

# Splice or Split

**Moves towards re-uniting the Cherub classes of England and Australian/New Zealand have been complicated by a local development.**

By Robert Keeley

As published in Australian Sailing magazine, November 1995

WHEN Hugh Treharne announced a plan to build a new type of Cherub based on English rules and then subsequently expressed an interest in his son racing it in an international regatta to be staged on Botany Bay this Christmas/New Year period he really put the cat amongst the pigeons. Cherubs in Australia and England have been different boats (though only by degree in terms of hulls) for over ten years.

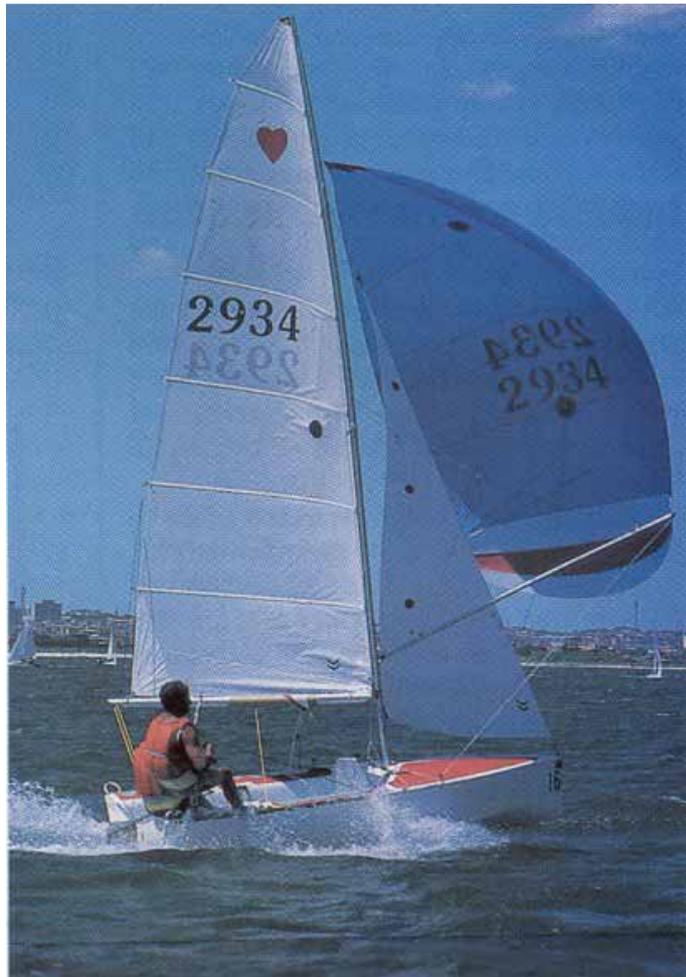
In 1984 the English Cherub fleet voted on a number of rule changes to those which then governed the class world wide. The changes were put to an international remit process and ultimately were rejected by Australian and New Zealand fleets, but the English sailors went ahead and introduced them in any case. Since then, the class had effectively been partitioned, racing as two separate fleets despite both retaining the class name.

The most significant changes to the English boats have been alterations to the mid-point chine measurement which effectively allowed English designers to make narrower and more deeply veed hulls and the addition of the asymmetric spinnakers on bowsprit poles. As well, self-draining cockpit floors were allowed and a total sail area rule led to some changes to sail profiles (a slightly bigger roached main and smaller jib).

The Cherub, which was designed by New Zealander John Spencer (who also drew the Flying Ant and Javelin classes) as an intermediate training class for teenagers and sailors in their 20s, started life as a "restricted design" class. It had relatively wide tolerances (compared to one design dinghies) to allow experimentation in hull and rig design. However, unlike completely unrestricted classes, some limits had been put in place to keep costs down and development within a set of boundaries.

The English sailors who instigated the changes in 1984 felt they would make their boats better to sail and more attractive to newcomers in England, but most Australians rejected the proposals as unsuited to their circumstances and local conditions. Since that time, while communication had been sporadically maintained between the two groups, there had been no racing between them.

Then, over the last 18 months, a proposal was developed to stage an "international" regatta which would hopefully attract both New Zealand boats and some English competitors. While it could not be called a "world"



*Rocky & Bullwinkle, winner of the 1989 world champs on Botany Bay. Not much has changed since in the Australian boats (Bob Ross picture).*

championship because the prerequisite number of countries was not involved, it could still offer a competitive scenario for the different branches of the fleet.

A strong proponent of the event was national technical officer David Kelaher. He was keen to renew relations and he felt it would be interesting and enlightening if the two different versions of the Cherub could compete against each other.

The series is to be sailed, from December 28 through to January 7, from Georges River Sailing Club. At least ten English boats indicated they would be keen to attend.

Independently of this event, Sydney-based Treharne had begun looking at classes which his son Robbie could move up to from Flying Ants. He was not interested in either 420s or Lasers and when he began looking at the Cherub class he was not attracted to the current designs. "I'd sailed fast, lightweight machines when I was young and I didn't like the heavy, European style of boat. I spoke to Peter "Snubby" Moor (a regular 14ft skiff sailor who was also looking at intermediate classes for his son) and I mentioned the Cherub as the most suitable. But I didn't like the way they'd evolved. The boats seemed pretty boxy."

He felt the bottoms were semi-circular. They floated higher with buoyancy in the middle which was trying to lift the chines out of the water. "It was very clever, I suppose, but the boats seemed to end up pretty fat. Peter Moor and I were both partial to the Cherub but we were a bit sad about the way they looked."

Then he found out that several years before, the English had changed their hull measurements, narrowing the chine-to-chine mid-point measurement from 3ft 10 1/2in to 3ft 7in, and allowing the mid-point chine elevation from the keel to increase from 6in to 7in. "In my opinion those changes allowed you to draw a sweet looking shape," he said.

"I said to Peter, 'Why don't we try that?.'" When they looked in more detail at the English boats they saw their



*Pasta Frenzy English design enjoys an asymmetric spinnaker ride  
(Claire Spens/PPL)*



*English Cherubs racing in home waters.*

changes included the asymmetric kites, bowsprit poles, and self-draining floors. "We figured the kids could have more fun in those boats and they'd be quicker."

They gathered a group of interested parents and sailors then talked to Iain Murray (a former national champion in the class) who offered to design them a boat to the English restrictions. Treharne showed the lines to the current class production builder (and designer) Julian O'Mahony for comment.

The plans were put out to tender and after some meetings and further discussions production dinghy builder Mark Phillips of Dinghy Sports who, Treharne said, was keen to fund the project, was charged with putting together a prototype. Murray slightly modified the design, increasing the rocker a little and adding flared wings to the sides, then the building of a plug and moulds began.

The deck mould included a flattened false floor sloping aft as part of a self-draining cockpit and an open transom.

Cherub sailors in other locations (including the strong NSW fleets at George's River and Belmont) became aware of Treharne's actions and their concern grew. Kelaher says that officially most people in the class association are opposed to Treharne's new craft and the Australian class registrar has informed him it will not be registered for the purposes of the forthcoming international regatta. Treharne said: "It would be sad if we couldn't go in it, but it would not be the end of the world."

He said the English association had told him they would accept his registration as an English boat.

Treharne has spoken to a number of current boat owners concerned about his actions and the possible effect on re-sale values. He's told them: "Please don't feel threatened. If your boat is better, nobody will follow us."

He says: "I committed to go ahead because I believe in it. And Iain believes we're right. We still want to be recognised. I'm going to work as closely with the local Cherub association as I can." To that end he planned to make two boats available for demonstration sails (including his son's). "I've got no axe to grind and I don't want to offend anybody," said Treharne.

Kelaher says that although he has had a number of informal discussions with Treharne regarding the project, there has been no official notification about the new project to the national governing body, nor have they been sent a set of plans.

Kelaher himself has recently submitted a number of remits (the official channel for change to class rules) with the objective of "cleaning up" the rules. The major change proposed is the introduction of a self-draining cockpit. "But we're not going as far as a hull change or bowsprit and asymmetric kite," he said.

"My attitude is to get the UK boats here, sail against them and see what happens. If they're going really fast, everyone will want one, if they're not, they'll say 'Hmmm.'"

He also thinks, from a personal point of view, that bowsprits and asymmetric kites will eventually come to Cherubs. "The kids like them," he says. Kelaher has three offspring who currently sail Cherubs and he has



*English Pasta Frenzy design (Spens/PPL)*



*Julian O'Mahoney's stock boat.*

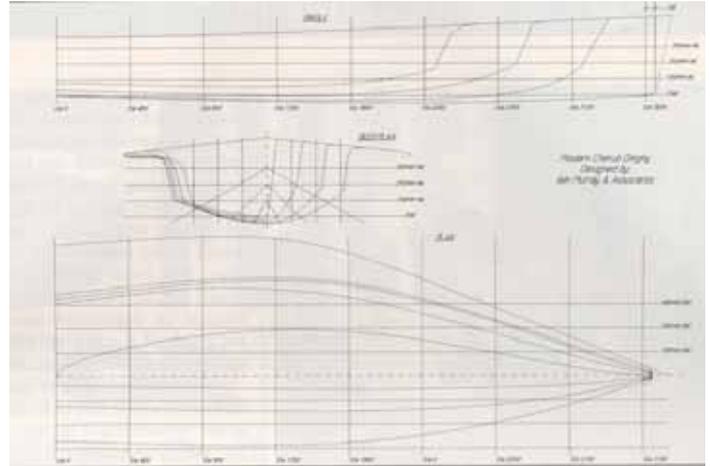
recently built two new boats to the current rules. In spite of this investment, he is not averse to change. "I want to have a good look at the UK boats," he said. "You can probably make a faster boat under their rules, but I think the nut behind the tiller will make more of a difference."

This is a view shared to some extent by O'Mahony, who viewed the plans at the invitation of Treharne. O'Mahony, a boatbuilder, former top competitor in Cherubs and winner of two National titles in the 12ft Skiff class (once as skipper and once as crew), currently builds his own design Cherub as a production boat.

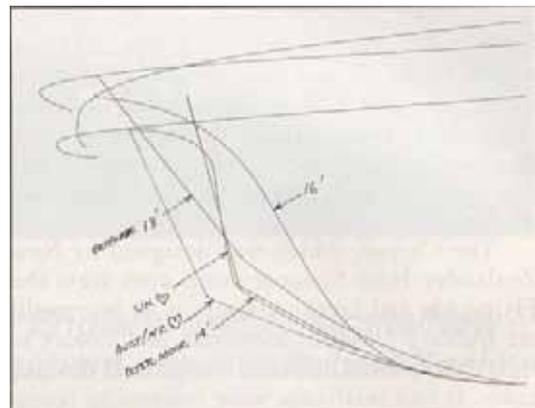
"It might be slightly better in some conditions and slightly worse in others than the current boats," O'Mahony says. "There won't be a great deal of boatspeed difference with the drawing I saw." He said the variation of the mid-ship section rule "allows you to make a skinnier boat." But he believes the biggest change to the boat will be the addition of an asymmetric spinnaker.

The Australians have already made tentative steps in experimenting with asymmetries. Last Christmas at the national titles held at Belmont 16ft Skiff Club South Australian Craig Simons fitted his boat with a prototype, complete with a bowsprit pole, to let everybody have a look at the system in operation.

Immediate past national president Duncan Groome, a fellow South Australian, has sailed with Simons since the set-up was improved (increasing the sail area and lengthening the Luff) and has been impressed by it. "Sydney sailmaker Ian MacDiarmid made one for the boat which we used in an Easter regatta on Lake Bonnet". "We sailed against another boat which Craig had regularly sailed against and we were significantly faster than before. The asymmetric makes a lot of difference to the fun."



*Lines laid Murray and Associates prepared for Hugh Treharne*



*Comparison of sectional shapes; Australian Cherub has the widest chine line.*



*The English Cherubs vary in shape . This is the Platypus design (Spens/PPL).*

Groome is another who thinks some change is inevitable, though he is more uncertain about how much a change to hull measurements will really matter. "Hugh seems to have jumped the gun." he said.

He said the fleet was now divided into what he termed "conservatives", who were against changes, and those who were prepared to look at the new boat. "Given the investment in the fleet - there are 110 Cherubs registered around Australia and 60 to 70 of those are good boats - many won't want to change. It's not a good position to be in, but the association has got to look to the future."

Andrew Kelaher, David Kelaher's son said the new boats he and his father have put on the water look significantly different from the high, slab-sided craft which have dominated the fleet for the last ten years, though their underwater sections remain similar. "They don't look boxy at all. In fact, when we launched it, people asked us what kind of boat it was."

---

### **Designer John Spencer's View**

Hugh Treharne asked the original designer of the Cherub, John Spencer, for his opinion.

I am fully conversant with Cherub development from 1984 through to 1990 in England and Australia and fully agree with your thoughts on the English rules. I tried hard to get Australian agreement to them when they were put forward as "remits". Australian administrators refused to accept them and put them out for voting to owners. I had support from other Australian states and New Zealand but NSW blocked all efforts to improve this class from the original outdated concept of a 20-yearold (me) boy. My efforts managed finally to get an updated sail plan on it, based on the English one that I was also involved in as an adviser, but Australia refused to accept any changes in hull measurement rules, excluding English boats from championships. Last week I had a letter, from a fellow who has lived in Canada, Australia and now here in New Zealand, that raised the same subject. With English Cherub rules, we might well see a true world championship again - not with Australian rules. Do not blame NZ for what has happened to the class that Australia has stuffed up.

-John Spencer

Reproduced with the kind permission of *Australian Sailing* magazine

[www.yaffa.com.au/mags/aslmag.htm](http://www.yaffa.com.au/mags/aslmag.htm)