

Bowline by Ian Roberts, Vice Commodore



Bowline approaching the Iron Pot across Storm Bay

A MIDST much excitement and relief, the delivery crew of Bowline left the RSAYS on 4 December to sail to Sydney to compete in the 2021 Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race.

The departure date had been set some six months earlier and it was with a measure of satisfaction that we had been able to get *Bowline* and ourselves ready to leave on time.

Over the previous six months, and with extensive studying of the Notice of Race, all crew members had complied with the requirements to be able to compete in a 'bucket list' race.

A delightful sail was had down the coast but unfortunately we caught the tide race going through Backstairs Passage which made for a very hard solid motor sail through.

Slowly but surely *Bowline* headed for Sydney. This was until just prior to Gabo Island when ominous black clouds appeared and we were hit with a storm that required some 36 hours of sailing under storm jib and no mainsail. Wind speeds regularly exceeding 45 kts were encountered. The driving rain which accompanied the storm made for a very wet and uncomfortable sail.

Ironically, this was a more significant storm than what was to confront us in the actual Sydney to Hobart race. The crew managed this period remarkably well and with some trepidation it was decided to try the autohelm. This was a saviour as with the autohelm the boat handled the extreme seas very well, and we were able to rearrange the watch system to accommodate more of a 'watching brief' rather than steering the yacht.

All crew were very thankful to see Eden appear, and we sheltered on anchor from the storm for a further 36 hours, when it was decided to jump on the tail end of the storm and head for Sydney. *Bowline* surfed her way to Sydney with a top speed of 17.7 kts being achieved as she surfed down some three to four metre waves.

The occasional sunfish was sighted to cause some level of anxiety but what was noticeable was a lot of jellyfish in the water as we headed to Sydney. We had a great view of the coast of New South Wales for most of this period.

Of concern was that it appeared we had 'sprung' a hull fitting with the pounding getting to Eden, and upon our arrival in Sydney *Bowline* was slipped to fix this weeping leak.

Due to the assistance of Genevieve White and the attention of the crew we were able to pass the compulsory category 1 audit in two hours, much to the relief of the owner and crew.

Christmas Day and social times were quiet affairs due to the Covid restrictions in place at the time and, unfortunately, all official functions were cancelled.

Eventually the day of the race came! The weather was fine and the excitement high. *Bowline* was on the second start line and after receiving best wishes from all the assembled Members in the RSAYS Dining Room (courtesy of a phone call from the General Manager, Adam South) the 'gun' went and we proceeded down the Harbour! It was decided to go 'safe' without a spinnaker, but rather go with a large headsail which was peeled to the number three as we tightened up and headed out through the heads.

Notwithstanding two detailed weather forecasts, nobody forecast the storm that was to hit the fleet on the first night. Given what *Bowline* had been through getting to Sydney the actual storm itself did not present any significant problems for the crew. Not so for the mainsail!

After some hours the offshore main began to come apart in an alarming manner. First and foremost the leech began to delaminate and subsequently a major tear occurred along a batten pocket. It was decided to take the offshore mainsail off the mast and to replace it with the delivery mainsail we had on board, and which under the Notice of Race rules for the Sydney Hobart is allowable.

It was no mean feat of the crew to quickly remove a mainsail, de-batten same and subsequently hoist the delivery main fully battened. Regrettably, the weather window which we were in was moving quickly and after a further 12 hours the wind had abated, leaving a very confused sea with very little wind.

Thereafter the real frustrations began as the wind dropped right out down the balance of the New South Wales coast and the coast of Tasmania until an hour or so after Tasman Island. The wind picked up after this and we were able to have the most glorious sail across Storm Bay, sailing past the iconic 'Organ Pipes' and 'Iron Pot' under spinnaker. Luckily, we were able to have a clear run up the Derwent and we finished at about 1930 hrs on New Year's Eve. After the finish line we were escorted down the wharf adjacent to 'Tasting Tasmania' to the most unbelievable welcome into Hobart!

All in all, it was a very frustrating race in that the first 24 hours was a solid hard sail, and the balance an extraordinarily frustrating light wind drifter until the Storm Bay spinnaker run.

Bowline subsequently cruised the West Coast of Tasmania back to Adelaide, but that is a story for another day.

If you are considering either crewing or entering for the race please feel free to talk to any of us about our experiences and what was/is required.



The happy crew in Constitution Dock

Rear: Jenny Geytenbeek, Andrew Geytenbeek, Bruce Roach, Reid Bosward, Nick Smith, Joe MacMathuna, Jodie Roberts, Anthony Pennington

Front: Peter Hutchinson, Ian Roberts



Smuggler By Seb Bohm



Smuggler passing the Organ Pipes Photo: ROLEX/Andrea Francolini

WE WERE SO CLOSE!!! The famous words of probably most sailors who have ever raced in the Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race, but for Smuggler in 2021, it really was very close to being 'The Year'! One puff of breeze was all there was in the difference between winning and losing the race for us ... more on that later.

The 2021 Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race had many ups and downs: was it going to happen, was it going to be cancelled six days out like the previous year? Thankfully, the Omicron wave had only just begun, and the Great Race was allowed to go ahead, much to the relief of everyone involved, including the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia and the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania. Unfortunately, I normally travel back to Adelaide to be with family for Christmas and then return to Sydney on Christmas night for the race. Due to the risks involved with Covid and possibly having to isolate (and hence miss the race) I decided to stay in Sydney.

We watched the Zoom briefing on 24 December and the race was all go. Strong S-SE winds were forecast for the first night, with possibly boat-breaking waves due to wind against current, which made for more of a 'traditional' Hobart than what we've experienced for the previous four races since the last big southerly in 2015. Thankfully, due to our incredible shore team and the impeccable preparation of our boat, we weren't too worried about the forecast, and this showed in the race when *Smuggler* managed to sail through what ended up at times being a 35 kt southerly. Over a third of the boats retired on this first night but we remained unscathed, apart from a couple of small crew injuries.

After the big blow on the first night the wind eased, and this led to a very pleasant crossing of Bass Strait. Due to the conditions, the routings took us very close to Flinders Island which was a first for just about everybody in the race. Once we reached the north-east tip of Tasmania and with the generally light winds, it led to a very strategic final 200 nm of the race. And not much sleep for the navigators! We were in a fantastic battle with the other three TP52s left in the race after the retirement of the three others on the first night. At this point the weather was jumping around from being a smaller boat race to a bigger boat race. The smaller boats in the fleet started building speed, crossing Bass Strait with a nice north-easterly and with spinnakers up. With 150 nm to go we were within 3 nm of

Ichi Ban and *Celestial* and easily had them on time at that point, but then the dreaded hole in the breeze hit us. *Quest*, the other successful TP52 which was slightly closer inshore than us, fell into the hole earlier than us and ended up sitting, becalmed, for five hours. We thought we were far enough offshore and were on the same longitude as *Ichi Ban* and *Celestial*, but then it happened – the breeze dropped out and we were left floundering for two hours. Much to our dismay, somehow *Ichi Ban* and *Celestial* continued on at 10 kts boat speed all the way to Tasman Island while we just sat there. The 3 nm lead ballooned out to 40 nm by the end of the race and that was that! We literally just needed that last puff to give us the momentum to get through the hole, but it just wasn't there

This was the closest I have come to winning the race, even closer than in 2017 which was a downwind race the entire way, only dropping the spinnaker briefly between Tasman Island and Cape Raoul when the north-easterly turned into a southerly just as we entered Storm Bay, and our spinnaker went back up to the finish. We were the only boat this happened to. We finished 6th overall that year and if it wasn't for mistakes made we could've been 1st. And once again in 2021 we matched my personal best effort of 6th overall. It would have been higher except for a couple of smaller boats getting in between us and 1st place.

These are the joys of the Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race and there are fantastic stories to tell on the dock. That is what makes the race so great and such a special event to be a part of. After the excitement of finishing the race is over, and you have spent all your money at Customs House, it's time to look forward to rolling the dice again next year!



Smuggler's crew