

Bladeriders are up, up and away

The thrill of sailing on hydrofoils will be on display when the Bladeriders race on the Docklands waterways during the Skandia Docklands Invitational. Many in the sailing world believe these single-hulled boats that lift from the water on hydrofoils represent the future of sailing.

Melbourne sailor Rohan Veal certainly does. He will be overseeing the competitors in the Bladerider races that will take place at Docklands over two days. Each race will take two to three minutes. "Even people with little or no interest in sailing say 'wow' when they see Bladeriders in action," Mr Veal says. "Unlike most other boats, they're very fast and exciting for spectators."

Bladeriders are a brand of Moth class boats. Moths are 3.3 metres long and have no trapeze or spinnaker, allowing super-high speed without any extra wires or sails. The rapid acceleration and high speeds involved in Moth class racing mean outcomes are never certain until the end. It also provides a true open-class event – men, women and youths can compete on an equal basis in the same events using the same equipment.

Mr Veal had sailed since he was 10, but his interest waned when he finished school. The excitement of the Moth class lured him back. Now the Black Rock Yacht Club member is a two-time world champion in the Moth class and also builds and imports Bladerider brand Moth class boats.

Mr Veal believes the next five years are likely to see the biggest growth in numbers and exposure of the Moth class in its history. Although interest in the Moth class is currently booming, the class is not new. It



PHOTO: VIRGINIA VEAL

Bladeriding: the future of sailing

MOTH CLASS YACHTS AND BLADERIDERS

- While in competition, Moth class crafts can only take one person but the boats can take two on joyrides.
- Eventually, proponents of the sport hope to see Moth class events in the Olympic Games.
- Bladerider boats are available in both carbon fibre and fibreglass.
- All boats come with a two-year international warranty.
- Prices start from \$15,400 including GST and delivery.

began in Australia in 1928 when the late Len Morris built a cat-rigged (single-sail) flat-bottomed scow to sail at Inverloch, south-east of Melbourne. After he built two more, restrictions were drawn up for what was dubbed the Inverloch Eleven Foot class. The American Moth class was also starting, with similar dimensions to the Australian class, and the name of the Inverloch Eleven Foot class was changed to Moth class.

In 1962, the Australian Yachting Federation recognised the Australian Moth class as a national class – the first small boat class in Australia to be granted national status.

Modifications were made to align the Australian Moth and the overseas Moth and the International Moth Class Association was

established in 1972, bound by the restrictions of the class operating today.

During the 1970s, many Moth sailors began building skiff-type hulls and adding wing bars on the hull to keep the boat more balanced. These skiffs soon were faster than the old scow design, especially as hull shapes continued to narrow. The past decade has seen rules in the class bent to their limits with nearly all sailors now using professionally built carbon-fibre hulls about 30 centimetres wide with carbon-fibre hydrofoils and rigs, weighing only 30 kilograms complete.

Recognising the potential of the Moth class market, Mr Veal began Bladerider International with chief executive officer Mike McAuley in 2006. In its first year, Bladerider

made three pre-production Moth class boats and in 2007, it built 50. Last year, it was more than 150 and in 2009 they are planning to build more than 300.

"Some of our customers are people who have never sailed before, but they see one of our boats in action and immediately want one," Mr Veal says. "As an extreme sport it appeals to surfers, wakeboarders and snowboarders – those who might never have considered other types of boating. One of the things that is so appealing is that there are many international races – it's not just sailing for fun, although people certainly do that as well."

More information: www.bladerider.com.au