

5 MINUTE READ

FACING THE DEEP JOSKO GRUBIC

from Groundswell June 2020
by Cruising Yacht Club of South Australia



Who was the only yacht owner to have skippered 28 Sydney to Hobart races? Who, until 1994, had sailed the most miles in his own yacht – some 255,000 miles? Who built the largest racing yacht of the time in 1974, Anaconda II, heralding the era of the Super Maxis? That extraordinary fellow was Josko Grubic, a remarkable yachtsman, a member of the Royal South Australian Yacht Squadron and the Cruising Yacht Club of South Australia, who should to be remembered and revered but who has all but disappeared from history. He was a man of unbounding ambition and drive whose story and achievements ought to be an inspiration for us all. I first met Josko in 1982 when I came to Adelaide from my home town of Hobart looking for work and hoping to crew on a yacht in the Blue Water Classic, a dream of mine since childhood. I landed a job with a yacht builder and asked the owner if he knew of any yachts that might need crew for a Sydney to Hobart and he gave me Josko's phone number. The phone call with Josko ended in the vague offer to "come down to the boat on Saturday and we will see what you're like". From then on, I had the pleasure... and the pain... of sailing with Josko on Anaconda II for several years including the 1983 Sydney to Hobart as well as the 8,000 mile sail from Fremantle to Heard Island, Australia's most southerly island in Antarctic waters, and back again. During the long, cold days and nights on this expedition, Josko told me of his life. He told me that as a child in war-torn Yugoslavia he dreamed of owning his own boat, a passion that had driven him to build, not only Anaconda II, but three other yachts, Marina, Adria and Anaconda I. Josko told me of his escape from Communist Yugoslavia and his arrival in Australia as a poor immigrant who saw opportunity in transport engineering and how he built this business up from scratch making him rich and able to fund his passion for boats. Well, almost rich enough. Josko confided that Anaconda II had almost sent him broke and cost him his marriage and almost his life. A true selfmade man and, as it appeared, a jack-of-all-trades, or so Josko liked to think of himself. There was nothing he couldn't make or fix. Marina, Adria and Anaconda I were steel hulled, each one bigger than the previous and Josko told me how he wanted a boat bigger again and decided in 1974 to build Anaconda II in fibreglass and foam despite being told by so-called experts that it wouldn't be strong enough for racing.

Anaconda II



In the 1977 Sydney to Hobart Race Anaconda II, skippered by Josko, came fourth on line honours. Josko described the building of Anaconda II as both pleasure and pain, then recalling how the then Premier, Don Dunstan, intervened and arranged for the Harbours Board to supply, at no cost, a large floating crane to lift Anaconda II's hull on to the keel and when Josko was seriously injured when a weld holding the weight of the hull sheared and a steel beam hit Josko fracturing his skull, right hip, left leg and some ribs. Undaunted by these injuries and worried about finishing the yacht in time to compete in the Sydney to London leg of the Whitbread Round the World Yacht Race, Josko was back on deck, as it were, lowered in a wheelchair to supervise the stepping of the mast. On 23 December 1975 Anaconda II left Sydney Josko choosing to sail a course much further south than the other contestants and he rounded Cape Horn on 9 January 1976. Anaconda II crossed the Equator on 5 February and reached the finish at

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Dover on 8 March. Quite an amazing achievement for a man almost crushed to death only months earlier. He returned to Australia having passed through the Panama Canal and crossing the Pacific and landed in Sydney in late November to face his next quest, the 1977 Sydney to Hobart Race, with only five weeks to prepare. In this race Anaconda II was fourth over the line and 59th on handicap. Again, a remarkable achievement for a yacht that no-one thought would sail and a very determined man at the helm. I have been researching Josko's story for the past 11 years and feel it should be a movie, not just because of its historical value, but because of the inspiration behind Josko's achievements. Josko's character was eccentric to say the least. Maybe outrageous, bombastic, loud, controversial, extreme and confrontational are better words but all this I've come to realise makes good movie drama. For a few years now I've worked with some movie people and sunk a lot of my own money into the development. It wasn't until recently that I finally secured a relationship with a highly experienced international filmmaker with Hollywood connections and the script is coming together. If Josko can have a dream, a dream of the impossible, and then with a lot of tenacity actually make it happen, then we all can. My dream is to make a movie about all this but to do it I realise that the spirit of his determination and ambition needs to be harnessed by everyone on the production. I remember my first trip with Anaconda II to Heard Island. Yes it was an adventure, but it was also gruelling and terrifying at the same time. Now embarking on this movie is like a similar adventure and just as terrifying. I remember Josko insisting that I dive into freezing icy waters completely bare chested to untangle a rope wrapped around the propeller. Holding my breath and facing the cold deep waters was the perfect preparation to try and embark on making this movie story. That's why we're calling it 'Facing The Deep'.



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