

28th Australian Sabre Championships – Linisfarne SC TASMANIA
Report by Wayne Bates 2/3/06

Tassie, what a place! The Sabre Nationals was my first visit to the island, as it is called by the locals. The boat trip over on Spirit of Tasmania was enjoyable and relaxing, and was a fantastic opportunity to catch up with some of the other sailors, who were also making the trek to Tassie.

We arrived at Lindisfarne SC in convoy, unloaded our boats and gear and got a run down on how the floating ramps work. Then it was registration and finally time for a sail. With a dozen or more boats spread over the river I found the breeze patterns very interesting. In our time on the water I found myself splitting tacks with Barry Eastgate, finding a gain of 300m in 400m, only to then have Daniel Keil gain 150m in 100m over me. Even at this early stage I thought to myself, “What a place this is going to be to sail!”

The main reason for the gain and loss in ground was the tide or current and wind fingers, as I call them. Many thought that Blairgowrie, at the Sabre Nationals in 2003 – 2004, had strong tides, but Blairgowrie hasn't got anything on this place! At Lindisfarne I found that when the tide was moving in one direction it was sometimes fast and at other times slow and in light or heavy winds you had to be constantly considering the tide. To add to the challenge of sailing here, we came ashore with 45 degree variations in the wind. The dark water colour also made it difficult, at times, to see the wind.

The Invitation Race saw around half the fleet hit the water. I was pleased to see the wind blowing strongly but couldn't work out what was wrong with everyone who didn't take to the water. The breeze felt around 18 knots on my scale. But our race was short lived with an N over A going up after the committee boat reported a constant 35 knots over the deck of their boat. Some of us went for a sail, if only to show the committee boat that it only felt like 18 knots and that we were keen to race. But after a while we got rounded up and sent ashore. All good things come to an end some time!

Heats 1 & 2, the following day, were blown out. This gave Russell Rooney and I a chance to go to the lookout and watch the change in the current lines and wind patterns.

The next day was a bit of the same. We had strong winds early in the morning and as a result, all of us heavier ones were biting at the bit and keen to get out there. The AP flag went up and the wind abated enough for us to get onto the water. Winds were gusting to the limit, so the race was going to be more challenging for the lighter members of the fleet. The fleet split to both sides of the river going up the first beat, but at the top mark it there didn't appear to be a favored side. The wind was around 12 knots, gusting to 18 knots, (those wind speeds are on my scale) which meant that some of the fleet were in survival mode, while others were lapping up the conditions. The race saw boats being blown away from the sailors, a bent mast (too much vang down wind), some ‘grannies’ (Hey Nanna!), Fisty being ‘Booney’ with a go hard or go home philosophy (towel rails need to be bolted on, not pop riveted). Andrew Graham (Mr. G), being the figures man

that he is, has worked out that you have to multiply my wind speeds by two to get an accurate figure!

Race 2 saw a more manageable wind speed for most. Again the most of the fleet seemed to stay right as staying out of the river flow was the best way to go. You had to work the shifts the best way you could. It seemed at times a bad heading out of the river flow was better than good heading in it.

Race 3 saw the start with some breeze then it quickly drop out to light airs. With some shifts after the start, it left some of us with a lot of work to be done to catch up. Alan Riley was doing it extremely well. The sea breeze started to fill in on the last leg for the leaders, resulting in fingers of breeze favoring some but not others. This cost Maree Early the lead, while others lost or gained 10 boats during the last leg which had become a board reach.

Now! Does that sound like a big first day? From memory we were on the water for about 5 hours straight and with only 2 water bottles and 2 bananas in my boat, I had nothing left in the 3rd race. The strong winds meant that the boat was often unstable down wind so it was one of the only times I've ever found myself drinking water up wind not down. The beer, pizza and bourbon chasers went down well that night.

Race 4, the following day, saw lighter winds from the south. This wind direction made the river flow in your favor, so the middle of the river was the way to go, except for the last leg, with the wind going right. This cost some sailors a number of spots on the last leg yet again. Well, that's yacht racing!

After New Years it was back to medium to windy conditions. We started the day with light winds, getting two races in. Then, the wind slowly increased until the last race was N flagged. Once again, the day's racing saw winds coming in a westerly direction, resulting in river flow being the main concern for sailors. Also, with little fingers of wind filling in, it was easy to lose a lot of ground. It was difficult, but achievable, to gain ground, but with some risk. Big lateral distance, big gain or loss! With most of the fleet keeping out of the river flow, close racing resulted and it was great to be a part of it.

Race 6 saw the course marks in a similar position to Race 5, which meant that the right was the best way to go again. Close racing was enjoyed by all, with the wind slowly building to 10 knots (again, my scale!). So that means it was more like 20 knots.

What was to be Race 7, started in 10 knots with the course being moved left due to the wind shifting slightly to the right. The windward mark was on the left side of the river and the start line was slightly to the left of the main river flow, so left it was up the first beat! At the start of the race, some of us went left and some right. Fisty headed left and said, "I hope this is right!" Well Fisty, not right, but the correct way to go! But one small tip Fisty, when you pass the jibe mark, you will be near the lay line to the windward mark. There is no need to sail miles past it. Everyone that headed left rounded the mark before those that went right. The wind slowly built until Barry Eastgate and I

had 20 knots or more on the last run, with the bottom mark drifting close to the bridge. The waves bouncing back off the bridge pylons made it hard to jibe so there was no room for Nanna naps here! (Hey Nanna). I lost my footing and tipped over trying to jibe and hit my cheek on the boom as I hit the water. (Ouch!). I rounded the drifting mark close to the bridge and was loving the wild and windy conditions. It felt like about 20 knots to me but as stated earlier, you probably need to multiply this by 2 to get a more realistic wind speed. Then, the race was called off! I guess it was just as well, because when we hit the shore the wind was around 60 knots; too much for most of the fleet.

By now you probably think that the regatta was very windy to date, well that was nothing on today. One of the strongest gusts I've ever seen went through a boat harbour; you could hear it coming, ripping covers off of motor cruisers, and then lifting the water as it went across the bay. The racing was called off early and "Good call!" could be heard around the boat park. Masts were dropped as a precautionary measure, to ensure that boats were not blown over. And now might be a good time to tell you not to play against Barry Eastgate and Russell Rooney in pool doubles as you will lose every time.

Race 7 (resail) and Race 8 had light winds, an earlier start time, big wind shifts, finger breeze and strong river flow. This all means, you need to keep your head out of the boat and keep looking around; right around (we had sea breeze shift of 150 degrees).

There is not much more to add on the sailing side of things, but for those who sailed in Tassie, I can say that we all had a great time. It was not always the greatest weather, but we all enjoyed the series. The strong winds in the series undoubtedly suited some sailors more than others, but the standard of the fleet was so high that it was difficult for anyone to finish well in every single race. The Sabre has once again proven itself to be a fantastic and competitive dinghy to sail.

I would like to finish by expressing my gratitude to everyone involved in running the National Titles.

Good sailing
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