

REPORT ON AUSTRALIAN ARROW & ARAFURA CADET CHAMPIONSHIPS 28 DEC – 3 JAN 2015

The absence of the immediate past champion Steve Short (Vic) and top contender Adrian Fawcett (Qld) left the 2014-15 Arrow Championships at Christies Sailing Club, South Australia a wide open event. Seventeen times champion Frank O'Rourke was the obvious favourite from fellow NSW skipper Gary Powell and Victorian Dale Bryan but could a local skipper break the 31 year drought of a South Australian skipper winning on home waters?

The possibility gained traction after day three of the regatta when Victor Harbor skipper Brett Pearsons emerged with a win in the invitation race and placings of 1st, 2nd and 4th in the first three heats. The last result was due to him sailing towards a wrong mark in the complicated box-and-triangle course. Fellow Harborite Steve Rogers, a heavy weather specialist took out heat 2, whilst Dale Bryan took advantage of Pearsons' error to snatch victory in heat 3 by just 2 seconds from O'Rourke.

The first two days of racing could not have been sailed in more different conditions. The invitation race day was warm and sunny with an 8 to 12 knot southerly breeze. A change arrived overnight and the accompanying strong south-westerly and big shore break blew away chance of sailing on day 2. The wind had subsided by day three but the weather remained cool and heavily overcast. A large swell was still running – enough to cause queasy stomachs for a number of skippers!

The warm weather returned on day 4 when two races were sailed in an 8 to 10 knot westerly. In a pattern often seen in past championships, O'Rourke lifted his performance to secure two wins and take the series lead. Second placings were shared by consistent skippers Dale Bryan and Gary Powell, whilst Pearsons managed two thirds.

The pressure was on Pearsons on day 5 which scorched its way to 43^o C but miraculously the northerly held in at 12 to 15 knots until mid afternoon. Combined with a flat sea, it providing ideal sailing conditions. Pearsons rose to the occasion, winning by 3 seconds from Powell, with Rogers 3 seconds further behind. O'Rourke finished 4th. This meant that Pearsons and O'Rourke were level on points and with identical placings.

Events on the final day can only be described as bizarre. A change was forecast for the afternoon, but at 1330 hours it was blazing hot and quite still. At 1425 hours, the horizon darkened and a gentle breeze from the south-west started to ruffle sails. Fifteen minutes later, it was blowing 25 knots and skippers had to scramble to prevent their boats from being blown across the beach. Just as all hope of a race was fading, the wind moderated and skippers prepared again to launch. With 1/3rd of the fleet in the vicinity of the committee boat and the remainder on the way, the weather turned its last trick as the wind freshened again to 25 knots. Most skippers immediately headed for the shore, encouraged by the safety boats, but a few waited at sea for the official abandonment signal. Finally it came and the rule book was consulted to break the tie between Pearsons and O'Rourke. The decision went to the former on the basis that the better placed in the previous heat is the winner.

Pearsons sailed an immaculately prepared foam sandwich boat built with the help of his brother Craig. His sails were cut by local amateur sailmaker Marcus Towell, an ex-National Arrow champion.

As has become tradition, The South Australian Association set up scales for weighing boats and measured sails and several key boat elements. The scales produced a few surprises and in one case,

a scramble for lead ingots, but the bigger concern was the number of sails failing to measure. With more skippers choosing local sailmakers and those sailmakers keen to impress by not undersizing their sails, some had clearly not put a tape over their completed handiwork.

In the Arafura Cadet fleet, the age of the competitors ranged from 15 to 70 years, indicating the wide appeal and sailability of the little catamaran. The competition was even, with the top four boats scoring at least one heat win. Paquita Quilliam (SA) was a little more consistent than her rivals and won by one point from Victorian Mara Chachs, who beat another SA skipper, Charlie Coombs on a count-back.

The Annual General Meeting was anything other than a dull affair, with lively discussions on Arrow Restrictions changes and a proposal to change to a wide head mainsail for the Arafura Cadet. Passionate arguments were promulgated for and against the change but in the end, the meeting voted to proceed with developing a prototype and conducting a National Vote.

Next year's championships will be held at Mooloolaba on the Queensland Sunshine Coast from 2 to 8 January 2016.

Results:

Arrow: 1. *Sonic*, Brett Pearsons (SA) 10 points; 2. *Dino*, Frank O'Rourke (NSW) 10 points; 3. *Angry Ant* Gary Powell (NSW) 20 points; 4. *Scud*, Dale Bryan (Vic) 23 points; 5. *Air Power*, Daryl Skinner (Qld) 24 points; 6. *Nemesis*, Stephen Rogers (SA) 27 points; 7. *Carmma*, Craig Pearsons (SA) 32 points; 8. *Firefly*, Ian Champion (Vic) 34 points.

Arafura Cadet: 1. *Let it Rip*, Paquita Quilliam (SA) 10 points; 2. *Little Boots*, Mara Chachs (Vic) 11 points; 3. *Nirvana*, Charlie Coombs (SA) 11 points.