

“Talking Sailing” From My Archives. The 1911 Lipton Cup Contest

by Richard Crockett

For most of this year I have spent an inordinate amount of time researching the Lipton Cup from its very beginnings to the present day. Always with one goal in mind - that being to collate as much material as I could on the 6-8 Metre Challenge era and the 30-Square Metre era. My rationale was simple; few people today know the history of the Lipton Cup from those periods, but most can relate back to 1982 when the Cup was revived.

But before diving straight in, I must declare my research credentials first as they are important. Naturally I have dug deep into my own personal archives, those of the Royal Cape Yacht Club, and books such as Mary Kuttel's "Fair Winds in the Cape"; "Yachting in Southern Africa" by Anthony Hocking, and newspaper material from the National Library of South Africa (NLSA), and several other sources like Ivan Kohler and Judy Macintosh (Bartholomew).

Having stated the above, it is by no means exhaustive, and any and ALL material on the Lipton Cup, from whichever era, is always welcomed. So if anyone has archive material, newspaper cuttings, photos and more, please share them with me by emailing me [HERE: editor@sailing.co.za](mailto:editor@sailing.co.za)

Let me start with the first three races ever sailed in the Lipton Cup Contest, which was in 1911 on Table Bay when the Point Yacht Club challenged the Table Bay Yacht Club.

The TBYC Challenger - 'Patricia'

When photographs of Nick Chiazzari's newly built 'Tess' were received in Cape Town, they stirred interest and girded the Capetonians into action. The feeling was that 'Patricia', built in 1906, was their best option, but as she was over the eight metre rating, structural alterations would need to be made to not only reduce her rating, but also add considerably to her speed. 'Patricia' was originally a centre-board yacht, but in 1908 the board was removed and her keel lowered.

'Florence' was also eligible, although 'Patricia' was favoured, probably as she had a good season in the build-up to the Lipton contest as she won the Ohlsson Cup, the America Cup, the Harris Cup and the Licensed Victuallers Cup. New sails for the Lipton Cup were being made by Messers. Cameron and Co. Of Cape Town.

A few days before the first contest the **Cape Times** described 'Patricia' as follows: *She is of the "healthy racing cruising" type of boat - the sort of boat the international rule was framed to encourage. The rule aims at eliminating the mere "racing machine" in favour of a more stable ship.*

The PYC Defender - 'Tess'

'Tess', Nick Chiazzari's challenger for the Lipton Cup was launched on 20 May 1911. She was completely locally built in Durban to a Logan Brothers design from New Zealand, and built by Mr E Petsch. Her dimension were not kept secret and were shared with the TBYC.

A writer in a Natal newspaper said this: *Her shapely curves call forth all manner of encomiums - in a word, she is an ideal-looking yacht, but her speed and capabilities of course remain to be seen.* (Encomium - a speech or piece of writing expressing praise).

Build-Up to the First Contest

In June 1910 it was reported in a newspaper that the TBYC had hoped to have held the first series of races for the Lipton Cup in the previous August, but no challengers were forthcoming. Of great interest is that the Deed of Gift provided that members of the club holding the cup must race amongst themselves. This was covered in the Fifth Condition of the Deed of Gift. Wisely the club did not avail itself of that privilege in the first year as the notice which had been given to the other clubs was not of sufficient length to enable them to build a challenger.

The **Cape Times of 25 August 1911** devoted a full column to the contest on page 7, with photographs of each yacht, the Lipton Cup and the two crews, on page 9. That was impressive coverage indeed!

The reporter waxed lyrical about the contest and the boats, although this description summed up the two rivals pretty well: *Each type of vessel is in distinct contrast to the other. Something about 'Patricia' tells one that she is good for a "blow": something about 'Tess' tells one that it is in moderate weather she is going to score.*

Their performances were also described thus: *'Patricia' is never happy, and never lets herself really go, unless he has her lee rail under. She is "healthy" in the best sense of the term, and makes good weather in a "blow".*

'Tess' has been described as a "racing machine". Well, when she was out of the water, one could hardly form any other opinion. Barring her keel, there isn't such a great deal of her below the water. She looks a real racer. That she can travel in moderate weather, it would be idle to deny. She hums along sweetly under her own conditions.

The big day finally arrived, and all that had been written and said would be put to the ultimate test on the water in racing conditions in the very first race of the Lipton Challenge Cup contest on 25 August 1911.

The 1911 Contest

'Tess', the challenger, beat 'Patricia', the defender by 9 minutes and 5 seconds on the equilateral triangular course, the first ever Lipton Cup race.

Conditions favoured the Natal boat according to the **Cape Times**. The sea was smooth with a moderate swell at the distant mark. Wind from SE to SW, light, intermittent to the first mark; SW to WSW moderate to the second mark; SW to SE moderate to the line.

The race took 'Tess' 4 hours, 9 minutes and 50 seconds, and 'Patricia' 4 hours, 18 minutes and 55 seconds.

While the winning margin was large, the race was tighter than one might think as on her way to the finish 'Tess' lost the wind, while 'Patricia' made inroads from behind, and at one point looked like they may win. But, 'Tess' found some wind - and well, the rest is history!

I will unashamedly quote directly from the newspapers as the race reports were beautifully written, enthusiastic and full of information, and really should not be summarised.

The **Cape Times on Saturday 26 August**, published the following account of the first race on the triangular course: *'Tess' in her own weather, made the paces, and came in with a lot to spare. It was her day out, and she made the best of it. But, towards the end, it looked as though the finish would be exciting. She made the second mark, to the west of the Island, and was reaching for the home line, when she came a trifle too close, and lost the wind.*

'Patricia' was at this time away in the distance. With the naked eye - the tug was keeping up with 'Tess' - one could see a black smudge - it was little more than a speck - very, very far away. 'Tess' rattled over intervening water at such a rate that the defender's supporters had made up their minds long since that all was over, and that their boat would be badly beaten.

'Tess' lay where she could not get a breath of wind. The happening was unexpected. A moment before, with her sheets free, she was sailing sweetly home; now she lay bumping about in the swell with her canvas flapping awkwardly from side to side, and her boom creaking and dragging its clattering tackle over her deck - very disconcerting in the hour of victory.

When 'Tess' Lost the Wind

'Patricia's supporters plucked up hope. If wind was denied the challenger long enough, there might be a chance for the defender. So every glass was focussed on 'Pat'. Yes, she was out there - very far out. She was still on the beat, still splashing her way through the water with her canvas full. Could she manage to get on terms with the challenger, or, at least save being beaten by as much as was anticipated? Well, it was a ticklish problem.

Still the 'Tess' stayed where she stopped. She just rose and fell on the bottom of the swell. She was at the will of the water, for way she had none. Her crew petted and coaxed her. They tightened the sheets and slackened them. They pushed her boom from port to starboard, and did this, that, and the other thing, and still she refused to budge. A most perplexing situation for skipper and crew. 'Tess' looked like losing all she had gained.

Meanwhile, the black smudge so far out was clawing its way along the line of the horizon. Through the glass one could see that every stitch of canvas was doing its best to push her through the water at her best speed. Then she put about for the breakwater reach. Slowly, but surely, she came along, well to windward, and then - well, 'Tess' got the wind.

It came from the south-east. It was not unexpected, but it had been a long while

coming. With the first breath 'Tess' bounded forward as if anxious to make up for her tantrums in the swell. She slipped through - or rather skimmed - the water beautifully, and was soon into her stride. By this time 'Pat' had made up a lot of ground - or rather water. The black smudge of an hour before had given place to the white hull of the defender. She, however, when putting about, had gone a long way further to windward than 'Tess', and was apparently hoping to reach straight for the line.

Battling with the South-East

Meanwhile 'Tess' was spending a lively time. The south-easter freshened up a bit, and her overhanging bows smashed into the water scattering the spray over her decks. The puffs too that came were fairly heavy and now and again she buried her lee rail and showed the green beneath her waterline. Still she stuck stiffly to her task. She was making better weather of it than a lot of people expected.

'Patricia' began to take a hand in the game. With the south-easter right in her teeth 'Tess' looked as though she was going to have some trouble in making the line. It was certain that she would have to put about more than once if she wanted to get home first. 'Pat', meanwhile, was gaining a good deal. She was further to windward, and the question was whether 'Patricia' could still further decrease the big advantage which the Natalian was striving to hold.

There was quite a lot of excitement over the business. 'Pat', with her rail buried, was smashing along in rare style. 'Tess', nearer home, strove her hardest with the nasty breeze and the little chop of the water. But when the defender really got into the south-east it veered a bit to the south and forced her to get on another tack.

'Tess' still fought bravely. Now on the starboard and then the port tack she battled hard and gradually forced her way nearer and nearer. Then, with her beam to starboard when she came about for the last time. It was questionable whether she would do it. Swiftly, and bending gracefully at the winds will, she came up, up, up, and - bang went the gun and the race was over.

"How do you feel" someone asked the Durban representative on the bridge of the tug."

When the Gun Went

"Feel better now we've got the gun" answered Mr Wilson with a laugh.

Race 2 (Windward Leeward course)

The second race was a cut-and-thrust affair with it not being decided until the finish line with a mere half second separating the two boats - with 'Tess' pipping the defender.

The dogged struggle between 'Tess' and 'Patricia' to get to the line will live long in the memories of those fortunate enough to be spectators. As somebody put it, "it was the finish of a lifetime". Half a second - so the official timekeeper said after the boats had sailed 20 miles.

'Tess' led most of the way, but 'Patricia' was always so near that her case could

hardly be called hopeless. The challenger was hardly more than a quarter mile ahead, even when she was most advantageously placed.

Yachtsmen scented a south-easter on Saturday morning. They hoped with all their might that it might freshen, for upon a weighty breeze depended 'Pat's' chances in the long, arduous beat for the home mark. The hot summery sun glanced upon the snow-white feathers which the breeze sent fluttering along the tops of the waves.

Would it freshen? If it did, would it hold? By noon the breeze had developed in strength. There was a welcome swish about the wind and water, and when 'Pat' slipped her moorings and scampered out close hauled, it was evident that there was some body about the wind. She stood out straight for Milnerton, and put about with the first gun.

Five minutes later 'Tess', sheltered in the docks, made the entrance. She bent gracefully as her sail area met the wind, came up when the pressure of the puff relaxed, gave an impatient jerk of her shoulders, heeled over slightly, and shot forward. Bang went the second gun - five minutes to go.

Off on the Run

Now on the starboard, then on the port tack these cracks of the port manoeuvred to fill in the minutes before the final gun. They made a wonderfully fine picture on a glorious day as they gambolled hither and thither. But to the yachtsmen there was a lot that was serious about their movement, Slowly but surely they edged their way to the line as the minutes flew, came up in the wind, drew off, bore down, and -

Bang went the gun. The race had started.

Simultaneously bows turned for the line a few yards away. 'Tess' seemed to square her shoulders for a second, her sheets were slackened with a run, and swift as an arrow from its string - it was a delightful incident - she shot forward and crossed the line. The end of 'Pat's' bowsprit was on a line with 'Tess's' midship section - a great start.

Sharply spinnakers were set to starboard, with a man on each boom. 'Pat's' spinnaker fouled at the head, but in a moment one of the crew was swarming up the mast. He set things right and slid back to the deck. All was made snug. There was something in the breeze, and every stitch set that was set, drew.

'Pat' had the windward berth, but 'Tess' - lighter in build and thus enjoying an advantage on the run - slipped over the swells at an angle and led the way. So they travelled, with crew well aft, for the distance mark. 'Pat' held on grimly. She had a good berth, and was doing well despite her bulky frame. Now and again she would reduce the advantage just a little, but whenever 'Tess' got a puff she drew away. It promised to be a run fit to please the most exacting.

Beginning the Beat

Two miles from the breakwater the breeze slackened in the slightest degree. But though at times in the trough of the long lazy swell no great harm was done. 'Tess' edged further away to leeward; 'Patricia' held gamely to her course. It was plain that

there was to be a great fight for honours.

Later on the tug turned for the docks, to be boarded by a couple of hundred passengers eager to learn how things were going. Skipper Johnson got his tug away in record time, and the 'Elliot' steamed for the distant mark at a good ten knots. Once past the breakwater a hundred pairs of glasses were trained on the channel. The 'Innesfallen' - out for a spin - was picked up easily, and then the challenger and defender, further to leeward, making for the mark.

At half-past two somebody cried, "'Tess' is round." A moment later, "'Pat's' round. Good old 'Pat'!" One could pick them up with the glass. Sheets were tightened, all was snug aloft and below and the little ships were heeling to the breeze on the first bit of the beat. It was a long time before the tug got on level terms with them.

*The mark boat and her anchor had to be hauled inboard and then - off the tug went in chase of the boats. When the tug got nearer they were still on the first **board**** holding on in a breeze that was rapidly gaining in strength. The 'Innesfallen' flew up in the wind and paid off smartly on the port tack, and still 'Tess' and 'Pat' scampered away for the shore.*

*(****board** - the distances which a sailing vessel runs between tacks when working to windward. Thus a ship tacking across the wind to reach a point to windward of her present position can make short or long boards according to the frequency of her tacks; the more frequently she tacks, the shorter the boards. Ref. The Oxford Companion to Ships & the Sea.)*

"They're about". 'Tess' spun round in an instant, and the 'Patricia' followed suit. The challenger was into her stride before the other, but a moment later both were literally clawing their way through the water. The 'Elliott' kept to leeward and gradually drew level with the defender.

'Pat' Hangs on Grimly

'Tess', sailing remarkably close to the wind, had the advantage, and was leading the defender by about three hundred yards or more. 'Patricia' was doing finely, and grimly refused to be shaken off. So they sailed for a time, everybody crowding to the weather side of the tug to watch the latest phase of the struggle.

Up hills and down dales of swell water, with the chop of the south-easter smashing against her side, 'Patricia' struggled on splendidly. In glistening oilskins her men were perched on the weather side, with the skipper grasping the tiller. Swish, swish went showers of spray over her deck as she dipped and her shoulders forced their way through the water. Foresails and mainsail bellied out stiffly with the breeze. Swiftly and surely, with the wind whistling through her gear and the eternal swish, swish, swish of spray she sped on her way.

'Tess' was further forward. She was battling bravely with wind and wave. She was standing up to the breeze in a grand fashion, and almost leaping from wave to wave. She was doing better than many expected. Her overhang seemed to help her along. She too lay down a trifle to the heavier puffs, but her bow seemed to beat out a way for her. So they hung on the port tack, each striving for mastery.

'Tess' was pinching all she could. She sailed closer to the wind than 'Pat', and as she followed every manoeuvre made by the defender it was feared that 'Pat' was giving a lot away. About came the defender. About followed 'Tess' with a spin. Then off they went for the Milnerton shore.

When All Seemed Over

'Pat' hung on and hung on until she seemed to be almost into the breakers. At the critical moment she swung round in a shower of spray. Again the tug got into such a position that everybody could see the difference between the competitors. It had increased. 'Tess' had clawed along to such good advantage that she added something - it wasn't very much, but still she gained a little that would stand her in good stead - to the lead. 'Patricia' was pushing her way through the water in the rear endeavouring to regain that which she had lost.

The tug stayed there for a while then went for home. 'Patricia's' supporters appeared to have made up their mind for another defeat. 'Tess' was doing more than they had hoped on the arduous beat. 'Patricia' seemed to be losing a little on each tack, and there looked to be no chance of reducing the lead to such an extent as to bring her on level terms with the boat in front.

Most of the passengers were watching the animated scene off the Breakwater when somebody remarked "'Pat's' to windward". Everybody trained their glasses on the two boats to see what had happened. There was a mile and a half or so to go; the boats were on the last stretch. They came along close hauled, skippers using their canvas to the fullest advantage.

'Patricia' was to windward - well up. Her position in relation to the buoys and the distance to be travelled was summed up, and good judges declared she was "dead on". 'Tess' was further to leeward, and the point was whether she would be able to make the line. There was going to be some excitement after all.

"She can't do it" said a yachtsman referring to 'Tess'. It seemed hardly possible, but she was going beautifully, and her skipper was pinching everything he could. 'Patricia' - the breeze had veered a trifle - seemed to know that anything might happen, and was doing her very best.

A Fight to the Finish

'Patricia' had the shortest distance to travel. She was "dead on" to cut the line at an angle. 'Tess', moving more swiftly, for the wind had slackened a trifle, was further to leeward. If her skipper wasn't very careful she would miss the buoy. If she did - well 'Pat' would get home with ease. By this time 'Pat's' bowsprit was on a level with 'Tess's' quarter. The excitement on sea and shore was intense, passengers crowded the rails of the tug shouting for all they were worth.

The boats were still a hundred yards from the line. Both close hauled were striving their hardest to get the gun. Would 'Tess' clear the buoy? It was hardly possible, and yet -... Minutes seemed like hours. The crowd - cheering, screaming and gesticulating wildly - was roused to the highest pitch of excitement.

Both boats were moving swiftly and yet in those few minutes there appeared to be

something sluggish about them. 'Patricia', nearest the tug, seemed to pause before she rose to each wavelet. 'Tess' clawed her way along for dear life. Nearer and nearer to the line they moved, and still the result was in doubt. 'Tess', pinched to the utmost, forged ahead. 'Patricia' gave a little jump. 'Tess' swished forward. 'Pat' took an unconscionable time to weather a wavelet. 'Tess's' bow swung inches, she jerked forward, and -

Bang, bang went two reports, almost simultaneously.

Who's Won?

What had happened? Nobody seemed to know. Was it a dead heat? Had 'Tess' won? Was it 'Pat's' race? There were 300 questions. From the lower deck of the 'Elliot' came a babel of sound, the people on shore were cheering their hardest. In a corner of the bridge the three members of the Sailing Committee were discussing the situation with serious faces. This was an unexpected happening.

"What was the results" shouted somebody angrily.

A few minutes later came the announcement from the committee that was stated to be unanimous on the point. "'Tess' wins by half a second" was the megaphone declaration. The crowd cheered. So ended the finest race that was ever sailed upon the waters of Table Bay.

Neither boat was aware of the result. 'Patricia' came round smartly and travelled up to the tug. "Have we won?" shouted one of the crew anxiously.

'Tess'" was the reply from the tug.

About came the challenger, and down she swung gracefully until she was abreast of the tug.

"Who's won" asked the skipper, when there was a lull in the cheering.

"You have" shouted a hundred voices, and there was prolonged cheering. 'Tess' swung round and scampered delightedly away from the docks.

The finish was remarkable. "Outside" the crowd had cheered 'Tess', as they did 'Pat'. "Inside" with the issue in doubt up to the last few seconds, they shouted to 'Pat' to move. Everybody was tremendously excited, and even those who had the best questions on the tug seemed to know little about what actually happened. Most thought that it was a dead heat, others declared that 'Tess' beat 'Pat' by a couple of feet: some that 'Pat' had got in her bowsprit just before 'Tess's' nose. In any case the Sailing Committee declared for 'Tess', and 'Tess's' race it was."

The same reporter, in his inimitable style wrote this in the same report: There was one happening that calls for some comment. While the boats were making for the home mark, 'Florence' sailed across the bows of the 'Tess', while 'Canada' did the same to 'Pat'. They did not hinder the vessels in any way but as the end of the race proved, even half-seconds were precious. Mind you, they looked very pretty, but - well it wasn't sport. To distract the attention of skippers even momentarily, at such a

point of the race, wasn't quite the thing.

Race 3. Raced on a 15nm quadrangular course

'Tess' won by 5 minutes and 33 seconds, to win the contest overall with a 3 - 0 score line.

The **Cape Times report on 29 August**, reported on the third race as follows:

Challenger's Own Weather

For the third time in succession the defender was beaten in the last race of the series of races for the Lipton Challenge Cup. 'Patricia's' hope of saving the trophy was slight indeed. Unless something very remarkable happened she hadn't a chance. Again the challenger was favoured by splendid weather. The nice light breeze that sprang up from the west held steady to the last mark, and then freshened on the home stretch.

Both boats were away from the line when the first gun went. They came up close hauled at the signal, and 'Patricia' the leading ship, was still some yards away when the final gun was fired. She crossed first with 'Tess' a few seconds behind. 'Patricia' bore away on the starboard tack; no sooner had 'Tess' crossed than she went upon the port tack. From the spectacular point of view the manoeuvring that followed was the only interesting incident of the day.

'Tess' made a short board on the port tack, and then she came about. With a weather berth she followed the tactics of the opposition. 'Patricia' held on her course for a time, and then came about, 'Tess' crossing her bows. It was a glorious day. There was just enough wind to keep both boats busy, and they presented a delightful picture as, with wings of white, they frisked about in the warm sunlight, first on the port and then on the starboard tack.

The sea was smooth. There was the slightest suggestion of a swell from the west. 'Tess' could not have had better weather if it had been ordered for her benefit. The breeze was light and steady, while there was a little trough about the gently rolling water.

Lessening the Lead

'Patricia' led for a while - just a little while. 'Tess' made up a good deal, and finally led the bigger craft round the first buoy. Spinnakers were set and every bit of canvas flung to the wind for the run down. After the tug had left the dock with the passengers, it was seen that 'Tess' was leading a mile and a half or more, and going at a rattling speed. On the second mark she had 'Patricia' beaten by 12 minutes; but on the reach for the SE by E buoy the defender spurted a bit and reduced the lead by about six minutes.

Then the breeze freshened. 'Tess' tried to set a straight course for the line, but the wind headed her off. 'Patricia' plunging her head now and again, struggled gamely, but the weight of the wind came too late, and the challenger crossed the line over five minutes before her. 'Pat' should have saved at least a minute. By some error she came about too quickly, and though they tried to pinch her she failed to make the mark, and was forced to put about again before she succeeded in getting her

gun.

The challenger, meanwhile, had been laying up in the wind waiting for the finish. Hardly had the gun gone before she swung round, and swooped down towards the defender. Capt. "Nick" led off three hearty cheers, and the compliment was lustily returned by the defender's crew. Then both boats made for their berths."

Results Overall

1 Point Yacht Club	Nick Chiazzari	'Tess'	1	1	1
2 Table Bay Yacht Club	Charles Eglen	'Patricia'	2	2	2

Crew of 'Tess'

Nick Chiazzari; Gordon Wilson; J Roberts; J Burden; G Scott

Crew of 'Patricia'

Charles Eglen; Mark Witney; Fred Glaum; W H Leslie; B Tubb