

WILLATON & DURMAN:
AUSTRALIAN OFFSHORE POWERBOAT CHAMPIONS

Ross Willaton and Luke Durman have been crowned Australia's Class One Offshore Powerboat Champions on the Gold Coast at the annual offshore powerboat awards presentation night.

Willaton and Durman took up positions in the cockpit of the diesel powered *Simrad* boat at the beginning of the 2006 series, looking to stamp their mark on the series with some good racing, in the hope of improving along the way.

The pair managed a great deal more than that, eventually taking out the Class One title after winning the opening two rounds in Victoria, a remarkable achievement in what is Durman's first year of offshore racing.

The *Simrad* boat, powered by two diesel engines each with 1300 horsepower, then managed to cross for line honours at Sydney and Mooloolaba, ensuring the Class One title would be their's at seasons end.

"It's a credit to Luke and the way he has gone about things this year, it truly is an amazing effort to steer this boat home to a Class One title so early in his career", said Willaton.

"I'd like to thank Ross for a great year and for guiding me throughout the entire series, I've learnt so much from him and obviously it's proven to be a good combination", said Durman.

"I'd also like to thank Bill Barry-Cotter for giving me the opportunity to drive one of his boats in the Australian Series this year."

The Class Three- six litre 'JR Gilbert Trophy' was awarded to *Red Bellies Racing* this year, with Bruce Sanders and partner Colin Craven storming home to win the last four races of the series.

The Red Bellies boat was in terrific shape by seasons end, consistently pushing 160km/h and above thanks to a couple of brand new engines and some minor changes to the boat.

After a disappointing start to the 2006 series, Sanders and Craven were able to have their *Red Bellies* boat flying around the course by seasons end with the addition of two brand new Mercury 300x engines just prior to their home town race in Newcastle.

"The boat was able to do some amazing things this year, it really was the quickest I have ever had it, and it prompts me to think how well we might have gone up against a Class Two boat if there had been a few competing in this years series", said Sanders.

Hogs Breath Racing duo Paul Gibbs and Paul Fowlds absolutely dominated the Class Three- four litre category winning five out the six rounds in 2006.

Gibbs and Fowlds were deserved winners of the 'Shark Cat Trophy' in 2006 and are looking forward to some very competitive racing in 2007, having been crowned the four litre champs four seasons running.

"I think next year will prove to be a very competitive category, with the emergence of *Kwozzy racing* and the *Ezy Does It* team this year", said Gibbs.

"Both those teams will be very well prepared next year after getting a season of experience under their belt, so we will definitely have our hands full trying to defend our title in 2007.

"There's also talk of a few more teams that's may become part of the series next year, and we are looking forward to the sport growing and having as many teams involved as possible."

Don McClymont and Nick Purvis were the National A Class winners, and proved too classy for their challengers.

The *Advantage Marine* boat was built by McClymont and crew and the hard work has paid dividends, the *Advantage Marine* boat was steered home to six wins on the trot, a clean sweep of this year's offshore powerboat National A class.

Mat Humphrey was awarded 'rookie of the year', after an impressive series in the *Navman* boat. Humphrey was rewarded with two wins from his first two races in Victoria in the Class Three- six litre category.

The 2006 Australian Offshore Powerboat Series was proudly sponsored by ACME Fibreglass Supplies, with good support from the Nautilus Marine Insurance Agency.