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First all-female crew competes in LMYC Winter Series

A chance conversation between Club Captain, Eleanor Cunningham and Dave Nicholls, owner of eXcessive, led to LMYC having its first all-female crew sailing in the 2021 Winter Series and what a blast it has been!



Photo: David Young

The conversation happened over a beverage of course! Eleanor asked Dave if he could teach her more about tiller steering. Dave suggested that Eleanor gather a group of women and they could 'make a day of it.' Dave then suggested Eleanor ask Antonia Patterson to take the group out since she is a regular crew member on the boat and has many decades of sailing experience. Then, on what seemed a very spontaneous moment, Dave generously

suggested we form an all-female crew and enter the Adams 10.6 in the LMYC winter series.

From there it was like a roller coaster. Eleanor ran the idea past a number of women at the club to gauge interest. From about 15 who expressed an interest, 10 committed to sail and just like that She Sails @LMYC grew some legs, and had its first all-female crew sailing in the winter series. As encouragement to the crew, Dave was heard to say, 'Sail it like you stole it ladies!'

And it's been a wonderful experience. Our committed crew travelled from far and wide, with one member travelling weekly (until lockdown) by public transport from the Central Coast. All came to the Lake with different experiences. Some team members had clocked up a number of years in sailing, a few had just completed their courses at NCYC, and one or two had never raced just cruised. It was a great mix and all came with an enthusiasm to learn and to extend their skills to positions on the boat which they were keen to try. And, our team wearing a striking colour of blue haven't done too badly. We proudly won a race the other week and consistently crossed the line each week in the top four of the fleet. We finished 5th overall in the series earning some respect with our creditable results.

Whilst we have a lot of support on land, in particular Albert Mitchell who offered support and critique from his home in Belmont, we have a dedicated and favourite supporter on the water. Lucky the dolphin followed us around the course most weeks. This was a lovely distraction when the winter wind died. Graeme Paterson's support and after race

camaraderie ought to be acknowledged. We would also like to acknowledge the encouragement from Dave who raced each week on Pugsley, our benchmark and real competition. After each race he offered suggestions on how to improve our trim and racing tactics. We have also appreciated the great support from the other sailors competing in the winter series.

We received some great feedback from the ladies.

'It has been a pleasure sailing with this group of women and watching their confidence grow and skills improve each week. We have had fun and competed very well with an added bonus of having our dolphin accompany us around the course. It has long been my desire to provide a comfortable learning environment for women to become competent crew on any type of boat. Many thanks to Dave for trusting us with eXcessive and supporting us in this adventure.' – Antonia

'Love sailing with our crew, making new friends and I have learn't heaps. Thanks, Eleanor, for organising and Antonia for sharing her knowledge. And, so exciting to actually win a race. Smiles all round.' - Ollie

'I worried a bit when I heard about everyone's background as I am a beginner. But everyone was wonderful at showing me how things are set up, explaining what to do and why and never tiring of answering my questions. I loved every minute of the sailing as it challenged me physically and mentally and there is much to learn – the boat, the weather, the ocean – and the learning never stops as it is never the same. Doing all of this with a great group of women is the best thing I have ever done and I hope I will get more opportunities to do this.' – Antje



Photo: Allan Paterson

The crew of Antonia Patterson (skipper), Philippa Patterson, Eleanor Cunningham (crew 'boss'), Kathi Johnson, Sarah Gamble, Carole Wright, Ollie Fulmer, Antje Schultz, Sue Gardner and Lynne Russell would like to extend a huge thank you to Dave for lending us eXcessive for the series and in effect helping to officially launch She Sails@LMYC.



So, what next for She Sails? LMYC is proud to host the inaugural Women's Keelboat Regatta which is to be held on Sunday 14 November. We hope the non-spinnaker race will attract entries from clubs across the Lake and beyond and become an annual event.

For over 90 years, Lake Macquarie Yacht Club (LMYC) has supported women in sailing & mixed crews are common at LMYC. The first women's trophy, proudly displayed in the club trophy cabinet, was presented in 1930. Our club annually includes a Lady Skipper Series (6 races) in our Friday Twilight races & awards the Lady Sailor of the Year trophy at our annual presentation night. The Women's Keelboat Regatta is a further extension of the commitment from LMYC to grow participation of women in the sport of sailing.

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