



ROLEX SYDNEY HOBART YACHT RACE

NEWS RELEASE

16 December 2016

Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race: Maaate – have I got a tip for you

If you want to lose some money, you can always bet on the favourite in the Melbourne Cup, but if you want to maximise your chances of losing money, bet on a yacht to win the Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race.

Australia's premier yacht race is by far the most tactically challenging of the world's major ocean races; physically demanding on both yachts and crews, at times exhilarating and frustrating on the same day. It is cold, wet and exhausting and offering any number of opportunities for the afterguard to get it either gloriously right or badly wrong.

Still, if that spare change is burning a hole in your pocket, what are the odds? Let's start with line honours.

The 2016 race is shaping up as another epic at the front. There are four super maxis, each capable of smashing the race record: Wild Oats XI, Perpetual Loyal, Scallywag and CQS. Then there are four dark horses: Beau Geste, Black Jack, Giacomo and Maserati.

The boat to beat is Wild Oats XI, if only because she has won line honours a record eight times and won the triple crown twice; breaking the race record, winning both line honours and overall. She is, simply, the most garlanded yacht in the race's 71 year history.

Wild Oats XI may be 11 years old, but she is a radically different boat now than when launched. She underwent massive surgery last year when the boat was literally cut in half and a new longer bow grafted on. And though a torn mainsail robbed us of finding out just how effective the surgery was, there have been tweaks since.

Gone is the lateral hydrofoil installed a couple of years ago to stop the bow from digging in downwind. Skipper Mark Richards says the new, longer bow, with the mast stepped further back, has rendered the foil redundant, saving weight and improving her rating.

Judging by her recent performance in the SOLAS Big Boat Challenge, the Oatley family's Mark Richard skippered boat remains the fastest downwind - and is no slouch upwind either. If the winds are light to moderate from the north for long periods, the sleek, narrow Wild Oats XI will be hard to beat. And after retiring hurt last year, her crew will be motivated.

“We’re on a mission, to redeem ourselves, to ourselves, more than anything,” Richards says. “We were our own worst enemies last year and want to make sure we do a great job this year. Last year silly mistakes we never made before put us out of the race.”

Of course, the conditions most favourable to Wild Oats XI are also likely to suit the wily Ludde Ingvall and his radical CQS too. She is the 90 foot Nicorette Ingvall won line honours with in 2004, but she is unrecognisable now.

Lengthened, with a reverse curved bow, wings and a full canting keel, CQS is the most radical boat in the fleet. She is an unknown quantity, but her line honours in the Kiwi Round White Island Race suggests she is quick, in a race quite different to the Hobart though.

Stronger winds will suit the big, beamier, more powerful Perpetual Loyal and Scallywag.

Scallywag raced last year as Syd Fischer’s Ragamuffin 100, and while she had her share of problems, she showed plenty of speed. New owner Seng Huang Lee has extended the boom, fitted a larger mainsail and shaved off weight, so she is faster. David Witt drove the boat for Fischer and is skippering her again. He says she has never been better prepared.

When Perpetual LOYAL was first launched as Speedboat, she was billed as the fastest 100 footer in the world, but is yet to show that form in Australia, in part because she’s never had the conditions she craves, or she’s retired. That extra wetted surface on such a big, beamy hull, kills you in light airs. But upwind in a fresh breeze, she will run over the narrower boats.

“We are not an all-round boat, we have to accept that,” owner Anthony Bell says, “but we will play to our strengths.”

Bell has taken on some crew from last year’s line honours winner, Comanche, saying they have helped to really set the boat up. After two disappointing years, she showed doubters in last week’s SOLAS Big Boat Challenge Perpetual LOYAL that she is well and truly back.

“All of these boats have their strong points: at the end of the day it comes down to conditions,” Oats’ skipper says.

Last year every super maxi had major issues, including major foil and rudder damage from submerged objects. Those that completed the race anyway, mostly limped across the line.

A super maxi should arrive in Hobart first, but note the word should. Which brings us to Beau Geste and the V70s. Much longer odds, but in with a definite sniff if things go their way.

The V70s are fast, tough ocean racers, designed to be pushed relentlessly around the globe by uncompromising, professional crews. They are built tough, and frankly, they want a fast, brutal Hobart. Enough wind and no slowing down to hold together.

And then there is the New Zealand maxi Beau Geste. Bigger but lighter in many ways, the Botin 80 is less uncompromising than the 70s. Owner Karl Kwok characterises the Rolex Sydney Hobart as a coastal and ocean race, so unlike the reaching and running V70s, she designed to be fast in a range of conditions and wind directions.

The Hong Kong owner also believes they will be a bit quicker to make sail changes than the supers, so will be racing at 100 percent for longer than the super maxis. The boat has huge righting moment through her canting keel, not too much less than the 100 footers, so Kwok believes his boat is just as powerful to windward as them.

He raced her in the 2013 Hobart, finishing behind three super maxis and a V70, but ahead of another 100 footer and two V70s, and this when Beau Geste was brand new and the crew had only days to learn how to sail the boat.

Of course, last year, the American 88 footer Rambler was a revelation, at times leading all the supers in the dash for line honours until she damaged her starboard daggerboard. Kwok, though, is primarily interested in winning the 2016 Rolex Sydney Hobart overall. He did it in 1997 on an earlier Beau Geste, a Farr 49, on his very first attempt.

Picking the favourites for the Tattersall's Cup is even harder than picking a line honours favourite. There are a good 30 possible winners. Maybe more.

The typical race weather tends to favour the 50 to 60 footers. The TP52s are very competitive – there are nine. Paul Clitheroe won last year with his older TP52, Balance.

Matt Allen has yet to decide which of his Ichi Bans to take south, the TP52 or the Carkeek 60. He is unlikely to make a choice until the weather forecast firms up around Christmas Eve. Either way, both boats have had their share of wins.

And then former race winner Ray Roberts is back with his Farr 55, Hollywood Boulevard and Jens Kellinghusen returns from Germany after missing the podium by 38 minutes in 2013, this time with a newer Ker 56, Varuna VI.

It may well be the fleet will bash its way for two days, until the breeze swings to the north on Day 3. A slow race, favouring the backmarkers, old IOR boats like Love & War, and the Beneteaus. Or it could be a small boat reaching festival that 40ft Chutzpah was designed for.

Not to mention a flying first day northerly that blasts the super maxis down the NSW coast so fast everybody else loses contact. Suddenly the front runners find themselves on a completely different race course to the rest of the fleet.

The start of the Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race will be broadcast live on the Seven Network throughout Australia.

By Jim Gale, RSHYR media

ENDS

Photo Captions & Credit:

Chutzpah – Credit Andrea Francolini

Love & War – Credit Andrea Francolini

Official race website: <http://rolexsydneyhobart.com/>

Follow us on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/rshyr>

Find us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/RolexSydneyHobart>

Photos: Copyright free hi-res photographs from the 2015 Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race are available to registered media to download from: <https://pressroom.rolex.com/en/sports-and-culture/partnership-activities/rolex-and-yachting-news.html>

For further media information please contact:

Di Pearson, Rolex Sydney Hobart Media Director on +61 (0) 410 792 131