

GOLDEN YEARS

The VS class will celebrate 50 years afloat in 1987.

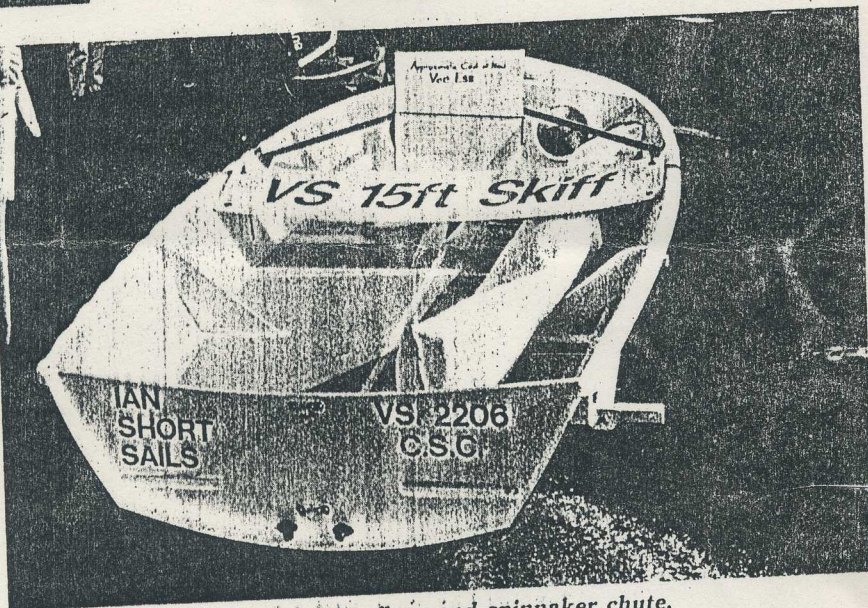
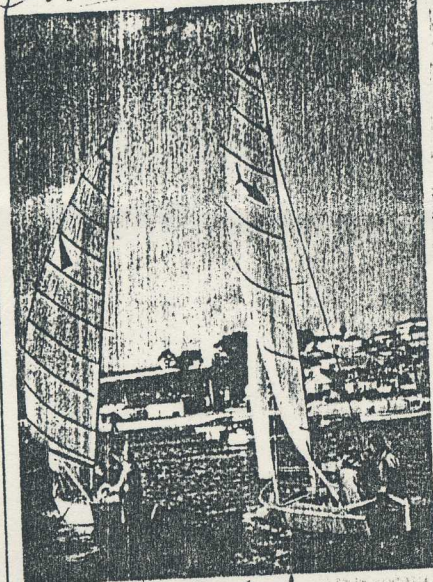
Robert Keeley reveals its chequered history and talks to some class enthusiasts

FIFTY years is a long time. When the VS hit the water for the first time in 1937 it was made of planked timber, Vaucluse was considered a village, and the citizens of Sydney were only vaguely aware of some trouble brewing in Europe.

Times make a habit of changing. World War II came and went, Vaucluse became a suburb (and later still an exclusive suburb) and the Vaucluse Senior 15ft skiff became a very popular dinghy. When Sil Rohu and Charlie Sparrow designed the VS as a step up from their popular VJ class, there were fewer than a dozen dinghy classes sailing in Australia. The strongest were the skiffs (10 footers, 12s, 14s, 16s, 18s) and for juniors there were Cadet Dinghies and VJs.

Immediately after the war VS fleets began sprouting up throughout NSW,

From the heydays of the VS; the early post war years.



Latest VS hull featuring a false floor and spinnaker chute.

and they gathered strength in Victoria. But times kept changing, and they rolled right over the top of the VS class. The VS was at the forefront of dinghy development one moment, and then swamped by it the next. It became a one design like so many others, introducing changes in an effort to keep pace with new developments.

It's safe to say the class has never again enjoyed the appeal it had in those early post-war days. Some people probably think there's a good argument for the VS closing up shop, but they are missing the point because the one thing that has remained the same about the VS since it shoved off into Sydney Harbour's Watson's Bay 50 years ago is the people.

The people who began sailing the class when Vaucluse was a village were looking for keen competition, but also for a fun boat and a social activity.

This coming season, in its fiftieth year, the VS is returning to Vaucluse, although not the Vaucluse YC, where it first sailed from. The fleet will race out of Vaucluse Amateur 12ft SC, and in the Bicentenary Year for Australia, it will be celebrating its own golden anniversary. As such it will be a key part of the revitalised Vaucluse Regatta and Carnival, to be held on

March 5 and 6. It's a regatta which has been held annually over the years as a local celebration, but because of the Bicentenary it has been upgraded and where around six classes usually sail, 16 have now been invited to attend. Woollahra and Double Bay SCs, and the Navy, will also assist in the organisation of the event. Activities will also take place on land over the two day period. The VS and VJ are inextricably linked to the Vaucluse area by their history. But the people are the key.

Almost 50 years ago John ("Chock") Winning Snr began sailing the VS. He had a break when the war started, but he returned to the class and won two National titles before moving on after 1950. This coming season John Winning Jr will follow in his father's footsteps, after spending several years racing a string of 18ft Skiffs. What attracted "Chock" to the class has also attracted his son.

They have both seen the VS as a boat to race and sail with their family and friends. "Chock" Winning was there at the beginning, when Rohu and Sparrow designed the VS as a follow on boat for the kids in the area that had sailed VJs. He says Sil Rohu wanted the boat to be home built, like his

successful VJ. "Early on they were all home built," says "Chock". "Sil and Charlie designed the VJ and VS because all these other boats (the skiff classes) were a bit rough. They were a pretty tough crowd in those days."

Rohu was a gunsmith and game fisherman, who raced 12ft Skiffs from Vaucluse, and who Winning describes as "the driving force" behind the two designs. "He was interested in kids," says "Chock". The first VS's were built from spotted gum (for the chines and keel), and cedar planks measuring $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 6". There were no glues and the planks were fastened with copper nails. Holes had to be drilled into the timber for the nails, and redlead was used as a sealant. The plans were easy to follow, and they subsequently became available through the Nock and Kirby chain of department stores (A fact which led to many new boats being unregistered by the fledgling association). Rigging was galvanised wire, and spars were solid timber, usually oregon. "Chock" Winning recalls "about 40" boats sailing prior to the war. When that began most of the sailors had other commitments. Sailing continued at a low ebb, but the VS was destined for bigger things after the conflict. Numbers in the years immediately after the war grew to around 250. They sailed in NSW, Victoria, ACT, and even for a time in WA. One innovation which led to the expansion of the fleet was the use of waterproof plywood.

Chock Winning says it was "a bit novel" when it was introduced. The VS was one of the first classes to take advantage of this new building material. In Jan 1950 32 VS's combined with 90 VJs to sail in a National title series on Sydney Harbour. Winning won that series,



NSW State champion from last season, *Windbourne Sails*, helmed by Pat Levy.

successfully defending his title victory from the year before. At various times identities such as Gordon Ingate and Peter Cole competed in the class. But by the late Fifties the introduction of marine plywoods had led to a developing interest amongst the wider population in dinghy sailing. The economy was good, and more people began to spend their money on boats.

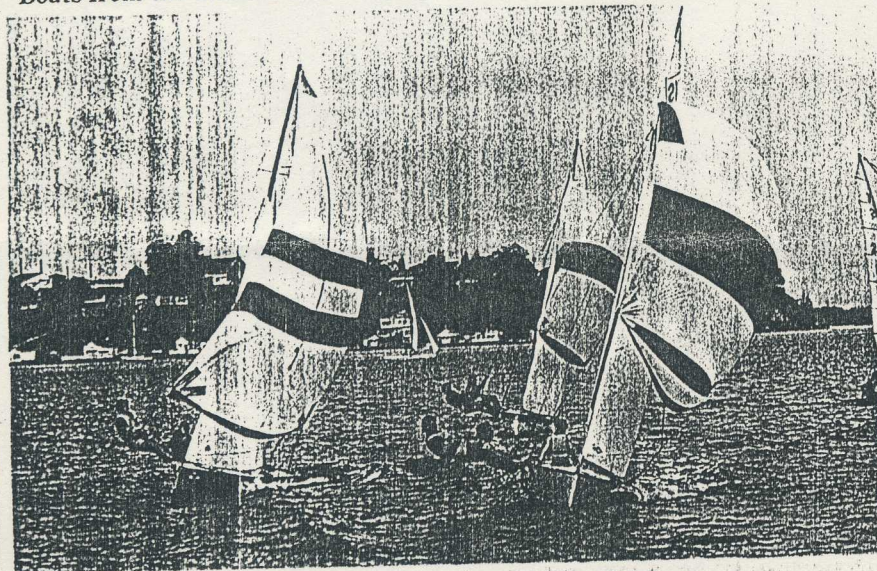
By the early Sixties more designers were drawing dinghies to cater for them. VS numbers dropped, and in an effort to remain competitive some class sailors changed the design. Phil Huon and John Anderson built the controversial straight stemmed *Contact*

at Kogarah Bay SC. Its success led to more experimentation, and by 1968 the class had been changed substantially and carried a new sail plan.

The boat had a parachute kite (from an FD plan) which replaced a flat reaching kite, a genoa headsail, and a high aspect main. Because two spinnakers were allowed to be carried, the boat retained its shy reaching kite. The class picked up for a few years, and split from its traditional link with the VJ association. Plastic catamaran classes began to boom in the early Seventies, and towards the end of the decade boardsailing took off. They all helped dilute the heavily populated class dinghy scene, and as a consequence the VS fleet as well. Paul Appleton, the current class President, believes the VS was suffering because it had been around for so long.

"The perception of the VS was a type casting of an old fashioned, slow, heavy lugger. But the boat was not really what outsiders thought it was. I think it was an unfortunate reality that because the VS did have a long history it was felt that it was an antiquated boat. Even today this stigma applies, but only to those who haven't sailed a VS lately!" In 1979 Bill Bollard was commissioned to design a new hull, based loosely on the current restrictions of 15ft LOA, three crew, and a minimum weight of 45kg. The design proved successful and in the next few seasons people changed to

Boats from the modern era, carrying masthead and parachute spinnakers.



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VS golden years

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new hulls constructed in foam sandwich.

Appleton says: "The Association now has the female mould for the class, and it's available to anyone wishing to build a VS. Basically the hull is one design on the outside dimensions with enough tolerances to allow amateur builders using a male mould technique to easily fall within the measurements. Hull layout inside is virtually unrestricted and the recent trend has been to false floor self draining cockpits." There are two 'leaning devices' allowed (trapeze or planks) and the skipper can use these. Full sponsorship has been allowed for 14 seasons, and the one design nature of the class keeps costs relatively low for a sponsor.

Next season a new masthead spinnaker will be introduced, and several boats are now being built with spinnaker chutes. These new innovations are not the attraction to John Winning Jnr. He sailed the VS before getting into 18ft Skiffs, and he says, "I always thought they were good boats." He sailed a series of Eighteens, including *Travelodge*, *Pacific Harbour*, *Yandoo* (named after his father's championship winning VSs) and *Flora*.

In the second year of his *Flora* sponsorship he says, "I finally came to grips with the fact that I didn't have enough time to sail Eighteens." This coming season Eighteens will be adversely affected by the withdrawal of a number of sponsors. Although Winning believes the Eighteens will survive, he says; "Sums of \$200,000 can't be justified to sponsors. The skiffs are looking at a lean year." Last season he stood out of sailing to concentrate on his role as managing director of his family business, but for season 87/88 he is keen to get back on the water.

He says: "The reason I went back to the VS class is that I wanted to sail near where I live, at a family club. And I wanted a boat that doesn't need a hell of a lot of looking after. Plus the VS is quite exciting to sail. The challenge for next season is to build up a good fleet of maybe 12 to 15 boats."

While second hand boats can be bought for less than \$3000, and new boats can be put on the water for less than \$8000. Despite the relatively small fleets which sail at the current VS venues (Vaucluse, Cronulla, Dobroyd Aquatic club, Kogarah Bay,

Brooklyn, Lake Macquarie, Taree, and Canberra, the competition is still enthusiastic. Current Australian champion is Ian Richardson, skipper of *Caringbah Boating*.

Richardson began sailing a VJ at 10 years of age from Burraneer Bay SC, south of Sydney at Port Hacking. From there he went into 12ft Skiffs. "They were the glamour boat to sail," he says. Eventually the glamour wore off and economics replaced it. Richardson never sailed a competitive boat because he couldn't afford them. "The best we did was about 11th," he says. "I got really sick of paying to get a 12ft Skiff fired up, and I started looking at the VS. You could get the same performance as a 12ft Skiff at half the cost," says Richardson.

In the 82/83 season he made the move, securing a sponsorship from a friend at Caringbah Boating marine supplies worth about \$1500, where they supplied his paint and fittings. "An average VS sponsorship is about \$1000 per year," says Richardson. "Only one or two boats get full sponsorships. The rest range from \$500 to \$2000."

In his first season Richardson scored a sixth in the Nationals at Yarra Bay. In the same boat the following season (83/84) he scored a similar result. With a new boat (built by Larry Selby, a regular supplier of top hulls to the fleet) and with the same sponsor, Richardson won the nationals sailed at Georges River SC. Together with his crew Mark Williams and forward hand Bruce Ryman he won every heat.

"We had worked out how to tune the rig properly. We were even downwind with the other boats, and we tuned it for upwind sailing. We powered up the mast a lot, and the sails we put on seemed to work". Richardson is a big is a big man, who steers from the wire and he says, "Probably we were sailing it a lot flatter than anybody else. You really need to sail these boats dead flat." The following season Richardson campaigned another new boat, which carried a false floor. He was pursuing an idea tried by another boat in the previous season. Crewed by Mark Williams and Andrew Shaw, he won a close series from *Harvey World Travel* skippered by Terry McLeod. Last season he kept the same boat, but he opted for a new forward hand, Steven Floyd.

At the National titles sailed from Belmont on Lake Macquarie he put together an almost faultless display, scoring four heat wins, and two seconds. "The crew worked really well together, and we won in light as well as heavy weather," says Richardson. He has decided to stick with the VS

"probably for another two years."

"The masthead kite has been introduced, and it should make the class more attractive to other skiff sailors. They're getting priced out of skiffs," he says. "The bigger kite (to be 220sq ft) is the first significant class change since I've been sailing it," says Richardson, "And that had 18 months planning before it was approved."

"They still suffer from the old staid image of what they were. But they're a very fast boat now. When I got out of Twelves I was brownd off with having to fork out money all the time. VSs

renewed my keenness in sailing." △

Show stoppers

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came with the first boat show appearance of the Exocet II, a 4.24m fun boat designed by Julian Bethwaite. The two man planing dinghy carries socketed wings, but no trapeze, and an asymmetrical kite on a fixed pole. Its working sail area is 16.75 sq m, while the spinnaker is also 16.75 sq m. At a weight of 65kg the hull can be handled by two fit crew members, and when the dinghy was tested in moderate wind

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