

Chong's seventh heaven in China

Newcastle's Karen Chong has returned home with an impressive haul of medals after representing Australia in the ancient sport of dragon boat racing.

Chong was part of the national team, known as the Auroras, which competed at the International Dragon Boat Federation (IDBF) World Championships in China.

She claimed seven medals from the Senior C division, 60-plus age group.

In the two kilometre distance, Chong picked up two silvers (women's standard boat – paddling, and open standard boat – drumming), as well as a bronze (mixed standard boat – drumming).

Just a couple of days later, she added a bronze in the 500 metre mixed standard boat (drumming), before earning another silver (women's standard boat – paddling) and bronze (mixed standard boat – drumming) in the 200 metre section.

A silver medal in the 500 metre women's standard boat (paddling and drumming) rounded out her haul.

The Newcastle Hunter Dragon Boat Club member said it was a fantastic experience.

"It's the highest level of competition for dragon boats," she told *Newcastle Weekly*.

"In swimming, you have the Worlds and the Olympics – this is the equivalent.

"Twenty-four countries competed, and China put on a spectacular show; there was a big opening ceremony, they staged all of the events, and then the closing ceremony."

Chong, who took up the sport six years ago, underwent a rigorous selection process to qualify for China.

"It was my first time competing at that level, and it was a long campaign," she said.

"The length of preparation from when I first started training to when it [the championships] ended was about 16 months.

"I just love the sport, both the social aspect and the physicality – it's a very high-intensity sport."

Dragon boat racing has its roots in an ancient festival of contending villagers, which dates back to about 2,000 years ago in southern China.

It emerged, in modern times, as an international sport, beginning in Hong Kong in 1976.

For more information on the Newcastle Hunter Dragon Boat Club, visit dragonhunters.org.au

- Ben Murph



Newcastle Hunter Dragon Boat Club's Karen Chong has represented Australia at the world championships.

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