SIXTH ANNUAL CHAMPIONSHIP REPORT

Victoria's Port Phillip Bay was the setting for the sixth Australian Championships over the long weekend from January 30th to February 1st, and Port Phillip turned on both its scowling and most silky moods for the series.

In conditions off St. Kilda of sharp cresting seas that were at times surprising even to shock point for visitors, Heroneers from Papua-New Guinea, from South Australia, Tasmania, New South Wales and from the home State of Victoria, sailed in the most representative national Heron series yet held - and to the closest finish.

In the early part of the series Victorian craft challenged firmly against the title-holding State of N. S. W., but the Victorians' points slipped when the prevailing fresh weather cycle eased in wind strength and gave advantage to the top N. S. W. competitors who were sailing predominantly with lighter crews.

Eric Quarford of N. S. W. went on to win the championship from fellow Balmoral clubman John Muston, last season's titleholder.

It was the closest of series. On the eve of the fourth heat any one of six skippers had the chance to take out the title depending on their result in that heat.

Placings remained in doubt until the final minutes of this final heat. John Muston won the race but Eric Quarford's second place gave him the clear overall points lead for the series.

The performance of these two skippers was even more meritorious because both had gained only token points in the first heat - the race in which 43 craft were disqualified for failing to comply with a recall signal.

The racing was conducted by Victoria's premier club, the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron, who kindly undertook this at the request of the Victorian Heron Association, and throughout the series full club facilities were made available for competitors and their friends.

The five races held over the weekend comprised an invitation "get-to-know-the-course" event and the four championship heats. Three were sailed of a morning and two in the afternoons - and conditions before noontime and afterwards each day changed dramatically.

Winds were light of a morning but even so Herons could still shoot the seas, sometimes scooting to speeds which were ahead of the wind speed itself. Strange indeed to see a Heron skidding down a wave with both mainsail and jib hanging windless and limply amidship.

Of an afternoon the wind doubled in strength, sharpening the steep seas and cresting as many as one wave in three. In short, the conditions were quite "hairy". Swims there were aplenty - approximately half the starters dipped in during both afternoon events - and there were several cases of non-major damage to gear. But the many true-life wild sea stories acquired by visitors and the local Heron group alike well compensated for all that.

There was Alec McClure of Victoria sailing Apalie, launched brand new in a frenzy that got it to the start with only minutes to spare. Apalie, having her first race, bolted. She led the course for two laps and seemed a certain winner.

Then a turnbuckle on the starboard mainshroud unwound, toppling the mast over the side and leaving Alec with the only solace that there might be a moral in this for others too.

At least two records crashed or rather sank in the afternoon events.

Victoria's John Apted nosedived while planing down the face of a 45-degree wave to score his first capsize in a Heron.

In similar circumstances Australian Heron President John Dixon Hughes found himself explaining to his for'ard hand son that this was in fact his first capsize ever in an open boat after many years of sailing.

Both John Apted and John Dixon Hughes, and most others who involuntarily tasted the Port Phillip waters, managed to right themselves and carry on or make home without assistance. Others were aided by the ever-present and highly efficient pick-up crews provided by the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron. These volunteer crews were so fast off the mark that they picked up several Herons before the crews had time to seriously try to help themselves out of the bother.

It was perhaps this general standard of excellent seamanship in difficult waters that, despite the racing skills displayed, marked the series.

At the presentation after the racing, President John Dixon Hughes thanked the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron and the Victorian Heron Association for an excellent series. He made a special point of congratulations for the pathfinder launch which led the race fleet to each rounding buoy and for provision of marker yachts, moored and distinctively dressed in the area of each rounding mark.

Mr. Dixon Hughes also announced that South Australia had applied to hold next year's series at Adelaide and that the Australian body would give the request "due consideration".

Final championship placings were:

1st, Eric Quarford, Seaforth, No. 3898, (N.S.W.), 3967 points
2nd, John Muston, Bluejacket, No. 5079, (N.S.W.) 3783 "
3rd, Paul Hopkins, Wap, No. 4474 (N.S.W.), 3599 "
4th, Frank McNulty, Duyfken, No. 3687, (N.S.W.) 3569 "
5th, Bill Youll, Willary, No. 2277 (N.S.W.), 3506 "
6th, John Sutherland, Tina, No. 3384 (Vic.), 3384 "

Heat Placings:

Heat One
1st, Felice, E. Rice (N.S.W.)
2nd, Willary, W. Youll (N.S.W.)
3rd, Nimue, B. Fleming (Vic.)
(No other finishers)

Heat Two
1st, Bluejacket, J. Muston (N.S.W.)
2nd, Wap, P. Hopkins (N.S.W.)
3rd, Seaforth, E. Quarford (N.S.W.)
4th, Quinta, J. Carter (Vic.)
5th, Slipstream, F. Allen (N.S.W.)
6th, Duyfken, F. McNulty (N.S.W.)

Heat Three
1st, Tina, J. Sutherland (Vic.)
2nd, Puppet, I. Spies (N.S.W.)
3rd, Duyfken, F. McNulty (N.S.W.)
4th, Willary, W. Youll (N.S.W.
5th, Julie, P. Rowe (Vic.)
6th, Seaforth, E. Quarford (N.S.W.)

Heat Four
1st, Bluejacket, J. Muston (N.S.W.)
2nd, Seaforth, E. Quarford (N.S.W.)
3rd, Wap, P. Hopkins (N.S.W.)
4th, M.I.J., J. Cook (N.S.W.)
5th, Duyfken, F. McNulty (N.S.W.)
6th, Tina, J. Sutherland (Vic.)

There's one final result that must be recorded. M. Greeves of Tasmania, sailing Dee-Kay, finished twelfth overall. And Dee-Kay is Heron No. 678 - the oldest Australian Heron. Truly, Herons live forever.