



Tales of Emma 2004

Sydney to Hobart yacht race on Boxing Day

At the moment the big news in my life is that I will be participating in the Rolex Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race 2004, which starts on Boxing Day at 1310 NSW time. I am sailing on a yacht called *Addiction*, a 37 foot Inglis design, with 8 others, and I will be the principal navigator. I have done quite a few ocean races on this yacht now.

Last week we delivered the yacht from Melbourne to Sydney, a trip which took 5 days, and we covered 724 nautical miles. Of the 5 days, 53 hours were spent motoring due to insufficient wind, or a small amount of wind coming from the wrong direction. It was a largely uneventful trip, although there are some stories to tell.

On the first night out I made a classic navigational error, and substituted a 5 for a 6 in the longitude for our waypoint in the GPS, which meant that we spent much of the night heading for a point out in the middle of Bass Strait of no particular significance, rather than the tip of Wilson's Promontory, which would have been much more useful, and 15 nautical miles and 3 hours faster. Lucky that it was an error seaward, rather than the other way! That woke me up, I have to say, and I was double checking everything for the rest of the trip. I'm also glad that little faux pas occurred on the delivery trip, not the race.

On the second day of the trip, as we were in the middle of nowhere, somewhere on Bass Strait, motoring towards Gabo Island, off the eastern tip of Victoria, we managed to get some kelp wrapped around our propeller, which meant that the engine was not functioning. Being a reasonably confident swimmer, I offered to go into the water & clear it, because we wouldn't have been able to continue without the engine. So I jumped into the water—and immediately regretted it for several reasons—it was bitterly cold, and it occurred to me that being over 60 metres deep in that part of the Strait, there were more than likely sea monsters around! Add to this that the boat was still sailing, although at less than 2 knots, so I had to keep tight hold of the sheet we'd put over the side for me, and I was making mad, quick dashes under the boat with the knife, slashing wildly at the kelp in an effort to clear the prop before something came up from the deep and said 'yum, canapé'!

It didn't take long to clear the kelp and check the prop still opened, and I managed to clamber back on board the boat to waiting crew with a towel and a hot drink. Ricky, the 18 year old son of one of the owners, passed me up an enormous piece of fruit cake, and I'm afraid I burst out laughing and told Ricky it would take me a week to eat that much cake, could I please have about 1/6th of what he was offering! I'm sure, being the growing boy that he is, he ate the rest.

Yachting news continued

Anyway, about 36 hours later, again when I was on watch, we got more kelp in the prop, only this time, it was around midnight. I told the skipper I was OK to go overboard again if he needed the prop clear, but I would need a torch. I have to say I was quite relieved when he said he wouldn't consider sending anyone over the side in the middle of the night, torch or no torch. The sea monsters would have got me for sure if I was in the water waving a torch around! We put up the sails and sailed off gently in mostly the wrong direction for the rest of the night, and the next morning, it seemed that the kelp had worked its way off the prop, and we could start the engine again.

Finally, on the last night at sea, we got wind. In spades. There were ferocious storms on land, gale and strong wind warnings at sea. We were regularly getting 35 to 40 knots of wind from around midnight onwards, from behind us, with a massive following sea. The boat is designed to be a downhill boat (goes well downwind), and the ride was wild & exhilarating—at one point we recorded 20.3 knots of boat speed with only a main with three reefs hoisted (for those non sailors that means no front sail, and a tiny back sail, so the speed is jaw dropping).

We got into Sydney a quarter of an hour late for our rendezvous with the sponsors, Paul & Shark Yachting—we were to take their office staff from the Cruising Yacht Club across Sydney Harbour to Doyle's Restaurant in Watson's Bay for lunch. We came to the boating equivalent of a skidding stop, loaded them on board and warned them to stay upwind of us as none of us had had a shower in over 5 days. And no one was to go below decks without a gas mask!

During the wild ride up the East coast the night before we had hit some debris in the water, so my job then was to (again) go over the side, but this time in the marina, and check the hull, keel fin & engine leg for damage. It seemed, from looking at it, that some paint had chipped off, but nothing serious. I did discover that a large chunk of Sikaflex was coming loose from the keel case—but the skipper didn't seem too perturbed by that.

So, the big race starts next Sunday, Boxing Day, on Sydney Harbour. We expect to take around 4 days to get to Hobart, depending on the weather (I would like everyone to hope for a following wind please!) and we will have a satellite tracker on board, which gives real time positions to a web site, allowing all those on land to see where we are. The web site displaying this marvellous technology is <http://rolexsydneyhobart.com>, We will have 9 crew (I'm the only female), so the trip will be even squeezier than the trip up to Sydney.

Earlier in the year ...

In January this year I helped bring the boat *No Fearr* back from Hobart. Most of the trip we were dogged by pretty nasty weather, so spent quite a bit of time ducking up the east coast of Tasmania, and hiding in various bays, including Wineglass Bay, which was absolutely gorgeous. I had a bit of a swim off the boat (in lieu of a bath), swam over to a cray fishing boat, knocked on the hull, and negotiated a deal with the fisherman to swap a slab of beer for about 8 crays. So we had warm cray salad for lunch, as we had on board someone who had previously been a chef!

When we crossed Bass Strait that time, we were beating into a westerly, making even the simplest of tasks a bit difficult—at one point I was trying to make coffee for those on deck and we went soaring over a wave and thumping down into the trough, so I went flying across the boat, open jar of coffee in one hand. I spent the next few hours sponging a disgusting mix of sea water and instant coffee off the cabin sole. In those circumstances, cheese toasted sandwiches are about as complicated as my cooking gets.

Triathlon training & racing

My goal this year has been to qualify to compete at the Forster Australian Ironman Championships in April 2005. In order to qualify, I had to either race a qualifying time at a Half Ironman, or race enough Half Ironman races to convince the Race Director that I needed a sympathy spot for the full Ironman. My training all winter has been geared towards this end, and I completed several ultra rides (180km plus) and ultra runs (three to four hours of very slow running).

At the beginning of October I flew up to the Gold Coast to compete in the Half Ironman (1.9km swim, 90k bike ride and 21.1km run). However, I had been slightly ill in the few days leading up to the race, and ended up being unable to complete the race within the required time frame (7 hours), which was very disappointing. My plan then was to race at Shepparton, in Victoria, mid November, and then at Canberra in mid December. However, two weeks before the Shepparton race I tore a ligament in my ankle, and it is still not even healed enough for me to run for any longer than about 15 minutes.

This means that I have no chance of qualifying for Ironman next year, and even if I did get a sympathy spot, I have had two months of next to no training apart from swimming, so wouldn't be fit enough to start the preparation for the race. Sadly, that means I won't achieve that goal next year.

My focus for the summer season has changed now, as I have accepted that I will be unable to run properly for some time as the ankle is healing far more slowly than it should. We have quite a full open water swimming race calendar in Victoria, so I will probably take part in some longer races in the Bay, 3 to 4 kilometres per race. There are some good races down the West coast too—Lorne Pier to Pub, the Apollo Bay Twelve Apostles Plunge, the Ripview swim, all coming in at around the 1.2km mark, easily achievable.

My Ironman goal will just switch to 2006—and I'll start trying to qualify earlier in the year, with races in Yeppoon (Far North Queensland), Busselton (West Australia) and the Northern Territory.



Me at swim training—I look a bit scrappy, but that's as good as it gets at 6am!



The picture is a little dark, but this is me next to the new vehicle supplied by work—a Mitsubishi Triton one tonne ute—it's a bit basic, but it's very useful to have a ute.

My family in 2004

Everyone is well—Mum is still working at Loreto, part time. Dad is still working at the hotel on night shift. Steph is working at the Lort Smith Animal Hospital, and has also recently completed a 6 month course to become a volunteer Zoo Guide. Mum & Dad have a trip to Japan planned for next year. Steph had the misfortune to fall very ill while on holiday in Cairns earlier this year, but has recovered now. It was difficult having her in hospital so many thousands of kilometres away, and we were extremely pleased when she finally got back to Melbourne.

We had Christmas dinner on the 20th this year as I will be in Sydney on Christmas Day and Steph will be in Cairns, visiting her partner, Spyder's, family. Mum, as usual, is going to England to visit her Dad and the rest of her family, leaving on Boxing Day.



Me, Mum, Steph & Dad at our Christmas before Christmas on the 20th

Where am I living?

In February this year I moved out of the beautiful house in Armadale (3 bedrooms, two living rooms, enormous old house) because house mates were driving me insane, and into a one bedroom flat just about 1km up the road. The flat is lovely, with a court yard, some kind of fruit tree, and polished floor boards. It is, however, very small. So small, in fact, that I have had to get a loft bed, a bed on stilts that sits over my desk & computer, and my chest of drawers. I still sometimes bang my head on the bed base when I go to get a T shirt in a hurry.

The flat also has termites—thankfully it's a rented flat, so technically not my problem, but the landlord does know about the problem. Some of the architraves and skirtings are mere shells, the only substance being two coats of paint.

I also had a significant number of possums living in the walls for a while, the first time they woke me up with their screeching disgusting noises at 3am, right next to my head, I jumped out of my skin. Then they started getting inside through the cat door, so I started locking the cat door at night. So they found a way into one of my kitchen cupboards and thence into my kitchen. I am a heavy sleeper, I have discovered, as I woke up one night, thought I heard a rustle, got out of bed to investigate to discover a possum in the kitchen running around on the bench, having spent some time, obviously, throwing things off the top of the fridge, breaking crockery, and eating an apple. He'd obviously been there a while.

Later that week the body corporate kindly relocated the possums to a new home (being protected in Australia, wringing their noisy, flea ridden little necks was not an option). The New Zealand approach is much more sensible—the only good possum is a flat possum.

Living by myself is heaven on a stick—I love it!

Trip to New Zealand in March this year

I took a long overdue trip back to NZ in March this year, to support a friend from the triathlon club in his attempt at the NZ Ironman (he did very well) and to visit family who I hadn't seen in quite some time—up to 20 years in some cases. I arrived in NZ about two weeks after the North Island had been inundated with rain and flooding, but the weather was superb while I was there.

I flew into Auckland to be met by my cousin Min, and her children Olly and Mathiu (who was about two weeks old at the time). Disclaimer here—descriptions of family relationships are not strictly accurate, for ease of description all my relatives in Auckland are cousins. I stayed with Min & Carol for a few days, having a bit of a relax, getting to know Olly and Mathiu, and jumping off the Auckland Sky Tower—sort of a bungee jump in the middle of Auckland City. I also got taken out sailing by my cousin Stephen in his boat with a few of his friends—we had a great evening sailing around, anchoring, going for a swim, having dinner. We also had a family dinner with all the rellies, and I saw my cousin Geoff's boat that was in the process of being built—it has since been launched, congratulations Geoff!

Taupo was the next stop, for the NZ Ironman, which was a long day, even for spectators. Unfortunately at this point in the trip I jogged something on the camera I had borrowed from Mum & Dad, and none of the photos after Auckland actually turned out.

The following day I went down to Wellington and caught a flight to Christchurch, to meet up with my cousin Chris and his family—Kathy, Connor (nearly 8) & Millie (nearly 5) - sorry kids if I got the ages wrong! They have a lovely house in Governors Bay near Christchurch, overlooking the water, and we went out in the tinny in the evening to set the nets for flounder, and got up very early the next day to go & fetch them in.

Of course, I couldn't go so far south without seeing my Uncle Tony in Oamaru, who, together with his housemate & friend, entertained me greatly—I had a fabulous tour of Oamaru, sorely needed as the last time I was there was well over 20 years ago, so I had completely forgotten anything about the town.

It was a short trip, but a great deal of fun, and well worth it. I am considering doing the NZ Ironman myself at some stage in the future because the course is so pretty, and family are so close.



Olly with his new dinosaur tail that roars!



Min's partner Carol with Mathiu in his little wombat hat



Family dinner in Auckland—Olly, Stephen, Helen, Chris & Geoff

Merry Christmas and a
Happy 2005, Love Emma

WHAT HAS EMMA BEEN UP TO IN
2004?

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Being the best me I can be

Long distance sailing—pros & cons

What I like about long distance sailing ...

- Disco dolphins—in the ocean we often see phosphorescence in the water, the water glows green when there is movement. So when dolphins come up to play on the bow of the boat, and streak around the boat in seemingly choreographed bunches, we can see ribbons of light weaving their way around the boat.
- Being totally away from everything, largely out of touch with the normal world. We normally have contact with Mersey Radio several times a day to let them know our position and to get a weather forecast, but the day to day news simply passes us by.
- Sailing along on flat seas in a tidy but not overpowering breeze, off the wind—either on a beautiful sunny day, or in the middle of a moonlit night.
- Charging along downwind in 35 knots, thundering down waves—exciting!
- The sense that we're doing something slightly out of the ordinary—anyone can get from A to B, but not everyone does it by yacht. This goes hand in hand with the sense of achievement felt from being able to successfully navigate a yacht around obstacles, identify ships & marks, and generally avoid hitting things in difficult circumstances.
- Being on watch at 3am is the perfect excuse to indulge in hot chocolate, Tim Tams and fruit cake—or anything that takes the fancy, really.
- Being in contact with Mersey Radio—this is a volunteer service run by a man called Lionel Whish-Wilson, who does a brilliant job keeping track of yachters & fishermen in Tasmanian & Victorian coastal waters, even to the point of including the NSW forecast in his skeds when we were heading up the east coast!
- Reminding myself to appreciate the really simple things in life, like showers, clean clothes, a full night's sleep and a bed that doesn't attempt to throw me on the floor regularly.

Things I don't really like about long distance sailing but can't do anything about ...

- Some sod always smuggles a polecat on board (despite the one bag per crew member rule) and we never find it in time to throw it overboard, meaning that after several days a miasma rises from the companionway and the crew that would make your eyes water.
- There's no deciding that we can't be bothered cooking and ringing for pizza—so if the trip takes longer than expected we might get down to having warmed up tinned spaghetti and fried sausage for breakfast. Odd, but definitely better than nothing.
- Only getting to sleep for up to three hours at a time, having to get up at 2.30am to go on deck for the graveyard watch, not being able to sleep because the boat is tossing around like a toy boat in a choppy bath. Exhaustion.
- After three days or so, even the friendliest of crew members can become a bit much and the longing for a bit of alone time gets intense.