

OKs are in a class of their own

THE now internationally recognised OK class had a humble start in life some 18 years ago.

The legendary Dane, Paul Elvstrom, in common with many in yachting, was disturbed by the relatively small number of young sailors getting into the Olympic classes.

The high cost of a Finn or Flying Dutchman was prohibitive and was putting a real damper on Olympic class fleet numbers.

Elvstrom made his feelings known to two other Danes, the Olsen brothers Kund and Axel. They decided there was a real need for a dinghy that lent itself to amateur construction and was inexpensive to put into the water.

The boat had to be fast and manoeuvrable and had to encourage expertise in rig tuning. In other words, the newcomer was to be a trainer for the more expensive Olympic class, the Finn.

The OK dinghy was born.

From these humble beginnings, the OK has blossomed into an international class in its own right.

It is now established in 30 countries around the world, including behind the Iron Curtain. In Sweden alone, there are more than 3000 registered OK skippers. In New Zealand there are now more than 450 OKs.

New Zealand was quick to adopt the OK. Among the first to seek the plans from the Danes were the Olliver brothers of Christchurch.

From this unpretentious beginning the success of the OK class in New Zealand has been one of the major yachting development stories since World War II.

In Auckland, a group of fathers at Pt Chevalier built 12 hulls in the basement of the Pasadena School.

Within a year, fleets were emerging all around Auckland and the Auckland OK Association was formed to later develop into the New Zealand International OK Association.

The first New Zealand championships were held off

THE OK national yachting championships end in Gisborne today. New Zealanders have won the world OK title three times in the past eight years, and this year it is intended to send a team of at least two top helmsmen to France in a bid to capture the title a fourth time.

With the world championships next year scheduled for Melbourne, when a team of at least 20 will represent New Zealand, the OK class in this country is expecting a big increase in fleet numbers. This article, from the New Zealand OK Class Association, backgrounds the development of the class in this country.

Kohimarama, Auckland, in 1964.

The first interdominion OK series between New Zealand and Australia was held in Sydney over Easter 1966, giving many New Zealand skippers their first crack at international opposition.

The climax to the development of the OK class in New Zealand came when the application to stage the 1970 World OK Championships was granted. These were sailed off Takapuna Beach in October, and were the first official world yachting championships ever held in New Zealand.

In no other small boat class has development in New Zealand been as rapid as in the OKs, which are regarded internationally as one of the friendliest of boats to sail in, while providing world-standard competition for even junior helmsmen.

The name Clive Roberts became synonymous with the progress of the class in New Zealand.

In 1965, Clive was invited to sail an OK in the Cairns (Queensland) Fun in the Sun carnival. The company in Cairns

included the then world OK champion Goran Andersson from Sweden.

Clive won everything but the final 20-mile "ocean" race, and his success against Andersson convinced those back home that, in an OK, New Zealand had every potential to do well internationally.

New Zealand has been represented at every world contest since.

The big performances, of course, have been those of the late Clive Roberts (1973), Peter Lester (1977) and Richard Dodson (1979) in winning the world title for New Zealand.

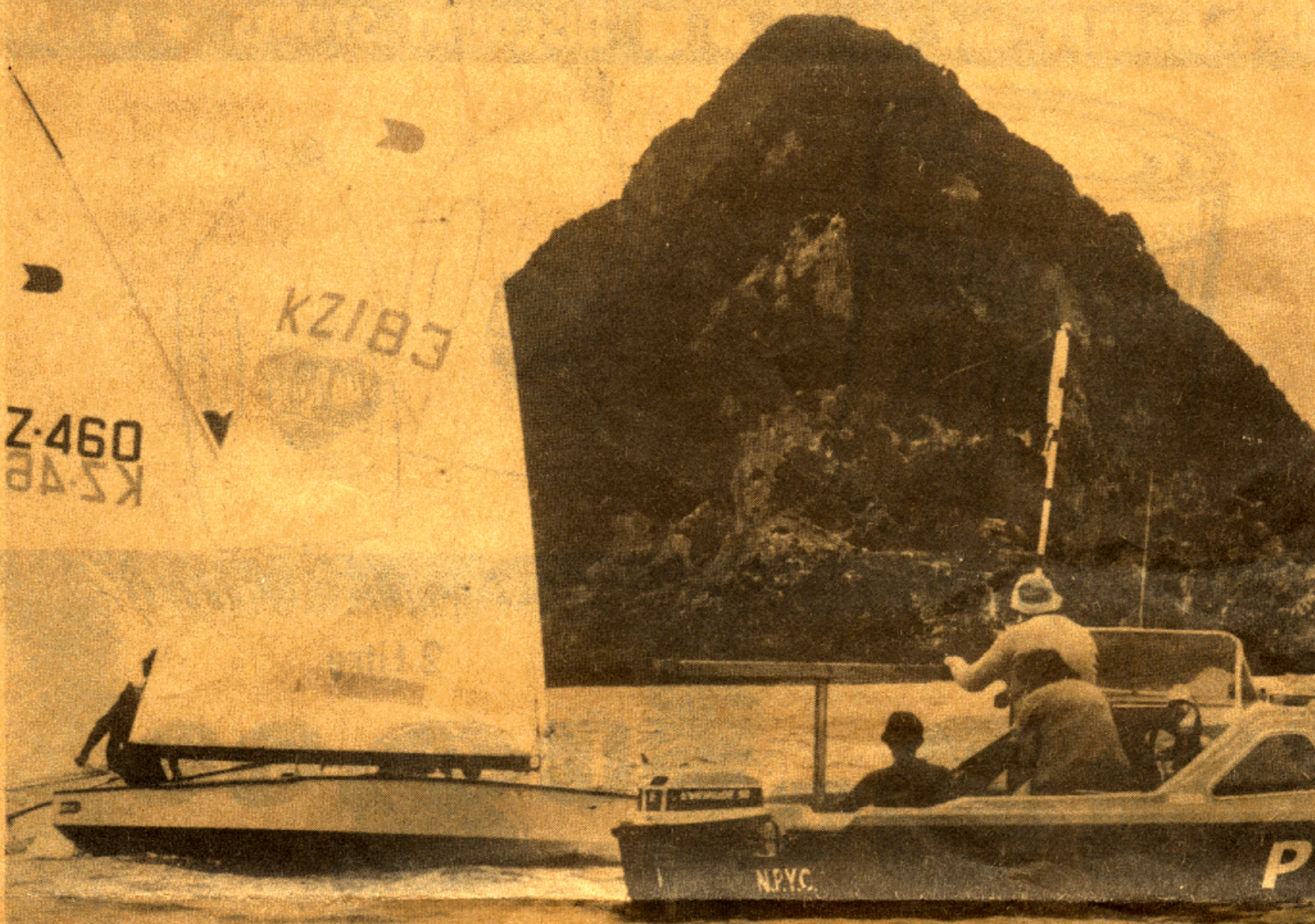
But there have been other top performances. Jonty Farmer (Rotorua) came third and Clive Roberts fifth when the worlds were first held at Takapuna in 1970, Graeme Woodroffe (Auckland) was runner-up in Sweden in 1972 and third in Adelaide in 1974, and Peter Lester came third in Finland in 1975.

The nearest New Zealand came to winning another world title was in Holland in 1978, when Leith Armit (Mairangi Bay), then only 17 and travelling on what was considered to be only a training trip, came within one point of taking the title, eventually losing to the veteran Danish skipper, Jorgen Lindhardtzen. Armit was declared world junior OK champion.

The four-man team to Holland was then the largest ever sent to Europe for an OK worlds. Tom Dodson came fifth, Richard Dodson came seventh and the other helmsmen, the late John Welson, came further back in the fleet.

The following year an even larger team went to Norway. In addition to Richard Dodson, who won the world title, Garry Lock (Auckland) came fourth equal, Guy Manning (Napier) finished eighth and John Moyes (Auckland) and Mark Berry (Wellington) also finished in the top 20.

Because of the expense of staying in Sweden, only one New Zealander was sent to the world OK champs last year. Greg Wilcox (Wellington) who finished in the top 20.



Typical neck and neck racing from top OK class boats. Gisborne yachtsman Peter Millar battles for second place on the line, just ahead of Wellington's Greg Wilcox, in one of the races at last year's championships. Millar finished eighth overall, while Wilcox went on to represent New Zealand at the world champs.

This dinghy rules the waves — OK

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FIRST CRACK

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WORLD TITLES

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New Zealander was sent to the world OK championships last year, Greg Wilcox (Wellington) who finished in the top 20.

The OK is smaller, beamier and lighter than the thoroughbred Finn but every bit as demanding to sail.

The hull is four metres overall, 1.5 metres in width with a minimum weight of 72kg.

The seven-metre unstayed mast and three-metre boom support nine square metres of sail.

The combination is a boat quite beamy for its overall length which requires a high degree of physical fitness if it is to be sailed to its maximum.

The boat has retained its concept of simplicity in hull form with only minor refinements — produced by competition development — within the scope of the original tolerances.

Rig adjustments are confined to controlled mast bend and luff adjustment to control the draft in the sail.

This set-up permits only a minimum of "playing" with the rig, but enough to make it a critical feature of the class enabling skippers to adjust the rig to suit their bodyweight.

Because of this, the OK is a class where an ideal bodyweight is nowhere near as critical as, for instance, in a Laser.

The 1970 championships off Takapuna Beach presented New Zealand's OK people with the perfect opportunity to gauge their standing in the world OK

fleet and their understanding of OK development.

On the water, it was plain that the likes of Roberts and Farmer were in world class even if they couldn't, in that particular series, match the brilliance of Sweden's young Kent Carlsson.

Ashore, Alf Lock was given the responsibility of measuring and checking all the boats which sailed in the contest.

Lock designed and built a jig to simplify the checks. He recalls: "It was a double edged sword really. The jig made sure that the boats were within the measurement tolerances laid down in the class rules."

"But it also showed us the different shapes that were being developed within those tolerances and then to check the performances of those shapes out on the water."

The detail gleaned by Lock and other local OK experts led to the development of racier OK hulls for New Zealanders.

"Up to then, we Kiwis had been too trusting," says Lock. "We were building boats that fitted right through the middle of the rules."

"But from then on we pushed things more. We stayed within the rules, but we took what was to be had from them after assessing the characteristics and related performance of the overseas boats."

The thoroughness of men like Lock has enabled New Zealand to stay right at the front of OK development.

Eight points split OK champs boats!

ONLY eight points separate the four yachtsmen who are leading the OK class yachting national which finished in Gisborne this afternoon.

The 20-year-old Wellington skipper Greg Wilcox is leading after five races with 21.7 points from a 7-1-3-2-13 series.

Only three points behind him is the former world junior OK champion Leith Armit, of Auckland, who in turn has a narrow 1.3 point lead over Guy Mannering, of Napier.

The fourth yachtsman in contention for the title is the 17-year-old Auckland Greg Knowles, who is sailing in only his first OK season. He has 29.7 points.

Tough

The Caltex nationals are proving exceptionally tough for anyone to dominate this year, especially as they are doubling as the trials to select a team of at least three for the world championships.

The New Zealanders will be bidding for a world title for the fourth time in eight years.

The fleet of 36 yachts from as far south as Christchurch has so far encountered varied conditions — from the very light easterlies on Friday to the strong southerlies yesterday — which are testing the all-round sailing skills of the competitors.

Sewn up

In the first race yesterday, heat four, Armit appeared to have it sewn up by the second weather mark with a lead of 37 seconds over Mannering. But on the flat run Armit's rudder came loose and he capsized just as Mannering was drawing level with the 15-knot north-westerly winds right behind him.

He fell back to eighth place, taking 1m 18s to get started again.

Disqualified

Mannering, sailing in a borrowed boat which leaks around the centreboard, crossed the line first ahead of his younger brother Adrian, who was subsequently told he had been disqualified for excessively rocking his boat.

He is appealing against this decision.

So officially second place was given to Wilcox, the overall leader of the Caltex series, who was 1m 14s behind Guy Mannering, after having moved through the fleet from the 13th place he held after the first heat to windward.

Third place went to Greg Knowles, fourth was John Moyes of Auckland, and Armit was fifth.

Heat five was sailed in strong 20 knot southerly winds with Armit leading the fleet around the 13 kilometre Olympic triangular course to finish with a comfortable half-minute margin over Guy Mannering.

Yachtie Wilcox rules OK

NEW ZEALAND representative yachtsman Greg Wilcox of Wellington is leading the Caltex OK class nationals in Gisborne.

Wilcox and another Wellington helmsman Earl Berry, both recorded victories in the two races sailed yesterday in light easterly winds.

The Caltex nationals are doubling as the trials to select the three yachtsmen to represent New Zealand at the world championships in France in July when a determined bid will be made to win the world title for this country for the fourth time in eight years.

Wilcox heads the overall points

table with 18.7 points, followed by Knowles (24), Earl Berry (25), Leith Armit, the former world junior champion of Auckland, (30.7), Mark Berry (32), Jason Trow (34.7), Brian Fifield (40.7), Adrian Mannering (Napier) (42.7), John Hoogerbroeg, Havelock North, (46) and Guy Mannering (48).

Dream Win To Wilcox

Greg Wilcox (Wellington) picked the right wind swing to finish second in the last race of the national OK dinghy championship and take the title at Gisborne yesterday.

It was a dream finish for Wilcox, who started badly and had to work his way through the fleet.

Wilcox did not appear to be in the running for the title when he was sixth starting the last windward beat. He picked the shift, made up the placings to finish second and the championship was his.

Leith Armit (Auckland) was second, Guy Mannering (Napier) third and 17-year-old Aucklander Gary Knowles fourth.

★ ★ ★

North-west winds gusting over 30 knots yesterday brought a sorry ending to the Zephyr class silver jubilee national championships.

Only 19 of the 66 helmsmen entered in the contest ventured out to race. Only four finished.

Overnight leader Cameron Duncan (Waiuku) was forced

out of the race when he was in trouble on the downwind leg.

Max Walker (Waiuku) went on to win but failed by .7 of a point to take the title from second-placed Russell Durrent (French Bay).

★ ★ ★

Frenchman Jean - Pierre Siret demonstrated the art of board sailing at the first class national championship at Browns Bay.

Siret, from New Caledonia, missed the first two races on Friday.

He won all four races sailed in the heavyweight division.

David Brookbanks, who won both races on Friday and followed with four seconds on Saturday, was the overall winner.

High winds and big seas forced the last race to be abandoned yesterday.

The lightweight section was won by Glen Cochrane, who had five wins and a second.

Brookbanks and Cochrane designed and built their own boards for the contest.

Greg rules yachts OK

THE YOUNG Wellington yachtsman Greg Wilcox remains in the lead after five races at the Caltex OK class national championships in Gisborne, despite finishing only 13th in the fifth heat yesterday afternoon.

Wilcox, who came 20th as New Zealand's sole representative at the world championships in Sweden last year, has recorded a 7-1-3-2-13 series for the loss of 21.7 points after discarding his worst performance.

He is closely followed by the former world junior champion Leith Armit of Auckland, who has 24.7 points from his 2-6-10-5-1 series.

In third place was Guy Mannering, of Napier (26 points), the winner of two heats, who came 8th at the world championships in Norway in 1979.

The 36-boat champs are doubling as the selection trials to find the three yachtsmen to sail at the world championships in France in July in a bid to win the world title for New Zealand for the fourth time in eight years.

Heat 5 was sailed in 20-knot southerly winds, with Armit leading the fleet around the 13-kilometre Olympic triangular course to finish with a comfortable half minute margin over Mannering, whose younger brother Adrian came third. Brian Fifield of Auckland was fourth and Lachie McLean of Napier fifth.

The win yesterday afternoon made up for the disappointment Armit suffered in the morning. He appeared to have heat four sewn up by the second winner mark with a lead of 37 secs over Guy Mannering.

But on the flat run, Armit capsized just as the heavier Mannering was drawing level, aided by the 15-knot northwesterly breeze behind him.

Whatever the cause, he fell back to eighth place because of the 1m 18s it took him to right his boat, fix the rudder back into place and get started again.

Mannering, sailing in a borrowed boat which had a leakage problem around the centreboard, crossed the line in first place ahead of brother Adrian, who subsequently told he had been disqualified for excessively rocking his boat, a decision against which he is appealing.

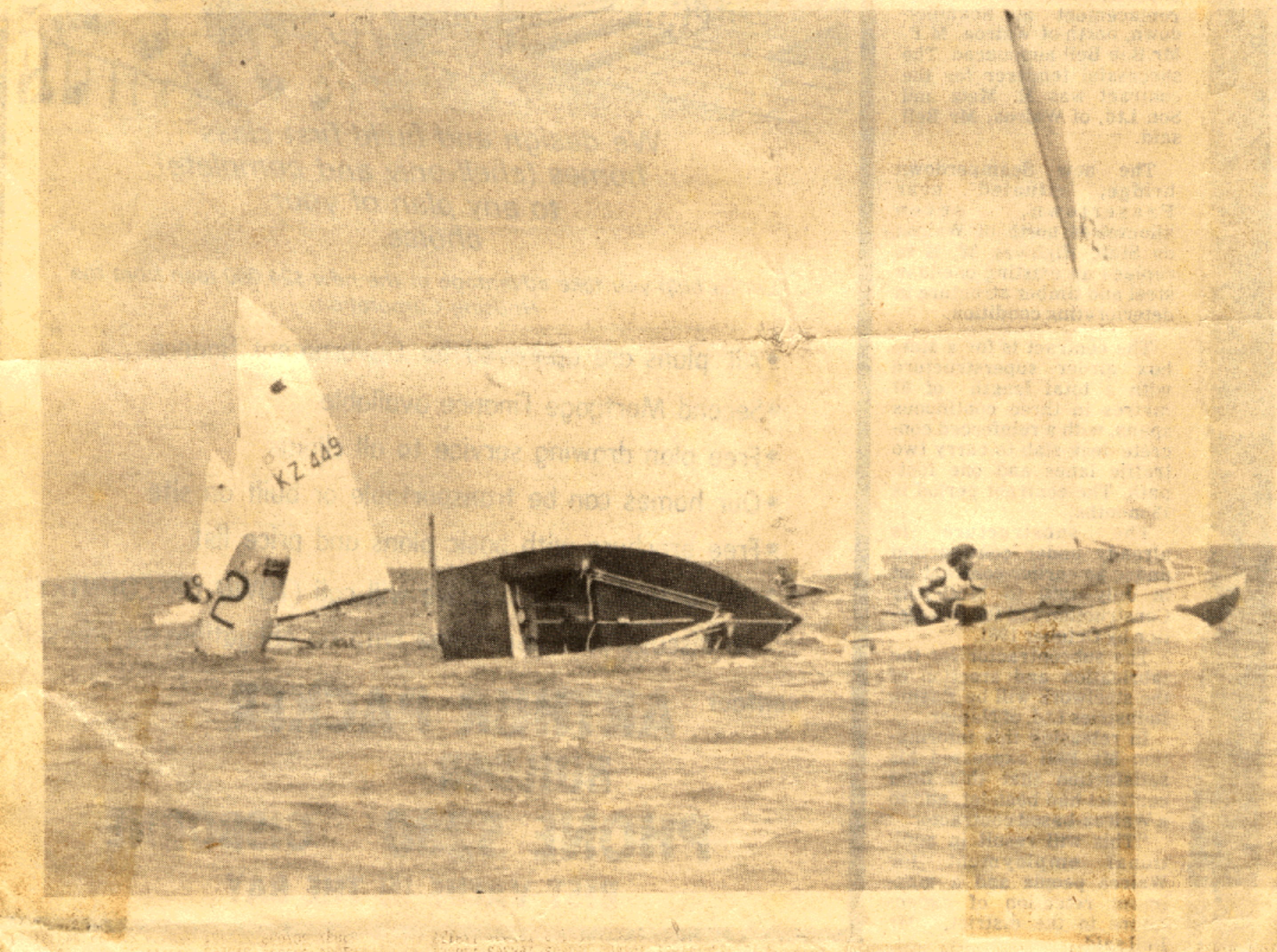


SECONDS off the starters line the boats pick their own line to catch the best breeze on the first reach of the triangular Olympic course in the national OK dinghy championships being raced off Gisborne. Nearest to camera is Takapuna's Hartley Atkinson. Race one winner Guy Mannering (right) makes a picture against the sun as he takes the finish line, nearly two minutes ahead of the second-placed boat. More pictures and results on page 6.





THE scene at the start line as 36 top New Zealand OK class yachts jockey for position and wait for the off.



WHEN there's an oops in your life don't expect anyone to stop. Particularly when they are all out chasing a New Zealand title.

Guy Mannering takes early lead but...

NAPIER yachtsman Guy Mannering raced superbly from start to finish in the first race of the OK class national championships at Gisborne on Thursday, making him the man to chase in the following six races.

He opened up a gap steadily on Auckland's Leith Armit, from 16 seconds at the first wind mark to 115 seconds at the line. Behind Armit was Guy's brother Adrian, one of a three-man Mannering team in the 36-strong OK field.

Guy, 22, the oldest of the three, and most experienced, but Adrian, 20, and Nigel, 18, who finished 14th, were well up with the play.

Following in the leaders were Greg Knowles, Auckland, Mark Berry, Wellington, Brian Fifield, Auckland, Greg Wilcox, Wellington, Peter Maynard, Christchurch, Duncan Gourley, Napier, and Gary Lock Auckland.

Gisborne's Peter Millar jumped the gun at the start line and suffered a

considerable setback in having to round the start boat again to chase from the rear. He finished 25th, with Gisborne's other entry, Greg Fisher, back with the tailenders.

The top skippers all started at the starboard end of the line because of a slight advantage there and at an early stage Guy Mannering locked into a wind shift near the land. This gave him the start he needed and his widening advantage on the experienced Armit was the feature of the race.

At the end of the triangle he was 36 seconds in front, at the second windward mark 50 seconds, the second leeward mark 78 seconds and at the finish nearly two minutes ahead.

The improver in the field was brother Adrian, who went around the first buoy in fifth, but picked up the two in front by the middle stages of the race.

Conditions for the first race were excellent, with a strong breeze that slightly delayed the start as officials shifted the course with the wind change.

... Wilcox is man in front

A WIN and a third in yesterday's two races have given Wellingtonian Greg Wilcox the lead in the national OK dinghy championships at Gisborne.

Fellow Wellingtonian Earl Berry led all the way in the second race until the windward beat when Wilcox moved ahead to eventually reach the finish line 12 seconds clear.

Berry gained his revenge by winning yesterday's second race which was sailed in extremely light airs. The wind varied between east and north-east and at times could hardly be felt.

So light was the wind that a time limit of 1 hr 12 mins was imposed in which the first boat had to complete the first triangle and it made it with only five minutes to spare.

Berry in fact took 2 hrs 26 min to finish the course which was shortened.

Overall standings after the

first three of the seven race series are: Greg Wilcox (Wellington), 18.7, 1; Greg Knowles (Auckland), 24, 2; Earl Berry (Wellington) 25, 3; Leith Armit (Auckland), 30.7, 4; Mark Berry (Wellington), 35, 5; Jason Trow (Napier), 34, 6; Brian Fifield (Auckland), 40.7, 7; Adrian Mannering (Napier) 42.7, 8; John Hoogerbrug (Havelock North), 46, 9; Guy Mannering (Napier), 48, 10.

Second race: Greg Wilcox 1; Earl Berry 2; Jason Trow 3; Mark Berry 4; Brian Fifield 5; Leith Armit 6; Greg Knowles 7; John Hoogerbrug 8; John Moyes (Auckland) 9; Paul McDonald (Auckland) 10.

Third race: Earl Berry 1; Greg Knowles 2; Greg Wilcox 3; Joe Porebski (Wellington) 4; Jason Trow 5; Dave Gunn (Napier) and Nigel Mannering (Napier) equal 6; Mark Berry 8; John Hoogerbrug 9; Leith Armit 10.

RACING out of the sun, these two middle runners jockey for the last at the finish line in their own private race.

JOE + Rene Van Ouden





THE sweet smile of success — New Zealand's team to the world OK yachting championships, from left, Leith Armit, Auckland, NZ champion Greg Wilcox, Wellington, Guy Mannering, Napier, and junior New Zealand champion Gary Knowles, Auckland, would be the team's reserve.

WILCOX WORKS A WONDER IN WIND

THE right decision and the right wind in the last few minutes of the final race and New Zealand yachting had a new champion here yesterday.

Wellington's Greg Wilcox was not considered in the running as he lay sixth in the

last race of the national OK dinghy championships in the bay. All eyes were on race leader Leith Armit, Auckland, and Guy Mannering, Napier, as they made the last beat to the line.

But suddenly it was sail number 460 that was cutting the leaders apart as he chose a more direct route for the line, jumping from sixth to second and clinching the title.

It was a dream finish to a race in which the 20-year-old house painter had made a lousy start.

Caught up with the tail enders, he took his boat "Halloosinashun" wide on a tack towards the land before rounding the first buoy in 11th place.

Then it was 7th, then 6th and Wilcox was poised for that vital decision on the beat to the finish line.

"I was a bit lucky. The boats ahead of me went a bit far to leeward and I got the best of the wind shift," he told the Herald later.

"I was going for it at that stage, knowing I had to beat Guy if Leith won the race."

Wilcox has had his new boat only this season and it is a veteran of second and third placings at the world championships. In Gisborne it took him to the title with 7th, 1st, 3rd, 3rd, 13th, 4th and 2nd placings in the seven races.

It also won him the right to represent New Zealand at the world championships in France in July.

Armit and Mannering finished second and third to Wilcox to become the other members of the Kiwi team, while in fourth place came 17-year-old Aucklander Gary Knowles, who took out the junior national OK title with this excellent performance.

He had been narrowly ahead before the final race but a broken pin in his tiller arm affected his final effort. However, he was pleased with his performance and the Kings College 7th former

is "definitely sticking with OKs".

The whole title bid rested on that vital last race, with Knowles, Wilcox, Mannering, Armit, Earl Berry and Adrian Mannering the ones with the chance to win.

But the surprise was Napier's John Hoogerbrug who leaped to the lead and had Armit, Guy Mannering and brother Adrian in his wake.

The final beat was an exciting duel between Armit, who took the lead, Hoogerbrug and Guy Mannering, until Wilcox made his run down the middle with the leaders a little too wide.

The sixth race had been a win for young Knowles, ahead of Earl Berry, John Mayes, Wilcox, Guy Mannering, Gary Lock, Hoogerbrug and Armit.

Guy Mannering won the Saturday morning race with brother Adrian second, but disqualified, then reinstated after appealing against the decision which was the result of alleged excessive pumping and rocking of his boat in the light conditions.

Wilcox, fourth at last year's championships, came to Gisborne counting on getting in the top five and expecting Armit to be the one to watch.

This country's represen-

tative to the world championships last year, where he finished 20th, Wilcox had the fleet experience that helped him win his national title yesterday.

He does not expect to take his own boat to France, but borrow a good one from someone he knows in Europe. After France, he will aim for the world championships in Melbourne next year.

Accompanying him to France will be the 1978 world junior OK champion, Armit, who won this title by finishing second in that year's world champs. He is also the current junior world Finn champion.

Third member of the team is Guy Mannering who has been to the world championships before, while Knowles will be the unofficial reserve but intends to put his studies before his yachting this year.

Final placings — Greg Wilcox, Wellington, 35.4 points, 1; Leith Armit, Auckland, 40.4, 2; Guy Mannering, Napier, 41.7, 3; Gary Knowles, Auckland, 46.4; Earl Berry, Wellington, 58.5; Brian Fifield, Auckland, 71.7, 6; Mark Berry, Wellington, 77, 7; Adrian Mannering, Napier, 80.4, 8; John Hoogerbrug Napier, 85, 9; Peter Maynard, Christchurch, 89.7, 10.