

Epsilon and the 57th Sydney-Hobart Race

Fred Tromp

Included in the 75 starters were eight Volvo 60s as part of their Round the World Race, incorporating the Sydney to Auckland leg. Eighteen boats retired because of broken masts, other gear and delamination of the hull. *Volvo Tyco* was disqualified for not reporting at Green Cape that she was fit to cross Bass Strait.

Our 37 ft Van de Stadt *Epsilon* was 39th across the line, 12th in the IMS Division of 37 and first in IMS Division C, a fleet of 13 boats.

Yes! A trophy at last! Hooray!

The result was a brilliant triumph for my nephew, 30 year-old Michael Tromp, builder, owner and skipper, after a fifth and fourth place in the last two races. For those who don't know, Michael took about 3,000 hours over three years to build the boat in his Dad's garage at Goolwa. He did this after recovering the use of his arms, which had been paralysed after a botched heart operation.

We again had a crew of eight, including RSAYS Commodore David Henshall. For the third time I was navigator, trimmer and co-helmsman.

We saw the big waterspout, over 200 m in diameter, which much featured on television and in the papers. It was about 12 nm off our starboard bow, but we did not get the same close encounter as *Nicorette*, which had her mainsail shredded by the force of nearby winds. The associated thunderstorm had massively spectacular lightning, and we got one gust of 60 knots. We were not too hard pressed by that, as we had already reduced sail. We felt somewhat sombre at the implications for tragedy playing out ashore, as our decks were blackened by ash falling from the sky from the extensive NSW bushfires. The pall of smoke completely blotted out the sun for two hours before sunset.

As co-navigator and radio operator I found the new requirement for three radio skeds a day (instead of the former two) a bit demanding, especially as the 6 Meg frequency didn't work well in the afternoons and at times it took an hour-and-a-half to get through one. We tried successfully a watch system of 3 x 4 hours by



Michael Tromp, owner-skipper of *Epsilon*. (David & Dee Henshall)

day and 4 x 3 hours at night, with four crew members each time. This worked much better than the straight 6 x 4 hours we had used before. With daylight saving in the high latitudes this meant that we had only one 'black' watch, from 0000 to 0300, which was rotated between the two watch teams.

Overall this turned out to be a much easier Sydney-Hobart Race than the last two. We averaged 6.7 knots to finish in only 4 days, 7 hours 50 minutes, which was a whole day less than before. Although we had our fair share of 'inclement weather' (and why is it always night time when exciting things happen?) none of it lasted long, and we did not encounter true 'on the nose' conditions for any great length of time.

The race started in Sydney Harbour at 1300 hours on Boxing Day, 26 December 2001, in abysmal conditions for sailing. There was almost no wind, which, with the sloppy seas from the hundreds of spectator craft and a flooding tide, made the trip out to the Heads somewhat of a

challenge. The rest of the race mostly had good winds, with not much over 40 knots.

The first three nights and two days were sailed close hauled, mostly on starboard tack, and saw us across most of Bass Strait with only a few tacks. Tactical tweaking of the strategy we had drawn up just before the race saw us make optimum use of the wind and the East Australian Current. The first three days required many sail changes — reefing the mainsail up and down and changing headsails — to match sails to wind conditions and obtain optimum speed. Doing this in boisterous conditions took a fair bit out of the crew, particularly since half of them were seasick for at least the first two days (but luckily not me). But spirits remained high, even if the food intake was a bit down. Also, this time we at least had the moon for company at night.

Two-thirds across the Strait, and 120 nm from land, we were able to get slightly off the wind, as the wind associated with the passing front from a 990 mb Low passing S of Tasmania had a fair bit of Win it. When we were about 30 nm off the coast and abeam of St Helens, we had a shy kite run for nine hours. With 3-4 metre seas on the beam this was fast and lively. Michael had always wanted a spinnaker run down the Tassie coast, so at least he got this one. Eventually, with darkness setting in and after the third broach the

kite was replaced with a very stable poled out No 3 jib. The reach straight down the preferred course continued for another five hours into the night. Michael was so enthralled he declined offers from others to take the helm from him. Around midnight, SW rain squalls associated with the front set in, taking away our friendly moonlight. The pole was taken down, and we were back to triple-reefed main and storm jib for a hard rainy windward slog past Schouten Island in the pitch-black night.

Due to the fabulous previous day and night conditions, at the 0400 radio sked on 30 December, down near Maria Island, we were provisionally placed 4th overall in the IMS Division! But dawn the next morning saw the wind progressively drop out, and after rounding Tasman Island early in the afternoon, we were frustratingly becalmed for four hours in Storm Bay (how ironic!). That put paid to the 4th placing and we returned to 12th.

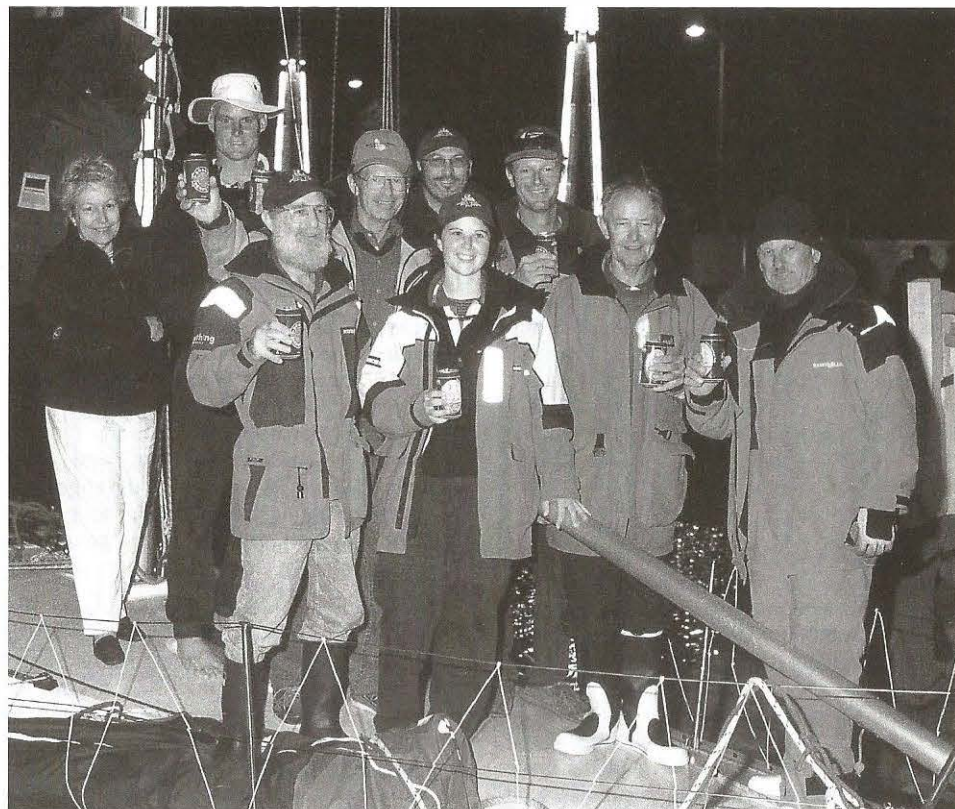
Eventually a sea breeze filled in nicely. Too nicely, actually, as we tore our masthead 0.5 ounce spinnaker. This had been loosely draped and flogging round the mast and rigging for some time in anticipation, and we tried to retrieve it after a light cord 'sheet' parted. We very quickly put up another spinnaker. (We had seven spinnakers aboard this time!) Then we had a dream shy spinnaker run across the



The Management Committee wishes to thank the dedicated band of volunteers, led by the Commodore, who committed themselves to relocating chain-moorings from January to May.

Marina Stage III
Construction commenced!

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Epsilon in Constitution Dock. Front Row Fred Tromp, Amy Jordan, David Henshall, Rod Becker. Back Row: Dee Henshall (welcoming them to Hobart), Michael Birks, Jack Tromp, Lyndon Bartlett, Michael Tromp. (David & Dee Henshall)

remainder of Storm Bay and all the way up the Derwent River, averaging 8 knots from the Iron Pot to the finishing line. We crossed with spinnaker up in fading daylight at 2050 hours on 30 December, which was 24 hours better than last year. There was much applause and cheering from many onlookers, family and friends as we entered Constitution Dock in the gathering dark. It was a splendid finish to a great race!

The good result is put down to a basic good design by Van de Stadt; a very strong and well built boat (wood/fibreglass sandwich and no delaminating here!); meticulous preparations for soundness of the boat and rig; sail inventory; a lot of collective sailing experience, with much learned on all fronts from the first two

Sydney-Hobart Race campaigns; and great teamwork, with a crew (including a female member) who had worked together before. Four of them race regularly throughout the year and five were common to all three Sydney-Hobart Races. We all remained amiable and good companions throughout the often cold, hard and wet conditions.

All ably skippered and led by young Michael, of course!

Epsilon arrived back in Adelaide on Sunday 13 January, after a round journey of 2,870 nm. On 20 February I set sail on the replica of Captain James Cook's bark *Endeavour* from Hobart to Rio de Janeiro on a non-stop ten-week voyage via Cape Horn. SD

Reprieve's Adelaide-Lincoln win

David Barnfield

Weather conditions for this year's Quin's Blue Water Classic Adelaide-Lincoln Race were ideal. The 72-boat fleet started in a fresh 20-24 knot SSW for a hard beat to Henley, followed by a port tack to Marion Reef. The wind moderated to 14-17 knots and veered during the leg along the foot to Cape Spencer. Although it lightened, there was enough to keep leaders and back markers moving in the right direction all night.

On *Reprieve* we had our usual conservative start and enjoyed the 'sprint' to Henley in plenty of breeze, with full main and No 2 before rolling a short reef in the main off Grange. Once round the buoy at Henley, we laid the course to Marion Reef. It was a great night on the water: clear and warm, and the seas probably favoured *Reprieve* with her heavy displacement design, but may have slowed some of the lighter boats.

Around 0500 we changed to a bigger headsail and waited until the sun was up before setting a

kite abeam West Cape. Luckily we were able to carry the spinnaker to Dangerous Reef and finish under genoa with the breeze staying in.

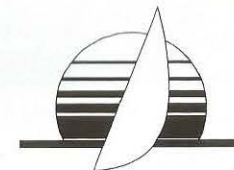
Being a 41 year-old timber yacht with a waterline length of 24ft, *Reprieve* has a generous handicap. Combining this with excellent crew work and attention to helming proved decisive. Crew Eric Taylor, Kate Jennings, Michael Fuss and Adam Tassicker deserve a special mention, as we all met as a team for the first time on race day. While three of us had sailed together before, Adam and Michael were last minute replacements who agreed to come along at very short notice.

It was fantastic to win overall and everyone was pretty excited. So excited in fact that only Kate managed to get to the presentation on time, making a fine impromptu speech.

The teams' trophy, claimed by the Squadron, was an unexpected bonus we were privileged to share with far more seasoned campaigners.

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