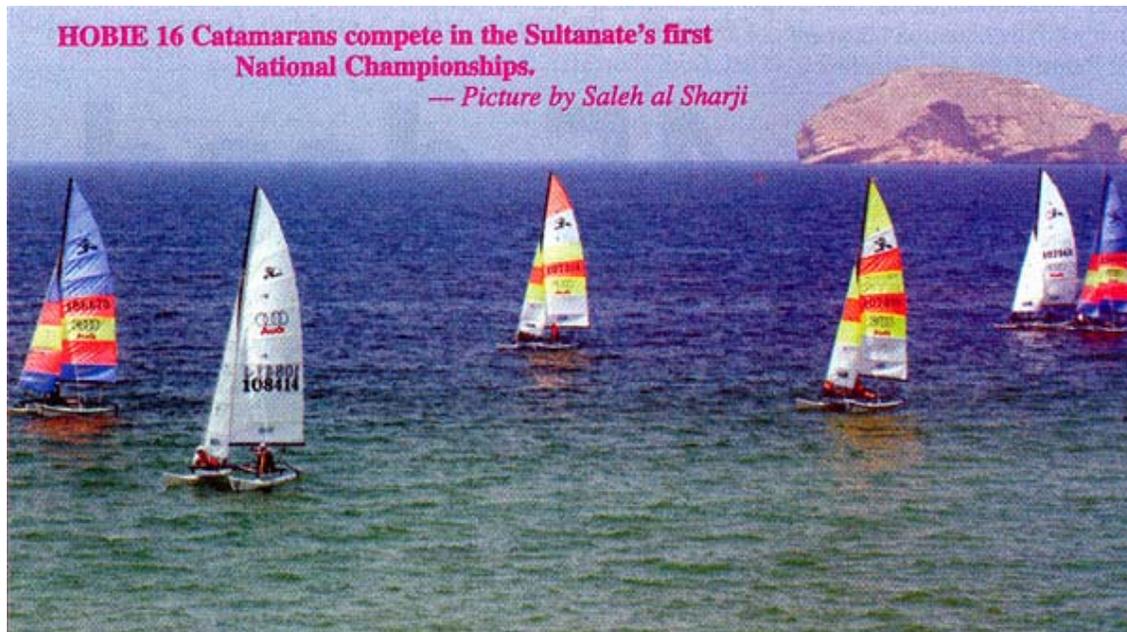


Oman's sailing championship this weekend



By Ali Ahmed al Riyami

MUSCAT - The Sultanate's first-ever Audi-sponsored 'Hobie 16 National Sailing Championships', an open contest that has attracted attention from the GCC and the region, is set to take place on Thursday and Friday at the Ras al Hamra Boat Club in Mina Al Fahal.

In all, there were 20 competitors scheduled to take part in last weekend's pre-qualification round. Of these 17 teams participated and 10 have qualified to take part in the open championship. The best youth team has already been placed and will receive its trophy at the main prize-giving ceremony on September 17.

Although lack of wind resulted in the cancellation of races scheduled for last Thursday and only a limited number of races taking place on the following Friday, it was a hard fought and well-contested pre-qualification round contest.

Fourteen contestants have been registered to take part in the upcoming championship that includes a further three Oman-based teams and one from Dubai.

Forecasts for this weekend's wind conditions are good and will hopefully allow for some exciting races that will provide a thrilling spectacle for spectators and sailing enthusiasts.

Dave Clark, Catamaran Sailing Captain and Training Instructor, and Volker Vahrenkamp, PDO's Ras al Hamra Boat Club Sailing Captain, spoke to the Observer about the championship and their hopes for

the future. They gave credit to Audi for sponsoring the event and to everyone involved in getting it off the ground.

They hoped that the championship would help generate more interest in sailing among Omanis. With such beautiful seas and coastline, along with Oman's famous seafaring tradition, it is unfortunate that there are not many more Omanis taking part in sailing events and activities, noted the captains.

However, one of the only Omanis taking part in the pre-qualifiers and the only Omani female to take part in the finals is the promising 17-year-old schoolgirl Safia bint Salim al Habsi.

This championship is an internationally recognised event and is a sailing competition with a unique history. The catamarans taking part in this championship are named after their inventor Hobie Alter. A keen surfer, he created the radical Hobie catamaran in the 1960s. It utilises the use of posts with high crossbeams to avoid what is known as the 'beam-wave-slam problem' that catamarans face as they speed over waves on the water. The Robie class of water sport crafts experience smoother and faster sailing because of this. World Championships are held every two years. Winners of this year's Audi Oman Hobie 16 National Sailing Championship will be eligible to take part in the upcoming World Championships.