

# **OK Dinghy International – Press Release**

## **Preview – 2010 OK Dinghy World Championships**

Wellington, New Zealand - 4-12 February  
Royal Port Nicholson Yacht Club

Tough challenge and fun times await OK competitors in Wellington

**The OK Dinghy has a long and illustrious history in New Zealand, but the world championship has never ventured as far south as its capital, Wellington. This year all that is changing with an almost full attendance regatta in the Kiwi 'windy' city. 72 sailors from eight nations are starting to gather at the Royal Port Nicholson Yacht Club to race for 48th OK Dinghy World Championship.**

Joe Porebski, Vice-President of the OK Dinghy International Association and one of the regatta organisers said, “The whole city is buzzing with excitement that the first ever yachting world championships will be sailed on Wellington Harbour. The city will host the New Zealand leg of International Rugby 7s and the "Waitangi Day" National celebrations all at the same time.”

“This year's regatta will certainly be the biggest dinghy championship ever sailed in Wellington, though in the past, Wellington has played host to America's Cup boats, the Volvo Round the World Ocean Race, BT Global Challenge stop overs and the 2009 Portimao Global Ocean Race.”

“The OK Dinghy is the most successful International class sailed in NZ producing 10 World Champions. The OK (in rugby terms) is grass roots yachting and the "front row" of sailing. Many of top sailors here have cut their teeth racing the OK Dinghy. Sir Peter Blake, Craig Monk, Dodson brothers and Peter Lester, all AC sailors, claim the OK on their resume.”

### **Strong local team**

Without doubt the Kiwi team are strong. Any one of 15 sailors is capable of winning races and it will be considered a local disaster if the top ten doesn't contain at least six or seven Kiwis.

Karl Purdie (NZL) World Champion in 2008 said, “Here in New Zealand the guys I have been racing against like Brad Douglas, Paul Rhodes, Ben Morrison, Matt Stechmann, Steve McDowell, Matt Stevens and Ade Mannering have the all around game to put them in with a chance. We also have a couple of heavy air specialists Dan Bush and Russell Wood who could take it away if the weather goes their way. As far as individual race winners go there are probably about another 15-20 people I can think of. It should be a close world.”

### **Contenders**

**Karl Purdie (NZL)** – Absolute favourite to take a second title after first winning in 2008. Wellington is his home town and local knowledge could prove critical. Fast in anything but loves the breeze.

**Brad Douglas (NZL)** - Possibly the dark horse of the regatta. Has had a stellar first season in the OK after switching from the Laser. Leads the current New Zealand rankings.

**Paul Rhodes (NZL)** - Always a strong competitor. Finished top 10 at 4 recent worlds, including second in 2002, and has been training hard. Sailing on his home waters, so should have an advantage.

**Greg Wilcox (NZL)** – World Champion in 2002, the last time the regatta was in New Zealand, but back on form last year, winning several major European regattas. Will always be a contender if the winds are light. Again, home waters for him, though he now resides in Germany.

**Thomas Hansson-Mild (SWE)** – 2009 World Champion. Not sailed much through boat being in container and Swedish winter, but still one of the favourites. Trying some new gear so should be interesting to watch. One of the fastest downwind sailors in the fleet.

**Nick Craig (GBR)** – World Champion in 2005, 2006 and 2007 but time away from the class cost him heavily in 2009. One of the best tactical sailors in the fleet so always in with a chance.

**Mike Williams (AUS)** – recently won Australian title from Roger Blasse and Andre Blasse. Mike finished 6th in his last OK worlds in 2006, and then campaigned a Finn for a few years. He has grown as a sailor and should do well in Wellington.

**Roger Blasse (AUS)** – 1998 World Champion and cannot be discounted. He has been sailing an International 14, but still finds time to sail his OK. He has won the Australian Championship ten times. He has some new gear and will always be up there.

**Andre Blasse (AUS)** – Third place in 2008 and multiple winner of Interdominions and Australian titles. Big sailor who loves the breeze, but can do well in any conditions.

## **Wind**

Purdie continued, “There's a better than average chance it will be windy and Wellington is well named for that. If the conditions are as I expect it will be an extremely physically demanding contest, easily on a par with what we experienced at the 2007 Worlds in Leba, Poland. It would be fair to say the conditions here lately have been windier than normal, but you never know, the weather can be extremely unpredictable and we could have a light airs contest. There is likely to be at least 2-3 races held in these conditions between fronts.”

Though the 2007 Interdominions in Wellington - over the same dates - turned into a light air contest, triple world champion Nick Craig is one sailor who hopes the venue lives up to its reputation, “ Whilst there are some big sailors I'll struggle to beat if it howls, I love windy weather sailing. 30 knots and rain every day would be the perfect holiday, though not sure if my wife agrees.”

## **Growth**

In recent years the OK Dinghy world fleet has been transformed with the introduction of several new builders covering five countries, attracting a new generation of sailors. In addition the average age of boats in this years fleet will be the youngest for many years.

Class President, Andre Blasse tells how it came about. “I have enjoyed sailing the boats from 1980 and did my first worlds in Melbourne, Australia in 1982. I wanted more people to sail OKs, but the

biggest problem we found in Australia was that the good guys had their gear and did not pass it on, so a lot of us were sailing 20 year old boats. The introduction of carbon masts was a great opportunity to start with new gear. So in 2004, I sold both of my boats and all of my gear. I spoke to a local boat builder in Melbourne, Jason King, who was building successful International 14's. He built me a new fully fibreglass OK, which I took to Denmark for the worlds in 2005. The plan was that anyone could order a boat and it would be the same as what I was using."

"At that worlds it became evident that the fleet needed a clean out. By getting new boats into the fleet, the older boats got sold thus increasing the quality and size of the OK fleets. So over a few beers, discussions were made that we should all try and build some new boats. I think we probably saw 10 new boats at the worlds the following year, which was great."

"Over the next three worlds these numbers increased and I think in Sweden in 2009, there were 60 new boats sailing – a huge change from the 1990s. I expect in Wellington most boats will be under 5 years old. This increase in boats has been a great opportunity for new and old sailors, as you can now buy a boat off the shelf. There has been some great work done by some individual sailors to accomplish this, and I would like to thank them all as it has created a very competitive race course."

On this years worlds, he said, "I believe the racing in Wellington will be very competitive, the top 10 will be very hard to get into. There are a number of world champions plus many others that have placed in the top three at a previous worlds, and countless that have finished in the top ten."

"For me, the OK Dinghy offers sailors great competitive sailing on the water, no matter where you are in the fleet. We also have a great time off the water. The other great thing is that all shapes and sizes can sail the OK. I personally am looking forward to a great time, with many old and new friends sailing, there will be 5 of us who sailed against each other in 1982, Joe Porebski, Greg Wilcox, Brent Williams, Adrian Mannering and myself. I also hope that we are lucky enough to run a full regatta, as this has only been done twice since the inception of a 10 race regatta, as a lot more consistency is required."

## **Social**

Porebski concluded by emphasizing the regatta is not just about sailing. "As Vice President I have tried to put the fun back into the regatta. Let's face it, only 10 sailors actually have a chance of winning, yet 80 turn out to compete. To ensure that the OK Dinghy remains a class people actually want to sail, I want the fun aspect re-introduced."

During the week, the sailors will have a traditional Maori welcome, the 'Powhiri' at the National Museum, a world soccer game, a 'Waka' Maori canoe race, a model yacht racing contest, a wine tasting trip, and some match racing in the new Olympic Elliot 6 metre.

"The visitors will be treated to first class hospitality. The event will give our international visitors the chance to experience traditional New Zealand culture and will definitely be interesting. The wine tasting will happen on the 'lay day'. Too many regatta have taken this day out of the schedule, which I think is a mistake, after all it's the friends you remember making, not the plastic you take home."

"In addition the fleet will sail ten of the most gruelling races in the windiest place in the World. When asked, many round-the-world yacht sailors all testified that Wellington Harbour was the hardest place to sail. It should be a fun regatta..."

The full social and sailing programme includes the New Zealand National Championships and

Interdominion Championships, which run from 1 to 3 February at the same venue. The practice race for the World Championship is on 5 February followed by an intended 10 race series for the 2010 OK Dinghy World Championship from 6 to 11 February.

Robert Deaves, 2010

Class website: [www.okdia.org](http://www.okdia.org)

Event website: [www.okworlds2010.com](http://www.okworlds2010.com)

Media contact during the event: Mandy Burt - [mandyjb@paradise.net.nz](mailto:mandyjb@paradise.net.nz)

[ends]