

## **NATIONAL HERON SAILING ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA**

### **ORIGIN OF THE HERON**

The English Yachting Magazine "Yachting World" mounted a competition shortly after the end of the Second World War in search of an easily built general purpose dinghy that could be transported on top of a car. The winning entry was designed by celebrated English yacht and small boat architect, Jack Holt, who produced a simple, hard-chine design that was built on its own frames.

The 11'3" length was dictated by the need to get the bottom and side panelling out of two 6 foot long plywood sheets. The length was also set so that the mast and gaff, 10'8" and 10'4" long respectively, could be stowed inside the hull. Her beam of 4'6" gave plenty of room in the boat, with good stability under sail, oars or outboard. She is high sided, as most English designs are, so as to be dry and capable of being used in rough weather.

A sliding gaff rig was adopted so that the spars could be stowed inside the hull for ease of transport. A modest sail area of 70 square feet gave a performance which could be handled by one person without trapezes or swinging planks under most weather conditions, but still sufficient to move the boat along well with a couple of adults and a child or two aboard.

A folding rudder and pivoting centre-board made for a convenient boat which can be sailed onto or off the beach with a minimum of difficulty.

The design was published in "Yachting World" in April, 1951, as the "Y.W. CARTOP". By 1953, a number of the class had been built, sailing mainly with the Ruislip and Bletchley Clubs in the United Kingdom. A Class Association was formed in the United Kingdom on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1954. The meeting adopted the name "YW HERON (Cartop)". Some 95 Herons were, at this time, sailing at eight clubs. The first National Championship regatta was held at Ruislip in 1955 with 89 entries.

By 2010, over 10,250 sail numbers had been issued. Australia accounted for about half of that number, the rest being allocated in the UK and many other countries.

### **THE HERON IN AUSTRALIA**

The first Australian Heron was No. 678 "DEE KAY" which was still sailing in Hobart until December 2000 when it was purchased by the NHSAA for placement in the Queenscliffe Maritime Museum in Victoria. The Tasmanian Heron Yacht Racing Association was the first organisation set up to govern sailing of Antipodean Herons. However, a centre of interest which developed in Sydney under the guiding hand of the first Secretary of the Y.W. Heron Sailing Association, Stephen Dearnley, became the main driving force in the proliferation of Australian Herons. That this should be so derived from the somewhat different use to which the Tasmanian and Mainland Herons were put. The Tasmanian Association was a racing Association, whereas Stephen Dearnley realised the potential of the Heron as a family yacht, capable of being skippered and crewed by just about any combination of father/child, husband and wife, brother/sister and so on.

With a total of six members and six boats, the Y.W. Heron Sailing Association of Australia was formed on 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1958. At the first Annual General Meeting in August 1959, there were 25 members present who owned 15 Herons. The first National Championship regatta was sailed at Clontarf, Sydney in 1960 and won by Frank Jones in No. 1583 SARANGA. 1583 is still registered with the Association by Devon Jones, his father's forward hand in those Championships.

By the second A.G.M. in August 1960, the Association had grown to 61 members with 46 Herons. There were 24 starters in the second Championship, again held at Clontarf, and the SILVER HERON, a trophy donated by the UK Association, was won by Bill Payne in THERON (2415).

By the third A.G.M. membership had grown to 90 with 70 Herons, including members in NSW country, Victoria and several in New Guinea. At this meeting, the rules were amended to permit the formation of State Associations, including the NSW Heron Association.

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The October 1961 meeting saw the adoption of the Class Burgee (a white Heron on a dark blue ground) and minutes of the December 1961 meeting affirmed the policy "That as the Association, following the pattern of the parent body in the UK was formed to promote Herons as a ONE DESIGN, this object should be maintained and be the deciding factor in any consideration of amendments or alterations to the Class".

The distinction between a ONE DESIGN class and a RESTRICTED class was stressed by the Secretary, who stated that all Herons should be theoretically exactly equal in performance, and that any difference in performances should be due solely to the ability of the individual helmsman and crew.

At this time, the Association adopted a Measurement Committee report dealing with measurement, skeg, thwarts, planing boards, built-in buoyancy, rubbing strips and standard of workmanship. Those members who had sailed regularly from Clontarf or Middle Harbour (meeting place for all the Association) decided to form a Club so as to place themselves on an equal footing with established Clubs sponsoring the Class, eg Balmoral, Connell's Point and Lake Macquarie.

January 1962 saw the Third Championships attract 48 entries and once again Clontarf was the venue. The series resulted in a first time win for Bryce Mortlock and a second win for THERON (2415).

The guiding hand of Stephen Dearnley was temporarily removed from the Association's helm in March 1962 when he went overseas. His efforts were recognised and Life Membership of the Association was granted on 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1962. A most important aspect of his trip was the decision by Iliffe Press in the UK, holders of the copyright on Heron Plans, to grant the Association sole franchise for Australian distribution.

The winter period of 1962 was warmed by much discussion on boat measurement, modification, etc. which culminated at the Third A.G.M. A decision was made to hold a special general Meeting at which a definitive stand would be taken by the Association on what would, and what would not be accepted as a Heron. The August 1962 meeting had far reaching effects upon the policy of the Association and the future of the Class. The modifications approved at the meeting are largely those promulgated today. Measurement Certificates were introduced in September 1962. 1962 was a particularly important and active year in the formation of the policy to be followed by subsequent committees.

The fourth Championships saw a change of venue and a new host club, Balmoral. A total of 50 Herons entered this series in February 1963 and the then President, Stephen Dearnley, sailed WINDOO (3000) to victory. In his retiring report to the 5<sup>th</sup> A.G.M., Mr Dearnley reported membership at 456 and set the goal of National Status for the Class.

Many Clubs were now vying to host Heron Championships and the 5th Series saw that honour go to the Bayview Yacht Racing Association (BYRA) located in protected waters at the southern end of Pittwater. For the first time interstate entrants from Victoria and Tasmania augmented the 77 strong fleet. It was January 1964 and the Silver Heron went to Jack Muston in BLUEJACKET (4279).

The 6<sup>th</sup> A.G.M. was held in August 1964 and saw business matters dominating social activities with further important definitions on policy of the ONE DESIGN concept being laid down. IYRU Rules were formally adopted, this being only a statement of practice of the Association since its inception. Membership had risen to 900 with 876 sail numbers issued.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Championships set the seal of a truly National organisation, being held outside NSW for the first time. Over 50 boats, representing NSW, SA, Tasmania, Papua New Guinea and Victoria, competed on the R.M.Y.S. course on Hobson's Bay, Port Phillip. The wild Victorian waters did not deter the polished NSW skippers and the Silver Heron went to Eric Quarford in SEAFORTH (3989) with Jack Muston second and Paul Hopkins third. DEE KAY (678) finished a very creditable twelfth.

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The 7<sup>th</sup> AGM held in August, 1965 heard President John Dixon Hughes report a membership of 1400 and announce that the Australian Yachting Federation acknowledged Heron representation in all States save WA by granting National status.

Over the years that followed these beginnings, Heron Membership peaked at 2002 in 1971 and has slowly diminished year by year.

Later years have seen other changes approved by the members. The introduction of fibreglass hulls has opened up the class to those wishing to sail an off-the-shelf, low maintenance boat. Stitch and glue construction has simplified the building of timber boats. An optional Bermudan (one piece) mast has been introduced after extensive trials showed no advantage over the traditional gunter rig. A larger headsail is now available to crews with a combined weight of over 135 kg, which has helped to keep sailors in the class.

In 1975 Yachting World Magazine returned to Jack Holt all rights regarding his Heron design, and the opportunity seemed right to acknowledge the considerable efforts made by the pioneers of the class in this country which had culminated in National Status. The Membership unanimously supported a motion proposed by the then Secretary, Denis Holm at the 18<sup>th</sup> AGM that the Association be known as the NATIONAL HERON SAILING ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA. The Heron class rightly claims to have introduced more families to small boat sailing in Australia than any other class.