

CHALLENGING STOPOVER

Last issue we carried a feature on Australian yachting, Coral Wasson and her exploits in the Global Challenge round-the-world yacht race. This issue we catch up with the other Aussies in the race and chat to them about their own experiences in this sailing epic...

By Briar Jensen

Sailing back into Sydney was probably the most special thing that was ever going to happen to me on this race," said Australian Andrew Forbes, "but to come in the way we did, I'll never forget it." As skipper of *BG Spirit*, Forbes was first across the line in the Wellington-to-Sydney leg of the Global Challenge 2004/05, which arrived on February 13.

Although Forbes has left Sydney in numerous races, he's never done the reverse: "I've never actually arrived back in Sydney at the end of a yacht race. To come through the heads and turn the corner at Bradleys and see the Opera House and the Bridge; it was quite a special moment, not just for me, but for the crew that had worked very hard to get the boat there as well."

The Global Challenge is the brainchild of Sir Chay Blyth, who in 1970, was the first person to sail around the world the 'wrong' way. The event sees 12 identical 72-foot yachts race around the world against the prevailing winds and currents.

"The thing that is different with this race," says Blyth, "is that anyone can take part, providing they're between the ages of 21 and 60. About 60 per cent (of crew) have never sailed before in their lives. Providing they help participate towards the costs, we train them and we set them off."



BG Spirit and Andrew Forbes win the Wellington-to-Sydney leg. Matt Riddell and *Samsung* arrive in Sydney.

Held every four years, the 30,000-mile race is divided into seven legs, with stopovers in Buenos Aires, Wellington, Sydney, Cape Town, Boston and La Rochelle, before returning to Portsmouth, England. The 2004/05 event left Portsmouth on October 3 last year.

Arriving in Sydney was also a highlight for the other Aussies in the Challenge, including Matt Riddell, skipper of *Samsung*, crew volunteers Coral Wasson (see *Against the Wind*, Vol. 20 No. 2) and Nicholas Brennan, and legger Paul Chin.

"Sailing into Sydney was amazing; placing was irrelevant," said Riddell, who came in sixth. "We sailed in through the heads, I sailed past where I grew up and learnt to sail. A friend came out in a helicopter and escorted us in and there were about ten different boats with family and friends. It was just a dream come true."

Brennan, aboard *Team Stelmar*, felt the same, despite eighth place. "I'd known that was going to be one of the highlights for me, just sailing back through the heads where I've done all my sailing, and to have family and friends out on boats cheering you in was fantastic."

SYDNEY AFTER DARK

Unfortunately for Wasson, who at 57 is the oldest woman competing, the arrival of *Team Save the Children* in eleventh place was not as disappointing as arriving after dark. "I am terribly proud of my city. I think Sydney Harbour is absolutely magnificent and I would have loved to show it to my fellow crew in daylight," she said.

Expat Chin, who sailed the 'corporate' leg from Wellington aboard *Barclays Adventurer*, said "Seeing the Sydney skyline was the just the most amazing experience, I hadn't remembered it as being as pretty as it was."

The fleet docked in Darling Harbour, at the National Maritime Museum, and over the next few days the surrounding area was littered with sails draped out to dry in Sydney's sunshine. There was also plenty of white English flesh on display, thankfully smeared in lavish amounts of sunscreen.

The location proved ideal: "The facilities were first class and enabled us to run the event without a glitch," said Rachel Anning, Challenge publicity coordinator. It was also popular with the general public, who were allowed unrestricted access to the fleet, in keeping with Blyth's aim to make sailing accessible to everyone.



The Cape Town re-start.

"The trouble with sailing is it's got an elitist element to it and you've got a lot of barriers," he said. "For example, if you go to marinas, they're usually locked. Even if you do get onto the marina, you can't get onto a boat; no one's going to say 'come and have a look at my boat.' We're the very opposite. We encourage people to come; we encourage them to have a look around."

Compared to the five-week stop in Wellington, where the yachts received a complete overhaul, the two-week Sydney stopover was brief, allowing sponsors just enough time to conduct corporate sail days, networking functions or fundraising events. But there's also a financial reason for the short stop.

"It's so bloody expensive here (Sydney). You might be interested to know, it's the only city in the world where we have to pay for our moorage."

COSTLY VISIT

"Basically it's the cost," said Blyth. "It's so bloody expensive here. You might be interested to know, it's the only city in the world where we have to pay for our moorage."

A protest hearing the next morning saw *VAIO* penalised three points for failing to keep clear of *Imagine It Done*. While rounding a mark at the start in Wellington. Consequently, they moved from joint fifth to joint seventh on the leader board. *Imagine It Done* remained in twelfth place.

Crews participated in team functions from beach BBQs to huge fundraising events, before taking a couple of days off. Both Wasson and Chin had speaking engagements with their sponsors and all skippers were involved in corporate sail days where guests got to work alongside the crew hoisting and trimming sails as well as taking a turn at the helm.

For *Imagine It Done* skipper, Dee Caffari, the sole female skipper, it was an opportunity to relax on the water while enjoying the surroundings.

"Sailing in Sydney Harbour for corporate sailing has got to be the highlight of the whole race really."

CANCER SCARE

There were numerous jobs for crew to attend to during the stopover; Wasson had skin cancers removed, Mark Setrem of *BG SPIRIT* had the boat logo shaved into his hair after losing a bet, and two English crew members got married. While rounding Cape Horn, Graham Thompson on *Pindar* used the daily radio chat to propose to his girlfriend, Laura Alexander on *BP Explorer*. He had secretly arranged the wedding to take place in Sydney, where they had met during the previous Global Challenge.



Securing a skipper's position in the Global Challenge is an achievement in itself. For the 2004/05 race, there were 384 applications from 11 countries. Being included in the final 12 was the culmination of a dream for both Forbes and Riddell. Forbes, 38, a freelance skipper based in England, decided to follow his childhood dream of sailing around the world after a 'wake-up call' with cancer in 2002.

As a child, Riddell, now 30 and skipper of a private yacht in the Caribbean, believed his dream of sailing around the world was as remote and inaccessible as becoming an astronaut. However, he now believes there are lots of opportunities, especially for kids in this country. "If you really put your head down and work hard and just keep going at it, you will get it."

CAREER BOOST

Competing in the challenge will be an enormous boost to the skippers' careers, because, as Blyth says, the race is a stepping-stone to other things. "Pete Goss was one of our skippers, a chap called Mike Golding, hell, even Ellen MacArther used to scrub our decks. These guys (Forbes and Riddell) will go off and do something entirely different. It opens up this opportunity for them."

With a long Southern Ocean crossing ahead, safety was the utmost concern for the next leg.

"We had a meeting to discuss the conditions and refocus everyone on the safety issues," said Riddell, "and make sure everyone looks after one another and stays in one piece."

While most teams had quiet departure-day breakfasts, the crew of *Samsung* were guests of the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron, where members listened to David Adams and Andy Cape, a navigator in town with the Volvo campaign. "That was a real coup," said Riddell, "It was a real privilege to have them to help us."

Following the blessing of the fleet, Riddell enthusiastically thanked Sydney for hosting the Challenge, before the yachts departed to their theme songs and cheers from fellow crews.

Family and friends were not the only ones left at the pontoon; leggers like Chin also had to watch their yacht pull away without them. "It's very tough leaving a close-knit team like that," he said, "I'm just hoping that I see them on the other side in one piece."

RACE UPDATE

After 40 days battling the relentless Southern Ocean, *Spirit of Sark* sailed victoriously into Cape Town on April 5 only just ahead of second-placed *BP Explorer*, with *Team Stelmar*, carrying Aussie Nicholas Brennan in third.

Andrew Forbes and his crew brought *BG Spirit* home in ninth place, only 10 minutes ahead of fellow Aussie skipper, Matt Riddell, on *Samsung*. *Save the Children* was next home in 12th.

The fleet left Cape Town on May 1 for the Leg 5 haul north to Boston. As we go to press, *Team Stelmar's* lead was surrendered to *Barclays Adventurer*, with *BG Spirit*, *Samsung* and *Team Save the Children* in the leading contingent in eighth, ninth and twelfth places respectively. The race is scheduled to end where it started, in Portsmouth, UK in July.

Look for an update on the Aussie contingent in the next issue, or follow the race yourselves at: www.globalchallenge2004.com.