

AUSTRALIA DAY 2014

By Julie Hartwig

We may have been a day late celebrating Australia Day, but the delay did nothing to dampen the enthusiasm of members and friends. Together with affiliate clubs, Cooloola Dragon Boat Club and Sailability Tin Can Bay, around eighty people gathered at the Club in true Aussie style to contest the Annual Australia Day Challenge.

First held in 2009, the Challenge was conceived as a way of integrating the newly affiliated clubs into the yacht club and building camaraderie between the members of all three. Five years down the track, it has certainly done that, with some people now members of all three organisations!

After the cancellation of the 2013 Challenge due to cyclonic weather and flooding, everyone was looking forward to the 2014 event. Organised by the Cooloola Dragons, a tough Challenge was anticipated as the Dragons have yet to win get their name on the trophy (the current score card stands at two wins to the "Yachties" and one to Sailability).

As in previous years, members are invited to get right into the spirit of Australia Day by wearing "the colours" - either red, white and blue or green and gold - with prizes awarded for the Best Dressed Male and Female. The Challenge itself is meant to be a FUN event and while cheating is frowned upon, unfair sportsmanship and skulduggery - while not openly encouraged - are not outlawed. The degree of seriousness with which members contest the Challenge sees fierce competition amid much fun and frivolity, all in the spirit of the Australia Day.

The Challenge consists of a series of fun events based on the water and the beach, with the winner taking home the prestigious Olive Dish Trophy. Events on this year's program included the more traditional sailing races in Access 303 dinghies and time trials in the dragon boat, as well as one of the all-time favourites, the tag-team kayak relay. Novelty events included hotly contested beach boules and thong throwing competitions, and recitals by members of original Aussie poetry compositions. Points are awarded for first, second and third, with the team with the highest score at the end of the "games" declared the winner.

The Dragons provided a kick start for the day serving up an Aussie breakfast of bacon and egg muffins, then Cooloola Dragons President, Sandra Wooster, welcomed all present. Dragon Gayle Barnett recited a poem she had written about the Dragons finally winning a Challenge that had everyone hooting with delight and set the tone for the day.

The first event was "Wot Yots". Sailed in Sailability's Access 303 dinghies, each club fields a team of four sailors to contest two heats, each of which comprised two laps of a short triangle course set in Snapper Creek. The Yachties and Sailability rounded up their "gun" sailors, while the Dragons were left to poach and procure as best they could. After all, paddling is their main claim to fame, not "pulling strings".

Both heats were sailed in strong, gusty winds and even though the 303's were well reefed down, the conditions produced a sight as-yet unseen: crew hiking out on the gunnels. Needless to say, the forty-five degree "attitude" of the dinghies soon saw plenty of "bucket action".

In the first heat, the Yachties' "Dream Team" - Nicky and Tracey - showed the field a clean transom, while Sailability sailed as steady race to take second. The Dragons' team ran foul

of a sandbank right after the start and an entanglement with the pin end buoy at the start of the second lap saw them well out of the results.

Heat 2 saw the 303's handed over to the remaining two team sailors. The Dragons (with a "ring in" Yachty as skipper) again made a "dog's breakfast" of the start, which saw the Yachties and Sailability streaking away towards the top mark. However, the Dragons got their act together and set off in hot pursuit, making huge inroads while the two front-runners engaged in their own close tussle, sailing side-by-side on the downwind leg. At the bottom mark, the Dragons caught the leaders unaware, sneaking inside both to snatch the lead. Now out front, they streaked away into what looked like an unassailable lead ... until disaster struck at the top mark and they snagged the buoy. By the time they had disentangled themselves, the Yachties and Sailability had made up the lost ground and the Dragons were back in last place ... again. However, the Dragons' never-say-die attitude saw them catch the leaders again and while they overtook Sailability, there was no catching the Yachties, who took first blood and 3 points from Sailability (2 points) and the Dragons (1 point).

The next event was "Draggin" - a time trial in the dragon boat. The concept was simple: gather a team of ten paddlers and set the fastest time for the short 250-metre course. Everyone expected the Dragons to be a "shoe-in" for the win and they were, easily recording the fastest time. Result? Three points to the Dragons, 2 points to the Yachties, leaving Sailability to pick up the remaining point.

This event has become one of the Challenge's all-time favourites. The rules are simple: Teams of four paddlers take turns to paddle kayaks out to a buoy about 100 metres off the beach. The paddlers in the kayaks wear a lei. Upon returning to the beach, they are then required to run up the beach to a marker, then run back down the beach to where the other three team members are waiting - one in the kayak - transfer the lei to that paddler and off they go again. This process is repeated until all team members have had a paddle. The first team to get their last paddler over the finish line is declared the winner. It sounds simple and on paper, it is. However, this event always sees unfair sportsmanship and skulduggery taken to a new level and this year's "Kayak Kaos" was no different.

The three teams all got away to a clean start and the field was evenly spread at the rounding buoy. The Yachties were first kayak back to the beach and "Team Leader" Russell sprinted for the beach marker only to find "Referee" (and Dragon!) Gayle running interference! The Sailability paddler got the same reception. After the Dragons' paddler Norma had struggled up the beach dead motherless last, "Referee" Gayle decided to level the playing field for the next group of paddlers ... and moved the beach marker a *LONG WAY* up the beach. One Yachty spectator thought this took unfair sportsmanship and skulduggery to unacceptable levels that bordered on outright cheating and ran down onto the beach to move the marker back to its original place. The beach "sprint" that followed saw the beach marker end up in two pieces. However, the paddlers were now onto their third lap. The Yachties were clinging to an increasingly narrow lead as Sailability made up ground, while the Dragons continued to languish "out the back".

It all came down to the last lap. Both the Yachties and Sailability had kept their "ace" paddlers for last - Grimmo for the Yachties and AJ for Sailability. They were neck and neck on the paddle out and neck and neck on the paddle back to the beach, but the Dragons' Linda made a bee-line for the Yachties' kayak and even though Yachties' team leader Russell tried to stop her, she still managed to tip Grimmo out of his kayak just before he hit the beach. Grimmo, however, is a fairly fit specimen and sprinted for the beach marker, only

to find Sailability's AJ coming up fast. Grimmo ran interference on AJ, then "Referee" Gayle stepped in and ran interference on both of them! However, this display of unfair sportsmanship was not enough to stop the Yachties from claiming another 3 points. Sailability collected 2 points, while the poor Dragons, staggered over the line to collect the remaining point.

At the halfway point of the Challenge, the Yachties were heading the leader board with 9 points from Sailability with 8 and the Dragons with 7.

With the tide now out, events shifted from the water to the beach, with the Thong Thing and Beach Boules competitions running simultaneously. Teams of four were required for each event. The Beach Boules was a round robin comp with each "match" held over six ends, with the winner being the team that won the most ends. The condition of the "green" left a lot to be desired with large water-filled craters (sting ray holes) littering the beach. The trick was to dodge the holes, a skill at which some were clearly better than others. The competition was seriously fierce, but when the scores were tallied, Sailability took the win and the points from the Dragons and the Yachties.

Over at the thong throwing arena, the competition consisted of two sections: the first required each team member to throw five thongs at five items - a bucket, a basket, a balloon on a spade, an inflatable hand on a stick and an inflatable surf-board. Points were awarded for every strike. The second part was "rapid-fire" thong throwing, with each participant given a set time to throw as many thongs at the obstacle of their choice, while a team mate collected the thrown thongs and returned them to be thrown again. Again, points were awarded for every strike.

After four rounds, during which allegations of cheating were heard to be mumbled (someone - who remained nameless - allegedly erased the throwing line in the sand!) the Dragons emerged to take their first win of the Challenge, leaving Sailability and the Yachties to take the minor placings.

With the "games" now concluded, all eyes turned to the scoreboard. Who was the winner? No one. It was a three-way tie. This presented a problem. There had been a contingency for a two-way tie, but not all three teams tied. How were the organisers going to settle this? In the best traditions of Aussie competitions with a Sudden Death Australiana Quiz.

Each team put forward one player, with the idea being that "Quiz Master" Gayle continued to ask questions until only one team got the right answer. The second question had been asked before Gayle realised she was looking at the wrong answers! A quick check of the right answer for question one revealed that Sailability's "Queens of Trivia", Sue Nugent, had actually given the right answer. And so, Sailability was declared the winner of the Sudden Death Quiz and collected that vitally important single point to break the tie and win the Australia Day Challenge.

However, there was one final impediment to collecting the Olive Dish Trophy. To retain all the points earned during the Challenge, each team had to recite a poem. Now, this could be an original composition, a poem with new words or a recital of an old poem (frowned upon as it lacked imagination!) It could be recited by a single person or a group. Either way, a poem had to be recited if teams wanted to keep their points.

Sailability's resident "poet" Kay Muir was first up, reciting a rollicking-good original composition that hit the spot just right. The Dragons' Marilyn was next up, reciting an original

composition written for the cancelled 2013 Challenge, but recycled for 2014. It looked at Australia's multiculturalism and asked us to look at what being Australian meant. Finally, the Yachties' resident "poet" Pam Graham delivered an original composition about a sailor named Mangrove Jack that saw laughs all round.

It was a tough decision and Dragons' President Sandra was left to announce that the winner was ... (drum roll please) ... Sailability! Sue Nugent stepped up to collect the Olive Dish Trophy, holding it aloft and proclaiming, "this one's for you, Bazza!" in memory of Sailability President Barry Ryan who recently passed away and whose funeral had been held at the yacht club on 21st January.

As winner of the Challenge, Sue was then invited to make the presentations to the Best Dressed people. It was a "no-brainer" for the females, with the Yachties' Teena Hartwig blinged out to the max in a sequinned Australian Flag dress, while Sailability's Paul took out the Best Dressed Male for his highly colourful shirt.

Other fun novelty activities included trying to ride a "knobbled" bicycle, "Guess How Many Gumnuts are in the Jar" competition (won by Sailability's Patrick Nugent) and in breaks between events, recitals of Australiana poetry - who will forget the recital of "FMG" (a.k.a. "Feral Mixed Grill").

The day concluded with a BBQ lunch (catering by the Dragons) and wrapped up with a rousing rendition of Advance Australia Fair (for those not sure of the words, they were printed on serviettes! How Australian!) All proceeds from the day (Gumnut Guess, bicycle ride and BBQ donations) were donated to Prostate Cancer Research in memory of Sailability President Barry Ryan.

The Australia Day Challenge will be held again in 2015 - put in on your calendar. It's a day not to be missed!