



TESTING THE WATERS

Ever wanted to set sail on Corio Bay but don't have a boat?

Linda Carr explains how Royal Geelong Yacht Club can make it happen and takes a look at the clubhouse renovations now taking shape.

Photography by Tom Smeaton

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You may have stood on Geelong's waterfront on a summer evening watching the yachts glide across Corio Bay and wondered if that could be you out there. What does it take to be in on the fun?

Well, it's wonderfully simple. Every Wednesday evening in summer, the Royal Geelong Yacht Club opens its doors to welcome interested new comers to Twilight Sailing. No need to own a boat and no experience is necessary. Sailing starts at 6pm and lasts about 90 minutes depending on how much wind there is. No charge, just register online with the club beforehand and you will be allocated a boat to sail on.

Don't be troubled by the term 'royal', club membership is open to all and in 2024 the Club is very proud to have held community celebrations for the centenary of that Royal Warrant, granted 65 years after the Club's founding in 1859 and refers to King George V: "Whereby we deem it expedient that vessels belonging

to the Royal Geelong Yacht Club shall be permitted to wear the Blue Ensign of His Majesty's fleet."

Today, unlike other modern sports, sailing covers a very wide range of activities. From a lazy Sunday sail in a tiny vessel through to the full-on competition of the big Maxi Yachts leading the Sydney to Hobart Race in December. It's a sport where you can find your own level but first you need to dip your toe in to discover what that level might be.

Someone who did give it a go is Natalie Anderson. She moved to the region from NSW some time ago and recalls her first impressions of being out on Corio Bay.

"I think Geelong is a very beautiful place, even with the industry," says Natalie. "It's actually just magical out there and I think it's a view that only the sailors see. Being a painter, I'm constantly looking at the sky, the weather. It's like a Constable painting or a Turner."

Those sentiments were echoed by local



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medico, Mark Davies, who continues to do Twilight Sailing after 15 years.

'There's nothing quite like ploughing through the water with six to eight people on board a 35-foot yacht,' says Mark. 'It's quiet and you look around ... there's another 30 yachts out there and all the sails are up, it's magnificent!'

What about that frantic competition we see on TV and in glossy magazine ads?

"Wednesday night is still competitive but it's not sheep stations," smiles Mark. "It's much more about enjoying being on the bay and sailing. A drink and meal in the club house afterwards adds to the conviviality."

"People do yell but not out of anger," adds Natalie. "It's because there's a lot of wind and some people can't hear. So be ready for a bit of yelling but it's not directed at anyone in particular."

There's a lot happening at 'Royal Geelong' with some exciting developments. A new sailing school and an off-the-beach clubhouse is taking shape with the opening scheduled for early 2025. The state-of-the-art facility will offer new training rooms and change facilities, a radio room for monitoring sailing and additional club offices. It really will be a community asset.

Sailing can open many doors for anyone in our community. One teenager who started with Twilight Sailing and

continues on with the sport is Will Farnell, who recently returned to Geelong from participating in an international sailing event in London.

"Maybe I'm wrong but I think sailing is more complicated than other sports," says Will. "More unpredictable with the wind and the tides – every time is different. So much is happening all at once."

Back on land as a new comer to the sport, you may be wondering why boat owners would invite perfect strangers onto their precious boats. The reason is straightforward – without a crew, a boat of any size will remain tied up in the marina but that's not what ships are for.

If you decide that sailing is not for you but you still want to be near the romance and magic then social membership is available. You can enjoy a cool drink while the others take to fun out on the water. For further information on Twilight Sailing or membership drop into the office at the Royal Geelong Yacht Club at Western Beach during business hours or visit www.rgyc.com.au



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