

Race report. Performance Boating Sales Pittwater weekend 9-10 August 2008.

Snakes and ladders. Positions changing almost at random, without rhyme or reason. That was the keynote of an exciting but frustrating weekend of racing.

Congratulations to Raging Bull for the line honours double for monohulls, to the singlehanders Lik Lik and Epic Venture for handicap honours, and to Big Bird for first overall at Pittwater.

The Saturday start at 12:00 was relatively civilised, allowing Pittwater boats to arrive without having to sail in the dark. A fleet of nine assembled in Middle Harbour. As usual, Raging Bull was first away, clearing North Head with a masthead kite setting beautifully. Wide Load, Hi Jinx and Lik Lik were not too far away, with Big Bird sprinting up from behind. For the rest of the day these five boats staged a very close boat for boat battle, with a gap to the second half of the fleet.

The decision to hold on to the kite after North Head paid for Wide Load, while others dropped for a while, then re-set. After Long Reef the westerly became fitful, competing with a northeaster. Big Bird and Raging Bull went inshore and died while the others caught up, then four monohulls crossed tacks taking turns at being first or fourth with each shift. Big Bird still held a narrow lead. Raging Bull went to sea and lost badly. Lik Lik made a great run up the shoreline on a new westerly, but when the northeaster finally settled Hi Jinx was first to tack onto it.

The snakes and ladders were not over yet. Some people got confused about the course and tried to go straight to Barrenjoey, but Big Bird still led narrowly at Lion Island, with Hi Jinx and Wide Load overlapped. Then the fun began. Big Bird rounded and headed for the lighthouse, correctly believing the finish was outside Barrenjoey. Hi Jinx went wide and fell in a monstrous hole, so it was Wide Load's turn to take the lead among the monohulls. All the monos believed the line was inside Baarrenjoey. In fitful puffs from all quarters Raging Bull slipped past close to the finish, but then Lik Lik overtook with an asymmetrical setting perfectly. A broach close to the rocks looked dangerous and Lik Lik's momentary lapse allowed the Bull to snatch line honours in the last 50 metres. Wide Load was about three boat lengths behind. A classic finish to a game of changing fortunes.

Hi Jinx struggled in later, with a genuine hard luck story. The second group were about half an hour behind, slowed by the northeaster, but Epic Venture had the handicap to score a close second to Lik Lik.

It seems that Big Bird finished correctly in the way intended in the instructions. A transit line includes the line between two points plus its extensions, so all finished correctly provided they rounded Lion Island. I feel we need to either clarify the instructions or change the line to finish at the red port lateral inside Pittwater, or perhaps by GPS on a line of latitude.

The anticipated raft-up didn't happen. People went home or stayed on their own boats, perhaps for lack of a dinghy, and went to bed early.

Next morning the forecast westerly arrived in gusts, with gaps of nothing in between. A smaller fleet of 4 started on a shy reach, with spinnakers emerging at Barrenjoey. An early gybe worked well for Wide Load for a while, but when the fleet settled down after Bungan Head the Bull had skipped away under a masthead asymmetrical. Spinnaker up or spinnaker down? A marginal call. Wide Load chose to fly a small kite as well as the headsail while Hi Jinx alternated between genoa and kite. When the breeze headed the fleet south of Long Reef the Bull had a big lead and won easily, while Wide Load and Hi Jinx battled it out, still overlapped after 15 miles of drag racing.

At North Head Hi Jinx was 50 metres wider, and this proved decisive as they picked up a new southeaster first and gained two boatlengths. Checkmate. Picking the shifts well, they finished in a 30-knot squall, with Wide Load under their tight cover and out of control after stuffing up the last tack. Debonair cruised in comfortably a bit later, having left their kite in the bag.

Congratulations and thanks to all who raced. It is amazing how such diverse boats can so often end up in a real yacht race, fighting tooth and nail for the critical boatlength that will stretch into a winning margin. It's all good fun.

Chris Bowling.