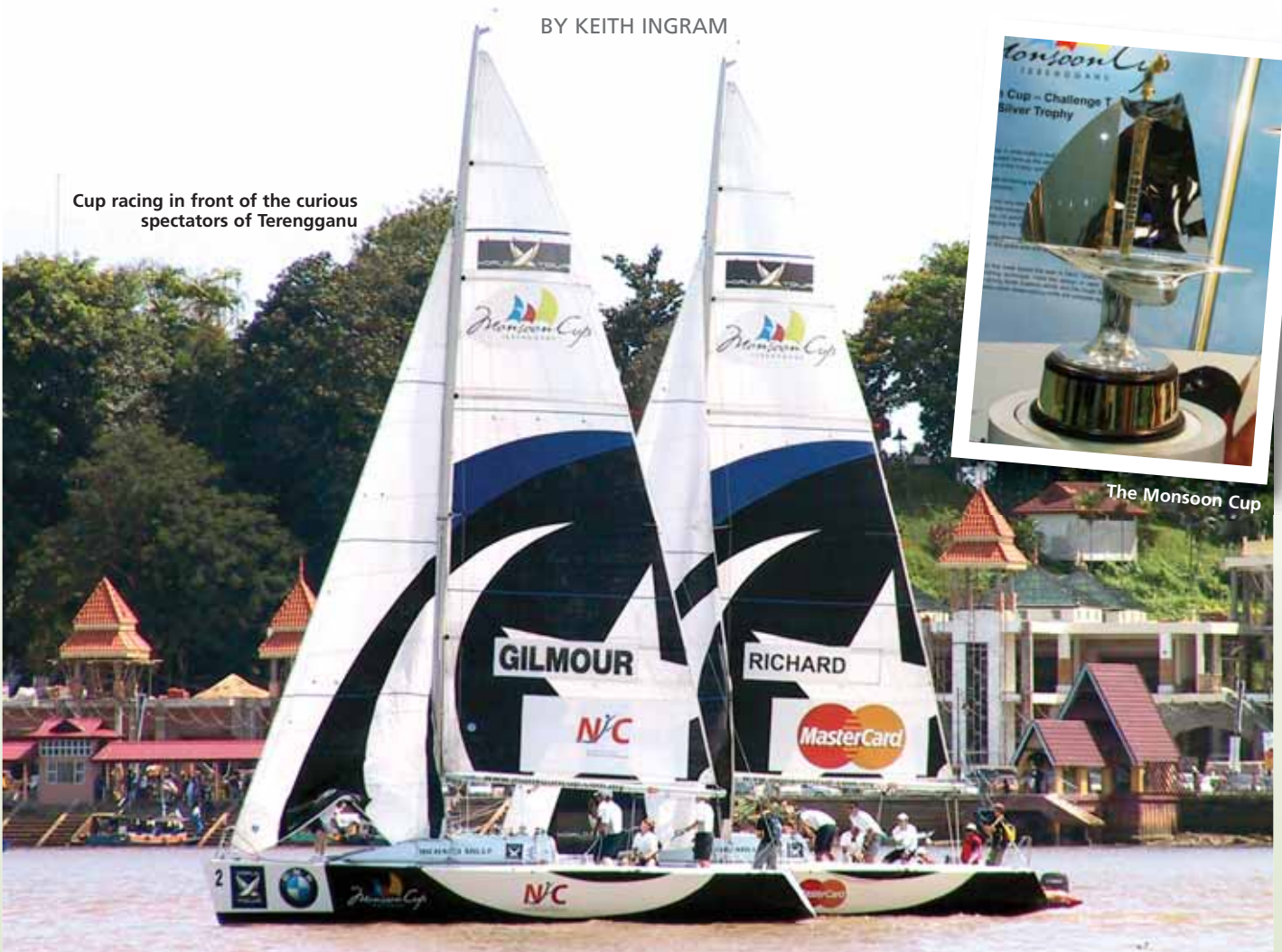


THE RAINS HAVE ARRIVED

BY KEITH INGRAM

Cup racing in front of the curious spectators of Terengganu



The Monsoon Cup

The rains have arrived and one moment we can be becalmed in bright sunshine, and the next a gentle breeze wafts in ahead of a closely following rain squall and visibility is down to 50m in torrential rain. For the sailors it's business as usual as racing gets underway for the second annual Monsoon Cup.

This is, after all, the monsoon season, and this year 12 teams, along with sailing enthusiasts and visitors have focused their attention on the latest stop of the prestigious World Match Racing Tour held in Terengganu, Malaysia.

The island is well-positioned to challenge experienced sailors with its calm to high-speed winds and torrential rain during its early monsoon season. Pulau Duyong also holds a world-wide reputation for its traditional boatbuilding industry on Duyong Island, which sits at the mouth of the Terengganu River.

The Monsoon Cup challenge is hosted by the Terengganu Heritage Bay Yacht Club, which is situated on these man-made extended islands within the sheltered waters of the river mouth.

Terengganu is one of Malaysia's most celebrated east coast states, and is endowed with a wealth of charming and refreshing natural landscapes. There are miles of golden sandy beaches and crystal clear water along its 225km coastline, exotic islands, lush virgin tropical jungle, quaint, traditional fishing villages and dazzling waterfalls.

The state is renowned for the rapturous celebration of its many



Cup success goes to Peter Holmberg and his crew from the Alinghi team

generations of cultural and traditional heritage, and the myriad of colourful pastimes, which include batik printing and songket weaving. Terengganu's population of about one million people consists of 90 percent Malays, with the rest being made up of Chinese and Indians.

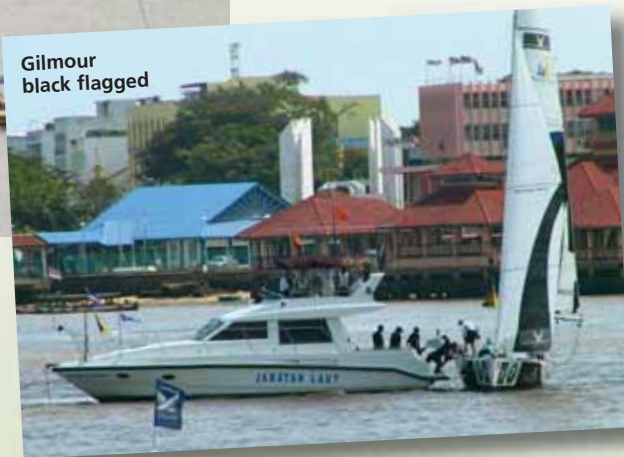
The pace of life in Kuala Terengganu, its state capital, and all the towns and villages in Terengganu is unhurried and unaffected by the hustle and bustle of a big city, and it is probably about 20 years behind the developing pressures of a modern city like Kuala Lumpur. ▶



Kelab Teluk Warisan, the new restaurant and function centre that can cater for over 1000 people at a time, took three months to build



Running repairs up the mast



Gilmour black flagged

Long may it last, as this is one of the secrets to the unspoilt charm of Terengganu, which can date its history back to the 1st century and has long been an important area of Malay settlement. Terengganu has been ruled by 16 Sultans throughout this time and up to the present day.

The city of Kuala Terengganu has grown tremendously since the discovery of oil. For most travellers, the favourite part of city is definitely Chinatown. A row of pre-war Chinese shophouses is filled with familiar scents of the past, including old, dusty rooms with cardboard boxes full of unwanted bric-a-brac, and aged documents piled up high in the corner with a lingering faint smell of dampness. Chinatown is also one of the few places to buy beer, as the state is predominantly dry.

Duyong Island has a number of small villages. It is now accessible by both boat and road, and while there are many cars and twice as many scooters, locals often choose to travel by water, where the local riverboats charge a nominal fee of 50 cents or about New Zealand 20 cents.

Villagers go about their business or unload their produce to sell in the market by the main riverboat landing. Bunches of bananas and baskets of chempedak fruit (a very pungent but delicious fruit!) are common produce.

Evenings are the best time to visit, as the young children come out to play on the banks of the river with their kites where they have inter-village competitions to be the "King of kites". There is a lot of strategy involved, sneaky tricks and all sorts of espionage going on. One sneaky way of winning is by modifying their kite's tether.

The older boys smash used lightbulbs and grind them into fine glass powder. Then they dip the kite string into a glue paste

and coat the string with the glass powder. Once the kite is up in the air and the string is taut, these specially modified kites are used as instruments of destruction. As the kites come together, entwining each other in a tussle, the fine glass is sharp enough to cut through the opponent's kite string. As the kite breaks off and floats away, the owner and his group of friends run off to catch the fallen star. The winner keeps the loser's kite, and so on it goes.

Who knows, these young kite flyers could be Malaysia's future sailors, and it was the yacht racing and the Monsoon Cup we had come to see. Following the inaugural event last year (see issue 49), the home of the Monsoon Cup at Heritage Bay in Pulau Duyong, Terengganu has undergone some significant changes.

While the dredging continues and the islands grow in size, gone is the canvas town of huge marquees. In their place are two impressive buildings several stories high with expansive views of the bay and the marina. The complex has been designed and built with yacht racing and major events in mind. Plans to extend the resort are in place, with new chalets to be built on the reclaimed land to give riverside views. These are supported by Kelab Teluk Warisan, a huge restaurant and function centre with the main ballroom on the top floor capable of dining 700 in a formal function.

Separated by a storm canal, the Heritage Bay Yacht club nestles against the local shipyard servicing the oil industry. There are also plans to turn this yard into a superyacht refit and maintenance base, while providing owners and crews with luxurious shore-side accommodation, restaurants and club facilities that include a fully equipped gym, saunas and massage areas for sports people and sailors. When the construction programme is finished, Heritage Bay will boast some of the finest facilities anywhere to cater

for the discerning and luxury traveller.

The Monsoon Cup 2006 is the sixth leg of the 2006-2007 World Match Racing Tour season, and has gained considerable prominence on the World Match Racing Tour. The facilities on Pulau Duyong have all been built specifically to host and provide ample viewing galleries for the race.

It also offers the richest prize purse for a sailing event, with RM1 million up for grabs, and the winner alone will depart some RM275,000 richer.

This event is the last ISAF Grade WC match race event prior to the America's Cup 2007 to be held in Valencia. Because of the pending cup challenge, the tour organisers have planned this tour to have a break after six series and resume after the America's Cup challenge. It is then hoped that many of the cup sailors will be available for the rest of the tour, which will end back at the Monsoon Cup in 2007.

Skippers and crews, particularly of the Alinghi team, the America's Cup holders, were keen to hone their skills during the event. Team New Zealand did not join the event this year. However, representing New Zealand was the Black Match Racing team lead by Adam Minoprio, who at 21 is one of the up-and-coming stars and a graduate of the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron's youth training academy.

He has been on the ISAF matchracing circuit throughout 2006, where he has recorded consistent top-two results. Winning the



The Heritage Bay Yacht Club at Pulau Duyong is one of the world's leading facilities for yacht racing

Asian matchracing championships in September in Terengganu, a feeder event for the Monsoon Cup, gave the Black Match team automatic entry to this event, and the chance to face some of the toughest competition under some of the most trying conditions.

Twelve teams from all parts of the sailing globe, including New Zealand, Sweden, Great Britain, two from Australia, Denmark, Italy, the United States Virgin Islands, France, Singapore and Malaysia were again sailing in the Australian-designed and built Foundation 36s.

The racing started with a round robin elimination series, after which four teams would be going home. After some very hard racing in frustrating damp conditions, Adam Minoprio of Black Match Racing, Tiffany Koo of Malaysia, Tan Wearn Haw representing Team China and James Spithill from Luna Rossa were left to pack their bags.

As we moved into the semi-finals, the standard of competition stepped up a notch as the pressure came on the teams in the building nor'easterly sea breeze coming off the South China Sea. Pressure was also coming on the race committee, as some sailors expressed their disappointments vocally at some of the decisions.

To be fair to the race committee, lead by chief umpire John Standley, they did a great job under trying conditions. By the end of the semis, Bjorn Hansen (Team Apport.Net), Jesper Bank (United Internet Team Germany), Paolo Cian (Team Shosholozza) and Sebastian Col (Team Areva) were heading home.

The last day's sail dawned with clear skies, bright sun and no wind. As the day progressed the sea breezes started to fill, and by late morning the quarter finalists, Peter Holmberg of Team Alinghi, Peter Gilmore, the defending champion, Mathiew Richard of Saba Sailing and Ian Williams of Team Pindar lined up for a day's excellent sailing as the breeze built to 10 knots.

In his first race against Holmberg, Gilmore came too close to the committee boat as he tried to tack, hooked the anchor line and became stuck fast to the committee boat. He required outside assistance and was black-flagged. The racing between these two was to heat up as the score became one-all. But it was not Gilmore's day, as Holmberg managed to force a penalty in the last race.

Meanwhile, Mathiew Richard won 2-1 against Ian Williams to go into the finals to challenge Holmberg, who hopes to be the helmsman in Alinghi's 2007 defence of the America's Cup.

At this level the competition proved hot, as the gloves came off and the prize purse was in sight. In the first start of the final we had a split start, with Richard going right and picking the strongest lift. This would give him the lead at the top mark and

he stayed there to win the first race.

In race two both entered the box and did the traditional dial-up, where Holmberg demonstrated his America's Cup experience to win this tussle. As Richard rolled away, Holmberg was on his tail, where Richard tried to ping him twice with a penalty, only to get the green flag for his efforts and Holmberg went on to win.

The aggression of these sailors increased on the third race, with each team taking every opportunity to force a penalty on the other. And half-way up the course, Richard tried to force Holmberg into a mistake, and although he maintained the lead he came away with the penalty for his efforts.

As he approached the finish three boat lengths ahead, Richard tried to do his penalty turn on the line and luffed into Holmberg approaching to get another penalty. It was now 2-1 in the best of five, and Holmberg was on match point.

At this point it is worth noting that Holmberg very nearly got eliminated in the round robins. Race four began with a clean start, and Holmberg with a slight overlap on Richard's starboard quarter, forced a tacking dual and reached the top mark a boat length ahead.

Richard responded on the down run to close the gap. The tacking dual continued on the next beat, and as the boats approached a superyacht Holmberg called for water. Richard responded, "Okay", and as Holmberg tacked he did not stay clear and touched, copping a penalty. Richard was making it hard on himself, as he fought to keep and increase the lead in an effort to gain space to do the turn on the finish line. Would you believe it, with Holmberg breathing down his neck he spun around the pin to win by a gnat's fart. This was certainly proving to be a tough final at two-all.

The last race proved to be a bit quiet after the excitement of the previous four races, as Holmberg started with a slight advantage and focused on staying out of trouble. He sailed in the steady breeze to keep just ahead of Richard, adopting the basic principle of match racing rules by staying between the mark and his opponent at all times.

He and his team were rewarded with the win, the purse of RM250,000 (about US\$70,000) and the prestigious Monsoon Cup.

RESULTS

Holmberg, RM250,000 1, Richard, RM150,000 2, Williams RM100,000 3, Gilmore RM90,000 4.