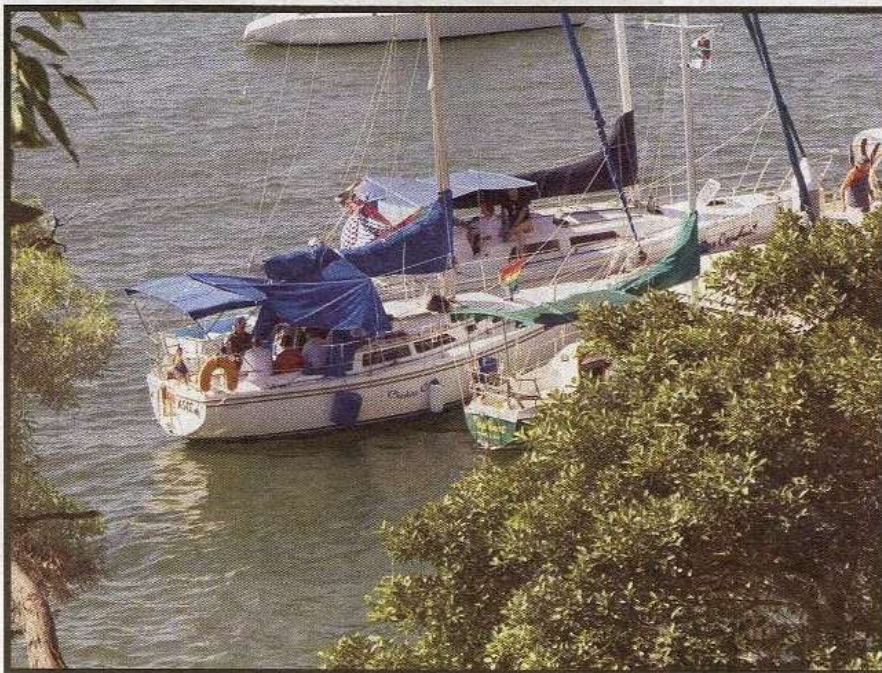


Sisters bless the fleet

WITH THE COMPETITION SEASON STILL TO START, MEMBERS OF THE GAY AND LESBIAN SAILING CLUB FIND OTHER WAYS TO AMUSE THEMSELVES. STORY BY DAVE RANDALL.

Photos: Dave Randall



It's an important annual tradition for the Australian Sailing and Cruising Club Inc. to have Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence arrive for the Blessing of the Fleet. On a recent sunny afternoon, the boats were rafted all around and the crews crowded on the wharf's end as the Sisters first solemnly piped out the outgoing commodore and piped in the new with their bright blue plastic whistle. With exhortations to avoid flotsam and jetsam, appeals to Saint Evinrude and the Holy Dingo, the Sisters called for the fleet's protection and for its decks to be not too heavily pooped upon by seagulls.

The Australian Sailing and Cruising Club is an openly gay club affiliated with the Yachting Association of NSW. Earlier in the day they had held their annual Treasure Hunt. Boats arrived for a 10 o'clock start with rainbow flags flying,

collected their crews and clues and chugged off, gently under power, not a sail to be seen.

Roger Patterson, the club's secretary, explained to the *Star* the virtues of this 80-strong club. There are about 15 owned boats from 20 to 52 feet but the commodore, vice commodore, rear commodore and the secretary are all without a boat right now. This fact emphasises the friendly nature of the club. Each boat taking part in the treasure hunt had only one owner but there were half a dozen or so crew on each. There were some girl boats, some boy boats and some with both on board. "This," Patterson said, "is an opportunity to get non-racing people out on the water to have a really good fun day.

"In the Mardi Gras season we also have our annual regatta. About 10

chartered Elliott yachts, each with a crew of three, sail from the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia at Rushcutters Bay for a series of races of about three quarters of an hour each. There are winter, summer and spring racing seasons that are supported by the hardcore racing people. The Broken Bay Cruise is a week in March with each crew required to provide a night of entertainment including the Commodore's Cocktail Party."

The lack of wind during the Treasure Hunt encouraged a more languid, relaxed approach to water-borne activities, inspiring sandwiches and chardonnay rather than sea spray and heeling hulls. Navigating duties over, the Blessing of the Fleet was followed by the prize-giving and the barbecue. Passers-by might have thought it a mot-

ley crew, attended by some wearing habits and wimples. However, those in the know had had a glorious day on the harbour in good company searching for treasure - though it seemed pieces of eight now come in the form of dinner vouchers at a good restaurant. The competitive tradition will return when the racing season starts.

The club holds monthly social meetings on the third Tuesday evening of each month at the Palace Hotel in Darlinghurst where newcomers are welcome, and they also have orientation days for sailing novices. If you like mucking about in boats, Patterson said, you'll find good friends here.

info The Australian Sailing and Cruising Club Inc. has its website at www.ascc.org.au. Phone Roger 0412 373 811 or Dayna 0425 205 484.