



Racing the crest

The 80th Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race is expected to attract huge interest from sailors from Australia and around the globe. Lifelong sailors Frances and Michael Howorth explain why everyone is eager to participate in this milestone event

Now known simply as “Sydney to Hobart”, the Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race is an annual blue water yachting event that has captured the imagination of sailors and spectators alike ever since its inaugural running in 1945.

Late in 2025 the race will celebrate its 80th outing and that is reason enough for “Aussie Sailors” to celebrate.

Organised by the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia (CYCA) in collaboration with the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania, the race charts a 628-nautical-mile course from Sydney Harbour

southwards, across the Tasman Sea, down the often-ferocious Bass Strait, along Tasmania’s rugged east coast, and up the River Derwent to the finish line in Hobart.

The route might appear simple when drawn on a chart. Just a straight sail south, but in practice, the Sydney to Hobart is one of the most difficult offshore races anywhere. Competitors face a wide range of conditions: scorching sun, sudden squalls, confused seas, and, in some years, outright storms.

The most notorious stretch is the Bass Strait, a shallow,

wind-prone body of water between mainland Australia and Tasmania that can generate towering, chaotic seas when wind and current collide.

The race is held annually on Boxing Day in the middle of Australia’s summer season. Thousands of excited spectators traditionally line the shores of Sydney Harbour. Whether viewed from the cliffs of Sydney Heads, followed online through live trackers, or experienced firsthand aboard a racing yacht, the Sydney to Hobart continues to captivate those who follow the call of the sea.

ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION

The race began almost by accident. A group of cruising enthusiasts, including British naval officer Captain John Illingworth, planned a leisurely cruise from Sydney to Hobart. Illingworth, however, famously suggested, “Why don’t we make a race of it?” Thus, a blue water sailing legend was born. That first race in 1945 featured just nine yachts. This year, the organisers are expecting a fleet of over 130 yachts to compete across multiple divisions suggesting that the 80th Anniversary Race is one for the bucket list.

Over the decades, the race has become a fixture of the international sailing calendar. Its mix of glamour, grit, and unpredictable conditions has drawn some of the world’s best ➤

Above: *Comanche*, the winner of the Sydney to Hobart yacht race, and other maxi yachts at the start on Sydney Harbour



sailors and most technologically advanced boats. Despite the rise of ocean racing circuits around the world, few events match the prestige, challenge, or sheer public appeal of the Sydney to Hobart.

THE COURSE AND THE CHALLENGE

One of the darkest chapters in the race's history came in 1998, when a vicious storm with hurricane-force winds led to the deaths of six sailors and the loss of five yachts. That tragedy resulted in major changes to offshore racing safety protocols worldwide, including stricter training, equipment standards, and weather briefing requirements.

Yet, for all the risks, the allure remains. The race is a rare test of seamanship, endurance, and team spirit. For many amateur sailors, simply completing the race is a career-defining moment. For professionals, winning line



honours (for first to finish) or the Tattersall Cup (for corrected time under handicap) brings international recognition.

FROM MAXIS TO FAMILY CRUISERS

One of the race's most unique aspects is the diversity of the fleet. Anyone can enter, provided their boat and crew meet the rigorous safety requirements, and many do. The stories of perseverance from smaller boats, battling on in tough

conditions long after the maxis have tied up in Hobart, are often the most compelling.

THE FINISH AND THE FESTIVITIES

For the fleet, arriving in Hobart is a triumphant moment.

Above: The most iconic start line to a yacht race anywhere in the world; against a backdrop of the Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge

The city comes alive in the days after Boxing Day, hosting finishers with maritime fanfare, dockside celebrations, and a warm welcome from the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania. The Hobart waterfront buzzes with festivities, food stalls, and families eager to meet the crews and celebrate their achievements.

A RACE LIKE NO OTHER

The Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race is more than just a test of boat speed or navigational skill. It is a rite of passage, a battle with the elements, and a celebration of the sailing spirit. From its humble beginnings to its status today as one of the great ocean races, it has endured, for 80 years adapting, and thriving.

For sailors and spectators alike, it's the ultimate Boxing Day tradition.

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