

Yachtsman Ger sails into history and wins award

By COLM WARD

THE final Limerick Person of the Month for 2005 was Ger O'Rourke, the local yachtsman who recently won his class in the famous Sydney-Hobart race.

Ger sailed into history last month when his yacht, Chieftain—the only Irish yacht in the race—finished top of its class and in fourth place overall.

The property developer led a crew of nine Irish, two New Zealanders and a German to success in the 650-mile race which took place after Christmas.

The race started on December 26 from Sydney and the crew crossed the finish line in Chieftain two-and-a-half days later.

But it was not all plain sailing for Ger and his



**LIMERICK
PERSON
OF THE MONTH**

crew. Some damage was done to the rigging midway through the race which led to a broken spinnaker that curtailed their speed for a few hours. But cool heads and professionalism prevailed and within a few hours, they were back on course.

Built at a cost of €1m, Chieftain was just one of



Dave O'Hara, Southern Advertising, joint sponsors of the Limerick Person of the Year, along with the Limerick Leader and the Clarion Hotel, makes a presentation to Ger O'Rourke to mark his yachting achievements (LL)

95 yachts which were competing in three different divisions.

The win was all the more impressive considering that this was the first ocean race for Chieftain and her crew. The nine Irish on board were all amateur sailors, one of whom, Edwin O'Connor, is a member of Foynes Yacht club.

"This was our first ocean race so as Sydney/Hobart debutants we were very realistic about our chances here and we're really delighted to have got this result under

our belts," said Ger after the race.

A native of South Circular Road, Ger is the director of Chieftain Construction based in William Street. The company has worked on numerous projects around the city, including Cratloe Student Village and the Summer Street apartments.

The yacht is currently on its way back to Europe, while Ger himself has returned to work in Limerick.

Chieftain's next outing in Irish waters will be the

Dublin nationals in May. It will then compete in the Round Ireland race in July. Ger has signed a sponsorship deal with Altana Pharma for this race and he is seeking potential sponsors for other races in the coming months.

The Limerick Person of the Month award is sponsored by the Limerick Leader, Southern Advertising and the Clarion Hotel.

The Limerick Person of the Year will be announced at a special reception on February 17.



At the Mayoral reception for the crew of Chieftain, who took part in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race, Ger O'Rourke, skipper, with crew members, Cathal Corbett, Castleconnell; Gordon Spain, Thurles; Andrew Deakin, Dooradoyle; Clare Steenson, Altana Pharma Ltd, sponsor; Domnic O'Sullivan, Cullen, Tipperary; Brian Griffin, Castletroy; Edwin O'Connor, Loughill, and Rory Herraghty, Kildare (LL)

Yacht crew on the crest of a wave

By MAIRÉAD NÍ CHAOIMH

THE crew of the triumphant Chieftain yacht who were victorious in one of the most gruelling long ocean races in the world, were honoured with a Mayoral reception at City Hall this Tuesday.

The Mayor paid tribute to the crew—all amateurs—who took fourth place overall in the Sydney Hobart race.

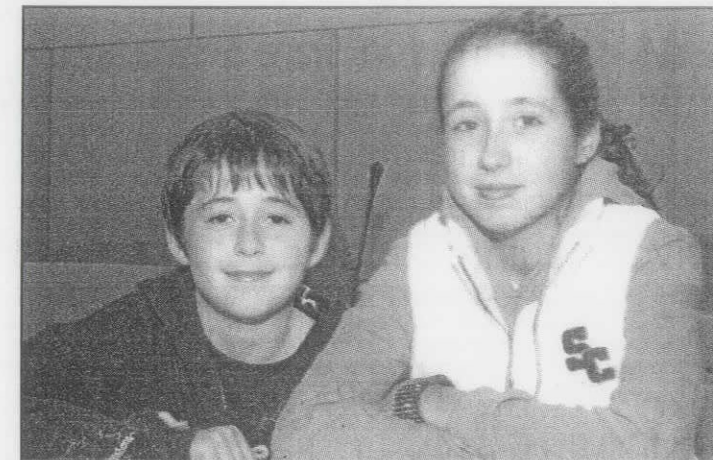
Battling over huge waves on the Bass Straits—a notoriously rough sea between Tasmania and Australia—was one of the highlights of the race for skipper Ger O'Rourke.

"We were on big waves, it was exhilarating and scary at the same time. I had an adrenaline rush," recalls Mr O'Rourke.

Driving the yacht past the finishing line into the city of Hobart on the island of Tasmania was his other highlight, in addition to starting off the race from Sydney Harbour with thousands of spectators lining the waterfront.

Despite competing against international professional yachtsmen, the Chieftain crew took fourth place overall and finished first in their class, Division B IRC.

And while they lost time due to a prod, a pole at the front of the boat, breaking, they still came in fourth in



Sean and Gillian, O'Rourke, Ballyclough (LL)

the 628-nautical mile race.

"This is a great achievement, especially for your first time out, and the city is proud of you," Mayor Diarmuid Scully told the crew.

Skipper Ger O'Rourke, a director of Chieftain Construction and who lives in Ballyclough, said the victory showed how strong sailing was in Limerick.

"This team is the product of various different sailing clubs around the area. This win is good for sailing, and it is good for Limerick," he said.

"We should be encouraging kids to go dingy sailing—we

have a river on our doorstep," he said.

Following on from their success, the Chieftain has secured sponsorship of €25,000 from the pharmaceutical firm, Altana, which will allow the crew to compete in the BMW Round Ireland race this July.

The Chieftain, built at a cost of \$1m, is currently being shipped back to Europe.

It was built by Cookson boats in New Zealand last year, a company run by Tania Cookson, the granddaughter of JC Hickey, a former Mayor of Limerick, and a cousin of Brenda Griffin, wife of crew

member Brian Griffin.

Mr Griffin 45, the portfolio manager at the Bank of Ireland in Dooradoyle, the oldest crew member, said participating was "a fantastic experience".

Rory Herraghty, another crew member, who works for Altana, said it was hard to fit in training and take part in competitions while holding down a full time job.

"Everyone's working in regular jobs. And sometimes it doesn't go down too well with the girlfriends and the wives. All my holidays go on sailing," he said.

But he is hoping that his employer, who have now come on board as a sponsor, may be able to give him more time off in the future.

"The Sydney Hobart was a massive undertaking, a project that had to be managed. A boat had to be built. We had a guy full-time out in New Zealand organising the whole thing. There is more work off the water than on," said Mr Herraghty.

He said that it was common for successful businessmen to get involved in sailing as they "tend to be good managers".

The Chieftain was crewed by two New Zealanders, a German and nine Irish men including, Cathal Corbett, Castleconnell; Andrew Deakin, Dooradoyle, and Edwin O'Connor, Loughill.