

THE FASTEST OF THE FLEET.

ON BOARD THE AVOCET.

A Boisterous Afternoon.

By the Passenger.

A friendly argument had been fomenting for some time among the owners of the larger motor launches in the "Royals" as to which was the fastest boat in the fleet, but as there are no regular races for this class of craft, the event had only reached the "arm-chair" stage until last Saturday. There is always a certain pride in ownership, whether it be a horse, a dog, a certain breed of fowls, or a car, each person having the idea that his particular possession is just a little superior to that of everybody else; but most boat-owners guard the reputations of their crafts more jealously than their own, and that was how the race came off.

The entrants were Commodore W. G. and Mr. E. S. Rymill's Avocet, Rear-Commodore E. A. Johnstone's Chum, and Mr. E. Knofel's Koonawar. Mr. Knofel was keen for the fray, and waltzed up and down with a lively step past his larger competitors, who on account of a vicious sou'-wester still hung on their

a vicious sou'-wester still hung on their moorings. Chum was the next to warp out from a buoy, followed by Avocet.

Mr. Samuel Perry was very inclined also to "have a go" in his new 90-footer Isis, and secured the services of Capt. Jack Sheridan for the afternoon. Mr. Ern Rymill had been working on the new Tortoise all the week; but on Friday tried a couple of new "gadgets" on the Avocet's old engine. When he took her for a trial spin, however, she "honked out," and The Wizard was engaged until the early hours of Saturday morning, replacing the old parts. Mr. Johnstone had his three-ply superfine engineer aboard, in order to get the last ounce out of his engine, and it could be seen that Koonawar's foundry had been "monkeyed up" for the occasion.

The Race.

The actual race started from No. 6 beacon (just beyond the powder berth), but the boats left the squadron at 2.30. It was unfortunate that just at that time the Zealandia was being turned opposite McLaren Wharf, for she almost blocked the river. The three launches, in close company, passed her astern, and the swirl from the steamer's propellers almost caused a broadside collision between Avocet and Koonawar. In the excitement of the moment the latter's engine stopped, and she drifted into a dangerous position between the tug and the steamer, her machinery started, however, in the nick of time, and made a fast dash astern, "like a squid," as the commodore remarked. The other contestants waited for her. A good start was made at 3.17 when abreast of No. 6, Koonawar being a length a head, and Avocet bringing up the rear about half a boat behind Chum. The engineers were not seen for five minutes, for each was down below getting the last kick out of his iron. The trip to the Outer Harbour was tense with excitement. Each boat was doing her utmost. Koonawar just kept her position ahead, and Avocet drew away a length from Chum.

Koonawar Retires.

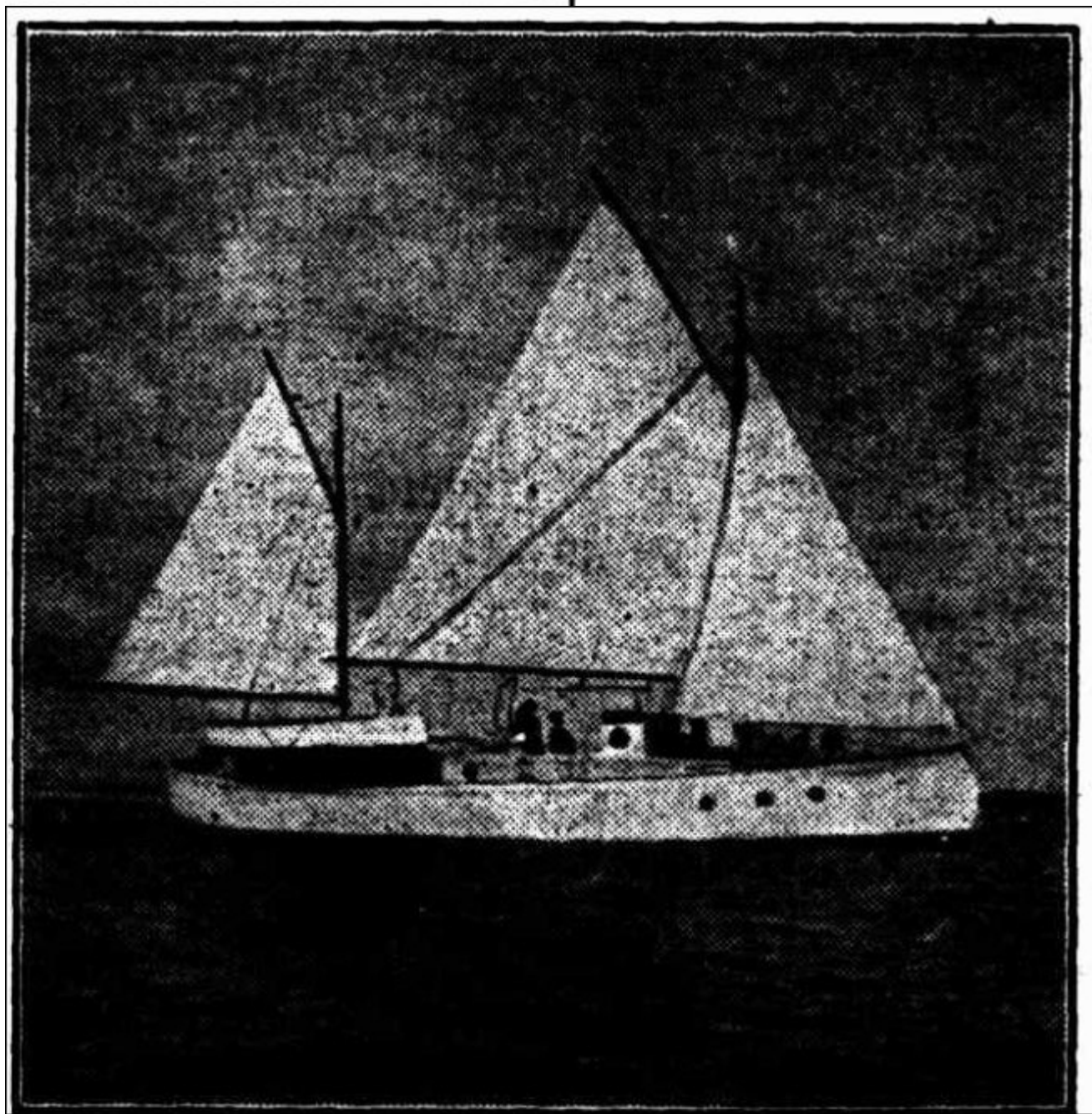
Approaching the mouth of the river

Approaching the mouth of the river great white combers could be seen going right over the breakwater, and a nasty rip was experienced when turning around the old lighthouse. The boats then steered into the teeth of the sea for the Wonga Shoal light. The waves were steep and angry, and an extra big one covered Avocet with spray from stem to stern. Koonawar was now a few lengths

in the rear, and when the big one reached her she jumped clean out of the water, landed into the trough with a "boof," and emerged from the next sea with water streaming from all her scunners. She lost some gear overboard, and her skipper, deciding that discretion was the better part of valour, turned back to the smoother water of the river. Chum had dropped back to 100 yards in the rear, having apparently slowed her engine down to make better weather of it, and Avocet did likewise. The trip to the lighthouse was very rough. Spray was continually drenching the boats fore and aft, and it was impossible to keep one's feet without something solid to hang on to. At this stage the cook suddenly remembered that he had an apple pie in the meatsafe situated on deck, and he rescued it tenderly in a more or less sodden condition. The great regret of the owner's son was that Chum was too far in the rear to obtain a good photograph of her almost completely enveloped, as she was, in spray. Avocet rounded the Wonga Shoal light at 4.4, and Chum a minute later. After turning the seas were more on the beam, and the boats rolled considerably. Chum's bilge keels were continually in view, and on one occasion the keel itself was visible. After manoeuvring an especially large sea, Chum almost made a half-circle turn and showed her propeller. The big yachts racing for the Kintore Cup could be seen in the distance, heeled over with decks awash, just about to round the Port Malcolm buoy, and the "fourteens" were closer in shore, running to the northerly buoy. Avocet rounded the southerly mark at 4.16, followed by Chum a minute later. Avocet showed her superiority before the wind, and she quickly trebled the distance from her opponent, and passed the finishing line nearly 400 yards ahead of Chum.

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It was too rough to stay at the Semaphore, and a course was set for home. Afternoon tea was dispensed just after entering the river, and everybody seemed more keen for it than half an hour earlier. It was altogether a most pleasant afternoon. The strong wind possessed a salty freshness that blew away cobwebs, and the excitement on board was as great as if the crew had been on a racing hydroplane; but there were the added attractions of more comfort, and a rather numerous, happy, ship's company.



THE AVOCET.