



ROLEX SYDNEY HOBART YACHT RACE

NEWS RELEASE

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Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race: Southerly still the big question

Skippers and navigators of the 89 yachts competing in the 2016 Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race have received their Christmas Eve weather briefing from the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) at the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia this morning.

BOM's Jane Golding has told them the forecasts produced by the various models that meteorologists use, have been pretty consistent in recent days, confirming a fast start on Sydney Harbour in a brisk north-easterly, and that the breeze will strengthen throughout the afternoon as the boats run down the NSW coast.

It translates to spinnaker sailing in a 20 to 25 knot nor-easter on day one for everyone. This is when the super-maxis will streak away from the boats chasing them.

As expected, a big front currently lying in the Southern Ocean, south of Western Australia, will reach the southern NSW coast around midnight, turning the winds to the south.

The southerly will slow the super maxis first, and then make its way back through the fleet during the night.

How long the southerly lasts, and how strong it is, will go a long way to determining which type of boat will win overall, and whether the record is broken. Most likely it will be around 15-25 knots, lighter than was expected a few days ago, and great news for the sailors after last year's battering. One model is saying it could be even lighter.

A second front is also expected to move through Bass Strait on Tuesday, affecting the leaders, and there could well be some areas of very soft wind lying in wait when the super maxis get there.

By Tuesday afternoon, winds will start shifting around to the north again, and the spinnakers will get another outing.

The softening forecast would seem to favour the slimmer Wild Oats XI and CQS over the broader, more powerful upwind Perpetual LOYAL and Scallywag in the race for line honours.

"We liked the forecast from a couple of days ago actually," Perpetual LOYAL skipper, Anthony Bell said this morning. "We were excited by a big southerly, but it looks like we won't get as much of that.

"We're going to have to make some calls that could put us back, but could also put us further in contact with the other super maxis. Going down the Tasman coast is a lottery, light running suits the skinny boats, so we'll have to become more tactical.

"On the plus side, the theoretical weather and the real weather are often distant cousins. I don't think I've ever, even two days out, received what the forecast said it was going to be," Bell says.

As you would expect, Mark Richards, the cagey skipper of Wild Oats XI, is not counting any chickens yet. "It's never fun for anyone to get a flogging, so the latest forecast is good for everyone."

"All these boats (super maxis) are going to have their moments, so it's just a matter of who does a good job in their not-so-good moments."

And then there is CQS, Lutte Ingvall's radical 100 footer. The softer forecast will suit his slimmer boat, the dark horse of this race.

As Richards points out, he doesn't really know what to expect or how fast this boat will turn out to be. Neither does her skipper, Ingvall, who says, "We have a boat with lots of toys in the toy box and we have no idea how to use them yet."

Outright boat speed is always critical in the dash for line honours, but sail into a hole and even the fastest boat stops dead in the water. This will be a tactical race, and managing the transition Monday evening from brisk northerly to we-are-not-so-sure how brisk southerly – being in the right place with the right sails up – could be a game changer.

"The first change will be interesting. Whoever does a good job there, will get a good jump," says Scallywag skipper David Witt.

But all this is crystal balling. Whatever the weather eventually throws up, Witt pretty much summed up the Hobart race for all 89 skippers and crew: "Start at one o'clock and go south. It is what it is."

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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Photo Captions & Credit:

Panel at the press conference after the CYCA's Weather Briefing this morning – credit ROLEX/Daniel Forster

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