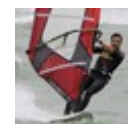


Windsurfer One Design Australian Championships – The battle on the bay

by Nicholas Sands 3 Feb 08:19 AEDT
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Close racing all round - Windsurfer One Design Australian Championships © Shane Baker / www.shanebaker.net

Parkdale Yacht Club on Port Phillip Bay hosted the 41st Windsurfer One Design nationals with competition in four disciplines across the Australia Day long weekend.

The regatta attracted 49 competitors from New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania, Queensland taking on a strong Victorian contingent on home waters.

The Windsurfer One Design is the largest and strongest sailboard class in Australia. Its classic shape, based on the original Windsurfer, has trained some of Australia's best over the years and all of Australia's Olympic sailboarders have raced in the class.

The board and rig set-up is simple by modern standards but the 'Wally' is highly technical to sail and boasts the hottest board racing fleet in the country.



Slalom action - Windsurfer One Design Australian Championships © Jane Leonard

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Contested under hot and sunny skies, the fleet made a colourful sight with competition areas set close to shore which attracted great crowds of onlookers. Conditions provided something for everyone to strut their stuff - with breezes ranging from 5 – 18 knots across the racing period. Rolling bay swell in sea-breezes kept everyone on their toes, whilst shifty northerlies off the land on the last day let the flat-water specialists shine through.



Mel Webb - Splits on the Rail - Windsurfer One Design Australian Championships © Shane Baker / www.shanebaker.net

The vibe throughout was fantastic with a strong social calendar and friendly atmosphere ensuring good times on and off the water. The deck at Parkdale YC provided perfect for watching racing as well as cooling down post-race.

Course Racing

Twelve windward / leeward course races were conducted by the slick Parkdale race management team with all in starts meaning crowded lines and plenty of tight racing up and down the track.

With competitors split into weight divisions for scoring there was frantic action with the short 25 minute races keeping things close.

In the Lightweights (<75kg) a four-way battle between super speedy NSW female Mel Webb and Victorian's Mark Lloyd, young gun Will Grimshaw and Jason 'JMO' Morris saw each taking heats and the title up for grabs in a cut throat last race. Sailed in a fading oscillating Northerly, Lloyd and Grimshaw broke loose and match raced the final beat with the lead changing multiple times. Will showed great maturity to stave off Lloyd and take the gong but Lloyd had done enough to grab the crown.

Victorian Nick Bez showed excellent pace all regatta and sailed very consistently bagging 10 wins out of the 12 races to turn in a clean sheet after two drops in the Mediumweights (75-84.9kgs). Tim Lelliot from South Australia kept things tight to snag second, with former national champ Danny Bainbridge from Victoria grabbing third.

Simon Jones from NSW and Scott Buckingham from Victoria had a ding dong battle in the Heavyweight division (>85 kg) with both taking multiple wins. In the end Buckingham put in a strong last day to clinch the crown with local Paul Grimshaw completing the podium.

The Women's division saw Mel Webb dominate with a clean sheet. Sailing in the lightweight class she took 3 overall race wins as well. Great stuff. Next was the local favourite Tonia Grimshaw-Lloyd with young Grace Webb sailing in her first Nationals third.

The Novice division was a showcase for up and coming racers who sailed a shorter course. Plenty of persistence was shown with 12 year old Josh Baker was a standout, sailing well in all conditions and taking a deserved win. Next was Dave Peterson back into racing after a long break. German exchange student Linda Meyer was next in her first ever regatta, then the ever smiling Grace Hawkless.



Marathon fleet - Windsurfer One Design Australian Championships - photo © Jane Leonard

Australia Day morning saw competitors wheel out their best for a 3 minute trick routine. Onlookers were treated to up close action with the judging area set very close to shore. Great music and commentary from the viewing deck of the club created a fantastic atmosphere as sailors went through a variety of sail tricks, board spins and sailing positions.

Great routines were complimented with dressed up tricksters including 'Elivs', 'Warnie' and the '70's Nutbush girls'. The 3 judges had a tough time scoring when 'Wedgie man' entered the arena.

Dan Bainbridge was a stand-out early with some very neat sail tricks and a well executed no handed 'coffin'. Tim Lelliot, sporting a tutu, got stuck in with a great variety of tricks and multiple rail rides including the crowd favourite bunny hop.

But in the end the judges liked the work of Mel Webb who scored a very popular win. She came out firing with a variety of rail-rides and sail tricks showing great control throughout. With the crowd cheering Mel put the cherry on the cake by doing the splits on a reverse railride. Very hard and very awesome.

Slalom

A building sea-breeze presented perfect conditions for the Slalom competition. Run in heats, the top four competitors progress through the elimination table to reach an eight person final with three heats.

Losers are able to work back through a 2nd chance bracket and still make the finals the hard way. The course features a very short start line, small beat then multiple gybe marks round two laps.

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Course Race 11 - Start - Windsurfer One Design Australian Championships - photo © Shane Baker / www.shanebaker.net

plenty of spills and some great action.

Tight finishes were a feature as the fleet was whittled down. Some of the favourites ended up swimming and were either eliminated or went through the repechage.

The final saw a few dark horses in with some old hands. The breeze was down to 12 knots but the lumpy sea-state made it a real challenge. A big crowd of sailors and supporters crowded the PYC deck for a first hand view. Commentary and music kept the crowd amped up.

The first heat saw Mark Lloyd cruise to an easy win from Jason Morris and Nick Bez. Heat two was very tight with Morris taking a bullet from Bez, with Peter Monkhouse grabbing 3rd. Lloyd was out the back door to score a 5th.

With no drops Morris was in the box seat and just needed a top 4 to seal the deal. Heat 3 started in a left hand pattern. Local Nick Bez nailed a pin end start and tacked across the fleet and was away. Morris meanwhile got hung up and went to last.

Bez extended as the chasing boards tussled and cruised home with a win and the overall slalom title. Next was Lloyd snatching a 2nd and second overall. Tim Lelliot was 3rd in the heat leaving Morris at the tail end and having to settle for third overall.

Marathon

The marathon is an endurance test sailed over an extended course for multiple hours. The PRO set a long beat from the start just off Parkdale to beyond Mordialloc pier then a run back to PYC, a



New windsurfer hull - Windsurfer One Design Australian Championships - photo © Andy Baker

Mentone and then a final reach sprint to the finish off the club.

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for a building sea-breeze.

After a general recall, the fleet was away with one bunch heading out to sea and the other along the beach. NSW sailor Matt Ishenko was revelling in the conditions, along with Mel Webb and Steve Walsh looking good early.

But local knowledge proved useful as a group of Victorians who went left gained the upper hand half way up the leg. Mediumweight Nick Bez led the charge with Will Grimshaw hot on his heels with Jason Morris close behind.

Bez just let the fleet at the windward mark and the sprint back downwind was on. The fleet splashed colour across the horizon as it spread out on the run. At the turning mark Bez had extended slightly with Grimshaw, Morris and then Ishenko battling it out. The long reach to Mentone was a test as competitors grappled with a softening breeze and residual slop.

Bez had a 20 board length lead at the start of the beat to Ricketts Point. Grimshaw headed left, whilst others went looking for pressure on the right. Bez covered Grimshaw but took a few digs into more pressure to consolidate whilst Morris hooked into some nice air on the right.

Indeed, the right proved better as the fleet plowed on and some in the mid fleet made some nice gains.

At the last windward mark Bez had made more time and settled back downwind with a nice break. Behind, Morris worked passed Grimshaw with Ishenko and Mel Webb in the frame.

The final leg saw the breeze drop further with just 3 knots and big pressure gaps. Bez was holding on but the lightweights were charging with Morris applying the blowtorch just ahead of the pack.

In the end Bez got the gun but saw his lead cut by 2/3rds. Morris was next then Will Grimshaw, just ahead of Matt Ishenko and Mel Wedd (who also took first women) rounding out the top five.

The fleet battled on in very light airs and super hot conditions with finishers coming in over the next hour. A great effort by all – truly a marathon effort.

Overall

The Pentathlon is an aggregate of all four formats with a slight weighting to course racing. The Women's overall was dominated by Mel Webb who had a great regatta taking out each discipline. Second was junior Grace Webb followed by Victorian youth Isabella Grimshaw.

The Men's champion was Nick Bez who grabbed his first Pentathlon crown, then Tim Lelliott and Scott Buckingham rounding out the podium.

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