



## SYDNEY GOLD COAST YACHT RACE 2014

### **Celestial wins Land Rover Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race Wild Oats XI takes line honours - again**

*Wild Oats XI* and *Celestial* emphatically took line and overall honours respectively in the 384 nautical mile Land Rover Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race in July, but the race record stayed intact.

The 29<sup>th</sup> running of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia's race was a far cry from last year, when a number of yachts retired, citing time constraints as the race climaxed on the fifth day.

And although the tricky weather at the start left a lot to be desired, it was one of the most pleasant races in recent history for those who managed to stay ahead, or up with, the storm fronts and weather changes.

Enjoyable 15-20 knot north-westerly and south-westerly winds, aided by flat seas, were tailor made for a fast reaching race. There was also the added benefit of sea life spotting, anything from seals to penguins, dolphins, whales and sharks.

Conditions prompted America's Cup and Olympic sailor Iain Murray (*Wild Oats XI*) to comment afterwards: "An enjoyable reaching race on flat seas – it doesn't get much better."

Fifty-five yachts piled up at the boat end of the Nielsen Park start line on Sydney Harbour. A wet, miserable grey morning transformed to sunny blue skies by the 1.00pm start, but the predicted breeze was nowhere to be seen.

Instead, light shifty 5 knot to nothing airs, fanning from all points of the compass, turned to parking lots on the Harbour. The pop of spinnakers at least provided extra colour.

Bob Oatley's *Wild Oats XI*, skippered by Mark Richards, appeared the only one to be free of the windless shackles. Richards would later say, "We had a plan, we stuck to it, and it paid off big time. The crew were fantastic and kept the boat going up the Harbour."

He steered the super maxi straight down the eastern side of the Harbour, and although slowing down at times, it didn't stop. Steven Proud's *Swish* was the only one to get within cooee of *Oats*. The Kernan 44 trailed the 100 footer to Lady Bay, but then lost touch with the breeze before finally setting off again.

As *Wild Oats XI* reached the Heads, Paul Clitheroe's *Balance* Bruce Foye's *The Goat* and Darryl Hodgkinson's *Victoire* started to make good ground near North Head.

Able to see the funny side, Clitheroe, who recently purchased the 2008 Rolex Sydney Hobart winner *Quest* and renamed her *Balance*, reported: "Must buy a new boat more often. After much drifting between the Heads and enjoying watching sunbaking seals and penguins, *Balance* is arguably the first boat to Manly.

"A fair point is that *Wild Oats* is halfway to the horizon and made more distance, but if it was Sydney Harbour to Manly, we've got that covered. Problem is, we've got no idea what will happen next, but lovely afternoon....so far!"

Left in this group's wake was *Perpetual LOYAL*, owned by Anthony Bell who had friend and Australian cricket captain, Michael Clarke, along for the ride. Up alongside was *Black Jack*, the Queensland V70 owned by Peter Harburg.

Harburg's skipper, Mark Bradford, commented pre-race: "The predicted reaching winds will suit us and *LOYAL* down to the ground, although the breeze won't be strong enough. These boats (both designed by Argentinean Juan Kouyoumdjian) need 20-25 knots."

His prophecy proved accurate, as the closest *Perpetual LOYAL* got to *Wild Oats XI*, was 4 nautical miles on the first evening. "At one point, *Black Jack* "came barreling at us, but when she gybed back in to the coast, that was it," Richards said.

From there, *Wild Oats XI* kept up a steady pace all the way to Southport, averaging speeds of 18 knots. It reached the finish line in 15.27.46 hours, taking 26 hours 27 minutes and 47 seconds, more than four hours short of its 22 hour 3 minute and 46 second record set in 2012.

Over two hours later, *Perpetual LOYAL* finished second on line for eighth overall, while *Black Jack* repeated its third on line of last year, but this time was well up the overall board in second place.

The only blip on *Oats'* radar was her year-old carbon fibre hydrofoil wing snapping off while surfing down waves at speeds averaging 18 knots, but surging into the 20's, at around 1.30am on the morning after the start. Installed to improve speed, a crew member said it did affect their performance.

Richards said they would likely go back to the drawing board. "We're not really sure what happened yet – whether we hit something or not – we'll have to take a look at the hull and see what's what," he commented.

Anthony Bell had mixed feelings on playing maiden again. "Obviously we're a little disappointed with second over the line; getting stuck in the Harbour was a disaster. But the lighter conditions didn't suit us and we have to accept that," he said, adding they had not seen more than 21 knots during the race.

"Cocko (Michael Coxon, his sailing master) and I are extremely happy with the boat looking ahead to Hobart, where we know the conditions will be tougher. I'm just thankful to my crew for the great job they did."

On Michael Clarke's first offshore adventure, Bell said: "He loved it - had a great time and wasn't seasick at all. He tweeted from the boat constantly, ran around helping where he could, and he'll have another crack. But the Hobart will have to wait until he's retired from cricket."

Sam Haynes' overall win with his Rogers 46 *Celestial* was an impressive one; two hours better than nearest rival *Black Jack*, the next six places filled by *Wild Oats XI*, Matt Allen's *Ichi Ban*, Colin Woods' *Pretty Fly III*, *Balance*, *Victoire* and *Perpetual LOYAL*. It was a big boat race, but somebody forgot to tell Haynes that.

Best finisher nearest in size to *Celestial* was Tony Kirby's ninth placed *Patrice*. The eight month-old Ker 46 is the same length, give or take an inch or two, and led the race overall until east of Yamba, when *Celestial* took the reins.

*Patrice* spent more time offshore than the others in the group, including *St George Midnight Rambler*, *Balance*, *Victoire* and *Primitive Cool* (former *Secret Mens Business 3.5* with previous owner Geoff Boettcher in the crew), and that decision probably sealed Kirby's fate.

“What a great race to win – it’s a marquee event,” CYCA member Haynes said when given the news. “It’s great winning the first race of the CYCA’s Blue Water Pointscore too,” he said of the CYCA’s six- race series, which includes the newly re-introduced Montague Island Race.

Others such as *Chutzpah*, *Ichi Ban* and *Occasional Coarse Language Too* and *Pretty Fly III*, also flirted with the top spot, but Haynes and crew kept chipping away and then got away.

“We did our best sailing at night. On the last night we had our A3 spinnaker up and ran hard all night. It enabled us to sail close to the rhumbline and that gave us an inside line all the way up. It meant we avoided the current, which was quite strong. I think that made a difference,” Haynes said.

Haynes said the course they took meant as few gybes as possible to make Cape Byron, thereby saving time and effort. “And we were in the right place at the right time to pick up some shifts,” he said.

“The wind was forecast to swing round to the east – and it did – we had a nice 14 knots. It eventually dropped down to 9 knots – that was scary – but we needn’t have worried, it stayed in.”

From Point Danger to the Main Beach Southport finish line, *Celestial*’s crew changed sails “four to five times for maximum benefit.

“We knew we had to keep racing hard, because some, like *Pretty Fly III* (a canting Cookson 50), and *Balance* (a TP52), were too close for comfort. *Patrice* sailed out from the coast, so we thought we had it over her,” Haynes said. “My crew put in a fantastic effort.”

Haynes’ 16 year-old son Will was aboard *Celestial* and can now lay claim to being the youngest winner of the race – and in his maiden offshore yacht race. “He was very good, he trimmed and packed spinnakers and pulled his weight,” Haynes commented.

Will said it was “Pretty good to win my first offshore race. It was interesting to see how the crew performed offshore racing compared to how it works inshore. I had a great time – I’d do it again.”

Among a few first-time offshore racers aged from 16 to 19, Will was one of at least three from the CYCA’s Youth Academy, along with 19 year-olds Emma May and Nicky Bradley, who were overjoyed to accept Noel Cornish’s offer to sail on his Sydney 47, *St Jude*. The lucky girls were also given two full sets of new ocean racing wet weather gear, donated by the QLD (Quiet Little Drink).

Ben Psaltis got the best grounding he possibly could. The 18 year-old sailed with father Ed (*St George Midnight Rambler*), who’s standout win was the fatal 1998 Sydney Hobart aboard the little Hick 35 now racing as *Luna Sea*.

Like Will, Ben has clocked plenty of ocean miles on deliveries and raced inshore, but had not raced offshore. On *Wild Rose*, Samantha Scott had the advantage of Roger Hickman and her father Andrew Scott as teachers. She will contest the rest of the BWPS with Hickman, including her first Hobart race, as he defends his title.

*Celestial* also won ORCi overall from the two canting Cookson 50’s; *Pretty Fly III* and *Victoire*. PHS came down to a fight between yesteryear boats *Helsal 3* (Robbie Fisher/Paul Mara, Tas) and *She’s the Culprit*.

*Helsal 3* led for most of the race, until the Culprit Syndicate, headed by Glen Picasso, momentarily sailed their modified Inglis/Jones 39 into the lead. However, the Tasmanians prevailed, the Culprits took second and James Murchison’s Tripp 47, *Abracadabra*, was third.

Other wins went to the Carkeek 60 *Ichi Ban* (first yacht 60ft and under); *Pretty Fly III* (50ft and under) and *St George Midnight Rambler* a Ker 40 (40ft and under).

Not everyone had an easy ride. Brad Kellett (on Jim Cooney's *Brindabella*) reported from the 21 year-old yacht on the second day: "It's been a tough 24 hours. The start was very slow and we found it hard to get the old girl rolling."

Others also experienced ripping kites and other sails in the hard running conditions.

"Going into the south-westerly front we were in a decent position to attack the fleet and hold onto our position with the other boats around us. It all went pear-shaped when our A3 spinnaker burst out of its seams and started flogging all over the ocean at 2.30am; just what everybody wants," Kellett said.

The last four yachts finished on the fourth day. Some of the smallest in the fleet, they were caught in the shifting west-nor-west to north-west 10 knot and weakening breeze during the third day. Peter Mosely's *Local Hero* from Canberra and John Nolan's *Isabella* finished just after 8.00am, leaving just two behind.

John Blair's *Bear Necessity* and Robert Carr/Stephanie Cook/Kerry Burke's *Mortgage Choice Rumba* were a couple of miles apart with 20 odd miles to go, when Blair reported: "We've only been doing 3 knots of boat speed this morning, it's been very light - a bit painful - but it's very nice out here. We hope to make the finish by just after 5.00pm.

It did get better; the light west-nor-west winds picked up again to 10 knots, bringing the pair home just after 3.00pm, 41 minutes apart. *Mortgage Choice Rumba* was last to dock and loudly cheered in by fellow yachties relaxing at Southport Yacht Club.

From 55 entries, there was unusually only one casualty. Phillip King's Salona 44, *Last Tango*, sustained damage to its forestay, which the crew were unable to repair.

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**By Di Pearson**