



The AFP's Dragon Racers

While Sydney basked in some uncharacteristically beautiful weekend weather, the AFP women's team turned on some great performances at the recent Australian International Dragon Boat Festival. Stephen Simpson reports.

The Festival was held on Darling Harbour and at least 80 teams from Australia and overseas contested more than 40 races with six teams in each race.

With all of two months training the AFP women's team surprised themselves and quite a few others with some excellent results in the colourful Festival held on the weekend of April 15-16.

Darling Harbour was a spectacular venue with its magnificent Chinese Gardens as an appropriate backdrop.

The AFP side got lots of cheering from a big band of supporters after winning their first race on the Saturday morning and in their next race, the Sydney Ladies Trophy, they came third to the Australian champion women's team, Manly Warringah. In their final race on the Sunday, the Ladies Challenge, the AFP side got a creditable fourth place. They beat some experienced teams in both events.

The only match race in the entire Festival saw the AFP stalwarts up against the first class Singapore Police ladies team. The AFP paddlers showed plenty of determination to push the Singaporeans all the way and lost only by a boat length.



The Festival lived up to its international claims with teams competing from China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, Penang, Macau, Malaysia, New Zealand, Thailand, and North America.

The races in Sydney are one of twelve international dragon boat festivals held annually around the world to commemorate the death of

a poet, Chu Yuen, in China in the fourth century BC.

In despair over his country's affairs, he is said to have taken his life in the Mek Lo River and then local fishermen raced to the spot in their boats in a vain effort to recover his body.

The boats now raced are 14 metres long with a crew of 20 rowers, a sweep, and a drummer sitting at the bow. They race over a 500 metre course with the top teams rating at 80 to 90 strokes per minute, and the champion Chinese men's team rating at an incredible 110 strokes. Those fellows would give the Manly hydrofoil a run for its money!

The AFP Paddlers

Our AFP team was: Sandy Browne (Drummer); Dianne James, Jenny Stokes, Allison Barrett, Virginia Rowe, Julie Little, Belinda Goodall, Rowena Lacey, Sue Travers, Debbie Deer, Melissa Snell, Marjorie Brown, Jo Campbell, Larelle Keenan, Kathleen Abrahams, Debbie Simpson, Sue Harrison, Virginia Hatcher, Karen Locke, Barbara Thorpe, Veronica Elton, Sheryl Hedges, Ann Lawler, Tanya Globe, David Dick (Sweep) and Paddy Donnen (Manager).

