

# CLASSIC HOBART

## RUINED BY RACE COMMITTEE

**THE** 2011 Rolex Sydney-Hobart should be remembered as a testing but not dangerous race that resulted in some magnificent boat-on-boat racing, an underdog line-honours victory and a well-deserved handicap win. Unfortunately, it will be remembered for another controversy that could and should have been avoided.

The Hobart Mercury summed it up with a page two cartoon on December 30. It depicted a couple walking along the docks, with the man saying to his wife, "Let's go and see the winner of this year's Sydney-Hobart protest."

It does the sport in Australia no good to have this as the public perception of its greatest race.

### TESTING CONDITIONS

The conditions out on the water were always going to be ugly. When the Bureau of Meteorology forecaster, Rob Webb, addressed the skippers and navigators in the pre-race briefing, he promised them light-to-moderate north-easterlies for the start, southerlies above 30 knots for the first two days and a total lack of wind for those still out there on the third night. Everything that was promised was delivered.

What made things worse than just head winds was a very big northerly swell, emanating from a tropical cyclone off the Queensland coast. This swell-against-wind created nasty seas.

On the first night, which was pitch black under heavy cloud that offered no horizon, people who had never been seasick in their lives were revisiting their Boxing Day breakfasts. *Investec Loyal* reported that more than 50% of the crew were sick and the cabin sole "was like a skating rink of vomit". Helmsmen reported they couldn't see the waves coming, which added to the irregular motion of their boats.

As the second day dawned, the big boats had made a break on the field and took advantage of light, localised northerlies down the east coast of Tasmania. *Wild Oats XI* led from *Investec Loyal* while *Wild Thing* returned to Sydney with a blown mainsail, to become one of 12 non-finishers.

At this stage the website predictions suggested it would be a 40 footers benefit, with three Beneteaus, *Victoire*, *Too True* and *Balance* among the handicap favourites. That was before the wind dropped.

*Balance's* owner, Paul Clitheroe would email on the third night: "We've stopped. This is not amusing. The bigger boats are sitting in the dock, crew at the pub as they move up the IRC standings while drinking rum and eating steak.

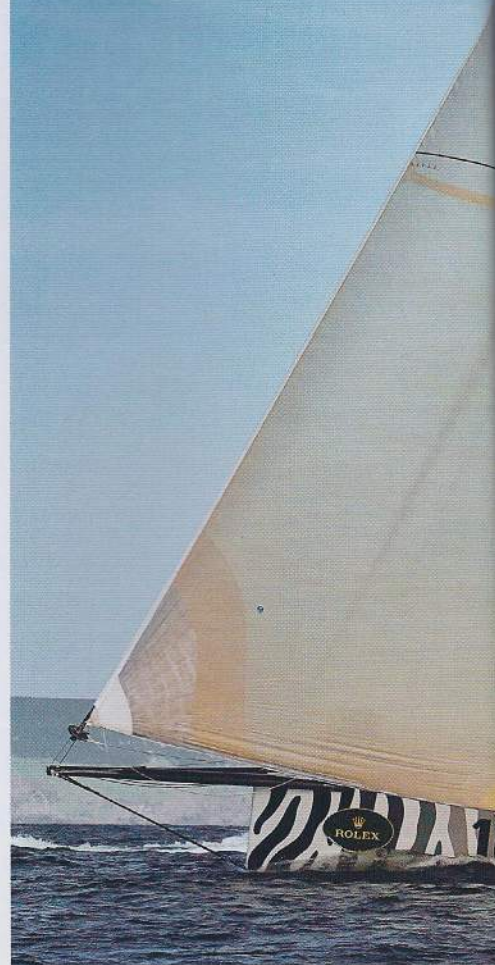
"We along with *AFR* and *Victoire* are now floating around trying to get past Tasman Island, generally unsuccessfully. We have about 2 knots from the SW and the current flowing out of Storm Bay and sweeping around the corner is really helpful. Not.

"The forecast is not giving us much hope, so we are


ROGER MCMILLAN  
REPORTS ON A  
GREAT RACE THAT  
WAS MARRED  
BY COMMITTEE  
INTRANSIGENCE.

MAIN IMAGE: *Investec Loyal* holds *Wild Oats* at bay during their gybing duel on the Derwent.

TOP RIGHT: The crew on handicap winner *Loki* making another sail change.







THIS YEAR THE PROTEST WAS EVEN MORE ILL-CONCEIVED

rationing food and planning to buy a bigger boat."

The next morning he updated the gloomy news: "Now for something completely different. We enjoyed watching the sunset as we drifted next to Tasman Light. Roll forward some nine hours and we are enjoying sunrise at Cape Raoul. This represents a magnificent 9.8 nautical miles covered overnight.

"Storm Bay has been, in three of my Hobarts, a complete glass out. The other two, the waves so big you lost sight of the boats around you as you plunged down them.

"Personally, I am really enjoying the views, but my navigator seems to be in need of a psychoanalyst upon arrival (we have hidden all sharp objects)."

## GYBING DUEL

When Clitheroe wrote this, the crews of the big boats were indeed at the Customs House Hotel in Hobart. By that stage, *Investec Loyal* and *Wild Oats XI* had been in port for more than 24 hours, having arrived at 7.14pm on December 28.

*Wild Oats* had led all of the way until they rounded the corner and parked in a wind hole. Able to observe their rival's progress on the yacht tracker, *Loyal's* American navigator, Stan Honey, had routed the boat around the hole and into a very slight lead.

As the two super-maxis sailed up the Derwent under asymmetrical spinnakers, *Wild Oats* would close to within

half a mile, then *Loyal* would spurt ahead. Watching the media boat we saw one white kite appear around Iron Pot, then the other. As they came towards us, we could see through binoculars that the spinnaker with *Hill* on it was bigger than the one with *Wild Oats*. *Loyal* was still in front.

Both boats were in perfect trim, skimming along a knots in about the same amount of southerly breeze. At the helm of *Wild Oats*, Mark Richards called for a gybe. Effortlessly, *Loyal* covered. *Wild Oats* gybed back. *Loyal* covered again. Finally, the tacticians on *Loyal* decided enough was enough. They were on the lifting gybe and heading towards the finish line so they allowed *Oats* without covering.

*Loyal* crossed the finish line 3 minutes and 8 seconds ahead of the five-times line honours winner and record holder. The underdog had its victory.

Sadly, owing to a monumental error of judgement by the race committee, they had barely two minutes to their success. The committee boat drew up alongside and handed skipper Anthony Bell a protest form, alleging *Loyal* had breached Rule 41 relating to outside assistance.

## ANOTHER NONSENSE

During the 2010 Sydney-Hobart, the race committee had protested *Wild Oats* and *RAN*, alleging that they had entered Bass Strait without a working HF radio

ABOVE: Merit and Optimus Prime meet at Tasman Island.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The crew of *Investec Loyal* finally get their medals after surviving a protest by the race committee.



radio message had been received by the relay vessel. This was a correct protest to lodge. However, when the boats produced credible written evidence that radio messages had been received by Hobart Radio, the protests should have been withdrawn and should never have gone to the International Jury, which dismissed them both.

*Wild Oats'* prized safety record had been called into question and the crew had been forced to wait nearly 24 hours before being able to celebrate their win.

This year the protest was even more ill-conceived. It led to a radio conversation between Michael Coxon, *Investec Loyal* and the ABC helicopter, which had flown over *Wild Oats*. Coxon was heard to ask what *Wild Oats* had up and when the pilot replied that he didn't know one sail from another Coxon asked, "What are they?"

The pilot replied, "Grey."

Coxon let out an audible sigh of relief and said, "That's not news."

When we first heard that someone on *Loyal* had asked whether *Wild Oats* was flying a trisail, we all thought this was an attempt to garner outside assistance. However, when the circumstances were explained, and when we heard the tape of the conversation, it was very obvious what had happened.

I was privileged to observe the jury hearing when Stan Grey and Michael Coxon presented the evidence. (For more report go to [www.mysailing.com.au](http://www.mysailing.com.au) and search for *Investec Loyal*.)

Coxon is CEO and owner of North Sails in Australia. He is also one of five North Sails experts worldwide working on the latest technology 3Di sailcloth, which is expected to supersede 3DL. *Wild Oats* is Coxon's biggest bet and was using an experimental 3Di mainsail valued to be worth nearly \$250,000 and representing investment by Norths of many millions more.

Following a tough night at sea during which *Investec Loyal* had required two reefs in the mainsail, Coxon was very concerned to discover whether the experimental sail on *Wild Oats* had survived the night intact - and therefore whether his career as a sailmaker was in deep trouble. On being told that *Oats* still had the mainsail intact, his relief was obvious.

This was a conversation that Coxon should not have had. He had been woken from a deep sleep, after 30 hours of watch, to take the call, but it was very clearly not an attempt to gain an advantage for *Loyal*. The information was of a commercial nature, not a racing matter, a matter which *Wild Oats* skipper Mark Richards was quick to point out in a TV interview.

When the evidence was laid out for a very distinguished International Jury, the protest was dismissed, but the damage had already been done.

Anthony Bell said, taking line honours in the Sydney-Hobart over a clearly faster opponent was something you don't expect to achieve in three lifetimes. His crew achieved it, then had been deprived of the euphoria that should have accompanied their historic win. He was still angry about the protest long after it had been dismissed and he had received his trophy, winner's medal and skipper's Rolex watch.

For the second year in a row, the sport had been dragged



PICTURE BY: DANIEL FORSTER/ROLEX

across the front pages of the country's newspapers and had been lead story on all TV channels for the wrong reason. It had been made to look foolish and nit-picking, a sport that can't get its act together.

Race committees perform a thankless task and put in long hours for no reward. It is difficult to be critical of them, especially this one which has a bigger task and greater responsibility than most. But this committee does need to take a long, hard look at itself and its willingness to protest boats when no competitor is claiming to have been disadvantaged.

Like the *Wild Oats* and *RAN* protests the year before, the issue needed investigating, especially as it was referred to the CYCA by a media organisation. However, as soon as they heard the tape and knew the circumstances of Coxon's question, they should not have proceeded with the protest.

A statement to the media was all that was required, saying that a Rule 41 breach had been investigated but that under the circumstances no attempt to gain an advantage had been sought or received, no other competitor had lodged a protest and therefore the matter had been dismissed.

The chairman of the race committee stated at the jury hearing that the committee did not want *Loyal* to be penalised... so why bring the protest? In my opinion, common sense did not prevail - for the second year in a row.

## POPULAR VICTORY

Back on the race track, the handicap standings were swinging back into the big boats' favour. Stephen Ainsworth's RP64 *Loki* was fourth across the line and had a corrected time of 3 days, 22 minutes, 34.32 seconds, nearly an hour ahead of *Living Doll* and *Ragamuffin*.

As usual, it was an anxious wait for the crew as one by one their nearest competitors failed to beat their yardstick.





PICTURE BY: KURT ARGO/ROLEX

ABOVE: Syd Fischer's *Ragamuffin* cuts the corner on her way to ORCi handicap honours.

With the wind dying to nothing (see Clitheroe's comments above) they went to bed confident that they would receive the Tattersall's Cup the next morning.

So it proved, and it was a popular victory for Ainsworth and his principal helmsman, Gordon Maguire. The pair had put together a remarkable campaign over the previous three years, contesting and winning most offshore events and making gradual improvements to the boat and the crew until they had a well-oiled machine.

"We were quietly confident that we'd win because it was a fading breeze, not a building breeze and that worked for us," Ainsworth said at the presentation ceremony. "So many things have to go right for you (to win) and the wind gods worked for us this year. We had very good navigation and weather skills on board.

"We're elated, it's just a fantastic feeling," he concluded.

Syd Fischer is a vocal critic of the IRC handicap system under which the Tattersall's Cup is raced and despite his pleasure at placing third with his beloved *Ragamuffin*, the 80-year-old was more elated to win the ORCi division, ahead of Chris Bull's *Jazz* and Jason Van de Slor's *Calm*.

Anthony Sweetapple's *Quetzalcoatl* won PH of Andrew Wenham's *Southern Excellence* and McKay's *Wasabi*.

All eight Sydney 38s finished the race, with Watson bringing her young crew on *Ella Bach* Hobart in second place behind Tony Levett's *Management*. She was promptly thrown in the her troubles.

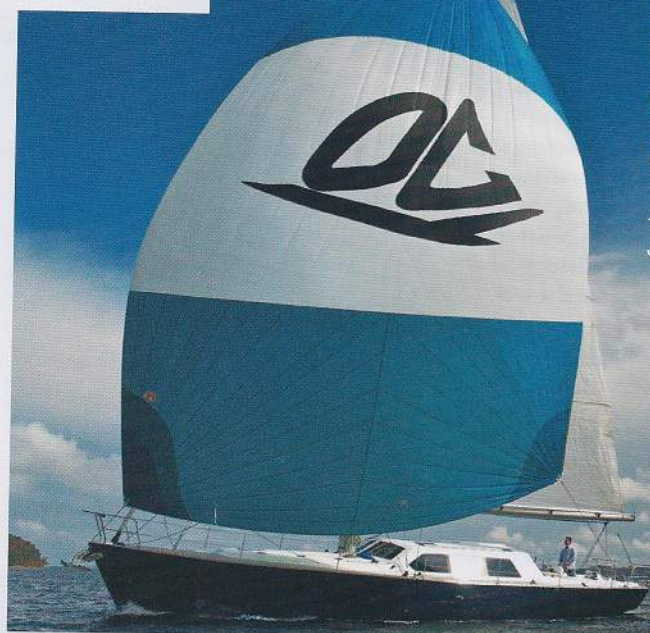
Throughout the fleet there were boat-on-boat because any time two similar boats share a piece of ocean, you have a match race. But none was more closely contested than the one between the two Australian entrants.

Trevor Taylor's Marten 49 *Optimus Prime* and Childs' Farr 49 *Knee Deep* had both sailed the edge of four Hobarts just to make the start line. Then 628 miles and going either side of a wind hole, they finished 18th and 19th across the line, with *Optimus* finishing 31 seconds ahead of *Knee Deep*. There was a jug of beer riding on the result.

As I said, this was a classic Hobart that saw men arrive tired and chastened by their battle with the but feeling they had achieved a worthwhile goal. I think that next year there are no protests, especially by the committee, and that the line honours winners can truly reward for their extraordinary achievements.



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