

## 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Rolex Sydney Hobart – 2019

Race Report – Will Oxley, Navigator, Overall Winner *Ichi Ban*

The 75<sup>th</sup> edition of the Rolex Sydney to Hobart Race began in a 15-18 knot north-easterly sea breeze, with the large fleet of 157 yachts, setting off from four lines in Sydney Harbour. The tracks of the divisional and line honours winners are shown in Figure One at bottom.

The weather situation at start time showed one high-pressure system in the Tasman Sea and another in the South Australian Basin, with a stationary trough between the two highs. For the fifth year in a row, the fleet enjoyed fast running north-easterly winds on the afternoon of the 26<sup>th</sup> December. Winds built quickly to 25 knots by mid-afternoon.

The early evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> saw the front runners encountering the near stationary trough. The trough was aligned NW-SE and it was possible for the leaders to sail along its northern side in light winds while south-east winds were to be found on the southern side. Meanwhile, the smaller boats continued to enjoy good north-easterly running conditions. This was reflected in the progress handicap placings, with smaller yachts like *Enterprise* and *Katwinchar*, featuring well in the standings. Overnight, whilst transiting the trough, the leading yachts experienced wind holes and light winds, and these ensnared several handicap and line honours contenders. On the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup>, the two high-pressure systems merged in the Tasman Sea causing the trough to recede. Whilst all yachts experienced light winds, it seemed less painful for the smaller ones.

A large counter-clockwise current eddy was positioned 85nm east/south-east of Gabo Island with a favourable south-bound current to the west of it. All the leading yachts in each division seemed to setup to make the most of this positive current (See Figure Two).

The leaders passed south of the latitude of Gabo Island (into a loosely defined Bass Strait) around 0800 on the 27<sup>th</sup>, with the 50-66 foot pack entering soon after between 1000 and 1100 am. (*Komatsu Azzurro* entered around 2200 that night. *Calin Lomhara* brought up the rear, entering around 0700 on the 28<sup>th</sup>, and by this time in strong northerly running conditions.)

By 1100 on the 27<sup>th</sup>, the top half of the fleet was experiencing light-moderate (6-14 knot) E-NE winds, with the rear third in stronger 15-20 knot N-NE winds.

As the day progressed, the high moved east and strengthened, with a corresponding increase in the wind speeds from 16 towards 25 knots, and a left shift in the breeze to the NE-N.

The entire fleet enjoyed good running conditions throughout the night and into Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> December. The leading 100 footers were off the Tasmanian coast by 2100 on the 27<sup>th</sup>, with the leading 50-60's close behind at midnight- one am. At this time, the rear of the fleet was entering Bass Strait.

At 0500 on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> a second trough pushed through Tasmania just as the 100's were rounding or approaching Tasman Island. This trough slowed up, as the high to the east stalled, causing light winds for the yachts off Tasmania. *Comanche* drifted across the line first to take line honours at 0730am.

The interaction of the trough with the complex SE Tasmanian terrain created a very tricky weather pattern and the fine details of this were not handled well by the global meteorological models. Light and variable winds saw the leading 52's slow dramatically on approach to Tasman Island between 12-1400 hours. This brought smaller yachts like *Katwinchar*, and the Farr 40's *2 Unlimited* and *Enterprise*, back up the leader board as they enjoyed downwind running at this time.

Conditions for the handicap leaders *Ichi Ban*, *Gweilo*, *Envy Scooters* and *Quest* continued to be difficult in Storm Bay, with very little wind between Tasman Island and Cape Raoul. Further west, there was a split breeze with moderate southerly winds to the south (of a line west from Cape Raoul to Bruny Island) and a good SE breeze in the northern part of Storm Bay. There was an area of no wind between these split breezes. The prevailing theory for strategy in Storm Bay is normally to try to stay on, or north of the direct line between Cape Raoul and the Iron Pot, and this is what the majority of the 2019 fleet did.

*Ichi Ban* was one of only three boats to play the Bruny Island side of Storm Bay. While trying to avoid the no wind zone near Cape Raoul, she sailed into the building southerly wind with no wind between this breeze and the south easterly winds to the north. Consequently, *Ichi Ban* split from her closest rivals *Gweilo*, *Envy Scooters* and *Quest*. She used the moderate southerly to get west to Bruny then gybed north towards the Iron Pot in a freshening and backing S-SE wind, which carried her up the first third of the Derwent.

*Ichi Ban* crossed the finish line in good pressure at 1918hrs, followed by *Maserati* at 1931, then *Gweilo* at 1942, and *Quest* at 2159.

The evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> and the eastward progression of the trough resulted in headwinds off the Tasmanian east coast. This, coupled with light winds on the 29<sup>th</sup> December, put paid to the chances of any smaller boats taking overall honours.

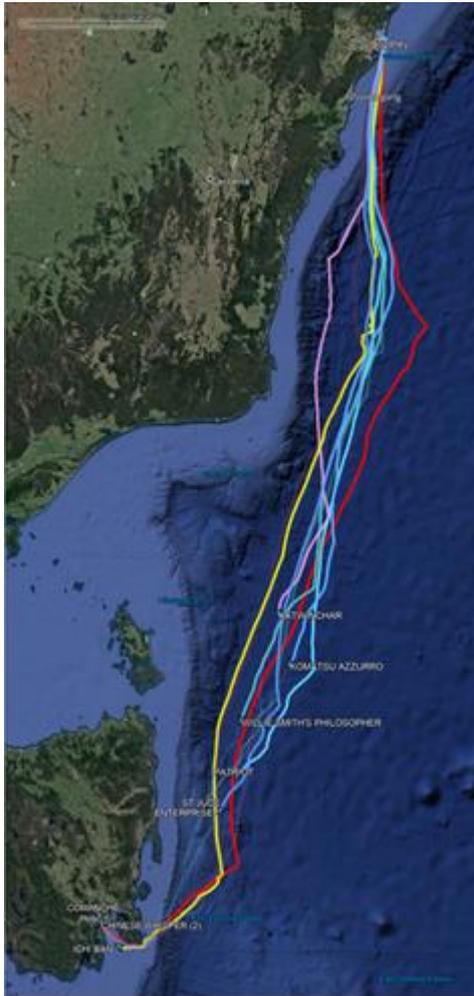
A nasty front passed over Tasmania on the evening of the 30<sup>th</sup> December and this saw some of the tail-enders seek shelter to let it pass.

Final IRC handicap placings were *Ichi Ban* 1<sup>st</sup>, *Gweilo* 2<sup>nd</sup> and *Quest* 3<sup>rd</sup>. There were 154 finishers and 3 retirees: an excellent result and an indication of the preparedness of the boats and crews in this 75<sup>th</sup> race.

### **Addendum: The 2019-20 Bushfires and Australia's Climate.**

The weeks leading up to and during this year's Rolex Sydney Hobart race saw terrible bush fires affecting large parts of Australia. Bush fires have long been a part of Australia, but the large decrease in rainfall across the SE of Australia and the long-term increase in the fire season associated with the warming climate meant these fires were without precedence. In fact, 2019 was Australia's warmest and driest year on record (BOM Annual Climate Statement 2019). According to the 2018 State of the Climate report, (<http://www.bom.gov.au/state-of-the-climate/State-of-the-Climite-2018.pdf>) , there are now more highs and fewer lows as a result of increasing mean sea level pressure in southern latitudes and "the increase in mean sea level pressure across southern latitudes is a known response to 'global warming'. The reduction in the number and intensity of 'cut-off' lows in the SE regions of Australia is attributed to this change in the climate. The majority of the rainfall in SE Australia comes from these cut-off lows (BOM 2018). The Sydney Hobart race weather is affected by the changing climate. Whilst they will still occur, the probability of intense lows on the racetrack and the strong 'southerly busters' the Hobart race is known for, have decreased.

**Figure One.** Screen shot of Google Earth showing tracks of all IRC Division winners (Ichi Ban winner: yellow; Katwinchar: pink), and line Honours winner Comanche (Red). Positions are for 1645 on 28/12/2019.



**Figure Two.** Screen shot of Google Earth showing tracks overlaid on SST image (with altimetry current arrows) of all IRC Division winners (Ichi Ban: black; Katwinchar: pink) and line Honours winner Comanche (red). The SST image was sourced from the Integrated Marine Observing System (IMOS) - IMOS is a national collaborative research infrastructure, supported by the Australian Government. (See [imos.org.au](http://imos.org.au)). Positions are for 1645 on 28/12/2019.

