

Mind game

The International One Metre worlds were a battle of wits as well as hull shapes and rigs, by Sam Walker

IT'S NOT the speed or design of the boat, but how you play the game, that gets you over the finish line of the International One Metre class in first place. That's the opinion of Australian Craig Smith, who took out the title in the Grove Fruit Juice IOM 2005 world championship in September.

Hosted by the Mooloolaba Radio Yacht Club at Lake Kawana on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, the championship attracted 84 entrants from 15 countries, including all former world champions.

Smith, a boat-builder from Victoria who specialises in producing IOM craft, said there is very little separating the top performers in the class. While he agreed boat speed is important, he said once competitors had a fast boat, it was not so much design features that separated the fleet leaders, as the psychological aspects.

"Controlling your negative emotions is what it's all about," he said.

Smith, who was racing an Obsession — his latest prototype, which looks likely to supersede his popular TS2 design — believes mentally, IOMs are the hardest class of boats to race.

"You have to have absolute concentration and you can't take your eyes off the boat. You're learning how to deal with yourself and you've got to stay cool, calm and collected and get on with your emotions.

"Most of the guys haven't worked that out yet. They think it's about having a faster boat. But it's all about where you stick the boat and when tactical situations develop, it's about how you're going to deal with it."



Extreme conditions

There were plenty of tactical situations during the week-long championship, with huge variations in conditions. Strong winds reaching up to 40 knots on the first two days of racing pushed the boats to their limits, causing havoc for competitors, with plenty of collisions for skippers not used to sailing in the gusty conditions. Emotions ran high and competition got vocal. Some came to grief with electrical problems, but others, like sixth placegetter and manufacturer of the popular Disco model, Brad Gibson from Sydney, embraced the challenge of sailing in the upper wind range.

"I personally have always loved to sail in extreme winds in any kind of sailing I do as it tests natural abilities against learnt abilities," Gibson said.

The IOM class is rigidly controlled and has three rigs, varying from a 1700mm A-rig to a 900mm C-rig, to suit the differing breezes and enabling it to be sailed in most conditions.

After the first two windy days, the rest of the regatta was sailed in fluctuating winds, making it difficult for the race committee to set true courses and for competitors to stick to their race strategies.

For second placegetter Graham Bantock, who has won the event twice previously, the fickle conditions at Lake Kawana were welcome. "It's unusual actually, it's been very good," Bantock said. "It makes it more challenging. You have to keep adapting and match the new winds.

It's always very disappointing to get the same conditions all the way through — once one boat finds its groove, it's hard to match that," he said.

Bantock, from Great Britain, has been building IOMs for 28 years and placed second with a Topiko, one of his own designs. He believes losing the lead was not due to the boat's design or speed, but to human error.

"I think the boat's very capable. The fact that I didn't win is totally down to me. I'm still kicking myself for the mistakes."

ABOVE RIGHT: Craig Smith (centre) with second placegetter Graham Bantock (left) and third placed Paul Jones (Peter Duncan/Quest Photo pictures).

BELOW: The winning boat, a new Obsession design in strong winds.





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Father and son

Given the level of emotional maturity required to make the top of the fleet, 13-year-old Josh Torpy, the youngest contender in the championship, was turning heads.

Sailing a Cockatoo, and despite a tear in his A-rig on the last day, the Sunshine Coast teenager managed to place 33rd overall, finishing within the top 40 he had aimed for.

Josh, whose father Greg Torpy is an Olympian and 2004 Etchells world champion, developed a love of IOMs when he first saw them sailing in Sydney when he was about four years old.

Josh and Greg travel to competitions up and down the east coast of Australia and Torpy Snr said he and Josh had a mutual respect and both learnt from each other.

While there are not many youngsters of Josh's age competing in IOMs, Greg Torpy (who placed 12th in the worlds) said this was slowly starting to change. He said the aim of the IOM class and one of radio sailing's biggest appeals was its low cost in comparison to most other classes of sailing, making it more feasible for youth to get involved.

An entry level IOM costs between \$1000 and \$1500, while the top boats cost between \$3000 and \$4000.

The boats might look like toys to the layperson, but the class attracts some of the world's best sailors and adjudicators. Most IOM sailors know all about the feeling of wind in their hair and salt spray on their faces.

The IOM is the smallest of the international classes and the fastest growing, both in Australia

and around the world. The boats are one metre in length, with a minimum weight of four kilograms.

Smith, who used to sail 470s and was a sail trimmer on Alan Bond's *Australia III* when they won the 12 Metre worlds in 1986 in the lead up to the 1987 America's Cup, attributes the IOMs' addictiveness to "guys being driven by their egos and continually needing to better their results." And this is why he thinks it is a male-dominated sport.

"It's just a different form of competing, a way of pitting yourself one on one with everyone else."

Asked which form of sailing he prefers, Smith was momentarily stumped. "There's no quick answer. From an experience point of view, there's nothing like sailing on a boat itself. It's you and your body being able to put up with the physical aspects as well as the tactical aspects of racing. There's no substitute for that.

ABOVE: Big breeze sailing added to the regatta's spectator appeal at Lake Kawana.

BELOW: Graham Bantock's Topiko leads the 10th placed Gadget design sailed by fellow British entrant Chris Harris.





ABOVE: Good starts were essential in the tight racing; Croatian IOMs 280 and 30 finished eighth and ninth overall (Peter Duncan/Quest Photo pictures).

RIGHT: Anders Wallin's Cockatoo from Finland shows how not to do it.

ABOVE RIGHT: Youngest competitor Josh Torpy accepts his prize from regatta organisers David Turton (centre) and Ken Down of Mooloolaba YC.

"The little boats don't give you that, they give you the technical and tactical aspects of sailing. It's incredibly tough from a mental point of view."

Greg Torpy describes it as virtual sailing. But he said it was a fast-moving sport, not only because the boats move quickly on the water, but also because each race is over in 10 to 15 minutes, creating plenty of action both in the water and among competitors on the shore.

He said sailing Etchells got vocal when boats came near each other, but otherwise, there was little contact with competitors. "With One Metres you're standing with 12 guys who are quite mentally and emotionally charged. Adrenalin starts running, sometimes emotions get quite high."

The series was umpired by an international jury, chaired by Australian Noel Allen with judges from Croatia, Singapore, New Zealand and Australia. The event was sailed under the same rules as full-sized boats, with minor amendments to allow for the skipper not being on the boat.

Winning designs

At the end of the championship 11 points separated Smith from third placegetter and fellow Australian Paul Jones. Brad Johnston, who finished seventh overall, took out the masters division for over 55s, after two wins on the final day.

Jones, the current Australian champion sailing a Cockatoo, said it was a very tough contest.

"I came here with what I thought was a fast boat and I've been looking for a bit extra ever since I got here," he said.

"There's a lot of good designed boats here but at the end of the day I believe it all comes down to the sail trim — how you've got your rig plan set up.

"There's homemade ones, Discos, Cockatoos; pretty much if they've got a good rig plan and sail trim they're competitive at the front of the fleet."

This was Jones' second world championship, having also finished third in the class at Vancouver in 2003.

Craig Smith said there was nothing radical about his Obsession. He said the TS2 is quite a lot wider (about 300mm) and in theory shouldn't have worked. But ultimately, it had a few drawbacks including a drag problem, which meant it was not ideal in light air. That led to the development of the Obsession, for which he has already had a multitude of requests.



For Bantock, the design of his Topiko has evolved over time. He said the boat has a good quality fin and rudder, and one of the most important design aspects for a good boat was symmetry. "Not many people can build symmetrical boats. The section shape of the fin and rudder is very important."

Spectator sport

This was the first time the championship has been held in Australia and the venue, which only opened early this year, was given the thumbs up by competitors. Lake Kawana is located a few hundred metres from Kawana Beach and about 10 kilometres south of Mooloolaba. The man-made lake was easily accessible, had big, open spaces for the racing, plenty of room to vary courses and lots of spectator vantage points close to the action.

The event attracted a steady stream of spectators keen to check out the action. Greg Torpy said IOMs were a great introduction to sailing and gave people an opportunity to see close up what was involved, unlike bigger boat racing offshore.

With more than 700 IOMs registered in Australia, about 400 competing and boat builders struggling to keep up with demand, the sport can only continue to grow.

Results

1. C. Smith (AUS, Obsession), 79pts;
2. G. Bantock (GBR, Topiko), 84;
3. P. Jones (AUS, Cockatoo), 90;
4. M. Roberts (GBR, Gadget), 95;
5. P. Stollery (GBR, Isotonic), 106;
6. B. Gibson (AUS, Disco), 112;
7. B. Johnston (AUS, Cockatoo), 218;
8. Z. Jelacic (CRO, Saplun), 235;
9. A. Kovacevic (CRO, Saplun), 242;
10. C. Harris (GBR, Gadget), 250.5.