



TUGS RACE THROUGH THE AGES

BY BADEN PASCOE

Without a doubt it was the largest gathering of tugs and towboats ever seen in New Zealand. What an event it was! Old and new, they were all there!

How did this all start? John Street, the owner of the classic 1920s former Auckland Harbour Board towing launch *Te Hauraki*, mentioned to me in passing that he was thinking of having a duel with the 1935 ex-AHB steam tug *William C Daldy* at the next Auckland Anniversary Regatta.

My response was, why not include all the other retired and operating tugs around the harbour? Immediately I had this image of a line-up of tugs and towboats from the early ages through to the very latest tug technology. In my mind I could see the likes of the *SS Puke* and *Romo* at one end, and the Ports of Auckland's *Wakakume* at the other.

I know most people just love tugboats and that most have no access to the water. So why not follow a tugboat race with a parade of tugboats through the ages in the Viaduct Basin.

After a telephone conversation with Joyce Talbot, the heart and soul of the regatta, the event was born. She and her team loved the idea.

Waiting for the gun



I made another call to Tony Blake, the chairman of the Classic Yacht Association of New Zealand, as I intended the CYANZ to be the host and owner of the event. He also loved the idea!

Now the really hard work started, with hundreds of telephone calls just to make sure the idea would not be a flop. The response was simply overwhelming. Once word got out about the proposal my phone ran hot.

Mike Thompson called and asked if he could enter his whole fleet! Five minutes later Brett Shipman called, and then Gregg Kroff confirmed his interest.

As well as having a passion for older craft through my involvement with the CYANZ, I also wanted to develop an event for professional skippers and owners. My next call was to Keith Ingram of *Professional Skipper* magazine. Admittedly he was a bit quiet at first, then the idea grabbed him like a shark feeding. Keith later became the race director for the event, as well as addressing the safety issues, a job I was dreading.

The day of the regatta, January 29, rolled up and the weather looked as if it was going to be kind to us, and one by one the boats assembled at the entrance to the Viaduct Harbour. At around 0900 I climbed up from one of the inner marina fingers to the outer

wharf/breakwater. The fleet looked huge.

I had this lump in my throat when I saw pioneers like the *Bondi Belle*, *Ferro* and *Glyn Bird*, to name a few, mixing and mingling with the new girls like the *Christine Mary* and *Whakakume*. The scene was topped off by the *Puke* steaming past with paying passengers and giving me and the film crew of Bill and Linda Hohepa a resounding toot!

Finding a suitable platform to perform any filming activities was initially an issue. I called Russell Ward to see if we could film from the bridge of the *Glyn Bird*. He kindly agreed. When I thought about the wash all these boats would make when underway I soon realised we needed to be on a much bigger vessel.

A further call to Mike Thompson of Thompson Towing and we had the right location on their flagship, the *Christine Mary*. We could not have found a better boat from which to film the events. As well as being able to do this, the skipper, Lance Brown, and the families aboard made us very welcome. Later, as we were steaming down the harbour, I noticed two greatly respected men in the world of tugboats, Jimmy Thompson and Pat Ganley, were also on board.

Linda shot some great footage as we made our way down to the start line off North Head, and we felt like Kings of the Castle on the *Christine Mary's* upper bridge. As the boats gathered and positioned themselves I could see the *Koraki* hastily making her way down to the start line.

Her skipper, Peter Benson, had phoned me during the morning to say their barge had problems and they would not be sailing to Whangarei that day. He did not want to miss the event: yet another tugboat man from the heart. So they were in!

I was rapt to see a big yellow and black tug as part of the event. I looked down and could see Pat Ganley with a big smile spreading across his face as the *Koraki* approached the start line.

The gun went off! There was a din. A sound like a huge washing machine filled the air, then a whistle as the turbochargers cut in. Clouds of black smoke appeared. I looked over towards the *William C Daldy* and I visualised those huge connecting rods grunting into her giant crankshafts. She looked an absolute picture surrounded by black smoke. It was all on for her.

We started to move off, and the *Christine Mary's* two big Cummins whistled away, with all the little boats surfing on the wash. I could see Dave Skyme surfing on the large tug's wake, and he looked like the ancient mariner as he held on to the *Phyllis's* upper helm - another seaman completely in his element.

The boats spread out and went around the first mark with the *William C Daldy* right behind us. Tucked in on her bow wave was *Te Hauraki*, with speed merchant John Street's hands on her big Bakelite truck wheel.

The *Christine Mary* heeled over as she went about and made a lot of leeway on the *William C Daldy*. We made our way up to the final mark with the *Daldy* slowly catching us. Lance Brown commented later that if it was not for the tight turn she would have had us, not too bad for a 76-year-old steam tug.

I am certain every skipper and crew in the race has a new story to tell. This is just what this event was about, people having fun with these beasts of burden, old and new.

The intention was that this section of the event would start with the oldest vessel leading, and finish with the young ones. Due to channel 79 not working (or being overloaded) it was ▶



... and they are off



The Puke



The race controller



Te Hauraki



Brett Shipman joins the fun



Jimmy Thompson's tow team



The Sierra