



Spectacular fleet here for annual race week

ANTICIPATION will make way for a spectacular fleet of yachts when the Meridien Marinas Airlie Beach Race Week gets underway tomorrow.

Temperatures are forecast to soar into the high 20's for the first couple of days of racing, giving the crews from down south some acclimatising to do before sails are tensioned for the opening race.

The weather forecast is just a reminder of why sailors from Australia continue to flock to the Whitsundays for the winter sailing season and fleet numbers may well exceed 100 boats, with a few stragglers seeking dispensation for late entries.

There is an excellent Grand Prix fleet and a record Sports Boat fleet, as well as an impressive number of Performance Racers, IRC Cruisers and 40 Cruising entrants.

Traditionally the hosts of Australia's largest regatta for high

performance, trailerable sports boats, this year's fleet is bigger than ever.

It will be an exciting week of racing in all classes with high quality entrants across all classes of yacht.

In the IRC Racing Class, Michael Hiatt's Farr 55 Living Doll has taken early favouritism but Ray Robert's Cookson 50 Evolution Racing, with previous winning form at this regatta, will be a boat to be reckoned with.

Rob Hanna's fixed keel Cookson 50 Shogun and Rob Date's brand new Reichel Pugh 52 Scarlet Runner will also be strong contenders.

Shogun has won at Airlie Beach before, as has Living Doll while Scarlet Runner recently impressed with a divisional win in the Gold Coast Race.

The 40 footers will have a 'battle royal' and could, as in past years, threaten the bigger boats on handi-

cap.

Russell McCart's Night Nurse, Ian Thompson's E11even and Bob Robertson's Cracklin Rosie, all fresh from the Brisbane to Keppel Race, will need to be watched.

The Performance Handicap fleet will, as always, be hard fought with Whitsunday Sailing Club boats including Damien Suckling's Fallen Angels, Kevin Fogarty's Idle Time, Tim Osborne's Rising Farrst, Roger Down's True Love and Craig Piccinelli's Wobbly Boot all in the mix. The Sports Boat fleet action will be wet and wild on Pioneer Bay and the hot temperatures will add to their racing enjoyment.

For more information on Race Week, see the 'On the Water' section on pages 14 and 31.

For information about entertainment during Race Week, see Chill inside today's paper.



Farr 55 Living Doll is favourite to win the IRC Racing Class at Meridien Marinas Airlie Beach Race Week, which starts tomorrow. It's pictured in battle with Wired at last year's regatta.