

## **The Two Islands 180 miler that became the brain busting One Island 90 miler.**

We had very light head winds up to Norah Head as the massive fleet of short handed boats (that would be 5 of the 6 that got to the start line - one unable to start due to loss of all electronics) left Balmoral at 10 am Saturday. Ok, we started about 25 past after not getting away from Pittwater early enough after refitting the rudder box and motoring down without one iota of assistance from the breeze.

Our late start including penalty turns didn't make too much difference except when we got out the heads, eventually, our trimaran rival, 'Voodoo Spirit' had taken off over the horizon and we never saw them again. Lots of whales and dolphins! By Norah Head, about 10 miles shy of the first mark which is Bird Island, the wind had evaporated, hours and hours of brain snapping slapping around in the swell and back wash was destroying the poor genoa as it got pulled into the mast and rigging twice on every wave. Crewman Chris had long sleeps anticipating a long race - I had virtually none. I did have a lie down but you'd be surprised how annoying lying down there is listening to the boat not moving through the water as all the rigging, ropes, gooseneck etc gets constantly worked from the waves throwing the boat around in every direction and you hear bits of metal tinkling down on the deck as shackle pins etc work themselves loose and fall from the sky.

Eventually, we reached Bird Island at midnight with a nearly full moon rising on a glassy sea, but it takes an hour to get around it. Voodoo is already back to just north of Broken Bay heading towards the 90 mile away PT Kembla mark 2 which is the island (Flinders Islet) where the big mono, Shockwave, exactly 2 years ago, tried to take a short cut through and the owner and navigator died.

Anyway, at the midnight sched my spirits were buoyed as they decided to shorten the course straight back to the harbour. Thank Gawd! Of course, the wind came in a couple of hours later from the SW so we could straight-line it to Sydney at 7-8 knots. The breeze was not as hard as the predictions had said it would be so we kept full gear up and it was really nice sailing in the dark. Beautiful sunrise and by 7 am, after Chris got up after enjoying 4 hours uninterrupted sleep, the wind went south and strengthened so we changed to the number 2 and put a reef in the main in 15-20 knots of breeze and we made our way towards North Head as we picked up every wrong shift. Go to the shore in ssw to get into flat water, the winds go sse, go out to sea to pick up the easting breeze and it goes back to ssw - ad nauseam.

Finally finished at 9 am, only 5 hours (!) behind Voodoo, who got all the good breaks. As Chris said: "The rich got richer and the poor got poorer." The monos weren't very far behind us. Close encounters with the whales on the way back out to sea, pop the kite and off we go - it really was an amazingly nice day with constant 15-20 knot breeze. The kite run back to Pittwater just about made it all worthwhile. Ok, sure we shredded the old kite but it was on borrowed time.

That poor old second hand tissue thin spinnaker. You couldn't even lay a hand on it with out it tearing. But we had lots and lots of good sails together. It was the modified fractional kite that came with the rig that I had harvested off the trimaran wreck I bought, stripped and chopped up and dumped at the tip in Yamba.

So there: the end of another very challenging and occasionally enjoyable shorthanded series.

Stephen Barton  
(Big Bird)