

THE DRAGON CLASS COMES TO RNIYC

by Pat Hobbs

It all began when R. E. Workman (grandfather of Jock Workman) and Austen Boyd (father of Trevor, Robert and Kenneth) were racing on the Clyde. They saw and were impressed by a new class of yacht being sailed by Donald Daly, a Glasgow stockbroker. This boat was a Dragon, built by Johanson in Sweden.

On 5th May 1937, Austen wrote on behalf of prospective Dragon owners at RNIYC, requesting a quote for: "six or eight Dragon class boats, for delivery in 1938, similar to the one which you recently shipped to the Clyde on board S.S. Orsa." The reply quoted a price of 4,900 Swedish crowns per boat "to include sails, all fittings, measurement certificates and rust-free steel wire." This was then equivalent to the sterling price of £252.19s.4d, plus fees payable to the construction supervisor of Gothenburg Kungl Segel Sällskap (Royal Gothenburg Yacht Club), Captain Simpson, insurance, freight, duty and harbour dues, making a total of £295.2s.0d.

A copy of the rules for the new Dragon Class, introduced in 1929 and accepted by the GKSS, KDY and KNS, was obtained on 26th May 1937. This included details of the rig and construction, also the crew was restricted to three, all amateurs. A schedule of material was obtained.

On 19th May, McGruer & Co had quoted a price, complete with sails, of £287.



On 25th May, a cable was sent to Johanson accepting the quotation of 4,900 Swedish crowns and ordering 13 Dragons for delivery during March and April 1938.



A letter from Austen to Johanson, dated 11th June, confirmed that a draft of 21,229 Swedish crowns, being one third of the total cost for 13 Dragons, had been posted. The following points were also detailed:

- The boats were to be exactly as Mr Daly's boat.
- 13 to be built at 4,900 crowns each.
- One third of the cost paid today, the second when planked and the remaining third when shipped.
- All boats for shipment in March or April or before the end of this September on account of winter gales.

Later in June, an order for an additional Dragon was placed. Concern was expressed that the stem head should be strengthened to allow for the mooring conditions on Belfast Lough. A letter from the Clyde Yacht Club's Conference dated 11th June to R. E. Workman RNIYC suggested using UK sail numbers "if only to swell the numbers of UK Dragons and impress upon the YRA what a strong class they are and thereby reproach them for their want of interest in anything that costs less than the price of pure gold."

A draw was held at the Yacht Club to allocate the 14 Dragons to their respective owners. The original RNIYC Dragon fleet was established.

Name	Allocation
McMillan	11, 6
Kinnear	11, 5
D. Stewart	11, 4
W. Stewart	11, 11
Swan	11, 10
W. Bell	11, 2
S. Mitchell	11, 12
F.C. Ashburn	11, 14
J. Stewart	11, 9
A. Boyd	11, 2
McMillan	11, 2
MacIntyre	11, 1
Christie	11, 7



Mr Gillholm of GKSS reported on 17th September that five keels had been mounted with keel board moulds and floorings and two boats partly planked, with the cleats and bulkheads complete for all boats.

A letter was received from the Clyde Yacht Club's Conference confirming that the Dragon rules issued by Scandinavia were very complete and that the YRA now had the authority to issue certificates.

In October, Captain Simpson confirmed following a visit to the yard that the first boat was finished except for painting. He also advised that if one or two could be stowed aft he thought they could be shipped during winter months with very little risk.

He later confirmed on 27th November that two Dragons had been shipped on S.S. Orsa and that the first three measurement certificates had been posted by the GKSS.

A letter dated 19th November from Mr Mackinlay of Glasgow, convenor of the Dragon Class Committee, explained that the writer had met the Dragon designer Mr Anker in London in an effort to persuade the IYRU to accept the Dragon as the fifth Olympic class for the 1940 Olympic Games, originally planned for Tokyo, then relocated to Helsinki, before finally being cancelled.

On 1st December, Johanson advised that the first two boats were on the way to Belfast. These were received with some damage to paintwork on the topsides so it was requested that cheap blankets or other material be used to prevent damage in the future. Johanson was congratulated on the beautiful workmanship and finish of these boats. Johanson agreed that topside covers would be provided, he also expressed thanks for the bottles of "medesins", delivered by Captain Simpson (Old Bushmills Whiskey?).

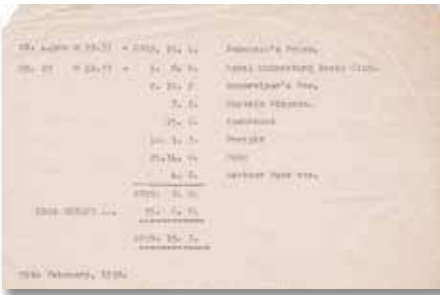
Johanson reported that Fafner had been damaged by the stevedores loading her, before he had arrived to supervise the operation.

A request was made to Johanson for the cost of a Dragon half model. Johanson confirmed the last two Dragons had been shipped, and that a Dragon model would follow with Captain Simpson.

Final payment for each boat was requested and received from their new owners by June 1938. A final payment of 21,229 crowns was confirmed on June to Svenska Handelsbank, Gothenburg for the account of H. J. Johanson.

Donald Daly wrote to Austen on 4th June inviting him and Mrs Boyd to spend time with them whilst on the Clyde and advising him that "the hotel you have been allotted is a temperance one, but Kirn boasts a very fine licensed grocer!" A strange choice of hotel for a distiller.

A letter received from Otto Albrecht Ernst, dated 8th June 1938, thanked the RNIYC for the kind invitation and continued: "I have definitely made up my mind to come with my Dragon to Belfast



Kenneth Boyd, David Keeling, The Author, racing at Burnham-on-Crouch 1968

and have written to the owners of other German boats to try to induce them to come along." A short note eight days later read: "...unfortunately it would not be possible to come to Belfast."

A quotation was received from Ratsey and Lapthorn dated 8th September, mainsails were priced at £13.10s.0d and foresails at £5.8s.0d.

Notice of a meeting to be held at the Royal Thames Yacht Club on 23rd November was received, this was to enable Dragon owners to raise any points with the Clyde Yacht Club's Conference as the governing body of the Dragon Class.

Minutes of the meeting included: Dragons in Britain increased from 40 in 1937 to 80 at present. A request had been made to the Dragon Committee in Scandinavia asking that official moulds for the measures in each country could be made by Mr Anker himself.

Spinnakers had been carried by the Solent Class last season and provisionally agreed by the Clyde Class for 1939. It was agreed that if Scandinavia decided to introduce spinnakers, it was important to ensure that those used all over the world were the same. Colonel Tennet's proposal that the Solent local rule that one professional might be carried was not adopted.

A letter to Johanson on 19th December expressed thanks for the beautiful workmanship of the model now received and included: "We have had a great year racing and are looking forward to next season."

Comment was made on the steady improvement in Johanson's English since the start of the correspondence; more than 48 letters and cables were exchanged between May 1937 and December 1938.

The Dragons raced at Cultra in 1938 and 1939, but this came to a halt on the outbreak of World War II. To minimise the risk of bomb damage, the Dragons were stored in scattered locations in the neighbourhood of the Yacht Club.

Many owners joined the services. In July 1941, Dunsmuir Mitchell wrote from XDO Forth and Armstrong Mitchell from RAF Swanton Morley, expressing thanks for the trouble taken in putting their Dragons into safe storage.

Dragon racing resumed on Belfast Lough in 1946, with 13 of the original 14 taking part. For the 1948 season the fleet had increased to a total of 22 with the addition of DK79 and a batch of new boats DK197/8/9 and 200/1/2/3 from Camper and Nicholson.

It has been suggested that the Island Sailing Club took one of the batch and ordered DK192 Bluebottle as a wedding present for the Queen and Prince Philip.

In 1947, Eric Strain won the Dragon Gold Cup on the Clyde, sailing Billy Barnett's Ceres. The Dragon had eventually been accepted as an Olympic class and Ceres II from RNIYC, helmed by Eric Strain and crewed by George Brown and Jackie Wallace, did have the distinction of representing GB in Torbay for the 1948 London Games.

Though there is no longer a fleet of Dragons racing at Cultra, the

Edinburgh Cup was most recently held on Belfast Lough in 2012. A fleet of 42 boats from around the world competed. The Cup was won by Simon Brien of the RNIYC in Kin IRL214.



Jack Workman, Tommy McCann, Sydney Orr, Tom Morton, Armstrong Mitchell, Willie Hume and Austen Boyd

