

# THE CACTUS CUP STORY

## THE SQUADRON'S MOST HISTORIC AND PRESTIGIOUS EVENT

### **Introduction :**

It was during the early stages of the great depression of 1929-1932, that this story was simulated to the conditions at the then Royal St Kilda Yacht Club when, during the yachting season there were very few trophies due to the lack of money. At that time a lot of members were out of work and each Monday would front up for the jobs that were offering, or for those who missed out, it was back to the dole queue or as many put it "Back to the Cactus".

### **The Story :**

Years ago a story was told of a donkey which lived in the desert. The standard of living was poor and the main course on the menu when things got tough was cactus. One day, during his wanderings he came to a high fence. On the other side of the fence was lush grass and all sorts of vegetation and animals in prime condition. The donkey said to a horse. "Things look good in there, how does one get in?". The horse said, "Go down to the end of this fence, turn left and you will come to a gate, there will be someone at the gate, ask to get in". The donkey went to the end of the fence, found the gate and asked to get in. The horse at the gate said "What do you want to come in for?, all of us are geldings !. The donkey said, "If that is the case, it is back to he cactus for me".

### **The Tradition :**

The Cactus Trophy event, free of race entry fees, was conceived by H.A.(Toby) Armstrong, backed by Bert Bryant, Ivor Bowles and Jim Thorpe. It was first contested March 25, 1922, when 9 yachts on sealed handicaps competed over a 5 mile rectangular course for a small trophy donated by Jim E. Thorpe and the winning crew of the yacht Helen, skippered by D. Dowse, later entertained at a café by the instigators of the event.

The next contest was April 12, 1930, for yet another small trophy donated by Jim Thorpe and the crew of the winning yacht Petrel, skippered by Stan Gamble, had to arrange for a mussel supper to the extent of trophy money at an informal musical evening held in the spar room. From then on contests for Cactus Trophies donated and presented by Jim Thorpe, became an annual event,

Soon the format became that the crew of the winning yacht were later on to collect mussels from the pier, cook them in tubs in the traverser pit for a no charge formal presentation , supper and entertainment evening held in the spar room, on the first Saturday of July, towards which the Club provided a keg of beer annually. Member

Bob Ellis had a special song for the occasions. “Up at Tumba-Bloody-Rumba shooting Kanga Bloody Roo’s “,

On one occasion the supper was held in the Club lounge, at which members were permitted to invite a guest. For reason this broke tradition it proved a failure to revert back to the spar room in the years to follow.

Jim Thorpe, no doubt inspired by the interest taken in the event annually, decided to purchase a Cup for annual competition to be named the ‘Cactus Cup’. As guest of honour at the Cactus Cup evening May 1940, by then a formal dinner suit function in the spar room. He presented, the cup along with replica, to Barney Snider who won with Eun-na-mara. The supper on that occasion and the following year, along with the traditional mussels consisted of crayfish, cocktail frankfurts, savouries, greens and potato chips. Soon in the interests of the event, as many did not want to win, and have to collect and prepare the mussels, entries became few, resulting in a change of format being made, that the crew of the yacht that finished last, were to gather and cook the mussels in the traverser pit, this change brought about a marked revival in interest and entrants..

Following the death of Jim. E. Thorpe in 1940, the Cup along with annual replica’s were then provided for and as was tradition, presented on the night of the supper by Ivor Bowles until his death in 1970. In time for reason of pollution, the collecting of mussels from the pier was discontinued, so Otto Meik, the new provider, decided that the format be changed, with the supper, consisting of bottled mussels, frankfurts, buttered bread and be held in the yacht storage area under the Club building immediately following the event

A further change came about following the death of Otto Meik in 1979, and with no provider forthcoming, and finances in the club at a low, especially trophy funds, the Squadron broke tradition by introducing race entrant fees. Again in the mid-nineties an attempt was made to hold the function in the Club lounge following the event, this again proving unpopular with the members.

By the early nineteen –ninety’s Cactus Cup functions had developed into a popular party as the result of making use of tables and chairs in the yard, this encouraged members to invite their wives and friends to join them following the race. The tradition of providing a feast of mussels, cocktail frankfurts and buttered bread following the event will no doubt continue as long as the Club exists. The date of the event moved forward to December in 1992, rather than January as was the previous practice in recent years, when Jazz Band provided entertainment until late at night.

In 2007 a donation by a member was put into a Trust Fund, to make the Cactus Cup a Perpetual Trophy, this finally ensured Cactus Cup contests would continue to be popular annual events on the racing calendar, of significance, was its format reverting back to, as originally intended, having nil entry fees to entice as many entries as possible.

In the long history of the contests, on four occasions this prestigious trophy has been

won by the same yacht on successive occasions, with two yachts winning on five occasions, Eun-na-mara (Barney Snider) and Yvonne (Selim Nurminen).

Compiled entirely from the following sources : Squadron Records to include:- Minute Books, Annual Reports, Sea Breeze and race records.

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