

Contest Report: North Cronulla, Sunday 17th May 2010.

TRADIES OCEAN & EARTH SURFMASTERS COMPETITION

If Tony Babic penned this piece it would commence with "it was a dark and stormy sea that day my friend", which is entirely appropriate because it describes the ocean at 7.00 am on Sunday morning.

The ocean had risen to official "huge" status the day before and there was a rumbling around the beach the event would have to be cancelled or reconvened at Shoes or Shelly. Overnight the swell settled and we elder statesmen of the surf assembled dutifully each considering the impact of repeated shutdown sets on our paddle-out soon to come.

Surfing NSW mobilized their professional event team erecting tents, tables, technology and power in just one hour and the first geriatric surf fest was underway. They ate breakfast cereal from official surfing NSW containers and we were off about 15 minutes late at 7.45 am.

We got underway with the Over 45 short board (heat 1), a heat scheduled for a full compliment of six paid surfers and two reserves. Only five hit the water, indicating not everyone was sure they wanted a piece of the day's action. The sets were up to six waves in number and they were shutting down the alley stretch with some mid size waves affording mainly lefts into the alley and the odd unpredictable right without rhyme or reason. Before I get into the report proper, I want to acknowledge the organizers and sponsors of the event.

Brad Whittaker, our very own Manager Beach Operations of Sutherland Shire Council, the man who dwells in the office we would all kill for at North Cronulla and a damn fine surfer, was the organizer although he is not yet "of age" for this geriatric festival of surfing. He worked his magic and organized, took photos, communicated with the various beach tribes which resulted in a brilliant day and event. Thanks Brad.

Once Brad had enlisted the pro-event team of Surfing NSW, the numerous event sponsors contributed to make the day a winner for all competitors.

The event did not require competitors to judge, so everyone concentrated on the surf, talked about the swell, impending hip/joint replacements or how good their recent operations had worked. This fitted in well with the Surfmasters event concept being about involvement in surf activity. It was also the first event that joined the shortboard and longboard tribes, which made for an original event.

I personally found the whole thing a real buzz. I was blown away by watching Scott Baxter and Craig Naylor (plus plenty of others) in the shortboard division. They ripped it up and although some of the shortboard entrants were on longer equipment for the division, I saw plenty of smooth mid length surfing as well.

The competitor perspective: I suffered from shutdowns and paddle outs in the heat, and avoided too much of a flogging in the final, but if you got two open faced waves you did well. I remember tasting my breakfast after a long paddle out in the heat; funny thing was I didn't have breakfast! Must have been digging deep down to dinner some 14 hours earlier.

The tough bit was finding the open faced waves amongst the mess. I reckon I learned something though about competing in those conditions I might be able to apply if it happens again. And on top I need to remember to un-tie Mr Smith's leg rope before entering the water.

Some guys in multiple divisions of the same age group were really tested, as the age group finals were sequential. The guys I remember were Rob Smith (45s), John Skinner (50's) and then Doug Iredale and Gordon Hunter (55's). If there is anything to learn from this first Surfmasters event it is to stagger the finals to prevent exhaustion and attrition of the multiple division competitors.

For this not to result in a corresponding problem for multiple short board entrants (like Craig Naylor – over 45 and 50) it will take some special thought. Probably not such a big issue in tamer conditions just a bit of fine tuning.

The finals came and went pretty quickly with plenty of club names not making the cut. In the 45 finals Rob Smith had a caddy on the beach with longboard and singlet, making a quick exit from the Over 45 shortboard final ready to back-up for the 45 longboard final, whilst the other competitors, Steve Hartnett, Ian Morton, Ulladulla's Ross Murphy and myself did a leisurely paddle out from South Cronulla beach. All the while I was thinking how stuffed Rob would be and it was now our chance to take the 2009 Club Champion and mercilessly destroy him.

During this final the highest score of the day and a perfect 10 went down..... to Rob Smith so it shows you can't beat a good man (not without a stick anyway, which I will have for the next occasion we meet). Whilst waiting out the back around half way through the final a set loomed with a defined peak; Rob was in the prime spot so I politely asked if he wanted it, only to hear him yell "going left". I watched from behind as he took the drop and saw the swirling whitewater and sand mixture without any visible rider, then hear a tremendous crowd roar. Crispy the MC told everyone that Rob Smith had ridden the tube of the day. Crispy then backed up announcing Rob was awarded a perfect 10 and the highest combination of the day of 17.7 points. At that point my waterlogged ears shut off.

In the over 60's Harry Lamb got out the back in the final and got a few waves - a personal accomplishment I would think and a great finals placing especially after a thumping earlier in the day. The 60's was taken out by Odran under the non-deplume Ordan according to Crispy. This must be perfectly normal for Odran cause when he first relocated from Melbourne, then a stranger, we used to double check we said it right. Years later as a mate its easy to say Odran Lipscombe (you may wish to practice it at home).

In the 55's Rob LeRay did well and his score and 2 final place position reflects his go for it attitude. Another personal best performance I think. A few guys in the club that would normally be ranked above them chose not to surf, so along with Brian Bull these guys all dug deep, and should go home feeling proud of their performances.

In the Over 50s final, Peter Toby was all smiles after a return to form to win the 50's longboard. He is a competitive chappie who likes to wear short black socks while surfing in all conditions, and doesn't he love it when it gets bigger. Peter made a very professional speech thanking sponsors, only to be matched by Jonny Lavers (Over 55 winner) who reckoned it was a long time since he stood on the podium in first place, Lavo also went on to match the Toby speech for sponsor thanks. Smiling happy faces from the boys all round.

The presentation was short and sharp; the prizes were etched "Tradies and O&E" beer flutes (a nice touch) and a gift from the O&E catalogue. (I got a knee leggie which is pretty appropriate because the current one got a stretch on the day). As Rob Smith is a non drinker who got three beer flutes (one for highest heat score) they will be referred in the Smith household according to his wife Jo, as the kids "juice glasses": I consider mine a "juice glass" as well and had a "juice" on arriving back home.

Brad made sure the entrants felt like winners for their \$20 entry courtesy of O&E and Tradies. O&E are still a soul surf brand and it's the involvement at grass roots level that keep them there as a PURE surf brand. I used to feel the same way about some of the public and giant companies but they are a little too aloof and slick these days. Ocean and Earth means great quality equipment supporting real surfers not fashion followers.

Tradies Club deserve a thanks for their support, as do some of the SSMC sponsors who turned out on the day, Greg McCarthy (and his brilliant surf photo display), Jacksons (and their brilliant

surfboard display), Cronulla Stand Up paddle along with Dominelli Ford who sent the fussy Ferdie Bird down as comic relief and kids entertainment.

I hope there is another Cronulla Surfmasters next year. By the way, there is a final down Kiama way if you qualify through this event and are a member of Surfing NSW. For details check out www.surfingnsw.com.au.

What are the enduring memories of the day? The dirty big grins on the faces of winners Smith, Toby and Lavers, oh and the crowd of several hundred roaring after Rob took off on the tube of the contest to get that elusive perfect 10.

Rod Dale

OVER 45 Men Longboard

R	Stephen Hartnett	5
W	Ross Murphy	2
Y	Rob Lumdy	6
B	Robert Smith	1
O	Rodney Dale	4
G	Ian Morton	3

OVER 50 Men Longboard

R	Peter Toby	1
W	Brue Metham	5
Y	Gordan Hunter	6
B	John Skinner	2
O	Doug Iredale	4
G	Greg Todman	3

OVER 55 Men Longboard

R	Kevin Price	4
W	Jon Lavers	1
Y	Warrick Cavanagh	5
B	John Mingramm	3
O	Ian Urquhart	6
G	Robert LeRay	2

OVER 60 Men Longboard

R	Odran Lipscombe	1
W	Dennis Galvin	2
Y	Peter Bazley	4
B	Larry Beaver	5.5
O	Alan Williams	5.5
G	Harry Lamb	3

OVER 45 Women Longboard

Did not run