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Noakes Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race a stunning success

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NOAKES SYDNEY GOLD COAST YACHT RACE

Chutzpah's hurrah!

The spectacular Noakes Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race ended in an overall victory to one of the most deserving crews writes LISA RATCLIFF

(Credit - Crosbie Lorimer, Bow Caddy Media)



Chutzpah had a long history of finishing just behind the eventual winners - not any more! (Credit - Andrea Francolini)



A fleet of 54 boats entered the 2018 race. (Credit - Andrea Francolini)



Kingsley Piesse, Bruce Taylor and Peter Fletcher, crew of Chutzpah, celebrate their overall win in the Noakes Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race

The life lesson that perseverance pays off doesn't quite fit Bruce Taylor. His commitment to winning a Rolex Sydney Hobart is more of a "pathological obsession or sheer madness" he suggests, and so he will be back in Sydney on Boxing Day for the 38th time this coming December, chasing that elusive result.

Taylor's story is one of 'almosts'. He sold his Hick 35 to Ed Psaltis and Bob Thomas six weeks before the crew of what was renamed AFR Midnight Rambler overcame a heinous Bass Strait weather bomb that decimated the fleet and cost six men their lives, to win outright. In 2014 Chutzpah was beaten into second by Roger Hickman's Wild Rose, the Tattersall Cup taken out of Taylor's hands by a southerly blow home for the aged Farr 43 skippered by the late Roger Hickman.

Multiple top-five finishes and very likely the record-holder for the greatest number of divisional wins, 11, in the bluewater race over the period 1979 and 2018 might have caused others to give up, but Taylor has the chutzpah to keep trying because the key ingredients are still there - the fun and the people.

"The core crew of Kingsley Piesse, Gavin Gourley, James Permezel and I have been doing this since we were in our 20s," says the almost-70-year-old retired orthodontist who swims every day and teaches at the University of Melbourne. "We used to be one of the youngest crews; now we are working out how to get carbon-fibre Zimmer frames on the boat."

Given the Noakes Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race is Chutzpah's Hobart warm-up, the long-standing team of Victorians and fly-ins, including trusted navigator and mate Kingsley from Perth and son Drew for the Rolex Sydney Hobart, take some confidence from the boat's overall win in the 2018-19 Audi Centre Sydney Blue Water Pointscore season-opening race.

Better known as a reaching-running performer, Taylor's Reichel Pugh 40 sailing for the Royal Yacht Club of Victoria held onto the boats of the same size in the mostly upwind race, until their turn came for some fast reaching along the northern NSW and south-east Queensland beaches in the final third of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia's annual winter race.

Taylor is actually a Kiwi who started sailing P-Class, Flying Ants and Cherubs in Wellington as an eight-year-old. He moved to Australia with his family at 14 and continued in dinghies, then in 1979 in his 20s, he and some mates built a Holland designed three-quarter tonner called Pirra. The designer's brief was to create something that could beat the Sparkman & Stephens 34s on Port Phillip, ironically the very design which almost relegated Chutzpah to bridesmaid once again, this time in the Noakes race - Shane Kearns' Komatsu Azzurro, a two-time winner from four starts.

"I sailed on and against Challenge with the great Lou Abrahams who became my mentor, and Sunburst, both IOR boats. I built the first Chutzpah in 1985 and kept

building them - two Davidsons then the Hick 35, the 1998 Hobart winner, a Dovell IMS 36 then a Sydney 38, the Reichel Pugh 40 and lastly another Sydney 38, the eighth boat."

The husband of 48 years, father of three, grandfather of eight - two of those now budding sailors up in Asia where Bruce often joins son Drew on his Mills 41 called Ambush - is fondly described by Piesse as a family man and generous boat owner.

"Bruce is passionate about his sailing and puts the time, money and effort into a good program, and consequently he has built a team who stay together. There's even a queue for deliveries! Bruce knows people's strengths and weaknesses, and he puts them in the right position. Plus, he knows when to step aside."

Piesse calls the Noakes Sydney Gold Coast Chutzpah competes in every two or three years "the proving ground". It's when the team leaders cement their Hobart crew and nut out what needs to be changed for the main race.

Winning the first of the two ocean classics gives Taylor some pride to take forward to Christmas, but he knows all too well the odds of the stars aligning for a second time in one season, for the 628-nautical-mile Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race, remain the same as the 37 races, for which he's already challenged.

So, how many more Tattersall Cup attempts are left in the unassuming Bruce Taylor?

"I've said for the last seven or eight years, I'm happy to keep doing the Hobart if the guys with me are happy to do it. I need to be comfortable when I get into my bunk at night that those on deck know what they are doing, and are safe. While that exists and I can still afford it, I'll keep going."

After collecting a raft of Sydney Gold Coast divisional trophies and the IRC overall silverware at Southport Yacht Club, Taylor's departing line was: "with the grace of God and the help of medical technology and an understanding bank manager, we'll see you next year!"

Thanks to Noakes for their support of the 2018 Noakes Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race.
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Black Jack plays a deft hand



Black Jack claimed line honours in the Noakes Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race in a thrilling finish. (Credit - Michael Jennings Creative)

It was an electrifying, three-way sprint to the finish that ended the 100-footer line-honours battle in the 2018 Noakes Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race,

In a gripping finale, Queensland supermaxi Black Jack match-raced and beat Wild Oats XI to the finish line by just under two minutes over a 384-nautical-mile course.

Peter Harburg's 30m Black Jack finished at 7:26:20 on Monday July 28 in 6-9 knots of cool north-westerly wind, giving them an elapsed time of 1 day 17 hours 36 minutes 20 seconds and reversing last year's finish order.

When the breeze went light pre-dawn Black Jack made their move. "Every boat is a one-trick pony - we are stronger in light airs and we struggle upwind in strong conditions, but we have to be ready to pounce if the light air comes," owner Peter Harburg said.

Their victory is the first time the Queensland boat has beaten the Oatley family's Wild Oats XI in an offshore race having faced-off many times over Black Jack's 13-year program, both in Harburg's RP66 and now in the 100-footers. Wild Oats XI is a six-time Sydney Gold

Coast race line honours winner.

Wild Oats XI's helmsman Chris Links said of the battle behind Comanche between them, InfoTrack and Black Jack: "It was a great race between the three 'classic' maxis and everyone had their moment. You can't break the cord in the Southport race, it's one of those races you can't get far enough away from the opposition to be safe.

"In that light stuff with their configuration the cards fell

Black Jack's way. Good on them, it was great to see them have a win."

Jim Cooney's Comanche finished third having led from the 1.50pm Sydney Harbour start on Saturday until the last 15 nautical miles when the wind dropped out and the front four squeezed up.

Cooney paid tribute to Black Jack's owner and skipper for a race well-sailed, and such a tight finish. "We are very happy with Comanche's performance, particularly in light air," Cooney added. ⚓