

# OFFSHORE

NUMBER 72

JULY 1983

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**OFFSHORE**

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# THE TASMAN CUP DISASTER

by John Brooks

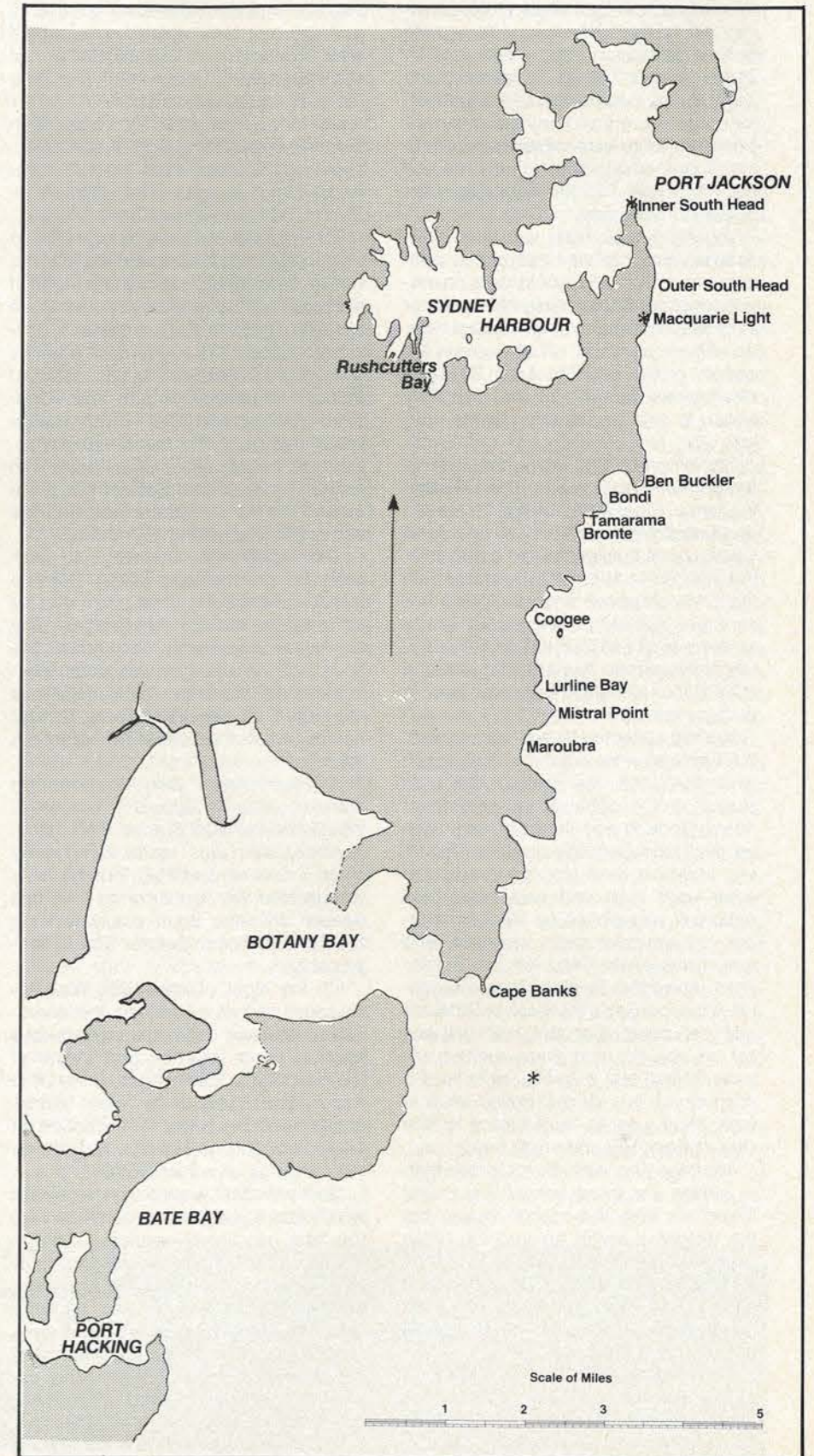
The Tasman Cup race for Division 4 (JOG) on April 15th 1983 will long be remembered as the most disastrous race in CYCA history. Two boats sank, four yachtsmen drowned and a massive sea search that lasted all weekend engaged the attention of hundreds of yachtsmen, naval personnel and police. At one stage there were over 50 yachts at sea participating in the search, in addition to numerous police and naval craft and helicopters. The search was only partially successful; out of nine crew members missing, five were picked up, one of those almost by chance by a fishing boat which was not even involved in the search.

The race started at 2030 hours on Friday night, and the forecast was for south to southwest winds, 20 to 30 knots and a southeasterly swell. The CYCA, already aware that conditions for Joggies would be lumpy, altered the course as requested by the JOG Association and signaled one which bypassed Botany Bay and took the division to a mark off Jibbon Beach in Port Hacking, then straight back to the finish in Sydney Harbour, a total distance of 44 nautical miles. It was not a night to be turning the fleet into Botany Bay.

At the start, no hint of the coming disaster disturbed the minds of either officials or competitors. Lulls of wind down to 15 knots in the harbour promised an easy running start, and the conditions outside the heads were nothing that the Joggies had not handled before. As the 15 boats punched out the heads into the strengthening southerly, they were faced with a beat to the south of 20 miles. It was very dark, and a nasty cross sea promised to make boat handling difficult for the next five hours. In fact, it was to make it difficult for the next two days.

*Solitaire*, which was to play a major role later on in the night, elected to set up for the conditions outside early by reefing the main and carrying a No. 4 jib in the harbour. As a result of this conservative approach she was last out of the heads and decided to track close inshore on the beat south. It was a tactical decision which was to have a profound effect on the drama to follow.

*Montego Bay*, a production Hood 23 owned by Chris Hatfield and one of the best known JOG boats in NSW for several years, took a tuck in the main and a No. 4 jib for the beat south and for the first hour handled the conditions easily enough. An experienced crew, who knew their boat and the conditions off



## The Tasman Cup Disaster

the Sydney coast as well as anyone, they had no qualms about the conditions.

Then they fell off a couple of waves and were engulfed by one big green one, experiencing the worst of a sea-way set up by the heavy primary swell and a secondary that was running across it and kicking up some steep seas; things had started to get uncomfortable. About 2150 hrs the crew noticed that there was more water sloshing about down below than seemed warranted, and Richard Connelly went below to investigate.

Joggies are all fairly wet boats in a seaway, but this was out of the ordinary, and Connelly could see no obvious reason. Shortly after this the water increased noticeably and Michael Condon observed about 12" of water in the bottom of the oat. *Montego Bay* was moving well in spite of this, but they began to discuss returning to the marina.

Shortly after 2200 hrs, Chris Hatfield turned *Montego Bay* about and headed for home. The water below increased dramatically in a matter of minutes, and Condon was bucketing from below over the side in an attempt to keep up with the inflow. At about turnaround plus five minutes, Hatfield sent Connelly below to make a SECURITE call on the radio. Connelly queried this and suggested a PAN PAN call as the boat was now in obvious trouble.

Hatfield corrected himself and agreed, the PAN call went out but was changed to a MAYDAY just before the boat started to sink, although this was never heard. Condon and Connelly went back on deck and Connelly fired two flares, one of which went low out to sea, the other went high and was seen. The radio call was picked up by Barry Barker, an amateur radio operator who runs Bankstown Base for the Bankstown Bluewater Fishing Club. He copied *Montego Bay's* PAN call at 2218 hrs and responded. A second PAN call was cut off abruptly and there was no answer to Barker's subsequent calls. He telephoned the Water Police and at 2220 hrs the police launch *Price* left the Dawes Point HQ and put to sea.

*Montego Bay* went down in less than a minute, the crew scrambling to get lifejackets from the cockpit locker, but the weight of water against the hatch prevented them from opening it. They all jumped into the water as the boat sank. There was no panic, more an atmosphere of disbelief that it was all actually happening.

They were approximately 3 miles ESE of Ben Buckler, and initially they were able to keep together, but about 15 minutes after the sinking another

yacht was sighted, and Chris Hatfield and Matt Hayes swam toward it, hoping to attract attention, and this separated them from the others.

Connelly, Condon and Robert Rush stayed together, clustered around a portable fuel tank which had surfaced after the sinking. They started breast stroking towards shore after shedding their oilskins, and for an hour or so they made slow progress towards Ben Buckler. Around midnight wave action separated Condon from his two companions but he was later rejoined by Rush. They never saw Connelly again.

They found themselves close in to Ben Buckler and were worried that the heavy seas could slam them against the rocks but they were swept out again by a strong current. They heard a helicopter about this time and saw its searchlight further out to sea, realised that a search was on and took hope. Chris Hatfield and Matt Hayes, meanwhile, had much the same experience. Battered by heavy seas they made it in to the vicinity of Ben Buckler about the same time as the others and had the same difficulty getting any further.

The flare fired by Connelly had been seen by at least two boats. *Solitaire* turned towards the flare and switched on radios. In the next 30 minutes some confused radio traffic led them to believe that the situation was under control and that no further assistance was required. They rejoined the race, a tragic mix-up which caused some bitterness later.

*Waikikamukau's* story is somewhat different and, it appears, unrelated. *Waikikamukau* was the first Farr 727 in Australia and was made famous by Hugh Treharne and Rob Mundle, who slaughtered the opposition in their first season with the boat, easily winning the 1976 National Quarter Ton Championship.

On the night of April 15th, *Waikikamukau* had been handling the conditions with ease under the experienced hand of John Tavener, part owner of the boat and a leading light in the JOG Association. The crew was experienced offshore with the exception of 14 year old Phillip Baker, who was no raw beginner on a yacht either.

Neville Walters was on the main sheet which had to be worked constantly as the boat alternately crested 3-4 metre waves and dived into the troughs. Martin White and young Phillip were perched on the weather rail, all were wearing safety harnesses and all were clipped on, although up until this point the deck had been comparatively dry and there were no washboards in place in the main hatch.

*Waikikamukau* had reached a point

about 3-4 miles east of Coogee when suddenly a wave much larger than usual, steep-walled and breaking at the top, loomed over them. The boat went up the wave, then fell sideways down the face, landing heavily on its port topsides with the mast in the water and was buried as the wave rolled over them. All the crew were tumbled into the water, still attached by lifelines to the boat. The main sheet was free but the jib sheet was cleated.

Two of the crew managed to climb back on board the boat which swung stern on to the seas, the self-righted and almost immediately took another wave over the stern and fell over again onto its starboard side, making it difficult for Neville to get free of his safety harness. It sank very quickly after this.

Neville Walters concentrated first on getting out of his safety harness, then his oilskins, clinging to the upturned bow of the boat during the latter exercises. Neville and two others drifted away after the boat sank but were quickly separated in heavy seas. Neville found himself alone, stripped to shorts and a T-shirt and uncomfortably aware that no flare or radio message had gone out from *Waikikamukau*; there had simply been no chance. The sequence of events from beginning to end had taken only a couple of minutes.

Neville made a conscious decision after a while not to swim for shore, although he is a good swimmer and an experienced diver, therefore at home in the water. The long distance swim was not too daunting but his main reason lay in his knowledge that the rough onshore seas would give him little chance of a safe landing. Better to stay where he was and hope to be picked up by the returning JOG or other boats in daylight. He steeled himself to survive until dawn.

*Solitaire* had continued south, freed from responsibility, as previously noted, by a confused radio message that all was well. She had reached a point east of Botany Bay when failing battery power deprived her of instruments and navigation lights, and they decided to return to Sydney Harbour. They had stuck to their plan of staying closer in than the leading boats and found the going easy, picking up time on boats further out and only running into heavy seas when they tacked well offshore. This now influenced them to run for home close inshore, and at 0130 hrs they were only 150 metres off Ben Buckler when they heard a call for help in the darkness.

It seemed to come from the direction of the cliffs, but when they turned the boat around they spotted the orange oilskins of Hatfield and Hayes to sea-

ward. They got them aboard on the second pass and learned that there three more crew from *Montego Bay* somewhere in the vicinity.

They got on the radio and fired flares. The police launch *Price* and the CYCA launch *Offshore* were on the scene in minutes and it was the *Price* which quickly found Condon and Rush, pulling them on board at 0156 hrs. The search continued for Richard Connelly.

For CYCA officials the tragedy announced itself on the committee boat radio, in the form of the radio traffic which broke out immediately following *Montego Bay's* emergency signal. *Offshore*, which had been starting boat for the JOG fleet and nearly 30 other yachts in the 90 mile Bird Island race fleet, was on standby duty in Rushcutters Bay awaiting the midnight radio schedule. The peaceful routine was shattered when the crew overheard the Water Police radio traffic and recognised *Montego Bay* as one of their own.

*Offshore* put to sea to assist in the search, joining the police launches *Price*, *Doyle* and *Lees*. *Offshore* is a Masters 34' diesel cruiser, well known for its sea keeping ability, but the crew found the conditions heavy going for a small motor launch. Nevertheless, they remained at sea until 0500 hrs when they were forced in to refuel, and at this time the crew decided to wake up other Club officials to provide some back-up.

By 0630 hrs a command centre had been set up at the CYCA sailing office and radio contact established with the search vessels and Water Police HQ. At the 0700 radio sked with the race fleet, the Bird Island race was abandoned and the yachts directed to join the search under the direction of the Water Police. As news of the disaster spread, the Club also began to handle what eventually became a flood of telephone enquiries from anxious relatives, friends and Club Members volunteering their boats and/or themselves as crew to help in the search. These additional yachts started to leave the CYCA marina about 0800, and by noon it was estimated that over 50 yachts were at sea and involved in the search.

The Navy joined in with the Patrol Boat *Attack* and the Torpedo Recovery Vessel *Trevally*. The duty helicopter took off from Nowra to join a growing fleet of

police and media helicopters. The Water Police now had an incredible array of craft to direct and the huge variations in speed and capability of these vessels presented great difficulties for the *Price* which was co-ordinating the search at sea.

Nevertheless they marshalled boats ranging from slow-moving yachts to motor cruisers to warships into line abreast formations miles across and ran them slowly up and down the coast from close in to the cliffs to three miles and more out to sea. Eventually, the search area encompassed Botany Bay to Broken Bay and five miles out to sea, but they concentrated on an area within three miles of Ben Buckler.

Just after 0830 hrs the Club command centre was electrified by the news that a lone survivor had been picked up by the fishing boat *Lomar* about two miles east of Ben Buckler and that he would shortly be transferred to the *Price*. A radio recall went out to all yachts, and officials in the Club started to relax. Fifteen minutes later they found to their horror that the survivor was not Richard Connelly and learned for the first time that *Waikikamukau* had also sunk during the night. They now had four missing crew members, one from *Montego Bay* and three from *Waikikamukau*. The inbound yachts were turned around and sent out again.

Neville Walters was determined to survive, and survive he did. During the night he had seen the flares fired from *Solitaire* after they picked up Chris Hatfield and Matt Hayes and he was very encouraged by this, realising that another boat was in trouble and that a search would get underway. Shortly after this he heard a helicopter coming up from the south and saw its searchlight passing inshore. After this the helicopter often came near him and even passed right overhead on one sweep without spotting him.

Later, a police launch passed about two waves away but he was neither seen nor heard in the heavy seas. At dawn he dared hope that the boats which were obviously conducting a search of the area would eventually stumble across him and he drove himself to hold on for as long as it took. *Vengeance* passed him by about 200 metres away, and at about 0800 hrs

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his frustration was intense.

Not long after this he saw a fishing boat coming straight at him from the north and his fear of not being seen was so real that he could not bear to look at the boat for more than a few seconds at a time. He closed his eyes, then dared to look again and the boat kept coming. It passed right alongside, and an amateur fisherman, hanging over the side in some distress, saw Neville frantically waving his arms. He smiled weakly and waved back before it dawned on him that he was looking at someone adrift in open sea. The *Lomar* turned around and picked Neville Walters up at 0830 hrs; he had been in the water around 10 hours.

At 1500 hrs some of the race fleet yachts started to come in, some short of fuel and some with crews exhausted after 12 hours of heavy racing followed by eight hours being tossed around in the search area. Many had not eaten since the night before and their haggard appearance told the story of the deteriorating conditions off the coast. Some boats, like *Offshore*, refuelled, changed crews and went out again. The Water Police stayed out all night.

On Saturday night the CYCA issued an appeal through the media for volunteers to continue the search on the Sunday and they started to arrive at the Club at 0630. Again, dozens of yachts joined the search, and many volunteers helped man them. It was no place for beginners, however, because conditions were, if anything, worse than on Saturday. More than one boat returned to the marina with seasick volunteers, only to change crews and try again.

By mid Sunday all hope of finding the survivors had vanished, and early Sunday afternoon the weather deteriorated to the point where spotting anything more than 30 metres away became next to impossible. Mid afternoon, a heavy squall was reported moving up the coast from Port Kembla, and the Water Police ordered all small craft back into harbour. The stragglers got a taste of this storm front as they were lashed by 40-50 knot winds and wild seas.

For all practical purposes the search was now over, and a saddened yachting community withdrew to consider its worst ever racing accident and to study the lessons to be learned. □











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## BIGGLES' COLUMN

by John Brooks

There can't be many sports which have to suffer the trauma of losing four of its enthusiasts in one tragic blow. The night of April 15th left the sport of ocean racer in NSW reeling as it contemplated the questions raised by the sinking of two well known JOG yachts. Should night JOG racing be banned? Should the wearing of life jackets be compulsory? Could something have been done that wasn't done? Will the Government step in and take the answers to these and other questions out of our hands? These were some of the thoughts which were circulated in the aftermath of the CY-CA's 'black weekend' in April.

All things considered the public reaction was fairly sympathetic, helped no doubt by the media which confined itself to straight, if sometimes inaccurate, reporting, foregoing the temptation to sensationalise things to the point of encouraging witch hunts. Politicians, too, generally refrained from any ill-informed outbursts, with the result that yachting authorities have been left to consider the lessons to be learned in an atmosphere of relative calm.

Just what form their reaction will take is, as yet, unknown. Some new safety regulations will come out of the investigation, but not, it is hoped, anything too Draconian. There have been a few calls to ban JOG offshore racing, an over-reaction and a decision which would be better left to the Joggies themselves, but it seems that some of them are having second thoughts about night racing. It could happen that the cost of

satisfying new safety requirements will discourage night racing anyway.

The tragedy also revealed, yet again, the reluctance of yachties to wear life jackets at any time other than when their boat is about to sink under them. This is not surprising because approved life jackets are cumbersome, uncomfortable, difficult to work in and awkward to get in and out of. Most crewmen accept the wearing of safety harnesses when so ordered, but life jackets are rarely worn.

It can be argued that if conditions are such that safety harnesses should be worn then a life jacket is probably prudent too, particularly at night. However, experience has shown that when it comes to their own safety people tend to underrate the danger and therefore the necessity of wearing personal safety equipment, influenced no doubt by the clumsiness of such equipment. There is a glaring need for a research programme into a suitable lightweight life jacket that is comfortable and convenient to encourage regular use in the same manner that motor racers wear crash helmets.

Some years ago in this column I suggested that personal safety equipment, such as life jackets, be made the responsibility of the crewman instead of the boat owner. That way the onus is on the individual to know where his safety equipment is stowed and to ensure that it is in serviceable condition. Making him wear it is something else again, but a comfortable, lightweight design, perhaps combined with a safety harness, would go a long way towards achieving this.

As *Offshore* went to press seventeen entries had been received for the Admiral's Cup from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bermuda, Britain, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Sweden and the USA. *Shockwave* will lead a New Zealand team with two charters yet to be named, selected presumably from those yachts which fail to make the British team.

There are said to be 24 contenders for the British team including the latest 'hi-tech' Dubois design *Indulgence* (Graham Walker). *Indulgence's* deck was cooked in an oven and the hull in a device called an Autoclave, which is a cross between an oven and a pressure cooker, all in the name of improved strength/weight ratio.

The Mooloolaba Yacht Club is trying to organise a feeder race for the 1984 Sydney-Mooloolaba Race in the form

of a handicap start Mooloolaba to Sydney 'Grand Chase'. The handicap start is intended to result in a mass finish in Sydney Harbour about a week before the start of the Sydney-Mooloolaba and is aimed at encouraging more Queensland entries in the latter event. John Gleeson has written to various commercial firms seeking sponsorship for the event and hopes to get 100 firms to each contribute \$1,000 making it one of the richest yacht races in Australia. Good luck Gleeson.

At the close of a very successful season Ray Johnston and his boys in *Scallywag* stood at the top of the ocean racing tree with Blue Water Championship scalp in their collective belt. In terms of points score *Scallywag* won only narrowly from Peter Kurts' *Once More Dear Friends*, but *Scallywag* achieved a 'grand slam' of the three biggest races on the east coast calendar, the Hobart, the Montagu and the Sydney-Mooloolaba. They must be delighted with those results.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Ray has having the latest Farr design built for next season. A 40 footer, it is a development of the 37 footer *Migizi* which won Class E at the SORC this year. The new boat rates at 30.5', the new One Ton limit and the Admiral's Cup minimum rating. Designer's comments are that it should be very good to windward, especially in fresh conditions, and exceptionally fast downwind with the design slanted towards Australian and Hawaiian conditions.

If Division 4 could count towards the Blue Water Championship, *Scallywag* might have been eclipsed by Alf Hancock in *Corfu*. Alf had a sensational season winning the Endeavour Cup, the Zilvergeest Trophy, the Montego Bay Trophy and the Zilvergeest II Trophy. He was first in Division 4 of the Ocean Point Score with four firsts, first in Division 4 of the SOPS with six firsts, two seconds and one third. Alf needed a truck to carry away his prizes on trophy presentation night at the Hilton. *Corfu* is a near sister ship to the ill-fated *Waikikamukau*, and this long-lasting Farr quarter ton design has been preeminent in Division 4 racing since it was introduced to Australia in 1975. Nevertheless, what Alf Hancock achieved with *Corfu* this season in all respects.

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## RACING ROUNDS

by Duncan van Woerden

### On various cures for premature ageing...

■After the final results of the Blue Water Championships were finalised, I'll bet the Old Age Pensioners Association wouldn't mind an age allowance formula adapted to the government's fortnightly handout! Old timers *Scallywag* (ex *Smir-noff-agen*, *Satin Sheets*, *Nike*, *Cherana*, *Corfu* and the not new *OMDF* really scooped the silverware at the Hilton on June 3rd. Congratulations to all.

■On a decidedly unpleasant note, tragedy struck the JOG fleet on the weekend of April 15th. I have no intention of preempting any CYCA Sailing Committee or AYF Safety Committee conclusions as to why or how such a tragedy can occur, save that it should be a constant reminder of the power and unpredictability of Mother Nature in her fluid state. To the guys who survived in the water that night, and especially Nev Walters (*Waikikamukau*), I 'dips me lid'.

■The loss of the Kiwi ocean racers *Southern Raider* and *Lionheart* have not exactly brightened the results of the recent Pacific passage races and add to an already hideous record of yachts returning from Noumea and Suva in recent years.

Probably one aspect of safety equipment that will come under review in light of the recent accidents is the design of safety harnesses. I've long had the view that most designs on the market are

downright dangerous, as are the various of deck fastenings seen on the majority of yachts. It's a sad reflection when one sees snapshackles that are designed to be capable of hanging onto maxi boat spinnakers, yet can be released under a five ton load, with one finger, being confined to halyards and sheets because 'they're too expensive' to use on harnesses. What price your life?

I have no wish to see yacht owners forced into extra expense in this area as I see it as a 'personal safety' problem. I would envisage a proper safety harness ringing the till to the tune of about \$250, which would put Bernard Lewis or Jack Rooklyn \$5000 closer to financial despair. Personally, I am thankful that the aforementioned gentlemen provide my sporting pleasure in the form of their yachts, and I see no reason why I (the crew man) should not provide for my own safety.

I can remember paying over \$1000 for a set of golf clubs and ancillary hardware some 15 years ago to become properly equipped to compete in that quite ridiculous sport, and I am of the firm opinion that yacht crew should provide their own safety clothing at least.

So what design do we need? I've seen quite a few frightened men extricate themselves from smouldering racing cars after losing their sense of direction, in record time and at the press of a button on their harness, so maybe we ought to start looking at other sports for our ideas. I know from experience it doesn't take but fractions of a second to ditch a faulty parachute, but I'm damned if I can get out of most regulation yachting harnesses when stripping, off watch, let alone in the water being dragged behind a pilotless yacht.

Listening to Nev Walters' account of *Waikikamukau's* sinking, it also became apparent to me that a long safety line is going to improve your chances of being able to extricate your person from a yacht that is sinking or trying to drown you if pilotless.

■ Whilst on the subject of harnesses of varying description, I've always held contempt for the lack of safety and, indeed, workability of the average bosun's chair. I cannot fathom how some skippers could sanely send a crewman aloft on a backless plank of wood – in the marina, let alone at sea in foul conditions.

Climbing spars is a duty that I am called upon to perform almost daily in my chosen profession, but I refuse point blank to indulge in this process at sea unless I have my own chair. I literally searched the world for a proper bosun's chair and finally in exasperation commissioned sailmaker and friend Bob

Fraser to construct a device to suit my clumsiness. The major prerequisite was that if I went to sleep at the top of a 100' spar, through either boredom or accident, my return to deck would be via the same chair and halyard and not by freefall. I do not know *one* bosun's chair marketed that would contain an unconscious crewman aloft in any kind of a seaway. Bob skillfully provided me with a chair that is similar to a parachute harness in design which contains the body allowing an inverted descent if you are so inclined. This sort of equipment is expensive but, once again, what price your life?

Incidentally, on a professional basis I have found that this chair reduces time aloft by 50% by enabling full use of both hands whilst working.

Before dropping (the subject of) bosun's chairs, I wonder how many yachts carry two? I know of only two on the Club Register. There's a pretty good reason for this – if you've ever had the misfortune to retrieve an unconscious crewman aloft or indeed one with a fractured arm when the only chair on the yacht is 50 feet up the spar with the disabled body.

I would not be the least bit adverse to seeing the bosun's chair come under much closer scrutiny from our over-worked safety inspectors.

■ Before closing up the moan department, I was staggered recently to notice a somewhat inadequate compass used by a competitor in the last Hobart Race. The compass was of the flat, tactical, deck-mount type commonly used on Etchells and like harbour yachts. This compass has minimal damp, no lighting, and upon bemused enquiry to the owner, it turned out to boot that it had never been swung. I'm fully aware that it's pretty difficult to miss Tasmania even without a compass, but if this is the sort of seamanship the sport is fostering I'll try to get my golf clubs back from Mr Goldstein's pawn shop in Darlinghurst Lane.

■ I was reminded recently of an anecdote from aboard *Apollo* during last year's Clipper Cup. A certain yachtsman 'Nigel' gained a reputation during the series for being extremely reluctant to part with his 'moolah' in the bar, preferring to hop from school to school without being caught in the chair. This habit solidified a few days later when the Nigel announced that his wallet had been lost or stolen whilst partying on a large American yacht.

Well, duly the wallet did in fact get returned intact to its rightful owner, along with an accompanying subtlety – presented to Nigel encased in a twelve-inch-square brick of ice! □

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Photo by Larry Moran

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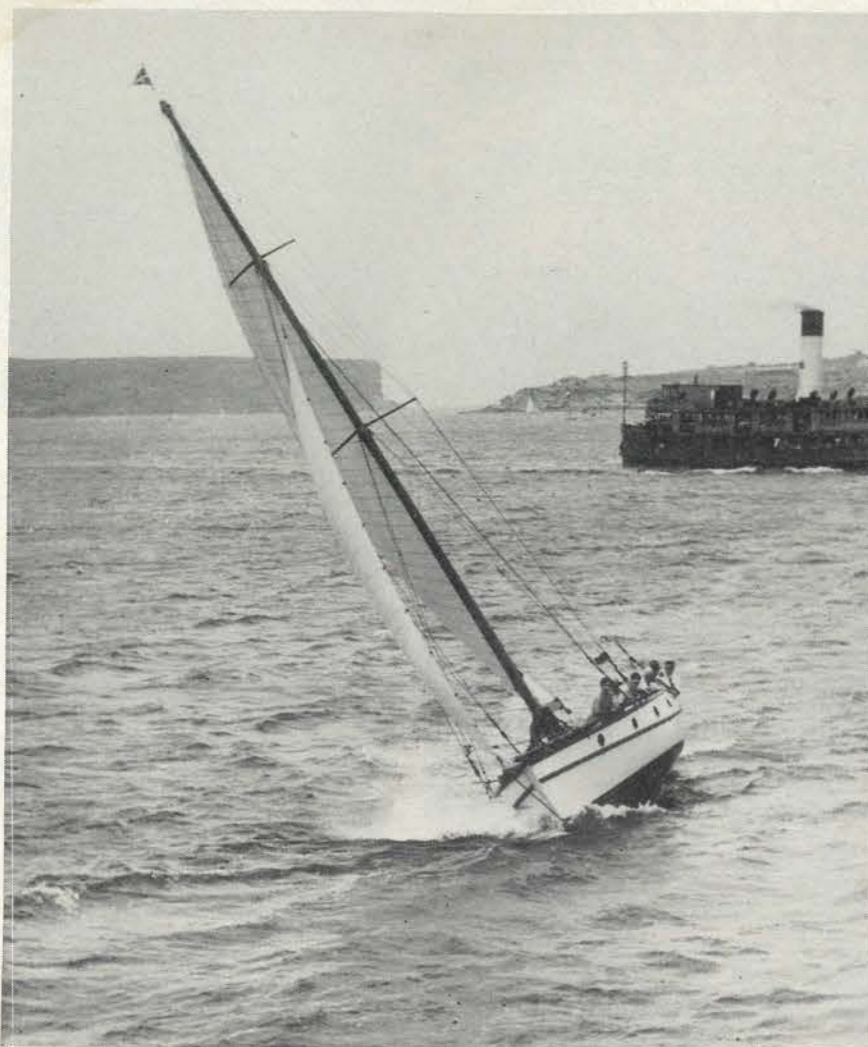
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# HORIZON

## Performance Sails

# VARUNA – GODDESS OF WATER



Varuna, harbour racing in 1950. There was a bit more room on Saturday afternoon then.

by Bill Sherman

If you think you need a modern 'state-of-the-art' yacht to enjoy racing, then *Varuna* will prove you wrong. In fact, despite her 47 years she still races as hard, and as successfully, as most of her younger sisters.

*Varuna* is a 31'6" LOA cutter built in Sydney, at La Perouse, by C.A.M. Fisher. She is a Ranger type craft, being Cliff Gale's original Ranger and built for Cliff's brother-in-law. They built *Varuna* by eye, to a design which had its foundations (loosely) in the hulls of Greek fishing boats.

Her raised deck is very functional. While it has many advantages it is rarely seen today – the Hood 20 and Hood 23 are perhaps the best known modern versions. The many benefits of the design are the high for'ard freeboard, giving a very dry boat; fewer places on deck are likely to leak; and it provides maximum space below decks, as well

as ease and economy of construction, particularly in wood. It also provides greater strength, as all beams forward of the cockpit span the entire beam.

Back in 1936 there was plenty of timber (and no fibreglass) so she was built of full-length planks in huon pine, one inch thick, on spotted gum frames, with a teak deck. The frames, which are small to look at, were placed at 9" centres for strength. Copper fastenings were used throughout, with bronze bolts, all fastenings being roved. With an 11-foot beam on a 30-foot waterline, she is a beamy boat, but it is mainly carried above the waterline and her wetted area is small for her era. A full-length keel with rudder on the back give good directional stability, and she is very fast, particularly when reaching in heavy weather.

Working sail area is 700 ft<sup>2</sup> and she has a 1200 ft<sup>2</sup> spinnaker. The mast is

an original – a very tall piece of oregon, mounted on the keel. The rig is a two-spreader arrangement, complete with runners.

Early on, there was no backstay, and failure to pull on the windward runner quickly put the mast at risk, so her owner, Dr John Musgrove, had a V-shaped frame built off the stern to take a backstay. (The 19-foot boom is sufficiently long to foul a stern-mounted backstay.) The extension has other uses too; a hinged boom gallows folds down onto it when sails are set and, as it projects about four feet over the stern, it also makes a great diving and fishing platform.

*Varuna* was originally rigged as a sloop with a jib topsail, but she now has a cutter rig with roller furling headsails. Various other changes have been made over the years, including the reduction of sheeting angles to 10° to improve her pointing ability and updating other equipment to make her easier to sail. With this constant upgrading she has remained a competitive boat for harbour races, and with her crew of seven last year she came forth in Division 2 of the RSYS series.

Speaking to John Musgrove, it's easy to believe he liked the old style of racing better than the new, and he could be right. A jug of rum and coke served in a busy CYCA bar after a race can't compete with going to Store Beach, as they did after Squadron races in the early 50s, for beach picnics – serviced by white-coated Squadron waiters.

John started racing *Varuna* in 1945 after coming back from the service with the RAAF in Europe. His father, Jack, who ran the Sydney Trocadero, had purchased *Varuna* in 1943, and she had spend her war as a naval auxiliary patrol vessel, painted grey, fitted with bright lights, motoring backwards and forwards across the Heads looking for invaders.

She was brought round to her present mooring around Christmas 1945 and put on Cyril Kelshaw's marina – 6d per foot per week, and that included having Cyril bring the boat to the wharf before a sail, clean her down, put ice in the chest and return her to the mooring when she came back.

When the CYCA was set up, in Kelshaw's home and boatshed, people on the marina paid for the building of their own part of the jetty. This was done by paying two years' rent in advance, and the same technique was later used to pay for the lockers now used by the Club (but originally put in for Members). For those they paid five years' rent in advance.



Owner John Musgrove has owned *Varuna* since 1943.

*Varuna* is still in the same spot she occupied in 1945. If she were human we would probably have given her honorary membership by now!

Inside, *Varuna* is just what you would expect of a yacht of her vintage – beautifully crafted timber, glasses and decanters in their own fitted gimbaled racks, and lots of space.

Up forward is a full-width toilet compartment, and the main cabin has four

bunks with the upper one each side set well forward with storage underneath. The end of the upper bunks folds away to leave full-length lower bunks either side of the centre folding table.

Behind the bunks is more storage – cupboards are built in Queensland maple – and the opening portholes which are a delightful feature of the hull. They are fully operational and, being regularly underwater when sailing, need fre-



*Varuna* got her first big spinnaker in 1947. She was also the first cruising division yacht in the RSYS to have an overlapping genoa.

quent maintenance.

At the rear of the cabin is the galley, divided to place the gas stove on one side of the gangway and the sink and eutectic fridge on the other.

*Varuna* is equipped with a 25 hp diesel located under the cockpit floor. Access is behind the cockpit ladder, and the whole area, about 10'x10'x3' deep, is white painted and fitted with its own lights.

The cockpit in *Varuna* is huge. In fact, the lower bunk cushions can be fitted side by side on its floor. It makes a great entertaining area (the cockpit, that is, not its floor) and can be covered with awnings and covers to extend the living area. The back bulkhead of the cabin folds down to make cabin and cockpit one huge area.



ALRIGHT THEN - WHERE'S THE BLOODY BOAT!!

A cartoon from the crew. With this yacht's beam it would all fit easily.

There are not many boats around to compare with *Varuna*, and it is easy to use too many adjectives to describe her, just because she is old and unusual. In fact, she is a rare survivor of her age with enough space, comfort and speed to make her an excellent and distinctive harbour yacht for either cruising or racing.

It will be interesting to see what John Musgrove can come up with to celebrate her 50th anniversary in 1986. □

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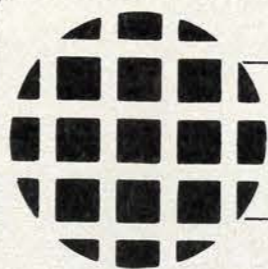


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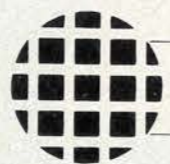
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## CLIPPER SHIP SAILING

(continued from previous issue)

by Robert McNeill

with illustrations by Peter Harrigan.



*We continue with the transcript of the handwritten account of Robert McNeill about his early life at sea in clipper ships. His story began last issue, in England, where in his early teens he left his job as an office boy and joined the crew of a barque heading for America. His experiences as deck boy on his first voyage ended when, having reached America, he jumped ship and signed onto a Russian barquentine heading back to Scotland.*

*We rejoin him as they approach the coast of Scotland.*

The living conditions were fair, altogether not too much to grumble about. She proved to be a very leaky little vessel with one hour at the hand pump night and morning and was no easy task. What is most permanent in my memory of that passage was when we were beating around the North of Scotland we encountered continuous head winds and Scotch mists. These mists are very wet and intensely cold. Said fogs as these I had never experienced before and the number of hours I did duty on the lookout turning the hand fog signal were a great many. The signals warn other vessels which may be about what tack your ship is on so as to prevent collision when trying to discern each other in the Scottish mists.

One day we sighted a big headland while I was at the wheel and the Captain said to me "That's the fatherland, Bob". Those words were a tonic to me, because I had no idea of the ships position, for the only English

spoken was between the Negro cook and myself. The weather eventually cleared and we got a good slant down the East coast of Scotland and were soon amongst the fleets of fishing smacks. What splendid little vessels they were and how the sight of them made me feel happier than I had felt for many a long day. The crews of them were my own countrymen and I was near home. They would sail very close to us and one morning I called out to one of them "How far are we from Dundee" and he answered "Two thousand miles" but as I was to find out shortly we were right at the Port. The fishermen evidently thought that I was having a joke, so he returned it on me.

Soon after this a tug boat came steaming out to us and after some bartering with Captain as to how much he would charge to tow us to Dundee he gave us his tow line and took us to an anchorage in the River Tay just off the Port of Dundee. The passage from Mobile had taken sixty-eight days.

Our cargo was consigned to Perth some miles up the River Tay so a considerable amount of work had to be done before we could leave the anchorage. The deck cargo had to be discharged and made up into rafts to be towed up the river to Perth. This lightened the vessel to allow her to pass the shallows in the upper reaches of the river. Then the topmasts had to be lowered to allow sufficient headroom for our masts to pass under the Tay Bridge. All these preparations complete, now commenced the tow of about twenty five miles up the river to our final port of discharge.

The scenery on the Banks of the River Tay still remains vividly in my mind. The undulating farms stretching for miles. Further on near our destination we passed a Bluff of Rocky Heights almost overhanging our ship as we slipped quietly by behind our tug. The water of the river as far as it is navigable for vessels of the size of our ship is so clear that the bottom is quite discernible as also are the fish with which it teems. I learned afterwards that the precipitous country which lay directly opposite where our ship was berthed is famous by the fact that Robert Bruce's cave is situated there. We were moored to a wharf attached to a timber yard in a small inlet off the river.

Then commenced the arduous task of discharging our cargo of twelve by twelve oregon, by hand power of which I took no mean part, for I was on a hand winch all the time until the cargo was discharged. I had my diversions and pleasure when the days work was done having become friendly with some of the town boys who used to visit the ship. Many evenings and weekends they would take me to their homes for many a meal which was a very welcome change from ship's food. They would lend me a bicycle and we had some pleasant tours into the country during the weekends. It was very hard for me to understand their broad 'Scotch' accent and when they ask me "Do ye kin when you are gwan awa?" it took me quite a while to get the gist of it, and we would have many a good laugh over my non-comprehension. I in turn would give them a little enjoyment by taking them rowing in the ship's boat, and suppose I would feel quite proud of my own prowess in being able to teach the other boys the science of sculling. We would pull the boat to the town bridge, a very historical work of masonry, to

## Clipper ship sailing

watch the fishermen hauling in their nets, and incidentally to receive gratis part of their catch. For all-round good nature give me the 'Canny Scot' of Perthshire and for some considerable time from different parts of the world I correspond with my Scottish friends.

On arrival at Dundee I had written to my parents and given an explanation of my desertion from the *St. Vincent* and needless to say their reply was for me to come home as soon as possible, so I told the Captain I wanted to leave the ship. He asked me to stay and that we were bound for Burnt Island to load coal for some port in Sweden, but I refused. He then told me he would pay me off when we arrived at Burnt Island. With the cargo all discharged we were to be towed out the next day, and that evening previous to sailing I had a right royal send off from my friends.

The *George* was towed to Burnt Island and when she was moored, I lost no time packing up my belongings, for I was very glad to be going home to my people. To get there I took the train across to Glasgow and then per passenger steamer to Liverpool. On arrival at the Glasgow railway station I engaged a rather seedy looking individual to take my luggage to the steamer and when we got their the coin I gave him was not sufficient so commenced an argument. Now the Chief Officer must have been within hearing and seeing, I expect, that I was a young sailer by the appearance of my kit, lost no words and assisted him violently off the wharf. I have learnt many a time since by personal experience of the inherent feeling one has for a shipmates well being and that seems to extend to all men of the calling.

Home, the return of the 'Prodigal Son' could not have had a greater welcome than I had. I was the man of the hour and the anxiety that I had given my people was forgotten and forgiven. The Captain of the *St. Vincent* had written to them to say I had deserted the ship and he had done his best to find me, that I was a good boy and was sorry to lose me. It pleased me greatly to know that he bore me no ill will, for boy as I was my conscience pricked me occasionally for the trick I had served him.

Well my mother pleaded with me to give up the sea and to go to a trade before I got past the age to become apprenticed (my age was then sixteen), but it was of no avail, nothing but a Clipper would satisfy me, for by now had I not had some experience, the sea life suited me, I would not 'swallow the anchor'. My father first coaxed and then threatened me, and

in the end with thorough disgust, told me to do 'what the — I liked.' When I think — and I remember them clearly the pleadings of my mother and father of close upon forty years ago — what a determined young bugger I must have been, and what utter foolishness to go to sea contrary to their wishes, little knowing the hardship and peril I would experience before I was very much older. If one were gifted with foresight what a vast difference it would make in ones career.

Well I had a good holiday amongst my relations. I visited the home of my school chum Chris for he had already been to my people and had given them an account of my desertion. It seems that the *St. Vincent* had made a good passage to Cardiff and he arrived home six weeks before me, and that he had sailed again for the East Indies. He also deserted the *St. Vincent* but returned to the ship again. I don't know the full details because it has never been my good fortune to meet him again, for as it is explained later that our subsequent voyages lay thousands of miles apart.

Soon the 'wander lust' became an obsession with me again and I would make an occasional trip down amongst the shipping. My short experience had taught me to take notice of the size and various rigs of vessels. I would stand on the different wharves and feast my eyes as such ships as *Claverdon* and *Plaindes*. These two vessels I learnt were bound around Cape Horn to San Francisco; the *Torteth* and *Holt Hill* to the west coast of South America and many more clipper ships, too numerous to mention, did I admire. These big iron ships were much larger vessels than either the *St. Vincent* or *George*. Their roomy and snow white decks and the gleaming brightness of their brasswork fairly held me spellbound.

How I would like to make a voyage around Cape Horn in any one of these ships were my dearest thoughts. Arriving home one day from one of my shipping exploration, I told my parents of my decision and the class of ship I intended to sail on and the voyage occupied one or two years. I did not meet with much opposition, I suppose they could see that it was of no avail opposing my wayward nature, so I commenced with earnest to try for a berth on one of those fine clippers.

The first ship I went on board was called *Tamar* and the Chief Officer told me she would not be ready to sail for at least a month. He proved to be a very congenial kind of man, as on hearing from me that I had done a voyage in sail we had quite a long

yarn. This I might say gave me great encouragement, because in that day of rigid discipline a boy looked upon an officer as something of a fearsome individual, and when I left him it was with an assurance of a berth as deck boy when the vessel would sign on for the next voyage. I was not destined to sail in the *Tamar*, as it so happened that a friend of my family knew personally Mr. R.W. Leyland, the Liverpool ship owner of a very big fleet of ships. These vessels were named after suburbs of Liverpool such as *Liverpool* (I believe she was the largest British ship afloat at that time), *Wavertee*, *Allerton*, *Torteth*, *Dittor*, *Spike*, *Roby*.

This friend of ours gave me a letter of introduction to Mr Leyland and he in turn gave me a letter to the Chief Officer of the full rigged ship *Roby* informing him to employ me as deck boy. What pleasure it gave me to be told "All right my boy, you can turn to as soon as you like." A casual look around was enough to let me know that she was just the type of ship I wished to sail in, so I lost no time in getting home to let my parents know of my good fortune, for was I not going on a voyage around Cape Horn in a fine big iron clipper ship.

My sea outfit had to be replenished so the next day was occupied attending to these wants, and visiting relations with whom I had become quite popular. I think I gained quite a lot of needless notoriety through my obstinacy to my parents.

Well the following day I reported for duty on board the *Roby* full of enthusiasm but which as after events will prove turned out to be despair. The few days I was on board previous to signing on were busy days, for coal was being loaded into the ship at the Bramby Moore Dock, Liverpool and my job was continual cleaning away of coal dust, and when my days work was finished, I imagine there was a strong resemblance between myself and the Negroes of the Southern States.

The vessel was now loaded and hatches battened down. The sails were bent (sent up aloft and secured to the yards and stays) by shore riggers who had been working aboard for some time renewing rigging on the main mast. Then the ships stores commenced to arrive and what a conglomeration, all to be manhandled by five hands all told (the ship had not yet signed on the crew) so labour consisted of Chief Officer, Second Officer, the apprentice, and ordinary seaman who had already made two voyages in the ship so he was very efficient at his work and myself.



Many coils of rope of various dimensions, blocks, cordage, canvas, drums of tar, paint, oil are only a few of the deck stores required for a long voyage. Then the victualling department with practically all preserved foodstuffs to feed twenty-eight men. I say preserved foodstuffs because such a thing as refrigerators were never carried in cargo carrying sailing ships. Consequently beef and pork were contained in casks of brine. Also in canned form was butter and vegetables in tins, but more about these luxuries will be written later. The final item on the store list was two small black pigs and they were duly installed in the pen to be fattened up for Christmas or at some convenient date, when all hands would get one or two 'real' meals. The stores all aboard and the ship was washed down everything was now taking shape to engage the crew.

On the fourteenth of August in the year Nineteen Hundred (I having just attained by seventeenth birthday) a full crew were signed on at the Liverpool Shipping Office for the full rigged ship *Roby* and bound to Pesagua on the West Coast of South America with a cargo of four thousand tons of coal. The crew consisted of Captain, 1st Mate, 2nd Mate, Boatswain, Sailmaker, Carpenter, sixteen Able Seamen, one Ordinary Seaman, one Apprentice, two Deck Boys, Cook and one Steward. This ship's tonnage was two thousand one hundred and eighteen tons registered and capable

of carrying almost four thousand tons deadweight. She had: painted ports (that is, imitation old fashion gun ports in black and white around the hull); white painted masts and yard and carried a main skysail yard; one large house on deck between number one and two hatches housed the crew; port and starboard forecastles at the forward end, then an athwartship allyway for the seaman's oilskins etc.; abaft this came the gally and abaft that again on the port after corner was berthed the Petty Officers, i.e. Boatswain, Sailmaker and Carpenter. Then, on the starboard after corner, [was that] which is termed the Half Deck in which we boys were housed.

I had my final leave-taking of my parents that morning and with a solemn promise to them that I would not desert ship again but remain on the *Roby* until she came home again, no doubt eased their worry a little over my departure, but their worry concerning me were greatly increased by later events.

The crew commenced to arrive on board, some of whom were none to steady having imbibed too freely, no doubt on the strength of their months advance. All crews signing on this class of vessel were allowed one months 'advance note' payable about ten days after the ship had sailed, and in most cases that money would be owing for board money and in others would be cashed by the boarding masters or publicans for allowance of a large percentage, some as high as

## Clipper ship sailing

thirty three per cent. The old-time genuine seaman and his hard-earned money was easy prey for unprincipled people all over the globe, for the truth and actual facts of the lot of those men has seldom been written.

The ship's moorings were singled up, that is to say all extra ropes and wires taken in and the tugboat *William Jolliffe* alongside. The Captain and Pilot were on the 'Poop' deck together with some of the company's officials. The Chief Officer and the Second Officer were with us young fellows doing this and that coiling this up here, lashing that there and a hundred and one jobs preparing the ship for sea.

Then came a roar from the Captain "Are they all aboard yet, Master?" of course meaning all hands. The Mate went forward and found three were still missing. I happened to be within hearing of the Master's reply to the Mate's report; it would not be etiquette to commit his words to paper. You see the ship was ready for sea, and as soon as the tide was sufficiently high to allow the dock gates to be opened, the tugboat would then tow us into the river and then out to sea providing all hands were aboard, but if the crew were short, then it meant letting the anchor go in the river until we got a full complement of men. Anchor work in a big sailing ship is slow arduous work. However, the three men arrived with the assistance of two or three policemen, who were treating them good naturedly maybe owing to the strains of 'Whisky Johnny' which the men were singing; a true indication of the sailing ship man. All aboard and visitors ashore, the usual good bye and good luck, the tug boat in position and the tow lines made fast — the Captain shouts "Let go for'ard" then a short interval "Let go aft". The tug boat strains at her lines and we are under weigh passing out of the dock and into the swift running River Mersey. Once in position in mid river for our tow out to sea the *William Jolliffe*, known in both hemispheres for some wonderful towing feats, lengthened her tow line to the regulation length. All hands are now employed with the sheets, halliards and braces cleared for running preparatory to loosening sails, in which I found myself fairly handy, vastly different from my first voyage for I felt no pangs of home sicknesses or sea sickness now. The weather being fine with a slight breeze, our tug boat made good progress and we were soon clear of the Northwest Lightship where we discharged our pilot. Now commenced the task of loosening our sails and setting the lower ones, before we cast off the *William Jolliffe*. ▶



The lower topsails, foresails and fore topmast staysail set, yards trimmed to a steady fair wind, the upper topsail halliards to the capstan and yards hoisted to the tunes of the "Black Ball Line" where I served my time. Our vessel was not gathering way which meant we were slackening the tow line, our speed was greater than the tug boats so the orders were to stand by the tow line then 'let go' and as we sailed majestically past the *William Jolliffe* she gave us the usual good bye signal from her siren and a cheer from her crew. Top gallant sails, royals, skysail and fore and aft sails were set. My orders from the bosun "Up and loose the main royal and skysail sonny" he must have noticed that I was slightly experienced, for was I not a 'second voyager' and my enthusiasm in this fine big clipper helped quite a lot. The vessel was now under full sail with a moderate breeze and bowling along at about ten or eleven knots an hour. The ropes coiled up everything was now looking trim and shipshape so a short respite was given to us, which was occupied by me in admiring the ship. As I looked aloft at that towering mass of white canvas with the summer's setting sun shining on the billowing sails made me feel proud of the small part that I had taken in the setting of them.

All hands were now ordered to muster aft on the quarter deck to be allotted to their respective watches.

What is meant by this is that the men line up on deck faced by the Chief Officer and Second Officer. The Chief Officer then has first pick of one man, then the Second Officer does likewise and so on until all the men and boys are evenly divided into two watches. The Chief Officer is the Port Watch and the Second Officer is the Starboard Watch. I was picked out for the Chief Officers watch and considered myself lucky, for he turned out to be a first class seaman and was also very popular with the men, a matter that was not always apparent in the old time ships, but which creates smooth running in a calling that often has ones nerves and energy at straining point. This Officer to whom I am referring is at present Master of a big liner trading between Great Britain and the Colonies.

Our watch consisted of Chief Officer, eight able seamen, one apprentice and myself as deck boy. Many nationalities were represented amongst the men. One West Indian Negro, a Dane, a Swede, an Italian with the rest being Britishers. But whatever colour or caste they were all real sailormen, and from each and every one of them I learnt to become a more efficient seaman. The first night at sea and on all subsequent nights watches it was my duty to keep the time on the lee side of the poop deck, that is strike the bells every half hour in addition to attending to the Chief Officers wants,

also assisting with anything appertaining to sails. I was not allowed to take a wheel in this ship, at least not in the higher latitudes, but when we got down into the tropics I took my regular trick.

In the day watches we lads were kept up to scratch by a big Liverpool Irish bosun shinning and climbing overhauling buntlines, which are handled from the deck and are used to haul the sail up to the yard to keep it from flapping and billowing out too much when making it fast. Overhauling the buntlines is always the boy's job and consists of: letting the rope go off the belaying pin on the deck, stop it with a single turn of twine. The idea of the single turn is, when taking the sail in a hurry, it is easily broken, the slack part up aloft logs over the forepart of the sail and is not so liable to chafe the sail. Any loose ends of cordage - 'Irish Pennants' as they are called - must be cut off or rectified. No matter what position aloft they are in amongst the maze of rigging and woe betide us youngsters if we were slipshod in our duties.

We had a very good start and carried a fair wind for a number of days, which took us well clear of the land and out into the Atlantic Ocean. When aloft I used to admire our fine vessel with the enormous spread of canvas, having a slight list due to the steady quartering wind. It is a sight not to be forgotten to view a sailing ship

from aloft as she cuts her way through the water under the pressure of thousands of yards of canvas turning the sea to a frothy white foam. Well we were having an extraordinary good passage and were not long getting down into what felt like tropical weather, the Captain and Officers, likewise the men all in the best of humours due no doubt to the splendid start we were getting. The ship was doing regularly ten or eleven knots an hour, I assisting to heave the log line in my watch on deck, hence my knowledge of the speed we were travelling. Heaving the log line is also the boys regular job every two or four hours, and such practice enables one to be able to judge a vessel's speed to within a fraction by watching the foam pass the ship's side.

As I have already stated we had a fine bunch of sailormen and a musical lot to boot and they soon had the 'Foo Foo Band' in full swing. Bennett was a fair 'tenor', Sam the West Indian man - the 'banjoist', Car, a Swede - 'accordian', Johnston - the 'drum major' - the drum composed of an empty cask with canvas ends, and a young Scotsman, McDougal, the mouth organ. Consequently the six to eight dog watch was looked forward to by all hands including officers.

Sometimes there would be a variation from vaudeville to aerobatics. One item especially caused lots of fun and pain too, to the man who did not manipulate the trick properly. It consisted of hanging by either your chin or the back of your neck in the noose of a rope made fast to the backstay and well clear of the deck, then let your hands go and hold your weight by your head, but if you slip out a nasty graze with the rope on your ears or cheeks will be your reward. This was only one of many dare devil tricks of the programme. At other times there would be competition in weight lifting and gambling with plugs of tobacco on various climbing feats. Tobacco was always the form of currency, for money was an unknown quantity when at sea in sailing ships and for that matter also in great scarcity in ports. Some of these watches would be spent with the men spinning yarns about different ships they had sailed in, hard case ships, hungry ships and the varied news and experiences of the general run of sail trained men would make volumes of facts far stranger than fiction.

One man amongst our crew, a Swede by the name of Olson was a real 'Hans Anderson' for fairy tales, marked with an occasional ghost yarn of the 'Flying Dutchman' series. Some

of these ghost stories were positively hair raising for anybody with a superstitious nature and these were the means of quite a lot of devilment and fun to the detriment of a young Italian Able Seaman, who was nick named 'Domo' because his correct name was 'Dominic'. Well Domo did not like the ghost stories which sometimes would have a religious strain about them, and he would remonstrate and sometimes blaspheme in his own language which would often create roars of laughter and at times would assume almost a serious aspect which at the same time only tended to accentuate the source of diversion. One story in particular I well remember which nearly brought on war between Scandanavia and Italy. Runs as follows: Olson to Domo: "I dreamt about you last watch, Domo." "What you dream?" "Vell, I dream you come and say to me 'Olson, I die in three days'. Den on de next day you come to me and say 'Olson I die in two days'. Den on de next day you say 'Olson I die tomorrow'. Next day I keep watch over you, you are working out on the jib boom and you fall overboard. I rush across the foc'sle head to dive over for you but you call out "Don't come, Olson, someting pull me down". "By Cristo" fairly yelled Domo, "You squarehead, I killen den you" but his quick move towards Olson was intercepted by some of the other men.

Now Olson was a fine sailorman and could no doubt have taken care of himself, good natured but I suppose seeing that 'Domo' was susceptible to his eerie yarns, he no doubt made them very pointed, to the detriment of Domo's firey temper, who I might say apart from this weakness, was a good shipmate. Although I was only a boy I used to advise him to take no notice of the yarns. Maybe due to the Domo's temper a series of tricks were played on him very detrimental to his nerves. Mind you there was no question of malice, but pure school boy devilment. The practical joke played on him was when he was doing his turn on the lookout on a dark night. A dummy man made of white canvas was lowered over the fore yard by means of a rope leading from the deck with the legs dangling below the front of the sail. This was too much for Domo. He came flying down the Forecastle ladder, exclaiming to the rest of the watch "Dis ship no good" evidently thinking he had seen one of Olson's ghosts. So to appease his now badly frayed nerves all hands went forward in a body to lay the nocturnal visitor by the heels, but found none, certainly not. The dummy had been well and truly stowed away in the mean time. This was not the finish of Domo's troubles for on the following night when he was going to the wheel the dummy was put alongside the lee ladder leading up to the poop deck. Now it is unforgiveable for any member of the crew to ascend

(continued on page 31)



# NOUMEA '83

by Peter Campbell

There have been great ocean races from Australia to exotic Pacific seaports such as Noumea, Port Vila, Suva, Lord Howe Island, Port Moresby, but there has been no welcome, I think, to equal that which Australian yachtsmen received in the inaugural La Route du Paradis which followed this year's Club Med New Caledonia races from Sydney and Brisbane.

For most of the Australians, La Route du Paradis gave them their first experience of the magnificent cruising waters which lie beyond Noumea, taking them to the unspoiled island of Ouvea in the Loyalty Islands Group, to the northeast of New Caledonia, and then back to the Melanesian village of Touho, nestling among the palm trees below the towering green mountains of the east coast. Introduced by the Cercle Nautique Caledonien (CNC), the host Club in Noumea, and the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, La Route du Paradis became the palliative to yachtsmen who had endured between a week and 12 days of bashing to windward in the Club Med races this year. Unfortunately, 'unseasonable' weather produced rain and only light winds instead of promised southeast trades for the 'second leg', but for those who completed it La Route du Paradis will no doubt remain the highlight of their Pacific experience for 1983.

The arrival of the fleet in Touho will also be long remembered by the native people living in the little villages along the coast, certainly by those who had their first-ever opportunity to go aboard a large racing yacht. Among them were some 80 children from the local school who were shown, in groups, over Peter Rysdyk's *Onya of Gosford*. For the first time in 40 years the local tribes there agreed to conduct a traditional welcome for the visiting yachtsmen, with the town hall of Touho packed to capacity for speeches of welcome followed by a spectacular dance outside, in which most of the yachtsmen and women later joined in.

## First leg a bash

Unfortunately, the hard beat to windward in the fresh to strong easterly winds and rough seas took its toll on the record 50 boats of the two fleets which set sail from Sydney and Brisbane. Fifteen retired; several of the Cruising Division sailed again when the weather improved.

Despite the long hard beat, virtually on one tack from both Sydney and Brisbane, there were few lasting complaints from the crews once they reached Noumea. But, then, for most the wind eased for the last couple of days, the seas flattened, the sun shone warmly, so the pains of the long bash were



The Cercle Nautique Caledonien's modern marina on the southern end of Noumea.

soothed by the time most stepped ashore in Noumea's old harbour to a warm welcome from the local French community and members of the CNC.

First to reach the finish line (this year moved from Amedee Lighthouse to the Petite Pass into Noumea Harbour) was Sydney yachtsman Marshall Phillips in his latest *Sweet Caroline*, giving him a unique 'double' in races to Noumea (he also took the double in '79) and the unofficial title of champion ocean racing yachtsman of the southwest Pacific. After a slow beginning - "We were all a little seasick for the first couple of days and sailed the boat badly" - *Sweet Caroline* took over the lead from *Satin Sheets*, and these two sloops led the way across on the 1060 nautical mile course from Sydney to Noumea.

Less than 35 miles apart on the final morning of the race, the corrected time result was wide open between *Sweet Caroline* and *Satin Sheets*, but in the final few miles the Dubois 44 was able to close reach to the finish while the Peterson 2-tonner ended with a beat all the way after a wind shift. Andrew Strachan in *Satin Sheets* had about six hours in hand to win the race on corrected time but could not quite make it, *Sweet Caroline* finally winning by only 42 minutes 44 seconds.

They were followed in by *Pacha*, *Sangaree* and *Meltemi*, with *Meltemi* taking third place on corrected time for her Canberra crew skippered by Gunnar Tuisk. It was a fine effort by her 'lake' crew in this 1971-vintage design.

With three yachts named *Sweet Caroline* Phillips has been what some would call the most successful Australian yachtsman in international racing in the Pacific. Apart from his two Sydney-Noumea Race wins he has won the Sydney-Suva Race and has repre-

sented Australia in three Pan Am Clipper Cup series in Hawaii, twice being a member of the winning team, in 1978 and 1980, with his previous boats.

In his latest *Sweet Caroline*, as sistership to the English Admiral's Cup star, *Victory*, Phillips raced in the CYCA Clipper Cup team last year, and this past summer has won Division A of both the Hitachi Sydney-Hobart and Marine Hull Sydney-Mooloolaba races.

Third boat to reach Noumea was the leader of the Brisbane fleet, Mal Hewitt's Peterson 2-tonner *Envy*. Like *Sweet Caroline*, she took out the line/handicap double, but by even greater margins.

The only significant retirement from the Sydney racing fleet was the French yacht *Pomme d'Api* which twisted her mast and damaged her rigging and sailed more than 200 miles back to Mooloolaba.

## Brisbane fleet

The Brisbane fleet set sail 26 hours after the Sydney boats, and for the most part it encountered worse weather. Only two Cruising Division yachts finished within the time limit, and at least two boats never got outside Moreton Bay. Another early casualty was the powerful Coffs Harbour sloop *Virgo*, sailed by local Club Commodore John Williamson, which broke her mast the first night at sea.

*Envy* sailed a powerful race, revelling in the hard conditions more than 8½ hours ahead of Paul Kent's *Aztec*, skippered by Mooloolaba yachtsman Lloyd Maher. *Envy* averaged 6.7 knots over the ground for the 800 mile course, but her time for the race - 6 days 5 hours 30 minutes 41 seconds - was well outside the time set by *Siska II* in the inaugural race from Brisbane two years ago. She beat *Aztec* on corrected time by under

seven hours. Third place went to the Tasmanian ½-tonner *Hotshot*, a Carter 30 owned by the Prescott family of Hobart and skippered in this race by 20-year-old Greg Prescott, already a veteran of three Sydney-Hobarts. His crew, which included one girl, were all under 25 years of age. Also a member was a rising Tasmanian star of offshore racing, 23-year-old Craig Escott, skipper of the ill-fated sloop *Solandra* which was wrecked on Cat Island in Bass Strait on its way to Sydney for the race to Noumea. Craig and another crew member hitch-hiked to Brisbane to join *Hotshot* after salvaging all possible gear from the timber-hulled *Solandra*, winner of the 1982 Melbourne-Hobart Race.

## Arbitrary Divisions

Both fleets had an Arbitrary Division (primarily for yachts without IOR ratings but open for IOR yachts, too). The majority of racing yachts entered both divisions. Winner of the Sydney fleet was Peter Rysdyk's *Onya of Gosford*, the 10th to carry the name of either *Onya* or *Onya of Gosford*. It was a fitting reward for the man who revived interest in the Sydney-Noumea Race, enlisted sponsorship from UTA, Peugeot, Club Med and others, and who has in the past been (three times) a Noumea Race Director. This was Rysdyk's first race to Noumea in his own yacht, and the Miller 40 performed well, finishing sixth in the IOR Division as well. She won the Arbitrary from *Meltemi* and from Kanga Birtles' Holland 2-tonner *Sangaree*. *Lotus* was fourth, followed by *Pacha*, and the little Tasmanian sloop *Thylacine*.

The IOR winner of the Brisbane fleet, *Envy*, entered both divisions and won both. Second place in Arbitrary went to *Carinya IV*, John Burkitt's lovingly restored and expertly sailed little Carmen class timber sloop, while third went to *Vivace*, a steel hulled Joe Adams cruising sloop owned and skippered by Seafort Matheson. *Amon Re*, being sailed for the last time by Queensland Yachting Association President Dayle Smith, finished fourth, while in fifth place was the first Mackay yacht to contest this race, *Aegir*, skippered by Neville Edwards.

## Cruising Divisions

The strong headwinds and rough seas took a toll of the Cruising Divisions in both fleets. The last to finish was the Swanson 36, *Senang*, which finally reached Noumea 13 days out of Sydney, after a zig-zag course across the Pacific, including a rather close encounter with Elizabeth Reef. The Cruising Division was judged by Race Director Alan Brown on a point score system which included a predicted average speed for the course, the use of sail and motor, and other general factors of good seamanship.

Winner of the Sydney division was David Beer in his comfortable 15.2 metre aluminium ketch *Mandalay III*, a Peter Cole design. (Beer also won the Cruising Division in the 1979 Race with *Mandalay II*.) The point score was remarkably close, with *Mandalay III* scoring 327.12 points from *Wyuna II* (Bill Arnold), with *Shiraz* (Col Green) third with 299.54 points.

Brian Willey's big cruising sloop *Banjo* from Brisbane was the only boat to finish within the time limit in the Brisbane fleet scoring 325.17 points.

## La Dieppoise

For the third time, the French Navy provided an escort vessel for the two fleets, with *La Dieppoise* sailing from Noumea to Sydney especially under the command of Lieutenant Commander Gille de France. *La Dieppoise* was also the radio relay ship; she passed position reports back to the CYCA through Penta Base and also to the CNC in Noumea. Radio operator aboard was Captain Jean-Louis Boglio, the Harbour Master of the Port of Noumea.

"The Cruising Yacht Club of Australia greatly appreciates the fine efforts of *La Dieppoise*, her captain and his crew", race director Alan Brown said in Noumea, after presenting a commemorative race plaque to the French Ship.

"The role of the French Navy in providing an escort vessel for this long ocean race was vital to the safety and communications of this record fleet and was a gesture which must cement the good relations between Australia and New Caledonia."

Alan spoke highly of the efforts of the Port Authority of Noumea which organised the loan of large barges from private companies to form a special harbour for the yachts.

Club Med's John Youngman presented the major trophies, which included two fine paintings, to the owners of the winning IOR Division yachts in each fleet. Among the trophies were several special ones from the French Navy and from *La Dieppoise* itself.

## Route du Paradis

The highlight of the 1983 race and cruise to Noumea was the inaugural La Route du Paradis, starting from Noumea, two days after the trophy presentation and providing the opportunity to race and cruise to the beautiful coral island of Ouvea and then back



Ouvea Atoll, in the Loyalty Islands Group.

to Touho. Sponsored by Air Caledonie and owners of the Ouvea Village Resort and the Coco Beach Resort hotels, the event attracted 18 starters in two divisions - Racing (arbitrary handicaps) and Cruising. The first leg of some 110 miles from Noumea to Ouvea was marred by drizzling rain and little wind. After starting off the Noumea Beach Hotel the fleet motor sailed to the Baie de Prony on the southern end of New Caledonia and then reassembled for the start of the overnight sail to Ouvea.

The steady drizzle and little wind caused several boats to turn back and others to transfer from the Racing to the Cruising Division - by the simple method of motor sailing to Ouvea, led by the three-masted schooner *Ile Oia* from Geelong.

*Ile Oia* was built by Geoff Wood in 1953, and the 66-year-old Geelong grocer has sailed the unique Herreschoff schooner in



Peter Rysdyk and school children from Touho Village aboard *Onya of Gosford*.



four Sydney-Noumea Races, three Sydney-Suvas, ten Melbourne-Hobarts and Three Sydney Hobart Races. At the presentation night (marking completion of his fourth Sydney-Noumea) Wood and *Ile Ola* received a special Half Million Sea Miles trophy.

While most boats motor sailed to Ouvea, several enthusiasts persisted with sailing, Aztec and Meltemi actually dead-heating across the line at the Coetlogan Passage into the atoll; on corrected time Aztec won. Third place went to a Mooloolaba boat, Graham Savage's *Galatea*. Winner of the Cruising Division was Frank Buckland's comfortable cruising cutter, *Passport*, a centre-cockpit 13-metre design by Doug Brooker. Second went to Noel Bradley's *Gomorra* and third to Bill Oxley's cutter *Knots*.

Race Director Alan Brown flew to the island, finishing the fleet off a rocky point with the aid of the local chief's son. Host to the fleet was the newly opened Ouvea Village Resort, a traditional thatched-hut hotel set amid coconut palms about midway up the island with its superb white beachsweeping in a semi-circle some 34 kilometres. Developed by Air Caledonie, the hotel hosted the crews to a relaxed poolside cocktail party and trophy presentation, the winning boats receiving native carved wooden figures.

With the attraction of diving and just relaxing on the beach, several yachts elected to stay on a few days at Ouvea, but ten set off on the second leg of La Route du Paradis, a 65-mile course back to the mainland of New Caledonia. After an exciting midnight start through a narrow passage in the reef, in 25 knots, the wind once again died away, and the majority of boats finally motor sailed to reach Touho in time for a magnificent welcome by the Melanesian tribespeople of this beautiful village on the mountainous east coast.

This time the fleet was led to the finish by the big Queensland ketch *Windsong III*, skippered by John Goss of Mermaid Beach, but the winner of the Arbitrary Division was the Sydney sloop *Double Bogie*, skippered by Robbie Landis, with second place going to the big Geelong ketch *Wyndham*, owned and skippered by Geoff Graham.

In the Cruising Division the first two boats were from Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club, with Bill Oxley's *Knots* winning from Frank Buckland's *Passport*.

At Touho the yachtsmen were entertained by race sponsors, the Coco Beach Resort, another native-style hotel on the edge of the lagoon. The prizegiving feast was prepared in traditional style, and there was a magnificent array of trophies.

The 1983 Club Med New Caledonia Ocean Race may have been a hard slog to windward, wet and uncomfortable for many a day, but for those yachtsmen who went on to sail La Route du Paradis, it was made worthwhile. □



Robbie Landis and a Noumean friend.



Ouvea Village Resort.

PETER CAMPBELL

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## CAPTAIN SEAWEED'S NAUTIWORDS

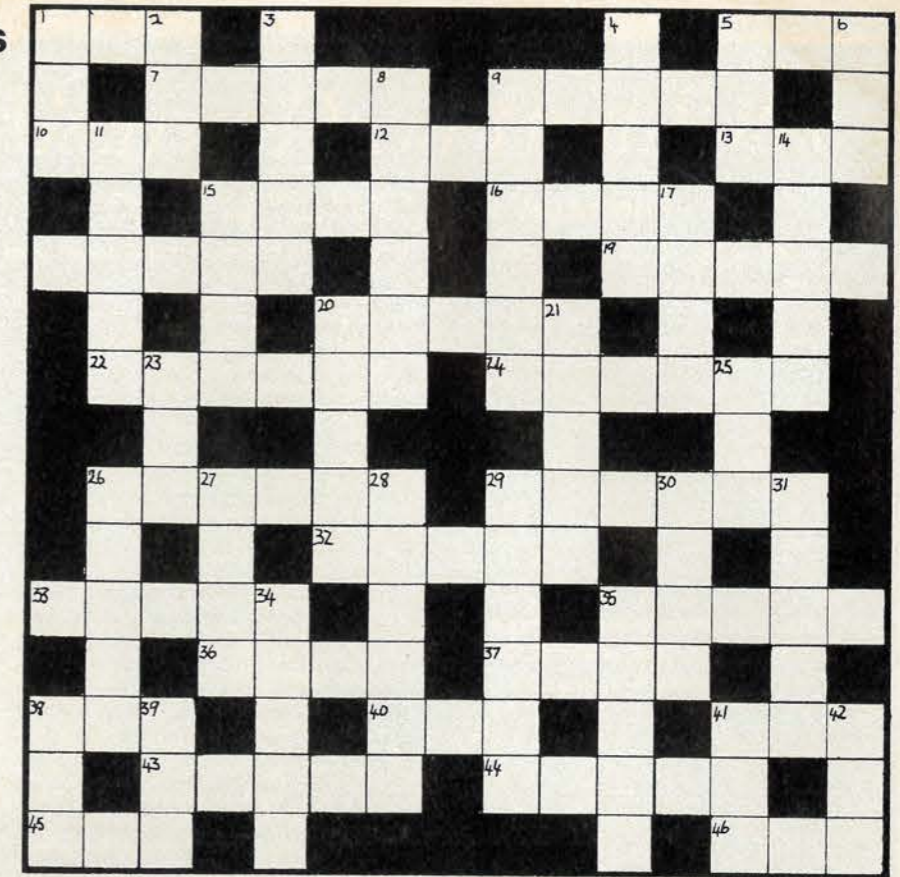
By John Hawley

### ACROSS

- The Tasman is one.
- What goes with Love.
- Half a yacht (or half a big wind).
- Let's go by tram.
- Sir Jim's second name, for short.
- Old English compass point.
- Any size rum.
- A classic international series.
- Lend them to Caesar.
- Requisite for putting up Zs.
- An anaesthetic or yore.
- Make off that sheet.
- A foot bone.
- Ron Swanson's boat, 5th in 1963.
- The big gherkin.
- Heroin does this to those who can't spell.
- A bull, a steak house, or the beginning of a publisher.
- They make our path rough.
- A base for communication.
- First in the first Sydney-Hobart.
- A shy kite makes it hard to handle.
- A sponsor of the Noumea Race.
- A prefix that signals a revival.
- First mate's number.
- Co-founder of the Q.L.D..
- Blue coated neighbour of the CYCA.
- Essential for a Sportsman's Luncheon.
- Dry disease of timber boats.

### DOWN

- Tension at the back prevents this.
- A boring thing.
- Descriptive of most racing yachts today.
- Result of 18 across.
- Knit this for a change of character.
- He quits a sinking ship.
- Get these by winches.
- Bob, owner of *Capucine*, 15th in 1970.
- Flinders has one.
- Two on a big one, by Hal Roth.
- Scorch.
- Far from stern.
- Jolly good in Suva.
- Thank goodness modern yachts do not have them.
- Cleopatra clutched one in the end.



- Sydney time in winter (you guessed it).
- Slightly astern.
- Famous Solent lightship.
- First to Hobart in 1962.
- Coffelt is one, especially of the Whitsundays.
- He Masters and Surveys.
- Slippery sheets.
- West Indian dance.
- Found on many a yacht, but not *Police Car*.
- Long life milk.
- Ubiquitous harbour snapper.
- One of a pair in a tender behind.
- Do it well in the Blue Water Room.

Answers on page 32

(continued from page 5)

## Brokerage off to good start

Maurice Drent Boat Sales, CYCA franchise yacht broker, is off to a good start, according to Maurie Drent, proprietor of the yacht brokerage located at the CYCA. "The first six months have gone very smoothly," Drent told *Offshore*. "Boat sales are improving, mainly due to the fact that we're open seven days a week." A number of Members have commented favourably on the blackboards located on A and C marinas, which give the daily weather report and tidal information - compliments of the brokerage.

Apart from sales of new and used boats, Maurice Drent Boat Sales offers competitive insurance rates, a boat delivery service, and the company is a charter agent for *Magic Flute*, a 65' Irwin stationed at Hamilton Island in the Whitsundays. •

## Clipper ship sailing

(continued from page 27)

the poop by means of the weather ladder, that being reserved for the Captain and Officers. On reaching the lee ladder and perceiving the dummy he raced across to the other side of the deck and up the weather ladder, there to be met by the Officer of the Watch wanting to know "What do you mean by coming up this ladder?". The Officer had been put up to the joke. Domo's reply was "Dis ship no good" and explaining to the Mate what he had seen at the foot of the lee ladder, of course the Mate crossed the deck but could see nothing unusual. It had been taken away in the darkness. He then

called me to tell a couple of the men to come aft and sent them in search of the ghost. Of course it was not to be found. Domo was sent away from the wheel that watch. **To be continued.**

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(continued from page 13)

started them [the races] on Saturday afternoon and finished them in the night it would be a lot better than night starts. And then you've got Sunday to get over it...a good sleep Sunday night and start fresh again.

Because I wasn't on my own boat, too, I went home from work, and I was relaxed; I had a nice feed before sailing.

**OFFSHORE:** What are your thoughts on Category 3 for these sorts of races, Nev?

**WALTERS:** Well, obviously we've got to look at the position where the life jackets are carried and where the flares are carried - whether they should be somewhere in the cockpit.

*Neville Walters was back in hospital nine days after his rescue, with pneumonia. The doctors said they expected that to happen; the sea is a soup of marine bacteria (as well as other things in the area where Walters spent the night in the water). He spent a week in hospital and some further time recuperating at home. We spoke with him again briefly just before going to press.*

**OFFSHORE:** Having now had six weeks to mull it over, and to have nightmares because of your fulminating pneumonia, is there anything particular that has solidified in your thoughts about it all? The lessons of it, or results of discussions you've had?

**WALTERS:** I've decided in my own mind that I will be making my own boat more buoyant, by making some of its lockers airtight and building an airtight compartment in the bow.

Even if it will float half submerged it's a better target than a black head like mine.

The other important thing is that I feel that the safety harness, if you put it on, should have some buoyancy attached to it. If you have your harness sewn into a buoyancy vest - normally you only use your harness in rough conditions - if you fall overboard the buoyancy vest will offset the weight of the warm clothing that you have on.

I've been going through a lot of English and overseas magazines; they have, because of their larger boating populations, a lot more boating equipment available. And I've since been talking to manufacturers in Australia, who have sought me out to ask my opinion, and I think there will be a better range of buoyancy coats and inflatable vests on the market here in the future.

I've also given thought to pumps. Mine are installed so that the intake is on one side of the boat; if the boat were lying on its other side you'd be just pumping air.

In general, what price is safety? Is \$100 too much to pay for safety gear? In my crew I'm sure that every one of us will be buying his own, and that's a point I'd like to make - to impress upon crew members that once they hit that water they're on their own. It doesn't matter what the owner has supposed to have done; what life jackets etc. there are may be up in the forward locker where they won't get damaged. And you can talk about \$80 personal strobe lights, but there is available a tube with a chemical that you can break and that glows underwater; they cost about \$3, and one of them in your pocket, and a seventy-cent whistle, could be

afforded by every crew member.

Another thing. While the police do a very good job, we can't expect that they will be there all the time, just for our exclusive use. And they're not as experienced seamen as half the fellows racing on the boats. So if you have built-in buoyancy incorporated with your safety harness, you will have built-in warmth as well, and you may need it.

The position where flares are stowed and where the radio is located is also important. You have to think of the worst conditions in which you are likely to need them.

Whatever you think about what safety gear to have and what not to have, whatever safety gear you finally end up with, all your planning is combined with just plain luck out there. Still, I think it's best to have the dice loaded in your favour. □

**Answers to Captain Seaweed's Nautiwords**




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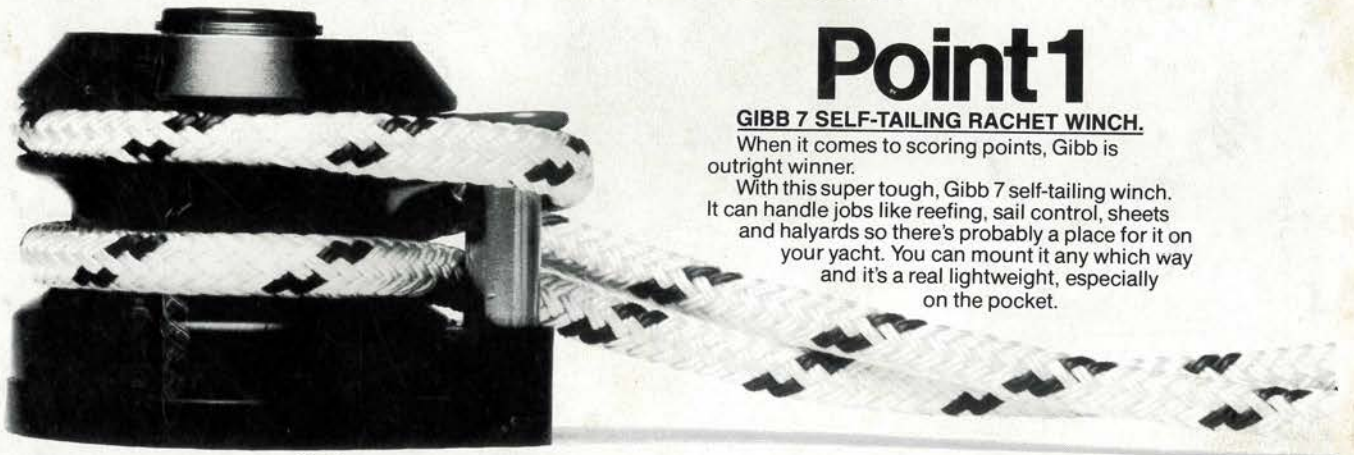


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