Bumpy ride to success for SMU crew

Varsity team makes ‘eye-opening’ debut against professionals

BY DAWN PHUNG

BOAT racing is not all smooth sailing, as 11 sailors from the Singapore Management University (SMU) discovered.

Covering a gruelling 80 nautical miles in less than 30 hours, the two SMU teams — among the youngest in the fleet — came in a respectable ninth position overall.

It was the first time a Singapore tertiary institution had taken part in the “Top of the Gulf Regatta”, which was held in Pattaya, Thailand, from May 1 to 5.

They competed against professional sailors from Australia, Britain, New Zealand and Thailand in one of most closely watched events on the Asian yachtig scene.

It was the first time the SMU team had sailed overseas, and they had been on the platu boat only once before the competition. Despite a lack of experience, the students came fifth in the first race.

Joshua Chan, 22, a first-year economics student and bowman of one of the teams, said: “Teamwork was the most important element during the race. Although there was only one skipper on board, the rest of us were more than just puppets.

“Even the skipper needed to be a follower at times in order for the boat to function effectively.”

The sailors were impressive in their spirit and dedication. Waking up at six in the morning every day, they headed down to the marina and were out at sea by nine. They also endured countless cuts and bruises, swollen fingers and aching joints.

When one member nearly fell overboard, they pressed on to the end regardless.

But racing wasn’t all they did. Koh Shingli, 20, said the cocktail parties and dinners were a chance “to network with prominent figures in the sailing community, who were surprisingly unassuming” outside the sporting arena.

Describing the experience as “an eye-opener”, Joshua said: “I would definitely recommend sailing to anyone who wants to learn lifelong survival skills, build physical endurance, develop leadership, and have a great time.”

The writer is a student at the Singapore Management University.