Letters to the Editor

As a member of the Cruising Committee I am attempting to attract interesting speakers to our information nights. Excellent speakers can demand state-of-the-art presentation equipment; this would also help to attract business functions (and revenue) to the Squadron premises.

I have suggested the acquisition of such equipment in various brain-storming sessions and in the recent Plenary Meeting. However, in the current situation and at an asking price of around $10,000 I understand that the Treasurer has other priorities.

I APPEAL TO A FEW GENEROUS MEMBERS to donate funds towards a modern LCD video projector with the following features:

- Day light capability
- Enhanced TV projection (for BREATHTAKING Sydney-Hobart experiences)
- Enhanced video projection (for REAL movie nights; ideal for the Boat Show, too) DVD projection (ready for the future)
- High resolution PC screen display (many interesting presentations are done electronically, eg via PowerPoint. EVERYBODY could read the Treasurer's figures...)
- Live video camera projection (also acts as 3-D overhead substitute)

Some of the funds could be retrieved by equipment hire. If you can help, please contact Bernie Matzat or the Cruising Committee for further details.

Bernie Matzat (Cruising Committee)

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D'Estree'
Kingscote SA 5223
13 October 1999

I make the following comments on the 1998 Sydney–Hobart Race with a degree of humility, because I was not there and I do not wish to appear patronising to those who were. But I have sailed, with Anthea, more than 60,000 miles in offshore waters in *Morning Hustler*, including many weeks cruising or racing in the waters of Tasmania and Bass Strait. I have recently read Bob Mundle's book *Fatal Storm*, in which he describes the horrific conditions so eloquently. [Reviewed in our last issue — *Ed.*] I commend him for documenting so much information so quickly after the race. This book should be compulsory reading for all who aspire to sail offshore.

I have not read all the reports and recommendations available since the race, but I believe there are some matters that are obvious. They are opinions I have held for a long time.

I make three fundamental points.

1. Many of the boats currently racing offshore are not strong enough.

There will always be structural failures, for example in older but apparently sound boats. The critical problem is that the rules currently allow vessels to race offshore which clearly should be raced only inshore. The collapse of the deck or coachroof of some yachts proves the point. At the other extreme, it would be overdoing strength to build yachts like the pressure hull of a submarine! Somewhere in between is a happy medium, and it should be up to the rule makers and nautical architects to find it. There are already plenty of yachts that do.

2. A positive righting stability to only 115° of heel is not enough to prevent people trapped under a capsized boat from being drowned.

I have been surprised to find that many yachtsmen have little understanding of the theory of yacht stability and don't understand the relationship between centre of buoyancy and centre of gravity. Perhaps, as with first aid, some very basic knowledge would make people more

wary of light displacement , beamy and flush-decked hulls. When in an inverted position, some of these are quite stable. Tony Bullimore's yacht remained upside down for days with its keel sticking up in the air! Taking the other extreme again, a yacht with a hull cylindrical in cross section could still have a positive righting moment when inverted to 179.9°!

Some older designs, like the S&S 34 and the Duncanson 29, with large (and to some eyes unsightly) coachroofs and high ballast ratios have very large angles of positive stability and recover from a capsize very quickly. In conditions like the 1998 Sydney–Hobart Race, any yacht may be dumped and capsized. The important thing is that they don't break and they recover quickly. It is not difficult to design and build such yachts. It only requires the will.

These first two points are not new, and they are obvious now if they weren't before. I am lucky to have had the privilege of discussing them at various times with no less authorities than Alan Payne and Peter Jourbet, Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Melbourne University and himself a casualty in the 1998 race. CJ Marchaj wrote his book *Seaworthiness: The Forgotten Factor* as a result of the disastrous 1979 Fastnet race. The lessons appear not to have been learnt.

3. The weather conditions experienced in the 1998 Sydney–Hobart Race will occur again.

Nobody can control the weather or the south-going NSW current, the combination of which caused such horrendous seas, but can a race course be set to minimise its effect? I believe it can. There are three factors to consider:

(a) If you cruise or race much around Tasmania and listen to weather reports for Bass Strait, you will find that the strongest winds usually occur in the NE part, E of Wilsons Promontory (and to a lesser extent on the NW corner of Tasmania). I believe that the strength of the (W) wind falls quite rapidly eastwards out in the Tasman Sea. It is common knowledge that wind accelerates through narrow passages like Bass Strait, Backstairs Passage and Cook Strait. We have experienced all three. As it exits the passage it decelerates. *Morning Hustler* departed Refuge Cove on Wilsons Promontory for New Zealand on 6 January 1985 in strong W winds, at the same time as yachts were returning from a very rough Sydney–Hobart Race. We found that 50 to 100 miles E of Refuge Cove we had much less wind than vessels closer in to Bass Strait that we spoke to, notably Jimmy Howell's *Sunburst* and Bruce and Jane Arthur's *Morning Swan*.

(b) Sea conditions are better in deep water outside the continental shelf than in shallow water. Waves are longer, less steep and less likely to break. Crossing the Tasman Sea we had swells above our mast height but quite harmless. In recent years we have always made our passages between Kangaroo Island and Tasmania or Bass Strait outside the continental shelf, as we have found the sea conditions so much more pleasant. Also it takes one clear of cray pots and S of the shipping lane.

(c) The third factor which caused such violent seas in the 1998 Sydney–Hobart Race was the effect of the wind against the current. You don't have to go further than the Port River to experience how wind against current makes the sea stand up. In January 1998 I was nominally sailing master on Malcolm Kinnaird's *Catriona* in the Tall Ships Race from Hobart to Sydney. My son Sam was navigator. Together we attended the pre-race briefing, where we were shown infra-red satellite images of the NSW current. It was pointed out that if we went out to 152° E longitude (ie about 100 miles E of Gabo Island) we would be unaffected by the S going current. *Catriona* was the only vessel to take that advice. During one 24-hour period we overtook more than 70 boats and finished the race 19th out of about 160, which clearly demonstrated the strength of the current holding back the rest of the fleet.

If a point 100 miles E of Gabo Island were made a mark to be left to starboard, the course would then be outside the continental shelf, outside the NSW current and in an area where the W wind blowing out of Bass Strait is decelerating. Sea conditions could be expected to be much less severe than those experienced by many yachts in last year's race.

There is no doubt that from time to time yachts will capsize. Even if they are undamaged, there may well be serious injuries to crew who are thrown about above and below the deck. Some radical preventive measures might be worth considering. Lee cloths that absolutely prevent a person falling out of a bunk in a capsize are obvious, as is a seat belt for the navigator. But what about something akin to a motor car seat belt for crew in the cockpit or a diver's weight belt, without the weights? It may not be practicable while they are working, but flying around on the end of a 1.8 metre safety harness line can cause very severe injuries. Don't reject the idea out of hand. Give it some thought, but don't make compulsory something which in some boats you may find impracticable.

I hope the forgoing may stimulate some new thinking on these important issues.

James Cowell

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Thistle's Island is about twelve miles long, and from one to two or three in breadth, and in the middle part is high enough to be seen ten or twelve leagues from a ship's deck. The stone of the north-east end was found to be calcareous; but at the top of the north-west head, not less than two hundred feet hight, there were many small pieces of granite, rounded to all appearance by attrition in the water. Some of the cliffs on the western side are white, as if composed of chalk, and the soil in general seemed to be sandy; yet the island was pretty well covered with wood, principally *eucalyptus* and *casuarina*. No water could be found; and as the ship's hold was becoming very empty, I returned on board, after observing the latitude, with the intention of running over to the main in search of it. But on comparing the longitude observed by lieutenant [Samuel] Flinders with that resulting from my bearings, a difference was found which made it necessary to repeat the observation on shore; and as this would prolong the time too near dusk for moving the ship, Mr Thistle was sent over with a cutter to the main land, in search of an anchoring place where water might be procured.

Flinders M. *A Voyage to Terra Australis; undertaken for the purpose of completing the discovery of that vast country, and prosecuted in the years 1801, 1802, and 1803, in His Majesty's Ship Investigator, and subsequently in the Armed Vessel Porpoise, and Cumberland Schooner, with an account of the Shipwreck of the Porpoise, arrival of the Cumberland at Mauritius, and Imprisonment of the Commander during six years and a half on that Island*. London, Nicol, 1814, Vol I: 134–5. Events of Sunday 21 February 1802.