



ROLEX SYDNEY HOBART YACHT RACE

NEWS RELEASE

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Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race: Glorious Start to 72nd Epic

Sydney turned on a magic day for the start of the 72nd Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race, as crews and curious onlookers jostled along the narrow dock arms of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia this morning, it was clear that this was going to be one of those classic Sydney Harbour summer days.

By the 1pm start, the sun was blazing, a sweet 12 to 13 knot north-easterly sea-breeze had established itself, and god was in Her heaven – or maybe at the helm of Perpetual LOYAL.

Whatever happens out to sea, Anthony Bell and his crew owned Sydney Harbour. A great start, neck and neck with Scallywag, Wild Oats XI and CQS in the opening minutes, it all looked very close until Oats was forced to tack first as she approached the shoreline. On port tack, first she peeled off behind Scallywag, then behind Perpetual LOYAL, and then, shock horror, behind the 80 foot Beau Geste.

With Wild Oats XI struggling in fourth place, barely 3 minutes into the race, the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia's 2016 Rolex Sydney Hobart was already running against all pre-race expectations. A Hobart race is always more improvised jazz than aria, but just minutes into the race?

So now it was an upwind fight between Scallywag and Perpetual LOYAL, racing to windward in a fresh breeze. This is what Perpetual LOYAL was built for, and slowly she steamed away from her rival.

By the time Bell's big black super maxi closed in on the first mark, she was 10 or 11 boat lengths ahead of Scallywag. For the second year running, she would be first out of the Harbour.

Then, as Scallywag approached the mark, another dramatic upset. The 80 foot Beau Geste got the inside running, and passed the sea mark ahead of Seng Huang Lee's Scallywag. Karl Kwok's 80 footer representing New Zealand was second boat out of Sydney Harbour with three, count them, three super maxis in her wake.

This was becoming grande opera indeed. If nothing was going to plan for Wild Oats XI so far, CQS was having her own brand of stage fright. Suddenly this highest of tech yachts was on its side.

Owner, Ludde Ingvall, later explained that another yacht had come at them on starboard, forcing CQS to tack, but the big boat's engine stalled, so there was no hydraulic power to swing her big canting keel across in time, tipping the giant boat over dangerously onto her side, the crew frantically scrambling to release the keel manually.

Thank goodness this happened in the smooth waters of Sydney Harbour, but it was not the debut Ingvall had planned in front of hundreds of thousands of gawking Sydneysiders.

Behind all this drama, the fleet was tacking toward South Head. If the frontrunners were all about sheer boat speed, down the Harbour each helmsman had to carefully thread their way through a web of other equally determined, but cautious boats, buffeting their way through the traditional Sydney Harbour washing machine as an armada of spectator boats gunned their engines and chased the big boats.

Once around the first mark the Wild Oats XI crew decided it was time to put things to right. While Scallywag sailed straight for the sea mark Wild Oats XI lay off a few degrees. As she hardened up again at the sea mark it was nip and tuck, and again Scallywag found herself squeezed out by a rival.

As Oats popped her big Code Zero for the run south, Scallywag lost precious minutes continuing out to sea, a flogging headsail refusing to make room for their downwind chute.

Happily though, no damage was done and 2 hours into the race, crewman Andrew Crowe reported: "We're happy we had an incident free start and got out cleanly. Our small furling incident has been resolved and we are neck and neck with Perpetual LOYAL and Wild Oats. We're a little faster than LOYAL."

Trailing them is CQS, Ingvall. "We are somewhat underpowered at the moment," he reports, all the others have spinnakers and we do not, but it is still early stages."

CQS has also lost a piece of their radical new foil, designed to lift the boat out of the water at high speed, but Ingvall says the damage is "not a major issue."

At the tail end of the fleet the Russian entry, Simple sail Mahligai was also having a rather more complex sail than anticipated. Their second mainsail batten had somehow slipped out and overboard.

At first they considered heading back to the CYCA, but decided to press on. They plan to make up a replacement batten out of bits and pieces from below. A good old fashioned, seamanlike thing to do, but not conducive to modern high speed racing. The Sydney 46 crept out of Sydney in last place.

A short time later, Freyja, Richard Lees' 71 year old timber cruiser became the first yacht to retire, her headsail blew out just beyond the Heads, and she is back at the CYCA. Lees says everyone on board is disappointed but no-one was hurt and he is still determined to take Freyja to Hobart for the wooden boat festival in February.

Despite a fairly benign forecast, it is likely, unfortunately, that Freyja will not be the only retirement this year. As the start showed this afternoon, no Rolex Sydney Hobart ever goes entirely to plan on every boat.

Perpetual LOYAL, though, did sail exactly to plan in this opening stage. All the pundits have said she is the fastest of the super maxis to windward, and that is exactly what she showed. Unfortunately for Bell there isn't a lot of windward sailing ahead of her over the next day and a half.

In breaking news, Sibby Ilzhofer reported shortly after 5pm that her Farr/Cookson 47, Dare Devil had a broken rudder, making her the second casualty of the race. Eighty six yachts remain at sea.

By Jim Gale, RSHYR media

*****Ends*****

Photos and captions:

Perpetual LOYAL was the first boat out the harbour – Credit ROLEX/Kurt Arrigo
Today's start on the iconic Sydney Harbour - Credit ROLEX/Kurt Arrigo

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