



Guy Irwin

Ian Macintosh: Guy, before we come to the Amateurs, where and how and when did you start sailing? How far back?

Guy Irwin: I started sailing when I was about six years old. I used to live in New Zealand, lived in a place called Waimate. Holidays, our father used to ship us up to our grandparents' place in Christchurch. And they had what they call a 'batch', the Kiwis call holiday houses 'batches'. And it was on a river that led into a lake. We used to go there trout fishing and they had a little sailing dinghy. So, I used to sail that on the river, up and down the river and just muck around with boats.

IM: And you've sailed pretty much ever since?

GI: Yeah, I joined the Navy over in Western Australia, and I used to sail whalers over there. And I remember sailing over from Fremantle across to Rottnest, yes, and whalers and racing them across there actually, which was very interesting.

IM: I hardly think of a naval whaler in the same breath as your current Mumm 30.

GI: No, slightly different.

IM: So, what brought you to the Amateurs? You joined the Amateurs in... '98.

GI: '98.

IM: What brought you to the Amateurs?

GI: Because I lived on Cremorne Point, with a friend who lived on Milson Road, and he had a boat and which I sort of taught him how to sail with it. And it was called *Clueless* and I'll explain to you the reason why, because he didn't have a clue how to sail boats and he wanted me to teach him. So, I knew about the Amateurs having lived on Cremorne Point. He then got a job over in Western Australia and sold the boat on to me.

IM: So, you joined Amateurs with the original *Clueless*?

GI: With the original *Clueless*, but I couldn't change the name because until my mooring came through in Shell Cove where I could then take over his mooring, which was in his ex-wife's name.

IM: Well, history says you never changed the name because you had three boats at the amateurs and they'd all been *Clueless*.

GI: But the spelling changed. So, the first two years I sailed *Clueless*, C-L-U-E-L-E-S-S at the Amateurs and then finally I got my own mooring, and I could then change the name and I was thinking well what am I going to name her? At that stage I'd won a Kelly Cup at the Amateurs in the old *Clueless*.

IM: People must be realising by then that you've pulled a swift. You call your boat *Clueless* (ed: soon to become *Clewless*) and you win the Kelly Cup.

GI: Well yes, a lot of people used to look on me in the Harbour and say, "You're clueless, aren't you?". And I said, "Well you know, results will tell".

IM: Before we come to the sailing, I'm interested in your first impressions of the Amateurs. What sort of place did it strike you as when you first fetched up there?

GI: Look, it was me. Old sort of style and the members were sailing members. There was no bullshit. You go there and nobody doesn't care what your background is, if you sailed, and everyone was friendly.

IM: Classless.

GI: Classless, yeah. You could say classless, yeah.

IM: So, your early days at the Amateurs, you were already racing in Division 2?

GI: Yes, I think it was Division 2. At that stage, sailing at the club had declined quite a bit. I took over Division 2 and built it up and I wrote a lot of articles after each race and things like that.

IM: You were the sailing chair for eight years I believe.

GI: Yeah, but not at that stage. Between '98 and 2001, and that's when Charles Maclurcan came and tapped me on the shoulder.

IM: It seems that a lot of prominent Amateurs, flag officers and directors and so on have been tapped on the shoulder. How did it happen for you?

GI: Well, he obviously saw that I'd put a lot of time in building up the Division 2 fleet, only for self-interest, because I wanted more boats to race in it. The starter then...

IM: Russ Chapman.

GI: Russ the starter, yeah. Saying to me, look, you're doing a really great job. It's good.

IM: So, they buttered you up first?

GI: Yeah, they buttered me up first, and Charles came and said, look, Peter McCorquodale was retiring at that time and he said, "Would you like to do it?". And I said, "Well, if you think I'm capable", (and) he said, "What you've done with the Division 2 fleet, just do it to the club".

IM: I remember over those years reading your reports. They were usually two or three pages long in the Amateurs News, and they were very detailed and obviously a labour of love. You must have put a lot of time into the chairing the racing.

GI: Yes, and I'd made a point when I became Chairman of Racing in those days, it wasn't a... It wasn't called captain. ...a flag position. I felt that the sailors weren't connecting. So particularly on Friday nights, I would go around and get different skippers and take them to different tables and introduce them and it brought, I felt, quite a bit of camaraderie back into the sailing. I also then introduced the Super 30 fleet in 2004, 2005.

IM: Did you run into much opposition?

GI: It was interesting when I introduced it because a friend of mine, Richard Lavers, who had a Super 30 type boat, I used to sail against him in the Division 2. He was sailing at the Squadron but racing against 40, 50-foot boats. And he said, "Would you be interested in setting up a Super 30 type fleet?".

So, we sat down and we sort of targeted people who had Super 30s that may join the fleet. And Chris Sligar was one of them. He had the *Tasty*, which he was racing out of the Middle Harbour Yacht Club. I thought there was an opportunity to create another Division and there was lots of these boats on Sydney Harbour.

IM: Give me some feel for what it involved running racing. You've got multiple divisions, you've got all the dramas of handicaps, of safeties (safety certificates) and organising the races and the protests. It's a pretty complex task, isn't it?

GI: But to me it didn't seem that complex because it was a labour of love. I enjoyed sailing, and whenever I take any challenge on I sort of go in boots and all.

IM: I think you're also very competitive, aren't you?

GI: Oh yeah, definitely. I've had crew with me now for 15, 20 years, same people. And now with my son, three of the others are now owners of our latest boat. We always sail to have fun, but we always sail competitively. We don't sort of do a lot of yelling or screaming. We go out there, sail hard, (And) results just come through.

IM: I was going to ask you about how you get and keep crew, bearing in mind that 50 years ago the Amateurs was a very different place. Families sailed – they tended to race on Saturday, go cruising on Sunday. The time pressures were very different. Today everybody is time poor. How do you assemble and keep a good crew?

GI: I've always had a core of probably a dozen, the *Clewless* crew, three or four of them have been sailing with my sons as well, (and) with me since 1998. So obviously over time we've had people drop out, but the people that have come in have been introduced by one of the existing crew, and they've sort of been suitable, the same mindset as we are.

IM: Over that time, you've won 10 season gold medals, two Kelly Cups. Is success part of what keeps your crew together?

GI: No.

IM: What does?

GI: I think camaraderie. Last year, or the year before, we hardly had any success. And this year, for some unknown reason, I think we won every division we went in. It came second in the other. I mean, you go out there to race your best. If you win, that's an added bonus.

IM: Tell me about the three yachts named *Clewless*. Take me from the first to the current one. Tell me what their strengths and weaknesses are.

GI: Well, the Endeavour, the first *Clewless* (A92), Endeavour 26, she was a wonderful offshore boat. Very stable. Every year we would go to the Nationals, which could be up at Lake Macquarie. We took her up there quite a few times. To Gosford, and down to Botany. So, they were the three main places, or we had them in Sydney...the Nationals. So, I had her from '98 to, I think, 2012. So, 14 years. If we went to Lake Macquarie, we would all go up for the weekend. I'd take the boat up and stay at a motel up there. So, we had the camaraderie of sailing all weekend, and socialising, and partying.

IM: So, you do that for a dozen years. At what point did you decide to swap her out for the next *Clewless* (4377)?

GI: Well, mainly because I wanted to get into the Super 30 fleet. I'd developed that fleet and seen it evolve, and how popular it is. It's so popular still today.

IM: You had to be in that.

GI: Yeah, yeah, eventually. I was ready to move on, I think.

IM: This is the competitive Guy, isn't it?

GI: Well, I could see that it was more exciting going fast. And why? And look, it was a good boat, Cape 31. But especially in a heavy breeze, she was very stable. She had a very flat

bottom. But anything under probably six or seven knots, she used to stick to the surface, having such a flat bottom boat. So, she wasn't very good in that stuff.

IM: How long did it take you to come to terms with her strengths and weaknesses? I mean, you were winning pretty regularly, weren't you?

GI: Yeah, she was a good boat. She was a timber boat, dynel sheathed, took a lot of maintenance. But she was a very stable boat. We actually, when we got her and we had to put a new engine in her, which myself and my sons, we did that. Very good boat. We didn't sail her offshore at all, but she could have gone offshore. But she was very low topsides.

IM: She was an Andrew Cape design. Where was she built?

GI: Down in Bowral, or somewhere like that.

IM: A one-off?

GI: No, I think there was about three of them made.

IM: And then in 2018, you moved up to the Mumm 30 (AUS6151)?

GI: Yeah, a friend of mine, Matt Wilkinson, who sails at CYCA, over the years we'd raced against here, other boats, I think. And we were really good friends. And he bought a boat called *Foreign Affair*. And he said, "Guy, you've got to get into these Farr 30s. You've got to get into them". And I said, "Oh, well, maybe one day".

And he keeps sending me these links of these Farr 30s. Anyway, I eventually took the bait. And I thought, well, I'm ready to move on. Because I had a partnership in the Cape that wasn't really working out that well. And I wanted to dissolve that partnership. So, I thought, we'll sell the boat and get this.

And the new boat, I then went to my long-serving crew members, who had sailed with me all the years, which is fantastic. And I said, well, look, I'm going to get this boat. So, I invited three of them to come on board and my son. So, there is now, we bought the new boat with five owners.

IM: Oh, it's a syndicate?

GI: Yes.

IM: What's the age range?

GI: Well, I'm the oldest, probably 50-odd, another 60, and probably mid-40s. And then my son.

IM: Sailing is for all sizes and all ages.

GI: It is, yeah. You know, we don't fight who's going to do what. I generally run the boat, which I always have, run all the boats and sort of maintain them. But they're very good in a sense, they've got their different expertise. Whenever I call them, they'll come and give me a hand. It's good having five owners because there's no requirement to commit to any series, which gives everyone in the crew freedom to do whatever they want.

IM: And kinder on the wallet.

GI: Definitely. Yeah, that's big. A boat like that costs about 15 grand a year to run.

IM: To keep it competitive.

GI: Yeah. Yeah.

IM: Could you ever see yourself sailing a Ranger or some other of the gaffers?

GI: I have sailed Rangers on a couple of times. I've skippered one.

IM: Quite a different pace to the Mumm 30.

GI: Yeah, yeah. But every boat's got its peculiarities. I don't mind; I'd sail on anything. Usually when I sail on other people's boats, I'd sail on Herschel's (Smith's) boat quite a bit. And he always said, "Guy, take the helm". And Chris Manion's boat. In fact, Chris Manion's first boat, *Magic*, I used to sail on that. And call on a friend of mine, Jack Stenning, who sails out of Middle Harbour. I used to sail a lot with him on that.

IM: In 25 years, you've done a huge amount of inshore racing. Does longer distance offshore cruising hold any attraction?

GI: Long term cruising? No, not really. I'm quite happy to do (it); I've done a couple of bareboat charters and one in Croatia and one in Turkey. That would be more interesting for me than cruising around the world.

IM: You've raced up the coast. You've raced to Lord Howe Island.

GI: Yeah. I haven't done a Hobart. I missed out one year with Jim Dunstan.

IM: Racing has been the *raison d'être* for the Amateurs for 150 years. How do you think the Amateurs are doing today with their racing program?

GI: Well, look, I think they're doing very well. I do. And I think having Alice (Murphy) as a captain, taking over from Chris (Manion)...all the club captains have, in my view, been very good selections. And I think it's quite healthy. I'm quite proud of the Super 30 fleet, which I introduced.

IM: One of the challenges for sporting clubs and social clubs generally in this day and age is attracting new members. In the first decade of the 21st century, you were a key part of

building the size of the Amateurs fleets. In the second decade, we've seen quite a change in the way we get new members in. How important is it to keep that, if you like, rebirth going?

GI: Well, the Amateurs has taken that under its arm. And Bruce (Dover), when Commodore, introduced crew membership, I think that was... I was trying to get it years and years ago when I was club captain, but it was all too hard because it wasn't in the constitution. But Bruce did a fantastic job. I was only speaking to him a couple of days ago about how many crew members we've got, it's something like 100.

And all my crew now are all crew members, whereas before, they couldn't be involved to the extent that they are now. And they feel as they're part of the club. And then after three years, they'll become members, but they are a lot younger than me, like my son. But he's been a full member for quite a few years. The others are in their 40s and 50s, which is considerably younger than me.

IM: It's attracting youngsters. That's the real challenge, isn't it?

GI: Yeah. There are a lot of young people out there who want to sail. Whenever I can't get crew, my regular crew, I can usually find crew around.

It's not hard and they're usually younger people and they're very keen. One I had recently, she sails on *Double Dutch*, a girl called Nic. She's probably in her mid-40s, but she's a very good sailor and very keen, but she's the sort of people that we need to get into the club.

IM: And that's the other noticeable change in the Amateurs in the last 10 or 20 years has been the influx of female members.

GI: Yeah. And I think that's fantastic. I would say one of my best sailors is Susan Hardy, who I taught to sail when she was a Sea Scout down at Mosman Bay, 3rd Mosman Bay. In fact, there's quite a few others I can call on through that program I did at 3rd Mosman Bay that if I'm short a crew, I could always give them a call.

IM: That's the secret, isn't it?

GI: A lot of them still sail, yes.

IM: You spent a good deal of your life in the Royal Australian Navy, 16 years of that in submarines.

GI: That's correct.

IM: In my way of thinking, I can think of nothing worse than being in a submarine, but what did you learn in submarines that's helped in your sailing career?

GI: In a submarine, if you're under the water and you're there for two weeks at a time, you have to get on with other people. You're living in a confined space. If you dive for that

period of time, you're two hours on, four hours off, so you don't get much time to think about anything other than sleeping when you can, because you can be called on any time 24/7.

IM: Must be liberating to be sailing on the surface.

GI: Well, it is.

IM: Guy, what would you regard as the downsides or the negatives of being in charge of racing at the Amateurs?

GI: I think there was only one time when I had somebody come and complained about a handicap.

IM: Only once? But you've got multiple divisions, a wide range of yachts.

GI: Yachts, yes...

IM: Handicapping is a real challenge.

GI: Well, it is, but you use a datum yacht. You always use a datum yacht, so you can see a boat, and quite often I used my boat, because I sailed in so many different divisions. You could then relate other boat handicaps against that datum boat. You never ever got it right, because as they explain...

IM: You never make everybody happy...

GI: No. PHS is obviously, too. You can have a boat that goes out that's got a dirty hull, and they clean the hull, and next week they're twice as fast. So, I think the handicapping system we've got now is pretty good, because you can adjust it to suit quick changes if need be for twilight racing.

IM: But race management at the Amateurs and other sailing clubs is really the product of a lot of, dare I say it, unsung heroes. You're running the racing in the 2000s. You've got starters. You've got a whole raft of other people who are involved. Tell me about the starters at the Amateurs.

GI: Well, the one I had the most involvement with was Charles Maclurcan, John Jeremy, Russ Chapman. Russ was a stalwart, and Tony Barry, too, at that time.

IM: They do a remarkable job, don't they?

GI: Oh, fabulous job.

IM: Week in, week out, all weathers.

GI: Yeah, and then you look at Charles and John. They were Olympic starters for the 2000 Sydney Olympics, so having them on board was less (work) for a chairman of racing. You didn't have to teach them, and they were constantly teaching people, and you had the best two starters in Australia at the time.

IM: Guy, where do you think the Amateurs goes from here? After 150 years, as I said earlier, times change, people change. What do you see as the immediate future of the Amateurs?

GI: I think it's going to be good. It's on the right track, and as long as it keeps doing what it's doing, which is not losing its identity, which over the years I've never seen it lose its identity, and it's progressed. Bruce Dover did a fantastic job in introducing crew membership and changing the constitution. That was a major step forward.

IM: Helps to future proof it.

GI: Yeah, it has brought in younger members and more members. It's been around for coming up to 150 years, so for any club to still be going after that time, it's fantastic, and the camaraderie down there, as you mentioned, the working bees, it's just fantastic.

IM: That is one of the Amateurs' secrets, isn't it? The self-help volunteering spirit.

GI: It is. Yeah. I was only looking at photos the other day when we built the slipway, the new cradles. That was 2015, or was that seven years ago now?

IM: I wonder what they would have cost if we'd had to have them built by a contractor? But you know, 150 years running a racing program due to volunteers and people who, like you, got tapped on the shoulder, it does bode well for the future.

GI: Yeah, it does. I think people will always be tapped on the shoulder, that people will be recognised for the particular talents they've got and they'll be tapped, and the club will roll on. It'll still be there, I think, in another 100 years, hopefully.

IM: Well, thank you for your part in the volunteer spirit, particularly what you did for racing in those 10 years, at a time when some clubs were struggling to put fleets on the water.

GI: They were, yes.

IM: And thanks for sharing your reflections.

GI: Well, thank you.