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INSIDE *ICHI BAN* AND *COMANCHE*'S RECORD-BLASTING RUNS TO GLORY



HARSH LESSON

MARK RICHARDS ON THE DECISION THAT COST *WILD OATS XI* THE LINE HONOURS CROWN

PERSONAL BEST

FULL WRAP-UP OF ONE OF THE GREATEST HOBART RACES

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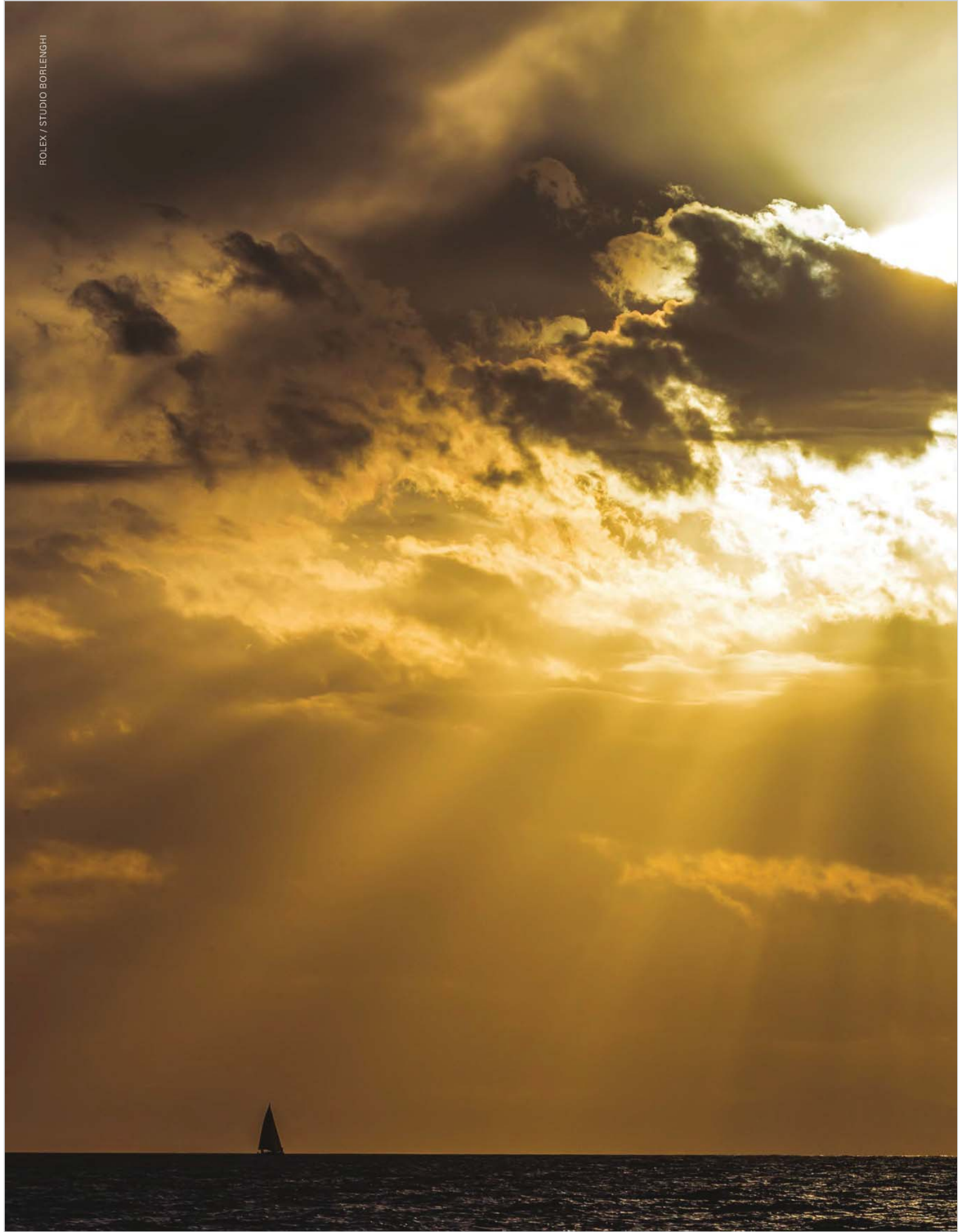
FEB/MAR 2018

\$9.95 (inc gst)

PP: 100007344



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73rd Rolex Sydney Hobart

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Race Round-Up



Fast & furious

A swag of records tumbled in a sleigh ride south but as *Di Pearson* reports, the race for line honours ended in the protest room.

Five yachts finished the 2017 Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race inside record time. Amid a throng of media and wellwishers, *Wild Oats XI*'s crew celebrated with sprays of Mumm champagne, but controversy followed when *LDV Comanche* lodged a protest against *Oats* – and robbed her of a ninth line honours victory. There were no such qualms for Matt Allen's *Ichi Ban* though, who was cleanly named overall winner after a close battle with two-time winner and her TP52 stablemate, *Quest* (Bob Steel).

Crossing the start line in the 73rd running of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia's 628-nautical-mile race were 102 entries, including 27 internationals (a record shared with the 2015 race).

The weather was dull, but the racing was anything but as a light easterly breeze set the fleet on its way. *LDV Comanche* jumped well off the pin end, but Peter Harburg's *Black Jack* was quick to respond, chasing the aircraft carrier down Sydney Harbour.

Later *LDV Comanche*'s skipper Jim Cooney acknowledged the importance of their good start. "We were away cleanly, with no damage. That really was goal number one," he recounted.

Other goals were soon in sight, but meanwhile, the Oatley family's *Wild Oats XI* was buried mid-line, and Christian Beck's *InfoTrack* was a little slow off the blocks, both trailing even the transoms of Karl Kwok's *Beau Geste* (HKG), Peter and David Askew's *Wizard* (USA), and the 66-foot *Wild Oats X*, skippered by Troy Tindill.

While all others were clear at the start, on the second line *St Jude*, *Smuggler* and *Jazz Player* were forced to return and restart after jumping the gun. Disappointed, Geoff Cropley commented from *St Jude* at the time: "We also lost all our instruments 12 minutes before the start (they repaired later); only our compass is working. We are sailing like dinghy sailors – by the seat of our pants."





DRAG RACE

Ichi Ban in the clear and setting the cracking pace that would deliver an overall victory.





SINGLE COMBAT *Wild Oats XI* and *LDV Comanche* left the other supermaxis in their wakes.

SPATIAL AWARENESS

Black Jack caught and passed *LDV Comanche* before the first mark, claiming the honour of first out of Sydney Heads, while *Oats* picked up pace. Mark Richards aimed her at the western shore, but when he tacked back, *Wild Oats XI* was on a collision course with *LDV Comanche*. The Oatley boat didn't tack in time, so Jimmy Spithill called protest from the helm and the red flag was seen fluttering from Cooney's boat as the top three headed south for Hobart. (At the first sked that afternoon, *Comanche* confirmed she was protesting *Oats*.)

With skipper Mark Bradford at the helm, *Black Jack* had carved a nice lead at the sea mark, but as the wind bent to the east/northeast, *Comanche* caught up and found the overtaking lane. Joined a short time later by *Wild Oats XI*, the two were to battle throughout the rest of the race for line honours.

General opinion expected *Comanche* to leave the fleet behind as she sailed in her ideal off-the-wind strengthening north-easterlies, but after her retirements in the past two battles, we finally witnessed the effects of *Wild Oats*' major modifications. An all-absorbing battle between the two ensued with *Comanche* in front, but *Oats* stuck to her rival like glue and never more than 16 nautical miles separated the pair.

Early that night, a man overboard was reported from *Invictus Games 2018 Down Under*, with Clipper entry *HotelPlanner.com* retrieving the man within 15 minutes. With only minor scratches, he was delivered back aboard *Invictus*. Later the rescuer received 120 minutes redress, which gave her the leg win from *Sanya Serenity Coast*, skippered by CYCA member Wendy Tuck.

By 8.50 pm and averaging 19 knots,

Cooney was just eight nautical miles in front of *Oats*. *InfoTrack* was a further three nautical miles astern, with *Black Jack* a further three and a half miles adrift. The 80-foot *Beau Geste* and last year's overall winner *Wizard* (then *Giacomo*), were another five miles astern, followed by *Wild Oats X* and *Ichi Ban*.

By evening, the predicted strengthening 20–25 north-easterly had begun to weave its magic on the two frontrunners and it was on as *LDV Comanche* increased her lead over *Oats* to 16 nautical miles. *Black Jack* was another 15 nautical miles away, with *Beau Geste*, *InfoTrack* and *Wizard* chasing.

RECORD DAZE

By mid-morning the next day, all six were sailing in a 25–30 knot north-easterly and aiming at *Perpetual Loyal*'s record from last year.

Comanche's lead had evaporated to 11 nautical miles as the two flew along the Tasmanian coast. *Wild Oats XI* had closed the gap during the morning despite ripping the top out of the headsail most suited to the conditions. Richards reported they had sailed bare-headed (mainsail only) for some time while the remnants of the damaged sail were recovered and a new sail set.

Comanche held the ace in strong winds, but ahead of record pace, neither gave way. At this point *Indian*, *Celestial*, *Quest*, *Rockall*, *Concubine* and *Smuggler* were top six overall, with *Ichi Ban* hot on their tails, but by lunchtime *Ichi Ban* led from *Wizard* with a challenge from *Quest* looming.

As the two super maxis sailed the final miles, they found light airs and parking lots in the Derwent. As we saw in 2014, the big wide *Comanche* struggles in light air, and so it was that *Wild Oats* grabbed every zephyr she could, kept moving, and overhauled her rival to cross the line first. Sailing in just one day, eight hours, 48 minutes and 50



Left: **PACK MENTALITY** *Quest* leads the TPs out of the harbour. Right: **SCENIC ROUTE** *Concubine* enjoys a stellar run past the Organ Pipes.





seconds and 26 minutes before Cooney's boat, she took four hours, 42 minutes and 30 seconds off *Perpetual Loyal's* 2016 time.

In fact, five yachts finished inside last year's record: *Wild Oats XI*, *LDV Comanche*, *Black Jack*, *InfoTrack* and *Beau Geste*. *Wizard* missed out by 12 minutes, but finished nearly two hours faster than she did when she won overall last year.

REVISIONIST HISTORY

In any sport, it's a shame when victory ends in the protest room, but that's how it was with line honours. Jim Cooney had signalled his intention early in the race and went ahead, winning the protest.

The international jury penalised *Wild Oats XI* one hour for the port and starboard incident, and it cost them a ninth victory. Instead, the new race record of one day, nine hours, 15 minutes and 24 seconds was established by *LDV Comanche*, bettering last year's record by four hours, 15 minutes and 56 seconds.

"It was an exhilarating race. Who'd have thought we'd finish in time to turn the Hobart into an overnighter!"

Jim Cooney, Owner & Skipper of LDV Comanche

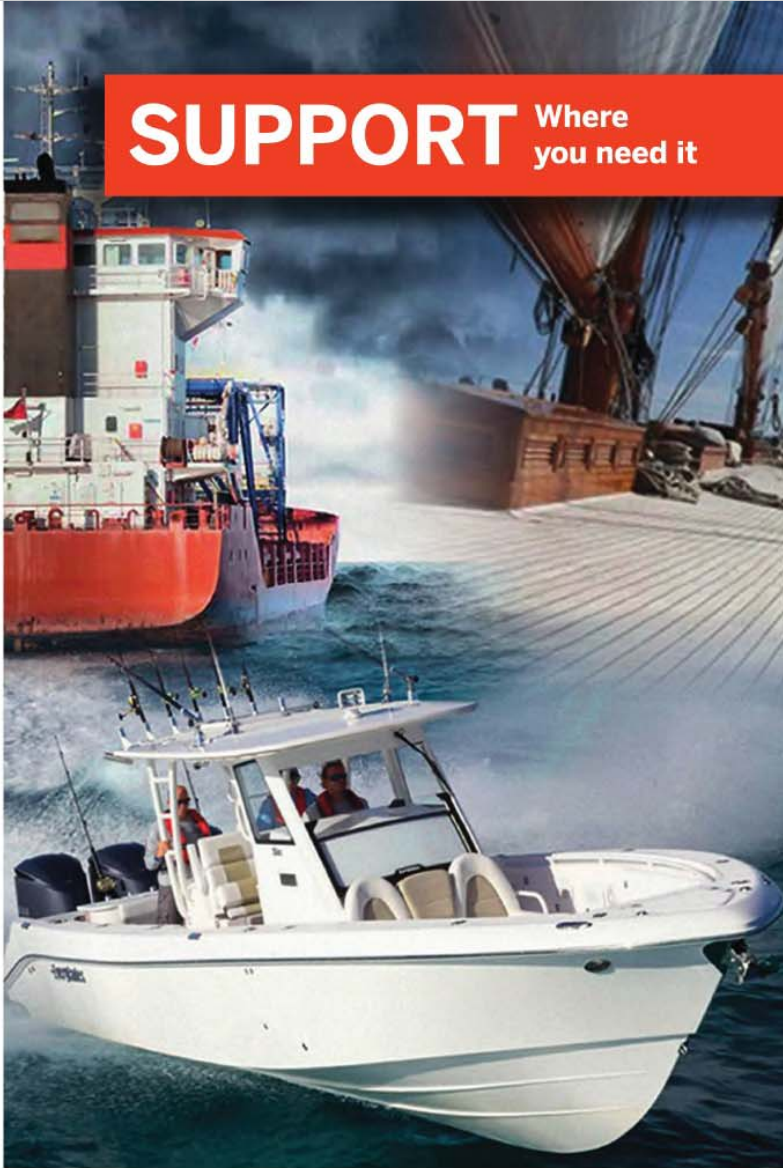
On the evening of 28 December, while the bulk of the fleet was sailing in a northerly wind, Jim Cooney and those of his crew still in Hobart were presented with the J H Illingworth Trophy, while Rolex Australia's General Manager Patrick Boutellier presented Cooney with a Rolex timepiece.

"It was an exhilarating race. I loved every minute of it," Cooney said. "The boat exceeded my expectations and who'd have thought we'd finish in time to turn the Hobart into an overnighter!"

"The result is a fitting testament to the crew and the potential of the boat. The guys were fantastic. Stan Honey is not just a navigator, he is *the* navigator. Jimmy Spithill, too, is brilliant. Nothing escapes his attention anywhere – on the water or around him."

A previous line honours winner in 2015 (on *Comanche*) and 2011 (*Investec Loyal*), veteran navigator Honey commented on his sixth Rolex Sydney Hobart: "Conditions suited *Comanche*, but it's always a challenge in a 100-footer in that kind of wind to sail the boat in such a way that you don't break stuff.

We had a lot of very good sailors paying very careful attention, and my decisions were geared to giving us the fastest passage."



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Difficult though it must have been, Sandy Oatley congratulated Jim Cooney on his win while Mark Richards accepted the penalty with grace, acknowledging, "That's yacht racing."

On finishing, offshore racing novice Christian Beck (*InfoTrack*) said: "It's hard, very hard, but worth it in the end. It was scary at times with a lot of stuff breaking. The scariest thing was the sail changes at night with big waves washing over the boat. It's one of those things that are more fun thinking about later than during the race."

THIN EDGE OF REASON

With line honours confirmed, the race was on for the Tattersall Cup, which was to be awarded to the overall winner along with a Rolex timepiece.

Throughout the race, *Ichi Ban*, *Quest*, *Mascalzone Latino* (Italy), *Wizard* and the 40-plus-footers *Chutzpah* (VIC), *Patrice*, *Concubine* (SA), *Smuggler* and *Indian* (WA) flirted with the top five placings, and although it may have looked like an easy sleigh ride, it was not the case:

"Everybody always says that when it's off the wind it's a fast and easy run but really, it's very tough," Ray Roberts commented from his Farr 55, *Hollywood Boulevard*.

"It's probably the most dangerous angle for these boats. We had boat speeds of 30 knots and if someone happens to get knocked overboard, or falls overboard, it's hard to go back and pick them up. You have to be very cautious, and sometimes sail a little conservatively, but still keep pushing the boat."

Many had their share of drama, including Bob Steel's *Quest*. A broach under spinnaker cost them dearly – perhaps the race – when Mike Green and Adam Brown were thrown, and Green took out the port steering wheel. Others, including *Ichi Ban*, blew up spinnakers, while rudders and



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CLOUD NINE *Wizard* settles into the groove, making her run south.

other damage were reported throughout.

But when Matt Allen docked his new TP52 on 28 December after 01:19:10:20 days at sea, he knew he was in good shape. And while he waited to see if any of the smaller yachts could beat his time, the Australian Sailing president celebrated *Ichi Ban* breaking the conventionally ballasted record set by *Brindabella* (George Snow) in 1999 (by one hour and 36 minutes), and the under 18.5 metre yacht record set by *Yendys* (Geoff Ross) in 2008.

Finally confirmed the following day, Allen slowly came to grips with his first win in the 628-nautical-mile race as a boat owner: "It hasn't sunk in yet. It's been 34 years since we

won on *Challenge II* with Lou Abrahams. In 1992 I finished second with *Morning Mist* (Alf Neate), but this is special because it's my boat.

PURPOSE BUILT

"I've been planning this race since about 2001. I've built a number of boats, including the Farr 52, and in a way the Volvo, to do it. Then I built the (Carkeek designed) 60-footer, then bought the original *Shogun* and modified it.

"This time I tried to find a boat that fit the formula and could compete in lots of conditions," he says of his new TP52, launched in time to convincingly take line and overall honours in the Newcastle

"I can't tell you how pleased we are – I had a great crew this year; they worked hard,"

Tony Kirby, Owner of *Patrice*



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Left: **STAR POWER** Ben Sinton wrangles the bow requests on *Celestial*. Right: **SWEET REWARD** Tony Kirby and his *Patrice* crew charged home to a third overall in IRC.





DERWENT SPEEDWAY *Triton* and *Koa* battle it out as they power into the river.

Bass Island Yacht Race in mid-October. *Ichi Ban* is lighter than her fellow TP52s. Allen says, "The first thing I built this boat for was ocean racing, and especially the Rolex Sydney Hobart. It's the premier event. Everyone follows it and knows the winners of this race. It's been a long-held passion to win it since I did my first in 1980 at the age of 17."

Allen says putting the right crew together is paramount. "Gordon Maguire and I have been sailing together since 2002, and I originally sailed with Hicko (the late Roger Hickman). You have to get it right and have the right sort of ingredients for good camaraderie.

"The guys just worked so hard. When we had to put the pedal to the metal, we had to steer the boat at high speeds without comprising the integrity of boat."

Going into the first evening, *Ichi Ban* had a bit of a margin on her contemporaries, but next morning the crew blew out the A3 and A6 (reaching and heavy air spinnakers respectively). "It slowed us down," Allen said.

"With our backs against the wall, we had to come up with the goods to bring the boat home."

Allen's main rival *Quest*, also a TP52, finished second overall, just 21 minutes behind *Ichi Ban* on corrected time. Bob Steel commented: "Matt deserves to win – it's his 28th Hobart. I've had my share (2002 and 2008 with two different boats), so I am disappointed for us, but happy for Matt!"

An incredible boat, *Quest* won the race in 2008 and again as *Balance* in 2015, and was fourth overall as well as top Division 1 boat last year, and still managed to clinch first in ORCi from *Ichi Ban*.

Meanwhile, Tony Kirby was thrilled with third overall on his Ker 46 *Patrice* as it makes for his best result from 10 Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Races as an owner. The result also made him the 2017 Blue Water Pointscore champion, which Noel Cornish's *St Jude* had lead coming into the race.

"I can't tell you how pleased we are – I had a great crew this year; they worked hard," Kirby said.



CROSBIE LORIMER

LOCKED ON

Beau Geste prepares to shift up a gear.

ALL OR NOTHING

Foreign entries cleaned up IRC Division 0, with *Wizard*, *Mascalzone Latino* (Vincenzo Onorato) and *Beau Geste* taking the top three places – 20 years after Kwok won the race overall with a smaller *Beau Geste*.

Further down the course, Warwick Sherman (*Snowdome Occasional Coarse Language Too*) recalls being belted by a southerly. "I heard boats only seeing up to 26–28 knots – we saw 42. I decided we needed to look for more pressure, but I was sorry I

made that call. When we got into the river, there were just zephyrs. That was hard because we'd lost all our instruments by then," he said.

Sherman, who has just gone a second round with lymphoma, set out to finish the race and raise awareness for the Snowdome Foundation – and won the Corinthian division into the bargain.

On the smallest yacht in the fleet, 9-metre-long *Maluka* owned by Sean Langman, crew Erin Cameron said, "Like others, we had park-ups, but came screaming home in 35 knots of southerly."

And so it was down the fleet. The bulk of the race sailed in a nor'-easter that later clocked to almost due north, then, as is usual at some stage, the second half of the fleet found themselves in a stiff southerly and nothing at all.

Tony Ellis crossed the finish on *Triton*, becoming the second man to reach 50 Rolex Sydney Hobarts behind Tony Cable. Ellis praised "the fantastic owner who was prepared to put it all on the line, upgrading the boat and putting on new sails.

"Jacko (old mate Jack Goluzd), Gotzey (co-owner David Gotze) and I were very hard on putting together a very, very good crew. It was one of the happiest and most go-fast oriented crews I've been lucky enough to sail with," he said.

"We didn't want a sleigh ride on *Triton*, but you have to go with what you're given. We've got a boat that is a good all-rounder, great upwind and good in up to 18–20 knots downwind. With the TP52s and so on – skiffs on steroids – we don't have any answers for them in a sleigh ride and it's very obvious.

"We had a great race down the river though with *Koa* (Andy Kearnan/Peter Wrigley's TP52). We'd run out of breeze; she'd run out of breeze. The front was coming down and she'd hit it like a twin-turbo racing car when a gust hit. But upwind (*Triton* has been reconfigured by Andy Dovell), we had it. It's a really good boat."

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

The last boat home was *Freyja*, after Richard Lees pulled into shelter along the Tasmanian coast, but she still finished at 8:09:59 on New Year's Day. And while there were some retirements – *Blunderbuss* (broken boom), *Imalizard* (dismasted), *Jazz Player* (HF radio not operational), *Opt2Go Scamp* (sail damage), *Rockall* (broken rudder) and *Wots Next* (broken rudder bearings) – overall, the race delivered once again.

Find all the news, results, photos, video and more on the official race website: rolexsydneyhobart.com. ⚓

