

Race Report Two Islands Race

With the race start postponed until 2.00pm we were able to leave Pittwater at a respectable 8.00 for a bumpy and wet motor sail down to Middle Harbour and a leisurely lunch, much better than the 5.00 am rush down to the harbour that I had been preparing for.

Five of the ten entrants having withdrawn prior to the start, the fleet consisted of the Pogo 40 Krakatoa II, the Swarbrick 40 Wide Load, Debonair, a Beneteau 42s7, Lik Lik, a Mt Gay 30 with an updated rig and ourselves in Raging Bull, a Bull 9000 that had been optimized for IRC racing.

Lining up for the start in a gusty South Westerly we were able to get away first with Lick Lick, Wide Load and Debonair all in a tight pack behind us and Krakatoa II down to leeward. Reaching out to North Head we were not quite able to hold onto the lead with first Krakatoa II (K2) then Wide Load slipping trough to leeward, K II looking particularly impressive and in it's element close reaching.

Having decided to go for the big symmetrical chute, we set first and were able to surf through below K2 to very briefly regain the lead until K2 managed to pole back their huge asymmetrical and proceeded to disappear into the distance.

The ride down to Bird Island was awesome with regular busts in the 18's and 19's and rides with 2 to 3 waves strung together with the log never dropping below 14 knots. By working every wave we were able to draw ahead of Lik Lik with Wide Load, having taken the safer option of a hounds kite further back. Meanwhile Debonair looked very comfortable under a poled out jib, but probably still doing hull speed brought up the rear.

The grins were quickly wiped of our faces though when we laid the Bull flat trying to gybe and managed to wrap to kite around the forestay. By the time we had the mess sorted out, (I having ignored Mal's calls for a knife) and were able to get back on course and raise the jib, Lik Lik had surfed past and Wide Load was right behind us. Rounding Bird with Lik Lik about 250m ahead and to leeward we were gradually able to work out over the top of them, no doubt helped by our brand new Quantum/ Contender Maxx #4 that Geoff Couell had rushed out for me during the week and which was a glamour.

Driving with one arm wrapped around a stanchion while bashing into an extremely confused and steep 3m swell, we watched Wide Load tack inshore while Lik Lik dropped further out to sea, seemingly unable to match our height. Having started out pointing at 180, contrary to our expectations, the breeze clocked right to 220 for a few hours, however we stuck to our game plan to head to sea until the predicted swing to the South East occurred. When the left shift started just before midnight, we saw Lik Lik pass less than 100m behind us heading on a long tack into the shore, we were later to hear that they mistook us

for Wide Load being (over)confident that they had done a number on us, perhaps thinking that their water ballast and extra crew was enough to give them the upper hand?? We hung in heading out to sea for another few hours and were rewarded with a further 30 deg shift to the left before tacking and carrying right to Cronulla before tacking back as the breeze shifted right again.

With the fleet split and out of sight in the rain squalls and a number of further wind shifts through the night we had no idea how we were going and just concentrated on hanging on as we were thrown around by the sea. This was difficult enough and in one moment of inattention, I found myself hanging vertical by one arm from a stanchion when the wave we climbed over suddenly disappeared and we pitched seemingly straight down.

When dawn finally arrived, I was pleased and some what relieved to see Wide load to leeward and K2 ahead, but Lik Lik and Debonair no where in sight. When Lik Lik provided their location at the morning sked, it took my sleep deprived brain some time to accept that we were 7 nm ahead. We were advised later that Debonair had retired having issued a Pan Pan call when it was discovered that there was a foot of water over the floor boards. Remarkably considering the rough and wet night we had had, the seas abated considerably as we approached Flinders and with the sun out we enjoyed a pleasant beat up to the Island in a 10 to 15 Knot South Westerly.

We were feeling pretty happy with ourselves as we rounded Flinders less than 20 minutes behind K2 and with Wide Load only 100 meters ahead having slowly run us down in the final few miles to the Island. Lik Lik had closed the gap considerably but was still a comfortable distance behind so all was right with the world as we set the masthead for what we expected to be a fast reach home. But this was not to be as the wind soon headed and dropped so we changed down to our reacher and slowly hauled in Wide Load. Just as we got abeam, the wind died entirely and we wallowed helplessly in the increasingly confused sea until a very light sea breeze appeared. Our decision to edge out to sea initially appeared to pay dividends as we opened up on Wide Load and drew ever closer to K2. But my thoughts of sailing around a becalmed K2 and into the lead soon died with the breeze out wide, as the boats inshore picked up pressure out of a squall which had circled around us.

So began probably the most frustrating period of sailing in my memory as the breeze oscillated from all points of the compass for periods of 30 seconds interspersed with regular periods where the only discernable movement was the downdraft off the wildly flapping sails and the masthead wands incessant gyrations.

Great measures of calm and confidence were called for as K2 drew ahead then first Wide Load then Lik Lik passed us before the fleet was becalmed again off Cronulla. When K2 started their motor and headed off home, Mal and I were both

of the feeling that we had been bruised, wet and tired for too long to throw in the towel and determined to see the race out no matter what it took, though by this time the conversation had changed from analysis of the virtues and vices of the various yachts we had sailed on and against to the advantages that lawn bowls had over sailing as a sport.

Our fortitude was further tested when first Lik Lik, then Wide Load, though both less than one hundred meters on either side of us started moving in a private breeze that had inexplicably managed to avoid us. When we finally got going we set out after Lik Lik who had taken the lead and by staying inshore and close tacking in phase with the shifts managed to hook back into the lead in time for the arrival of the sea breeze, who's fight for supremacy over the land breeze had been the cause of our frustrations.

With the sea breeze established, a 200m lead to Lik Lik , Wide Load a further 200m back and a close reach toward South Head we were feeling relaxed right up to the time we got head butted by the Westerly stream coming from the harbour. Five or so tense tacks later into oscillating and dying pressure with an eye always on the opposition, we finally crossed the finish transit at 20.35.06.

Having finished we were able to feel for Lik Lik and Wide Load who got hurt badly in the final beat to the finish line, with the finishing times not reflecting just how close a race it had been and how easily the results could have been different. Both the Wide Load and the Lik Lik crew (all three of them) showed themselves to be tenacious competitors in very difficult conditions who kept the pressure on through out the race, right to the very end.

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