

A number of people quite liked my description of last year's race, so I decided to write again about our Sydney to Hobart campaign – starting with the delivery up to Sydney. Although the race itself was nowhere near as tough as 2004, and we got to Hobart nearly two days earlier than last year, we still had our dramas.

I had pulled out of the race in October due to work commitments, but was still keen to do the delivery up to Sydney, as I had greatly enjoyed the delivery trip in 2004. So when we set off on December 10 for Sydney, my intention was that the trip would be my ocean sailing for the season.

On board for the delivery we had Richard (skipper), Matt, Simon, David Green, me, & my friend Jim, who was keen to get some more ocean sailing. Six of us would be a nice easy number to take the boat up to Sydney, with a proposed watch schedule of 2 hours on, 4 hours off, with an afternoon off of 6 hours every three days. That's one of the things I like about deliveries – there's more off-watch time for fiddling about, enjoying the view, and sleeping.

On our way down Port Phillip Bay we noticed a faint smell of diesel, and put it down to the fact that the tanks had been filled only that morning. This diesel was to become a significant problem later in the trip. We had a relatively uneventful sail down to Wilson's Prom, but when we turned the corner to go up towards Gabo, through the oil fields, the wind & weather turned on us, and we were beating into 30-35 knot winds.

I was seasick the first night out, for around 6 hours. I was still able to stand my watch, but I wasn't able to eat, and I wasn't used to that. No real problem – just a few spews and a bit of a headache for a while, but not a great start to the trip. I firmly maintain that the reason I was sick was that I spent the first afternoon below trying to sleep in the diesel fumes.

Jim was not coping at all with the conditions – in fact, Simon had to coax him off the companionway steps, where he had camped for several hours, making life rather difficult for the rest of us who needed to get in and out of the cabin. Jim spent several hours on the rail, and then went below and was not seen again until Eden, earning himself the nickname Lord Jim. He also had an uncanny ability to identify the best bunk (driest, largest) and occupy it continuously for two days.

So we were down to five people standing watches – no problem, slight modification to the watch system and we could cope with that. But about half-way across the oil fields we noticed that the smell of diesel was significantly stronger, and in actual fact, it was all over the floor. Now, diesel is horribly slippery and smells disgusting, and we were all spreading it round with our boots to every part of the boat, including the companionway steps and the deck. This made getting around the boat extraordinarily dangerous, as it was like being on a skating rink with no direction control. Add to that the fact that we were

beating to windward in heavy seas and high winds, and you can imagine that life was a bit fraught at that time.

Richard had a go at cleaning up the diesel, sponging the floor with soapy water, and sopping out the bilges. I gave him a hand – obviously not seasick any more as I was soaking diesel out of the bilges with one hand and eating a ham & cheese toasted sandwich with the other, taking care not to swap hands at any stage, and feeling mighty fine.

But wherever the diesel was coming from, it was not finished yet. It just kept turning up in the bilges, then on the cabin sole, on the steps, on the deck ... the bane of our lives.

At around this point, David Green came a cropper while attempting to negotiate his way to the forepeak – as he stepped around from the galley, the boat was airborne, and when it came crashing down on the next wave, he went crashing down too. Breaking his fall with his back on a boat rib. After a few minutes lying winded on the floor of the boat, he managed to get up and get my attention - I was on watch on deck.

When I figured out what had happened, I yelled up the companionway that he had broken a rib – Simon's face went white, he looked shocked to the core, and he said, 'He broke a boat rib?!' When I said, 'No, one of his own ribs', the look of relief was sort of funny, but understandable, as breaking a boat rib in those conditions could have meant the boat itself being in danger of sinking. Of course, the look of relief was closely followed by concern for David's wellbeing.

So there we were, a crew member with a broken rib and another crew member who refused to get out of bed – four competent people to sail the boat through the night in testing conditions. We were waiting for the southerly change to come through – desperately hoping that it would come through SOON.

We moved to a three hours on / three hours off watch system, which is awfully difficult to maintain overnight, when your body is screaming out that you are MEANT TO BE ASLEEP RIGHT NOW, GET THE MESSAGE, but we had no choice. We couldn't even take shelter anywhere along the coast as there are no places for a boat with our draft to get in. The best we could do was tack in to shore as far as possible to get in the lee of the coast, before tacking out again into the swell and the waves.

While approaching Gabo Island Matt & Simon had put in the last reef, which meant that they had to rig the inner forestay to balance the forces on the mast, as we had reduced mainsail area by 60%. Now this meant that tacking was horribly complicated as each watch was only two-up – made even worse by the fact that the boat has running backstays.

Richard & I came on watch around midnight, and Simon was explaining the whole tacking process, including the inner forestay, which I had never dealt with

myself before, at the top of his voice, right by my ear, and I could barely hear him. When he had finished explaining it he said, 'Do you understand?', to which I replied, 'Yes', but something must have made him doubt me, because he said, 'Really?', and then I was honest and said, 'No, but I'll figure it out.'. To make matters worse, every wave was breaking over the deck and my wet weather gear was failing in any way, shape or form to keep the water out. At least the weather was warm, or I would have been miserable.

As it was, I was just apprehensive – would I remember the detailed instructions I'd been given on what to do when tacking? Why did I have to do this for the first time in the dark, disgusting conditions? Answer: That's life, deal with it. When Richard uttered the dreaded words – 'we need to tack' – I had to sit there & talk it through with him. So here goes, how to tack with two on deck with three reefs in, in a howling gale, in far too many not so easy steps:

1. Release the tack line that holds the inner forestay and pull on the lazy sheet to bring the inner forestay up to the mast.
2. Go forward, while copping gallons of water full on the face, and making sure that the tether isn't getting tangled in anything, find the inner forestay and attach it to the base of the mast. First problem – the inner forestay had fallen against the sail – not ordinarily a problem, but the boat was heeling over to a stupid degree, and as I reached across to grab the inner forestay, I slipped, and landed on the lee rail just as we ploughed through another wave. All I can say is, thank heavens for tethers and vb cord on the foredeck lifelines – I landed flat on my back on the spinnaker pole, drowning, but still on the boat.
3. Haul wet carcass back up to the mast, clutching the inner forestay in hand, and try to attach it to the mast.
4. Fail to figure out how the stupid clip works (Sod's Law, when Simon showed me the clip the next day when it was light it took me 3 seconds to figure it out).
5. Use another halyard to tie inner forestay down to the base of the mast instead – complicated, but effective, until the halyards end up tangled.
6. Crawl back along the lee side of the boat to the runners at the stern, taking a salt water bath every few seconds or so, hanging on for dear life so as not to go between the lifelines.
7. Prepare lazy runner for a tack.
8. Realise there's no winch handle, attempt to stand up and get it off Richard, who at the same time is trying to prevent the helm from overpowering the boat, and trying to see the next wave.

9. Stop to spit out three gallons of salt water. Rub eyes, make them worse by rubbing salt water into them.
10. Helm down, tack the main, Richard lets off the working runner, takes the helm across while I bring on the new working runner.
11. Move around Richard from the back of the boat to the main part of the cockpit, entails standing up and walking around him – not easy as boat pitching, rolling & yawing all at once, but MUST STAY tethered on because the risk of falling off the boat is high, and the odds of being found in this weather and sea state very low. Not easy for Richard either, trying to concentrate on helming when someone is squeezing past his back.
12. Try not to fall over and hit head on various protuberances on the boat – it's been done before and it's ugly, broken cheekbones, broken nose.
13. Tack headsail by kneeling in middle of cockpit (by this stage, knees & shins protesting loudly at the battering they have been getting), holding on to the working sheet with one hand and the lazy sheet with the other. Let go working sheet and pull in lazy sheet. Trim.
14. Go back to foredeck – just in case you might be getting dry, take bath on foredeck.
15. Find halyard that is securing inner forestay. Release. Accidentally let halyard go as the boat lurches and thumps down on another wave.
16. Slide face first down towards the spinnaker pole on the leeward side as lee rail goes underwater again. Start to cry hot tears of frustration. Coin the phrase 'fucking inner fucking forestay'. Curse whoever made gravity. Decide there is definitely no God.
17. Retrieve halyard and scramble back up to the mast.
18. Secure halyard.
19. Crawl back to cockpit, get washed along deck by waves.
20. Pull on inner forestay, then winch it on tight (discover later that this is a terrible mistake, causing the turning block to fail).
21. Sit on high side of deck, sniffing, cursing and winded. Blow gallons of salty snot out of nose. The whole process must have taken 15 minutes.
22. Hear Richard say, 'I'm dreadfully sorry Emma, but while we were tacking, the southerly change came through and now we have to tack back.'
23. Feel like screaming and raging. Repeat as required.

24. Go into a state of shock every time someone mentions 'inner forestay' from that point on.

Once we were round Gabo and the change had come through, things started to settle down, and finally, on Tuesday morning, we approached Eden. We needed to check out the diesel problem, pick up another crewmember, and put David & Jim off the boat – or so we thought.

As we were motoring into Twofold Bay (small waves, sunny day), towards Eden, I asked Jim whether he would get his wife to come & pick him up. To everyone's surprise, because we thought there was no way he would want to stay on board after being sick enough to stay in a bunk for two days, he said he wasn't getting off. Richard made it quite clear that he expected each crewmember to stand each and every watch, and half an hour later, Jim decided that he would get his wife to come & meet him.

At Eden we rafted up next a fishing boat, complete with smart-arse fisherman, and David Green & I scurried off for a shower at the Fisherman's Co-op. David did not realise, but the showers were unisex, and I was already in a cubicle when David got into the shower. I didn't say anything for a while, being too engrossed in chipping away at the accumulated filth and salt crust of three days, but eventually I called out, 'Are you OK, David?', thinking that his broken ribs might be making things difficult. We had a reasonable conversation then he must have been suspicious, because he said, 'are you in a cubicle in here?' I explained about the lack of showers in the Ladies, and I think that shocked David slightly – I promised not to open the door without warning!

Richard & I then spent quite some time washing all floor surfaces on the boat thoroughly with soap & water, to get rid of every last vestige of diesel. David Pawley, our new crew member, and coincidentally a marine engineer, had a look at the engine, but couldn't identify any specific problems that would lead to spillage, so we just cleaned up & hoped for the best. Meanwhile, Matt & Simon were on a mission to fix the lee cloths.

Around mid-afternoon we pulled out of Eden and re-started our journey north. Ironically, the rest of the trip we were plagued by light winds and slow speeds, having copped the beating of the trip in Victorian coastal waters.

Those who read my account of the delivery to Sydney last year may remember that I was foolhardy and jumped into Bass Strait to clear the prop when it was fouled with weed. Well, guess what, once again ... I have decided that required equipment for me to step on board that boat now includes my bathers, as it happened after the race too. At least this time we were off NSW and the water was warmer – the water in Hobart at the end of the race was extremely icy. I was still a little nervous about hungry marine creatures, though.

On our last night at sea before we got to Sydney, Wednesday night, I think it was, we broke the watch system for dinner, and ate together on deck. It was superb – beautiful sunset, great food, fine china (well, plastic mugs and spoons), and a couple of bottles of red, kindly donated by Jim, who left them on the boat when he got off at Eden. Cabin fever was getting to some of us, and we had a silly, laughing dinner, complete with phone call from PJ, during which Simon & I copped a bit about the ‘fucking inner fucking forestay’. At least we know now what not to do. Richard was also a source of entertainment – he had just got a new phone two days before we left Melbourne, and was getting everyone to help him figure out how to send text messages to Angie, his wife. We larfed & larfed & larfed.

Then Simon ‘Dish Pig’ Shaddick did the dishes, I took a photo, and we started a running joke that had kind of run out of puff by the finish line in Hobart. I still haven’t been able to convince him to put the pink dishwashing gloves on, not even by promising to paint dolls on them to make them seem like Living Doll uniforms (another boat in the S2H, with bright pink crew shirts, for those who don’t know). It’s almost a matter of honour, now.

Just as an aside, the reason I ended up doing the delivery and race, instead of just the delivery, is that David Green was down as race crew, and having broken his ribs, I was asked to sub in as emergency crew at the last minute – of course, I was stoked to be asked, and extremely happy to oblige. David’s ribs are now on the mend, although he is disappointed to have missed out on the race.

Christmas Day

My Christmas Day was kind of weird – I can safely say that it’s the first time I’ve spent hour upon hour on Christmas Day reading a law text. First, I spent 40 minutes outside North Sails waiting for Ross Lloyd, who was never going to turn up – unfortunate mix-up, that. Then I spent two and a half hours at Melbourne airport waiting for my flight to Sydney – my Dad had to drop me off early at the airport. And on both occasions, the only book I had was rather dry.

In Sydney, Waz’ family had organised a fantastic picnic at Rushcutters Park for everyone, including a game of informal cricket. Now even though I’ve been in Australia for 20 years, I’ve never played beach cricket or any of its variants, but this was fun. Except I can’t throw to save myself, and that was a bit embarrassing, and I had to ask which side of the bat to use. Jeff also managed to whack himself on the leg with the cricket bat, which ended up causing complications during the race.

The atmosphere at CYCA was sizzling (as was the weather – I don’t know how those boys off Hugo Boss managed to keep their designer suits on in that heat) as everyone put in last minute preparations. Our final safety audit, on the morning of Boxing Day, was all fine and dandy, which was a relief, because the

original audit had identified some issues, including a deficient first aid kit, which had been my responsibility ... hmmm, must be more thorough next time.

The Race

The crew list for the race was PJ, Richard, Jeff, Matt, Simon, Peter Mac, Pauline, Rob, Waz & me.

The wind at the start was a light northerly, and there was a bit of chop on the Harbour. We had a pretty poor start and ended up way towards the back of the fleet. Apparently the back of the fleet isn't worth protecting from marauding spectator boats, and we nearly got wiped out by a couple of stupid people on motor launches out to watch the start, but unable to comprehend that there was an exclusion zone where ONLY RACING YACHTS were meant to be.

Once finally clear of the Heads, we headed out to sea, a tactical decision that did not pay off in the slightest, unfortunately. The boats that kept inshore made much better time down the NSW coast than we did, and later in the race, while we were shooting past boats in a very impressive fashion, actually, we shouldn't have been behind them in the first place.

At some point in the race – the days meld into on-watch/off-watch – we had run out of southerly puff, and were waiting for the northerly to come through, bobbing about with the sails flapping, but miraculously still making 3 knots over the ground in a southerly direction (helpful current). Addiction is a very hot boat below when there's no wind, and sleeping in the quarter berths is like trying to sleep in a sauna, while sleeping in the primary berths in the cabin is too distracting. Pauline & I took turns sleeping in the forepeak, nesting on a couple of sails. Quite cool, out of the way, the only problem was, it's got a great view of the head, so there were a couple of times where I was desperately keeping my eyes shut so as not to burn my retinas with the view of someone having a poo.

Mind you, there's really no such thing as privacy on board anyway – the guys often peed off the back of the boat, and Peter Mac & I started scoring their efforts on criteria such as safety consciousness (kneeling in heavy weather to bring the centre of gravity lower scored extra points, PJ), direction and how many shakes ... sorry guys, hope we didn't cause performance anxiety.

As we were approaching Gabo Island, I was below, at the nav station, and PJ was on the helm, it was the middle of the night and visibility was pretty poor as there was no moon. PJ yelled down and asked me to contact the vessel we were on a collision course with and ask them what their intentions were, make them aware of us, as he couldn't identify their lights. I did so, found that they had already seen us, and changed course, and then stuck my head up on deck to see what all the fuss was about. Well, less than a few boat lengths away was a very large Bravo Yankee Foxtrot (Big Yacht Flattener), the weirdest looking ship I've

ever seen, with no middle, and a host of lights that I've certainly never seen on my Collision Regulations flash cards. Close call.

Later that watch, we had a fabulous wind from the north-west, around 30-35 knots, and we were running with a full main and the masthead spinnaker, getting spectacular boat speed (over 20 knots at times) and phenomenal speed over ground (I have a picture from the Yacht Tracker system of us doing 13.5 knots SOG). This was truly racing on the edge, and then finally we stepped over the edge and broached in a big way. Those on deck were hanging on for dear life, someone blew the halyard, we rounded up, and discovered that we had giftwrapped the keel with our pride & joy, the beautiful masthead kite.

In the chaos that followed there was four of us sitting on the foredeck trying to keep hold of what was left of the kite, and pull it out from underneath the boat. After several minutes of trying to get it untangled we had to cut the tapes along the edges of the sail and haul the rest of the kite on board, along with, it seemed, half of Bass Strait.

With no sail up in the front of the boat, we were a bit unstable, and while we were getting the boat settled down again, someone fell on my head, and I heard that horrible crunching noise when vertebrae crackle. I remember thinking, 'oh no, that's going to hurt later', but actually, despite being a bit stiff, it was as if I'd had a rather primitive chiropractic adjustment, no real ill effect.

The forecast southerly gale came in, and we spent quite some time beating across Bass Strait, beating ourselves against the bulkheads and making generally slow progress compared to the spectacular speeds of the second night out. Then the wind turned northwest again, and we were back to running/reaching conditions.

It got to the point that the helmsman needed a helm-catcher on the other side of the cockpit, for those times when a bit of extra help was needed to keep the boat on course. That was why I ended up sitting on the low side of the boat opposite the tiller, with PJ on the helm, Jeff on the main and Simon all sitting on the high side. Then we were swamped by a massive wave coming over the deck, the boat jibed, I fell across the cockpit (once again, thanks to the tether, stayed on the boat), and Simon, Jeff & PJ were all swept to the back of the boat. PJ was squeezed into a corner no grown man should have to fit into, Jeff lost his glasses and beanie overboard, and Simon used his spine to bend a stainless steel staunchion. I don't think he recommends it. We were all underwater, and the only way we were going to right ourselves was to get my head out from underneath the tiller, where it had jammed. Somehow we managed to get settled again, but the seas were quite wild.

At this point in the trip, Jeff's pre-race cricketing injury started to take its toll – Jeff's leg & foot were swollen, bruised and tender. Under the conditions (not a

flat or stable surface in sight), he was unable to stand his watches for a day or so.

When we reached the south east coast of Tasmania, we were surfing down waves for such a long time that it felt like we just wouldn't stop – each surf continued longer and faster than normal – ride 'em, cowboys! Richard Bennett, sailing photographer, chose that time to fly over us and take some photos – I have a great one that shows a long wake behind the boat.

Of course, we couldn't finish the race without drama – the genniker (sort of cross between a headsail and a spinnaker) had to come down in a hurry, and one of the spinnaker sheets (ropes) ended up around the boat, and tangled in the engine propeller. You wouldn't think that this would be a problem for us until after the finish line, but it appears that even when the engine is in neutral, the prop has to be able to free-wheel for the engine to work. Being unable to turn the engine on meant being unable to charge the batteries. No batteries equals no effective radio communication, as the radios, particularly the HF, suck up the power.

This would only have been a minor problem if PJ hadn't managed to slice his arm open (pretty much to the bone I think, I know I saw white at the bottom of the cut) on the companionway steps, just after we rounded Tasman Island. This was a weird injury – anyone who has seen the companionway steps knows they are steel, two or three millimetres thick, not exactly a knife edge. Plus, PJ didn't bleed – well, he bled a tiny bit, but with a cut that deep, I expected blood gushing everywhere. It was just as well for all the sails he was sitting on that he is a bloodless prick!

As it was, we wanted to communicate with Race Control, put in our last sked, ask them to arrange a tow for us at the finish in case I didn't get to jump into the water to clear the sheet off the prop before we finished, and to see if we could get a paramedic to meet us for PJ. So we pulled out the satellite phone, as nobody's mobile was working that far offshore. But the sat phone has very little battery life so it was useful to make initial contact with race control, but pointless after that.

That last night was an exercise in frustration – the wind was 'light and variable', headsails were up and down like yo-yos, and we were all just willing the boat to the finish, tired beyond belief as the watch system had been disrupted that afternoon in a battle with Pretty Fly II just before Tasman Island. We eventually made it to the Iron Pot, which is the mark at the mouth of the Derwent River, and we knew we were nearly there. Just as we arrived, New Morning II, another boat from the same yacht club, but in a different race (the Melbourne to Hobart) arrived at the mouth of the river too. We couldn't let them beat us to the line, so we covered them all the way up the river, passing them in time to cross the (joint) finish line first. Addiction's pride lives on!

Naturally we were met at the dock by plenty of well-wishers, family & friends, who kindly supplied us with beer and champagne. The next three days is a bit hazy for me, but I know it included plenty of alcohol, a gawk at Icefire's damaged mast (looked like someone had attacked it with a giant tin opener), and a sprained ankle (post race drinking incident, no glory, no sympathy). If I offended anybody during that weekend, let me take this opportunity to apologise and blame the demon drink!

So there you have it, at three days, sixteen hours and 51 minutes at sea, we were nearly two whole days faster this year compared to last year, and it was a much more comfortable race, without a doubt.

Postscript. PJ was hustled off to the Hobart hospital as soon as we docked, for multiple stitches both internal and external, and several courses of antibiotics (that boat is a pretty filthy place after nearly four days at sea). His arm is healing nicely, and thankfully didn't get infected. I went diving under the boat the day after we arrived (and nearly froze in the water, it's a long way south in Hobart) to untangle the sheet from the prop, only to find that the sheet had been jammed in between the prop and the drive shaft, and the cover had come off a lot of the spectra. Still, at least we were able to charge our batteries.