

2014 Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race

Race Report – Jennifer Wells, Navigator, Overall Winner *Wild Rose*



The Bureau of Meteorology was pretty spot-on with its pre-race weather briefing just prior to the start of the 70th edition of the great race south, the Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race.

With a record number of entrants, boats competed fiercely at the starting line for that small tactical advantage that could mean so much by the time they cross the finish line in Hobart. Spinnakers competed with Code Zeros in an amazingly quick run-down the Harbour in a fresh southerly that must have been as thrilling for spectators as it was for the nerves of the crews scrambling on deck.

Once past the turning marks outside the heads, the fleet spread out as crews tried to settle in for an uncomfortable afternoon and evening with a very chopped up seaway. The SE breeze freshened to 25+ knots against a strong running East Australia Current. Retirements due to damage came fairly quickly during the radio position schedules.

As the distance between the fleet extended, the bigger boats had very light conditions for a long period of time when south of Green Cape and the mid-sized boats were also becalmed back near Montague Island.

While the conditions were light along the east coast of New South Wales for most of the second day, later in the evening the smaller boats did start to pick up some northerly wind which slowly filled in across the fleet.

The conditions were lighter than expected in Bass Strait and the mid-fleet spent much of the day searching for extra pressure in and around Gabo Island. Meanwhile the smaller boats

were gaining extra northerly pressure which increased steadily throughout the second night and third morning.

For the back end of the fleet, the breeze began to build from the north and there was almost champagne sailing helped by 2-3 knots of southerly current that ran to the top of Flinders Island - although well offshore. Trying to hold spinnakers down the coast of Tasmania became increasingly difficult as the breeze continued to build to fresh to frightening for the smaller boats. The mid-sized boats had enjoyed some fast running conditions near the bottom end of the race course while the larger boats had light winds across Storm Bay.

The final leg across Storm Bay and the Derwent was perhaps the most challenging for many competitors. Radios reported winds in excess of 50 knots and the mid-fleet experienced everything from 0-50+ knots from all directions of the compass other than the predicted westerly.

Generally the 2014 Rolex Sydney Hobart was a very complex race with regard to weather. It certainly had a slow middle and fresh following winds down the Tasmanian coast. These conditions may well have assisted *Wild Rose* being a smaller boat and *Chutzpah* being a fast running mid-sized boat.