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The start of the 2005 Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race PHOTOS: Andrea Francolini

MAGIC DRAGON TAKES GOLD

When one of the smallest and oldest boats in a fleet outsails a state-of-the-art line-up, it looks like magic. But *Pendragon's* win in the Sydney Gold Coast Race was down to talented sailing, report Lisa Ratcliff and Peter Campbell

Small boats, well-sailed, can still win major ocean races against bigger state-of-the-art yachts with their professional crews, as Sydney yachtsman Andrew Cochrane and his crew proved with *Pendragon* in the 20th Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race.

Pendragon is a heavy 34ft, timber boat, designed and built in New Zealand in 1983. According to Cochrane it was “stocked heavy with heavies” and likes running and reaching, the conditions which prevailed in this event.

After numerous divisional wins and a second overall in last year's race, Cochrane and his Stewart 34 *Pendragon* eventually clinched the major trophy in the final sailing of the 384 nautical mile event before the midwinter classic moves to a new April time slot next year.

Sailing in conditions that generally favoured boats in the 40–50ft LOA range, *Pendragon* stood out as a strong IRC handicap contender throughout the race. It was clear that her crewmembers were sailing the 34-footer to her optimum in the range of light to moderate breezes.

“We began competing in this event eight years ago, and I've still got many of the same crew on board, but we've developed a lot in that time,” said a delighted Andrew Cochrane after being declared overall winner at the Southport Yacht Club.

“Each year we've learned something and tried something different the following year and it's finally paid off for us,” he said.



Searching for wind

While the boat may be 23 years old, it's regularly seen under new sails. And once again, *Pendragon* carried a crew of highly experienced sailors, among them bowman Chris Cook and navigator Nick Cleary, two of the winning Rolex Farr 40 World Championship crewmembers on Richard Perini's *Evolution*. Cook was also on board when Perini won the Mumm 30 Worlds in Canada last year.

Tactician Tom King, who won a gold medal in the 470 class at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, added his skill set to the *Pendragon* crew last year and again played an integral role in this year's race.

Luke Ratcliff, a crewmember on the 2003 Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race overall winner *First National Real Estate* and a former 18ft skiff sailor, has competed in 11 Rolex Sydney Hobarts and at least the same number of Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Races, including the inaugural event in 1986. Skipper Andrew Cochrane and crewmember Bill Findlay have also contested numerous offshore races, including the Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race.

"Everyone steers and everyone trims on this boat," said Cochrane. "We don't race with the sole purpose of winning, but of course we like it when it happens."

Pendragon sailed consistently throughout the race and was the only boat that kept its place near the top of the IRC rankings as the CYCA's yacht tracker system calculated progressive positions. The crew sailed exceptionally well during the two nights at sea, maintaining fast-reaching speeds in the overnight land breezes.

Coming home with a south-easterly on the third afternoon of the race enabled *Pendragon* to clinch an IRC overall victory from Andrew Short's Farr 40 *Club Marine (ASM)* by a mere 42 minutes 45 seconds. Third place went to David Mason's Beneteau 44.7 *Prime Time*, followed by Julian Farren-Price's Cookson 40 *About Time*, Anthony Paterson's fast Mumm 30 *Tow Truck*, and Leslie Green's Swan 45 *Ginger*, skippered by Gordon Maguire.

None of the Division A boats figured in the top IRC overall results, but South Australian Geoff Boettcher's new *Hardy's Secret Mens Business* sailed an excellent race amongst its peers, winning its division from two Victorian boats – Steve Troon's *XLR8* and the newly

launched *Living Doll*, skippered by Michael Hiatt. *Hardy's Secret Mens Business* is a Reichel/Pugh 46, as is *XLR8*, while the spectacular looking *Living Doll* is a Cookson 50.

Canberra-based Gunnar Tuisk sailed a brilliant race with *Cadenza* to win the strong PHS division, spending the majority of the race at the top of the leaderboard.

"It was an excellent race for us. The design of the boat and the sails really suited close reaching," said Tuisk. "Last year the crew were mostly novices and they've built on their experience to come up with a great result this year."

Paul Spira's *Dreamtime* took second overall on PHS results ahead of John Cameron's *More Witchcraft*.

Overall, 10 Sydney 38s contested the Sydney Gold Coast, as well as racing one-design as a class. Victory went to well-known Perth yachtsman Alan Brierty with the chartered Sydney 38 *Contentious Issue*, which finished 2 minutes and 22 seconds ahead of Sydney boat *Calibre*, skippered by Geoff Bonus. Melbourne's Bruce Taylor finished only 1 minute and 52 seconds further astern with *Chutzpah*.

Brierty, an experienced offshore sailor who recently returned to small boat sailing with Sharpies, drew his crew from Etchells, J24, Sharpie and offshore sailors. The crew extracted optimum performance out of the boat to give WA its first division win in the Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race.

Aces wild

The twentieth annual Sydney Gold Coast – and the last midwinter race to Southport before it moves to an autumn timeslot – attracted an outstanding fleet of 74 boats, headed by the Reichel/Pugh 66 *Wild Oats*. The yacht was commissioned by Bob Oatley to defend the Admiral's Cup in England this year, before the event was cancelled.

The start of the Sydney Gold Coast race has often seen a spectacular run down Sydney Harbour before a wild westerly, but this year's start was one of the most placid in the 20-year history of the event. *Wild Oats* cleared the Heads 54 minutes after the start with Sean Langman's *AAPT* nearly 10 minutes astern. The tail-enders took more than an hour-and-a-half to get to sea.

Wild Oats' man aloft spotted a breeze out to sea and helmsman Mark Richards immediately tacked (in the direction of New Zealand) and was first to enjoy a filling nor'easter, and then tacked again on the north-making leg.

On the first night at sea the entire fleet made good time up the coast, which Roger Hickman, skipper of *Wild Rose*, described as "a dream run in a beautiful westerly. We couldn't have asked for better".

The two big boats with canting keels, *Wild Oats* and the improving *Wild Joe* (Steven David), along with the Volvo 60, *Seriously TEN* opened up a big lead from *AAPT* and George Snow's *Brindabella*.



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Antipodes' journey north

The Beneteau 44.7 *Antipodes* gave her crew a gentleman's sail in the 20th Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race and a very happy final voyage for me.

Deciding to compete in the race was easy. With the sale of *Antipodes* pending and a new Beneteau 523 on the way, what better way to celebrate the thousands of miles of ocean pleasure *Antipodes* has given us than a journey north?

Within a matter of hours we were up on the CYCA website as the first entry in the 2005 Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race – and the pressure was on. You know the story – insurance, boat preparation, arranging to get all manner of things serviced and re-gassed, Cat 2 inspection, race entries, accommodation, crew uniforms and catering.

Before I knew it, a dozen or more prospective crew – with a beer and burger in hand – were huddled around a table at the Hunter's Hill Hotel planning the 2005 sailing saga – Sydney to Gold Coast, Gold Coast to Mackay, Hamilton Island Race Week and then the glorious delivery home.

Antipodes had done it all before, but this year was to be something special.

Firstly, Netfront Solutions developed a great website (www.teamantipodes.com.au), to act as a communication vehicle for crew and prospective sponsors.

The working bees soon took their toll as the list of things to do seemed to get longer in direct proportion to the energy exerted. Moisture turned to leaks, leaks to broken fittings, sail clean-ups to re-cuts, orange patches to 20% coverage compliance ... and on it went.

The task of finding a sponsor for our journey fell to the Vinnicombe brothers. Young Kyle came up with the goods, bringing City Pacific Limited onboard after brother Simon's choice almost went belly up on the stock market in the middle of negotiations.

As all boat owners know, a good sponsor enables you to do many of the things otherwise only dreamt of – quality crew uniforms, full comprehensive insurance, race entries and fees, crew dinner and more.

The race briefing didn't give us any great expectations of a fast passage north, but as Inner Circle Rum had come good with their promise of a case of rum to accompany the three planned meals of chilli con carne, beef rogan josh and tuna pasta, then all promised to be well on the good ship *Antipodes*.

We awoke on the morning of the race to a prediction of light winds and blue skies. The gun sounded and the fleet split as we decided to crawl up the eastern channel away from the flood tide. As the afternoon progressed the wind built and, with the breeze moving abeam, we switched down from the number one light to our 'assy' and tracked up the coast in good company.

What a magic sight it was as the sun set. The night shifts went as planned as we followed the usual rigorous shipboard routine:

5pm – Happy Hour. Rum, red and white wine, cheese, smoked oysters and bikkies.

6.30pm – Dinner. A beautiful tuna pasta accompanied by a cheeky sauvignon blanc.

Then we were down for a nap.

Hugging the coast throughout the night, surrounded by masses of red and green navigation lights, made for magic sailing, even if it turned a little cold as the evening progressed.

Early next morning we experienced a dull thud on the keel, which we put down to a sun fish, though it was never seen.

Sunday saw us wake to a beautiful crisp morning. The 30 boats in sight boasted an array of brightly coloured spinnakers. The shift change settled down, then it was time for brekkie – cereal, followed by toasted egg and bacon sandwiches, orange juice and coffee. The day didn't get much harder as a bit of kite trimming merged with a slash out lunch, a couple of sail changes and increasing breeze.

Jostling for position was minimal as we progressed north in a gentlemanly fashion, each boat keeping a respectful distance. Evening came and we set to the arduous task of consuming all manner of pâté, cheese and olives before settling down to a great rogan josh.

Monday dawned, cold with crystal clear skies and the promise of continuing following winds. Unfortunately, only 10 boats are in sight as we passed Coffs Harbour at dawn, but many silhouettes are familiar, including *Cyrene*, *Sextant*, *Mr Beaks* and *Game Set* with *Kioni* and *Wild Rose* following closely. The morning brought home the uncertainties of the sked, with *Cyrene* trying to relay after *Wild Oats* and *Antipodes* had carried the banner on previous days.

As the day progressed the familiar south-westerly at 10–15 knots made way for a moderate south-easter and magnificent – if a tad slow – sailing.

We came on for the midnight shift with only 30 nautical miles to go, easing south-westerly winds and the challenge ahead to keep near the front of our familiar pack.

We went in to shore; they stayed out. We dropped back as the breeze lightened but then it progressively built and with no tide to speak of we progressively edged ahead. Around 1am *Sextant* and *Wild Rose* came down on us from the east and for the next two hours it was a fabulous tussle to the end. Up went the o.g, down it came. Up went the 'asy'. It ended at 3.33am. We'd held out *Sextant* but suffered defeat at the hands of *Wild Rose*, which powered in under a tight reach to finish two minutes ahead.

What a great race – even if it was our worst result, finishing ninth on PHS. No-one could complain. Fabulous weather, top food, good company and a tussle all the way.

– Greg Newton

Sunrise saw the leaders approaching Tacking Point, south of Port Macquarie. At that stage, the constant conditions favoured the smaller boats on corrected time with *Pendragon* at the top of the leaderboard for the first time.

By the Sunday evening *Wild Oats* was north of South Solitary Island, six nautical miles ahead of *Wild Joe*. *Vanguard*, *Brindabella*, *AAPT*, *Hardy's Secret Mens Business* were ten nautical miles further astern, abeam of Coffs Harbour, followed closely by the Victorian boats *XLR8* and *Living Doll* and then Geoff Ross' *Yendys*.

After a relatively slow night at sea with lots of sail changes, *Wild Oats* was only 20 nautical miles from the finish at sunrise on the Monday morning. The Reichel/Pugh 66 had sailed most of the night in a light land breeze, but it was enough for her to maintain a 10 nautical mile advantage over nearest rival *Wild Joe*.

Corrected time positions at that stage saw *Pendragon* back in first place in the IRC category ahead of Andrew Short's Farr 40, *Club Marine (ASM)*.

Crossing the line

Wild Oats finally took line honours at 9.46am on the Monday morning after a painful three nautical mile drift along the Gold Coast beaches to the finish at Main Beach, Southport. With less than half a mile to go, a light sou'easter began to stir and *Wild Oats* was able to pop a spinnaker.

Wild Oats' elapsed time of 1 day 20 hours 56 minutes and 51 seconds was well outside *Brindabella's* race record of 27 hours 35 minutes set in 1999. Helmsman, Mark Richards said: "We didn't get a drop of water on the deck the entire race."

Only seven minutes separated the next three boats to finish, with *AAPT* sneaking through close to the beach while *Brindabella* and *Vanguard* tried to pass each other further out to sea. In the end *AAPT* beat *Vanguard* by just two minutes.

As the leading boats crossed the line, the rest of the fleet was enjoying a spinnaker run up the NSW North Coast before a 12-15 knot sou'easter, bringing the smaller boats into contention to dominate handicap results. *Pendragon* was still at the top of the IRC list, but Anthony Paterson's Mumm 30 *Tow Truck* had made massive gains.

Apart from the well-sailed *Pendragon* and *Tow Truck*, the hardest sailed boats in the 40-50ft LOA range dominated overall IRC results. Significantly, there had not been one retirement from the fleet of 74 boats representing NSW, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, the ACT and Western Australia.

The 2006 Sydney Gold Coast Yacht Race, which will start on 1st April, will be the final race of the CYCA's Blue Water Series.

Southport Yacht Club has used the changes to the CYCA's offshore calendar to organise the Commodore's Cup, a new three or four day regatta, to immediately follow next year's Sydney Gold Coast Race. ■

2005 Sydney Gold Coast Race Results

Sydney 38 Division

- 1 *Contentious Issue* (Alan Brierty, WA) elapsed time: 2:10:25:34
- 2 *Calibre* (Geoff Bonus, NSW) 2:10:37:56
- 3 *Chutzpah* (Bruce Taylor, Victoria) 2:10:39:48

PHS Division

- 1 in division and 1st PHS overall: *Cadenza*, Farr 50 (Gunnar Tuisk, ACT) corrected time: 2:15:38:32
- 2 *Dreamtime*, Holland 44 (Paul Spira, NSW) 2:16:17:59
- 3 *More Witchcraft*, Dibley 40 (John Cameron, NSW) 2:17:36:48

IRC Division D

- 1 in division and 1 IRC overall: *Pendragon*, Stewart 34 (Andrew Cochrane, NSW) corrected time: 2:14:58:09
- 2 *Tow Truck*, Mumm 30 (Anthony Paterson, NSW) 2:16:45:13
- 3 *Veloce*, Elliott 11 (Phil Simpfendorfer, Vic) 2:17:35:36

IRC Division C

- 1 *Contentious Issue*, Sydney 38 (Alan Brierty, WA) corrected time: 2:16:58:11
- 2 *Calibre*, Sydney 38 (Geoff Bonus, NSW) 2:17:11:57
- 3 *Chutzpah*, Sydney 38 (Bruce Taylor, Vic) 2:17:14:01

IRC Division B

- 1 *Club Marine (ASM)*, Farr 40 (Andrew Short, NSW) corrected time: 2:15:40:50
- 2 *Prime Time*, Beneteau 44.7 (David Mason, NSW) 2:16:05:19
- 3 *About Time*, Cookson 12 (Julian Farren-Price, NSW) 2:16:12:44

IRC Division A

- 1 *Hardy's Secret Mens Business*, Reichel/Pugh 46 (Geoff Boettcher, SA) corrected time: 2:17:01:28
- 2 *XLR8*, Reichel/Pugh 46 (Graeme Troon, Vic) 2:17:28:26
- 3 *Living Doll*, Cookson 50 (Michael Hiatt, Vic) 2:18:04:18

IRC Overall:

- 1 *Pendragon*
- 2 *Club Marine (ASM)*
- 3 *Prime Time*
- 4 *About Time*
- 5 *Tow Truck*

Line Honours:

Wild Oats, (Bob Oatley, NSW)
elapsed time: 1 day 20 hours 56 minutes 51 seconds

Fleet:

74 starters, all finished