

Who could imagine a better way to spend New Year's than at one of the infamous Sharpie Carnivals, and I have to say this year's is one to go down in the history books. First and foremost congratulations to Mal Higgins, who has claimed his seventh win equalling John Cuneo's record and is looking to break the record for most wins in Sharpie history next year. Besides this momentous victory, the off-the-water entertainment has more stories than the amount of brain cells I have left.

George's River Sailing Club is a hybrid between a sporting club and a yacht club and is nestled on the mouth of Georges' River on Botany Bay. The club boasted vast green pastures for rigging boats (and maybe even sneaking in a tent or two). While the water was a bit of a hike from the rigging area this proved an excellent chance to sweat out the left over alcohol from the night before... or more realistically that morning. The sailing was pretty tight between the 40 boats in the fleet, each with at least a couple of boats on the same level. Full credit is due to the Race Officer who managed to put on some well laid courses, particularly given the trying conditions.



As far as the Vic boats are concerned we had a 21st overall scratch with Old Man Nichols, who boasts near on a thousand years of experience in the class, with his Sheet hand Owen Walker who came up after only three sails and was putting it away with the best of them by the end of it and Myself having attended my first Sharpie nationals at the ripe old age of 3 months. Next on the list is the purely alcohol powered yacht 'Waiting on a balance' finishing 34th with grape-water enthusiast Nick Major on the helm, Sally Radnell (A.K.A S Rod or T.B.A) the Queen of patience and Rain Mercer who is by far the loudest person in the fleet. 34th is quite impressive considering they couldn't see past the bow a majority of the time, hadn't sailed together before and had possibly one of the worst maintained boats in the fleet. The generous boys (and girl) donated their boat to an old NSW Sharpie family and we look forward to seeing it return next year (hopefully with a bit of a makeover). On a side note Nick decided to salvage the trailer by bringing it back down to Vic but managed to cop a sizeable fine for it being unregistered, which probably rendered the whole endeavour pointless.

Last but definitely not least for the Vic team was FIGJAM, who finished 37th overall, or as they simply put it 'not last'. On the helm we had John Radnell completing his second Sharpie nationals, Christie Lees smashing the sheet with only 10 sails worth of experience and up front we have the ring-in Lewis Davies who came up for the nationals not having sailed a sharpie in his life. These guys managed to win a first on handicap which shows how competitive the fleet can be.

Now the Vic Sharpie team does have a bit of work to do on the water however I think we managed to turn a few heads off the water. A day in the life of a Victorian at the regatta consisted of being woken up



at ridic-o'clock, generally due to the unbelievable flocks of kookaburras singing their morning song (wish I had brought a rifle), the sun nearly cooking you alive in your swag or Rain complaining how there's no beer left in the Esky which we forgot to buy ice for... again. Following this would usually be a trip to Hungry Jacks, Bunnings to purchase a roll of polyurethane for the nude bar-sliding or the components for a beer bong, the local Chandlery to buy air horns, (rendering us more obnoxious than before) and of course a trip to the bottle-o. Now that all the leg work is out of the way it's time to get serious.

This generally involves sitting around the campsite and talking absolute rubbish, doing work on the boat if it is absolutely necessary and maybe going for a swim to wash the grime left over from the night before off. Finally it would come to the early hour of about 1 pm, which meant we had to go get the boats ready for the 2 o'clock race (how many boat classes would have every race that late?).

This was when we actually got serious... well... sort of. With a (slight) reduction in the consumption of beer it was time to try and get some decent races in to keep the old man happy. Whilst we were actually quite competitive in the lighter winds (receiving an 8th overall and a 3rd on handicap in one race), when the heavier stuff came in we were lacking in weight (despite the copious amounts of carbs consumed). After a few laps of the course and an occasional second race it was time to come back in to the beach. The next few hours would be spent talking boats and catching up on the beers missed while competing. Eventually it would be time to head up to the club to hear the results of the day and grab a feed. A few of the nights the club had a bit of entertainment on including New Year's Eve when we were fortunate enough to see The Frocks, an all-female band with the largest lesbian following in Australia, so naturally we fitted right in. This of course resulted in a majority of the younger boys in the class with their tops off, front and centre on the dancefloor, with the security unsure of how to react and a sea of horrified faces amongst the aforementioned band followers. In all honesty I think they enjoyed it. The shenanigans were generally followed by the stragglers heading back to the campsite and rummaging through the rest of the Eskies to find some liquid gold (hence why we were generally out of it the next morning). Finally we would find a bed wherever it seemed fit (which in Rain's case meant not spending more than one night sleeping in the same location).

And now for the main event (and personally the main reason I'm there!). Each year the sharpies host a state's night (or more aptly named Chug-A-Lug) in which each state puts forward a team of their most formidable competitors. These teams race each other in a way I don't think you'll find in many other national level competitions. Essentially two teams line up along either side of a trestle table, in front of each team member is a schooner of beer, and the aim, as you may have guessed, is to neck the beer as fast as possible.





The first member starts off the round, and as soon as he finishes his cup and slams it on the table the next member is up. This continues until each of the four members finish their beer. Needless to say the team that finishes first is the winner. Once each state has competed against each other, the two best teams go on to the Grand Final. The prize in question is glory, respect, and of course the ancient, somewhat dilapidated and highly coveted chug-a-lug trophy (which has seen a big name or two in its time). The competition began in 1964, making this year the 50th year anniversary, so the

Vic boys decided to bring out the silver. After claiming the title the previous year in Perth we weren't going to let this one slip through our fingers. On the team in first position we had Rain Mercer, a returning champ from last year's win; Owen Walker, first time sailor long time drinker; Myself, Jake Nichols with my third consecutive year on the team and last but most definitely not least, in the solid position of anchor; Mr Lewis Davies, the wild card whose prowess must be seen to be believed. After some close races and about 6 rounds (for some reason my memory of the night's not 100%) the Vic boys (team vic fkn sik as they're better known) managed to just clutch the trophy out of the hands of the NSW legends team who are veterans of many Chug-A-Lugs past. A controversial re-run (do-over) was required to determine the final result due to an unnecessary amount of spillage from one side (not mentioning any names...). The girls also had a crack trying bring their trophy back home this year but the beer must not have been quite cold enough for them. They tried their tiny hearts out so thanks to Sally Radnell, Christie Lees, Toni Nichols (or camp mum) and honorary Victorian Hannah Tait.

All in all it was a very successful titles which could not have been done without the phenomenal work of the bar staff and the race committee, the sponsors (these things aren't cheap to run) and of course the New South Wales Sharpie association with their figurehead (and what a beautiful head it is) Marc Ablett who did an amazing job organising everything and putting up with all the complaints from those sad South Australians! Not to mention Harry Fisher who has been working hard to promote the class and an excellent job at commentating both the Chug-A-Lug and the Calcutta. Already wetting myself with excitement thinking of next year's titles in Hobart and eagerly looking forward to a big one in Victoria the year after.

Fly Sharpies and don't forget to get the word out and get your mates into it, nothing beats the atmosphere, comradery and absolute fierce competition of the sharpie sailors.

See you on the water (but hopefully not on the waters...)

Jacob Nichols.

