

EARLY DAYS by Eileen Caulcutt. Written in Cowes 7th March 2011

Match racing? What is match racing? None of us had ever heard of it in the early 70's, except as part of the exclusive America's Cup Races held every 3 years or so. The Long Beach Yacht Club in California invented the Series (called the Congressional Cup with a handsome trophy presented by Congress) and a Californian Royal spotted this Lymington member. Bill Green, who returned hotfoot from holiday full of enthusiasm and with all the details and he lured the Club into having a go.

Bill Woods, Rear Commodore Sailing elect, Derek Pitt-Pitts Committee member, and Club Secretary Howard Lewis took it onboard and so the 1974 contest started the ball rolling. At first British top racing helmsmen were invited and Contessa 32 Owners were wooed into lending their boats with the carrot that they could be on board and that they would learn a lot about how to win races!

The first foreign helmsmen came from winners and competitors in the Congressional Cup, who paid their own fares but were looked after as soon as they set foot in England. Gradually as more Countries joined in the fun, New Zealand, Bermuda, Australia, France, and the event became truly International. It was a learning ground for aspiring America's Cup crews and I know a number of them were grateful that the Royal Lymington Cup races gave them the chance.

Initially small sponsorship amounts of a few hundred pounds were put up by local businesses; Builders, Stockbroker, Sailmakers and so on, which covered small needs such as packed lunches, prizegiving dinner etc., but soon more money was required and sponsorship was brilliantly obtained by Ken Robinson.

It became more and more difficult to borrow boats that were evenly matched, in spite of great assistance from Jeremy Rogers, and so the long-suffering Owners of the Contessa 32's and subsequently OOD 34's were relieved of the job. The first boat sponsors were Westerly Yachts.

The highly competitive cutthroat one-to-one racing produced many Protests and it soon became obvious that the Club's Protest Committee were struggling. Mary Pera who was Chairman of the RYA Racing Rules Committee joined Richard Creagh-Osborne and between them they devised the introduction of Observer boats, subsequently with the Observers actually being on board the yachts themselves. The Royal Lymington Yacht Club was able to give something back to the Long Beach Yacht Club who soon adopted the same system. On the water judging of course followed much later. Over the years the Yacht Racing Rules were honed and protests were fewer, and the fun days when Protest Hearings were relayed up from the Club Office to the Bar, and much enjoyed by the competitors waiting for their protests to be heard, a distant memory! Protest Committees then became International Juries, led by our British Judges, Mary Pera, Bryan Willis and John Doer.

I don't think that any event at the Club has involved so many members and I thank them all for keeping me out of trouble over the 12 years in which I was involved. From feeling our way with Match Racing to the degree of professionalism all round in putting on an International Event I congratulate all the members who were professional in every department, and I hope they enjoyed it all as much as I did.

Eileen

