

Wild Thing finds pot of gold at end of rainbow Brannew wins first major title in Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race

One of the slowest races on record, the Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race was challenging and exciting, with both line and overall honours going down to the wire.

Neither the open race record holder, *Wild Oats XI*, or the conventional yacht record holder, *Loki*, were on the start line, and the fleet was a smallish one at 47, but it did not detract from a diverse grand prix fleet representing NSW, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania.

Grant Wharington's 100ft *Wild Thing*, taking part in only its second ocean race, led the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia's annual 384 nautical mile race from its midline start on Sydney Harbour. It was only headed once, in the last hours of the race, by John Honan and Peter Millard's 98 foot *Lahana* (NSW). But a short time later, the Queensland super maxi regained control and sailed to line honours victory at 14:21:14 on July 29, in 2 days, 1 hour, 21 minutes, 14 seconds.

Wharington and crew threw everything into keeping an advancing *Lahana* (NSW) and Peter Harburg's newly purchased Volvo 70, *Black Jack* (Qld), at bay, as the two came within 2 nautical miles before the *Wild Thing* crew found their pot of gold at the end of a colourful rainbow, caused by a rain squall just short of the finish line.

"Since early this morning (his last day at sea) it became very challenging – we had to think more tactically to keep *Lahana* and *Black Jack* behind us," said Wharington, who sailed *Wild Thing* over the line with full main and an R1, the largest light air reaching sail (for up to 12 knots) in his inventory - the same sail he used at the start of the race.

Lahana finished at 14.26.25, just five minutes astern and *Black Jack* (the former *Telefonica*) at 14.35.19.

On taking line honours, well outside the open record of 22hrs 3mins 46secs and the conventional yacht record of 1day 2hrs 52min 39sec, both set last year, Wharington admitted: "What a tricky race. It was a bit of a painful situation – to get 30 miles in front of our nearest rivals and then it was reduced to 20 miles - and then to have them come back at us so closely, especially this morning.

"We're very pleased," said the skipper, who also claimed line honours in 2006 with a two feet shorter *Wild Thing*. It's a shame *Wild Oats XI* couldn't make it; it would've been interesting to see how it handled the light conditions we go, apart from a couple of patches of 15 to 20 knots."

Black Jack's crew sailed their first ever ocean voyage on the boat on the delivery from Queensland to Sydney for the V70's maiden ocean race in Australia.

Crew member Peter Dowdney remarked: "The boat's quick – even though it was predominantly built for hard reaching and running. It handled the light weather very well. It's an easy boat to sail in a lot of respects, which might surprise some people, and it accelerates quickly."

Around the time *Wild Thing* finished, Chris Bran made a final push for overall honours with his one year-old Beneteau First 40 CR, *Brannew*.

Bran was victorious, but not without some angst. Late in the race, he still had to contend with various yachts, keeping the *Brannew* crew working overtime all the way to the finish line for their first major offshore win. After the CYCA skipper finished, he had to wait it out for several others to do the same.

Eventually, there were just three standing in *Brannew's* way; Phil Molony's Archambault 40 *Papillon*, Andy Kearnan's Summit 35, *L'Altra Donna* and Roger Hickman's Farr 43, *Wild Rose*, which caused the longest

wait. In the event, Brand's overall win was a good two hours on corrected time from nearest rival, *Papillon*, with *Wild Rose* pipping *L'Altra Donna* for third.

Launching *Brannew* in February 2012 "to race in the Hobart," Bran finished 18th overall in both the 2012 Sydney Gold Coast and Rolex Sydney Hobart races. He put this victory down to a bit of luck, some by missing many of the holes in the course, along with great crew work, and said it had him contemplating doing this year's Hobart race.

Celebrating with his crew at Southport Yacht Club, Bran commented: "To win the race is an incredible feeling.

"I went for a Bruce Farr design because they are tried and tested. A couple of years back, Bruce made the statement: 'Every now and again we get one right'. This is one of the ones he got right," he said.

The Sydney yachtsman agreed that it was a very tactical race. "We went both offshore and inshore – it was a very frustrating at times – but it was a great race," he said.

Bran praised those who kept him sailing hard. "Phil on *Papillon*, *Close Halled*, and *L'Altra Donna* all pushed us hard and were major competition for us, as was *Wild Rose*," he said, before describing the final 24 hours: "The wind dying on the last night at sea and there were rain squalls coming through.

"We got a shift, put our Code Zero up and sailed some of our best miles," he said of their last day at sea, which ended shortly after 1.00pm after three days of racing. "We knew then we were in with a real chance.

"Then *Papillon* caught us up again, but at Evans Head we cleared out and started to find our legs," added the yachtsman, who paid tribute to his crew, in particular Glen 'Hedgie' Cooper, his navigator, "who is very methodical. He's constantly checking the weather models and looking at the various scenarios. All my crew are top notch and it's them who got us into first place," he allowed.

Contenders knew the forecast ahead of the 28th edition of the race, so were under no illusion that it would be a quick simple one. Roger Hickman described it as: "Classic Sydney Gold Coast," while from 2008 Hobart winner Quest's owner, Bob Steel's point of view, "It was a race you want to forget."

Michael Logan from the Bureau of Meteorology prepared competitors for light and variable winds, forecasting a light westerly for the race start on July 27 (It was 3 knots, but increased to around 8 within the hour). He said the wind would tend northerly up to 10 knots in the southern part of the course and then light easterlies as the fleet sailed into the northern section, with a westerly or two mid-race. A southerly was due on the fourth day, too late.

The variable weather was reflected in the changes of overall leaders throughout, from super maxi Lahana, to Rod Jones 50 footer, Audi Sunshine Coast, to Bob Cox's Nine Dragons at 46 feet and Flying Cloud, owned by CYCA commodore Howard Piggott and Phil Molony's *Papillon*, both 40 feet, among others.

Kim Jaggar, co-owner of the 25 year-old Davidson 34, *Illusion* (one of the smaller yachts in the fleet), was not so sure. "Only if we don't get too far behind in the first couple of days can we capitalise on the southerly," he said.

"The big boats will get the stronger northerlies (up to 10 knots) and the westerly of up to 16 knots, which will push the bigger yachts quickly up the coast, and they should get away from us there. It will all come down to the transition in breeze and whether we can be in the right place at the right time. It'll be tricky and there'll be a bit of luck involved," Jaggar summed up.

The decision makers at the back of each boat had to work out whether to go offshore or hug the coast – some did a bit of both – but most stuck with the coastal route.

During the first race of the CYCA's annual Blue Water Point Score (to determine the best offshore performer in the six-race series), *Celestial's* owner, Sam Haynes, who finished the series second last season, noted: "This race had more holes than a golf course."

The holes left plenty of time for other fun pursuits, such as whale, dolphin and bird spotting. Graeme Hall and his Close Hulled crew got their amusement by sitting a dressed up dummy at the helm, declaring: "Crew morale? Wasn't so good till we found a stowaway – and at least she could steer!"

Of their race, Roger Hickman, who had competed in 27 out of 28 editions, said: "We knew what we had to do to win." He described conditions as: "Light and shifty on the first night with smooth water, which helped us, We went offshore at Seal Rocks and lost time, so we cut our losses.

"Off Coffs, we got classic Gold Coast race rain squalls and gusty winds. The second night it was westerly up to 17 knots at one stage, although the average was 12 to 15 knots – but within minutes it would drop to 5, and so it went.

"Cape Byron to the finish was one of the toughest parts. We were trying to sail to our ability and were following the tracker to stay in touch with what others were doing. We sailed as hard as we could and just scraped in to beat *L'Altra Donna*," finished Hickman, a big fan of race tracker: "It's used just as much by the fleet as it is by those following the race."

And while conditions favoured yachts at the smaller end of the scale, three in the 50-55 foot range showed great promise. Former BWPS champion, Darryl Hodgkinson, sailed his new *Victoire*, the Cookson 12 formerly known as *Jazz*, in their first ocean race together. He was pleased with their seventh on line and ninth overall.

"It was long and lumpy. The winds were so variable. All in all, for our first shakedown, we were chuffed. It was very close in our division," he said before realizing he had won Division O.

Rod Jones has spent time completely revamping "a Welbourn 50 from 2000, with a keel rudder and deck from the 1989 IOR 50 footer, *Heaven Can Wait* – it's had a major facelift, he said of Audi Sunshine Coast.

Jones plans on sailing his second, and according to him, "my last Hobart race. And for that, the boat had to be structurally good. It's good upwind, and as long as it's not a screaming downhill race, we should do OK."

"It's become what we hoped it would become," the two-time Australian IRC champion said of his yacht that crossed the line ninth for sixth overall, the best of the 50 footers.

Bill Wild and his RP55 *Wedgetail*, the former 1999 Hobart winning *Yendys*, have recently returned to racing and carried some of the best ocean racers aboard to finish fourth on line, for 14th overall, not reflecting how well the boat was sailed. The Queenslander has put a two year program in place, inclusive of the Rolex Sydney Hobart.

Meanwhile, Rob Date's RP52 *Scarlet Runner* will benefit from a world trip the Victorian plans to take his yacht on shortly. While away, Date and some of his crew plan on contesting a few major regattas, before arriving back in Australia for the 70th anniversary Rolex Sydney Hobart. "We're leaving straight after the Brisbane Keppel Race and can't wait to go," he said after finishing 30th overall.

Under ORCi, *L'Altra Donna*'s crew had their revenge, beating *Wild Rose* for the win, with *Occasional Coarse Language One* (Robert Alder and Bill Bailey) third. The top three under PHS were *Abracadabra* (James Murchison), *The Banshee* (Corinne Feldmann and Rob Francis) and *Upshot* (Wayne Keavy).

Some of these yachts are competing in the, The Cape Byron (for those competing in ORCi) and Tasman Performance (for PHS competitors) Series', held in conjunction with the Blue Water Point Score. The CYCA, for the first time, has also added a line honours trophy to the prestigious series.

Ten yachts retired from the race; all but two (electrical and radio problems) because of time constraints. *She's the Culprit* (Culprit Syndicate) and *Copernicus* (Greg Zyner) stuck to their guns, the last two finishing in 03:16:17:53 and 03:17:23:41 respectively.

For all information and full results log on to: <http://goldcoast.cyca.com.au>

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