

## THE AUSTRALIAN 12-FOOTER

In the spring of 1914 six 12-foot skiffs took part in a race on Sydney Harbor, conducted by the newly-formed Cremorne Club. This was the first contest held in Australia solely for this type of craft.

Today more than a dozen clubs in New South Wales and in Queensland are devoted wholly to 12-foot skiff racing.

On any one summer weekend more than 150 skiffs take to the water in Sydney alone, while crews, club supporters and spectators number more than two thousand.

Twelve-foot sailing boats had appeared on the reaches of Sydney Harbor well before the Cremorne Club's inception 33 years ago. They raced in company with 16 and 18-foot open boats until class racing came into being and mixed events became the preserve of keel yachts.

In 1917 a second 12-footer club was organised on the Lane Cove River. Prior to the formation of this club, all "twelves" raced under a restriction of 140 square feet of canvas for working sails and carried only small masthead spinnakers.

Lane Cove Club secretary Ben Roff introduced unrestricted 12-footer racing; with sail restrictions off, the class flourished, and four more clubs were operating in Sydney by 1926.

In that year Roff took his snub-type club champion skiff *Schemer* to Brisbane for a challenge race with

*Defiance*—a craft built specially for the occasion by Alf Whereat. Whereat downed Roff; the class was initiated in Queensland, and the Australian 12-foot Skiff Championship became an established annual event.

Despite her initial defeat, *Schemer* later won the National Title on four occasions.

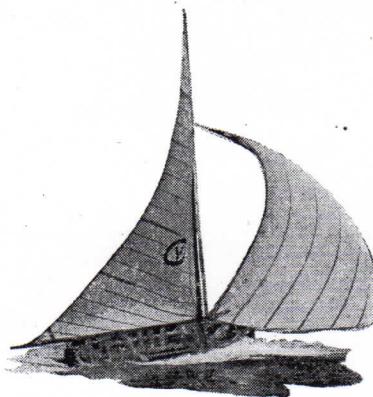
A Skiff Council was set up in New South Wales, to select State representatives and to handle arrangements for their interstate visits—or alternately to take charge of the National Title series, when held on Sydney Harbor.

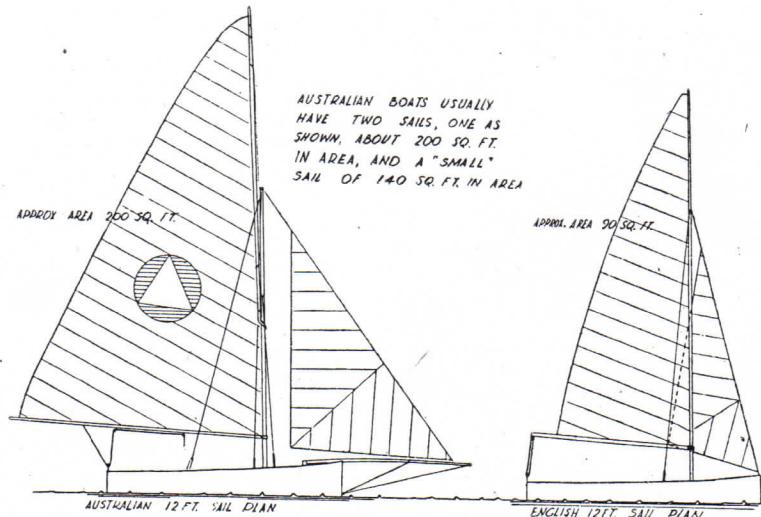
With the advance of the class in New South Wales, new restricted clubs also entered the field. These still race under the original sail area restrictions, though their hulls are basically the same as those of unrestricted boats.

Some of these 12-footer clubs were fostered by yacht clubs and by larger skiff bodies, to provide B Class racing for junior members. Restricted "twelves" hold their own State Championship contests, but conduct no interstate racing.

Today the unrestricted division remains the more popular of the class, and the majority of "twelves" built since the war come within this category.

The New South Wales Skiff Council was superseded in 1946 by a State 12-foot Skiff Association; this move was accompanied by a





*Sail plan of a typical Australian 12-footer compared with that of a popular English class.*

widening of 12-footer activities. The Association today embraces seven clubs, whose fleets total about 100 boats; among these are snub, orthodox stem, and English-designed craft. Association members consider that variety adds life to the sport, since it ensures continuous improvement of the class, by the time-honored "survival of the fittest" method of Mother Nature.

Rigs vary as well as the hulls. The sliding gunter predominates at present, though the Marconi is gaining in popularity. Some Marconi-rigged skiffs have revolving masts, and roller reefing has appeared in use with both rigs.

The average unrestricted skiff skipper has a choice of two working suits of sails. On fresh days, suits measuring up to 140 square feet in area are used, while 200 square feet of canvas are sported in light weather. A few skiffs set as much as 300 square feet of canvas on very light days, but they are the exception rather than the rule.

The peakhead spinnaker is the main down-wind sail addition. The average medium weather extra measures 300 square feet and is carried on a sectional 18-foot spar.

Ringtails are popular in Queensland, but few New South Wales skiffs care to risk them. Queenslanders have the edge in interstate competition at present, and

each new victory by Brisbanites results in a temporary swing back to ringtails in Sydney. New South skiffs travelling to Brisbane for the season's championships took ring tails along for the occasion.

Most revolutionary addition to unrestricted rank in the past decade was an "Uffa King" craft, built to a famous English design by a Sydney enthusiast during the winter of 1945-46. The skiff has competed successfully in open company, carrying only 90 square feet of working sail—less than half that of other rivals.

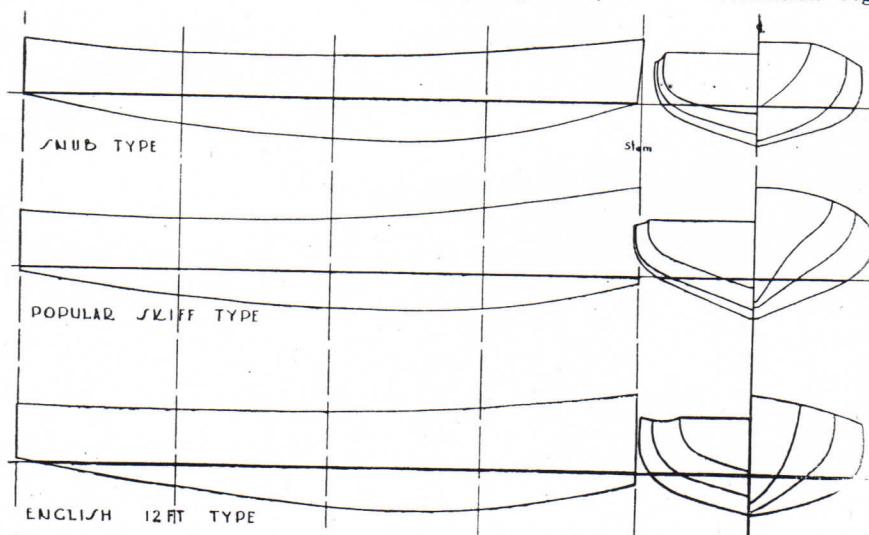
This boat races with a crew of two as against the three and four-man crews of the usual Australian 12-footers. It cost £65 to put in the water, which is much the same as the cost of a home-built orthodox craft, complete with two suits of sails.

Unrestricted class adherents claim that freedom of design and rigging tolerated by Association rules has allowed for greater development through the years and has encouraged new designs to test the standard craft of the day.

Many home-planned, backyard-built creations have faced the starter in the annual State Championships, their success or failure showing the way to subsequently designed racing skiffs.

Restricted area enthusiasts, on the other hand, claim their class is more open to sailing followers, by reason of cheaper outlay on gear.

Be that as it may, all craft conforming with N.S.W. Association regulations are eligible to start in the annual State Championship races, whether they race with restricted or unrestricted clubs. Six craft are selected from each State series to compete in Australian Title races, at present held alternately in



*Hull lines of two types of Australian "twelves," with those of a typical English racing dinghy.*



Sydney and Brisbane. This means that restricted club skiffs may also gain State representation, if successful against unrestricted entries.

Association rules state that the hull must be built of wood, must measure between 11 ft. 11 ins. and 12 ft. in length; beam must not exceed 5 ft. and bilges must be of fair curves. No hard chine boats are allowed.

Gunwales are limited to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ins. in width. Inboard gunwales, deck lee cloths and collapsible decks are not permitted. Sail area, rig, weight of hull and type of construction are optional, but craft must sail with a minimum of two hands when racing, and must have no moveable ballast.

Conventional skiff hull construction embodies 3/16in. cedar or maple planking, with ash or spotted gum for thwarts, timbers and keel, ti-tree or laminated wood for knees. Hull weights vary from 150 to 300 lbs.

Most popular design at present is the stem hull, well sprung fore and aft, with a slightly flared bow. This was evolved in Brisbane, and has been developed in both States in line with 18-footer hull progress. Many other successful variations

may be traced back to Queensland, which appears to be the real home of open boat racing.

Dinghy type hulls, with deadwood or heel, have been abandoned by present day designers, though snub craft still compete successfully in New South Wales. *Ariki*, the Greenwich Club champion, which again represented the State in Queensland this season, is a snub type and has one of the best sailing records in the class.

The main trend today is towards lighter hulls and gear, even at the expense of sail area. One example of this is the increasing use made of wooden centreboards, in place of the heavier mild steel plates previously in vogue. This is in line with overseas developments, as wooden centreboards are being very much used in Britain and the U.S.A.

From all indications, the 12-footers are on the up-grade at present. Under a lively, progressive leadership, the Association is striving in every way to extend the class within New South Wales, to promote its interests in Queensland by means of interchange of ideas, and to establish it in other States of the Commonwealth.

The ultimate goal is Empire Championship racing—but perhaps we are looking a little too far ahead.



*Top: "Viking"—a skiff type 12-footer—running before a fresh breeze.*

*Left: "Rufus"—first 12-footer in Australia built on English lines (Uffa King Class).*

*Below: Skiffs "Tornado" and "Toogara" fighting for the lead on Middle Harbor, Sydney.*

