

# 2015 Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race

Race Report – Nick Scott-Perry, Overall Winner *Balance*



The 71<sup>st</sup> Rolex Sydney to Hobart started in the predicted North Easterly breeze of 15-20 knots. The work up the harbour proved challenging for many. A match race between *Wild Oats XI* and *Comanche* let *Loyal* lead to the first mark, though she was soon overtaken by *Comanche* on the tight reach to the sea mark. The upwind work in tight traffic resulted in several race-ending collisions amongst the rest of the fleet.

Kites were set at the sea mark and the fleet charged South in a 20+ knot North Easter. *Loyal* eventually resolved their code zero issues and overtook all of the small boat traffic. As the afternoon progressed, the weather became affected by the approaching pre-frontal trough – extensive thunderstorms developed inland and the build up towards the Southerly began.

The first decision for most of the fleet came near 5pm as the wind started to move left towards the North West. Routing was suggesting for many that heading offshore would bring better current and pressure, though they would experience the full force of the oncoming front. Many division 0 and 1 boats went offshore, some – including *Balance* used the opportunity to gybe towards the coast and slightly more shelter.

The front arrived in the dark, so no ominous roll cloud appeared. Its imminent arrival was noted when the front runners slowed down to 5 knots. On *Balance* we ran towards the front with a full mast-head kite, 2 very well made reefs in the main and a #4 headsail hoisted instead of a staysail. The kite came down as the front arrived and all crew were on the rail.

The Southerly front built to 30 knots with gusts to the mid or high 30s. A long, noisy and wet night was had by many as the boats moved down the coast. For others, they were caught up in boat damage that led to the retirement of many boats. A disappointing, but drier run home to Sydney for them.

Southerly conditions persisted for the majority of the NSW coast – S-SSE offshore, S-SW inshore – and much of the way to Tasmania. *Balance* stayed close to the coast in the right hand breeze, and made good progress to Gabo by dusk on day 2, and then into the passage past Bass Strait.

By dawn the remaining competitors faced lighter conditions that allowed time to recover and repair from the previous 36 hours. Afternoon breeze along the Tasmania coast allowed division 1 and 2 boats to make good progress South, whilst the smaller fleet was caught in more variable conditions.

As the boats moved South, they moved towards the second cold front moving towards the fleet – only *Comanche* was around Tasman Island in time to miss this. The arriving South Westerly front came to the division 1 and 2 boats on the lower coast of Tasmania in the earlier hours of the 29<sup>th</sup>. Mid-size boats were sheltered by the lee effect of the Tasmanian mountains, whilst those at the back received the change as a Westerly.

The boats offshore in Southern Tasmanian waters faced a long and cold morning working straight upwind to Tasman Island in 25 knots. The boats that broke with tradition and chose to set up for the change closer to the coast were able to head South parallel to the coast on a tight reach in what was a lighter West South Westerly breeze.

For *Balance*, noon on the 29<sup>th</sup> brought us towards Tasman Island, where several boats were close to becalmed on the Western side. A slow, scenic beat towards Cape Raoul ensued. Once past Raoul, the South Westerly reasserted itself and quick progress was made across Storm Bay, and then stayed in as a 15 knot West South Westerly for a very fast run up the river.

For the smaller boats offshore, the breeze stayed in the South overnight, and then through the day on the 30<sup>th</sup> changed quickly to a building Northerly, rocketing the fleet down the coast of Tasmania and then across Storm Bay and up the River Derwent in good pressure. Between 2pm and 11pm on the 30<sup>th</sup>, 40 boats – more than half of the remaining fleet – finished in a flurry of welcomes and cheers from the Taste and dockside.

For *Balance*, having won our division on handicap, it was a tense, but seemingly hopeless wait in Hobart as strong afternoon breezes caused havoc in the harbour and surrounds. The luck of Storm Bay and the River Derwent was a disappointment for our handicap competitor *Quickpoint Azzurro* as the conditions first moderated, and then glassed out as the evening progressed.

The river effectively shutdown from 10 pm till 5am except for 2 finishers. Dawn saw the breeze return and 22 boats finish with a few hours – the very last boat *Myuna III* in by 9am. Fellow division 4 boat *Courier Leon* managed to slip into second overall, while *Quickpoint Azzurro* settled for third.

Handicap favoured the fast boats and the slow boats. *Rush*, the leading boat in Division 2, came in in 23<sup>rd</sup> spot.

The key to winning division 1 came in 6 parts. Boat preparation and planning on the day had us very ready for the first cold front. Staying close to the NSW coast had better conditions

and breeze angle than those offshore. Having enough materials on board to repair damage to boat and sails. Closing in on the lower Tasmanian coast once the second southerly arrived and inshore tight reaching, rather than offshore and beating to Tasman island. Getting to Tasman Island in the middle of the day. A fantastically fast run from Cape Raoul to the finish.

The key to winning overall? The weather systems put division 1 and 4 in contention. The smaller boats who looked likely to beat us for overall honours encountered the Derwent at night. Here the weather played a critical role with the Derwent breeze shutting down to effectively zero, two nights in a row.