrical spinnaker was desirable, while changes to the hull dimensions would not occur.

"While the proposed hull changes would have resulted in a faster boat, they would also would have obsoleted the entire Australian and New Zealand fleet and the members could not see any benefit in doing this. It was also decided that the UK spinnakers were too small and the measurement rule quite cumbersome.



First boat out of the O'Mahony moulds takes off under the asymmetric.



Working sail plan is unchanged; asymmetric measures 15.5sq m.

"During the winter of 1996 a draft set of rules was produced by the Australian and New Zealand Cherub councils after consultation with sailmakers and sailors from the larger skiff classes. Some experimental spinnakers were produced to these rules and tried on existing boats and a new boat purposely built to be an asymmetric Cherub. These boats were demonstrated in the 1997 Nationals. "The council thanks the following sailmakers for their assistance in the project: MacDiarmid, Ullman, Phillips and Ken Fife (NZ). It is interesting to note that the UK Cherubs recently revised their spinnaker rules and increased the area by approximately 10 percent making the area very similar to the new Aust/NZ spinnakers.

"During this period the council had also been talking to long time class builder O'Mahony Boat Constructions about the production of a new set of hull and deck moulds to take advantage of self- draining cockpits (which had already been approved). The containment of cost was also a key criteria for the new mouldings. It was decided that by making the foredeck concave rather than convex, substantial savings could be achieved through reduced labour. A remit was also prepared to allow convex foredecks.

"At the annual general meeting held during the 1997 nationals, the members decided to proceed with the asymmetrical spinnaker and convex foredeck remits. The remit closed on the 31st of March and revealed a very strong vote for both remits, 95 percent for the spinnaker and 85 percent for the decks - a two-thirds majority is required to pass a remit. Both remits were passed and have been incorporated into the rules.

"O'Mahony Boat Constructions have produced the new moulds and already have a number of orders on their books. The news of the asymmetrical spinnakers has created a lot of interest in states other than the traditional stronghold of NSW, with a growing number of youth sailors looking for the thrills of the larger skiffs in an affordable boat which is more suited to their crew weight. A particular growth area is Queensland and to satisfy demand Brendan Matthews (Brisbane) has also recently built a new hull and deck mould.

"Existing boats can easily be converted to asymmetrical spinnaker by putting a tube through the front tank in which the telescopic pole slides. Information on converting existing Cherubs can be obtained from Duncan Groome who also has available plans for the popular *Foreign Affair* and *Tasman Express* designs for those people who would rather build their own boat from scratch."

State of the class

Meantime, the Cherub class looks back on a successful 1996-97 season, especially in NSW. A fleet of 45 boats from six states contested the national championship in Adelaide. The NSW championship, a progressive series of seven races held at various clubs, consistently had 35 boats on the starting line.

President of the NSW Cherub Association, Ken Williams, said an open forum approach through the 1996-97 season allowed class members to express their views and understand the issues. The consultative approach had resulted in



Mainsheet system and general gear layout is similar to that of the 49er and the 18s

"amazing" class consensus for change. He said O'Mahoney had worked closely with the class in developing changes necessary to satisfy the up-and-coming youth market. Through this process he has respected class members over-riding wish that the current active national fleet of 70 boats remains competitive.

The ages of current competitors ranged from 14 to over 50, both men and women. The Cherub had a strong appeal as a step-up class from intermediate youth classes such as the Flying Ant, Flying 11 and VJ. "There is now considerable interest from the older end of the Flying 11 class," Williams said. "A few of these sailors are Samantha Williams,

Adam Chapman and Adam Forbes from the Ants and James Moor and Sarah Board who took some time out from their serious F11 campaigns to test out the Cherubs."



Dish-shaped self-draining cockpit and concave foredeck is the most obvious new feature.



Asymmetric is launched through a 49'er style throat and stowed in a sock.



Cockpit and rolled side decks are easy on the crew.

The Cherub had become located in clubs as the feeder boat for the powerful adult skiff classes. Many of the country's elite skiff sailors had spent time in Cherubs. Competitive weight carrying capability was wide. In the 1996 nationals 18 footer sailors John Boyd and Geoff Beauchop placed sixth with a reported all-up crew weight of more than 160 kgs. They won the title in 1995. In this year's NSW titles, Adam Chapman and Ben Stevens weighed approximately 120kg.

Competitive designs are:

- Boats built from the mould of 1985 champion *Foreign Affair*
- Boats built by Julian O'Mahony to his mark one and mark two designs.
- Current Mark Matthews design from Queensland.
- Boats built to the design of 1989 champion *Special Edition*.
- Boats built to the *Wop* design.

O'Mahony boats built to the *Foreign Affair*, O'Mahony-designed mark one and mark two designs have taken out the last eight national titles. The boats last a long while. The O'Mahony built *Foreign Affair* design 1989 world title holder *Rocky and Bullwinkle* has achieved consistently high national and state title placings throughout the 1990s.

The NSW association has access for amateur builders to the *Foreign Affair* and O'Mahony mark one mould. During an evaluation period in the 1996-97 season to develop appropriate sail measurement rules, competitive boats fitted with the asymmetric were found to be some five minutes quicker around the course. Older boats are being easily converted to carry an asymmetric by installing an offset pole and sleeve into the front buoyancy compartment with the pole angled so that when extended, the pole is on the centreline of the hull. The sail is being stowed in the existing front launcher tube.

Poled spinnakers can still be carried by older boats and a separate division for poled-spinnaker boats is being considered for the nationals.

The O'Mahony boat

Julian O'Mahony sees his production Cherub as a stepping stone to Olympic and skiff sailing. An emerging new market for the Cherub was that of feeder class to the 49er, the new high-performance Olympic dinghy, fulfilling much the same role as the 420 had for the 470 for many years.

He says: "The role of the Cherub could well expand even further than the potential that we have today and the production boat

could be the launch pad for making the Cherub a truly international class. With Cherubs the obvious choice for juniors aspiring to be skiff sailors this segment of the potential Cherub market should continue to expand also.

The new O'Mahony production boat has the same hull as his mark two design with the most noticeable different feature the concave foredeck, similar to the 49er's and seen on 18ft skiffs.

There's no boat speed advantage or disadvantage, he says although it will allow the crew to get into more comfortable position when lying forward in extremely light weather.

It does identify the class image with the 49ers and 18s but the most important consideration behind the concave foredeck was reduction in building cost, because: the deck is simpler and quicker to fabricate. There is no internal spinnaker

chute but a throat moulding and sock arrangement like the 49er's and a retractable pole is easier to fit to a dish deck than with a foredeck in place.

So O'Mahony is able to offer his production boat, on he water ready to sail, for just under \$12,000 where a fully-rigged one-off O'Mahony Cherub used to cost about \$15,000.

He has modified the deck shell and framing layout to take the stresses from the shrouds the foredeck previously handled. He says, in answer to a commonly asked question, that the shape of the deck has no bearing on whether a boat nose dives or not and that asymmetric kites, if well designed, make the boats safer from nose diving.

The production boat is built of fibreglass/foam sandwich. With a minimum hull weight of 50kg including fixed fittings in the class rules and the false floor adding structural stiffness, O'Mahony believes there is no need to go to anything more exotic.

The boat comes fitted out with Ronstan deck hardware and ropes; mast and boom rigged. A cradle including webbing straps and cleats is part of the package.

O'Mahony is producing the mast-alloy with a fibreglass top section-and Craig Phillips the sails.

Class File

Cherub: Restricted design 12ft skiff class, two-person one on trapeze, spinnaker.

Length overall: 3.658m (max).

Beam: 1.524m (max).

Hull weight: 49.9 kg (min).

Sail area: mainsail 8.4 sm; jib, 3.8 sm. Asymmetric spinnaker: 15.5 sq m.

Optimum overall crew weight: 120-150 kg.

Where sailed: WA, SA, Vic, Qld, NSW.

Current national champions: Scott Day/Scott Davis.

Designer: Various.

Sails: Closer to a "one design" with strict limitations on shape measurements. Most height tightly controlled, Asymmetric spinnaker set off retractable pole now allowed,

Contacts: Cherub National Council of Australia, secretary Holly Norris, 043 908065, phone/fax.

For information on converting existing boats to asymmetrical spinnaker or plans for home-building boats, contact: Duncan Groome, Technical Officer, CNCA, 7 Roslyn St, Largs Bay, SA, 5016; 08 8272 9455 (ph), 08 8242 1140 (ah); fax, 08 8272 6899.

Production builder: O'Mahony Boat Construction Ply Ltd, PO Box W 176 Warringah Mall, 2100; phone/fax 02 9905 4570.