



Members of the Stirling Marblehead Yacht Racing Club put their boats through their paces using radio controls.

Landlubbers vie for line honors

By Caitlin Carey

Lake Woorabinda at Stirling is a picturesque place to be ... but especially on Wednesday mornings.

The Stirling Marblehead Yacht Racing Club meets there mid-week to race its fleet of radio-controlled model sail boats.

The 1.3m long and more than 2m high yachts provide a spectacle as they sail with the scenic lake surrounds as a backdrop.

Up to 12 members of the club can be found lakeside, deep in concentration as they manoeuvre their yachts around buoys, navigate the hazard of water-borne ducks and negotiate a large fallen tree in the water.

They are silent, that is until someone cuts them off and that's when the competition begins.

Shouts of "No, of course I didn't go short of the buoy!", "Hey! You can't do that, you know!" and "I was on starboard, have a look!" can be heard as the members jostle each other to get in front going around the buoys on the course.

"It can get a bit competitive," said Commodore Jeff Gerrard of Strathalbyn.

"We occasionally have collisions."

Mr Gerrard, who has been a member for about eight years, said a love of water

sports initially drew him to the yachts.

His friend made one for him and he has been competing ever since.

According to Mr Gerrard, there are many rules to model yachting and learning them can take some time.

"Not only to learn them intellectually, but to practice them," he said.

"It's very good for concentration, also perception, visual perception, both for your own boat and when you're going parallel with someone."

They tried to set an umpire for each race but in the end, no-one wanted to sit out.

The club sets a social day each month to educate members about rule applications, as well as sail setting and other general issues.

The yachts are made out of lightweight carbon fibre or fibreglass because, as Mr Gerrard puts it, "we're going for lightness".

And, like cars, they are also routinely updated to keep up with the latest technology every two to three years.

Two types of radio controls are used, one which operates on a set frequency and one with the ability to select a wavelength nobody else is using.

The club also takes on other yacht enthusiasts in an inter-club competition at Lake Woorabinda, Paris Creek, Patawalonga and



Commodore Jeff Gerrard and yachtsman Bill Weste with their radio-controlled yachts at Lake Woorabinda in Stirling.

West Beach four times a year.

Mr Gerrard said members come from all over Adelaide to join the racing.

Bill Weste, who has been racing since 1994, comes from Seacliff Park to join in on the fun.

Mr Weste said that after he retired, he needed something to do to keep him from spending too much time at home - his wife's "domain".

"All of a sudden, you retire, and you've invaded their space," he said.

"You need to develop these alternatives and quite frankly not enough is made of retirement."

Most of the men involved in

the races didn't know each other until they joined the club, but a shared passion has made them friends.

Word of mouth has been credited as the reason most of the members have joined the fraternity.

According to Mr Weste, sailing events were a network, with "two common things: water, boats".

Mr Weste said he used to sail at West Lakes but enjoys the relaxed atmosphere of Woorabinda.

Both men agreed the competitions were a passion of theirs, and they found them highly enjoyable.

As Mr Weste put it, "it's a second delinquency".