

Media Release

Blind Sailing Championships held on Lake Hume

October 19, 2008

The Inaugural Australian Blind Sailing Championships were hosted by the Albury-Wodonga Yacht Club from 17th – 19th October. Sailed in a club member supplied fleet of Noelex 25s the Championships were supported by the Noelex Yacht Association of Australia and Noelex Yacht Squadron.

The event was conducted in the Blind Sailing International integrated fleet racing format. Crews are made up of two blind or vision impaired sailors (helm & mainsheet trimmer) and two sighted sailors (headsail trimmer & a tactician who cannot operate any equipment) with divisions for B1, B2 and B3 vision-classified helms. AWYC Noelex owners made up the final member of each crew.

While the number of competing teams was small, the Championships were well organised by the Club and nine races were conducted over two warm sunny days with favourable breezes.

Experienced blind sailor, Paul Borg from Victoria's Gippsland Lakes Yacht Club, aided by crew Jane Bellamy (main) and Morgan Staley (tactician), posted a clear win in the overall competition. They finished 6 points clear of Joan Andrews (Albert Park Yacht Club – VIC) sailing with Roy Jewel and Terry Caldwell.

There was only 1 point between the 3rd and 4th placed teams. Anthony Fowler (Sailability Rushcutters Bay – NSW), with crew Don Scott and Julian Clements, held out the South Australian team of Peter Aspinall (Adelaide Sailing Club), Michael Zannis and Bob Schahinger.

Division winners were:

B1 Division - Joan Andrew, Roy Jewel and Terry Caldwell (VIC)

B2 Division - Anthony Fowler, Don Scott and Julian Clements (NSW)

B3 Division - Paul Borg, Jane Bellamy and Morgan Staley (VIC)

Racing conditions were excellent, with consistent 5-12 knot breezes allowing groups of 30-45 minutes heats to be sailed back to back before crews changed over into the next provided boat. Nine races were completed over the two days.

The Championships were an opportunity to identify and prepare teams for the IFDS Blind Sailing World Championships, being held in Rotorua, New Zealand from 13-21 March next year.

While blind and vision impaired sailors from three States were gathered together in one place, plans were also hatched to formally incorporate an Australian Blind Sailing organisation to help grow participation, provide avenues for skill development, and support teams competing at an international level. It is hoped that the new organisation will promote the Australian Blind Sailing Championships as a regular annual event.

For additional information, visit the Australian Blind Sailing website - www.blindsailingaustralia.org

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