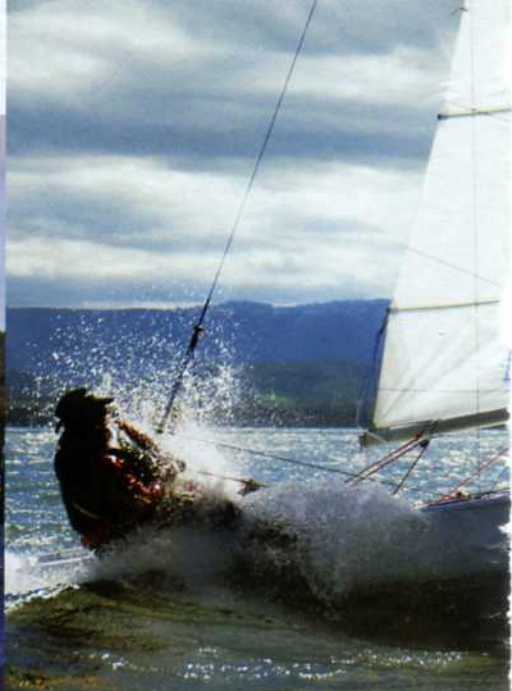


**RIGHT:** *Rocket Fuels* (Marc Ablett, Max Rosenbaum and Steve Hart) on Lake Burley Griffin; the young ACT crew are aiming for the Port Kembla nationals. Marc follows his father Chris and grandfather Erik into the class.

**BELOW PICS:** Three views of new Sharpie *The Fox Hat*, minus centre console but with mirrored chute launcher.



JORDAN SPENCER



extends out to the chine at the waterline.

Built for strength, *The Fox Hat* still came in under weight, just (by 3kg)!

The other interesting point about the boat is that they have removed the console. Jack reckons it was to get some weight out of the back of the boat (though I suspect it was because he wanted less to do). Either way, it does look clean.

Oh and the mirror in the spinnaker chute opening, that's just for laughs.

How does *The Fox Hat* perform? I can't tell you yet, but it will be interesting to watch.

### Loving the rough stuff

As for sailing a Sharpie, they are a ton of fun. The addition of a third body just adds so much to the enjoyment. An extra pair of hands generally means less things to go wrong, but when they do they can be fixed quicker. There is also an extra head for tactical decisions and the conversations between races are a lot more fun.

The boats are reasonably powerful and being so long and so heavily veed under the water, they love the rough stuff. Nothing tracks like a Sharpie. The narrow, heavily chined hull, deep vee underwater profile and large foils all contribute to that feel of it being on rails. There is none of the 'slideyness' you get with a 505, or the bounciness of a skiff, but more of a grunty, punch-on-through feel.

As a consequence there is no point in the skipper waving the tiller around, as that just slows the boat down. Helm movements need to be subtle, combined with sail trim and shifting body weight to steer. Add this to the

size of the chines and you can see why there is a real benefit to sailing the Sharpie dead flat uphill.

To do this on such a narrow boat requires excellent communication and understanding between the crew, and the communication needs to really pick up downhill, where the narrowness contributes to the 'capsizeability' of the Sharpie. There is little margin for error because there are no flared topsides to provide form stability, so it is not unusual to see a few boats hit the water when gybing.

The fun factor steps up on a reach, particularly in flat water. Get the crew stacked back aft on top of each other, bow up and kite drawing and enjoy. Add some large swell and the workload for the guy on the wire triples, particularly if the helm or sheet action becomes violent, (don't skimp on rail grip, people). But there are some real rewards for the extra effort. The sensation is a bit like being in a small runabout under full throttle.

### Getting hooked

The best thing about a Sharpie is the ability to introduce less experienced sailors to top level racing. Having three in the boat means two can cover the third as they are learning. I have seen first-hand the impact being at the front of the fleet can have on a newcomer. That excitement can hook someone on sailing for life and surely that can't be a bad thing for our sport.

The class is also strong in coming up with different ideas to keep the sailing interesting. Even though there are plenty of women in the fleet and there have been some great

performances, including Emma Perkins' third overall at the 2006/07 nationals in Largs Bay (SA), they often run ladies' days. It's always a great day with female skippers going head to head.

The SA fleet also runs the Birkenhead regatta in the tight confines of the Port River, right in front of the Birkenhead pub. With lots of short, sharp racing, it has had real success in attracting non-sailing spectators. Think Extreme 40s, but in Sharpies.

### Heading for Illawarra

The 65th Australian Sharpie nationals were held last Christmas on the Swan River in Perth, hosted by the East Fremantle Yacht Club. Wade Henson, Sam Abbott and Alan Hopping in *Vicious* took home the title in the 42-boat fleet with a seven-point margin over fellow WA boat *The Lizard*, skippered by Peter Chappell with Marc Lewis and Michael Duffield.

South Australians filled the next two places, with *Pigout* third (Geoff McCloud, Sam Flint and Mark Beaumont) and *Blur* fourth (Malcolm Higgins, Sam Sanderson and Andrew Chisholm), followed by another WA boat *Blatantly Obvious* (Vern Tidy, Danny O'Byrne and Geordie Thuijs).

The class association recently refurbished its moulds, and some new boats have been built ahead of the 66th national championships at Port Kembla Sailing Club, on Lake Illawarra, NSW. Dates for the regatta are December 27 to January 7.

Perhaps a few skiffies may come to have a look at what all the fun is about. ☺