

Summary of the History of OK Dinghy sailing at Drummoyne Sailing Club

(.....this write-up for use in regard to the DSC history documentation, and currently a work in progress as at Jan 2012)

The OK Dinghy.

The origins of the OK Dinghy date back to a design commissioned from Knud Olsen of Denmark in 1957, with the class name subsequently adopted from the reverse initials of the designer. The class quickly gained an international following and became established in Australia in 1961, with the first Australian Championship sailed at Melbourne in 1962-63. The class is currently sailed regularly at Black Rock, Albert Park and Geelong in Melbourne; various fresh water dams in country Victoria; Adelaide; Hobart; Wangi Wangi at Lake Macquarie and Drummoyne in Sydney; in addition to competing at various venues and regattas throughout the country from time to time. During the past 50 years the class has adapted successfully to the changing technologies in construction, sails and rigs, and is sailed in over twenty countries across the world. The OK Dinghy has a broad appeal and attracts competitive sailors that vary in weight from 75-110kg, come in all shapes, sizes and age groups, and who universally take great joy in racing (and just sailing) "Mr. Olsen's wonderful little boat".

Peter Horne.

Peter was an integral part of a generation of young blokes who began their sailing in the VJ class at Drummoyne during the late 1950s and moved on to play a role as talented skippers and crew with the 16ft skiffs at the club from the early 1960s (an era when 50-60 16ft skiffs regularly competed at the Club). About 1985 (during the period of significant change for the 16's when they changed from 4 to 3 handed crew) Peter took up sailing an OK Dinghy, the *Be In It*, which he'd acquired from one of his old skiff buddies David Swales who had relocated back to Sydney from a stint in Canberra where he had been racing OKs. The *Be In It* soon took up permanent residence on the beach next to the Club, and it's absence meant Peter was out sailing and most likely down the harbour where he would race with the fleet of OKs based at Mosman Amateur S.C.

Initial racing at Drummoyne.

OK Dinghy racing began at Drummoyne in 1986 when Peter Horne along with Len Nordstrom purchased four surplus OKs from the Mosman club and then encouraged others to take them for a sail. Regular racing began during the 1986-87 season with the assistance of then junior division starter, Geoff Smith who would send the OKs away after the junior classes had been dispatched. There was always a strong emphasis on having fun with these guys and the inaugural end of season presentation was a "champagne breakfast" at the club one Sunday morning that attracted 60 people. Interest in the class began to grow quite rapidly, particularly from former skiffies such as Bev James, Bob Stuart, Bill Daley, Mick McQueen, Martin Pagett and others, and it wasn't long before the number of the boats began to increase. In February 1988 the Club ran the NSW State Championship. For the 1988-89 season Bob Stuart donated the Bob Stuart Shield for the OK Dinghy Club Championship, and in the first season was won

jointly in a tied score by Bob Stuart sailing “Stuo” KA 647 and Mick McQueen in “San Jose” KA 629.

Leith Armit

An interesting addition to the fleet during this time was Leith Armit, a quiet and unassuming New Zealander who was more than happy to punch around at the head of the fleet in one of the older, well-used boats. Leith, in his quiet and confident way, made a big contribution in demonstrating the best sailing methods to adopt with the OK and became a role model for many who raced at Drummoyne during this time. He was always happy to pass-on sound advice in regard to sailing, trimming, rigging and on some occasions in building an OK. He later returned to NZ in order to qualify for the upcoming World Championship in Melbourne in January 1990, which he subsequently went on to win (using his own boat KZ 487) – this being the 3rd time he had won the World OK Championship, he then won it a 4th time in 1994, a huge achievement from a very accomplished sailor.

Interest in the class continued to develop during the 1989-90 season and was no doubt influenced by another Peter Horne initiative in the running of the “King OK Knockout Series” which encouraged one and all to have a sail and a bit of fun in these extraordinary little boats whilst providing some great entertainment for those on shore. As the season progressed, more boats were added to the fleet and even a couple of new boats began to appear following the involvement of Gary Phillips and Todd Henry in a joint boat building venture that gained access to a hull mould owned by John Corby. It was also during this period that the OKs began racing as a separate division in the Tuesday evening twilight series conducted by the Club.

OK boat storage

During these early years the OKs availed themselves of any spare shed space in the boatshed under the Club alongside skiffs, etc. At about this point in time the skiff numbers at the club had started to decline and it wasn't long before someone figured out that the OKs could be stored together in the separate section at the far-end of the club, which they did, with some boats up in the old skiff racks and others on trolleys on the floor. In these days there was a skinny (rickety) little wharf that projected from the boat ramp out towards Snapper Island about as far as the end of the sea wall. There was also a rickety old gangway that ran along the front of the club building to link the club's land with the wharf / boat ramp – that always provided a challenge to negotiate, and gradually just got worse with time. Sometime in the early 1990's a vast improvement to club / boat ramp access was made whereby a section of the western wall of the OK shed was removed, boat racks dismantled and a roller-door fitted to provide a very useful walkway – happy days for everyone, you could even carry a skiff through to load on a trailer. A working bee was then put in place by Club Captain, Glenn Thompson, and a set of tailored OK Dinghy storage racks were installed using cast-off 2” steel pipe and a bit of good old initiative. We were now able to store about 18 OKs in the leftover space in addition to a dedicated mast rack, whilst boats on launching trolleys were able to find some spare floor space or found their way over to the old work sheds on the club property, whereby they could just as easily launch from the western ramp.

1990's.

There were 24 OKs on the club register for the 1990-91 season, from which 17 raced on a regular basis, with an average of 11 boats racing every week; and the standard of racing improved considerably. The Club ran the Australian Championship in January 1991, which was won convincingly by former 3 times world Laser champion Glenn Bourke with the club's Peter Jackson and Peter Horne Jnr finishing 3rd and 4th respectively. Peter Jackson won the NSW Championship at Jervis Bay that season, whilst both Peters and Nick Gray traveled to Auckland NZ to compete in the Interdominion Series using borrowed boats where Peter Horne Jnr finished 3rd. The season concluded with the Drummoyne 'A' Team venturing down harbour to Mosman to compete for the "OK Bell" in the Annual NSW Association Teams Race, winning it for the first time, and the beginning of a long winning streak.

The "Junee"

The Junee was the first committee boat owned by the Club, as up until then the Club had depended on the generosity of private owners in making their launches available for this task, but with sailing activities expanding it was time for a more suitable approach. The Junee, a 34ft work boat, was donated to the Club by Stannard Brothers in 1991. It would appear that she had come to the end of her industrial working life and I suspect through the persuasive efforts of then Club President, Bob Stuart, Stannards made this wonderful and very welcome gesture. A working-bee by members soon installed some creature comforts for the dedicated volunteers who would be using her, while Peter Horne fabricated and welded-up a stainless steel frame to allow a full size awning to be added to cover the open working cockpit from the elements. She was an ideal craft for this role in which she provided wonderful service to the Club.

1990's continued.

During the 1991-92 season the OK Division operated as a separate entity within the club, conducted events using it's own courses and start crew, via access to the club's recently acquired start boat the "Junee". At a very windy nationals at Glenelg SA, Peter Horne Jnr finished a very credible 4th, and a month later went on to win a the NSW and Combined Interdominion Championship at Jervis Bay. Craig Jelfs in his first season in the class finished 2nd in the NSW Championship. Peter Horne was made a life member of the International OK Association of NSW for his efforts in establishing the class at Drummoyne and his assistance with the development of the class in general.

For some OK sailors the opportunity to sail their OKs and introduce their kids to sailing via the Junior Division was one of the big attractions in sailing at Drummoyne during these times, which certainly helped in maintaining our fleet numbers. Of course we had the usual turnover of those who came and went within the space of a season or two, whilst to this day there has been a core of dedicated club stalwarts who continue to race their OKs at the club. During these times it was not unusual to see other single handed classes join in our club racing, such as Finn, Europe and Impulse dinghies.

During the winter of 1992 the club organized a number of working-bees to address various maintenance issues around the premises. One significant w/bee was the re-painting of the western side of the old club, a significant undertaking over several w'ends and in which the OK members were happy to contribute.

By the start of the 1992-93 season the OK Division affiliated with the Yachting Association of NSW to ensure it operating correctly within the rules of the class and sport, and in order to retain a level of independence in how it operated. Note, at the time the Club was affiliated with the NSW 16ft Assoc. and not affiliated with YA, but the Junior Div, Yacht Div and OK Div each had separate affiliation in order to meet the requirements for their racing activities.

The Club conducted the OK National C' ship over Easter 1994. This event was run at short notice and in the shadow of the recent World C' ship in Napier, New Zealand. The members of the Club responded magnificently to rally together and run a very successful event, which was won by Alistair McMichael from Adelaide. Whilst Alistair is a very accomplished sailor, he had never sailed at our venue beforehand, but from race 1 demonstrated that he had the skills and sailing smarts to adapt from the open waters of Adelaide to the tricky and confined waters of our river courses, and provided another demonstration as to how the cream will always rise to the top.

Some changes afoot.

About 1995 there were some changes in the wind. The Yacht Div decided to introduce Sunday racing and took control of the "June" and the club rounding marks every second Sunday to run their events. If we wanted them to start our races then we were expected to fall-in with their agenda – ie use their course configuration and a start/finish earlier in the day. It didn't take long for the OKs to take back control of their own destiny, wherein we set our own courses using alternative marks, used "gate starts" and a "club-house" finish line to manage our own racing. In addition, the Junior Division was about to fall into decline (quite rapidly as it turned out) and by the 1996-97 season was no longer active. This took some people by surprise, but then again junior programs can be a very tricky undertaking where the limited window of involvement for participants demands a strong focus on suitable succession planning (it can never be taken for granted).

Towards the end of the 1997-98 season, a new focus had emerged to re-establish the Junior Div, but they essentially had to start again from scratch. A number of OK sailors assisted with this start-up, namely Rob Brown and Glenn Yates. In 1997 the rigging / launching deck at the old club had to be replaced and a couple of working bees were organized for this large undertaking with OK sailors well represented. Another development around this time was the introduction of boatshed rent, probably long overdue as a means to regulate the allocation of boat storage, but more importantly was the stipulation that only boats that regularly competed in club events were eligible to access this facility.

About May 1998 the Yachting Association of NSW introduced a new membership / club affiliation scheme, whereby individual membership changed from boat-owners only, to the expectation that all who are involved with the sport (owners, skippers, crew, officials, etc) must become a financial member of the Yachting Association. In addition, the new scheme required that the Club must be the only entity to affiliate (not sub divisions of the club) along with the requirement for the payment of a substantial annual fee for the privilege to do so. Naturally, this did not go down too well (especially at a time when the club was doing it very tough financially) and it was quite a few years before the Club ventured down this path, whilst the logic and reasoning behind the financial demands imposed by the YA have yet to be adequately explained (other than they need the money for them to exist – yet, if they ceased to exist, it would have little or no impact on the sailing activities of our club?).

Club Sailing Committee.

About Dec 1998, the Club Sailing Committee, chaired by the Commodore, was formed in order to bring together all of the various sailing stakeholders at the club and provide a centralised entity to manage and co-ordinate the sailing matters of the club. The OKs have had a representative on this committee since it was formed.

Junior Div re-established.

By 1998-99 the “new” Junior Division was up and running with new faces, commitment, ideas, a modest fleet of training level Sabots and a couple of well used “tin-dish” support boats. The OK Div acquired their own set of marks, ingeniously conceived to allow them to be deployed / retrieved from an OK Dinghy should the need arise (with full credit to John Dunne and Sandor Tornai). We continued to run our own races separate from junior events, but shared access to a “tin-dish” to set our courses and start races, in addition to sharing shed space and launching facilities, as well as dealing the inevitable “power plays” from the occasional overzealous new-comer on the scene. The site for the new club was cleared and construction started, and it was necessary for surplus and abandoned boats and gear to be removed, with a many finding their way up to Wangi Wangi S.C. at Lake Macquarie where a new fleet of OKs had recently become established. This also coincided with the merging of the Mosman Amateur S.C. into the Sydney Amateur S.C. with OK events now conducted by SASC.

Ongoing issues with the maintenance of the “June” created the situation where the Club sought financial contributions from each of the sailing divisions towards the funding of this maintenance. The OK Div contributed \$500.00 in the year 2000.

Gordon Brown

This is probably a good time to mention the long term support the OKs have received from club stalwart Gordon Brown. Gordon has supported the OKs ever since they began racing at the Club, whether it be an annual trophy donation, access to his launch “Robbo” to assist in running events, as well as the many occasions when the OKs have ventured up to the annual regatta at Port Stephens and enjoyed his hospitality at the legendary “Club Mouse”. A big thank you is in order for Gordon.

Last season at the old club

The 2000-01 was the last season of racing based at the old Club house. Construction of the new club was well under way. A new RIB, the “DSC 3”, was acquired by the Club through the efforts of the Junior Div. who were able to gain access to the relevant Govt grant in regard to junior training assistance via the local state MP. An interesting initiative that occurred about this time was the creation of the position of Club Sailing Officer – initially an honorary role, which later became a part-time staff position. This role was able to fill the grey-area between those who ran the licensed Club on a day to day basis (ie nothing to do with sailing) and the sailing related interests which the Club was responsible for (eg boatshed storage, rents, mooring use, support craft maintenance, general sailing enquiries, dealing with organizations such as NSW Waterways, Yachting Association, other sailing clubs, etc).

In July 2001 the first edition of the Club’s monthly newsletter was produced by Lindsay Curtis, and has been in production by Lindsay ever since, having changed from printed version to E-mail version about July 2007.

A new club house.

The new club was officially opened in July 2001. It took a while to settle into the new premises as boat / dinghy storage had not been a high priority when factored into the new facility – initially, they just did not exist. For some it appeared that the new club had been created merely as a yacht club without due consideration for the requirements of dinghy and skiff sailors, as well as women sailors. But one should be mindful that to get the whole undertaking up and going several years beforehand was indeed a substantial task for a club that in financial terms was doing it pretty tough – limitations had been imposed. However, all in good time, things did turn around and the required facilities were gradually installed. When racing started from the new club in 2001-02, the OK fleet was probably the smallest it had ever been, but happy to hang in there until better times came along.

The “DSC 1”

For some years the “June” had been in and out of service, which created an obvious need for some hard decisions in regard to future funding and maintenance. In July 2002 the “DSC 1” appeared on one of the club moorings (and is still there), no-one appeared to know too much about this purchase beforehand and very little detailed information was ever forthcoming afterwards. The “June”, seen by many as the sentimental favourite and the preferred boat to operate, was sold, whilst the “DSC 1” has provided great service to the Club ever since. The DSC 1 is in fact a former ship’s boat off the “USS Fairfax County”, a naval ship purchased by the Australian Govt in 1994 and renamed “HMAS Manoora”, with the ship’s boats subsequently disposed of by the Australian Navy. The set of coded letters on the stern of the DSC 1, namely “36PL806”, identifies the boat as a 36ft LCPL craft, the 6th boat of a batch built by Polaris Marine (probably in Florida) since 1980. These craft are built to military scantlings, have a displacement of 9 tons and are powered by a very substantial V8 Detroit Diesel motor.

2000's continued.

In 2003, work was undertaken to replace the western ramp, and whilst the structural work was done by contractors, a working-bee was organized for the final and substantial task of laying down the planks, with OK sailors on-hand to contribute to this task.

The 2003-04 season began on a very sad note with the passing of Peter Horne in August 2003. Peter had many friends at the Club and the sailing community, and while missed by many will not be forgotten. His son Peter jnr, donated a trophy on behalf of the family which the OKs now race for in the annual season's pointscore event.

By this time sharing the Club's sailing resources was an obvious priority for all sailing divisions, with the Junior Div providing the start/finish for the OKs, whilst the Flying 11s, Lasers and OKs developed a set of courses they could all race on together. In turn, the OK owners became financial members of the Junior Division. At this time there were just 4-5 OKs racing regularly at the club, but with the 2006 World Championship at Belmont NSW just a couple of years away, interest in the class began to pick-up. In addition, the introduction of carbon masts improved the sailing qualities of the OK and invigorated the class in general with many upgrades in rigs and sails along with some new boats as well. Better times were starting to emerge for the OKs at Drummoyne and by 2005-06 we had 10-12 boats racing on many occasions.

2006 OK Worlds

For the first time in the class' history a World C' ship would be hosted by the NSW OK Assoc., due mainly to the determined efforts of class stalwart Bill Tyler over quite a few years. The 44th OK Dinghy World C' ship, sailed from Belmont 16s on Lake Macquarie in February 2006, attracted 85 entries and was a huge success, with it's organization and running providing a benchmark model for future OK Class events the world over. This success was very much a team effort by the NSW OK sailors with those from Drummoyne playing an integral part. We all learned a great deal from this experience and took away a great deal of satisfaction in the process. For his efforts in the running of this event and no doubt for his enduring services to the sport over many years, Bill Tyler was awarded the "Service to Yachting Award" by Yachting NSW in August 2007.

For the next couple of seasons we had a fleet of 8-9 boats racing regularly at the club under the control and (by now very astute) management of the Junior Div. The flow-on effect from the 2006 Worlds was that the standard of racing in the class locally had stepped-up somewhat and tended to stay-up. In February 2007 the Club ran a low-key but quite successful NSW C' ships, that attracted 27 entries over a 6 race series that provided some close and interesting racing on our unique river courses. Peter Horne jnr won the event but had his work cut-out in keeping ahead of a talented young teenager in Tom Burton. These days Tom is a member of the Australian Sailing Team and applies his sailing talent to the Olympic Laser Class.

At the 2008 World C' ship at Warnemunde in Germany, the International Class Assoc launched a book to celebrate 50 years of the OK Dinghy Class, titled "Completely OK", a marvelous compilation of information that covers all aspects of the OK Dinghy. In

addition, at the Class AGM, Bill Tyler was inducted to Class Hall of Fame, a great honour for Bill and well deserved.

These days – January 2012.

For the past few season we have maintained a fleet of 8 boats made up of a core group of long term class devotees along with the odd newcomers, some of whom may come and go – normal turnover. I am pleased to say we still race for fun and to enjoy the sport, we have some real talent in our ranks and plenty of opportunity to keep our racing at a reasonably high level. Naturally as we all get a bit older some of us tend to be less enthusiastic about travelling to interclub and interstate events.

The waterway at Drummoyne is certainly a more challenging venue to race on than say 20 years ago – there is less navigatable water available thanks to the increase in the number of moorings and the increasing size of boats that occupy them. The mooring and berthing facilities up-river have increased significantly and many of those boats tend to travel downstream for a day out and then during the afternoon when we are racing, they form a procession of boats heading back up-river, some under better management than others. Rivercats, ferries and charter vessels are increasing in numbers, getting bigger and travelling faster. The river is slowly but surely becoming more congested and difficult to navigate on a busy weekend afternoon. Perhaps in the future we may be forced to race mid-week in order to seek any satisfaction from racing on the river.
