



ROLEX SYDNEY HOBART YACHT RACE

NEWS RELEASE

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Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race: That Viking spirit brings Swedes to Sydney

A somewhat unfocused 2015 racing season in Sweden is the reason Jonas Grander bought a boat he'd never seen in Sydney, and is about to embark on his first Rolex Sydney Hobart.

Grander has been racing his J109 for 10 years in the spectacularly beautiful, in summer at least, tranquil waters of Sweden. As the crew have got older and wiser, it has become harder to commit to a full racing season.

“We all have careers and kids now,” Grander says, so he decided that in 2016 he wouldn't try to do the usual 10 races, just four, cutting down the number of training days too: “We could do that because we have been sailing together for so long. We know the boat and each other so well,” he says. “And we could plan a long time in advance. That was the key.”

Then he had another brainwave. At the end of the season they would all do something a bit exciting and extravagant – and what could be more extravagant than competing in a race on the wrong side of the world - the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia's Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race.

“They thought I was joking at first, and a bit crazy, but eventually they realised that I was for real. By saying we were going to do this I set a level we all had to reach.”

Last December, Grander began looking for a boat to charter, but decided that wasn't what he wanted. “We didn't want to be crew on a boat that was skippered by someone else.”

Now he was going to buy a boat, sight unseen, for a race that is totally different to any race in Sweden. But what type of boat?

“We are not professionals, so we were not going for a grand prix racer like a TP52. We did not want a big boat because it is too difficult to handle. Bear in mind that we race a 36 foot boat at home. That's what we're used to.”

Eventually the Swedes settled on Veloce, an Elliott 44 which had come second in the 2013 Rolex Sydney Hobart, and had won three successive Melbourne Hobarts. They have renamed her Matador. “It is a solid boat, solidly built, and we can enjoy the boat even in rough conditions.

“At first we thought Veloce was race ready, but she wasn’t” Grander says, so he has had to manage a refit, including new sails, at a very long distance. Fortunately a good mate of his, a professional racing sailor, had lots of good contacts in Sydney.

Grander finally saw his Matador for the first time just 10 days before the start of the race on Boxing Day. Thank goodness he likes what he sees.

“We considered buying the boat and selling it after the race, but we’ve done such a good refit we might as well use it,” he says. The plan is to take Matador to Europe for the Rolex Fastnet Race, and to do one big race in her somewhere around the world each year.

So how does he think he will go in a very complex race like the Hobart against the locals who have been racing in it for decades?

“Our navigator is a very good meteorologist and computer engineer. Nowadays you can get so much knowledge from the internet. He has been studying the currents and conditions. We know now how important it is to be in the right spot.

“Whether we will do it right I don’t know. But our navigator proved he can get it right when he did the Fastnet with a couple of my crew, which is known to be a locals’ race. We have sub-divided this race into five different parts and studied each.

“We have a culture of racing in Sweden,” Grander says, “it stems from a long tradition going back to the Vikings and being a small nation dependant on trade. We have a very long coast and it is part of our identity to go out on boats.

“We have heard that the Rolex Sydney Hobart is a fantastic race but a bit rough. As we enter the race it has become more of a concern to us. Lately I’ve read so many stories about it; I’m not afraid, but I have a great respect for the race.

“Frankly, we have never sailed in these conditions, so it will be interesting how we react.”

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

By Jim Gale, RSHYR media

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Photos and captions:

Jonas Grander – Credit Andrea Francolini

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