

AUCKLAND TO FUKUOKA, JAPAN RACE REPORT

Tim Edkins with his yacht BOHEMIAN CHIEF almost won the Auckland to Suva leg of the Auckland to Fukuoka, Japan Race on IOR. Unfortunately about 120 miles from Suva he broke a check stay causing the mast to whip forward and break a lower spreader. This destroyed any chance of a place and the eventual IOR winner of the first leg was a super light Yamaha built Farr 40 that rated the same as BOHEMIAN CHIEF and was behind at the time of the spreader failure.

Many Squadron members will never have heard of Tim Edkins or his latest boat BOHEMIAN CHIEF. I met Tim through motorcycle racing around 15 years ago. My first memory of him was seeing him sliding down the bitumen at Philip Island after falling off his Yamaha TZ350.

This would have been around 1977 and long before any of us had thought about yachts or yacht racing.

When motorcycle racing finally seemed too silly to continue, Tim and Rob Harrison, who is currently sailing on MORE WAR GAMES bought a Duncanson 29 called PALDARI and went cruising. After selling his share in PALDARI, Tim went to WA, purchased a Carter 37 that was to be eventually called BOHEMIAN and sailed her back to Adelaide.

We sailed BOHEMIAN in the Melbourne to Hobart and started what seems to be a history of rigging failures. In this race BOHEMIAN suffered a broken forestay about 80 miles out from Hobart. We finished, however it was a long slow day spent nursing the boat over the finish line.

Tim and Rob Harrison then sailed BOHEMIAN in the Melbourne to Osaka Two Handed Race. They broke a shroud in Port Philip Bay and had to significantly re-rig the boat before starting. This race started an interest in a number of Australian and New Zealanders in racing to Japan. The Japanese organised such a great party when they got to Japan that many of the competitors

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really wanted to go back again. A significant number of sailors from the Melbourne to Osaka Race are currently involved in this latest race to Japan.

Thus we come to this race from Auckland to Fukuoka with stops in Suva and Guam. The race is for fully crewed yachts and there is both an arbitrary handicap and an IOR division.

Tim bought WAR GAMES and renamed her BOHEMIAN CHIEF specifically to do this race. They did a significant amount of work on the boat before sailing to Auckland. Most significantly, a bulb was fitted to the keel to make the boat stiffer as Tim believes it is impractical to keep the crew sitting on the rail in such a long race.

I flew into Auckland 4 days before the start and found them well settled in the Westhaven Marina after an uneventful trip from Adelaide. There was to be 60 boats starting in the first leg and 48 of these were going all the way to Japan.

The Adelaide members in the crew for the first leg were Rob Gale, well known Etchells sailor who had taken 4 months off work to do the entire trip, Andrew Scott (Scotty) who also was going all the way to Japan, and myself.

The entire crew was 9 with the others being either Eastern State Australians or New Zealanders. One of these New Zealanders was an 18 year old who had been through the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron training scheme. He was excellent and it became evident why this yacht club was sporting the Admirals Cup, the World One Ton Cup and the World Match Racing Championship in its foyer.

We left Auckland after a confused start where the New Zealand Navy failed to fire a gun even once. The first 2 days were square running in 10 to 25 knots of true

breeze. We pushed pretty hard and were still in the hunt on corrected time despite having moved a little too far to the west of the rhumb line. The breeze then moved further into the East and we were 2 and 3 sail reaching up to the point that the spreader broke.

We managed to satisfactorily stabilize the mast although there was some very anxious moments when Tim was up the mast and it was pumping very badly sideways without any intermediates.

We were most concerned to keep the mast loads down so while the wind remained at 20-25 knots we only used a storm jib and trisail. While reaching we could maintain 5 knots in this configuration, however our main concern was that we expected to have to harden up over the last 50 miles into Suva.

We managed to wedge the spreader back into place using the plastic bread board cut and shaped to make a bush for the spreader base. This gave us sufficient confidence to go up to a number 3 as the breeze lightened and went forward.

As Murphy would have it, as we neared Suva the wind dropped to 5-10 knots, directly from the direction we wished to go and there was still a big sea running. The wind kept swinging through shifts of up to 90 degrees and just as we were getting a little fed up with the conditions it would rain. All in all not the conditions that should be sailed with a No 3 and trisail.

It was just like the time we nursed BOHEMIAN across Storm Bay into Hobart.

Once in Suva, in between just a small party or 2, Tim organised for one of the guys going back to Auckland to take the spreader for repair. Tim felt it was better to get the job done by people in Auckland that we knew were really good rather than getting it done locally

where the skills were unknown. Unfortunately this meant that despite checking the mast thoroughly it was not until the Sunday before the Tuesday afternoon start that we discovered the mast was also broken.

We fitted the new spreaders and could not work out why the rigging would not tighten up properly. Only then did we rip off the rubber boot around the mast at the deck to discover the mast had cracked almost completely through and luckily folded in upon itself. We suddenly realized exactly how close to losing the mast we had been.

I had to return to Adelaide, however I believe that Tim and the crew pulled the mast out and successfully sleeved it in time for the start of the second leg to Guam. It is still not impossible that the 24 hours lost in the first leg can be made up with some clever sailing across the Equator.

PETER DREW

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