

# Sailing class makes sport a breeze



Photo by Ben McCarty

**FRANCES BURNS** keeps her Opti boat gliding across the water during Thursday's intermediate class session.

By **BEN MCCARTY**

News staff writer

The wind blustering its way through Hood River harbor rustles the wind chimes on the yachts sitting at anchor as seven small Omni boats slice their way through the waves.

It's a breezy Thursday morning, and after three days with little winds, students in the Columbia Gorge Racing Association's intermediate sailing class are taking advantage of it.

Some of them handle the wind better than others. While a few of the boats make near-perfect turns, others run the risk of dumping their occupant into the cold water.

"I guess I'm just too light, because it almost tipped me!" Trey Roeseler said after he was safely

back on the dock.

The group is the final intermediate class of the summer for instructor Dan Falk and first-year assistant Nick Hubbard, from Seattle.

While Falk stands on the dock giving instructions, Hubbard gets to cruise around with the instructees in an Omni boat.

This causes Falk no small amount of consternation, for while his younger colleague is out on the water, he is standing on the dock hoping not to get a sunburn while exhorting his pupils not to get "Mark-itis" and focus on the point where they are to turn and forget sailing basics.

"Nick can fit right inside of an Opti and I kind of resent that right now," he said.

For his part Hubbard said he

"started out in Opties and never grew out of them I guess."

In the past year the classes have nearly doubled in capacity, including a new course in Cascade Locks, and now have two paid instructors and two new boats. With 135 spots between the beginner, intermediate and advanced classes, the future of sailing in the Gorge is growing with each summer.

In this particular class, eight budding sailors, six boys and two girls, seven of whom had previously taken sailing classes, were developing their skills with all the bumps that come along the way.

For Mason Romero, the bumps were of the literal variety, as he

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took a sail boom of the side of his head on two different occasions.

"They're OK - I've just got a couple of lumps here and here," he said pointing to opposite sides of his head.

While the stiff breeze caused a few bumps and bruises - which Falk calls "making memories" - it also allowed the students to learn sailing much as it would be on the

Columbia.

"I don't think there is anywhere in the country where kids learn in this much breeze," he said.

As the sailing classes in the Gorge continue to expand, Falk would like to see increased opportunities for youth to get out and race, which would continue their sailing experience beyond the summer classes.

"We do really have an excellent sailing school here," he said. "After three weeks these kids go away really knowing how to sail."



**DAN FALK** gives his class instructions on how to avoid "Mark-itis" while their boats are on the water.

Photo by Ben McCarty