Welcome to the National Heron newsletter!

Recent events saw the election of a new team to run the show for the next year. Below are the names you need to know!

President: John Nobbs (QLD)
Vice Presidents: All state presidents serve as Vice Presidents
Secretary: Warren Monaghan (NSW)
Treasurer: Paul Armstrong (NSW)
Registrar: Ian Cole (SA)

This seaworthy little mob is now committed to looking after the business of the national Heron fleet for 2011/12. On the evening of the third Tuesday of the month the group gathers around their respective, collective phones and conducts a national meeting. Anyone from the membership is welcome to join this group in their monthly discussions. The chat is conducted on a conference line (but you can participate with a phone glued to your ear if you haven't got conference facilities on your phone) and connection details are:

Queensland phone numbers: 07 3811 0706 follow the prompts and punch in 460320# then 862036# and this will get you connected. Please consider joining in if you have something to communicate or a question to ask. It's always good to hear current developments in the various states, etc. At last month's meeting David Johnson (QLD), Richard Gibson (SA), John Veale (NSW/welcome back!) were all added to the mix. If you want to find out your state phone number please email Warren Monaghan <wmmonaghan@optusnet.com.au>.

The principal purpose of this particular newsletter is to make sure you receive your annual renewal form in hard copy. If you know of a new boat owner please photocopy the form and encourage them to join up officially. Your form is enclosed so fill it out and send it back with a nice little cheque to Ian Cole as soon as you can!

The newsletter will appear periodically and the next one will contain details for registering for the NSW Heron Nationals to be held January 14 to 21 at Belmont Yacht Club on Lake Macquarie about 1 ½ to 2 hours drive north of Sydney. Start planning your trip NOW!

Don Jamieson joins us as our first writer in a series of Heron reminiscences
Enjoy the read, add cheerful, speedy registering for 2011/12 and happy sailing to that list!

SAILING AND HERONS; A REMINISCENCE BY DON JAMIESON.

I have on my trophy shelf a cast-brass plaque which says "God does not deduct from our allotted life span the time spent sailing". Just as well or I would have been gone long since. On the back is inscribed: "Wife does not deduct from her sum of grievances the time spent sailing". Joke it may be but demonstrably true and probably fair. My first memory of sailing was as a bailer boy in my dad's 16-footer on the northern rivers of NSW in the 1940's. Heavy planked gaff-rigged boats from the 1930's. Then at age 14 I built a VJ (also planked, on hardwood frames) which I sailed with a few others on the Macleay River. Once a year the crack light plywood VJ's from Sydney would come north for a regatta and show us how to sail.

Fast forward to being a newly-married engineering graduate, in Melbourne wondering what to do on weekends. The answer was to build a 20ft x 10ft B class catamaran, and sail it out of Sandringham Yacht Club. Powerful boats, lots of adrenalin on the 20 knot reaches from Williamstown to Corio bay. No game for old men. Returning to Sydney in 1967 I settled in Clontarf, got together with some friends and looked around for a suitable boat to sail with kids. There they were on Clontarf beach. Herons. About thirty of them. So we built three Herons forthwith. Mine I named Abracadabra, it weighed 80 Kg.

It was so different from the big cat that I had to learn to sail all over again. Lots of capsizes and finishes at the bottom of the fleet. In my first Heron Nationals at Sydney's Rose Bay in various heats I put my foot through the floor boards, sat on the tiller and smashed it off the rudder stock, capsized, hit other boats and finished 48th. Years passed, four in Canberra where I sailed a bit on Lake Burley Griffin. Great place to sail, you don't need to tack the wind does it for you with instant 90 degree swings. Back in Sydney I bought one of the early Mark I fibreglass hulls and fitted it out. I persevered at Clontarf, and improved partly because I was then sailing with my kids who were light. About that time I discovered Dr. Stuart Walker's books, which introduced the ideas of having a race plan, with wind / current strategy more important than tactics, all made easy to digest through anecdotes of his own triumphs and disasters.

In the late 1970's I was finishing in the top 10 in State and National regattas, and noticed an important pattern. My results improved with each heat in a series. If I sailed the first few heats before the competition, would I get the poor results out of the way, and start not with an 8 but a 3? I bought and old Laser, and sailed two or three evenings after work for a month before each regatta. I tried some of Stuart Walker's tips, learning to sail to windward for minutes at a time with my eyes shut, feeling the pressure of wind on sail through my backside and the mainsheet hand, sensing speed by listening to the note of the bow wave. After a while I didn't need to look at the rig any more, line and speed just happened. I concentrated on using or avoiding waves. Now I could look around for wind, current, and other boats. It all came together at Hervey Bay in 1980 when I cracked the big one with a Nationals win, in spite of dropping a first because I failed to sign on!

At that time I had been president of the Association for a few years, and was sick of the small civil wars that Mary Clark our paid secretary felt obliged to fight in the Association. To be

fair to Mary she worked too hard and cared too much for the otherwise relaxed atmosphere which should have marked a small boat class association. (She was eventually deposed in an ambush in an AGM through a "no confidence" vote from the floor, or something similar. See Colleen McCulloch's October Horse novel re Brutus and his 21 co-conspirators). In any case I felt that maybe I had "done' Herons and should try something else. That turned out to be a J24 small yacht which I raced with some friends (with modest results). The best bit of the J24 was holidaying on the Hawkesbury with Dana and the kids, catching fish, getting stuck on mud banks.

But the Heron itch was still there, and I had to scratch it. After handing over the J24 to son Scott and nephew Adam, I bought a floppy Mark II hull and fitted it out (Adept). It carried me to a State Championship in 1985, but somehow I felt the boat didn't suit me or I didn't suit it. The next year I became interested in an old timber boat called JID which was unusually smart off the wind and borrowed it to sail in another Nationals at Hervey Bay. I found out that it was quick partly because it wasn't a Heron, and had to rebuild the back third of the boat to make the transom Vee legal. It also had a nice regular plane in the bottom panels, without the nasty twist up to the chine corner of the transom, which I presume Jack Holt put there because he never expected Herons to plane on their home waters in the UK. JID just measured without changing the bottom planes; it was still quick off the wind but was a pig going to windward, pounding in a chop, which I eventually attributed to it being fat at frames 1 and 2, and to the chine line lifting up at the bow, rather than running straight along the waterline.

Lessons learned from JID became the basis for building the famous Abracadabra, which was not only quick off the wind but ate waves going to windward. This second characteristic meant that I could sail it a little higher than most of the competition as it didn't stagger in the chop. I addressed the awful Heron weather helm problem in two ways. One was to promulgate the change to a vertical rudder blade in class rules. The other was to move the deck plan in Abracadabra forward over the bottom plan. The only thing connecting the two was the transom angle which was (unbelievably) not measured in those days. At that time three other boats were built the same way, with vertical transoms. We got the come-uppance we deserved of course. The Measurement Committee (then mostly Ray Brown and Peter Macleod) ruled that the vertical transoms were not acceptable and specified retrospectively that they should slope no more than Hornet's (the plug for the Mark II GRP). To our credit we didn't argue, got out the tools and modified the transom, main crossbeam, mast step, stay attachment points etc. in all of these boats.

After building Abracadabra I found myself rather bored on a London flight and started writing the Heron (racing) Handbook. With help from Morrie Frost and Warwick Jacobson it was knocked into shape and the first print run was 380 (one for each member if they wanted to buy it). This sold out in the first few months and another 500 have been printed over the years, with copies going to the UK (lots), NZ, and Canada. I acted as the Association treasurer for several years after that, organising on the side the specification of, and mass production stocking and sale of alloy masts which had been first trialled by the late John Shipton, and adopted by the Association. On the water my good fortune continued with the

accumulation of NSW State Championships (eventually to number 14) and Nationals (final count 10). My biggest problem now was finding crews, with the kids grown up. I sailed at least three interstate Nationals with 50 Kg novices from local schools, which left me no match for Craig McPhee and Rob Brewer, both superb boat handlers and tacticians, on those occasions. Strangely my clearest memories of National competition are the races I stuffed up.

In the Association my interests came to focus on the Measurement Committee which lived in interesting times, through the great debate over built-in floor boards. I moved to allow baffles at the sides of frame 2 on half -height buoyancy hulls, to keep out water in a capsize and to mimic the advantage of full-height buoyancy. There was the revision of Jack Holt's plans to reflect modern methods and materials, and progressive extension and tightening of the Measurement Form. The proposal for a stitch-and-glue hull was adopted after a huge amount of work by John Deshon and lively debate. John believed that the S&G (or jig-built method) was just that, a building method. The Measurement Committee looked at his drawings and decided they were PLANS which had to be Official Plans and required an AGM motion. John was right of course, but the AGM motion ground finally through its process. The method, in combination with the buoyancy tanks, provided a stiff hull without all the clunky frames in the cockpit, and made building quicker and simpler.

We oversaw adoption of the Bermudan rig, after solid development work and trialling by James Gough and Rhys Llewellyn, and a finally the Genoa for heavyweight crews, also after two seasons of trialling organised by the writer. The larger foresail is aimed at evening out competition and keeping the kids in the boat a year or two longer. Optional new materials of construction were adopted for the vulnerable rudder box and tiller. These changes may all have come to pass in time, but were all brought forward and eased through the AGM motion process by a member-wide survey which explored interest in a number of possible developments of the Heron.

Finally, I would like to note the dozens of friendships which my association with Herons brought about and sustained, and the enormous satisfaction of contributing to the class. The little boat has spun off at least two generations of sailors, most of them competent, all of them happy for their past Heron sailing. Re-read your childhood copy of "The Wind in the Willows" and you will see that Ratty was right when he said "There is absolutely nothing so worthwhile doing as mucking about in boats" Obviously he meant Herons.

Don Jamieson July 2011