

Strength in numbers

Strong Australian contingent claimed the world Flying Fifteen crown in Auckland, by Lauren Bartlett

In light, tricky conditions, Western Australians Nick and Janet Jerwood won the Flying Fifteen world championships, held by the Royal Akarana Yacht Club in Auckland in March, and sponsored by Dulux Aquanamel.

Unseasonably hot weather and shifty winds barely reaching five knots during the morning and early afternoon made for more time spent drifting than racing at the beginning of the week. This levelled the playing field for a class that has been dominated in recent years by heavier crew combinations, and was perhaps fortunate for the Jerwoods, as Janet was a last-minute stand-in for husband Nick's much heavier original crew, who had to pull out at the last minute due to business commitments.

Later in the week when the wind arrived, the Welsh expatriates still achieved positions in the top ten and won the regatta with a total of 29 points, without needing to finishing the final race.

Seventy boats from Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Britain, Ireland, the USA and Spain floated lazily until an afternoon sea breeze kicked in during the early days of the regatta.

On day six the wind picked up and two races were held to make up for those lost at the beginning of the week. Overall third placegetters, Aaron Goodmanson and Alister Rowlands of New Zealand, won a heat in their favoured heavier conditions, while the Jerwoods gained a valuable second place.

The final day of racing was on a course south of Rangitoto Island on the Hauraki Gulf, a change from the course area east of Browns Island on the Waitemata Harbour that the fleet had been using.

Goodmanson and Rowlands rounded first ahead of veteran Western Australian Graeme Lillingston

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and Edmond Repsevicius, followed by Ashley Smith and Kym Thumpkin of Queensland, and the three boats held onto their positions to take second and third in the race.

The closest contenders for overall victory, Charles Apthorp and Alan Green of Britain, were slow off the start line and were covered on the first leg by the Jerwoods, but gained nearly 20 places downwind and pulled up to 17th, finishing second overall four points behind the Jerwoods.

Three more Western Australian boats placed in the top ten overall. Lillingston and Repsevicius were fourth, Grant Alderson and Dean McAullay placed eighth, and Ronald Packer and Peter Mudford secured tenth.

Australia also placed first overall in the classic fleet, with John and Rosemary Midolo winning five of seven races.

Well prepared Australians

The enthusiasm shown by Australian Flying Fifteen owners to attend the world championship was at an all-time high this year, reports **Nick Jerwood**. Fifty boats travelled to the nationals hosted by Adelaide Sailing Club in January to compete for the 14 places that were available to Australians at the worlds. Even after missing out on those places, three owners decided to travel to Auckland to capture the two qualification spots made available to overseas boats at the pre-worlds regatta. Australians secured both of those spots, resulting in a team of 16 boats. Another 14 Australian boats travelled to Auckland for the classic and silver international regatta held alongside the worlds, making the Australian contingent the largest from any visiting nation.

In recent years the British boats have dominated the international scene. Their Windibank designed Ovington and Dingwell built boats have been unbeatable, winning all previous world championship regattas since 1995, when Steve Goacher and Phil Evans (GBR) won the first of three consecutive world titles in an Ovington Mk 9.

Australia has responded by investing in the class and modernising designs to produce a world-beating product. In WA a Windibank Mk10 hull mould was purchased and faired by Grant Alderson, who

also re-designed the deck mould to make the boat stiffer, more ergonomic with improved drainage to ensure that the boat is at minimum hull weight while sailing.

The reshaped side deck allows crews to hike out in relative comfort, enabling them to project their weight further outboard, for longer periods of time than would otherwise be the case.

Windrush Yachts, building these Fifteens under licence to Alderson's company Sailpower Marine, uses GRP and carbon fibre composites combined with vinylester resins to produce a strong and durable boat that is able to support high rig tensions and cut through large waves without distorting.

Twelve of the Australian team used Sailpower boats, including the eventual winner.

On the Australian east coast, Bill Shand continues to produce his successful Windibank derived boats, three of which produced strong performances in this year's world titles.

Rig flexibility

Australians have generally adopted the rigs and sails used by the top British boats, intensively developed by sailmakers Pinnell and Bax and Goacher Sails and used almost exclusively across the fleet at this year's world championship.

Flying Fifteen rigs can be adjusted easily while afloat, allowing the now standard mainsail to be used by light and heavy crews alike. Some crews, however, opt for marginally fuller cut mainsails for improved speed downwind, relying on rig adjust-

ABOVE: New world champions Nick and Janet Jerwood leading the pack (Paul Todd/Outside Images pictures).

British crew Charles Apthorp and Alan Green, second overall (Outside Images).

