

Wizards and witches make a splash at boat festival

Viola Zhou and Naomi Ng

A strong dose of sunshine did not stop some paddlers at the Dragon Boat Festival from showing up in costume, even as fellow competitors waded knee-deep along the shore to cool off in 28 degrees Celsius weather.

About 6,000 dragon boaters on 280 teams battled it out on the Stanley beach waterfront from as early as 8am yesterday.

Teams of 18, representing mostly local corporations, universities and organisations, sped down 270-metre lanes in a bid to qualify for the finals, which began at 4pm.

While some simply sported caps, sunglasses and neon uniforms, others turned up as sailors, Harry Potter-style wizards and Wally, from the *Where's Wally* series of children's books. One team even showed up in chicken costumes, complete with chicken hats and wings.

The men's team from the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club clinched gold for the fifth year running with a time of 1 minute 7.42 seconds.

The team came half a second ahead of the Liechtenstein Princely Navy team, which placed second. Hong Kong Sea School finished third with 1 minute 9 seconds.

"We've been training really

hard all year and I'm pretty proud of all our efforts today," Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club team captain Gianni Aprea said.

"The weather conditions were great, it was a little rough out there, but it was a nice course."

The club's women's team also clinched the top prize in the women's category, finishing in 1 minute 19.76 seconds.

For the most outstanding outfit awards – paddlers dressed as Caribbean party-goers beat out Harry Potter wizards and witches.

Meanwhile, in Aberdeen, the former fishing village on the south of Hong Kong Island, large fishing boats decorated with colourful flags lined up to mark the race course.

Teams representing companies, universities, interest clubs and fishermen's groups took part in the Aberdeen races, with fishermen team Fishery Dragon taking the top prize.

Spectators on the promenade, many with cameras in hand, cheered as the longest 48-people dragon boats surged through the waters.

The Dragon Boat Festival, or Tuen Ng Festival, falls on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar. Chinese people mark the occasion by racing dragon boats and eating rice dumplings while paying tribute to the ancient poet Qu Yuan.



Paddlers sport costumes and masks for team spirit. Photo: K. Y. Cheng