Houston’s Ladies of the Sea

Yacht Club’s Feminine Skippers Ask No Odds During Sailboat Races

And There's Work Aplenty for All Hands When They're on Bay

BY IONE KIRKHAM

LADY skippers at the helm.

Ladies handling the ropes, too, as racing season opened yesterday at the Houston Yacht Club.

The lady skippers asked me to ship with them. And I learned all good sailors aren’t men.

The ladies know the sea rules from fore to aft. They rig, trim and sail their own boats.

They sail fish boats, skip-jacks or sloops.

They battle squall or calm.

They don’t mind a tricky wind. They don’t mind a gale.

But they do mind sunburn.

They shove off in sun-hats, slacks and long-sleeved shirts. They wear goggles and even gloves.

But that doesn’t mean they’re slay sailors.

Winner Many Times

They switch tack, close haul and jockey. They sail a beam wind without luffing.

And they breeze home winner in many a race.

“Intuition gone to sea,” the men call it.

But the lady skippers swear it’s “good sailing.”

They ask no advantage in any race. They’re on an equal footing with men in this sport. It is a match of brain not brawn.

All they ask is a boat and a breeze.

Yesterday they had both.

The sky was cloudy. A brisk wind whipped the bay.

Skipper Fairfax Moody smiled approvingly.

“Swell sailing weather,” she said.

Let’s go.”

I climbed into the fish boat I was to crew. It seemed too little for three people.

There wasn’t any place to sit down.

There wasn’t any room to stand on deck. I hadn’t learned that lying flat on the high side is the best position.

Race Time Nears

I was told to handle the jib. I didn’t have a jib from a jib. But I had I could serve as a sailboat. We got under that before the race ended.

We slipped out of the basin into the bay—six little boats driven by a blazing breeze.

“We’re sailing a six mile course,” a skipper explained. “It’s an equilateral triangle. We go around it.”

I asked what tending the jib meant.

“You watch the ropes on the front sail,” the skipper said. “Don’t let it flail. When I say ‘hard-a-lee’ let out the rope, duck the boom. Fasten the rope on the other side. Say”.

I really didn’t see at all. But that was no time to tell the skipper.

The racing judge had just fired a pistol. That means two minutes until starting time.

The skipper looked up. “Pop watch while we sigh in the wind. We were almost in line with the starting point.

Only 18 Years Old

On the right—I mean starboard—a boat jockeyed for position.

Mrs. Harry Baker Jr. was tending the jib.

Another skimmer past ou our post. Betty Moody was rowing it.

She’s sailed the bay all her life.

Mrs. Billy Taylor and Mrs. All Pelt came out to watch us leave.

Jules Gosnel and his wife stopped work on the ‘Ginful’ to look.

Commodore Billy Hilliard slipped past in the ‘Astron.’ I wished for a minute that I was on the comfortable cruiser.

The skipper must have read my thoughts.

“Don’t worry,” this is a swell little boat. She’s only 18 years old.”

I didn’t have time to worry. The starting gun was fired.

“Hard-a-lee,” the skipper yelled.

I tried to pull the ropes and duck the boom. When we got through the judges stand was far behind.

The lady skippers were letting out sail. Two boats were ahead of us. We started out to catch them.

NEXT: Racing with the lady skippers.