

## SKATE REUNION

The sport of sailing forges friendships like no other. Nowhere is this more evident than at CRSC. There is one group of old CRSC sailors who get together every year if they can, to meet up with old friends, tell 'tall tales but true from the legendary past' and reminisce over old photographs, the ghosts of boats past. This group of old CRSC sailors were the original members of the Skate Class which first appeared at the Club in 1959.

This class appeared at a significant time in the history of the Club. On the water, the Vee Jay was still popular and the class of choice for beginners but 'A' Division which had included the VS, various Skiff classes and the odd Gwen 12 was almost defunct. The Skate slotted in and took over this division and breathed new life into the Club. On the management side, the parents of sailors had run the Club from its inception. Many had moved on and for the first time we saw the young sailors taking on the key positions. It was the members of the Skate class who took the Club through the next decade. Under their stewardship the first newsletter which consisted of one foolscap sheet and titled "Up the River" was produced and the Cadet Division was formed.

From the late 1950s through to the early 1970s the Skate Class reigned supreme at CRSC. The Club produced a number of State and National Champions in the class. The Skate of that era was a restricted development class. It was considered one of the fastest boats on the water in a strong breeze and would plane up wind. In the old money it had 14ft (4.27m) long by 3ft 10.5in (1.18m) wide fully decked timber hull with 18ft (5.49m) mast; sail area consisted of 85sq ft mainsail and 35 sq ft jib and 80sq ft single luff spinnaker. Twin 8ft swinging planks were used and the crew would slide in and out to keep the boat balanced. These planks had to be pushed through from one side to the other on every tack. Nonetheless, you needed to be a 'front row forward' to keep the boat upright in any sort of breeze. By the end of the 1960s there were 170 boats registered in NSW, Victoria and Western Australia.

In Perth where every summer afternoon the Fremantle Doctor blew long and hard the Skate sailors had developed a 10ft (3.05m) swinging plank for the for'ard hand who would precariously climb out off the boat in these steady breezes for more leverage. After being trounced at a Nationals over there, the Eastern



*561 Peta IV sailed by Bob Lowndes (skipper) and Les Donovan at the 1967 National Titles. Photo supplied by Bob Lowndes.*

States developed their own versions of these swinging planks. However there were a couple of young lightweight lads from CRSC who took these long swinging planks to another level by putting one of their own specially designed planks with footholes under the skipper as well. At the next National Titles in Perth, the lads from the East beat the boys from the West at their own game with their lightweight crew and two long swinging planks.

You can imagine how skilled CRSC crews had to be, raising and lowering

spinnakers on our tight courses and keeping the boat upright in our knocky breezes. But there was nothing like the exhilaration of seeing a Skate in full flight screaming out of Fishers in a black nor'easter, spinnaker billowing, crew teetering on the edge of disaster. Although the Skates disappeared from the Club in the late 1970s there are two current members, Les Donovan and Barry Roy who experienced firsthand those halcyon days and bemoan how moored boats in Kissing Point Bay, the development of high rise buildings at Mortlake



*591 Interlude sailed by Graeme Senior (skipper) and Bob Chapman. Photo probably taken at the 1967 National Titles and supplied by Bob Chapman. Bob Chapman still lives locally and sails at Drummoyne.*

and the intense planting of trees in Kissing Point Park makes it virtually impossible to sail spinnaker boats at the Club today.

The modern Skate looks quite different to those we remember at CRSC. The hull was slightly widened and only one 10ft plank is allowed for the crew with an 8ft plank for the skipper. Built from modern materials, it now has an asymmetrical spinnaker attached to a fixed or retractable pole at the bow, the sail area was increased as has the height of the mast to give a better aspect ratio.

Next year it will be 50 years since the Skate Class first appeared at the Club. To celebrate, our original CRSC Skate Sailors are planning their next together at the Club on Sunday 8th February 2009 and inviting all old Skate sailors from every era. Members are welcome – spread the word. Old photographs and memorabilia will be on display. The Club even has footage from an old movie taken of Skates sailing at the Club in the late 1960s. More details will be available closer to the event.

*Sandra Donovan*

TETA #561  
R. LOWNDES  
L. DONOVAN



*Bob Lowndes and Les Donovan coming out of Fishers. Note the sailing gear, or lack of it – no gloves, no shoes and no buoyancy vests! Note the shoreline. The Kings School rowing shed can be seen in the gap between the jib and the mast as well as the Club rescue boat. There are no trees and almost no moored boats! The large buildings is the old Slazengers site which was demolished to make way for the new play area at Putney Park. None of those old housing commission houses still exist and are now all two storey McMansions. The boat behind is probably Interlude sailed by Graeme Senior.*

**Sunday 8th February 2009**

**Skate Reunion**

**CRSC**

**All welcome**

