



The History of Wemmer Pan Rowing Club



1970 to 1989

by Rod MacKinnon and H Juniper

(edited by Rod MacKinnon & Charley Lewis)

Lean Years

Stan Patterson was in the Chair as the decade opened, serving in this position from 1962 to 1972. Stan was a force behind the stabilisation and growth of the Club after Jim Rogers' departure. He contributed to the growth in school rowing, continued development of the buildings and accommodation of in-coming clubs as Sections of the Club, also playing a strong role in development of officials. Ishbel Rennie was Club Secretary for 4 years and took the administrative reins fully in control. She returned to the Secretarial seat as Mrs Brink for the 3 closing years of the 1980s.



The Sprint 'cover boys' from 1975 to 1993 Sean Tregoning (S), Terry Munton, John le Roux, Lytton Coomer

The 1970s began dismally. Wemmer was unable to record a single victory at the SA Champs for the first time since 1957. However, the four (Paul Diener, Mike McMahon, Ray Cox and veteran Jack Mok) succeeded once again in the Grand. With the exception of Jack the other three were selected for the Trident four. The early Trident method of extracting rowers from clubs in the season had been abandoned because of its effect on clubs..

This crew, with Ivor Valdel of Durban, raced the Holland Beker on the Bosbaan, won the Wyfold Cup at Henley and went on to Lucern. They qualified on times for the World Championships, but did not go

because of the adverse political situation.

This was the final year in the first four for Jack, who retired at the age of 35. By this time his record was 9 SA Championship fours wins, 10 national eights championships, 1 Championship double scull and 9 Buffalo Grands. He was subsequently the first rower to receive the State President's Sports Award and medal in 1972. He was a 7:21 Silver Medalist in Comrades in 1977. The next three rowers to be honoured with the Award and medal were also Wemmer members: Lytton Coomer in 1973; Ray Cox, in 1975; and John le Roux in 1976.



1976: the unbeaten four of Lytton Coomer, Sean Tregoning, John le Roux and Albert Doggart

During the year the Pan was partially drained for the installation of the musical fountains and while it was low the Council upgraded the jetties and installed the pillars and platforms for the start of the Sprint course. A buoyed course on two submerged cables was installed for the first time. This provided four lanes with buoys every 15 metres and once again set Sprint apart. Within a couple of years Sprint had the first fully buoyed 6 lane course in the country.

Ivor joined Wemmer on his return from the Tridents. This crew again won the Grand in 1971, while Lytton Coomer won the first of his three Silver Sculls titles. The four was again selected as Tridents, with Trevor Steyn as manager. They competed again at the Bosbaan, this time in the Elite division and then spent a week at the Razeburg Academy in Germany with Karl Adam. At Henley they rowed up in the Stewards Cup, and lost the final to Thames Tradesmen, whom they had beaten the year before.

This year the Kroonstad regatta was revived on the Valsch River as an early season event.. It was a great hospitable away regatta, and regatta dances were still *de rigeur* . The regatta disappeared in 1978.

Members of the Club were still very active in the Trident movement, with Kurt Hipper, Stan Patterson and Trevor Steyn as selectors.

The senior four did not win the Grand in 1972, but took a full house at Sprint. New rowers had moved into the senior squad, including Terry Munton, Peter Croal, Rob Dukes, Walter Polak and Eric Winkler. The Sprint programme hosted a ladies' race for the first time, although the Club did not field a crew.

The following year was very active, both off and on the water. In the clubhouse the change of the guard after Stan stood down gave space for a redesign of the Club badge. The striped blazers and embroidered badge were replaced with navy blazers and the Wemmer 'W' in silver. Rumour has it that the motivation came from members who wanted modern blazers for the 'bioscope', and felt a bit 'spare' in candy stripes. Alan Francis, it is recalled, was one of the members who stuck with tradition, a bitter-einder in the world of rowing fashion!



Kurt Hipper at the winners jetty at the first Masters Championships, 1974

On the water, a tour to England was organised by Ray to expose the next generation to seriously competitive racing. Under Doug's coaching Sean Tregoning (S), John le Roux, Lytton Coomer and Terry Munton (B) took the Grand to start another four-year winning streak, and Lytton won the Silver Sculls as well for the first of two consecutive years. For the tour they were accompanied by Ray Cox and Walter Polak as a 2-/x/spares..The tour exposed the rowers to senior and elite racing at Reading, Marlow and Vienna. However it also suffered from the political environment and their entry to Henley was not accepted.

'Uncle' Ray Cox, then Chair, was drafted into the four the following year as work and army obligations reduced numbers. After a scratchy start to the season, they retained the Grand and Championship titles, a feat to be repeated the following two years with Albert 'Doggie' Doggart and Sean Tregoning also as members. The 1976 Trident crew was Lytton, Sean, John and Doggie, with Terry as Manager/coach. Colin Graham of VLC was selected as the first sculler for many years. They came second in the Senior A fours at Lucerne, raced Marlow and lost the semi of the Wyfold at Henley.

This brought to an end eighteen years of consistent domination of the prestigious events of Buffalo, SA Champs and Tridents selections. The Captain's annual reports record concern at the lack of members coming in and moving through, and lack of consistency and training in these divisions.. Terry remained involved as a coach and selector for the Club and Tridents, holding the VP Selection and Coaching seat on SAARU for several years. In that role he started efforts to have a squad selected and under observation throughout the season in order to raise standards. Ray also coached and managed at the Club and Trident.



The squad at the Veterans Regatta, Dec 1979

Meanwhile the oldies were getting fidgety and looking for an outlet for their steam. In 1974 Kurt Hipper rowed the first FISA Masters Championships in Berne winning the 38+ sculls. He rekindled friendships from his days of international rowing, including Thomas Keller, FISA President, and his rival from the 1950s. These connections were invaluable in Kurt's successful efforts to protect our membership of FISA. In 1976 the first Veterans Regatta was hosted by Wits at the Pan. Wemmer won the regatta, with Doug Munton recording four wins.

In 1977 a Ladies four was boated for the first time in 8 or so years. By 1979 Trish Benn (S), Penny Davis, Pippa Nettleton and Joyce Hughes were SA Champions. Pippa tried her hand at sculling in 1979, and won the Ladies Sculls as a Novice, missing the record by only 7/10th of a second. In 1977 Ralph Adamo progressed from novice sculler to Sen. B Champ in one season. Unfortunately, also in 1977, the Sargent & Burton eight was smashed when the trailer rolled on the way back from the Long Row.



SA Champions 1979 Penny Davies, Trish Benn (S) Lesley Benn (cox), Pippa Nettleton & Joyce Hughes

construct the Roodeplaas course, now the Alan Francis Course, in time for the 1973 SA Games. The course was a major step forward, with 6 fully buoyed lanes, a finish tower and permanent bank-side facilities. Of the committee of 10, half were Wemmer men: CB Anderson, Alan, Stan, Trevor and Tom Price. Alan followed this with 6 years as Chair of TRA until 1978. He maintained the course for 37 years, passing the responsibility to another gallant Wemmer man, Peter Heidstra, who has been in the TRA Chair for 12 years this year.

John Pemberton, with Sean Tregoning, and then Mat Cooper, won the pairs at Champs in 1978 and 1979. In 1978 Keith Reid and Terry were re-drafted into the eight, which took the Champs. Also in 1979 Darryl Phillips came second in Sen. A sculls at Champs, ushering in a new wave of lightweights in the Club.

Off the water Alan Francis had been instrumental in the search for a permanent venue of international standards,. He chaired the committee that found the site, negotiated all the agreements and secured funds to

By the end of the 1970s Sprint was a premier event on the calendar. The VIP catering and lunchtime entertainments of marching bands and drummies were legendary. Margaret Francis and Ishbel Brink were forces behind these, supported in later years by Kirsty and Tracey.

The 1980s opened with the veteran crew of Derrick Read, Keith Reid, Barney Steiner, Keith Maybery (VLC) and Kevin Bennett travelling as Neptunes RC to the FISA Masters Champs in Denmark where they won the 35+ event in a record time, and defended their title the following year.

1980 saw a solid senior squad on the water. Pippa Nettleton repeated her Champs sculls win. The Club began supporting Kelokitso Secondary School in Soweto, the first township school to start rowing, by providing boats and many members to coach. Kurt Hipper was particularly instrumental, providing transport. Although the club struggled and stopped rowing once the transport became unsustainable, several of the club's rowers have rekindled Soweto rowing in the Soweto Rowing Club, now housed at the Pan under Peter Heidstra's guidance.



The winning Kelokitso crew 1981

Terry resuscitated the Trident squad system in 1981, with 8 Club members being selected: Wayne Meredith, Willie 'Estee' Esterhuizen, Mark Shuttleworth, Alan Edwards, Phil Johnson, Doggy, Monty Derlsey, Graham Stewart and Clive Gilman. The Wemmer four broke the Grand drought, and Phil Johnson won the Silver Sculls.

Susanne Standish-White was the driver behind the success of the Wemmer women at Champs in 1981 and 1982, with Janice Campbell, Bonnie Lucas and Judy Heine. Susanne also won the sculls in both years before moving to Wits.

In late 1981 Frank Howes, Rory Paton-Ash and Garth Lemkus joined and enlarged representation in the Trident squad. In the following year, 1982, Trident sent its largest team – a heavy four, and pair, and, for the first time, a lightweight four and sculler. Wemmer members made up the majority, with Mark, Garth, Rory and Frank in the four, Wayne Meredith in the pair and Phil Johnson, Eddie Bruce and Clive Gilman in the light four. They won their divisions and the club trophy at Schweinfurt, spent a week at Ratzeburg and went on to Henley. The fours were drawn against each other in the first round. After the lightweights had repaired to the bar tent, the heavy four progressed to being the losing finalists in the Wyfold.

On their return Frank retired into medical practice, and Garth, Rory and Alan Edwards moved to VLC soon after (producing VLC's first Grand in 11 years in 1983). Steve Lockwood joined the Club, and took on the reins of coaching the light/heavy brigade.



Alfred Phela in 1980

In 1983 Phil beat Mark in Sen A sculls at Sprint, but Mark took the Silver Sculls at Buffalo. The Club splurged on equipment, buying an early John Waugh pair, a Janousek 2-/x and the wooden Empacher eight, Electra, which graces the Pan still, these 28 years on.

Boats alone do not a squad make, however. Work commitments, Wayne's back injury and the Mark's and Phil's move to Vikings reduced the squad to 3 heavweights and 4 or 5 lightweights, with Clive Gilman, Daryl Philips, Eddie Bruce, John Gearing, Chris Smith and Adrian Buddingh making up the eight. Kevin Bennett did the many hours required for good coxing. Such was the growth of lightweights that separate events were provided on the Sprint and SA Champs programmes for the first time in 1994. Kurt Landsburg was Pairs Champion for four years, with Steve Bassett in 1983, Rod MacKinnon in 1984 and 1985, and Tim Lahner in 1986. In 1985 Kurt, Rod, Garth (returning from VLC) were the last members to win the Grand in a composite, with Mark Shuttleworth (Vikings).

Kurt, Estee and Kevin were selected to the Trident tour in 1983, with Steve Lockwood as coach/manager. Kurt was in the Thames Cup winning Trident eight the following year with Rod as spare man. In 1985 Kurt and Rod were in the heavy four, and Darryl was in the lightweight double. The final Trident for the decade was Tim Lahner, selected into the 1986 eight. These tours raced in Germany in international B regattas and at Henley in 1983 and 1984. However, objections at Henley prevented entries after the 1984 Thames Cup win under a thinly-disguised local club entry.

In 1987 the Club mourned the passing of C B Anderson, Hon. President for 25 years and active in all its endeavours, especially very actively supporting the growth of schoolboy rowing. Also off the water, Kurt Hipper (1982 -1992) and then Richard Wilkinson (1992 - 2000) served as presidents of SA Rowing, for 20 years between them, steering our sport through the years of isolation from international competition and then bringing it back into full participation at the highest levels. George Cavalieri supported the Club on many committees and also advertised in the Sprint brochure for a remarkable 27 consecutive years. Tom Price developed rowing as a major sport, first at King Edward School and then Mondeor. He was largely responsible as President of the SA Schools Rowing Federation for the amazing development and growth of schools rowing.



*The 1983 SA Champs
Ladies Coxed Four*

