



ROLEX SYDNEY HOBART YACHT RACE

NEWS RELEASE

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Sydney yacht racing to reach Rolex Sydney Hobart start line

Come-on guys admit it - we have all done a little bit of ploughing at some time. Maybe we cut a corner a little too aggressively, or relaxed a bit too much on a lazy twilight jolly - mostly it amounts to no more than red faces and a ribbing back at the club bar.

But when Tony Levett's Sydney 38 *TSA Management* kissed a rock during a run-of-the mill Wednesday afternoon fun race two weeks ago, it looked as though he had just blown his place in the nation's biggest yacht race of the year, the 2015 Rolex Sydney Hobart.

"Somehow the keel got stuck under the rock," he explains. "It took two Navy loading barges an hour to get us off. So embarrassing, and on a Wednesday afternoon! There were no sheep stations riding on it or anything."

When Levett hauled *TSA Management* out to check the damage, he quickly realised he needed a whole new keel. "I thought, 'That's it. We won't make the Hobart in time'."

However, he has found someone to build the new keel, and fortunately there was no damage to the hull itself. It will be tight, but Levett thinks he just might make it to the start of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia's 628 nautical mile race.

If he does, it will be the Middle Harbour Yacht Club member's 13th Hobart and his 12th in the hotly contested Sydney 38 one-design race within a race.

It took a Sydney 38, one of the smallest boats in the fleet this year, to get him back into Australia's toughest ocean race after a horror baptism.

"My first was in 1990," Levett recalls, "And it was the worst race I've ever done. It took us five days and I was throwing up for four of them. Between us, the crew managed to eat just one Mars Bar, we were so crook. It took 13 years before I did another one."

In the intervening years Levett did a lot of offshore racing with his Northshore 38. Then he chartered a Sydney 38 for a Sydney Gold Coast race. The rest, as they say, is history. He bought a 38, but could not get her ready in time for Boxing Day, 2003. He was there in 2004, though, and hasn't missed one since.

"With a 38 you want a bit of everything. We take three to five days to get to Hobart, so you know you will always get a southerly front somewhere.

"My ideal Rolex Sydney Hobart would be a 40 knot southerly the first day to slow the maxis down, then a good nor-easter across Bass Strait, and then another southerly just after we tie up in Hobart, to slow down the back of the fleet.

"We pretty much got that last year, but it still didn't stop Hicko {Roger Hickman} from beating us all in *Wild Rose*," he sighs.

"I much prefer one-deign racing too. You can see how you're going against the other boats in real time. Over the years we have had some fantastic duels," Levett says, having won the Sydney 38 division twice, in 2010 and 2011.

Of course, for years the late, great Lou Abrahams set the benchmark for every aspiring Sydney 38 skipper.

"He was just in a different class. Unbelievable," Levett remembers. "One year I thought 'I'll just follow him'. He headed out to sea to find the current, which can add 30 or 40 percent to your upwind speed over the ground in these boats."

"Sadly, our internet went down so we lost him. About 20 miles out we turned back, thinking we had missed the current, but we later learned that Lou had gone out 40 miles to pick it up. Lou always had time to talk to you: the nicest guy. He did so much for the class."

There will only be three Sydney 38s battling it out this year, the same as last year, among them Abrahams' last boat, now owned by class newcomer, Chris Mrakas.

Twelve Hobarts in a row - does that amount to an addiction?

"I always say I've done my last. I do get a bit seasick, a bit queasy, if I do too much down below. I enjoy offshore racing though, and each year we think, 'Well, the boat is well prepared, we might as well do it'. Maybe it is an addiction."

The Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race starts on Boxing Day, December 26 at 1pm AEDT. The start of the race will be broadcast live on the Seven Network throughout Australia, webcast live to a global audience on Yahoo!7 and live streamed via mobile.

By Jim Gale, RSHYR media

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TSA Management during last year's race - Credit ROLEX, Daniel Forster

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