



CRUISING YACHT CLUB OF AUSTRALIA

Home of the Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race

1998 SYDNEY HOBART RACE – 10 YEARS ON

BACKGROUND ABOUT THE RACE

The fleet of 115 boats in the 1998 Sydney Hobart Yacht Race enjoyed a fast sail down the NSW South Coast on the first afternoon and evening. However, as the fleet sailed south an intense easterly moving low (980hPA) developed in Bass Strait. The bulk of the fleet encountered a south-westerly (hurricane like) storm as it entered Bass Strait on 27 December. Winds gusting at times to over 70 knots combined with heavy seas over a strong flowing East Australian current resulted in the heaviest toll ever experienced in the history of the race. Six lives were lost at sea, five yachts sank and a further 66 boats retired from the race, with only 44 yachts reaching Hobart.

The severe and fast developing storm resulted in the biggest maritime rescue operation ever in Australian waters, with 55 sailors rescued in an operation involving some 25 aircraft, six vessels and approximately 1,000 search and rescue personnel. Nevertheless, the majority of yachts forced, or electing, to retire reached sheltered waters without outside assistance, some under jury rig - a tribute to the seamanship of their crews.

The maxi Sayonara, the first yacht to finish, crossed the line in Hobart at 0800 hours on 29 December with the last boat, Misty, finishing in position 44, crossing at approximately 1830 hours on 1 January. The overall winner of the race was AFR Midnight Rambler, a 34-footer owned by Ed Psaltis & Bob Thomas.

RACE REVIEW & SAFETY STANDARDS

The Cruising Yacht Club of Australia conducted its own Race Review and published the findings and recommendations in May 1999. Additionally, a NSW coronial inquest was held in 2000. All findings and recommendations from the coronial inquest and CYCA's own race review either were in place prior to 1998 or have since been implemented by CYCA and relevant authorities, and updated to reflect current thinking. These include, for the Rolex Sydney Hobart and equivalent races (although many also apply for other categories of race):

RACE ORGANISATION

- Set up of Emergency Management Team (EMT) and Mobile EMT with approved plan and Standard Operating Procedures.
- Compulsory skipper and weather briefings conducted by a representative of the Bureau of Meteorology, including one on the morning of the race start.
- Plain language forecasts issued by Bureau of Meteorology and improved warnings of likely adverse conditions.
- Improved communication and data infrastructure on board Radio Relay Vessel (RRV)
- Independent Race Committee Chairman
- Race Management Manual implemented

- Green Cape reporting gate: A mandatory report must be made to Race Management on the condition of crew, yacht and equipment when the yacht is abeam of Green Cape and about to enter Bass Strait. Severe penalty for non compliance.
- Boat notes and photos of all yachts sent to Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) prior to each Race

YACHT SEAWORTHINESS

- Yachts are required to have large racing numbers displayed on the hull, and a 'V' (distress) sheet aboard so they can be easily identified.
- Physical identification of storm sails prior to the start of the race
- Mandatory radio checks prior to the start of the race

- 406 EPIRB's required for boat, rather than 121 (406 includes an identifier)
- Each liferaft is required to have essential equipment stowed & secured so as to be available undamaged after launching and inflating (see Yachting Australia Special Regulations Appendix A, 2.0)
- Batteries are now closed or gel cell type
- All boats now have to carry a barometer
- Liferafts only less than 40kg can be stowed below deck (see Yachting Australia Special Regulations Section 4, 4.19.2)
- One EPIRB per liferaft carried
- Waterproof handheld VHF radio required
- Drogues or sea-anchors recommended

COMPETITORS

- Requirement of competitors to communicate true weather and wave

- conditions if winds are experienced over 40 knots
- Increased levels of crew experience including previous ocean racing experience (specifically Category 1) for 50% of the crew, setting a minimum age limit (18yrs), 50% of the crew must have completed a Yachting Australia Safety and Sea Survival Course (or an approved equivalent), and a minimum number of crew who have senior first aid experience, radio operations, first aid and Offshore Skipper certification
- All crew members now required to have a personal EPIRB
- Mae West type lifejackets banned
- Personal strobes for each crew member are now compulsory
- Additional harness tethers for 1/3 of the declared crew number
- Crotch straps required on PFD's

The Cruising Yacht Club of Australia has long been well regarded for the leading role it plays in improvements to the way it and clubs around the world stage ocean yacht races, including following the 1998 race. The most noteworthy change following 1998 is the Safety at Sea Survival Course, a qualification process that the CYCA initially established as a direct result of the 1998 race. This training method has proved so successful that the concept has been adopted by the sport's governing body, the International Sailing Federation, as the global standard.

The race was a poignant reminder that the sea always holds the trump card; however from the tragedy of the 1998 race the sport has seen a positive ripple effect spread across the world with broad ranging improvements in education and training of participants and race management, and changes to safety equipment and the preparedness for, and methods of dealing with, emergency situations.

Today we see new international safety standards being set for ocean racing, improvements to search and rescue operations, and better maritime weather forecasting, all because of a savage storm cell that formed in Bass Strait and hit the race fleet during 27 December 1998.

CYCA SOLAS TRUSTS

CYCA Sydney Hobart Yacht Race Safety of Life at Sea Trusts (SOLAS) was set up as a charitable trust in 1999 as a result of the tragic events of the 1998 Sydney Hobart Yacht Race. The CYCA SOLAS Trusts objectives are to:

- Provide assistance (financial and other) to immediate families of those lost at sea during Australian Yachting Federation sanctioned races
- Make donations and provide support to search and rescue organisations
- Foster and fund research and training to improve safety and rescue procedures and equipment used in ocean races.

To date, the SOLAS trust has donated in excess of \$430,000 to search and rescue organizations Australia wide including NRMA Careflight, Volunteer Marine Rescue, St Vincent's Hospital to name just a few.

REMEMBRANCE

To commemorate the lives of those six sailors lost in the tragic events of the 1998 race, a series of events to mark the ten year anniversary will take place and these include:

- *Wreath laying at the Tasmanian Seafarers Memorial at Triabunna*
Commodore Matt Allen of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia joined Commodore Clive Simpson of the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania in laying a wreath during Triabunna's annual Blessing of the Fleet and Service at the Seafarers' Memorial. Among the plaques at Triabunna is one that features the names of those six men lost in the fateful storm.
- *Rolex Skippers Party*
A one minute silence will take place during this annual event to remember those six men and others who have lost their lives at sea
- *Compulsory Race Briefings*
A one minute silence will take place to remember those six men and others who have lost their lives at sea
- *Constitution Dock Dockside Presentation*
During the Constitution Dock Dockside presentation there will be a wreath laying, followed by a one minute silence
- *Official Presentation – News Years Day, Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania*
During the Official presentation a one minute silence will be observed.