



## ROLEX SYDNEY HOBART WRAP

### Triple treat repeat for Wild Oats XI in Rolex Sydney Hobart

When Mark Richards and his *Wild Oats XI* crew burst off the start line in the 2012 Rolex Sydney Hobart, the right weather patterns for a race record and an overall win by a big boat were already destined; and Bob Oatley's 2005 record holder was odds-on favourite.

After last year's shock defeat by Anthony Bell's *Investec Loyal*, Bob Oatley and his *Wild Oats XI* crew vowed they would come back faster than ever, their light weather performance improved by new keel winglets, a retractable bow centreboard and a new Code Zero light weather headsail.

It is impossible to know if these mechanisms helped the super maxi beat her 1 day 18hrs 40mins 10secs record, in a new time of 1 day 18hrs 23mins 12secs, as the weather was never light long enough to test the theory.

The newly renamed *Ragamuffin-Loyal* did take miles out of *Wild Oats XI* in lighter moments, but could not keep pace when winds freshened.

In the end, *Wild Oats XI* repeated her incredible feat of 2005, winning the treble again, but not before some anxious moments.

She took 16 minutes and 58 seconds of her old record for the 628 nautical mile course, the only yacht to twice take the treble in the history of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia's race.

The only other yacht to deliver a treble was inaugural race winner, Englishman Captain John Illingworth's *Rani*, in 1945.

*Wild Oats XI* now boasts six line honours wins, just one short of *Morna/Kurrewa IV's* record seven.

*Wild Oats XI* scooped the pool, courtesy of a dream forecast in the 68<sup>th</sup> edition of the race. The Bureau of Meteorology's (BOM) Michael Logan had told competitors it would be a big boat race if they were there for the breeze transitions.

It was a bitter pill for other competitors to swallow, but all remained hopeful, because in this race, anything can happen.

Back to the start, drama was unfolding on Boxing Day morning. After extending the time limit for paperwork, two and a half hours before the start of the race, CYCA Commodore Howard Piggott announced that the Race Committee would not accept the entry of *Wild Thing*.

He said, "The decision has been made as a result of non-compliance with the Notice of Race, in particular NoR 4.1, dealing with documentation to be lodged and verification of construction requirements."

*Wild Thing* had undergone recent extensive modifications, including a new section of her hull that added 2ft to her overall length. The race rules require that a boat designer and builder provide declarations that the yacht has been built to ABS standards

“The Race Committee has worked with the owner of the boat, Grant Wharington, to allow him up to three hours prior to the start of the race to provide the documentation required. However, that has not been forthcoming, and the Race Committee has no option but to not accept the entry of *Wild Thing*,” the Commodore said.

Then *Ragamuffin-Loyal* was declared OCS at the start, but the Race Committee sought redress on the yacht’s behalf, as the proper procedure for individual recall was not followed. The international jury found in favour of *Ragamuffin-Loyal*, so no penalty was applied.

The start itself was spectacular. A 20 knot southerly pushed the 76 yachts out of Sydney Harbour under spinnaker quickly after Colin McLachlan, the only surviving member of the crew that steered *Solo* to her first overall victory in 1962 (his first ever Hobart race), fired the start cannon.

Characteristically, *Wild Oats XI*’s skipper Mark Richards pointed the 100 footer at the pin end of the line, and with precision timing, fired, leaving *Ragamuffin Loyal*, *Black Jack* (Peter Harburg), *Loki* (Stephen Ainsworth) and *Lahana* (Peter Millard/John Honan), to give chase.

Oatley’s yacht reached the turning mark in just over six minutes, the fastest unofficial time to-date. In fact, all but Bob Steel’s 2008 overall winner, *Quest*, exited Sydney Harbour within 20 minutes.

Problems sorted, *Quest* was last out to sea, but quickly caught up fellow TP52, Tony Lyall’s *Cougar II* from Tasmania, which had broken the Maria Island race record in December.

While the southerly was beneficial in the Harbour, once outside, yachties felt the brunt as they sailed straight into it, and was made worse by choppy seas and a big swell. Conditions were as predicted by the BOM, whose entire race weather forecast was sound.

Early on the first afternoon, the breeze swung east/north-east, so the fleet to sail a reaching soldier’s course. Wind dropped from 20-22 knots to 17, but the sea was still uncomfortable, until Geoff Cropley reported late afternoon from *Lahana*: “Things have calmed down and we’re settling in for a long port tack.”

*Wild Oats XI* led *Ragamuffin-Loyal* throughout the first afternoon and evening by 3-4 nautical miles, with *Lahana*, *Ichi Ban* (Matt Allen), *Black Jack* and *Loki* behind – all within a 7 mile radius.

At that stage, the 40 plus footers were sailing to their optimum in ideal conditions. Overall, Robbo Robertson’s *Lunchtime Legend* (Qld) led Roger Hickman’s Farr 43 *Wild Rose*, Geoff Boettcher’s 2010 winner, *Holdens Secret Mens Business* (SA) and the Beneteau 45, *Peugeot-Surfrider*.

Conditions changed around midnight. Geoff Cropley reported early the following morning: “The breeze went east and softened to 4-5 knots. *Ragamuffin-Loyal* took time out of *Wild Oats XI* during the lull.”

Adrienne Cahalan, *Wild Oats XI*’s co-navigator confirmed Cropley’s statement, adding: “We were constantly changing sails in yesterday’s changing conditions. The wind gradually shifted around to the north/north-east, and built in the early hours of the morning.”

The north-easterly was at 15 knots and built to 30 knots. Cropley reported after the change: Wild Oats is now about 30 miles ahead of *Lahana* and *Ragamuffin-Loyal* is around 20 miles ahead."

Behind its record by 27 miles, these are the conditions the leader and her cohorts were banking on; hard running across Bass Strait. It cost all some breakages and sails, but *Wild Oats* constantly logged 24 knots, putting her on record pace.

Abeam of Flinders Island, she was around 10 miles ahead of her 2005 record, and had to finish before 7.40.10am on December 28 to beat it. Around 32 miles behind, *Ragamuffin-Loyal* was also inside the record.

At 5.00am, *Wild Oats* was approximately 40 minutes behind the record, the nor' easter replaced by a weaker westerly.

But at 7.00am, the crew's hopes were revived as the boat picked up speed to 15 knots in a fresher breeze. Her original 8.30am ETA was upgraded to 8.00am, then 7.50, 7.36, 7.23 and 7.13 with 5 miles to go.

The breeze eased. Richards ordered a bigger sail up front, and although her pace slowed, she was fast enough to break the record. The tension aboard could be seen in every face.

Elated, Richards said: "We're all over the moon. How many places have this level of race with a fleet this size?"

"Last year we were beaten by *Investec Loyal* (now *Ragamuffin-Loyal*) by three minutes, which was very disappointing. This year we beat them by much more," he said of the 45 miles and over four hour gap.

"We'll be back next year," Richards declared. Bob Oatley concurred.

Of beating the old record, Richards explained: "We just kept chipping away. You expect it to be light in the Derwent and it did get lighter towards the end. This is a very testing event and the Derwent is very testing."

Along with the treble, Adrienne Cahalan finished her 21<sup>st</sup> Hobart, a Women's record, while team member Steve Jarvin sailed his landmark 25<sup>th</sup> race and made it a record 11 line honours victories.

Meanwhile, *Jazz*, Chris Bull's Cookson 50, and the TP52 *Calm*, skippered by Jason Van Der Slot, were hoping to spoil the treble for the Oatley's boat. *Jazz*, whose British owner races internationally, finished the race fourth overall last year and second in 2010, so anything was possible.

And despite being told the raced belonged to the big boats, *Calm's* co-owner remained confident, saying, "I've put together the best crew possible. Tactician Barney Walker and navigator Richard Grimes - a couple of Tassie guys for local knowledge. Our crew and the boat have perfectly prepared."

*Loki*, *Black Jack* and *Lahana* were still in contention, but as it happened, the breeze was slowly shutting down behind the top two, and further back in the fleet, a second strong southerly hit, with some reporting 52 knots.

*Loki's* crew did exactly what they did in 2011. Closing in on Tasmania, they sailed the rhumbline course and finished second overall.

"You can't be too unhappy with that," said a laconic Ainsworth, who collaborated with navigator Michael Bellingham and sailing master Gordon Maguire. "It was a similar last third to last year and it meant we also won the Blue Water Pointscore."

*Black Jack* and *Lahana* went wide, for third and eighth overall respectively, while *Jazz* and *Calm* were fourth and fifth. Van Der Slot was devastated. "The Tasman hasn't been good to us. We parked for two hours off Tasman Island and for an hour in the Derwent," he told.

"We watched *Jazz* come up to us under kite - they took 20 miles out of us finding their own private breeze. We only just beat them over the line - that was hard."

"We were aiming to finish in time to win - around 1.00am - that's the cruelty of it all. Up to Tasman Island, we were on track. It had all gone according to plan until then... We did everything possible to win this race."

*Ragamuffin-Loyal* was sixth and *Quest*, with tireless sailing master, Mike Green, who sailed his 34<sup>th</sup> Hobart (one less than his dad Peter Green), did a great job in finishing the race seventh overall and second TP52.

*Quest* was sailed with a mixture of the initiated and some young guys with little or no Hobart experience. They were among an encouragingly growing number of new blood this year.

Despite limited opportunities for the smaller yachts, the race and races within the race proved riveting, right to the finish line. There were some thrilling finishes and divisional fights to the end.

The first ever Lithuanian entry, *Ambersail* (Simonas Steponavicius) and Japan's *KLC Bengal 7*, match raced to the finish line, *Ambersail* the victor by six minutes on line when the Japanese ran out of air, but Japan the victor once the handicap was applied.

*Chutzpah* (Bruce Taylor), David Pescud's *Sailors With Disabilities* (with London Paralympic SKUD gold medallist Liesl Tesch sailing her second Hobart with Pescud), *Rikki*, the Kiwi entry of Ray Haslar (2012 Olympic 49er silver medallist Blair Tuke was aboard for his first Hobart), and *Peugeot Surfrider*, with Nicolas Lunven and his mostly French crew experiencing their first Hobart, also lunged for the line together.

They finished in that order, only 15 minutes separating the four which variously got caught in the dying breeze after nearly four days at sea.

For the record:

- Tony Cable sailed a record 47<sup>th</sup> race aboard *Duende* to finish 54<sup>th</sup> overall
- Tony Ellis sailed his 46<sup>th</sup> on *Ragamuffin-Loyal* with owner, Syd Fischer, the oldest competitor this year at 85, sailing his 44<sup>th</sup>. The two sailed their 40<sup>th</sup> together – a record
- Bill Ratcliff sailed his 44<sup>th</sup> on *She*
- Lindsay May sailed his 40<sup>th</sup> on *Love & War*, which he skippered to a win in 2006
- On *Aurora*, Jim Holley sailed his 25<sup>th</sup> and wife Mary her 16<sup>th</sup> – their final Hobart
- *AFR Midnight Rambler* co-owner, Bob Thomas, sailed his 25<sup>th</sup>
- Youngest crew was 18 year-old Australian, Cameron Johnston, on Kiwi entry, *Akatea*

- Five international crews; *Ambersail*, *KLC Bengal 7*, *Akatea*, *Rikki* and a mainly French crew sailing *Peugeot Surfrider*
- Only five yachts retired
- The ACT and every state of Australia was represented
- Last boat on line was Sean Langman's gaff-rigged *Maluka of Kermandie* – as it was last year. She was the oldest (80 years) and smallest (9.1m) yacht in the fleet
- Greg Scarlett held up a “Will You Marry Me” sign from the yacht *Local Hero* to Jane Beresford ashore. She said yes. The two met when they sailed the Rolex Sydney Hobart together on *Wave Sweeper* in 2010
- Bruce Taylor (*Chutzpah*) missed again in his 32<sup>nd</sup> attempt (his 21<sup>st</sup> Hobart with son Drew) to win the race overall
- In remission from cancer, 58 year-old Warwick Sherman climbed his personal mountain by adding a first Hobart race to his ocean racing resume and won Division 2 into the bargain with his *Occasional Coarse Language Too*.
- Roger Hickman (*Wild Rose*) had a nail-biting time waiting for *Love & War* to finish – the wait was worthwhile when Hicko won Division 4 from his nemesis. The two beat all Division 2 and 3 yachts overall
- *Living Doll's* crew showed extraordinary seamanship when they broke a rudder and were taking water on one tack, mid Bass Strait

So many stories, too little space.

**By Di Pearson, Rolex Sydney Hobart media**