



# COUTA BOAT ASSOCIATION INC

# SCOOP

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## OUR NEW WEBSITE: [WWW.COUTABOATCLUB.COM.AU](http://WWW.COUTABOATCLUB.COM.AU)

Please come on board and visit the new official Couta Boat Association site. On it you will find the very latest key Couta Boat information. The latest Class Rules can be read on line, from a PDA or mobile phone with web access, or print a copy directly off the site. A 'Boat Register' shows all measured boat statistics plus more interesting information regarding race records and history of the various boats. Boats for sale, Couta news, buy CBA gear and contact the Association features are all there. In time we plan to COUTABLOG so that our more immediate issues can get a through airing and an opportunity for all to voice an opinion. [www.coutaboatclub.com.au](http://www.coutaboatclub.com.au)

## THE PORTSEA CUP 2005 - A SKIPPER'S RETROSPECTIVE

It happens on the second Saturday of January, and has done so every year since the '70's at Portsea, Melbourne's so called playground for the rich, on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula. It's a unique sailboat race called "The Portsea Cup" hosted by the Sorrento Sailing Couta Boat Club. The Portsea Cup, which has been part and parcel of the revival of the renowned Couta Boat, has come a long way.

For the uninitiated the couta boat is a gaff rigged, open, wooden boat a craft that historically fished Victorian coastal waters. The coutas pack a fair whack of sail area, they are a great day boat and are extremely seaworthy (in the right hands). Uphill they are not exactly a metre boat but they do have a good turn of speed and they are a lot of fun to sail. A lot of keelboat yachties who get on for the first time are amazed at the buzz of being so close to the water, the tight racing - and all with no winches and no electronics. Even boatspeed logs are outlawed.

The race is sailed in two divisions: Div 1 being the crack "26 footers" and Div 2 being the slower or smaller boats.

The heat is really on when it comes to line honours for Div 1. This year's race was no exception; just read on to get a who's who and maybe you'll also find where old Etchells sailors go!

This year's race was held in ideal conditions in Portsea's Weeroona Bay. Portsea is unusual in that it is located on a 2 kilometre wide needle - like peninsula separating Bass Straight from Port Phillip Bay. At the extreme western end of the peninsula is the notorious "Rip"; the entrance to Port Phillip.

The Weeroona Bay race area is superb because in the summer months it is blessed with afternoon 12-15 knot sea breezes from the

SE which essentially means the race is held under a weather shore - lovely flat water and plenty of movement in both wind direction and pressure. Weeroona Bay has a headland at each end; Point Franklin to the east and Police Point to the west; working these can be very tricky. Add to this the rather extraordinary tidal streams generated by the proximity to the Rip and you have rather interesting sailing.

The 2005 race saw 34 boats in Div 1 start at 2.30pm followed by 19 Div 2 boats some 10 minutes later. Both div 1 and 2 sailed the same course: Triangle/Sausage/Triangle/Beat which inevitably became congested on some of the mark roundings.

The pre race favourite was former OK dinghy world champ and Starboat notable Peter Gale sailing *Vivienne*, a boat launched in 2002 and carrying a very experienced crew including sailmaker Mark Rimington of Halsey-Lidgard Melbourne loft.

Next in line were 1992-launched *Whisper* with Nigel Abbott, a member of the Bond '87 America's cup team and former world match race champion, and 1914 - yes 1914-launched *Surprise* with ex Etchells champ and Olympic Star Class aspirant Nick Williams. *Surprise* is somewhat shorter than 26 feet due to several bouts of major surgery which is not surprising given that she is over 90 years old. Williams crew consisted of his old Etchells mates including Volvo veteran and Hobart race record helmsman Ian "Barney" Walker, Yachting Australia President and former Etchells world champ Andrew "Dingo" Plympton, Wayne "Moose" Johnstone, Etchells veteran Peter "Windows" Dore, Peter "Greyhound" Graham, and human winch and centreplate lifter Vinnie "Muscleman" Samintino. It is no surprise that the reserve was former top ranked Etchells skipper Noel "Nitro" Drennan.

Other heavies in the fleet included 2 time Etchells world champ John Savage sailing *Gemfish*, a boat he helped design, John Bertrand, with the assistance of a team NZ's navigator skippered Georgio Gjerja's 2004 launched *Darney*. Georgio won the 1996 Hobart in *Ausmaid*; also a member of the victorious '96 Kenwood Cup Team.

It was interesting to see Milton Green's boat *Jesse* being sailed by a crew consisting entirely of boys from Skandia in their first event since the Hobart disaster.

The rest of the fleet was loaded with talent. Sydney Gold Medallist Mark Turnbull was on Ross Wilson's *Beau*, Montreal Olympian and former Etchells Champion James Byrne was steering *Minerva*.

There are some race days that are big. The Portsea Cup has been big ever since its inception; a single race held to declare a winner. Looking around, the Portsea area is not short of ego, nor the quid it takes to own a piece of it, yet this one day every year presents the opportunity to leave your mark on the place; the winner of The Portsea Cup ranks around here, and for that matter ranks on any CV.

As I recall this years race I think of that technique used in the movies when a scene from the end is used at the beginning; in this case, before my eyes I see C14 *Surprise* (1914) a 91 year old boat consolidate her lead for the first time by crossing my bow clear ahead on port. She is now the race leader, unchallenged and within seconds of winning the 2005 Portsea Cup. In sailing it is never over till it's over, but in the seconds that remain, I know that the physical positioning of the boats seals a checkmate. The Gold leaf on the board for this year will soon belong to *Surprise*.

As the final boat lengths are sailed the race is lost. In an event like this you can't help but feel the strength of the loss. The extreme opposite of the joy just celebrated onboard the winning boat. Our attention switches to confirming the placings. There are 3 boats within a boat length, all now vying for second. Two are on the lay-line for the finish, our boat *Whisper* must tack. With the boats this tight all skippers no doubt consider their options of Port Starboard, lee-bow positions and tactical positioning that may advantage them in these last crucial lengths to share the minor spoils.

This race is most definitely the Melbourne Cup of the sailing calendar. Unique classic timber boats with bowsprits (jib booms) and yards slug with cascades of white polyester braids. The course location off picturesque Portsea, significant crowds on the pier all combine to offer sailors a special expectation of the day. The sailors make an art form of playing it down. When that game is played it is just an example of how serious it really is. Yet the mood has a definite air of quietly going about it. Many new sails have 'quietly' come out of the bag during the week for a test or two. Others blow the secret in an instant, crackling loudly on the first hoist out of the bag. Hot sailors begin to populate the boats – all apparently a coincidence.

Ideal preparation is to build a regular quality crew and test the sail selection prior to race day. In our case C92 *Whisper* has been short on regulars all year so the recruitment of sailors returning from the Hobart or in between other events is where we went looking. Typically we ask around the dinghy scene for sailors who might have just finished racing in Sail Melbourne and are looking for a day trip to the peninsula. The scent of the Portsea Cup usually catches their competitive spirit. A day at the beach or on the clubhouse grass also suits the family looking for what may appear to be a social day of sailing. Regardless of their chances to win, all boats boost their effort for the day.

This year we ended up with a crew of 6. Ian Brown a past Bronze Medalist and Olympic Coach was returning from Hobart after the Sabot Nationals with another mate Jake Gunther. We had only 2 regulars on board being myself and brother-in-law Jon Dwyer.

I was grateful to have strong talent aboard, but I was also aware that Ian's tactical style differs from my own. He is an astute and logical tactician, where as my own creative nature mixed with a lot of local experience manifests a 50/50 balance between tactical play and seat of the pants local intuition.

Prior to the start Ian recorded wind oscillations and began working up his own race brief. Watching him profile the conditions was quite impressive. My thought at the time was to consider his input looking for observations

that I had not considered or would otherwise have overlooked. I welcomed the opportunity to see first hand how guys like Ian operate. The Portsea race area generally has gusty offshore sea breezes and heaps of current running. It is challenging to catch all of what is going on so the extra skilled observations were welcomed.

As always there is never much that anyone can do about the calibre of our competitors and certainly there was no doubt the fleet had imported plenty of talent and new equipment. As start time approaches, you get a glance at the cheeky buggers. Bertrand, Walker, Plympton, Turnbull, Savage, Anderson, Brown... A couple of Kiwi Americas' Cuppers, new sails shaking and crackling around the start area... You could never doubt it; this is the big day.

The preparatory 5 minutes flashes past. Sail selections must be complete well ahead as rigging the headsail on the jib boom takes around 3 mins. On *Whisper* we started well with a clean start and speed at the gun. About all I ever aim for. Ian picked the early shifts well however in a classic Couta you have few tacks to spend. Some boats such as *Surprise*, C97, *Gemfish* and *Vivienne* all are much savvier to tack. I have sailed on them all and their agility is a fact that needs to be considered when every boat length counts. Our strategy therefore is to sail more like a fast catamaran and spend the minimum time tacking. At the windward mark several boats arrived together heralding we have a top race on our hands. At this point I always make a note of where the favorite *Vivienne* (the fleets fastest boat) is placed. If she is 7th or better at the first mark she will win. Today she was 14th suffering a poor start.

I think *Surprise* rounded first with several others very close. Bertrand took advantage of the strong outgoing tide and made a large shoot from well below the lay-line to round inside *Whisper*. (Blokes like that get away with stuff like that). The reaching legs are played mostly to not lose any ground; overtaking is not really going to happen in a four ton displacement fishing boat. Onboard I was becoming overly busy relaying instructions to a basically debutante crew. Prior to the race I had marked all the halyards with a black texta. The Peak halyard position for up wind and off wind, the jib halyard hoist, traveller, mainsheet and Jib cars had all been freshly marked for easy understanding, yet my head and the heads of the crew were increasing looking into the boat. You are really looking for the boat to be sailing its self with the crew sourcing the trim instructions from what they see on the course and what they feel from the boat under them. I guess at the time I really wasn't aware of how this situation was sucking my thoughts down into the activity inside the boat and away from the race developments. Things were pretty busy at this point and we were well placed. Had I alerted myself to the inward distraction I am not sure what I could have really done about it. You see, this is what preparation and practice is all about, allocating each crew with a set of responsibilities that then lightens the load collectively.

On the second lap we held 3rd position at the windward mark prior to the run. The two leaders rounded and gybed immediately. This tactic was most certainly a mistake. Delaying such a gybe and covering from in front would have been sounder. On the course, the strong current whilst looking downwind ran across the course travelling right to left. To stay on starboard with this strong current moving your boat to the left would more than likely negate the need for a gybe at all on this leg. Prior to rounding for this leg we had checked the wind pressure that only confirmed an immediate gybe was not required. Simple as it may sound, I make it a fundamental choice to sail where the most wind is. I like to have more wind in my sails than my competitors. On this occasion the wind carried us most of the way down the leg and into first place. The previous leaders *Surprise* and *Darney* (Bertrand), ended up close reaching to the leeward mark on Starboard against the current offering us decent distance break on them.

Re-telling a race via a boat for boat description can become somewhat tedious however I have wanted to share some of the many thoughts that go on onboard; but what value to you the reader – as we didn't end up winning. We screwed up; how! – Remember the beginning of this story.

Now on the last lap any leading boat simply needs to cover. Done well that renders the trailing boats with little opportunity. The trailing boats know they need to establish separation to create a passing option. We all know that no race is won until the gun smoke and Portsea can provide surprises.

Beginning the last beat *Whisper*, followed by *Gemfish*, *Surprise*, *Darney* and an ever-closing *Vivienne* began the leg leaving the last mark to port on port tack. Up course the breeze looked healthy. I mean gusting, still variable but no visible significant changes.

Our mistake had already been made. By choosing to sail on Port until trailing boats tacked away to starboard, we had offered them a chance to gain separation on us. Even when we tacked straight away to starboard to join them our separation quickly became a liability if the wind headed us on starboard. Bit like Dennis Conner in Newport. Once he had begun that fateful leg his separation from Australia 2 did him in. Quite a distance behind A2 benefited from a different breeze and achieved a lower heading. Presto the race quickly changed with both boats virtually equal on cross wind. In Portsea a shift to the left is always on the cards late in the day. Rounding the wing mark on the last lap can often be used as a guide to see how that side (the left) of the course is going. In any case the theory for the wind shifting to the left is a southern hemisphere given for last legs. Trailing boats tacked for the left and sure enough the breeze began to roll. Checking our cross wind we initially held the lead but after some 6 - 7 minutes the wandering left shift gobbled up the last of the leading margin. The final cross seals victory for *Surprise*. She is home for this years Cup and the prestige is well earned.

*Nigel Abbott.*

## PORTSEA CUP 2007 RESULTS

*Held on 14th January 2007*

### *Division 1 - Line Honours*

- 1 C2003 VIVIENNE
- 2 C888 MYSTIFY
- 3 C03 DARNEY

### *Division 1 - Handicap Winners*

- 1 C888 MYSTIFY
- 2 C2006 ZEPHYR
- 3 C73 LINCOLN ROSE

### *Division 2 - Line Honours*

- 1 C31 LUCY
- 2 C96 DAWN
- 3 C81 FIONA

### *Division 2 - Handicap Winners*

- 1 C911 LYNDAL LEA
- 2 C148 IT'S ALL GOOD NELLIE
- 3 C51 CORSAIR

## AUSTRALIAN WOODEN BOAT FESTIVAL – HOBART TASMANIA FEBRUARY 9–12 2007.



Held on Hobart's historic waterfront every two years during February, the Australian Wooden Boat Festival celebrates maritime craft, art and heritage through four unforgettable days of colour, action, music, theatre, flavours and fun.

The setting is brilliant – the festivities are centred on the docks of historic Sullivans Cove, the harbour of the Derwent and the city's scenic dockside precinct, with the convict-built sandstone pubs and warehouses of Salamanca as the perfect backdrop. Senses are aroused by the strains of acoustic music over the water intermingling with a wood carver's mallet or the rippling of sea water against a clinker hull.

From the inaugural event in 1994, when 180 wooden boats graced Hobart's docks, The Australian Wooden Boat Festival has grown to become one of the nation's most exciting and spectacular celebrations.

It's a festival of authenticity and intimacy – both qualities are enhanced by the superb location in and around Hobart's historic docks precinct.

In 2005, more than 40,000 visitors admired 450 superb wooden craft of all shapes and sizes, including international exhibits like the two replica Viking boats from Denmark. The presence of remarkable wooden boats like this has made the festival the biggest event of its kind in Australia and given it international recognition as a maritime festival of the highest quality.

The Australian Wooden Boat Festival is an iconic event on Tasmania's biennial calendar. It is strongly supported by the Government of Tasmania, Hobart City Council, Hobart Ports Corporation and a range of business and community groups.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT [WWW.WOODENBOATFESTIVAL.COM.AU](http://WWW.WOODENBOATFESTIVAL.COM.AU)

## SAILING CLUB PASSED OVER FOR INVASION *October, 2006*

BETA QUADRANT, ZGYXA—Nearly 5 hostile aliens from the planet Zgyxa skipped invading the Sorrento Sailing Couta Boat Club last Tuesday, saying it "really it does not seem worth the effort." "A Club scan indicates that its resources will be used up by 2007, its most intelligent life form cannot fly, and it possesses no significant deposits of Tangium," (A type of fish) said Supreme Commander Kasha Ak-Bej,

the nine-foot serpentine leader of the invasion. "Not to mention that their fleshy exoskeleton would make the earthlings totally unfit slaves for fishing Zgyxa's sea's of ice cold, foaming, lager."

The Club treasurer expressed his extreme disappointment!!!!

# WHY A COUTA BOAT?

Why a couta boat? Could I even build a boat? My boat building experience had been a plywood kayak in Scouts as a lad. Was this a childhood dream that really should stay as just that? I had a pile of boat grade King Billy: the left over from a friends boat building project. A phone call to Tim Phillips one winter evening some 5 years ago helped to set me on the path.

I had a pile of Wooden Boat magazines beside my bed that I had read over and over as a means of keeping the dream alive. I had just the boat... "Alerion", a 26' Herreshoff design. I had even rung a builder in Maine to see how I could get plans. "What you need to do is to get the keel laid" said Tim towards the end of our call. I guess I could work that out from Bud Macintosh's "Building a Wooden Boat". Then he quietly asked me why I wasn't going to build an Australian design. What design? How about a couta boat?

I had to admit to not knowing much about the design apart from some of the modified putt putts I had seen around Port Sorell in the north of Tasmania. I could tell he was enthusiastic. Then I remembered a Wooden Boat article about the couta boats. In the next breath he suggested I come over and have a look. I was hooked!

How about an 18' "Woodpecker" design. Surely I could achieve that. Tim very kindly let Wayne Parr take some time off building to take me out and show me the boat. I could simply have been a tyre kicker, but Tim and Wayne willingly gave of their time and expertise from the start. I realised there was an energy here that was going to get me through this project. I've never been afraid of a challenge or an adventure.

But the 18 footer felt like a dinghy. I had a Timpenny 6.7 at home; a big NS14, and climbing aboard "Woodpecker" had the same feel. I was after a proper boat. So we went up in 2 foot increments and when I stepped on board a 26 footer, I knew I had found the boat. I bought a set of plans on the spot for Tim's "Jennifer".

Tim then had another very sensible suggestion. Why not have one of his boat builders stay with me for a week to get me started? I was straight home and headed into Britton Timbers in Smithton the next day. I had to keep the momentum going. Yup, they could get a keel for me and they would be running some celery soon so I could also get the decking. Three months later I had a phone call from Rob Keogh at Brittons to say he had two keels and that I should come out and choose one. Stringy Bark; as dense and straight as you could wish for. That 30' 12 b' 4 sat supported at each end next to the spot where I was to extend the shed at home for 18 months. Would I be able to take that next step?

Back to Tim. Again he was prepared to accommodate this rank amateur when I rang him to say that the keel was ready and how about I make a start in early 2003. He suggested a start after the 2003 Wooden Boat Festival in Hobart. I organised a locum so that I could take some time off and teed up Brittons to get me some celery for the ribs. Again the timing was perfect. They could cut it the week before I needed it, which would be perfect for the purposes of steaming the ribs. I caught up with Tim and Wayne at the WBF in early February. Tim again with masterly tact steered me in the right direction when he said that Wayne would be over for two weeks. One wouldn't be enough. I had no idea! I was in the hands of professionals.



And so Wayne and I laid the keel in the second week of March 2003. We were frenetic. I was learning so much. Wayne was the ever patient teacher. I was the apprentice who paid his wage. A strange but very effective relationship that resulted in a framed and ribbed 26' couta boat, complete with for'ard garboard in two weeks! During the day we would achieve more than my dreams could have imagined. By night, we would have a few beers and talk boats. The enthusiasm was infectious. It was only when I saw Gary Kerr's video that I realised that Wayne and I had done in two weeks what Tim and one of the Lacco masters had also achieved in two weeks when Tim built his first boat.

Then Wayne headed back to the real world of boat building in Sorrento and I just looked at the beautiful sculpture sitting in the shed. Four months later I had only tinkered. I needed more impetus and a friendly kick up the bum. I was too afraid to muck up a huon plank. Back I headed to Sorrento. A day spiling and fitting lining boards in "Darnie", Wayne's comment that my precious huon "was only wood", and Tim's "you need to keep moving" was what I needed.

I didn't look back. I only mucked up one plank and then I was able to reuse it later on! Another visit from Wayne in October 2004 to fit the centre case and a visit from Tim in March 2005 when he brought the "RoughUp" across Bass Straight to support Michael Blackburn's Laser crossing, kept me on track. I caulked the seams on a celery engine box tonight, and sitting in the shed is the completed hull, primed and ready for the undercoat, and awaiting the final engine fit out. A July launch is on track.

I've kept a log book of the visitors. Tim Phillips, Wayne Parr, Bill Foster, Mick Drake, Mac Humphries and many others. All boat builders, and all enthuse "the wooden boat". They've all provided valuable advice, loaned me tools, put up with Sunday morning mobile phone calls. "Tim, I'm about to do the carlins. Talk me through it". "Wayne, what sized bolt do I make up for the apron?" Always enough information, but not enough to flood me. Always encouragement. And always a sign off with "ring any time; don't be afraid to ask". Thanks guys. I've made some great friends. I'm achieving my dream and I've rekindled amongst my many friends and patients a spark in their eye and an excitement in their voice when they ask "how's the boat going doc? When is the launch".....Sunday July 9th at 10 o'clock in Stanley, far NW Tassie!

*Vernon Powell.*

Couta Boat Association Inc.

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We are actively seeking your Couta tales (stories about the boats, club life or events) There has been a fantastic response to the online Boat register 137 boats to date So don't miss out on being part of it and register your boat TODAY even if your boat is on the supplementary register.

*Preserving the Heritage and promoting the sailing of Australia's unique Couta Boats.*