

Memories of the A – The Cat and the Class.

I first became involved with A class when attending the Cat Weeks in the early to mid '70's whilst sailing my QB2. At that stage one week of the regatta was an open event and the other was set aside for National titles. This is where I met legends of the A class like Horst Kopp, Greg Goodall, Brian Hooper, the Thomas brothers, Harold, Dawn and Phillip Stevenson to name a few. The natural progression was to join the A class.

I first started sailing A class cats in 1981 after purchasing a half built Brian Hooper design (KA400) from Kerry Cook when I was living in Darwin. Jo-Anne and I attended the 1982 State Titles at St. Leonards for a look and then my first Nationals were 1982/83 at Waranga Basin. Same year John Dowling attended his first Nats.

Since then I have had 12 A Cats. Most were either made or assembled by myself. 9 of these were prior to the boys attending secondary college, so the school fees slowed development a bit.

I was first involved in the Association in Victoria from 1985 with the build up to 1987 Blairgowrie Worlds. After that I took over the running of the Victorian Association from Brian Jennings, along with Jo-Anne as Sec/Treasurer. In 1994 Jo-Anne and I were honoured to be made Life Members of the Victorian Association. This honour was extended to the Australian Association in 1996/97 when we incorporated the National Association and dispensed with the State Associations due to cost and simplicity of operations.

Having served as National President when titles were held in Victoria 1989 and 1991. I was appointed the Australian President following the 1994 Lake Cootharaba Worlds and retired from that position after the completion of 1999 McCrae Worlds. I was then also President of IACA and retained that position from 1997 until 2005. It was during this period I negotiated the class agreement with ISAF, ran postal ballots for constitution and minimum weight and did a complete re-write of our championship rules. Following the 2009 Belmont Worlds I was re-elected to AIADCA President and held that position until our immediate past Nationals at Paynesville (2020).

Over the 40 years of enjoying the A class family Jo-Anne and I have made many friends throughout the World and I feel very lucky I have been able to pursue a sport where the friendship and comradery is second to none.

We have also seen many families develop and grow up. Of special significance is the pleasure of seeing children of legends of the class sailing against their fathers, Life members Horst and Michael Kopp, Harold and Phil Stevenson, JD and Jeff, Myself and Matthew. We have also seen the children of World champions strutting their stuff, Allan and Jon Goodall, Scott and Michael Anderson, Landy and Andy. There have probably been a few more and hopefully we will see young Mason Collett at some stage. There has also been a number of brothers competing against each other. Most of these have won National, World or State championships so the competitive nature within families is certainly a driving force. Those that come to memory are Brett and Shane Thomas, Allan and Greg Goodall, Chris and Graeme Parker, Paul, Dave and Tony McKenzie (along with father John), Matt and Chris Homan.

I remember sailing against a brash young kid at his first A cat regatta (the Brass Monkey regatta at Rathmines) in 1996. At the time I wrote a piece for the newsletter and stated we needed to watch this kid as he pushes the boat harder than Paul McKenzie. 2 months later Glenn Ashby won his first World championship.

I first met Bags at the Melbourne boat show in 1986 and quickly talked him into A cats. Well that's my story. Bags probably had made his mind up anyway. Since then I regard Bags as one of my closest friends and thank him for all the hard work he has done for our class and the support and help he has been for me over most of the years I have been on the executive committee. The role of President does not happen smoothly without the assistance of a good committee and I would especially like to thank Michael Kopp and Stuart Scott for their help and support over the past several years. I would also like to thank all the State Reps and Measurers for their contribution over the years as well. The most outstanding contributor for Queensland, of course, is John Dowling who has held positions of President, State Rep and Measurer for as long as I can remember. Of course I wouldn't have been able to do the job without the support of Jo-Anne and the kids.

Over the years we have seen a number of changes to our class and championships. We went from running 2 hour races to half hour races. What happened to the reach? Better ask Hamish! We moved from Aluminium masts to carbon masts. I was one who disagreed with the cost, especially when Paul McKenzie won 2 World championships with an aluminium mast against a fleet of carbons. I remember using a borrowed boat with carbon mast lent to me by Pieter Saarberg for the Dutch Worlds in 1995. On the plane home I remarked to Jo-Anne how expensive the trip was going to be because now "I had to have one". Since then there has been nearly 100 Saarberg masts go through my shed (much to Scott's dilemma). Following the introduction of carbon masts and carbon development we went through a couple of minimum weight restrictions. First 80 kgs and then 75 kgs. Straight centreboards became cantered, then C boards and finally the foiling boats which has been the biggest single change and challenge to our development class.

As the only true development catamaran class we have seen many innovators and "nutty professors" along the way. Many systems have been tried for rudder and centreboard controls, mast control, curved travellers. Landy first had winglets on rudders back in 1996. Masts have gone from 27'6" to 33' and then back again. We started with pear shaped masts then the Australian wing and Italian Sori masts. In 1990 Barry Marmion dispensed with the tapered mast and ran a deck sweeper main. The untapered mast remained but the deck sweeper disappeared until just a few years ago. Even the tapered mast has made a re-appearance.

Over the past 55 years the A cat has attracted the cream of catamaran sailors and we have had the pleasure of sailing with and against many Olympic and World champions. This has not only increased the speed of the A cat but also helped with the development. Recent America's Cup innovations have now been downloaded to the A. Some even started life being developed on the A then adapted to the larger cats.

At our 2019/20 Nationals in Paynesville, the sailing manifest included the first sailor to clock 50 knots, the current World speed holder, the winning skipper of the Volvo Ocean race, World and Olympic champions. All this without any team NZ sailors present!

How lucky are we!

Ian "Storm" Johnson

January 2020