



Robert Evans

Richard Palfreyman: Rob, you've been a very successful sailor, you've been on the board here for 15 years, 15 years or so at a time. What does the Amateurs actually mean to you over these past 30 years?

Robert Evans: Well the Amateurs means a lot to me, it's been my club for just on 30 years. It's given me an interest, a passion and a lot of knowledge about boats and how they're built and handled. So I think it's a really good thing, it's a great little club.

We do things together. My grandfather was member and there's a photo of him in his little boat, *A107 Sanora*, in the forum of the club. His father, my great-grandfather, was also a member and James McIntosh won the Federation Medal, sailing I believe a 22-foot racing canoe, in the Federation Regatta in 1901.

That medal actually is still within the club, it's now used as the medal for the winner of the Australia Day Regatta. To that end *Celeste* (A26), my little boat, won it some years ago. The medal's done the full circle and it does show the involvement that we've had for a long time.

RP: So that association with the club, that long association with the club, with the family, probably goes some way to explaining your love of wooden boats.

RE: It does, but I've always been involved with wooden boats. My uncle, a doctor in Parramatta, had a lovely old ketch called *Bissy Girl* 40 feet, 22 tonnes, flat mainsail, and as kids we sailed that boat on Pittwater. My uncle was very generous, we all sailed it, we were all just kids in those days, but *Bissy Girl* was lovely.

So that was sold in about 1972 and sort of went out, but for the years before that, I was with my cousins and had a great time with *Bissy Girl*.

RP: And then your association with the club and sailing has really centred on your beautiful wooden boat *Celeste* (A26).

RE: Yeah, *Celeste* is a darling. I bought it in 1995. I bought the boat from Simon Fraser, an antique dealer in Balmain.

It was a bit long in the tooth. It had a few leaks and bits and pieces, and the motor was seized, and it was all the things that I needed to get me going. We fixed it up, got the motor going, did a bit of work to it, not much, until someone said at the end of the first season, this would be a good boat to take to Southport. I think it was Dal Wilson, but anyway, that's what happened.

So we decided we'd take it to the Southport race, which gave me at that stage about nine months to get the boat ready. That involved putting a new rig in it, new sails; virtually the whole boat was stripped, put back together again, and we started. But when we started, actually, I had two fully charged power drills on me, just in case.

That was the first Southport race the boat did, and I came back again for the next two years. After the first race, I came back and we hadn't really finished all the restoration, so I stripped off the varnish and, well, unfortunately, when the boat was put back in the water, the boat sank, the seacock had been left open, so we had to do it two months before the Southport race. I had to do it all over again.

Anyway, I did, and we started that race, and we finished that race, and again the next year. So that was my ocean racing at that stage on *Celeste*.

RP: There's a photograph I've seen in one of the anniversary books of you at the slipway here, working on that boat.

RE: Yes.

RP: It must have been a huge work to try and get that done in the two months to get it back up ready for the Southport.

RE: Oh, it was. It was almost 24-hour days, but we did it, and the boat was great.

It's a lovely little boat to sail. It's designed by a Dane, Knud Reimers. *Celeste* really is a beauty. Also, *Celeste* is quite unique. It's a timber boat, but it's got a monel frame inside it, so it's a composite metal timber (boat), and that also means the planks don't move and the boat doesn't leak. It's a lovely boat.

RP: Well, you've had a lot of success in it as well. I think a Kelly Cup, six, seven gold medals, season gold medals.

RE: Yes.

RP: Very, very successful.

RE: Yes, it has been, and it still will be. Someone else will buy it, and it'll be a lovely boat for them to do what I've done. I think there's no reason why it can't be still going another 30 years.

RP: And so obviously, sailing and racing in particular has really been your mainstay in the club, your most enjoyment that you've got out of the club.

RE: But I've also cruised extensively. I've been from Eden to the Queensland border, and back again, several times. And it's a lovely boat offshore.

RP: And a good record offshore as well. Any other races apart from Southport?

RE: Oh, we did that three times, and then they changed the rules, and we've been to Batemans Bay three times. But the real race, we got it out there. I don't know how many times I've been to Pittwater, or Pittwater up to Port Stephens, but many, many times.

RP: What are your best memories of particular boats here in the club, because we are a historic club in the sense that we still have the Rangers, we have wooden boats, we've got a history. How do you look back on the boats of the club?

RE: Oh, with a lot of joy that they're there, because the reason I think that now, for all these lovely timber boats to be in Mosman Bay, is that Sydney

Amateurs has become the place to go if you have a classic boat. Our division has been strong up with the classic boats.

RP: So what are the boats that have really sparked your interest in the classics?

RE: The first boat to really spark my interest in the classics, when you hear classic boats, in particular classic racing boats, was the boat *Waitangi*. *Waitangi* was part of the Classic Yacht Association in Victoria, a group of guys who got together to restore old boats that were of significant historic interest. Their head was Doug Shields.

Doug encouraged me and helped me set up a Classic Yacht Association branch in New South Wales, and I slowly built up a database to include these boats. And they were boats that had a significant history, they'd been racing boats. What we managed to achieve then was through some great functions, get a fleet together that raced at Sydney Amateurs.

The boats that we had included some Hobart winners, *Struen Marie*...boats that had gone to Hobart, *Malohi*, *Mr Christian*, and over the years several others, but they're the main starters. We had about 20 boats who raced on a regular basis, as they still do.

RP: Now you've also been able to combine both your interest in classic wooden boats with classic cars.

RE: We had the opportunity to use the Superyacht Marina after the (Sydney 2000) Olympics. The marina was empty, it had no boats in it, and it was a great spot to have a boat show. I remember the boat show, someone said, why don't we bring a few cars down as well? So we had the boats lined up on the marina, and we had the cars lined up on the wharf. You'd actually get up on the Anzac Bridge walkway and see down this wonderful collection of boats and cars. I did it three times, or sort of four really. We had two that we had at the Superyacht Marina, which then became no longer available. We did one at Woolwich Dock, which was terrific. It rained a bit, didn't matter. The cars and boats came.

I've been involved in one at the Squadron. The boats that turn up are all of interest, some of great interest. They don't have to be that old, but we've got some lovely boats who turn up at these things. And we have some

fantastic cars. At the last one, we had Rolls Royces, we had Bentleys, we had MGs, we had **Rileys**, we had all the classics...I think 50 cars and about 30 boats. It was a great show.

So that'll happen again, and we're doing that against soon. But what it does, it brings the classic fleet together. And that's what this has always been about, about keeping the classic yachts busy and active, which they have to be, otherwise they die.

And also, it has been great for Sydney Amateurs, because Sydney Amateurs now has one very distinct feature, it is the home of classic yachts.

RP: That's great. And of course, talking of classics, you also own another classic boat, this time a power boat (*Sailfish*) and a Halvorsen, which is also very much part of the club.

RE: We have a little lunch that the older members enjoy. We're almost ready to go again now to see you. It's the RUTUS group, as in 'Round Up The Usual Suspects'. We're going round to Middle Harbour to have a little feed at the restaurant there under the bridge. And there's probably a lot of wisdom on board. A lot of nonsense, but there's...

RP: It's probably because most of the people on board are old enough to have some wisdom.

RE: Well, we like to think so. We like to think there's a bit of wisdom coming out of these lunches we have. They've been a lot of fun, and we'll do them again.

And the Halvorsen is just a beautiful boat. It's one of the last built at Ryde. It's 32 feet long. Viking is the design. Twin screw. Very, very comfortable with us and the guys on board going to lunch.

The Halvorsen has actually done a lot of miles with me. I've taken it up to Brisbane and back, taken it to Port Stephens on many occasions, several occasions. It's a very nice sea boat. You've got to be careful. Obviously, no one's going to be doing anything silly with it, but a lovely boat.

RP: So after 30 years of membership here, 15 years on the board, three years, four years as Commodore, how do you look back over the club and see what...and think about the achievements that you've seen here over the last 30 years?

RE: I look back at the club with delight. I love this club. It's sort of now looking as good as it ever looked. It's a lovely little club. It's financially very sound. It's been well run.

It's had some good Commodores to ensure that what we started has always been finished. We have a unique thing here we do by volunteers. We've relaid the deck with volunteer labour.

We've painted the building with volunteer labour. We have another shed in Mosman Bay, which is the Green Shed. It has had everything. It has a new deck, basically new walls, new roof, the whole lot. And it's a wonderful spot and a great spot for the club's members to work on their boats. Sydney Amateurs has a life of its own, I think, now.

Also, the other thing that I think I've had a lot to do with, and I've had great pleasure in doing it, which is bringing the classic fleet basically to Mosman Bay. We have boats now ranging in size from *Josephine*, which is 47 feet long, down to the Ranger 24. Most of them are used regularly, raced regularly. But what's absolutely magnificent is to see them on the water still, in some cases, after over 100 years.

RP: So, Robert, what do you see as some of the challenges that the club is facing now that it's in its 150th anniversary year?

RE: Well, there's always a challenge of renewing the lease. We don't own the freehold, so we are here at the government's behest.

However, the challenge that worries me most, I guess, is maintaining (our boats).

There's a number of people who are prepared to spend the money to have a classic yacht restored to the state where they can race it with us. The last few years have seen a huge increase in costs of doing this. We're looking at \$100 plus an hour in labour rates, and also we are losing a lot of our slipways, or have lost a lot of our slipways around the Harbour.

Where we'll end up, I don't know, but in the past it was possible for the member to fix the boat himself, as I have done. That's slowly disappearing. Many clubs won't let the members work on their boats on the slipway. That's going to be the big challenge for Sydney Harbour.

I think the way we're tackling it, with becoming the home of classic boats is the way to go. As people recognise the club as being where they have to be, to be part of the scene, the club will continue to attract the membership that makes these boats still race.

That's the big challenge. Other than that, we don't have many. Financially, the club is quite secure. At the moment, the membership is very good. I think we have 450 plus members.

RP: Rob, thanks very much.