

Wonder Woman in Whangamata

Ever wondered how far off high tide your boat can get into Whangamata Marina? Well, WOW woman extraordinaire, Megan Harris, was given the task of getting her 2.4mtr draft race boat 'Whatever' down the narrow channel and into the marina before the outgoing tide got the better of her.

Last weekend the Mount Yacht Club hosted their annual race between Whangamata and Tauranga, starting at Whangamata this year. We did it 3 years ago in Pussy Cat (GBE catamaran) and came 2nd to the Newick trimaran 'Suncherro' and the following year Colin and Roy Pearson won on line and handicap again on Pussy Cat.

Colin was on Jury Service and hoped to be out by lunch time Friday. I organised the 4 other crew to meet at 1400 in the hope that Colin could jump on and off we'd go. But at 1400 he phoned to say 'It'll be 3 or 4 before we get out so just go without me'. It didn't phase me too much as it was a sunny day with a nice 10knt breeze but we had to go now to make it in time to catch the tide.

We motored out of the harbour and close haul sailed all the way up the coast straight over the Matakana shelf to avoid the incoming tide. As predicted we arrived at Whangamata entrance at 2030 but were 2.5hours after the high tide, exactly when the harbour master said we may have a problem. A calm sea made the 2.3mtr sand bar at the entrance passable with a little heeling over and we motored quickly up past the pole moorings. The light was fading fast as we took the sharp left turn into the marina channel under full power to counter-act the sideways current but BOOF! SPLAT! SHAZZAM! ...'Whatever' was wasted!

What can a woman do but wave down a passing fisherman...'Heelp, help us please we need a tow!' They tried, but alas, she wouldn't step off her perch...but then along came our heroes. Lance Putan from Two to Tango just happened to hear my call for help whilst onboard the harbour masters boat and insisted in coming to our rescue. 'Throw us your halyard!' he called from the darkness. My crew and I, perched on the leeward side, braced ourselves for the heave but instead it spun us around narrowly missing the channel marker. Poor 'Whatever', so ungracious, lucky for the darkness nobody could see us.....yeah right!

Car headlights shone on us from the shore...'Yes Colin I know it's you' I thought as one more haul had us upright again regaining our composure. While our heroes slipped away into the shadows assuring us we'd be alright we carefully followed the many channel markers leading to the marina. Luckily, I remembered the large gap where a water skiing lane traverses the channel and I could just make out the faint green lights of the channel markers on the far side. Otherwise I might have made a bee line for the bright green & red lights marking the entrance to the marina which would've put us aground again. Phew! So treacherous!

My last challenge was crucial...finding our marina berth in the dark and berthing the boat safely. I'd booked one earlier in the day which posed some problem for the staff with our 2.4mtr draft but they found us one at the far end on E pier. We entered in trepidation and again, chivalry prevailed. Colin phoned to say that Wil Horne would move his 'Berenice' from the deep berth on AA pier for us...yay! So with cell phone at my ear I spun 'Whatever' around and headed back towards the marina entrance, pulling into the confined arm while 'Berenice' slipped away then slowly I manoeuvred our beloved Whatever into her berth with a sigh of relief.

But wait...Two to Tango suddenly appeared at the entrance looking for a party...it's not like Lance to be left on his own so we hailed him over to the pier, cracked open a beer and turned up the stereo....no time to sleep! Some of us value our sleep and quietly slipped away around midnight. Unfortunately, there was a fishing competition happening so everyone was in party mode so not much sleep was had and then all those madmen were heading back out to sea well before dawn...I know...I was awake the whole time! Grrr!

Never mind, racing sailors don't need much sleep and we were all up at 7am (except Colin who'd partied too hard) ready for racing action...yeah! Actually, we had to get out while we had water in the channel...didn't want a repeat of last night. On barely a breath of wind the A & B division fleets started the race and slowly but surely Whatever slipped into first place to beat our arch rivals, Suncherro, by 33 minutes and again take out line and handicap honours...and the rum! Arrrr!

What an adventure for a WOW woman! Another notch in my belt and it just goes to prove we can do it if we have to!

Cheers

Megan Harris