

2023 ROLEX SYDNEY TO HOBART RACE REPORT

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NAVIGATOR OF OVERALL WINNER 'ALIVE'



Figure 1: Alive approaching Tasman Island 28th December 2023 (courtesy of ROLEX Kurt Arrigo)

The 2023 Rolex Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race will be remembered as one of the more difficult Hobart races to forecast in the week and days leading up to the start on 26th December. The uncertainty of the race forecast was due to the high temperatures and high humidity in the weeks leading up to the race on the east coast of Australia which continued right through Christmas and up until the start day.

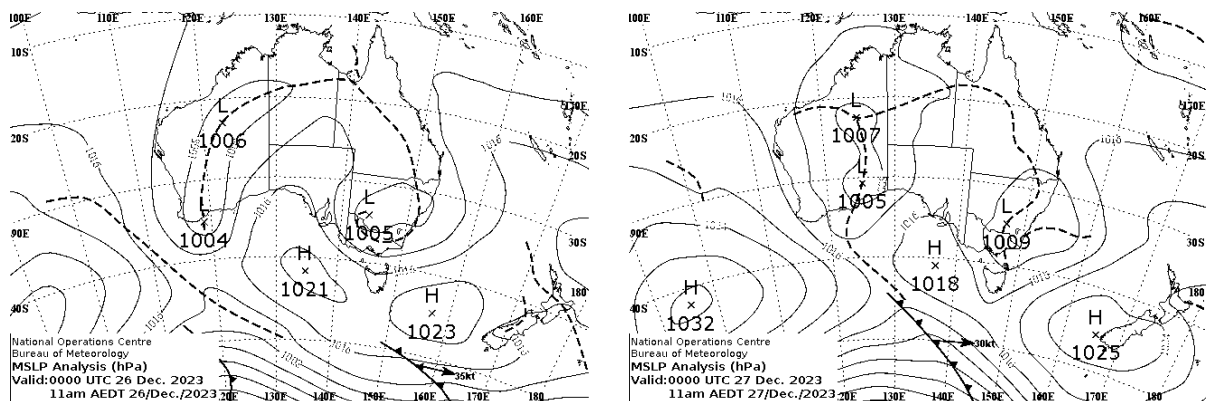


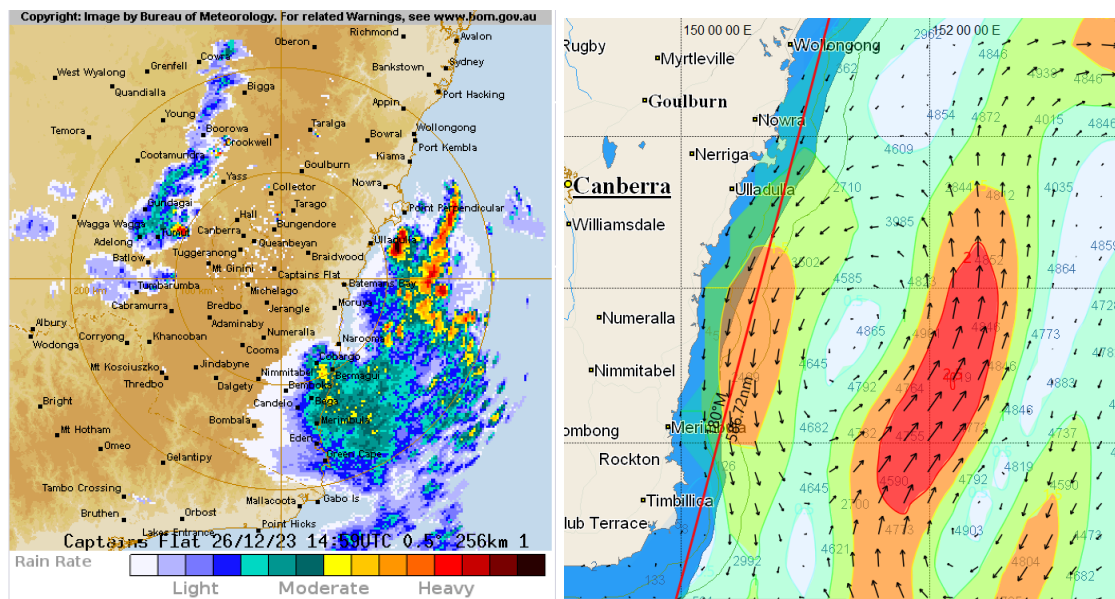
Figure 2(a) & (b): Synoptic chart for 26th & 27th December (courtesy of Bureau of Meteorology)

At 11am on 26th December 2023 a 1005Hpa low pressure was centred inland NSW (Figure 2(a)) and the question for the fleet was where the centre of the low would be situated as it moved east across the race course on 26th-27th December and which would determine the conditions for the fleet on the first night and early part of the race. It was the difficult conditions on the first night that largely shaped the outcome of the race and those yachts that committed to a course well east of rhumb line including the 100 footer maxis (*Andoo Commanche* and *Law Connect*) and mini maxis (*Alive*, *URM* and

Money Penny) achieved the top 5 placings on IRC and line honours and enabled *Alive* to be in a position to secure the overall win.

The weather at the start in Sydney Harbour was unsettled, a thunderstorm crossed the harbour in the hour before the start. When the gun went, the 100+ strong fleet allocated to 4 start lines reached down the harbour, through Sydney Heads and into the open sea. The fleet was warned to brace for difficult conditions the first night as thunderstorms and strong winds were forecast for the NSW coast overnight 26th-27th including the potential for heavy rainfall, lightning, poor visibility and hail. As forecast, the larger yachts saw less of the storm than the slower yachts in the fleet as they were able to sail more quickly offshore and avoid the worst of it on the NSW coast.

The maxi and mini maxis had the option to avoid the squall activity on the NSW coast overnight 26th-27th by sailing a course more south-east rather than south on the rhumb line and sail around the squall line (*Figure 3(a)*). The course south-east kept the maxis and mini maxis including *Alive* in E-NE winds overnight 26th-27th rather than SW winds onshore as well as being outside the squall area on the NSW coast. The decision to sail the offshore course south-east needed to be made promptly by the afternoon of the 26th and while the maxis and mini maxis committed to the course offshore, several yachts elected to set their spinnaker and sail rhumb line inshore which although had more favourable current (*Figure 3(b)*), proved costly. Yachts under 60 ft who had fewer options to avoid the squall activity on the NSW coast were able to take advantage of favourable current but were unable to avoid the squally and unsettled conditions which enabled the mini maxi such as *Alive*, *URM* and *Money Penny* to get a break offshore particularly away from the TP52 fleet which were favoured to win overall on corrected time.



Figures 3(a) The squall line inshore at 0200 on the morning of 27th December (Bureau of Meteorology www.bom.gov.au) *and* *Figure 3 (b)* grib showing favourable current on NSW coast and unfavourable current offshore (grib courtesy of CSIRO and application courtesy of Expedition marine software)

By early morning 27th as the maxi and mini maxis entered Bass Strait, the trough had moved offshore (*Figure 2(b)*). Unfortunately *Alive* was unable to avoid 3 hours of 25-30kn SW winds 0600-0900 associated with the squall line as it moved east however we sailed fast on a course due south which meant that by 1000 on 27th December we were back sailing in E-NE winds while the rest of the fleet inshore faced upwind or variable conditions on the NSW coast. The maxis were on a course slightly inshore of the mini maxi battling unsettled conditions as they sailed south which enabled the mini maxi to keep their time on the 100 footer maxi.

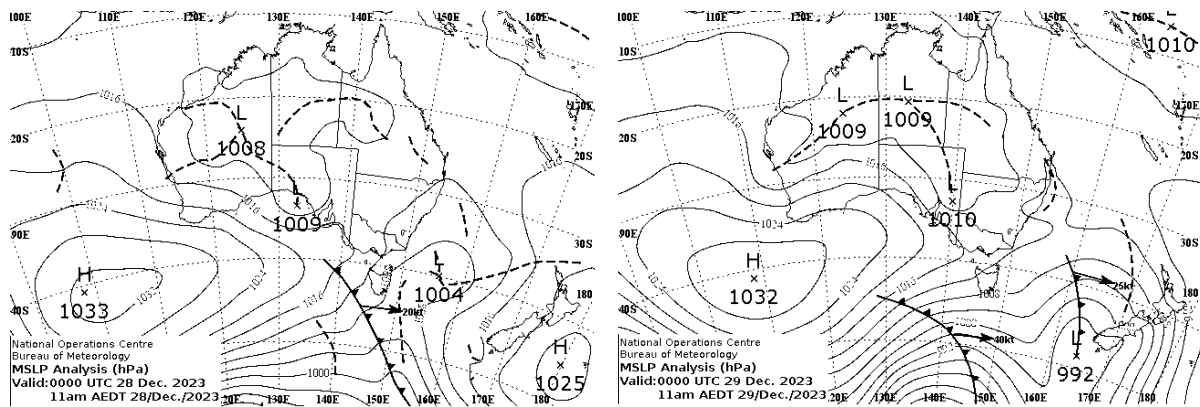


Figure 4(a) & 4(b): Synoptic chart for 28th & 29th December (courtesy of Bureau of Meteorology)

On 28th- 29th December the next weather system to watch was the approaching front which would bring south-westerly winds around Tasmania and Bass Strait. The front crossed Tasmania during the day on 28th December *Figure 4(a)*. On 27th-28th December, the maxis and mini maxis took the option to stay well offshore in the E-NE winds until Tasman Light bore around 250° so that they could lay Tasman Light when the front passed on the morning of 28th December.

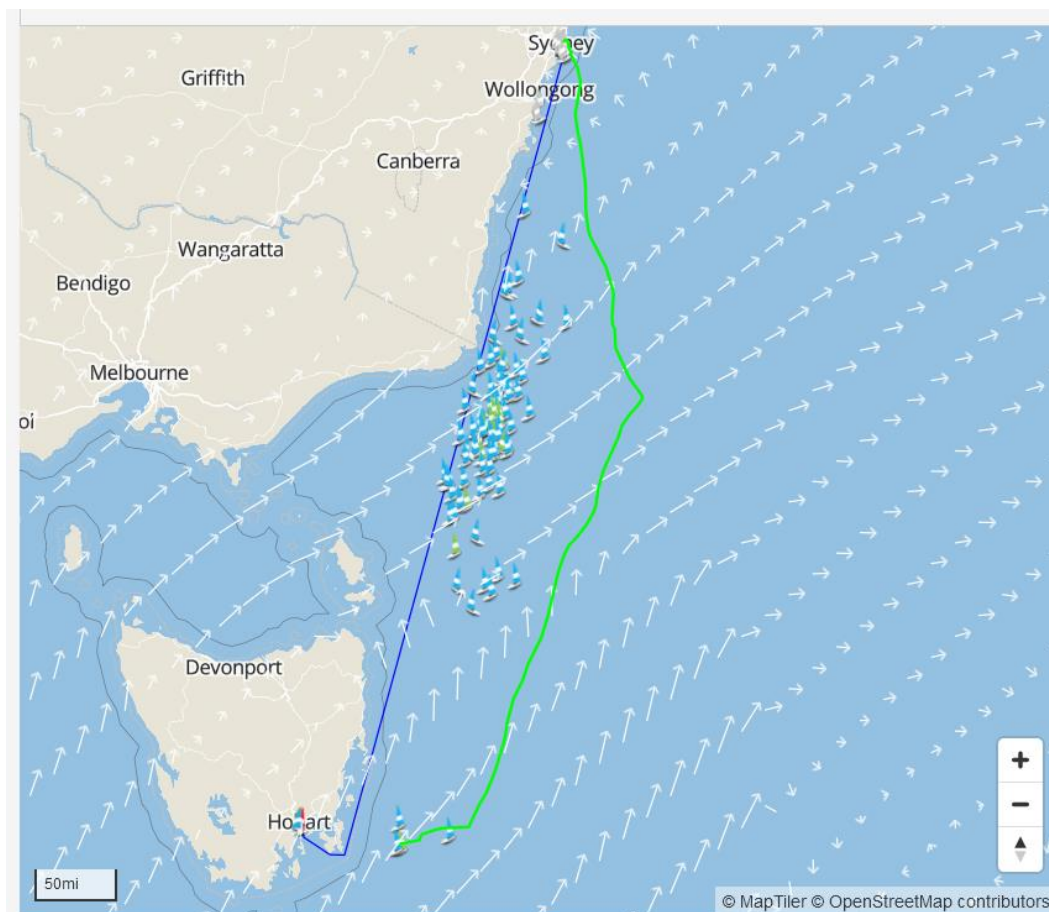


Figure 5 CYCA Tracker showing the course of our yacht 'Alive'

The SW change met *Alive* 50nm from Tasman Light at around 7.30am on 28th December. We only had 50-60nm of upwind sailing before rounding Cape Raoul and reaching across Storm Bay in a strong SW wind and into the finish. *URM* who were close to us on corrected time but 9nm in front at the Iron Pot at the entrance to the Derwent River, sailed into a light SE wind in the Derwent River and were becalmed

on the eastern shore. We had been watching the observations in the Derwent River and making the best of a consistent S-WSW wind, we sailed rhumb line favouring the western shore of the Derwent and in doing so caught up to *URM. Alive* only experienced calm winds in the last 0.5nm before the finish and so was able to take the overall race win from *URM* in 2nd place. *Moneypenny* secured 3rd place which showed that the offshore course taken by the three mini maxis and maxis was the winning move with the two 100 footers securing 4th and 5th place overall.

By 29th December the SW winds were well established on the Tasmanian coast (*Figure 4(b)*). On 30th-31st December a 1028Hpa high moved east and was centred in the Bight (*Figure 6(a)*) bringing strong SW-WSW upwind conditions for the remainder of the fleet at sea in Bass Strait and on the Tasmanian Coast. Several yachts reported gusts of up to 50kts rounding Tasman Island and it was these tough upwind conditions that meant that the smaller yachts in the fleet had no chance to beat the mini maxis on corrected time.

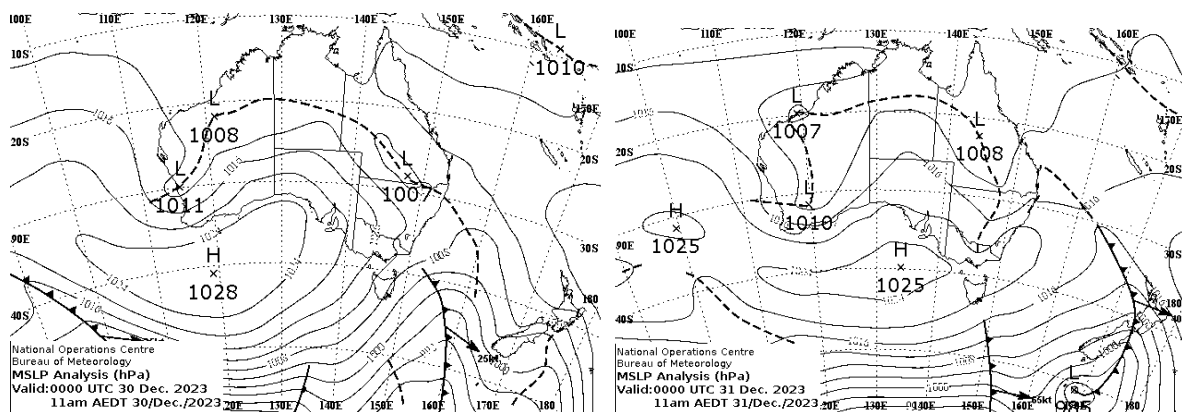


Figure 6(a) & 6(b): Synoptic chart for 30th & 31st December (courtesy of Bureau of Meteorology)

In summary, the range of weather conditions throughout the race meant that there was a large gap from when the first 6 yachts had all finished by 6.10pm on 28th to the 7th yacht who finished 19 hours later at 1.10pm on the 29th December. Only 6 yachts finished on 28th December, 12 yachts finished on 29th December and the majority of the fleet finished on 30th December (45 yachts). By 31st December, 81 yachts had finished the race and only 4 of the 85 finishers remained at sea in the new year with the last yacht *Sylph VI* finishing in the morning of 3 January 2024.