



Christmas 2003

sorry, but it's the Heppell's Christmas Newsletter from Brightlingsea again; you asked for more photos... so here they are... Past editions: www.heppell.net/christmas

In the words of John Lennon "So this is Christmas and what have you done? Another year over... etc". Oh dear: on the house front, on installing the Aga, on the motorbike fixing, on many unfinished tasks "c'est nil points" if that's not mixing our sources. But on the other hand it's been a really great year for skiing, sailing, work and such important things, so perhaps we should start with one of those?



pausing mid mountain, M, C, T & J



at Val Thorens...

Last Christmas' big family ski with David and Pat and their girls was hugely enjoyable - luxury chalet living turned out to suit us (mm!) and we had great snow almost daily at Val T in France. Stephen contrived to rip his calf muscle in as unspectacular way as can be imagined (he just, er, fell over...) late on, but

it was torn clean through and had to be stretched off after skiing a fair way back in one leg; thus we were very pleased to be flying home for once and not driving. It's Val Thorens again this year; a little less grandly but for a fortnight with kids and various boy/girlfriends.



Cracker at West Mersea

In our Oyster 37 "Cracker" we started with the usual East coast SailEast regattas - round the cans stuff and great fun - we won the inter-club Wallet Shield - before taking her round to the Solent for a first bash at the Round the Island Race in June. Slightly daunted to find 1,596 boats lining up for the start we were quite pleased in the end with 87th overall but too knackered to party much; it's quite a race! After nipping back East for Ramsgate (we'll draw a veil over the partying there - sufficient to mention Toby's late night excursion into the marina waters whilst lost on his way back from the marquee!!) and some other East Coast stuff we then had a rather hectic delivery sail back to Cowes (Carole and Stephen, no engine, overnight, gale... non stop... yikes!) for Cowes Week and again seemed to have found some remarkable boat speed (yet more new sails helps of course) resulting in a few days on the podium and some spectacularly close finishes in front of the Squadron's cannons. Socially the week was exhausting too - we all stayed on the boat (we've 8 berths) and on a friend's boat and we took our big RIB (see left) down to get around easily, see the fireworks, collect the v. cheap Mumm champagne, etc. Afterwards, Carole and Stephen then had a very gentle "cruise" home for the rest of the East coast events, finishing with a great result at West Mersea. Very satisfying indeed. Of course having three Olympic aspirants on the boat helps doesn't it? but we are rarely all on board at the same time. Busy, busy, busy, but fun, fun, fun.



Cracker's tender...

Youngest Toby (now 20) has swapped undergraduate life at Portsmouth for Southampton and is really enjoying the rather more wired approach to creativity there - the Portsmouth tutors suddenly decided that digital video (which he is really good at) somehow didn't go with writing and theatre which rather stymied what would have been a very creative final year so we completely support his change of course - the new one is much better and he has an extra year effectively to enjoy student life! He now has a racy Suzuki Jeep and had a particularly promising end to his year in the 49er (see



Toby on the RtI



Toby and Rick 49er-ing

above). They got up to sixth in the national rankings, slipped back a bit and then surged forward again at the end with a really good regatta a month or so back at Warsash. The UK 49er fleet is about as hot as they come with four out of the top seven in the World so he and Rick are still on course for China in 2008, with a few more European regattas next year.

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Melissa (now 23), our middle one, stopped her freelance web and graphics work, although it was going rather well, to take the job of picture editor for Yachts and Yachting magazine (well, you can understand that...) which she is thriving in and she now commutes from Westminster to Southend-on-Sea in a bizarre kind of way.



tripping the kite

She lost her 470 crew right at the start of the season so really mainly did big boat stuff on Cracker all year but at Y&Y met a new and keen crew Harriet and they are back in harness, so to speak having based one boat at Thorpe Bay YC and the other at Brightlingsea or wherever. They are starting to look quite together already and hopefully Melissa will get back up to her 4th place ranking or better next year. As bow on the Oyster she has been a bit indispensable, so her year out of 470ing was good for the parents.



Melissa + Cracker

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Letty in the Alps

Juliette (now 24) has had another exhausting year in PR, leaping from company to company as is the modern way. But she's finally decided to have a proper go at journalism, always her love through school as a future career. We think it was all the boozing with journalists at PR parties that led her to it, but it may have been a few good offers from the national publications to write pieces for them, avoiding a lot of apprenticeship time in the regional press.

Either way she is happy with this prospect and can now get free drinks from her PR mates instead of buying them for her journalist pals! Gamekeeper turned poacher! She and George moved into a new flat which was gorgeous, in Fulham, but it was promptly wrecked by a massive flood from "somewhere above" so they are learning tons now about legal matters. Maybe another career next year? We bought Letty a Selfridges' picnic hamper for her birthday and she has spent much of the year looking for fun places to nibble and pop corks. The Proms in the Park was but one highlight for this busy hamper and hamper holder.

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Carole (25+!) has had a pretty good year at the 'lab and is now quite a national authority on her area of work rushing around country and world. She's finished with her on-line community of 20,000+ headteachers (!) and has now been building a radical, world leading, on-line degree. Oo er.

But much more importantly Carole has also been Cracker's ace navigator again all year and that is no mean feat with so much competitive racing in such complex waters. In the Solent there were places where a score of metres make a world of difference with the complex tides there and with such a light week we spent an awful lot of time tacking along various beaches or rocky ledges. Maneuvering 37 foot between the li-los at speed is all a bit non trivial. Carole's armoury of navigating kit on board is starting to look as complete as her kit in the 'lab with a whopping great colour chart plotter a latest edition - and it paid for itself in the various gales and thunderstorms of our delivery trips to and from races.



Carole at work

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Stephen

Stephen's year at work has been interesting too with work now embracing innovations in mobile phones, TV, computers still and a lot of architecture (radical new "learning spaces") including shortly a TV makeover of a school classroom although we can't quite see Stephen in one of those flouncy shirts. You might have been unlucky enough to catch him on TV again. Work partners now include everyone from the V & A museum to the BBC and with projects all round the world he is having fun. Stephen is just back from Hong Kong where the biggest challenge was munching a giant sea slug with chopsticks (no, you are not supposed to spear it and yes, they are very slippery little blighters...).

The New Zealand end of the lab is now getting established; Carole and Stephen have been generously offered citizenship by the NZ government which made the rugby doubly interesting to watch (they lost and won!). The sailing has been a joy and wheeling out the old (1939) Brightlingsea One Design for the annual Pyefleet Week with a very last minute crew he even managed to win a few races at the end of the week, but started a bit too slowly to win overall. But he seems generally fat and happy and, together with the whole family, wishes you a **peaceful, restful Christmas...**

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