

TS16s half season report.
By Asa Wahlquist



Championship Start R6

The first half of the season started later than usual – November rather than September – due to Covid. Only six races were scheduled and of them two – race 2 and race 4 – were abandoned due to heavy weather.

The season saw a new boat join the fleet, Neil Bilsborough's Totally Sinister, and the return of Vinca under new ownership, increasing the Johnston family's fleet to three boats.

The first race was held under almost ideal conditions, with a 15 to 25 knot nor-easter. Totally Sinister, skipper Craig Jelfs and Neil Bilsborough, was leading the scratch race when three quarters of the way down the final leg the boom vang broke. Uncle Norm, Eric Partland and Gary Wills, won by 20 seconds from Totally Sinister, with Hironnelle, Peter Barnes and Geoff Smith, crossing the line third 30 seconds behind the winner. Hironnelle was the winner on handicap, followed by Tempo, Peter Dallas and Ian Campbell, and Murphy's Law, David Johnston and Kate Thompson.

Boom vang repaired, Totally Sinister won Race 3, the first championship, with Tranquil, Neil Johnson and Brett Pollitt, second and Uncle Norm third. The three boats finished within 23 seconds of each other. Tranquil won the handicap, with Aeolian, Darren and Kylie Chignell, second and Tempo third.

Race 5 was the only handicap race sailed. The wind, once again, was a brisk southerly. Tempo was first across the start line and held their lead after the first round. It looked like it was their race to lose. But after they rounded the club buoy, as Ian was poling out the jib, he slipped and fell into the water. He tried to swim after the boat, but lifejackets are good at keeping you afloat, but a hindrance to swimming.

The second boat, Aeolian, went out of its way to contact a club support boat, to tell them Ian was in the water. Peter Dallas said it was the second time they'd been in trouble and another boat had jeopardised its position to offer assistance. The first time was several years ago when Tempo capsized and Neil Bilsborough and Denis McDermott in Ultimately Sinister came to their aid. DSC sailors are competitive, but if someone is in trouble, they will always lend a hand.

Tranquil won. Skipper Neil Johnson said it was a very hard breeze, “The bullets (squalls) were hard when they hit. I nearly fell over the side twice. There were some good rides.” For’ardhand Brett Pollitt said the conditions were good but gusty, “you had to be on your toes all the time.” He said the lead changed between the first three boats several times on the last leg. “We only got in front in the last 100 metres.”

Annette, Ron Johnston and Ben Speed, was second and Aeolian third. Tranquil also had the fastest time.

Race 6, the last of the season, a championship race was also held in a gusty 25 knot plus southerly. Only seven boats started.

They say a race is won at the start. Totally Sinister got an excellent start, three quarters of the way up the start line on a starboard tack, while most were on port. They rounded the first buoy ahead of the fleet, but they really took off when they caught a good breeze on the downwind leg. “Once we got to the 8 (Huntley’s Point mark) we had a pretty good lead,” Neil said.

The fleet was flying in the next downwind leg, along the Drummoyne shore.

Neil said both Uncle Norm and Tranquil got closer in the last leg, but Totally Sinister had a comfortable win, with Tranquil second and Uncle Norm third. Murphy’s Law, David and Russell Johnston, won the handicap with Merlot, Peter McSullea and Peter Deall, second and Totally Sinister third.



Totally Sinister

Neil Bilsborough is very pleased with his latest creation, Totally Sinister. “It is definitely faster downwind than (his last boat) Ultimately Sinister. It’s definitely running a lot quicker than the old boat. It’s a great feeling knowing you’ve built a boat and it seems to go OK,” he said, with significant understatement, “because when you first put it in the water you have no idea. It’s only when you go out against other boats you can see how it performs.”



L to R: Ron Johnston, Ben Speed, Russell J, Luke J and David J.

The other new boat in the fleet is Vinca, which is now part of the Johnston family's expanded fleet. Russell, who for the past seven years has sailed as for'ard hand with brother David in Murphy's Law, is now Vinca's skipper. His son, Luke, is for'ard hand. This brings the Johnston family boats to three – Annette, Murphy's Law and Vinca – sailed by three generations of Johnstons with some honorary family members.

Ron Johnston, the 81-year-old patriarch of the family, has been sailing TS16s at DSC for the past ten years. He has a long sailing career. "I started in old planked 16s, with cotton sails," he said. Ron was the fifth hand, the bailer boy.

Ron sailed in Patricia with Kate Thompson, whom he calls an honorary Johnston. He then bought Murphy's Law from Denis McDermott. When Kate injured her shoulder five years ago and had to stop sailing, his grandson, Ben Speed, then joined him afloat. Happily, Kate is back this season, sailing with David.

When Ron moved on to Naylia, son David expressed an interest in sailing Murphy's Law. David said he hadn't had much experience as a skipper. "I used to sail when I was a kid. I went out with Dad in his 16ft skiff as a sheethand."

His sporting interests turned to football and cricket. "I couldn't play anymore. Dad was going to sell Murphy's Law and I said I'd sail it."

After Naylia, Ron sailed Tempo, then he built Annette.

Russell was keen to skipper, and so late last season he bought Vinca from Trevor Bell.

Russell said that, apart from a sprint race last season, it was his first time at the tiller. Eric Partland went out with him several times before the race. Russell had clearly been paying attention. In his first race of the season, much to the delight of son Luke, they came in ahead of the rest of the family.

Luke says he will give it one season and then decide if he wants to continue. If he is like his cousin, Ben, who Ron says has really taken to sailing, there'll be another Johnston sailing at DSC.

The Johnston family excel at winning the point score. David said the secret is "you need to show up every week". And they do. There have been some heavy weather days when the Johnstons sailed half the fleet.

Ron and Kate won the point score in 2011/12 in Patricia, then in Murphy's Law in 2014/15. David and Russell won it in Murphy's Law in 2015/16 and 2018/19. Ron and Ben won it in Tempo in 2016/17 and in Annette in 2019/20 and 2020/21.

First half 2021/22 season results

Championship point score

1. Totally Sinister
2. Tranquil
3. Uncle Norm

Fastest Point Score

1. Tranquil
2. Totally Sinister
3. Uncle Norm

Spring Point Score

1. Tranquil
2. Murphy's Law
3. Aeolian