

Enchantress By John Willoughby OAM

ENCHANTRESS sailed all the way from Adelaide to Sydney for the 2020 Rolex Sydney Hobart Yach Race only to have it cancelled as we arrived. I then had to scarper back to Adelaide to avoid hotel quarantine. The crew moved her to Brisbane and trained in her for the 2021 Race. Due to border closures, I was only able to visit once, for the South East Queensland Qualifying race.

When Queensland borders opened, I sailed her from Brisbane down to Sydney, doing maintenance as we sailed. In Sydney, we passed all the audits except we didn't have the Satphone hardwired with a permanent external aerial. That was brought over by crew member Paul Craig on Christmas Day and wired in. During the audit on Christmas Night, the lid of the battery box was inadvertently left loose.

We started on Boxing Day with high hopes as we believed the forecast suited *Enchantress*: a smack on the nose to sort out the weaklings, followed by a drift where we pay only half the 'parking fines' of the big boys, and then a downwind gallop to the finish like we had when we won the Melbourne to Hobart Westcoaster race in 2010. However, at 2300 hrs on the first night when the second front arrived, our electrical system suddenly shut down while we were peeling jibs under the foredeck light. In the ensuing mayhem, the mainsail was holed by halyards that broke free, and a reefing line plus a jib car were broken. We were worried by the unexplained electrical failure so we returned to Sydney to sort it out.

Meanwhile, all our delivery sails were on a truck bound for Hobart so we tried, unsuccessfully, to find a replacement mainsail. We also had to stand in pouring rain for six hours to get a new PCR test to be allowed in to Hobart. Two of the crew caught COVID-19 from that lineup.

We set off again using only a jib topper and the storm trysail to get to Tassie in front of a 34 kt north-easterly wind, and hit speeds of 16 kts with our tiny sails. Nick came down with Covid on 3 January so we had to remain isolated. However, Nick has a son in Hobart who collected our delivery sails and dropped them and some food supplies to us on the Dunalley jetty. We sailed on down the D'Entrecasteaux Channel and around to Port Davey for two nights, and then up the west coast of Tasmania to the Gates of Hell, and



Enchantress flying its racing trysail with Melanie and Nick

then King Island and Portland. We finally sailed into Bay of Shoals, Kangaroo Island for another PCR test. Nick remained positive while Joe and I stayed negative. We left Nick isolating in Reeves Cottage while Joe and I sailed *Enchantress* home into RSAYS on 16 January to complete a 2,000 nm adventure.



Inukshuk By Rob Large



A sunny blustery day offshore

excitement that I think could never end; the ever-changing sea states; sleeping soundly while feeling the comfort of the rocking or pitching boat; being alone on watch and not having to share the moment.

The memories come and go, like the events of any sea voyage, in no particular order. The chronology doesn't matter, and that too is the magic of being at sea.



Secret Men's Business (Geoff Boettcher) dicing with Ichi Ban (Matt Allen) Photo: Down Under Sail

THIS year I sailed the first Lincoln Race for a long time without my own boat. Following the sale of *Aikin*, Geoff Boettcher had invited me back to *Secret Men's Business* for the season, which I have thoroughly enjoyed. The latest TP52s are something special – 20 years of evolving design to unparalleled levels with 15 crew, all 100% engaged in getting around the course and sailing to their optimum.

My job was trimming jibs up breeze and offside downwind trim. I was keeping an eye on the weather but not to the usual fine detail. In all honesty, I was looking forward to simply turning up and taking my part on the boat to perform as perfectly as I could in response to whatever the conditions that were dealt to us.

But like much of the last few years our friend Covid, with the associated restrictions and management thereof, had dealt us a blow 24 hours out. Steve Kemp was declared a close contact and was in isolation for the period of the race. Geoff called for Tim Cowen and myself to cover Kempy. The answer was an enthusiastic 'Yes!', but of course this left us little time to prepare both physically and mentally for the sprint to Lincoln.

The focus was to immerse ourselves in the intricacies of the weather, routing, boat navigation and the communication setup, as well as thoroughly considering and understanding the variables and opportunities on the race course in relation to the routings and weather drivers. It's fair to say, I'm glad the sunshine was on my side as I had sacrificed time spent packing and neglected plenty of things in my kit bag.

This year was a very pleasant race, as the wind was stronger than expected and nicely further in the east. For us, it was all about another chance to race against the current international offshore boat of the year and reigning Hobart winner, Matt Allen's *Ichi Ban*, and to make amends after being previously defeated by Nick George's *Another Hooligan*.

We got one of those jobs done, but *Ichi Ban* was just too good. The professionalism and knowledge they've developed as a team leaves no room for hesitation let alone mistakes in competition. They deserve every accolade and outcome they have earned.

The race had four distinct parts to it: the leg to Marion (Edithburgh), the leg along the foot to Cape Spencer, the leg from there to Donnington leaving Dangerous Reef to port, and then the short sprint into the the harbour around Boston Island to the town jetty and the finish line.

The first leg was a beat with the expectation that the breeze would ease as we got further away from the land. The effect of the metro shore kept the boat pressed and fast well below the rhumb line knowing (hoping!) we could lift and lay the corner. No matter how many times you have competed in this race, you always doubt yourself at the half-way point, knowing that if you don't lay the mark your race is as good as over. This year was no exception, further exaggerated by a large incoming tide creating about a six degree knock to our course.

We made it around with a larger than usual lift and set off for the reaching blast along the foot. These things boogie so quickly

I never saw the light at Cape Spencer on approach this year before they turned it on!

From there, it was a VMG run. Once we avoided the reef, we headed to the north of Cape Spencer, taking advantage of a favourable tide valley and playing the shifts across to Dangerous Reef into Donnington. We had to navigate the north-east rocks off Wedge Island and the two tuna-pen tow boats that were moving across the race course.

Ichi Ban had stepped out to a 5 nm lead at the top of the run and *Another Hooligan* had eaten into us. We had not quite nailed our reaching combination and we paid heavily. The shifts and pressure variables on the leg to Donnington offered us the chance to extend on *Another Hooligan* and take a little time back from *Ichi Ban*. At the finish, we had compressed into them a little less than 4 nm, and had our time on *Another Hooligan*. I remembered my two most important tasks as navigator: to ring Janine Kemp at Donnington to turn the oven on for the post-race pasties, and then again at the finish for their delivery.

It was a swift race and we had a blast racing the essentially high performance one-design boats. The party on arrival, as always, didn't disappoint. It was great to catch up with many great people who are brought together through this and many other yacht races over the years.

The regatta was a fantastic experience, with close racing on the flat shifty water of the bay in one of most welcoming towns I know.

I'm a little biased, but do yourself a favour and put it in your calendar for next year.

