

Appendix 3

The Dragon Story

When Jim Searle built the first Dragon Class yacht to be sailed in Geelong he certainly started something. Today the Royal Geelong Yacht Club is recognised as the home of Dragons in Victoria, with some 21 boats of this class on the Club register.

Conceived by Dane, Johan Anker, in 1928, the Dragon has an overall length of 8.9 metres and a 1.9 metre beam. With its fixed keel it has the true lines of the perfect yacht. Attractive in appearance, the Dragon is light on the tiller, fast and extremely seaworthy

Jim Searle decided to build his Dragon, Jaylene, DKA 28, in 1951. At the time he was operating a grocery business with his wife, Eileen, in Hope Street, Geelong West. Building space was a problem but by sacrificing an outside toilet he just managed to obtain the required length. Helping Jim were Norm Ranthe and Ern Armstrong who were later to crew together on Jaylene for seven years, plus a lot of helpers from the R.G.Y.C. including Tal Searle and Stan Jewell.

The build took about two years and Jaylene was launched on Opening Day in November, 1953. Em Armstrong recalls that it was a nasty day with the wind blowing hard from the south west. But they managed to fly a genoa and participate in the manoeuvres. For the first two seasons after the launching, 1953-55, Jaylene raced in B Class. Then with the advent of two more boats, Dragon Class racing came into being for the 1955-56 season. Jim Searle and his crew won the Class Championship for the next four seasons. They also won the trophy for the best found yacht on the Club Register in 1954-55 and 1956-57.

Jaylene was sold to Councillor Frank Moore in 1959 and continued racing with Em Armstrong as skipper and Frank Moore and Norm Ranthe as crew. They sailed together until 1965, winning the Championship Aggregate three times before the boat was sold to Brent Buzolich who raced it through to 1967, when it was bought by Jim Sim. Jim Sim raced the boat with some notable successes through to 1971, with two Championship Aggregates to his credit. Jaylene was sold to Melbourne in 1971 and is now thought to be in Sydney. In her 14 years of Dragon racing in Geelong, Jaylene had won the Championship Aggregate for Dragons no fewer than eight times, an enviable record which still stands today.

The class grew rapidly as more and more R.G.Y.C. yachtsmen came to appreciate the high qualities of the Dragon and the competitive spirit and camaraderie of class racing. For the season 1957-58 there were seven Dragons in the fleet. These were Sapphire, (Peter Blakiston); Snowgoose, (Jack Barr); Jaylene, (Jim Searle); Flicka, (Fred Fitzgerald); Tawarri, (Dave English); Sheelah, (Jack Fitzgerald) and Armored, (Ran McAllister and Roy Sanderson).



Geelong's first Dragon Class yacht: Jim Searle's Jaylene.

The fleet stabilised at about 10 through to 1970. But the following season 16 Dragons were on the register. By 1972 the number had increased to 20, peaked to 23 boats in 1980, dropped slightly to 18 in 1983 and currently, 1987, stands at 21. And during the period 1953-86 a total of 51 Dragon Class yachts have raced on the waters of Corio Bay under the banner of the R.G.Y.C

Championship Aggregate winners during that time were:

1955-56	Jaylene	J.B. Searle		
1956-57	Jaylene	J.B. Searle		
1957-58	Jaylene	J.B. Searle		
1958-59	Jaylene	J.B. Searle		
1959-60	Jaylene	Frank Moore	Ern Armstrong	Skipper
1960-61	Sea Joy III	Jack Fitzgerald		
1961-62	Sea Joy III	Jack Fitzgerald		
1962-63	Sea Joy III	Jack Fitzgerald		
1963-64	Jaylene	Frank Moore	Ern Armstrong	Skipper
1964-65	Jaylene	Frank Moore	Ern Armstrong	Skipper
1965-66	Thunderbird	Robin Robbins		
1966-67	Adios II	Jack Fitzgerald		
1967-68	Armored	John Sykes		
1968-69	Jaylene	Jim Sim		
1969-70	Armored	John Sykes		
1970-71	Jaylene	Jim Sim		
1971-72	Bermudiana II	Jack Fitzgerald		
1972-73	Sali	Ray Abikhair		
1973-74	Bermudiana II	Jack Fitzgerald		
1974-75	Bermudiana II	Jack Fitzgerald		
1975-76	Sali	Peter Jackson		
1976-77	Vara	E. Rudolph	A. Moody	Skipper
1977-78	Bermudiana II	Jack Fitzgerald		
1978-79	Blue Bird III	Guyan Wilson		
1979-80	Bermudiana II	Jack Fitzgerald		
1980-81	Chip	Jack Fitzgerald		
1981-82	Lyndara II	Tony Moody		
1982-83	Anastasia	Guyan Wilson		
1983-84	Ann	K. Middleton		
1984-85	Anastasia	Guyan Wilson		
1985-86	Chip	Mrs. J. Fitzgerald	Des Allen	Skipper
1986-87	Chip	Mrs. J. Fitzgerald	Des Allen	Skipper



"Bermudiana II", a Dragon Class yacht, racing on Corio Bay when owned by Jack Fitzgerald

While Handicap Aggregate winners were as follows:

1963-64	Sabre	Stewart Strachan		
1964-65	Jaylene	Frank Moore	Ern Armstrong	Skipper
	Adios II	Jack R. Fitzgerald		
1965-66	Thunderbird	Robin J. Robbins		
1966-67	Quest	Dave English		
1967-68	Flicka	G. Gauin		
	Sabre	Stewart Strachan		
1968-69	Adios	Jack Fitzgerald		
1969-70	Jaylene	Jim Sim		
1970-71	Lill	Stewart Strachan		
1971-72	Snow Goose	H. Thom,		
1972-73	Pan II	Dave English		
1973-74	Paula	Bob Umhauer	R. Wilson	Skipper
1974-75	Corinna	Geoff Searle		
1975-76	Paula	Bob Umhauer	R. Wilson	Skipper
1976-77	Vara	Errol Rudolph	A. Moody	Skipper
1977-78	Bermudiana II	Jack Fitzgerald		
1978-79	Ann	K. & R. Middleton		
1979-80	Ranui	Peter Jackson		
1980-81	Try-Den-Tru	John Backwell		
1981-82	Ranui	Peter Jackson		
1982-83	Anastasia	Guyan Wilson		
1983-84	Ann	K.enMiddleton		
1984-85	Anastasia	Guyan Wilson		
1985-86	Bermudiana II	R. Umhauer & L. Godwin		
1986-87	Breanne	Peter Jackson		

In addition, the J.A. Fitzgerald Perpetual Trophy for the Championship of Corio Bay contested at each Australia Day Regatta since 1960 has been won by:

1960	Jaylene	Frank Moore	Ern Armstrong	Skipper
1962	Seajoy III	Jack Fitzgerald		
1970	Paula	J. Akhurst		
1971	Paula	Jack Fitzgerald		
1972	Sali	Ray Abikhair		
1975	Adios II	J. Akhurst		
1976	Bermudiana II	Jack Fitzgerald		
1977	Bermudiana II	Jack Fitzgerald		
1978	Bermudiana II	Jack Fitzgerald	Ern Armstrong	Skipper
1979	Bluebird III	Guyan Wilson	Ern Armstrong	Skipper
1980	Bermudiana II	Jack Fitzgerald		
1981	Ranui	Peter Jackson		
1982	Anastasia	Guyan Wilson		
1983	Slaghoken III	R. French		
1984	Anastasia	Guyan Wilson		
1985	Chip	Mrs. J. Fitzgerald	Des Allen	Skipper
1986	Mantis	Tony Bowdler		

Dragon owners have also achieved the honour of being Commodore of the R.G .Y.C. on eight occasions as follows:-

A.R. McAllister	1955-1958
H.J. Glover	1958-1962
P.R. Walters	1966-1968
R.L. Abikhair	1975-1977
R.V. Moody	1977-1979
D.M. Clarke	1981-1983
G.E. Wilson	1983-1985
P.D. Jackson	1987-1988

Five Dragon men have been elected to Life Membership of the Club. These are:

E.R (Reg). White	Elected 1955
Howard Glover	Elected 1963
A.R. (Ran)McAllister	Elected 1970
Dave English	Elected 1972
Ray Walter	Elected 1977

Six R.G.Y.C. members have been made Life Members of the Victorian Dragon Association.

Dave English	Bob French
Des Allen	Stewart Strachan
Ron Moody	Ern Armstrong

Many Dragon sailors in the R.G.Y.C. have made substantial contributions to the success and development of the class in Geelong. But perhaps none more so than the late Jack Fitzgerald. He was an absolute Dragon fanatic and over the years did a great deal to promote the class, not only in Geelong, but in other parts of Australia and in a number of overseas countries. Jack, (or Fizzie as he was affectionately known), acquired his first Dragon, Sheelagh, named after his wife, which he had built by Higgs Bros. in Geelong in 1956. Sheelagh was the third Dragon to come on the club register and with her came the true start of Dragon class racing.

Raced for three seasons Sheelagh was followed by Flicka and then came the Sydney built Sea Joy in 1961. Sea Joy was a most successful boat and in one season she was sailed to 14 wins from 18 events in club championship class races. He later owned Adios and Bermudiana II and when he passed away suddenly in 1983, he was racing the Tasmanian built Chip. Today Chip is owned by Jack's widow Sheelagh, and skippered by long-time Dragon sailor, Des Allen who had crewed with Jack Fitzgerald for an astonishing 31 years.

But Fizzie's contribution to Dragon racing in Geelong went far beyond owning and sailing the class with considerable success. He was instrumental in arranging for boats already in the fleet to be purchased by new members, thus not only maintaining class numerical strength but increasing it. He was well known as the Dragon Super salesman as well as the Father of the class in Geelong.

In 1978 Jack Fitzgerald carried the Australian flag to Travemunde on the Baltic Sea where he won a heat and finished 12th overall in a fleet of 46 from 12 nations in the German Dragon Championship Series. Then with his R.G.Y.C. crew of Robert Umhauer and Bob French he went on to race on the Katagat in Denmark. Using the same boat Troika lent by the prior World Champion, West Germany's Marcus Glas, they gained 11th place from 48 starters in the European Gold Cup.

They then went on to Torbay in the south of England to race the Borrenson-built Dragon, Celebrity in the European Championship Series. In 1979, the same crew competed with moderate success in the European Championship on the Firth of Forth at Edinburgh and in 1980 in Holland for the Dutch Championship Series.



Some of the early Dragons racing on Corio Bay in the late 1950's.

Left to right: Armorel, Sapphire, Tawarri, Jaylene



Dragon Class yachts racing on Corio Bay.

Other Geelong Dragon sailors to travel overseas for various championship events are:-

1977	Jim Sim, Walter Wiggs & Ray Walter	World Title Series in Switzerland.
1979	Geoff Searle	Keil Week Germany
1979	Geoff Searle	Ostende European Championship
1980	Geoff Searle	Travemunde, German
1980	Peter Jackson	Ostende European Championship
1981	Jim Sim, Ron Moody, Guyon Wilson, Ray Wookey, Ern Armstrong	Travemunde, Germany

In 1973 Jim Sim sailed in the Gold Cup Series in Spain with Borg Borrensens of Denmark. Then in 1974 he imported Dragon moulds from Borrensens and set to work to build Dragons in fibreglass. Up to 1984 he had built and sold some 28 boats, including one to West Germany and one to Great Britain. And in 1983 Jim and Ern Armstrong took the "glass" boat Black Magic to the World Series in Vancouver, Canada. With a local sailor as the third crew member they put only a fair performance in the Series, then sold Black Magic in Canada where the locals were very impressed with the build and other features. Jim Sim also sailed in the Gold Cup in Ireland in 1977, and the European Cup in Doureneaux in 1979.

Perhaps the greatest highlight of the Dragon Class on the waters of Corio Bay was the staging of the 1978-79 Prince Philip Cup for the Australian Championship, followed by the 1979 World Championship Series.

Fifty-one yachts contested the Australian Title sailed over a series of seven heats.

The eventual winner was Rawhiti sailed by A. Albert.

Eight Australian boats became eligible for the World Series and these included Geelong's Ray Abikhair sailing Anastasia. There were 28 competitors in all, with entries from Austria, Belgium, Great Britain, Denmark, France, West Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, The U-S.A., Sweden and Switzerland. Going into the last heat five boats could still have won the title. The eventual winner was DKA 86, Killibilli, sailed by Sydney yachtsman Rob Porter.

The overseas competitors were particularly impressed with Corio Bay as a venue, the facilities of the R.G.Y.C. and the efficient manner in which the Series was conducted. It is interesting to note that when West German yachtsman Dr. Uehe Plath was told by Jack Fitzgerald that he could not compete in the 1980 Prince Philip Cup Series in Geelong because it was being sailed in Sydney, he asked "Where's that!".



Dragons on a close reach. Left to right: Slaghoken II, Anastasia, Bermudiana, and Tickle Me.

Geelong Dragon sailors also have a fine record of wins in the Victorian Dragon Championship Series for the J.J. Savage Memorial Trophy. The following is the imposing list of these successes:-

1973-74	Sali	Ray Abikhair		
1975-76	Vara	Errol Rudolph	Tony Moody	Skipper
1976-77	Vara	Errol Rudolph	Tony Moody	Skipper
1977-78	Anastasia	Ray Abikhair		
1978-79	Bluebird III	Guyan Wilson		
1979-80	Anastasia	Guyan Wilson		
1980-81	Shadow	Ray Abikhair		
1981-82	Lyndara II	Tony Moody		
1982-83	Lyndara II	Tony Moody		
1983-84	Chip	Est. J.R. Fitzgerald	Des Allen	Skipper
1984-85	Chip	S. Fitzgerald	Des Allen	Skipper
1985-86	Tickle Me	Tony Moody		
1986-87	Tickle Me	Tony Moody		



Ken Middleton's "Anne" weathering a good blow.

The R.G.Y.C. again hosted the National and World Championship Series for Dragons in 1986-87. With 48 boats competing, the first heat of the Australian Championship was sailed on December 30, 1986 with the seventh and final heat being contested on January 6, 1987.

The series was won by West German sailor, Andreas Lohman sailing Fiasco. Willie Packer from West Australia, in Hotspur, was second just .4 of a point away and Geelong's Bruce King, World Thunderbird Champion, gained a very creditable third placing in his restored Dragon, Fringe Benefit. It was a great effort by Bruce and his crew, Frank Hammond and Barry Walker who had only been sailing in Dragons for a couple of months.

Other Geelong sailors to do well were Tony Moody, Tickle Me, eighth, Tony Bull, St George, tenth, and Guyon Wilson Anastasia, seventeenth. All of these boats became eligible to compete in the World Series which started with the first of seven heats, three days later on January 9.

The World Championship for the Royal Hellenic Cup attracted a fleet of 43 yachts with representation from England, Scotland, France, Canada, Denmark, Holland, West Germany, Austria, Hong Kong and, of course, Australia. A notable competitor was Prince Henrik of Denmark sailing his lovely light blue hulled yacht, Marguerite

The series, which concluded on January 17th, was finally won by Danish sailor, Valdemar Bandolowski, in his Hong Kong built boat, Nordjylland. Andreas Lohmann, West Germany, was second in Fiasco with Tasmania's Stephen Boyes in Maj Britt, third. Prince Henrik was placed fifteenth with a good third placing in Heat number

All four Geelong competitors finished in the top half of the field with Tony Bull eighth, Bruce King

The Series concluded with a grand Presentation Night Dinner at the Club when some 320 people enjoyed a smorgasbord meal and much conviviality.

Once again our visitors were high in their praise of the efficient manner in which both Championship series were conducted, both on the water and ashore.



Veteran Geelong yachtsman, David English meets Prince Henrik of Denmark, a competitor in the 1987 World Title Dragon Series