



SYDNEY GOLD COAST YACHT RACE 2015

David and Goliath battle waged for 2015 Land Rover Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race

The Land Rover Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race threw its usual curveballs at competitors, combining nice reaching and running with wind holes, then Black Jack was announced overall winner before her Queensland owner and skipper declared an error in their finish time and Quikpoint Azzurro took the winner's seat, surprising her crew.

At the pointy end, after taking control of the race from North Head, Anthony Bell's Perpetual Loyal took line honours from Peter Harburg's 70 foot Black Jack in the 30th edition of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia's 384 nautical mile race.

The 100 footer sailed the distance unimpeded, but conditions were not conducive to breaking Wild Oats XI's time of 22 hours 03 minutes 43 seconds, set in 2012. Perpetual Loyal covered the course in one day nine hours 57 minutes 49 seconds, with her smaller adversary two hours behind.

Both yachts have undergone further modifications to increase speed since competing in the 2014 Rolex Sydney Hobart.

Bell said after the race: "This is the fastest the boat's ever been. We spent ages trying to work out what to do to make it faster. We modified the bulb and keel and it's all looking very positive. We are very confident in the boat."

He said they were happy with their race after sailing through a minefield of fluky light air to Sydney Heads.

"We took off after that. We were averaging 24-25 knots til midnight in a north-westerly, which suited us. Then it all went flat on Sunday. Lots of boats got trapped in Coffs Harbour and we parked a lot in the afternoon," commented Bell, who was "disappointed" that Wild Oats XI was not in the race.

"Given our modifications, I would have been delighted to race them, just to see how we went against each other in these conditions," the Sydney yachtsman said.

Harburg and his skipper Mark Bradford worked on making Black Jack more slippery in lighter winds and are happy with their findings too.

"Our boat's never been better suited to a race than this one. We've just modified it pretty heavily for lighter air, so the forecast is right for us," Bradford said beforehand.

Their point was proven when Black Jack took over 20 miles out of her larger rival when moderate reaching conditions returned late on the second evening as they headed to the finish line

Back at the July 25 start off Nielsen Park, there were shades of déjà vu as weak fluky winds, similar to last year's start, took hold. The Bureau of Meteorology's forecast 10 knot westerly arrived as the bulk of the 62-boat fleet was approaching Sydney Heads, with a little south thrown in on the eastern side of the Harbour.

Many of the smaller yachts took advantage of the situation in the Harbour, leading their larger contemporaries. Most opted for the eastern side of the Harbour. Tony Kirby's Patrice slipped

through the two big boats off Watsons Bay and made a beeline for the Heads under spinnaker, until the breeze kicked in and Perpetual Loyal overhauled the Ker 46, with Black Jack still giving chase.

As the boats headed north, the weather was variable, with parking lots offsetting lovely reaching and running conditions. Warm and sunny, seas were relatively flat, making it a pleasant race and creating opportunities for everyone, even though the holes caused frustration.

A few boats enjoyed their time at the top of the overall standings, including Perpetual Loyal, Black Jack, Chinese Whisper, Wild Rose, Quikpoint Azzurro, Black Sheep and Local Hero, which with Stampede, took a big dive offshore to briefly lead IRC and PHS standings respectively.

Initially, Black Jack was declared overall winner, with Quikpoint Azzurro second and Chinese Whisper third, before Peter Harburg and Mark Bradford pointed out the error in their finish time and were relegated to third.

Harburg was philosophical. "Mistakes happen. I like to win trophies, but I like to win them fairly and honestly. Bradford reiterated Harburg's sentiments, before calling Kearns to congratulate him.

Kearns' Quikpoint Azzurro and Rupert Henry's Chinese Whisper kept popping up in the top three. Dissimilar in nearly every way, the two finished first and second respectively. They were also the top two in ORCi, with Derek and Martin Sheppard's Beneteau 45, Black Sheep, third.

Henry purchased the former Jethou, a JV62 out of Europe, and launched it in Sydney five weeks before the race. A fully optimized race rigging package complements an ultra-light carbon fibre hull built purely for speed. With points on the board overseas, she was the talk of the town on arrival in Sydney.

An Etchells sailor and partner in the Sydney 38 Team Lexus some years back, Henry takes intermittent breaks from racing to see to business and family.

"I always had an eye on getting back into ocean racing. The time was right – I found an excellent boat and have an excellent crew – all friends I have sailed with; lots from the Etchells," commented Henry, who says next stop is the CYCA's Blue Water Pointscore and Rolex Sydney Hobart.

On the other hand, Kearns found the former Shenandoah II in poor shape after nearly sinking in Queensland. He restored the 1981 built S&S 34 to better than her original condition.

"A new sail wardrobe, including a Code Zero improved our reaching ability. A new staysail has stopped us rolling like a pig," Kearns said. New deck hardware and rigging enhances the performance of 'the little boat that could'.

It was an unusual top four at the finish, in that modern big boats were woven in with the smaller old ones. Roger Hickman's 2014 Rolex Sydney Hobart winner, Wild Rose (a Farr 43), celebrating her 30th birthday this year, rounded out the top four. In a David and Goliath battle to the end, Quikpoint Azzurro, the oldest and smallest yacht (10.1 metres) in the fleet was named the overall winner.

Kearns could hardly believe they had won, let alone earlier thinking they were second. The CYCA member was first to admit he has finished last on many occasions, laughingly saying: "I've paid my dues, it was my turn. And not only do I have the oldest boat - I've got the oldest crew.

"Roger Hickman was my inspiration – I wanted to beat him. We put a picture of him inside the spinnaker just to remind us," Kearns said of the three-time Hobart winner, multiple Blue Water Pointscore champion and former Ocean Racer of the Year, who finished second to Quikpoint Azzurro in Division 3.

Crew member Jim Nixon: “We thought we’d won until we broke both spinnaker halyards in the fresh winds off Ballina and thought it had cost us the race. We sailed the last bit with our spinnaker on the jib halyard.

“We had a great start and went out the Heads with the 50’s. We were small enough to avoid the parking lots, although we did find one off Smoky Cape,” Nixon said.

Kearns continued, “We had work done on the boat just before the race and the rudder bearing was way too tight, so it was really hard to steer the boat. We took half-hour turns at the tiller. Lucky all my crew own their own yachts, so they’re all good steerers.”

Kearns and others agreed the race was very tactical, “but our good start made us feel positive for the race ahead. It also makes me feel positive for the next Sydney Hobart.

“I also talked to my old skipper, John Walker (Walker was a well-respected yachtsman who died last year), throughout the race and I think he helped us,” he believed.

“Imagine,” Kearns said wonderingly, “I bought an old sinking boat cheaply (\$23,000) with a credit card and found the crew at John’s funeral.”

In PHS, Les Goodridge sailed Wax Lyrical to first place overall. Rod West’s Painkiller Forte, representing Southport Yacht Club, the CYCA’s race finish partner, was second. Kerry Burke, Robert Carr and Stephanie Cook’s Mortgage Choice Rumba filled out the top three.

A reinvigorated fleet prompted renewed competition. In a revival of the class, five TP52’s raced, Chinese Whisper sailed her first race in Australian waters, some boats were first-timers to the race, Dare Devil among others. And many changed hands, such as last year’s winner, Celestial, now racing as The Goat. Others, including Alacrity, returned to the race after long absences.

For the first time since 2005, there were no retirements from the race, with all yachts making it safely to Southport in good time after a slow start. The last two finishers were Quikpoint Azzurro and Painkiller Forte, which finished 27 minutes apart in just over two days 18 hours.

Co-incidentally, Peter Luke, co-founder of the CYCA, and last survivor of the nine skippers who participated in the inaugural Sydney Hobart Yacht Race in 1945, would have turned 100 on the race start day, July 25. Although the yachtsman died at 92, his family marked the day in Sydney with a special celebration.

For full results in the Land Rover Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race, go to:
<http://goldcoast.cyca.com.au/>

By Di Pearson