

Concord Ryde Sailing Club

Skate 50th Anniversary Reunion – 8th February 2009

Hi to All sailing friends,

It is now three weeks since the Reunion. What an amazingly successful day it was. Many people have made contact to express their thanks to all who made the day such a success. The success was really made by those attending and being involved.

I have been asked to write a report on the Event

About 120 past and present Skate sailors plus a few VJ mates, together with spouses, partners and friends all met at the Concord Ryde Sailing Club to celebrate Skates plus the 50th year since they came to the CRSC

The club hosted us all to a great luncheon and their members worked so hard to ensure we had a great day.

Many of the crowd had past membership of CRSC but the club made an open invitation to all from the past and present Skate supporters to be part of the day.

We had Don Dixon who was an integral part of the original design team. Richard Wilson from the Wilson family that built the first Skate was there. Ray Young the first National champion came. There were legends from the 1950's, the 1960's, 1970s etc right thru till present days.

CRSC organised a professional photographer to take group photos of us all through each decade. What great photos we still take!!

The club also produced a great souvenir booklet about the role the Skate class played in building CRSC through its earlier history. This brought back wonderful memories to many. Many past club history items and photos were given to the club historian to build up their records.

Also on display were many past CRSC trophies featuring many names of those attending, reflecting past glories. There were videos playing showing Skates sailing on the river.

The Skate Association brought along all the Associations National Trophies. What an array of Skate history they represented bringing back so many close fought racing regattas to memory.

For my own part the National Championship Invitation Race Shield (the Eddy Elliott Memorial Shield) held a real place for me. This has been now contested continuously for 47 years.

Eddy and Andy Hayes built the first Skate at CRSC in 1957/8 and these two guys promoted the class tirelessly to friends. They were successful in that in a short time. They convinced me and several others to learn to sail and that it should be on a Skate. Eddy and Andy were also strong advocates of sailing at every interclub regatta possible.

In 1961 it looked as if NSW might not be represented at the Nationals in Perth to try to regain the National crown. However with typical enthusiasm by Eddy we soon had a small team of John Gettens /Keith Cole in O'Lay. Eddy Elliott/Andy Hayes in Sparkes and Kent McDowall/Laurie Smith in Valiant, travel to Perth on appalling roads.

The team came back with the National crowns on scratch and handicap. This stirred up the West Aussies and ruined two cars, but we had a ball.

Unfortunately Eddie Elliott was killed shortly after in the winter of 1962 and the Skate Association and CRSC lost it's the most effective advocate of Skate sailing.

It was great to see Eddy's name still remembered.

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The day was hot and humid with a light Nor'easter blowing. The current Skate sailors had brought along and rigged 10 modern boats for all who desired to turn back the clock by sailing them. What fun it was to be back on a swinging plank with the Kite up. This Skate is still exhilarating and great fun.

Another piece of history was the operational appearance on an old style Skate named "Big Time Fred".

This boat was built by Steve Murphy and David Salter and sailed at CRSC. David a journalist has written some humorous pieces about "Fred" in his writings. Here was "Fred" rigged and begging to be sailed. David was there for the day and we hope may write a piece about us and this day. I hope so!

It was not long before "Fred" showed how the older small mitre cut spinnaker could really be put to use on a tight shy. CRSC courses used to have several tight shy runs followed by a gybe on to a three-quarter run.

It was always a great sight way back then. Modern Olympic style courses seem to have removed the tight shy runs. The modern Skate, with huge spinnaker, tacks downwind on broad reaches so the tight shy disappeared. It was a joy for oldies to behold.

"Fred" has been fully restored and is owned by Glenn Crichton, forward hand to Dave Luck, the current National Champions.

The day moved on and the camaraderie and stories grew with the mostly light beers consumed.

In all it was a great day and we were sorry that it came to a close. Apparently there were people still a few enjoying them selves after the Club officials locked the club and the park gates.

I would like to publicly thank the CRSC club officials for their welcome and work in hosting the day and to specifically thank Sandra Donovan the long time club Secretary for her work, enthusiasm and encouragement.

Also we thank the Skate Association secretary Ray Simpson for his wonderful work in arranging the boats to be there and helping to get so many legends to the day.

I have been asked by several when will the next reunion be. Well I think that those who enjoyed the day so much should think about who, where, when and how . I know that quite a few of us are considering holidays in Tasmania to coincide with the next National championships.

Thanks to all who came and encouragement to those could not make it, to stay in touch I am back home in Perth but reminisce on how great it was to be amongst great people who love sailing Skates

Till another time and place

Kent McDowall.