

# Cherub Charge

**Exciting and competitive, these dinghies are enjoying a resurgence of popularity.**

By Andrew Hewson

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Cherub sailing has grown considerably in the past few years and the class has now become one of Australia's most competitive for today's up and coming youth. Gone are the days of the "adrenalin junkie" Cherub sailors, who could only manage to pull themselves from their hangovers to sail if the breeze was over 20kts. The new generation of Cherub sailor is one who is keen to sail in a lively and exciting dinghy, while also partaking in competitive, large fleet racing. Competitive spirits have been raised in the Cherubs with the aid of close fleet racing, and a string of training sessions with coaches such as Greg Hartnett and Mike Fletcher. Finding a dinghy class which is both exciting to sail while also being extremely competitive is hard, but the Cherubs fit into this category.

The boats themselves have evolved with the sailors, and currently the top boats are made from epoxy resin, foam sandwich, vacuumed construction (both hull and deck), allowing for durability and lightweight. With the help of High Technology Boat constructions in Sydney, the Cherubs have begun to converge toward "One Design status". This snowball effect toward conformity began before the 1988/89 World titles in Botany Bay, Sydney, when the NSW Cherub association instigated a plan to start the production of competitive fibreglass Cherubs, which were not only light and durable but also affordable to most sailors. The plan was a great success, with the first stock boat out of the mould eventually winning the 88/89 world title.



*Spinnakers on cherubs are following the theory that big and powerful is fast (Neil Patchett picture).*



*Winner of the 1991/92 Nationals Kane Sinclair and Andrew Quinn sailing Go Hard or Go Home*

The stock boats are based on the 10 year old *Foreign Affair* shape which is still dominating the competitive arena with wins in the 1990/91 and 1991/92 Australian titles, still proving it's speed in all round conditions. Two other hull shapes have emerged since the 88/89 worlds. One built and designed by Andrew Hay in Sydney (winner of 88/89 nationals, and the second, built and designed by High Technology Boat constructions Nationals winner 89/90). All of these hulls

have similar characteristics with narrower bow and aft sections and sharper chines, making the boats very fast but a challenge to steer and control in heavy conditions. The above characteristics, coupled with the boats high sides have earned these shapes the prestige of being called the "coffin or box shapes". The hulls have a minimum weight of 49.9kg, and this, along with a more flexible and adjustable rig, allow for the crews to push their boats to plane upwind in eight knots.



*Otmorot was runner up at the Nationals: check out all those controls.*



*Otmorot is an example of the trend towards deep hulls.*



*A Goldspar mast was carried by Otmorot to compensate for its light crew.*

Latest rig developments have lead to two trains of thought within the class. One is to sail with a Proctor or Baverstock mast and a heavier crew (approx 23 stone all up), while the other is to use a Goldspar, or flexi-top mast and be able to sail with a lighter crew weight (approx 18 stone). At this year's national title Kane Sinclair and Andrew Quinn, with their boat *Go Hard or Go Home*, narrowly beat defending champions Andrew Hewson and Greg Stivano on their boat *Otmorot*. Both boats were using 57mm Goldspar masts, and with more sideways bend and pre-bend than most competitors, seemed to have good speed throughout all wind ranges. *Go Hard or Go Home* was using Anson sails, while *Otmorot* was using Flower and Adams sails. Third in the nationals, *Genetic Misfortune* sailed by John and Garry Boyd, showed great speed in the heavy conditions using a stiffer Proctor mast and McClelland sails. Fellow clubmates Matt Crocker and Michael Jackson on their boat *Back Seat Pickup* showed flares of excellence in the heavy airs with a new mast from Starboard Products, and Concept sails to finish fourth in the nationals.

The masts in the top boats are now all keel stepped, as opposed to previously deck-stepped masts. This has meant that the rig can be easily adjusted for different conditions by using a ram (magic box), or a preventer at deck level to control mast bend. Ram positioning has become one of the major controls, along with the vang and Cunningham, when "changing the gears" on a boat which has a fixed forestay system. Forestay tension is approx 42 on the rig tension scale but is increased along with the wind, allowing for more compression bend to occur, thus helping to flatten sails and depower the rig.

The high aspect rigs on the Cherubs (mast 6.7m high), give them a generous amount of sail area for a boat which is only 12 feet long. The mains are fully battened, and this, coupled with the high aspect rig, makes the leech of the main hard to keep straight. To counteract the twisting problem, the boats have end-boom sheeting, plus vang and cunningham controls

leading to the skipper. The importance of light weight on the boats is reflected in the use of Mylar by all top competitors.

The long blade-like jibs also make sheeting a problem. Some top competitors such as *Otmorot*, *Genetic Misfortune*, and *Back Seat Pickup* have adjustable jib luff systems, enabling the jibs to be moved up and down the forestay while sailing, adjusting the amount of twist in the sail.

The spinnakers on the cherubs are following the theory that big and powerful is fast, reflecting the fact that the cherubs tack downwind on large angles away from the rhumbline to get the best VMG while running. End for end poles are preferred by six of the top ten boats, while the rest are using pole launchers. The boats themselves are fast to accelerate allowing for large gains and losses to be made downwind. Constant monitoring of changes in velocity and wind direction are imperative to success.

The 1991/92 Nationals sailed from Henley SC in Adelaide saw a fleet of 50 boats from NSW, Vic, WA, ACT, and Qld. The nationals were characterised by dramatic close racing on the water, and a well organised but hectic social agenda off the water. The strongest fleet at the nationals came from the Belmont 16' SC on Lake Macquarie, which managed to take out the first four placings, and every heat of the nationals. The Cherubs were introduced to Lake Macquarie in 1988 as an intermediate class to bridge the gap between sailing small dinghies (Flying ants, VJs), and larger ones (SOSs and 16ft Skiffs).

The success of the Cherub fleet on Lake Macquarie is a culmination of good quality weekend racing, and the group tuning sessions (four to five boats) held through weekdays for most of the season. From half way through the nationals it was evident that it was going to be a close series with three boats fighting for the lead. *Otmorot's* position was threatened in the windy fifth race, five minutes before the race was abandoned, when they broke their mast. It was not until the final race that *Otmorot* conceded defeat by retiring with a broken trapeze wire. *Genetic Misfortune* after making



Currently, the top Cherubs are made from epoxy resin, foam sandwich, vacuumed construction (Neil Patchett picture).

a good come back in the middle of the series with two consecutive firsts, also had their hopes dashed in the last heat having to retire with a torn main. *Go Hard or Go Home* went on to win the last race and take the series.

The series was sailed in predominantly heavy airs with two races being abandoned due to heavy breezes and large chop. The heavy airs lead to many casualties including broken masts, booms, rudders, centreboards, not to mention flogged sails and one dislocated shoulder.

NSW Cherubs took up the majority of the fleet at the nationals and were fortunate enough to take out the top



Current hull shapes are nicknamed "coffin boxes"



seven positions. Eighth place was filled by local SA sailor Damien Carey on Iceman who sailed smartly in the heavy airs with a lighter crew. Ninth place saw the first WA boat, *Deep Sea Racing Prawns*, skippered by Peter Schneider who was let down by his light wind performances. The first Victorian boat was *We're No Angels*, skippered by Brett Sleeth in tenth position.

The year to come will see Cherub sailing in Australia receive a large boost when the Western Australians host the 1992/93 Cherub nationals followed closely by the eleventh world titles. The 92/93 nationals will be sailed from the Royal Perth YC on the Swan River. Sixty boats are expected to contest these nationals, but if the general trend for new boats continues, we could see numbers on the higher side of this figure.

The up and coming World titles should be a test to prove who can become one of Australia's best dinghy sailors. The worlds will be hosted by the Cruising Yacht Club of WA at Rockingham, which is 50km out of Perth. Rockingham is an old popular holiday destination, but next Christmas it will be brought to life with highly competitive sailing, with competitors coming from around the globe. Sailing at Rockingham usually takes place in 15-25kts of breeze and a short lake chop, providing for non-biased close racing. The World championships should include at least five competitors from New Zealand, and five from Japan, Thailand, the UK, and the USA. The Kiwi's will be out to prove a point and make this their second consecutive World title. Australian Cherub sailors will be out in force to regain the world title.



*Teenage speed machine.*

The Cherub class in Australia is continuing with strong growth. Queensland is now reviving their Cherub fleet in Brisbane as well as starting a new fleet in Cairns. In NSW numbers are still on the increase, with new fleets at Lane Cove and Illawarra now growing stronger, along with the fleets on Lake Macquarie, and Georges River. The ACT is also expecting an influx in their Cherub numbers due to the coming Worlds. Victorian Cherub sailing is on the increase along with SA, and the local sailors in WA will also have their sights set on improved performances in the nationals and worlds.

Any person interested in Cherub sailing should contact their local Cherub association, or talk to one of

the sailors themselves about this exciting class, and then join in the fun and action at the WA worlds.

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